

**Theological Reflection
On
Global Peace and Security**

Peace: Whenever I reflect on the subject as peace and security, let alone global peace and security I cannot first begin without quoting Jeremiah when he challenged the royal court of his day saying, *“They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, “Peace, peace.” when there is no peace. They have acted shamefully, they have committed abomination; yet they are not ashamed, they did not know how to blush.”* (Jeremiah 6:14-15). Respect for the other is the beginning point for peace, and this is the issue faced by all in the world today. It is a person-to-person, group-to-group, and nation-to-nation operational task. Respect cannot be realized as long as one keeps the other at a distance in an act of abstraction.

I am reminded of Mary as she stood before the tomb where the body of Jesus was laid – she must have felt lost to her Lord and her Lord lost to her and then, turning and hearing what appeared to be a perfect stranger call her by name – “Mary!” She found herself again in the particularity of her spoken name. To call someone by name is to relate to the one called.

The reason we struggle so with the idea of peace and security is that it too easily becomes an abstraction. It is not in our human nature to abstract the reality of life. We can look at the wealth of human creations that seek to vividly communicate the fullness of life to see this is true. We are constantly seeking to define the purpose of our very lives on this earth.

God chose not to be an abstraction. God lovingly creating with only the spoken word; compassionately bringing to order the chaotic forces raging over the deep. Everything was created in the order required to support and sustain the life that was to follow. In the beginning the abstract idea of God found particularity in relationship to God’s creation and in walking the garden with humankind.

All of scripture is filled with the tension of abstraction-v- particularity. Humanity struggling with knowing what we did not know, we eat the forbidden fruit and find the particularity of God abstracted once outside the garden and we turn to symbols and ideas in attempt to relate once again to an apparently transcendent God.

Yet it is God who really chooses to be related ... the garden, Abram and Sari, Jacob and Rebecca, Israel – starting with a single pair chooses a whole community – to be a blessing to the world. God so loved the world that God comes personally into the world not to condemn but to bring wholeness to the world (John 3:16-17).

For Jews, the particularity of God is found in the context of the act of corporate worship when the Word is read and the prayers are offered; for Muslims, the particularity of God is experienced in bending one’s will in obedience to the will of God; and for Christians

the particularity of God is realized in God's work through the gathered community of faith in the name of Christ Jesus.¹

The particular work of peace is concerned with salvation. *A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots* (Isaiah 11) speaks volumes about our need for an awakening. It continues in asking the question *I desire mercy, not sacrifice* (Matthew 12:7), and is born out of a cooperative spirit that brings creation to light ...*the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid* ... (Isaiah 11:6) which means for me that the wolf learns that his/her self identity is not necessarily discovered in eating lambs.

When I reflect on salvation, I discover that it is both personal and communal but never private. It is never complete when separated from the community context. Salvation is for the world and is God's gift – the giving of God's self in partnering relationships of service. A gift must be opened but to remain a gift, it must be given away again and again.

In many ways, salvation is peace. And here comes the rub: *Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth* (Matthew 10: 34). When we work to bring particularity to peace we will discover that we will need to cooperate together to bring healing to our homes, our cities, our land, our nations and our world. In this context, peace is not an end state but momentary stops along the path towards wholeness – in cooperation with the power of the Holy Spirit it is the journey of perfection (a journey that must be walked with care) and not the end-state of perfection itself. I wonder if the reason we so easily abstract is because we just become too tired and overwhelmed with the journey.

People-to-People diplomacy is the grassroots of peacemaking, and it is hard demanding work that requires we never give up on the relationship. It requires that we develop a sense of connectedness, mutuality, interdependence, trust, and respect of the other, all the variables found in the formula for love.

For me, *peace* is not the absence of conflict because every creative act gives birth to conflict. The very work of creation is conflicting. Change does not come without its price but it doesn't have to be violent. Therefore, it seems, *peace* is discovered momentarily in the midst of the actions of conflict resolution. Jesus reminds us that *the kingdom of God is near*. The thesis for global peace and security is this: Peace and security can be found through conflict management processes, keeping a critical eye on the need for restorative justice, and can lead to peace as wholeness where all are able to live in the tension of past-present-future.

¹ Miroslav Volf has an excellent perspective of this work when he says, *the cross is the giving up of God's self in order not to give up on humanity; it is the consequence of God's desire to break the power of human enmity without violence and receive human beings into divine communion* ... The cross is very concrete -- death is very concrete For me, the acts of human violence result in the rending of the divine community when human communities are torn asunder by their violent acts one on another. So the gathered community of faith is called out to become the peacemaking servant – God's blessing for the world.

Two critical paths must be followed: We must be willing to conduct honest and open self-examination, not only personally but corporately as well; and 2, be personally and communally committed to a vision for the future, or there can be no future. Human beings are time-spatial (lives in the continuum of history – past – present – future) creatures who live in the present remembering the past and hoping for the future. We cannot ignore the past or the future and we cannot only live for the present moment.

The process of remembering is critical – it grounds us in our present locale, and gives us freedom to reach for the future. Persons, communities, and nations need help embracing the tension between the glories and the wounds of the past; seeking transformational actions in the present time and space; and reaching for the future – fully aware of the truth of the human condition. The doctrine of remembering is important because we are called to look where hope began so that we can begin to discern together where and how it can become better in current affairs.²

Albert Einstein once said *The problems that exist in the world today cannot be solved by the level of thinking that created them*. I believe Einstein's point is that all of us stand on the head and shoulders of those who have led us to this place and time. It says that the state of world affairs and environment has been created for us by those who brought us here and that through our concerted creative efforts we are building the future for our children.

Security: When I listen to others discuss matters of security the idea of freedom is often inserted into the conversation, but free from what or for what? The answer is to be free from fear so that a person's life has meaning and does not become an abstraction.

Exploration almost always reveals that when people cry out for freedom, what they are saying is that they need power. This is why the matter of security is complex yet so very important to practice. John the Baptist didn't condemn the soldier who came to him asking what he needed to do to receive eternal life. John simply advised him not to extort or exceed his authority. Jesus praised the Centurion as a model of faith not to be found anywhere among the faithful.

It seems that personal and corporate power is essential to manage fear. With a modicum of power people are empowered to provide care of self (loving self) and to trade for and share possessions (relating to others – loving others). The kingdom of God remains hidden in an atmosphere of fear and likely cannot be revealed without the correct amount of security. Security is required to adjudicate those times when God's gifts of grace become our obstacles to grace.³

Freedom means that people possess power to actualize who they believe they are in the particularity of the community they live. Access to power opens for them avenues to relate to others in their community and to secure a level of self-determination and respect. Power-Pleasures-Possessions is a relational model. From our faith perspective it is

² I am indebted to Dr Marc Gopin and our conversation together assisting me in discerning these insights.

³ Msgr Chester Michaels, in his text *New Day*, explains that power, possessions, and pleasures (gifts from God) are too easily exploited.

operationalized through the spiritual disciplines of prayer (relating to God) –fasting (relating to self) –stewardship (relating to others). With a small leap, this model is very akin to Paul’s discussion of the community as the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12).

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body.⁴ We on this earth are no longer separate one from the other. We are now one body. Global economic engines and technology have knit us all together⁵ into one global body and each culture and every community and spoken language brings its unique giftedness to our global table for the purpose of building up the whole body – Now you are the body ... and individually members of it ... strive for the greater gifts ... and we know these to be hope faith, and love – the greatest of these is love. Without hope there can be no faith, and without faith there can be no love. The role of security is to provide for the space where hope can be restored, made accessible and preserved for all.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:12

⁵ Genesis 11