

Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference

Session 1: Experiences of nonviolence - Reflection Mairead Maguire

Mairead Maguire: Thank you Pat. It's a great joy and privilege to be with you this morning. And following on the bishop's comments I feel a bit like Cardinal Turkson's joke last night, when the elephant takes a bath there's no water left.

[audience laughter]

Mairead Maguire: Because the bishop has, in a nutshell, said what nonviolence is about. Nonviolence is about love. Nonviolence is about, it's a relational thing. It's about relations. It's about us trying on our journey to develop the ability to love ourselves and to love each other, to love our community, and to love our world. But that is a spiritual journey and it takes a long time because we are very human and we make mistakes, and we fall down, and we are afraid like the rebels. We too carry our fear. But we ask the Holy Spirit to help us lose that fear and come into complete love and joy and happiness, because that's what life is supposed to bring.

In Northern Ireland they call it "Troubles." In 1976, I won the 1976 Nobel Prize so I'm quite old. But when the Troubles started one of my younger sister's three children were killed in a clash between the IRA and the British army. And she seriously ill, and subsequently died. So the Troubles actually was there – killing, violence, and war on our streets. When we talk about : "troubles," we are talking about human life. We're talking about pain and suffering and communities never being given an offer to survive trauma, because everyone gets traumatized. We started a movement in '76 staying, "Stop the violence. Violence is wrong, violence is always wrong, violence doesn't work. Nonviolence does work." I am for the pope calling and having an encyclical on peace and nonviolence. I look forward to the pope saying, "Violence is wrong, violence is always wrong, there are alternatives, and violence is not the way of Jesus." In Northern Ireland before the Troubles started, I met a young man in the Irish Republican Army, very young, he was only 12 or 13. And he answered me, "We're fighting a just war. The Catholic Church blesses just war. The church has always blessed just war and our own struggle is a just war." I then started studying just war theory. And I was well into my 30s and a practicing Catholic from [inaudible] and I had never heard the just war message coming from the pulpits with a real conviction in the height of the Troubles. Violence is wrong, just war theory is wrong, you are called to love, to follow the nonviolence of Jesus.

I came and studied Just War theology, theory, with Fr. John L. McKenzie who said, "The just war theology is a phony piece of morality." Now we got it wrong. The church has got the theology of just war wrong. Because the Christian journey was total nonviolence and unless we go to the heart of the matter and declare "Just War is not the message of Jesus, we got it wrong," we might even go so far as to say, "We're sorry because we have not taught the message of nonviolence," then when Christians are forced in their situation to look at fight, which they might often do, or flight -- where is the third option, the way of Jesus' nonviolence? So I hope

we put up there the way of nonviolent teaching in every school, in every college, in every university, in every home, in every heart, nonviolence, the way of Jesus is the way of peace.

Now as a church, as a Catholic church, we are trapped in the heart of militarism and war and it is destroying the message of nonviolence and love. We must divest ourselves of blessing militarism and war. We deny the message of Jesus when we bless militarism and war. We have to change the theology. If we don't change the theology we will continue supporting a world [inaudible] of militarism and war, perpetual war, killing, injustice, and destroying the poor who have no hope. If the church identifies with the military industrial complex, which is it doing, and denies the nonviolence of Jesus, which it is doing, we have to look at the theology, of the idea of redemptive violence. Young men dying, or committing suicide, or killing in the name of their cause because blood sacrifice is in our theology. Go to the cross. It wasn't a violent blood theology. It was about love, truth, justice, being prepared to live for the love of people, but never, never to kill.

In Northern Ireland our message is nonviolence, non-killing. We have a right not to be killed and a responsibility not to kill each other. I hope the pope will have an encyclical on peace and nonviolence for the world. This is what the world is crying out for. They want spiritual leadership. They want an ethic. They want a morality based on nonviolence, and it must be clear. In Northern Ireland at the height of our Troubles we listened for the message of Jesus' absolute nonviolence, "do not kill, but work for people." And we didn't hear it from our pulpits. Today the world is looking to the Vatican, to the pope, and we want to hear from the pope. Non-killing, nonviolence, peace. We reject the just war theology. We reject cruelty and all its works. And we reject the militarization of our world. Militarism and war must be abolished, and if we, the Christians, don't start that work, who is going to do it?

Thank you very much.