Peacebuilding: A Practical Strategy of Hope

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What is Christian peacebuilding? Different from both just war theory and pacifism, peacebuilding represents a convergence of thinking from both directions and a new social movement. Peacebuilding unites convictions within traditional just war theory with commitments from nonviolent pacifism. With just war thinkers, peacebuilders agree that politically motivated violence must be limited and restrained, and that societies can move past injustice to justice. Peacebuilders share the convictions of pacifists that peaceful cooperation is a state to which all societies must aspire, and that ending violence requires a conversion of hearts and minds. Understood theologically, the heart of Christian peacebuilding is resurrection life in the power of God’s Spirit. Spirit-empowered life is displayed in action when peacebuilders reach out to adversaries, and build social practices that resist cycles of violence.

Christian peacebuilding nurtures the virtue of hope in Christian politics. There are many inspiring stories of Christian peacebuilders who do help and have helped to achieve reconciliation in their conflict-torn societies. But the more interesting question is what sustains people when prospects for success are low—when violence continues to rage, lives are lost, and enemies win? The root source of hope is not manifest good outcomes, but practical solidarity and commitment in the face of evil, a willingness to accompany the targets of violence faithfully, especially when destructive forces seem insurmountable.

This essay will compare traditional just war theory and pacifism, showing how developments within each approach to violence have contributed to the emergence of peacebuilding, especially religious peacebuilding. The important roles of women peacebuilders will be accented. Then we will confront the reality of discouragement and failure in efforts to restrain conflict, reconstruct societies, and build peace. Finally I will offer an interpretation of Christian hope as nurtured within communities of solidarity and loving action that mediate the grace of the Spirit.
active in the body of Christ. These communities are seeds of change in the larger political order.

**Just War and Pacifism**

At least if taken at face value, just war theory and pacifism are both focused on whether violence can be ethically justified or not, with pacifists saying “Never,” and just war theorists averring, “Yes, under certain limited circumstances.” Yet at a deeper level, peacebuilding places the emphasis not so much on the specific ethical analysis of instances of violence, but on virtues and practices that avoid or end violence. The noun “peacebuilding” is built from a verb, connoting an existential process not an intellectual exercise or an established state of being.

One thing pacifist and just war analyses share in common is a presumption against violence, and hence against war.¹ For pacifists, the prima facie obligation to avoid violence is in reality an absolute. Just war theory too depends on a presumption for peace and against violence, but the prima facie obligation to act nonviolently can be overridden. Therefore just war theory consists mainly in specifying criteria for using and limiting force. These criteria are differentiated into two categories: *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* (justice in going to war and just means in war). The standards within these categories can be spelled out somewhat differently.² Thomas Aquinas, the main source for their articulation in Catholic social thought, says that the right to go to war depends on defense of peace and the common good, right intention, and legitimate authority.³ He also considers just means in war, specifically,


³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II. 40: “Is it Always a Sin to Wage a War?”—that he shares the presumption against war is evident from the title of the question under which he addresses it.
the use of deceit in laying ambushes for the enemy. In modern times, the criteria of *jus ad bellum* have been expanded to include last resort, reasonable hope of success and proportion. *Jus in bello* now includes the all-important criterion of noncombatant immunity, and again, proportion and reasonable hope of success. More recently, and especially following the U.S.-led Gulf War in 1991 and invasion of Iraq in 2003, the basic categories comprising the theory have also been expanded as well, due to the widespread perception that even if the cause had been just in the two Iraq wars, the devastation wreaked on the civilian infrastructure was not. Not only the immediate and direct killing of civilians should be ruled out as valid means in war, but also any material damage or conditions of the termination of violence that would cause further suffering and make social reconstruction significantly more difficult.

The two new categories are *jus post bellum* and (less widely adopted) *jus ante bellum* (justice after war and justice before war). The planning of a war should already contemplate the cessation of hostilities and foresee the necessary conditions of rebuilding peace. And in the aftermath of war, there should be measures taken such as just peace accords, proportionate punishments, acknowledgement of wrongdoing where appropriate for both sides, economic assistance, the use of outside peacekeepers to establish human security, and the international monitoring of processes toward a democratic regime and the rule of law. We see from the addition of these categories that just war theory has taken on a bit more of the processive and ground-up character that will come to characterize peacebuilding movements and theologies. The goal of peace and the difficult mandate to build peace after violence are ever more on the “radar screen” of just war theorists.

