

Pope Francis as Peacemaker

Introduction:

What is your image of the first year of Pope Francis?

One powerful image is the September 7, 2013 day of prayer and fasting for peace in Syria, the Middle East and the World, culminating in a four-hour vigil of prayer for Syria... his words:

“How I wish that all men and women of goodwill would look to the Cross if only for a moment! There, we can see God’s reply: violence is not answered by violence, death is not answered with the language of death.”

As my brother Gerard Whelan, SJ commented: “when the Pope arrived it was like a friend and neighbor thanking us for having accepted an invitation to visit him at his home.”

In this theme of Pope Francis as peacemaker, let me propose three ways of examining the question: why is he the peacemaker he is, what is his understanding of peace, and what does that mean to us?

- What are the qualities that shape the Pope and his attitudes on issues of peace and non-violence?**
- What does the Pope say/what does he emphasize in his words on peace and peacemaking?**
- What are the implications for you and me, and Pax Christi, in light of who Pope Francis is and what he says?**

A. Qualities:

I want to suggest three distinctive qualities of Pope Francis that shape his way of being, and through those, how he views the issues of non-violence and peacemaking. They are: *teologia del pueblo*, Jesuit spirituality, and, for lack of a better word, the “pastoral gene.”

1. Teologia del pueblo/Argentine liberation theology:

When we think of liberation theology, a class analysis shared with Marxist perspectives is usually part of the picture. Liberation theologians bend over backwards to clarify that while they use Marxist analysis, they do not adopt the materialism and determinism on which it is based.

Teologia del pueblo:

The Argentine version of liberation theology, has much in common – the pastoral method of “seeing, judging, acting” for instance. But its starting point is different: is the experience of culture, and the history of that culture, not a socio-structural class analysis that motivates. In fact, it draws from the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* for its inspiration:

Man (*Humanity*) comes to a true and full humanity only through culture, that is, through the cultivation of the goods and values of nature. ... The word "culture" in its general sense indicates everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities;... It is also in this way that there is formed the definite, historical milieu which enfolds the man of every nation and age and from which he draws the values which permit him to promote civilization. (#53)

Rather than a class analysis, is a cultural analysis that motivates; no matter what one's class might be, she or he shares in a cultural experience with values which have the capacity to unify. Similar to more traditional liberation theology, to say nothing of the Gospels, the most authentic and faithful interpreters of culture are the poor, with their traditional spirituality and sensitivity for justice.

This branch of liberation theology is clear in Pope Francis' pastoral method; as Cardinal Archbishop of Buenos Aires, he went to barrios and met with people. He spoke of bringing the church to places where people are, reaching out to them. His recent image of the church as a field hospital suggests that the church finds itself where people are most in need. This underpinning of his pastoral practice, I think, is critical for understanding why he does what he does. He is *desde la base*, but it is an inclusive vision, not competitive or triumphalistic.

That being said, his disdain for the excesses of capitalism, perhaps better said, of "libertarian capitalism," is clear. His critiques of exclusion and inequality, trickle-down economics, and the idolatry of markets and money are striking, and threatening, for two reasons:

- The critique is moral and theological, and economists don't have an answer for that.
- Francis also says that the poor are not the only victims of this system. The winners, the 1%, are also dehumanized –
 - "almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassionate the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own the culture of prosperity deadens us; we

are thrilled if the market offers a something new to purchase. In the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*)

2. Jesuit spirituality:

Before Pope Francis became Pope Francis, before he was Archbishop of Buenos Aires, he was a Jesuit. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1958, more than 50 years ago. As a Jesuit, he made the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius at least twice, and he served as director of novices and as provincial of the Argentine province. Both of those roles would have forced him to delve into the roots and understandings of the Jesuit perspective on God in the world – that is to say, a Jesuit spirituality.

Much has been made of his Jesuit roots the past couple of weeks as we celebrate the first anniversary of his election as pope. Rather than cite chapter and verse of what others say, let me share with you what strikes me as distinctively Jesuit in his way of proceeding.

- I am a sinner: self-identification as someone in need of mercy---a grace of the first week of the Spiritual Exercises...
- His prayer: gospel images, drawn from imaging/praying them
- His lifestyle: simplicity is part of Jesuit spirituality...the temptations of riches, honor, pride...
- His leadership: consultative and decisive. He doesn't mince words.

3. The pastoral leadership “gene”:

Pope Francis has a tangible gift for pastoral leadership. This is probably a combination of nature and nurture, and I’m not going to analyze that. But the combination of his gifts and his practice of them have given him a pastoral presence that is striking in its intensity and authenticity.

