

## (Slide 1) Promoting Peace in Ourselves and in the World

Duncan MacLaren

Mary has given us a panorama of the Church's understanding of peace as a concept in Catholic Social Teaching and the necessity of building it up in our own lives and in our world. Her quote from Pope Paul VI brought to my mind seeing (slide 2) on a wall in Haiti, the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, a (slide 3) quote from his Message for Peace in 1972: **If you want peace, work for justice**, a new formula for an ancient concept inspired by the book of the Prophet Isaiah (Is. 32: 17). Written in Haitian Creole, it was encouraging the oppressed to work painstakingly for justice for themselves and society as they learned in Scripture that there was a direct link between justice and the attainment of peace for, as Isaiah says, "my people will live in a peaceful home, in safe houses, in quiet dwellings" (Is. 32: 18). Here, the social teaching of the Church was giving not just inspiration to people living in dire poverty and injustice but empowering them with hope.

I want to show by examples from my own experiences over many years in working for SCIAF and Caritas some of the elements of peacebuilding which have now for an agency like SCIAF become cross-cutting issues across all its programmes. (Slide 4) I also want to do this by making reference to the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church published by the Vatican in 2004 and another great resource for you to consult.<sup>1</sup> Even though it was published eighteen years ago, it was the first attempt to systematise the total corpus of the social teaching of the Church and it provides an authoritative reference of the official teaching up to the end of the pontificate of Pope John Paul II. Given the changes that Pope Benedict and especially Pope Francis have

---

<sup>1</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004).

brought to CST, it needs to be updated – and to a certain extent that is what Mary and I will attempt to do in the final lecture.

Mary told us that Pope Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* published in 1967 that “development is the new name for peace”. This is based on Biblical sources which illustrate that *shalom*, meaning ‘completeness’ in Hebrew, God’s peace, is not just the cessation of violence but, as it says in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, “a ‘value’ and a ‘universal duty’ founded on a rational and moral order of society that has its roots in God himself”.<sup>2</sup> It is holistic and covers the whole of life. Jesus “is the peace between us”, as it says in the Jerusalem Bible quoting St Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians (2:14), destroying barriers of hate between people and reconciling them with God and each other.<sup>3</sup>

War is inimical to development given the destruction it wreaks on people and countries and the antagonisms it sows in the human community. Ceasefires often do not address the underlying injustices which caused the violence in the (slide 5) first place or the instances when, as the Compendium states, “man [sic] is not given all that is due to him as a human person, when his dignity is not respected and when civil life is not directed towards the common good”.<sup>4</sup> The *Compendium* continues that promoting human rights is necessary to construct a peaceful society as well as “the integral development of individuals, peoples and nations”.<sup>5</sup> Peace comes about through the exercise of justice and love as well as the creation of community, and has to be an

---

<sup>2</sup> *The Compendium* par. 494.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* par. 491.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* par. 494.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 494.

ingredient of development since we are all responsible both for preventing war and for championing peace in authentic development.<sup>6</sup>

The approach in development programmes from agencies like SCIAF which follow integral human development contains elements that will ensure peace and reconciliation between people and not engage in practices which will foment conflict, cause human antagonism or lead to factionalism.

How did we come to this conclusion? One of the seminal experiences for us in (slide 6) Caritas was the 1994 Rwandan genocide when over 800,000 people were killed within a hundred days in what was termed the most Catholic country in Africa. We had to ask ourselves: Why did the Church get it wrong? Why did development programmes fail to prevent neighbour killing neighbour? What were the missing elements? Caritas (slide 7) Internationalis produced a handbook, *Working for Reconciliation*, penned by an international team of peacemakers, and this was followed by *Peacebuilding: A Caritas Training Manual* which argued that peacebuilding was centred on relationships and a process with the maximum participation of 'beneficiaries' in programmes affecting their lives and community.

By relationship-centredness, the authors meant that, to use a term from CST, 'right relationships' had to be established between communities and individuals and had to be woven into the relief or development programmes. That began a move to introduce conflict prevention and reconciliation work as an integral issue in the programmes of many Caritas members throughout the world.

---

<sup>6</sup> Pope John Paul II *Centesimus Annus*, 1991) par. 52, quoted in *the Compendium* par. 498.

(slide 8) We say in the Peacebuilding handbook that one way of imagining reconciliation is that it is about *making space*. That can be a *physical* space which is where people feel safe and free from harm. New *social* spaces can be created where people can speak freely and talk together about the future. Or reconciliation can be formed in creating an *internal* space where a traumatised person can be free of the burdens of the past because people who experience trauma lose personal and physical space in which to manoeuvre. Denying people human rights can likewise wipe out social space. Torture can make the victim not feel at home in his or her own body.