Another shared characteristic of just war and pacifism, in their Christian forms, is a biblical reference point. Vatican II and its call for a biblical renewal of moral theology introduced a new role for biblical nonviolence into Catholic just war theory. This is visible in the U.S. bishops’ 1983 pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response*, which combined (if uneasily) the moral justification of nuclear deterrence and a call to nonviolent discipleship. It is

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5 *Lumen gentium,* the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, nos. 39-40.

stressed even more greatly in repeated calls of popes and bishops for a nonviolent response to international crises, such as the events leading up to the 2003 Iraq war. John Paul II opposed military action, declaring, "NO TO WAR! War is not always inevitable. It is always a defeat for humanity." Yet this pope did not definitively rule out intervention for humanitarian purposes, maintaining that there is "a moral obligation to come to the aid of individuals, peoples or ethnic groups" whose basic rights have been violated "to the point of threatening their existence."

From the side of traditional pacifism, the picture has also changed, to bring both activism and theory closer to some of the traditional concerns of just war theory, such as Christian political participation for the sake of the common good, the mandate for Christians in powerful nations to appreciate that their faith entails global responsibilities, and the importance of empowering the voices of those suffering oppression so that their situations may change. So a third point of commonality today is political engagement.

Some of the more renowned U.S. Christian pacifists of the twentieth and twenty-first century have protested accommodation to liberal Protestantism and the modern state by exhorting people of faith to maintain fidelity to Christ’s cross and to the Christian story of nonviolent discipleship by renouncing violence in all its forms. The Mennonite John Howard Yoder published The Politics of Jesus in an era of Vietnam war protest, and it served as a call to his fellow citizens to resist extremist anti-communist ideology, American exceptionalism, and chauvinistic militarism. His intellectual and theological colleague Stanley Hauerwas also insists on biblical nonviolence as a necessary part of Christian character and community. Christians should not aim to be politically effective in overcoming injustice, but to live "a life of forgiveness and peace" that "is not an impossible ideal but an opportunity now present." This opportunity exists only within the Christian

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11 Ibid., 85.
community, however; “what makes the church the church is its faithful manifestation of the peaceable kingdom in the world.”

In contrast, Catholic pacifists, working against the backdrop of a tradition that has never been strictly pacifist, has always seen political participation as a Christian obligation, and that is increasingly adamant about the priority of nonviolent options, have typically endorsed nonviolent resistance to injustice. Examples are Gordon Zahn, John Dear, Dorothy Day, and Daniel and Phillip Berrigan.

The encyclical *Pacem in terris* (Peace on earth, 1963) of Pope John XXIII offers keynotes for developments in these directions, by calling for good faith cooperation among all peoples and nations, and casting doubt on the justifiability of modern warfare. David Cortwright has coined the term “pragmatic pacifists” to denote those who support peace activism but are willing to contemplate humanitarian uses of force. Functionally, this type of pacifism may not be that much different from the extremely stringent just war theories of John XXIII and John Paul II.

The presumption is always against the use of force and in favor of settling differences without violence, but reality dictates that some uses of force may be necessary at times to assure justice and prevent the greater violence that often results when exploitation and aggression are unconstrained. Even strict pacifists acknowledge at times soldiers can play a role in preventing the spread of violence.

And even “strict pacifists” informed by the historic peace churches and biblical nonviolence have become increasingly concerned about political participation and global responsibilities. Both Yoder and Hauerwas have written works challenging U.S. political and military priorities, in the hope either that they can be reshaped on the basis of just war theory itself, especially its presumption against war, or that “the world can and will positively respond to an ethics of peace.” Beginning from the Sermon on the Mount and evangelical nonviolence, Glen Stassen proposes a “just peacemaking theory” that can bring together pacifists and just war theorists, Protestant evangelicals, mainstream Protestants, and Catholics around ten initiatives to make war less likely globally, and to

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12 Ibid., 99.
enhance the prospects for peace. Today “sectarian” community-ethics, or radically orthodox yet politically disengaged ethics, is more a creature of first-world academia than of Christianity among the more than 2 billion people living on less than $2 a day, and witnessing the abduction, torture and killing of their children.

