

Christian Peacemaking and Eliminating the Nuclear Scandal V



Hope in the coming kingdom is already beginning to take root in the hearts of people. The radical transformation of the world in the Paschal Mystery of the Lord gives full meaning to the efforts of people, and in particular of the young, to lessen injustice, violence and hatred and to advance all together in justice, freedom, kinship and love. At the same time as it proclaims the Gospel of the Lord, its Redeemer and Savior, the Church calls on all, especially the poor, the oppressed and the afflicted, to cooperate with God to bring about liberation from every sin and to build a world which will reach the fullness of creation only when it becomes the work of people for people.

Justice in the World, 1971, #76-77

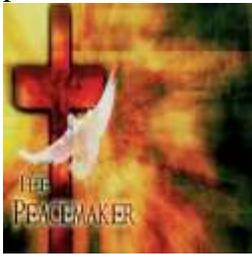
The struggle for a more just and peaceful world is at the very heart of the Gospel message and praxis. Any understanding of the Gospel apart from this would end up with an understanding of God's saving work as solely some ideological construct that has very little to do with concrete life. But the Church has always proclaimed and insisted on the lived manifestation of faith in concrete deeds of love, peacemaking, justice, compassion, mercy, forgiveness and repentance. All of this grounded in the historical ministry and the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ—the Church's Lord. For Christian peacemakers the pursuit of peace is only possible to the extent that real justice, God's justice, is being built up in the world. This is a fundamental or constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel.

The uncertainty of history and the painful convergences in the ascending path of the human community direct us to sacred history; there God has revealed himself to us, and made known to us, as it is brought progressively to realization, his plan of liberation and salvation which is once and for all fulfilled in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.

Justice in the World, 1971, #6



For deacons, as mentioned earlier in this series, the skills sets needed to be an effective justice-seeker and peacemaker are not often offered in formation and post-ordination programs. Some of this is the result of the many requirements that formation programs need to implement to be in conformity with the norms required from the Vatican. However, in post-ordination formation a real opportunity exists but is often resisted. The resistance often comes in the form of having to struggle with the fact that solutions to social/moral problems are long run enterprises and deacons often have little spare time to immerse themselves in such processes. Also, doing justice and peace work is often messy and often includes confrontation which often undercuts the ecclesial/institutional desire for order. That being said, I would suggest that each diocese consider having deacons exposed to the great issues of our times but also have 3-5 deacons specialize and focus on one of these critical issues of our times. In this way we utilize our resources more effectively. All this would be coordinated with the director of deacon personnel and the local bishop.



The call to be a peacemaker requires a deep spirituality culled from the Scripture and Tradition interacting productively and critically with the culture and other religious traditions, and people of good will. We know that history is replete with instances of persecution, bigotry, violence and discrimination among different religions borne of the perversion of their primal revelation. All great religious traditions have, and continue to, struggle with this problem. It is no different for the secular ideologies manifested in socialism, communism, fascism or capitalism. All of these ideologies have claimed the lives of millions of people. Any spirituality for peacemaking will work to break down these false and destructive barriers among different religious and ideological groups to point to and reinforce our common humanity. The arrival of the nuclear age makes this an imperative! In the words of Dr. Robert Oppenheimer, head of the atomic bomb project during WWII:



It is with appreciation and gratefulness that I accept from you this scroll for the Los Alamos Laboratory, and for the men and women whose work and whose hearts have made it. It is our hope that in years to come we may look at the scroll and all that it signifies, with pride. Today that pride must be tempered by a profound concern. If atomic bombs are to be added as new weapons to the arsenals of a warring world, or to the arsenals of the nations preparing for war, then the time will come when mankind will curse the names of Los Alamos and Hiroshima. The people of this world must unite or they will perish. This war that has ravaged so much of the earth, has written these words. The atomic bomb has spelled them out for all men to understand. Other men have spoken them in other times, and of other wars, of other weapons. They have not prevailed. There are some misled by a false sense of human history, who hold that they will not prevail today. It is not for us to believe that. By our minds we are committed, committed to a world united, before the common peril, in law and in humanity.

Robert Oppenheimer



Peace: An Interreligious Matter

Since the Second Vatican Council the Roman Catholic Church has been engaged in efforts to dialogue with the other great religious traditions in the world and secular ideologies to help all human beings to become *artisans of a new humanity*. The engagement with the other religious traditions of the world was a major breakthrough in the Church's dealing with the other traditions, recognizing that other traditions contain religious truths that Catholics can affirm whole remaining Catholic.

Religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language. Thus in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a

flight to God with love and trust. Again, Buddhism, in its various forms, realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination. Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.(4)

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.

Nostra Aetate #1,2

Without peace among the religions of the world there can be no hope for real peace, nor any serious movement to bringing the world to zero nuclear weapons. The regional antagonisms in the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia, unless brought to sufficient and just resolution, will continue to fuel nuclear weapons proliferation in these areas with the result of the heightened probability of these weapons use in war. Distorted and dangerous religious understandings undergird many of these conflicts—hence the need for greater dialogue and understanding among the various religious traditions. Therefore, the dialogue among the religious traditions is a critical area for deacon formation in being peacemakers.

