

Contributing to a renewal of catholic understanding of and commitment to non violence

Questions to motivate reflection

(Answers by Carmen Artigas)

In order to answer the motivational questions I feel necessary to clarify that the most part of my experience and every day challenges in the subject of the Conference, relate to my 35 years as a United Nations staff member.

Thus, my approaches and reflections on living in a world where violence is reflected in many different ways and fed by a myriad of political, economic, social and allegedly cultural and religious factors, are built up mainly from a secular environment that sometimes has seriously challenged my attempts to look into realities from the standpoint of my faith and the social teaching of my Church.

When trying to delve further into the many messages of the Church through its various teachings as regards no violence, Christ's peace ; justice; reconciliation and recently again the blessed notion of Mercy, the reality of an international community depending,for instance, on the Security Council dynamics; the balance among the interest of the powers; the greed of governments and transnational corporations, the dark horizon for human rights , democracy and the rule of law, bring up uncertainty and a degree of hopelessness.

The efforts of the United Nations towards early warning and preventing measures; peacekeeping and peacebuilding and the sensible relatively new trend along peace consolidation, are often threatened and weakened by the reality of countries reverting into conflict, getting far away from the realization of human rights and a true constitutional building process; an impossibility to authentically approach the deep root causes of conflict the difficulties in creating a real system of justice, based on truth and leading to reconciliation makes our reflection on a the need for active non violence based on Christ Peace urgent but, at the same time, hard to translate into clear messages and effective action.

The recent recognition by United Nations members that reconciliation must be a notion and an instrument accompanying the Organization's efforts around peace is certainly an important advancement to transmit the deep meaning of the Peace of Christ and the urgent demand to fill the idea of non violence with a content that is not defined by what it is not but instead by what is should be.

It is also imperative as taught many years ago by Jean-Marie Muller in his book "The Gospel of non violence" that violence is not only something that is expressed through conflicts, weapons, force, but also through any denial of human dignity such as hunger, fear, deprivation of health, education, work opportunities. This is fundamental to really understand what non violence means and how the absence of violence of all shorts determines a just peace.

Then, my answer to the first question is that what looking for non violent answers means to me is trying to understand the signs of times through the powerful words of our Lord Jesus Christ “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you” (Jn 14:27).

As I have tried to describe, all the tragic world events are occasions for challenging ourselves to look for new answers based on the ancient teaching of the Church and the most recent summons of its social teaching. There are many social sins calling upon us to strengthen the commitment towards the Peace of Christ, I would simply picture them in the faces of million of children around the world who are victims of conflicts, displacement, migration, denial of refugee status for them and their families, who starve in their countries, in refugee camps or in foreign lands, who are victims of trafficking, war, sexual or work slavery, who die in the middle of fire or are victims of attacks or frustrated attempts to reach what their parents thought would be safe harbors, who are denied the right to education and health, who, in brief, only know fear and need.

I would now turn to the two other questions trying not to extend myself beyond the required extension for this contribution.

I firmly believe that we should not think in terms of how non active violence brings strengths or opportunities but rather that active non violence is the only way to be loyal to the teaching of Christ and of the Church. The Peace of Christ, the true peace naturally entails active non violence which is our duty to define and fill with the contents of the so many social teachings of our Church.

I think that Chapter 11 of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, just to quote an example, offers a rich challenge for our analysis and reflection in looking for answers to the fascinating questions posed by this marvelous initiative of the Conference.

We could start approaching how its contents can be considered, discussed and commonly interpreted to understand to which extent there is room in there for any justification of the outrageous concept of “just war” or not; to which extent we can build up a thorough and sound notion of just peace and active non violence following the various paragraphs of the Chapter and how we can read them in the light of the messages contained in *Pacem in Terris*, *Caritas in Veritate* and *Laudato SI*, for instance.

I would only reproduce here one of the paragraphs of the said Chapter 11, which summarizes the enormous possibilities for us to expand on the renewal of the Catholic understanding and commitment to non-violence as wisely posed by the Conference’s organizers.

Peace is the fruit of justice, [1020] (cf. *Is 32:17*) understood in the broad sense as the respect for the equilibrium of every dimension of the human person. Peace is threatened when man is not given all that is due him as a human person, when his dignity is not respected and when civil life is not directed to the common good. The defence and promotion of human rights is essential for the building up of a peaceful society and the integral development of individuals, peoples and nations. [1021]

I would therefore say that the answer to the third question is that we should commit ourselves to learning and understanding better how the social teaching of the Church in all its dimensions challenges our capacity to give testimony of the faith we proclaim.

If we are legitimately worried by the lack of an active non violence regard in our responses to war, armed conflict and to any other denial of the plan of God for mankind or, as the secular approach would say, to the respect for human dignity and the full realization of human rights, let's start a common and active commitment to really proclaim what the Church has been demanding from us since long and try to structure these teachings as the basis for catholic education, advocacy, campaigning and voice in any fora and level in which we are called to be present in any capacity, as religious or lay persons, as teachers, employees, or politicians, as citizens or authorities, not keeping the message for ourselves or among ourselves but sharing it with a world in so much need of hope.

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