**Peacebuilding**

Peacebuilding has developed along with these revisions of just war and pacifism, responding to the global prevalence and intransigence of ongoing conflicts, especially those involving non-state actors. The term came into widespread use in 1992 when Boutros Boutros Ghali, United Nations Secretary General, celebrated the U.N.’s fiftieth anniversary with an *Agenda for Peace*. Since then, national and international peacebuilding efforts have proliferated under national governments, the U.N., and intergovernmental organizations, concentrating mostly on building state infrastructures. Meanwhile numerous NGO’s are also dedicated to ending conflict and building social and human capital in pursuit of peace with just social participation for all.

Peacebuilding brings together traditional just war thinkers and leaders with pacifists. The focus is not on specific action-guiding rules, nor on crisis intervention, but on long-term, comprehensive strategies to build institutions of government and civil society that protect human rights, enable development, and create sustainable relationships of social cooperation. Peacebuilding has a broad focus: what are ways of cooperative social existence that reduce violence, and how can reconciliation and social cooperation be fostered in ongoing violent situations?

Peacebuilding, as defined by Scott Appleby, is a response to violence implicating and affecting all sectors of a society, as well as transnational

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actors and the international community. Peacebuilding is a mode of conflict transformation that considers the long-standing nature of conflict and its intergenerational origins and effects. Peacebuilding tries to ameliorate the deep historical, social and institutional causes of conflict, and must operate not only “post bellum,” but also in the midst of ongoing deadly hostilities and in anticipation of their outbreak or renewal.

Accordingly, peacebuilding engages all sectors of society and all the relevant partners—people living in the local communities who perpetrate the violence or who are directly victimized by it; national elites in the government, business, education, religion, and other sectors; and diplomats, policymakers, scholars, international lawyers, religious leaders, and other professionals who often operate at a geographical remove from the conflict.20

Peacebuilding focuses in a special way on local communities affected by violence, but it also builds networks up and down the social spectrum from grassroots to local and national leaders and governments, to international, regional, and global actors. It involves both government and civil society, and works with and within religious traditions.

Resembling traditional pacifism, peacebuilding is nonviolent, even though practitioners do not focus on and may not agree about whether violence can ever be justified, for example, in cases of humanitarian intervention. Drawing from the common good and justice goals of just war theory, peacebuilding efforts and strategies do include a place for coercion, if not direct violence, because perpetrators must be constrained and called to account for their actions. A major part of peacebuilding is to establish the rule of law and respect for institutions of government. Peace cannot be built where there is an ethos of impunity, for example. This demands that at least some perpetrators make restitution or receive punishment, and that forceful measures be taken to deter future crimes. But perhaps the most distinctive work of peacebuilding is to alleviate the animosities that feed into cycles of violence by building mutual understanding and social trust at the local level.

What is most striking in accounts of peacebuilding activities, is the courage and persistence with which local peacebuilders network in their communities, taking risks to create mutual understanding and solidarity, and to stand up and even convert perpetrators. Nevertheless,

it is unsurprising that “peacemaking is a minority phenomenon.” The reality of violence and fear of being its target of course destroy the social fabric, taking away opportunities for people to come together, build relationships, and share concerns and hopes. Indeed, “the vast majority of grassroots people in most social contexts seem relatively passive and tend to be readily manipulated by political and/or cultural and religious elites.”

Healthy civil society is essential to the possibility and vitality of peacebuilding. This is why it is essential to cultivate neighborhood associations, religious communities, political advocacy groups, parents groups, sports leagues, volunteer organizations, and trade, business, and professional associations. Peacebuilders must work hard in their communities to build trust and reestablish opportunities for people to come together around shared goals.

Religious Peacebuilding

Even in its secular forms, peacebuilding has recognized and made use of the potential of religious leaders and communities to be forces for peace and reconciliation, as well as to provide stable infrastructures of civil society. Christian “peacebuilding” is a largely Catholic-sponsored movement and theory that shares essential goals of Glen Stassen to make political work for peace and justice an integral part of gospel identity, and to work with a variety of partners to reduce the likelihood of violence, using nonviolent means.

The primary focus and goal of Christian peacebuilding, as of Stassen’s just peacemaking, is a spirituality and nonviolent way of life that resists injustice and builds up communities. To accomplish this, most Christian peacebuilders work interreligiously and cross-culturally. Religious hostilities are often a cause of violence, or they can heighten it. Yet social cooperation and peace are also the ideals of most religious traditions. It is a fallacy to think either that religion is unimportant in the “secular” modern world, or that religion can play only a destructive role.