Calling for ceasefires to address the breakdown of peace in societies is necessary but not sufficient. The original injustices which have caused the lack of peace between peoples in the first place must be tackled and resolved. That requires action at the various political levels and at the grassroots where resentments will fester unless people are brought to a new place of reconciliation where toxic relationships can be turned into healthier ones. Caritas has many successful examples of this in the Balkans, Sri Lanka, Rwanda and elsewhere. However, peace and reconciliation praxis must also be exercised in societies which do not currently have conflicts or are not living through a post-conflict situation, meaning that Caritas members should ensure that human flourishing is allowed to take root by peace and reconciliation becoming an integral part in all programmes.

Let me illustrate how this works from a few living examples.

(slide 9) **Sri Lanka:** as you know, there was a long civil war which ended twelve years ago between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) insurgents. Between 80-100,000 people were estimated to have been killed. The suspicions between the Tamils, Muslims, Christians and

Buddhist Sinhalese continue to this day. Since the war, the Caritas teams were careful to promote reconciliation amongst the various groups in a very practical way. After the Boxing Day tsunami in 2004, they bought their goods to distribute to the poorest in their programmes not just from one trader who would belong to one religious tradition (which would have been the cheaper option) but from a Buddhist one, a Hindu one, a Christian one and a Muslim one and people could see the organisation was being fair-minded. This action also helped encourage the various faith groups to work together to help their own people. Caritas Sri Lanka then decided to make all their events ecumenical and inter-faith to lessen tensions between the religious groups as politicians tried to stir up those same tensions for political gain. Caritas Sri Lanka continues to exercise this method of promoting reconciliation.

**(slide 10) Croatia:** If you go on holiday to Dubrovnik or any of the other wonderful seaside towns of Croatia nowadays, you don't see too many signs of the bitter war between the Croats and the Serbs from 1991 to 1995. Yugoslavia was breaking up and the Croats wanted to be independent but the Serbs wanted them in a Greater Serbia, especially as many Serbs lived in Croatia. I witnessed the hatred between the two groups and religion played a part as the Croats were mostly Catholic and the Serbs Orthodox. Caritas Croatia had a huge reconciliation programme but the example I remember best was when the organisation was giving bikes to children so that they could get to school from the countryside. At the ceremony to give the kids the bikes, they always ensured there was a mix of Serb and Croat children as well as the occasional Muslim and at one ceremony I attended both the Catholic bishop and the local Orthodox Patriarch were on hand to congratulate the children and acted together as reconcilers.

**(slide 11) Palestine:** Caritas Jerusalem is the name given to the Caritas in Palestine which covers the whole of Israel. Given the bad relations generally between Palestinians and the state of Israel, Caritas Jerusalem began summer reconciliation camps to bring together Jewish, Muslim and Christian young people for sport and learning about each other's culture and religion. Many friendships blossomed from those camps which were sadly ended by the Israeli government. The idea was for the youngsters to get to know one another as human beings and then it's difficult to hate someone in abstract but that didn't fit into the political narrative at the time and certainly not now.

**(slide 12)** Building peace is not easy. Thomas Merton, the great Cistercian monk and peace guru of the 1960s, wrote in his book, *On Peace*<sup>7</sup>: "If the task of building a peaceful world is the most important task of our time, it is also the most difficult. It will, in fact, require far more discipline, more sacrifice, more planning, more thought, more cooperation and more heroism than ever war demanded". Peacebuilding is about taking people to a 'new' place because the old space is toxic. That new space can lead to new relationships being formed which are healthier.

The old place is spoiled, tainted, by anger or even violence. To continue in that same place will mean continuation of the wound that will never heal. But moving to a new place where both parties can feel in a safe space to apologise, forgive and move on is important if life is to be bearable. St Paul in the Second Letter to the Corinthians says that being reconciled with one another means we become a 'new creation'. In becoming renewed throughout our life, we become reconciled and reconcilers. And this is the chance to go to that new place, not just literally, but within ourselves too. To do that, we need

---

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Merton OCSO, *On Peace*, (London: Mowbrays, 1976).

imagination, that is the capacity to see things differently. How we interact with people is also important and I want to end with a story I have shared many times because it sums up what peacebuilding looks like and how transformative it can be.

(Slide 13) I call it The Story from Bam.

At the end of 2003, an earthquake struck the ancient town of Bam in Iran. Over 26,000 people died, many more were injured and 60, 000 made homeless. That part of Iran is 100% Muslim and we had a team from several Caritas members working there in link with our Caritas Iran. One of the Caritas workers, a sister, was asked by one of the earthquake victims, an old Muslim lady, for a Bible. “I can’t give you one” she said “the authorities would close us down and Caritas does not do that kind of thing anyway. But you are a good Muslim. Why do you want one anyway?” (slide 14) The old lady replied: “There are many people helping us here but you people are different. I want to see what makes you treat us with such respect and love – and I am sure the answer is in your holy book”.

It is in the holy book as well but it was also in the way people had been trained to be reconcilers and how maintaining everyone’s dignity is the first rule of the peacebuilding process. It can be used in any situation where there is conflict or disagreement. And it is an important element in the Catholic Social Teaching tradition and can be part of all our lives in everyday settings – starting with here in Maryhill.