An example that suggests this: after six years as provincial, he was assigned to be the rector of the formation program in Buenos Aires. His “house jobs” were to feed the pigs and do the laundry. The best use of his time? Maybe, maybe not...but for forming pastoral leaders among the men he led...absolutely yes.

The first year of his papacy has been filled with examples of this pastoral gene in action

- **Holy Thursday: he went to a jail and washed the feet of prisoners, including Muslim women**
- **Lampedusa: his first trip outside of Rome was to the port town of Lampedusa, a landing place for immigrants from Africa. There he decried the “globalization of indifference” to the sufferings of these people.**
- **During a Wednesday papal audience, he held the face of Vinicio Riva, a man suffering from neurofibromatosis (Elephant disease). Vinicio, accustomed to stares of shock and fear, was initially confused by the pontiff's lack of hesitation. "He didn't have any fear of my illness," he said. "He embraced me without speaking ... I quivered. I felt a great warmth."**

Vinicio's aunt recalled his shoes. "They were like this," she said, holding her hands apart and laughing. "I thought yes, this is someone who really walks."

Francis' pastoral leadership comes from these sources, but it all goes back to Jesus...who is peace (Ephesians).

B. How does this play out in Francis as peacemaker?

To understand Francis' understanding of peace and peacemaking, we can look at three of his recent writings: his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, his message of January 1, the World Day of Peace, and his address to the international diplomatic community at the Vatican on January 13 of this year.

Francis is a pastoral leader, but not a systematic scholar. His pastoral vision is expressed in his writing, which is thoughtful, colloquial, and representative of the themes of his homilies and speeches. Let me invite you to hear the tones of the qualities I mentioned earlier as we look at his view of non-violence and peace.

1. *Evangelii Gaudium*:

Evangelii Gaudium, published in late November 2013, reads like a series of reflections on topics important to Francis. As reflections, the images he was using throughout the summer regularly appear in this exhortation.

The themes of peace and an end to violence appear in three sections:

- **Some Challenges to Today's World**
- **The Common Good and Peace in Society**
- **Social Dialogue as a Contributor to Peace**

Some Challenges to Today's World reflect his economic perspectives. The section headings give us a clue of his views: *No to an economy of exclusion, no to the new idolatry of money, no to a financial system which rules rather than serves.*

- **Until exclusion and inequality in society and between peoples are reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence." (#59)**
- **When a society -- whether local, national or global -- is willing to leave a part of itself on the fringes, no political programs or resources spent on law enforcement or surveillance systems can indefinitely guarantee tranquility." (#59)**
- **"Today's economic mechanisms promote inordinate consumption, yet it is evident that unbridled consumerism combined with inequality proves doubly damaging to the social fabric. Inequality eventually engenders a violence which recourse to arms cannot and never will be able to resolve." (#60)**

In short, unless we deal with inequality, Francis believes violence will keep recurring, no matter how much might we might use in trying to suppress it.

The Common Good and Peace in Society may best be called his social anthropology: how he looks at humanity and our actions in a complicated and sinful world. Francis' focus is on human/humane development which is an expression of peace.

He affirms that progress in building a people in peace, justice and fraternity depends on four principles (#222-237):

- ***Time greater than space...*initiating processes more important than owning spaces.**
- ***Unity prevails over conflict...*face the issues! The message of peace is not about a negotiated settlement but rather the**

conviction that the unity brought by the Spirit can harmonize every diversity.

- ***Realities are greater than ideas:*** Christianity is incarnational; we must deal with the realities before us.
- ***Whole is greater than the parts:*** realities fit into a broader understanding of the presence of the divine working in our history, in our cultures, in our lives of faith.

Listen for these dynamics in these quotes from this section of *Evangelii Gaudium*.