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Key to religious peacebuilding is solidarity, a virtue that can be inspired by Christian commitment, but given social expression in partnership across religious, ethnic, and cultural lines. Sobrino calls solidarity “loving co-responsibility among members of the human family.” John Paul II defines solidarity as “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.” For John Paul II, solidarity comes from the awareness of growing human interdependence, both nationally and internationally, and solidarity constitutes the virtuous moral response to the fact of interconnectedness. Solidarity rejects and counteracts the “desire for profit” and “thirst for power” that hinder full development, and that not coincidentally are also at the root of most civil violence and war. Because solidarity is commitment to the neighbor’s good with the readiness to “lose oneself” for the sake of the other,” it begins the graced transformation of “structures of sin.”

A Catholic Peacebuilding Network (CPN) was formed in 2004 under the auspices of Catholic Relief Services and the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. Its aims are to develop engagement between scholars and practitioners, define the best practices of peacebuilding, develop a theology and ethics of peace, and enhance the peacebuilding capacity of the Roman Catholic Church in conflict areas. CPN efforts have been concentrated in three areas with longstanding conflict, and the need for expansion of peacebuilding resources: the Great Lakes region of Africa, the Philippines, and Colombia. My own experience with peacebuilding is with the CPN, especially in light of its aims to deepen engagement among scholars and practitioners, and to develop a theology and ethics of peace. As a theologian affiliated with the CPN, I had the privilege to attend international conferences of CPN members and allies in Bujumbura, Burundi and in Bogota, Colombia.

The Essential Role of Women

Women are among the most active and committed peacebuilders, perhaps because they are the mainstay of many civic and religious organizations and know how to network. Women are represented in the

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23 Christ the Liberator, 137.
24 John Paul II, Sollicitudo rei socialis, no. 38.
staffing and leadership of NGOs, both locally and internationally. “NGOs...have female power.”²⁷ Women have been leaders in “grass-roots” peacebuilding initiatives in the southern Sudan, Northern Ireland, and Liberia. Women are often most responsible for, and thus more motivated to secure, the practical necessities of daily living and of raising a family. These include the safety of family members and of the home, food, shelter, and schooling for children.²⁸ Yet women’s leadership in the local and regional contexts is rarely given the credit it deserves. Moreover, women are underrepresented in government, whether local, national, or international.

A general lack of appreciation of women’s leadership also pervades religious institutions, although women’s role in religious peacebuilding is crucial. In the Catholic case, even NGO’s fail to showcase and fully benefit from women’s upper-echelon accomplishments, seeming to denigrate and diminish them instead. In January 2011, Lesley-Anne Knight, a Zimbabwe-born lay woman, was denied Vatican approval to stand for another four-year term as secretary general of Caritas Internationalis, a Rome-based confederation of 165 Catholic charitable organizations around the world (including the USCCB’s Catholic Relief Services). The Caritas president, Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga of Honduras, was approved for another term, and met futilely with Vatican officials to try to reverse the decision on Knight. No specific criticisms were made of Knight herself by the Vatican, and the move caused shock, consternation, and even outrage among members of the organization. It occurred against the background of tensions between Caritas and Cor Unum, the Vatican office supervising Catholic charitable activity; and accusations that Caritas operates too much like a secular NGO, stressing service to the poor with inadequate concern for “evangelization” and theology. Knight’s response:

I would say believe in the poor, and the ability of the poor and the vast majority of the communities we serve to take charge of their own futures. There’s huge hope, and huge potential for development. At least eighty percent of Caritas workers are lay people, a majority are women and most of them are volunteers. A very small percentage right at the top is composed of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. The real work that’s happening, and the hope that’s there, is being generated by the day-to-day workers. The work will continue, and that’s terrific. That’s what our donors are supporting.²⁹

Rightly priests and bishops are recognized for the valuable work they do and the risks they courageously take. In the drug wars in Colombia, for example, Roman Catholic bishops have been among the few mediators trusted by adversaries on all sides. The episcopal conference’s National Conciliation Commission has proposed a ten-point peace plan for their country; and individual priests and bishops have ventured into very dangerous situations among armed combatants to negotiate or to offer sacraments in the hope of converting hearts. Yet clergy also often receive credit for the women working in allied ministries, or receive appreciation for more visible gestures while women’s day to day persistence in local community building and problem solving stays under the surface of public attention. One reason for this, no doubt, is that women frequently operate by creating relationships of mutual support, and networks that enable community survival. For women there is often more strength found in collective empowerment, than in following the example of a single courageous leader. “Women working for peace emphasize the importance of networks—from highly focused efforts that address specific regions to broader networks that aim at a general sharing of experience and reinforcement of community—as sources of support and inspiration and as ways to amplify their voices.”

