

## Pax Christi Sustainable Peace or a Militarised Asia Pacific? Australia's choice....

November 15, 2020

**In April 2016, as** 85 people from 35 countries gathered in Rome – many from places of extreme violence and oppression. Jose Henriquez, former secretary general of Pax Christi International said: *'We need to go back to the sources of our faith and rediscover the nonviolence which is at the heart of the Gospel.'* **The goal of nonviolent resistance to injustice is to awaken humanity in every person.** This conference was convened by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and Pax Christi International on the topic of **Nonviolence and Just Peace**. The conference finished with **'An appeal to the Catholic Church to re-commit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence'**. Though referred to as the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative it is not a confessional call but about the centrality of gospel nonviolence. It was a call for the church to move to a Just Peace based on Gospel nonviolence.

In his recent Encyclical ***Fratelli tutti***, Pope Francis lamented how the world had learned a lesson from its many wars and disasters, and was moving towards various forms of integration' and now 'Our world is trapped in a strange contradiction: we believe that we can ensure stability and peace through a false sense of security sustained by a mentality of fear and mistrust'. (#26). He concludes, 'In many parts of the world, there is a need for paths of peace to heal open wounds. (#225).

It is important that nonviolence is cultivated in peoples' everyday lives as well as institutions. This is what Pope Francis calls the politics of nonviolence - a culture that includes personal lives and institutions. All are necessary to achieve global peace.

When we consider violence, conflict and war we cannot ignore violence within our institutions and social and cultural structures, e.g., as in the treatment of Indigenous Australians since colonial times; the forced removal of children; the Indigenous overrepresentation in prison and deaths in custody; the conditions that refugees and asylum seekers endure; LGBTIQ+.

The **'Appeal ..... to re-commit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence'** was a call to recognise the centrality of active nonviolence to Jesus' message in which we have not often been consistent but being silent about or justifying violence, injustice or war which was a betrayal of the gospel's central message. To live this gospel of nonviolence and just peace requires an integration explicitly into all areas of life.

The conference summoned the church to walk *in the path of Jesus' nonviolence and turn to just peace by* reaffirming:

- *the centrality of active nonviolence to the life of the Church,*
- *to prophetically proclaim another way,*
- *to commit to the long-term vocation of healing and reconciling both people and the planet – according to the vision and message of Jesus.*

**The call for a Just Peace** reflects how we relate to ourselves, each other, the Earth and our God. It is not new. If there is no Just Peace, peace is not possible. It cultivates justice and peace in ourselves, our relationships, our social and political structures, and our culture, whilst also resisting injustice and violence. It is necessary to recognise and acknowledge suffering, violence and harm done. **Our task** is to find ways to build a better, more resilient peace which includes a participatory process, right relationships, restoration, reconciliation and sustainability. We can no longer justify cases where armed force may be legitimised. **The key goal** is to **outlaw war, not to legitimise or refine the criteria of war by using or teaching just war theory.** The focus is to apply the vast amounts of peacemaking research, civil resistance tactics, and just peace principles with the church's deep, pervasive peace theology.

Just peace is not merely the absence of violence but the presence of social, economic, and political conditions that sustain peace and human flourishing and prevent conflicts from turning violent or returning to violence.

*Laudato Si'* has become a manifesto for Just peace. **An integral ecology contributes to an integral just peace.** It recognises that **violence done to human communities is often accompanied by devastating environmental destruction.** This has been connected in the 'cry of the earth and the cry of the poor' (LS 49). **The lack of connection with the environment is a form of violence and contributes to the activity of war.**

In any peace plan, it is dialogue, dialogue, dialogue—within society, among states, with other faiths—to build a people of peace through reconciliation. Peace-building is people-building. Dialogue is not enhanced by vilification and provocative language or forming pacts against others.

The just peace approach means that we cannot settle for an end justifies the means approach. The just peace approach is not easy or quick. It includes restorative justice, diplomacy, building community relationships and integral development, prevention of violent conflict, challenging the systems that profit from war, acknowledging our interconnection with and caring for the environment, conflict transformation, cultivating cultures of peace, and much more.

A 2005 United Nations report, '*The Inequality Predicament*,' stressed: **Ignoring inequality in the pursuit of development is perilous. Sustainable Development Goal 16:** '*Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.*' It recognises that conflict and fragility have destructive impacts on journey out of poverty for countries as essential infrastructure such as hospitals and schools are destroyed including the increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence, that force families to seek safety or asylum elsewhere. Diplomacy between nation states is critical to preventing armed conflict and war, but strengthening the capacity of nation states to prevent and manage violence within their borders is increasingly important.

Peacebuilding is very much underfunded despite the cost effectiveness of investing earlier to prevent disputes from escalating rather than intervening after violence erupts. There has been a progressive decline in foreign aid and development assistance in recent decades. Australia contributes little as part of the global peacebuilding budget and given the number of fragile and conflict-affected states in the Asia-Pacific we can and should invest more in peacebuilding. It is in our national interest too.

Australia is in a powerful position in the Asia Pacific region but we need to ask what kind of global neighbour or global citizen will we be? It is not always seen as good neighbour. In 2007, the Australian Bishops challenged us to consider our role through the lens of globalisation and interdependence and base our judgements largely on the question of '***whether the least amongst us are doing well?***' ***This has implications for our foreign aid as well how we respond to people in our communities.*** To conclude, investing wisely in other countries across all areas of development is important to building peace as healthy ecosystems that include improved education, health care and living conditions.

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