“Demands involving the distribution of wealth, concern for the poor and human rights cannot be suppressed under the guise of creating a consensus on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority. The dignity of the human person and the common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges. When these values are threatened, a prophetic voice must be raised.” (#218)

“Nor is peace simply the absence of warfare, based on a precarious balance of power; it is fashioned by efforts directed day after day towards the establishment of the ordered universe willed by God, with a more perfect justice among men.” (#219)

“In the end, a peace which is not the result of integral development will be doomed; it will always spawn new conflicts and various forms of violence.” (#219)

Social Dialogue as a contributor to peace is a section underlining the need for the church to dialogue with various people and perspectives in the broader culture of the world. In some ways, this section reads a bit like a laundry list: dialogues with reason and science, with other

Christians/ecumenism, with Jewish peoples, with faithful of non-Christian religious, and dialogue in the context of religious freedom. But even in what can seem like a list of politically-correct conversations, Francis has a line which draws me back again and again as to the power and importance of dialogue:

“A dialogue which seeks social peace and justice is in itself, beyond all merely practical considerations, an ethical commitment which brings about a new social situation.” (#250)

To have these dialogues is to create a new social situation, is to make an ethical commitment to what can come from that new social situation. To harken back to the previous section, initiation is better than ownership, unity prevails over conflict, realities are greater than ideas, the whole is greater than the parts!

2. World Day of Peace message

Every January 1, the pope proclaims a message of peace for the world. This January 1, Francis gave his first World Day of Peace message, entitled *Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace*.

Let me acknowledge that “fraternity” is not an ideal word to use in English. It has gender-exclusive dimensions that are not present in either Spanish or Italian. So I will use the word, knowing that what Pope Francis means by it is not exactly what many of us hear. Fraternity is an expansive term that includes attributes of solidarity, community, care for one another and care for those in need: in short, it is the attitude of the Gospel.

***Fraternity, the Foundation and Pathway to Peace* can be understood as an extended reflection on the biblical story of Cain and Abel, a reflection that asks how we can create anew in Christ the “fraternity” that can bring about peace in the world.**

Quoting Benedict XVI, Francis notes near the outset that globalization makes his neighbors, but does not make us brothers. The many situations of inequality, poverty, and injustice, are signs not only have a profound lack of fraternity, but also the absence of a culture of solidarity.

“The story of Cain and Abel teaches that we have an inherent calling to fraternity, but also the tragic capacity to betray that calling. This is witnessed by our daily acts of selfishness, which are at the root of so many wars and so much injustice: many men and women die at the hands of their brothers and sisters who are incapable of seeing themselves as such, that is, as beings made for reciprocity, for communion and self-giving.” (#2)

The section headings of the message point to the foundational role of fraternity:

- ***Where is your brother?***
- ***And you will all be brothers***
- ***Fraternity, the foundation and pathway to peace:* In this section, Pope Francis states that integral development of peoples is the new name for peace, and peace is a work of solidarity.**
- ***Fraternity a prerequisite for fighting poverty***
- ***The rediscovery of fraternity in the economy***

- ***Fraternity extinguishes war:*** He notes that many conflicts are taking place amid general indifference.

In general, the message is not shy in challenging the world's notions of violence and peace. A few citations will suffice:

“For this reason, I appeal forcefully to all those who sow violence and death by force of arms: in the person you today see simply as an enemy to be beaten, discover rather your brother or sister, and hold back your hand! Give up the way of arms and go out to meet the other in dialogue, pardon and reconciliation, in order to rebuild justice, trust, and hope around you! “From this standpoint, it is clear that, for the world’s peoples, armed conflicts are always a deliberate negation of international harmony, and create profound divisions and deep wounds which require many years to heal. Wars are a concrete refusal to pursue the great economic and social goals that the international community has set itself.” (#7)

“Nevertheless, as long as so great a quantity of arms are in circulation as at present, new pretexts can always be found for initiating hostilities. For this reason, I make my own the appeal of my predecessors for the non-proliferation of arms and for disarmament of all parties, beginning with nuclear and chemical weapons disarmament.” (#7)

“We cannot however fail to observe that international agreements and national laws – while necessary and greatly to be desired – are not of themselves sufficient to protect humanity from the risk of armed conflict. A conversion of hearts is needed which would permit everyone to recognize in the other a brother or sister to care for, and to work together with, in building a fulfilling life for all. This is the spirit which inspires many initiatives of civil society, including religious

organizations, to promote peace. I express my hope that the daily commitment of all will continue to bear fruit and that there will be an effective application in international law of the right to peace, as a fundamental human right and a necessary prerequisite for every other right.” (#7)

3. Message to Vatican diplomats:

Each year the Pope addresses the diplomats of Vatican City, those representing other nations at the Vatican. This year’s talk on January 13 carried forward his points from the World Day of Peace message in the context of dialogue, in the need for integral development.

“Being closed and isolated always makes for a stifling, heavy atmosphere which sooner or later ends up creating sadness and oppression. What is needed instead is a shared commitment to favoring a culture of encounter, for only those able to reach out to others are capable of bearing fruit, creating bonds of communion, radiating joy and being peacemakers.”