When I traveled to Colombia with the CPN, we not only visited the bishops’ conference, we made “site visits” to witness local peacebuilding activities. In a barrio near Bogotá, the inhabitants have been displaced from their rural villages by the rampant violence caused by the three warring groups: the leftist Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN) and paramilitary forces. The name of a group of women working in the barrio captures eloquently the way they envision their teamwork: “Hormiguitas de la Paz” (Little Ants of Peace). Although the slum dwellers were threatened with eviction as illegal squatters, they were still being charged for water and electricity, and their children were in constant danger of conscription by armed groups. But the women banded together to accompany children to

school, to build a one-room community center by digging out a hillside, and to use micro-grants to produce income for their families. These efforts were supported by a small Catholic foundation, Codo a Codo (Elbow to Elbow), whose guide and mentor is a Catholic nun, Sr. Inez.32

Theologians working on peace tend to focus similarly on formal religious leadership, male theologians, and male organizational representatives. An exception is Dorothy Day, but her work for peace and her work against poverty are usually treated in disconnection, and her example is sometimes depoliticized in favor of an emphasis on Catholic community life, as represented by the Catholic Worker. In some ways, the marginalization of women in Catholic institutions and in public representation has freed them from constraints on their activity so that they can work more creatively and effectively behind the scenes to build peace, including work with members of different religious traditions. Women provide social services and emergency assistance; care for vulnerable groups such as orphans, widows, and victims of sexual assault; undertake trauma healing, especially with other women; sponsor microfinance; and undertake projects of environmental protection or restoration.33 Women’s willingness to “reach across lines of difference in tense environments,” to “mobilize communities,” and to challenge dominant theological constructions of gender roles when working for peace, “holds the promise to change discourse and preconceptions about how religious organizations can be involved in peacebuilding work.”34

When Efforts Fail

Sometimes the efforts of peacebuilders go on for years with only sporadic success, as has been true in Columbia. In July, 2012, five years after I visited there, the Colombian bishops addressed the stalled peace process at their plenary, urging the government and guerrillas to resume peace negotiations.35 Moreover, peacebuilders often work in the midst of ongoing violent situations, and endure extreme risks or

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32 See further examples in an essay by a colleague, David Hollenbach, S.J., who was present for the barrio visit I describe, “Lessons from the Wounded Edge,” The Tablet, August 11, 2007, pp. 8-9.
33 See Marshall and Hayward, Women in Religious Peacebuilding, 5.
34 Ibid., 3.
become targets of violence themselves. The ongoing realities of war and conflict around the world confront Christian social ethicists head-on with the tenuous nature of hope given what might be termed the “Augustinian problem.” Though we hope for the peace of the reign of God, earthly peace is usually a mere semblance of the real thing. Though we are committed to expanding what Augustine called the “tranquility of order” and “well-ordered concord,” we must also accept that the *libido dominandi* is irrepresible, and that politics is full of “miserable necessities,” vice, and failure.

The incidence and nature of war today urge a sense of Augustinian caution about the possibility of bringing incremental justice to the global political order. Although wars between nations have decreased since the 1980s, the wars within states have not. So-called “societal warfare” has increased since the 1950s, so that today it is the major form of warfare. This is why today at least 75% of those killed in war are civilians, compared to 5% during WWI. Even after conflict resolutions, conflict resumes within 5 years 50% of the time. Given these realities, the calls for peace often found in papal and episcopal writings can sound unrealistic or naïve.

A quick look at the history of the (non)implementation of U.N. Resolution 1325 is more than enough to document the truth of Augustine’s pessimism about the success of honest dialogue and diplomacy. In 2000, the UN Security Council passed a resolution to acknowledge that in present conditions under which civilians are increasingly targeted in war, women very often suffer sex and gender based violence, yet are rarely involved in formal structures of decision-making. Even after hostilities have supposedly been concluded, and “peace accords” signed, not only do perpetrators of crimes against women enjoy impunity, but women **continue to be** the targets of rape and other forms of violence. UN Resolution 1325 specifically condemns these crimes and calls for accountability by signatories, as well as mandating that women be included in processes of conflict resolution and sustainable peace. At the ground level, however, not only have many countries not ratified this resolution, but even where it has been ratified, it is flouted more often than seriously implemented. By the way, neither the US

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36 Augustine, *City of God*. XIX.13.1
nor the Vatican has ratified this resolution, joining Iran, Palau, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Tonga.