The deacon and the people to whom he ministers belong to a local and global community. What's more, in any given neighborhood in the United States a number of various religious traditions are present. This is becoming a more common feature in the Western world as peoples from various parts of the world emigrate to Europe and the United States. In my own neighborhood I have neighbors who are Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu and Sikh. How can the deacon's prophetic ministry be brought to bear on this situation of religious pluralism, while at the same time remaining faithful to one's own tradition?

This situation offers a tremendous opportunity and challenge to deacons in the ministry of kenotic service. What's more, this opportunity and challenge sits in a larger context of major forces shaping our world situation. These are some of the forces at work in our world today which are having significant impact on the present world situation:

- The recognition that human rights as norms for national and international conduct require groups and nations to adhere to these norms, regardless of their internal law, eroding some level of national sovereignty of nation-states.

- The widespread proliferation on nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction that render the defense of national border increasingly ineffectual for the protection of society.
- The growth of transnational threats that transcend state borders, such as damage to the environment, mass migrations, population expansion, famine and shortage of drinkable water.
- The continued development of globalization of capital eroding the control of national economy.
- The creation of a global communications network that penetrates borders electronically and threatens national languages, customs and culture.1

With these developments comes the opportunity to work for justice and peace via the cooperation and shared moral vision of the world's great religious traditions. We could also include a growing religious pluralism in the United States and the Western European nations as a current trend. Certainly, the concern for peace is at the core of all the great traditions. However, we know that even today religion plays a role in many conflicts and wars around the world. In our time we are being given an opportunity to redress the great scandal that has plagued human history of religions fomenting and fueling wars and persecution of others, often resulting in many people rejecting organized religion. For if there cannot be peace among the world's religions, how can there be peace? It is in the light of this scandalous situation the religions of the world have endeavored to be a source of peacemaking and justice-seeking reflected in the World Parliament of Religions' document *Toward a Global Ethic*.



(Pope Benedict XVI and Minister of Interreligious Affairs)

This vision for the unity of the human race and universal salvation under God found expression in the great prophetic tradition of Israel most clearly articulated in the book of the prophet Isaiah:

In the days to come,
the mountain of the Lord's house
shall be established as the highest mountain
and raised above the hills.
All nations shall stream toward it:
and many people shall come and say:

“Come let us climb the Lord’s mountain,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may instruct us in his ways,
and that we may walk in his paths.
For from Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and impose terms on many peoples.
They shall beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
One nations shall not raise the swords against
another,
nor shall they train for war again.

Is. 2:1-4

Ecumenical and interreligious cooperation and dialogue are among the dimensions of deacon formation mentioned by the *National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States*, #119:

Attention should also be given to topics reflecting the specific needs of the Church in the United States....the study of the beliefs and practices of other religions and Christian denominations—deepening a spirit of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. Ample opportunities also need to be given to the study and practice of missiology—learning how to evangelize—so as to form deacons who will be actively present in society, offering true diaconal witness, entering into dialogue with others, and cooperating in charity and justice to resolve common concerns.

In this regard it is important that deacon formation programs and post-ordination deacon formation address this situation in a manner that equips deacons for productive activity in the area of ecumenical and interreligious cooperation and dialogue. This is delicate business to be sure. It may be that certain deacons in the diocese are chosen to advance the cause of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and given advanced theological training to promote such cooperation and dialogue while at the same time maintaining orthodox Catholic teaching. I would submit that this is not an option but a requirement for the present and future ministry of the Church and the diaconate. The challenges that face the global family are too vast and far-reaching in their implications to engage in any form of *tactical provincialism*.2

The great issues of our time: war and peace, economic justice, environmental stewardship, migration, resource scarcity and other concerns will need a global effort to secure a humane future for the people of the earth. Certainly, this is fundamental to the concerns of the Church expressed at the Second Vatican Council in *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 1965, # 1

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of

Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of people, of people who, united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, press onwards towards the Kingdom of the Father and are bearers of the message of salvation intended for all people.

Such solidarity with the human situation compels the members of the Church to engage with every aspect of human and earthly life as a result of the Incarnation, reflected in the aforementioned quote from *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*.

In the *Directory For the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons, 1998*, from the Congregation for the Clergy it states:

The deacon....should be conversant with contemporary cultures and with the aspirations and problems of his times. In this context, indeed, he is called to be a living sign of Christ the Servant and to assume the Church's responsibility of reading the signs of the time and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, so that, in language intelligible to every generation, he may be able to answer the ever-recurring questions which men ask about this present life and of the life to come and how one is related to the other. #43

The ecumenical and interreligious cooperation for a global ethic finds solid foundation in the Second Vatican Council documents: *Nostra aetate* and *Unitatis redintegratio*. The challenge for deacons is to have a strategy for engaging in this aspect of their prophetic ministry. It could be reasonably argued that how the Church engages this aspect of its mission may well decide the future of the planet for:

- There can be no ongoing human society without a world ethic for the nations.
- There can be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions.
- There can be no peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions.

If the world is ever going to have the opportunity to eliminate nuclear weapons, and other weapons of mass destruction, it must start with the leadership of world religions. The Roman Catholic Church, more than any other tradition, is perfectly positioned to take leadership in this area.

Notes

1 Philip Bobbit, *The Shield of Achilles: Law, Strategy and History*, (New York), Anchor, 2003.

2 Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, (New York) Seabury Press, 1980 and *The Emergent Church*, (New York), Crossroad, 1981

3 Hans Kung, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, (New York), Crossroad, 1991, p. 138.