“How much pain and desperation are caused by self-centeredness which gradually takes the form of envy, selfishness, competition and the thirst for power and money! At times it seems that these realities are destined to have the upper hand. Christmas, on the other hand, inspires in us Christians the certainty that the final, definitive word belongs to the Prince of Peace, who changes “swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks” (cf. *Is 2:4*), transforming selfishness into self-giving and revenge into forgiveness.”

In summary, Pope Francis is a forceful advocate for peace as an expression of deepest human and Christian values, and as the intended end of integral development. For Francis, we cannot separate peace from the broader human context. For humanity, peace is our goal and our end.

C. What does this say to us?

As members and friends of Pax Christi, we cannot help but be animated by Pope Francis' thoughts on the necessity of peace and the context for peace making. Before suggesting three areas for further reflection, I think it could be helpful to remind ourselves of the Mission Statement of Pax Chrsti.

Mission Statement

"Pax Christi USA strives to create a world that reflects the Peace of Christ by exploring, articulating, and witnessing to the call of Christian nonviolence. This work begins in personal life and extends to communities of reflection and action to transform structures of society. Pax Christi USA rejects war, preparations for war, and every form of violence and domination. It advocates primacy of conscience, economic and social justice, and respect for creation."

Hearing those words as an entry point to Francis' message, let me draw out three areas for fruitful reflection.

- 1. Peace and peacemaking begin with people, and the primary context for understanding people is through the lens of the poor.**

For Francis, peace is not an abstract concept, a Platonic ideal. Rather, it is the end/goal of human existence, it is the focus of/identical with integral development, and it can only take place in the human context of fraternity and solidarity.

This perspective demands looking at the world from the perspective of the poor: those most likely to suffer violence, those most in need of the integral development inseparable from peace, those who often live fraternity more deeply than those who have much more.

We can be tempted to see peace as an ideal rather than something rooted in human experience. Our abstract notions of peace and peacemaking can separate us from the experience of those for whom peace is most needed and makes the most difference. Francis challenges us to ground our peacemaking in the reality of those most in need.

2. What is the language of peacemaking?

Massimo Faggioli, an Italian church historian teaching at the University of St. Thomas, made the following observations in the essay *The Shrinking Common Ground in the American Church*. (America, Feb 24 2014.)

“The crisis of the engagement of many Catholics in politics is one of the symptoms of the crisis of the idea of politics as one of the highest forms of charity, because it serves the common good. But the Catholic Church is one of the last defenders of the potentially humanizing effect of politics, and of the potentially dehumanizing effect of a

community of Christians closing in on itself. The question for Catholics is not whether to engage with the state and one another, but what defines this engagement. The particular challenge for Catholics in the United States is to overcome the temptation to see everything as a competition between two camps, whether in politics or among Catholics. The election of Pope Francis is perhaps the signal that the future of Catholicism consists less of apocalypse and division and more of prophecy and unity.

How often does our language fall into the ‘two camp model’ described by Faggioli? How often are our “Gospel values” propelled as much by rhetoric as belief? How often do we demonize and not listen to, or study, or engage the arguments of those who do not agree with us?

Prophecy and unity together are a difficult challenge, and Pope Francis is calling us to be up to the task. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he refutes the controlling images of apocalypse and division: “We are far from the so-called “end of history”, since the conditions for a sustainable and peaceful development have not yet been adequately articulated and realized.” (#59)

How does what we say and what we do help to create the conditions for sustainable and peaceful development? What do we say and do that get in the way?

3. Do we smell like the sheep?

Pope Francis initially used this graphic image of fraternity and solidarity when addressing the priests of the diocese of Rome. He

asked them to get out of their offices to meet with their people, their flocks, to smell like the sheep. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he extended that invitation to all of us, seeing the Church as missionary and all of us charged to bring the good news to those most in need of it. “I especially ask Christians in communities throughout the world to offer a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion. Let everyone admire how you care for one another, and how you encourage and accompany one another: ‘By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’” (#99)

Are we willing to get our hands dirty in the name of peace? Are we willing to let go of what we may think is important so that those we serve can have a voice? This can be a challenge, but it is the right one: it is the only way, Francis suggests, that we can truly have love for one another.

I hope this quick tour of Pope Francis as Peacemaker has been helpful for your understanding of the events of the past year. Let us ask for God’s help to move us further, as disciples of prophecy and unity, toward the peace that is the purpose and goal of our world...true peace reflected in the prince of peace.

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