The frequency with which peacebuilders encounter failure and discouragement is well-illustrated by a case study submitted by Jesuit Refugee Service members working in Santo Domingo. The situation on which it meditates can easily be reimagined as a case involving a rape trial in a supposedly post-conflict society where UN 1325 is not taken seriously; or a hearing to restore property to Colombian villagers whose land has been seized by militias.

JRS helped a group of young Haitian immigrants who were working as vendors to bring their case before the Labor Tribunal, because they were being abused and exploited by their boss. These young men sold frozen yogurt cones from machines seven days a week, but the boss took 80% of their earnings, even though he unjustly accused them of stealing. He threatened them with beatings and a gun, and one of them was beaten so severely that he required hospitalization. After many court delays, this young man faced his boss before a judge, with his co-workers as witnesses—but the case went nowhere due to anti-Haitian discrimination and corruption. And all the Haitian vendors were fired. In the words of the JRS narrator,

We felt miserable. After all those sleepless nights, and with such clear, solid cases, we had failed to make any difference. And yet, the young men we had accompanied thanked us sincerely. They told us that when we walked with them, they had felt safe, and that when they faced their employer and said the truth in front of a judge, they had felt some recognition as persons with dignity (even if their rights were not fully protected). If nothing else, our accompaniment had given them that. It had been worthwhile.39

In other words, the recognition and solidarity of the JRS workers gave the Haitian vendors back their dignity and restored some hope that justice is still possible in this world. Mutual recognition and respect for one another’s dignity is the essential meaning of justice and the basis of all just laws and structures. When the laws and courts of Santo Domingo failed to vindicate the workers or safeguard their rights, they reinforced structures of injustice. But the faithfulness of the JRS members planted small seeds of justice that may grow roots reaching deep and far enough to erode those structures from below. Whatever the

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eventual societal outcome, JRS accompaniment has already created new community, nourished mutual respect, and lessened the suffering of being counted a nonperson.

The resilience of peacebuilders who face multiple obstacles and failures is manifest in the stories of women documented by the Women PeaceMakers Program at the University of San Diego’s Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice. A participant in this program in 2012 was the journalist Nancy Sanchez, of Colombia. Nancy has been publicizing human rights abuses and the struggles of ordinary men and women for over two decades, at risk to her own life. After she and five colleagues reported atrocities committed against civilians by the Colombian military and paramilitaries, and exposed the presence of torture victims in the morgue, three of Sanchez’s colleagues were assassinated. She kept working in Bogotá and in the Putumayo region to fight political violence and the drug trade. But another colleague in this work, Father Alcides, was killed while celebrating Mass for his parishioners. Nonetheless Sanchez continued to monitor human rights abuses until escalating personal death threats forced her to leave the country. Eventually she returned and carried on work with women in rural areas, conducting workshops on human rights. A witness to all this suffering, she confidently declares, “My 20 years of experience as a human rights defender in various regions has given me the experience to assert that there is a great potential for women to transform their reality... The struggle for life is in the hands of women.”

Peacebuilding and Hope

We have seen from such examples that peacebuilders carry on despite profound obstacles and devastating losses. They carry on even when they do not meet with success, and even when their efforts end in death. How can they maintain hope when all the odds are stacked against them, and even when failure confronts them in the face? There is a simple, even platitudinous, answer readily heard in Christian contexts: hope is a gift of God, an “infused virtue” divinely bestowed. Hope is

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41 Ibid.
humanly inexplicable, and does not depend on any real-world conditions; it is purely and simply a work of grace. I believe this answer is too facile, and in important ways false. The truth in calling hope an infused virtue is that hope is a gift of God—but God’s presence or “grace” is often if not always mediated through worldly realities and human relationships. God’s grace-filling presence is in the body of Christ, the actual community of solidarity in God’s presence as Spirit and in resurrection life. Dominic Doyle has argued that even for Aquinas, the Christian virtue of “eschatological” hope not only bestows trust and courage from beyond ourselves, but is enhanced and increased by practical action for this-worldly goals. For Aquinas, we hope for an end only when engaged in virtuous actions that actually move us toward it. Action for peace and justice in history move us closer to our final end of union with God, and increase in us the virtue of hope, of both a this-worldly and an eschatological kind.

Yet if practical human action produces the theological, supernatural, or eschatological virtues, does this reading of hope not amount to Pelagianism—the idea that salvation can be earned by human works that merit God’s favor, even prior to grace? The answer is that it is God’s grace that enables us to work in solidarity with others, and relations of solidarity and compassion themselves mediate grace. God’s grace does not reach us by individual “infusion,” apart from our social identities, or at least not only so. Grace—the presence and power of the Holy Spirit—inheres in community, in the body of Christ, in those knit together by the Spirit. In Christ, “the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph 4:16).

Through the power of the Spirit present in community, many people living in desperate situations of violence or poverty do not in fact give up hope. They appeal for the support of other Christians and of all who

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44 Ibid., I-II.69.1.
46 In the fifth century, the British monk Pelagius propounded the theory that human nature is not so corrupted by original sin that humans are unable to choose between good and evil, or to merit divine favor by first turning to God. Pelagius was defined as a heretic, thanks to the efforts of Augustine; and in the 16th century the reformer Martin Luther again repudiated all versions of “works righteousness.”
are committed to a more humane and just world. To Christians in Congo, Myanmar, or Columbia, or for that matter Memphis in 1968, authentic Christian spirituality and discipleship require political action for a better world, and also require a hopeful vision in which a better world is really possible.

In her Nobel acceptance speech, Leymah Gbowee, the Liberian peace activist, urged,

We must continue to unite in sisterhood to turn our tears into triumph, our despair into determination and our fear into fortitude. There is no time to rest until our world achieves wholeness and balance, where all men and women are considered equal and free.\textsuperscript{47}

To act in solidarity is already to achieve justice. The basis of justice is respect for the human dignity of others. When we experience solidarity, we experience justice, and the restoration of injured dignity. This taste of justice and mutual respect brings hope.

**Peacebuilding, Hope and Love**

It might be said that the real “heart” of Christian peacebuilding, the inspiration of the relations and actions that yield hope, is love. According to Aquinas, divinely inspired love or charity is “the mother and root of all the other virtues.”\textsuperscript{48}

The connection of action for justice to hope is linked to love by Jon Sobrino. In *Christ the Liberator*, Sobrino insists, “not only are hope and praxis not opposed, they in some way require or can require each other.” He then goes on to suggest that the praxis grounding hope is ultimately love. “Hope arises from love, and where there is hope, love is produced.”\textsuperscript{49}

The Mexican-American theologian Maria Pilar Aquino affirms something similar:

For women and oppressed peoples, hope is crucial. .. .women from oppressed peoples know that although the sacrifice is immense, life must triumph over death,


\textsuperscript{48} Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II. 62. 3-4.

truth over lies, good over evil, love over hate, justice over injustice, solidarity over selfishness, grace over sin. Hope is not a far-off ideal or a palliative. It is a deep spiritual force—because it comes from the Spirit—that encourages the poor in their struggles. It is an objective reality, an anticipation of God’s justice and love as experienced in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.\(^{50}\)

In other words, at the heart of hope, is an experienced reality of love. Love in this context is not necessarily personal affection. It is being willing to reach out and sacrifice, to do so while aspiring to empathy with the other, and in anticipation of resurrection, justice, and new life. Sobrino again: “The ultimate root of all hope is—in my view—always love...whether hope is generated...depends essentially, I believe, on having seen, touched, and realized love; that is, it depends on the conviction that love is possible—so that without love there can be no hope.”\(^{51}\)

I believe that we see what this means concretely in the example of peacebuilding. From the individual stories cited above, it is obvious that peacebuilding starts with the desire, determination and courage of people who are willing to take risks. Peacebuilders like the JRS workers, the women of Hormigas de la Paz, Nancy Sanchez in Columbia, or Lehmah Gbowee in Liberia are driven by a passion to live in peace, but also by a faith and trust that people can make peace and build a life together. These people are willing and committed to reach out in solidarity even to those who threaten to harm them, or to those who as yet are not willing to reciprocate by recognizing the dignity and goodwill of the peacebuilder. It is right to call compassionate yet risky efforts at reconciliation by the name of love, charity, or agape.

The central role of love in peacebuilding is identified specifically by Eli Sasaran McCarthy, who argues that “peacemaking aims at conciliatory love” and “realizes the truth of the unity of all being.”\(^{52}\) I agree completely that peacemaking realizes “conciliatory love that draws enemies toward friendship, and truth, particularly the truths of the ultimate unity of all being and equal human dignity.”\(^{53}\) I would identify “conciliatory love” as the virtue behind peacemaking, and call the “unity of all being” the comprehensive good toward which this virtue disposes the agent. Beyond virtues, practices are integral: “nonviolent peacemaking


\(^{51}\) Ibid., 46.


\(^{53}\) Ibid., 187.
represents a virtue entailing a set of paradigmatic practices, which realize the specific goods of conciliatory love as well as the truth of our equal dignity and ultimate unity.\textsuperscript{54}

The great American Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who wrote in the era of the two world wars, is often considered unduly pessimistic because he denies that self-sacrificial love can ever guide social life in history. Instead, agape or the love of the Cross breaks in only occasionally from beyond history, inspiring exceptional individuals. Niebuhr insists however, that the mutual love and justice which are the possibilities of history depend on the rare appearances of self-sacrificial love to inspire and sustain them. When I think about the courage of Christian peacebuilders I realize how and why Niebuhr is right. Justice as respect for the dignity of all, and mutual love as fellowship, are in fact magnificent possibilities of history. Yet, when violence occurs, it is the gift of sacrificial love—not as masochism or victimhood but as risk, eager expectation and promise—that builds a bridge to conversion of hearts, the rebuilding of social institutions, and a different future.

Love, Hope and Social Ethics

We have seen from examples in Colombia and elsewhere that peacebuilders go beyond personal acts and relationships. They try to create community relationships and larger social institutions that encourage and support just peace. Eli McCarthy fills out his ethic of peace by adding to his Christian vision of peacemaking a human rights component, aligned with Catholic social thought. He also argues the viability of nonviolent peacemaking practices in public policy and government.\textsuperscript{55} Human rights criteria, for example, serve the institutionalization of human dignity, ensuring that social groups and institutions as well as individuals embody the virtues of justice and equal respect.

Of course, in the real world, peacemaking or peacebuilding must \textbf{usually} proceed in circumstances where it is precisely justice, equal respect and human rights that are sorely lacking or entirely absent. Peacebuilding activities bring hope in such situations because they are fundamentally rooted in love, a love that is “self-sacrificial,” or willing to take risks for a larger goal. Glen Stassen maintains that, whether at

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 185.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 226.}
the personal, national, or international level, someone must take the first “independent initiative to reduce threat”—without knowing whether the overture will be rebuffed, attacked, or reciprocated. To invest one's efforts in those who have no power or in those whose power over oneself makes action risky is a mark of Christian love. Taking the first step can break apart violent cycles and bring enemies to recognize one another’s humanity. Mutual recognition brings the possibility that destructive relations might be replaced by peaceful coexistence. The future begins to look different. Going back to Sobrino, “Hope arises from love, and where there is hope, love is produced.”

Peacebuilding is a process that is always marred by incompleteness. The “wounds” of war and human rights violations are deep. It is difficult to reconcile enemies, establish social trust, honestly face complicity and corruption, make reparations to victims, and overcome an ethos of impunity. Hope under such conditions is inspired by courageous, compassionate love. Its first manifestation and its first success is respect for the dignity of others. This in and of itself is sufficient to create hope, and hope nourishes and sustains further peacebuilding.

Peacebuilding is thus a practical strategy of hope. Peacebuilding demonstrates the possibility of and way to hope in the face of overwhelming adversity. Peacebuilding is sustained by the actions of courageous individuals who resist the oppressive and violent activities and expectations in which everyone else around them seems trapped. But peacebuilding also requires the action of groups like the Catholic Peacebuilding Network and its member organizations, whether they be Catholic Relief Services or local communities and churches. Peacebuilding consists most specifically in risky yet hopeful practices of solidarity and change. Practical peacebuilding strategies, by reaching out to victims and to adversaries within ongoing violence, already recognize human dignity, build social capital, and shape the building blocks of justice even if their short-term fate is defeat. Thus, even when there seem to be no rational or empirical justifications for the permanent cessation of violence, peacebuilding, inspired by love, is a practical strategy of hope for conversion, transformation, and justice.