

Cultivating a Culture of Peace

One of the big challenges in working for justice and peace is the magnitude of the problems to be addressed and the sheer number of issues. It is easy to feel overwhelmed and ineffectual. How do we maintain our sense of hope and purpose, our sense of making even a small difference, of achieving anything at all?

For me it is helpful to try and have a sense of the big picture, but to identify where my efforts fit in. If we use a framework to articulate our analysis of the reality, we can have a sense of doing something about something while acknowledging that we cannot do something about everything. We can see then how our contributions are part of the overall response that is needed, and we can also respect the partial contributions of others. We can be free to get on with the work, rather than dissipating energy in trying to convince each other about which part of the work we should be doing.

I was at an Asian region ecumenical consultation on social advocacy last year and heard Archbishop Ledesima from the Philippines refer to the culture of life, the culture of human rights and the culture of peace as nested paradigms. This really 'clicked' for me, so I engaged him in conversation about it afterwards. These reflections are grounded in the insight provided by the concept of 'nested paradigms' but diverge somewhat from the Archbishop's use of the concept.

1. Culture of Peace as Framework

I believe that the culture of peace can provide a framework for much of the welfare, justice and peace work that we undertake and a common language that can join our efforts with those of people of other faiths and none. The *UN Decade for Building a Culture of Peace* then provides us with opportunities for outreach, networking and communicating about our efforts. This is why the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council is using cultivating a culture of peace as a unifying theme for its work during the decade.

The philosophies underpinning the UN Decade and the related World Council of Churches *Decade for Overcoming Violence* are set out on the handout that you have received.

The ASCJC has adopted the language of cultivating rather than building a culture of peace in line with other Christians in the Asian region. Anyone who has ever supervised renovations or tended a garden will understand the difference in imagery!

I want to present my version of Bishop Ledesima's diagram as a way of unpacking the meaning of a culture of peace. This too is on the handout that you have received.

1.1 Culture of Life

The language of a 'culture of life' has become identified in our Church in Australia almost exclusively with anti abortion actions and euthanasia concerns. It has, I believe, become identified with a conservative view of the faith, and an emphasis on traditional family life. This is an unfortunate reduction of a very rich concept.

A culture of life is about affirming and defending the right to life, not only of the unborn child or the sick and elderly person, but also of the convicted criminal sentenced to death, and of those without

enough to eat. It is about welcoming new life, protecting the most vulnerable lives, the survival of the planet, the rejection of killing and all that leads to death.

The ACSJC's campaign against the death penalty obviously fits here. Our rejection of the use of force and armed conflict when it fails to meet moral and ethical criteria, such as the bombing of Afghanistan also fits here.

Where there is no justice, there can be no peace. Where there is neither justice nor peace, anti-life forces flourish.

1.2 Culture of Human Rights

There is more to a culture of peace than mere physical survival. A culture of human rights builds on a culture of life. It affirms and promotes civil and political rights such as: the right to life, physical integrity, freedom from discrimination on the basis of sex, race, religion, ethnicity, belief or political opinion. It affirms and promotes economic, cultural and social rights such as: the right to food, housing or shelter, healthcare, education, and participation in cultural life.

Not only do we all have the right to life, but we are also equal in dignity and rights.

The ACSJC's work on the rights of Indigenous Australians, of asylum seekers and refugees, of outworkers and unemployed people fit here. Our efforts to eradicate racism fit here, and many of our international solidarity actions also focus on the defence of human rights, for example representations to the Malaysian Government regarding people being held under the Internal Security Act for peaceful political activities, and our campaign against the blasphemy laws in Pakistan.

But a rights based culture is also not enough to ensure true peace. Rights claims may be in conflict.

1.3 Culture of Peace

A culture of peace needs to include all that we have described as a culture of life and culture of human rights. It includes a range of values, attitudes, traditions and ways of life such as: respect for all life, rejection of violence in all its forms, valuing diversity, sharing with others, listening to understand, preservation of the planet, and a commitment to solidarity.

Working for a culture of peace requires our means to be in harmony with our aims. The education and formation work that we do to try to change attitudes and behaviors through information and examination of core values fits here. A culture of peace is, in many ways a spiritual quest. For us, presenting and applying the Catholic social justice tradition, which calls us to live the values of the Gospel concretely in our world, is an important part of our work for a culture of peace.

2. Levels of Action

Culture is about how we make meaning of reality. It includes values, attitudes, beliefs and traditions. A culture is a collective thing, but it is carried by individuals. To cultivate a culture of peace then needs action at the individual, family, and community, national and international levels.

It is not only work on physical conflict or international relations that contributes to a culture of peace. Living with justice and harmony in our households is a contribution to a culture of peace.

For me, a nested paradigm is different to a linear progression. The three paradigms are not a sequence of steps, but concentric circles. In the same way, I think the levels at which we can work are nested rather than a series of steps. They are dynamically inter-related.

We are all continually challenged to live more fully the values of a culture of peace in our personal lives. If we had to complete this step before moving on to other levels of aggregation, we would never feel able to take on important spheres of action such as national legislation!

The important thing, I think, is to recognize the links between each level at which action is needed, and not to behave as though our personal behavior or the behavior of our community or country is unrelated to work for peace at other levels. How can we have peace in our communities when there is no peace in the world? But how can the world be at peace when our communities are not? How can I personally feel at peace when there is so much injustice in the world? The levels of action are inter-related. We should be striving for congruence in our efforts across each level.

3. Start Where You Can

Over the years I've become a great believer in starting wherever you can. If you are reflective about your action it will lead you to follow the connections both forwards and backwards, across different paradigms in the diagram, and across different levels of action.

As we move across the diagram from a culture of life, to a culture of human rights, to a culture of peace, each step is cumulative, including and building upon the previous one. In a sense we move from promoting life, to promoting the fullness of life.

Working to affirm and protect life is part of a culture of peace. Working to affirm, protect and promote human rights is part of a culture of peace. If we are working against the death penalty, we are working for a culture of peace. If we are working for fair wages, we are working for a culture of peace. If we are working on conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, we are working for a culture of peace. If we are working for the recognition of the rights of Indigenous people, we are working for a culture of peace. If we are working for the remission of death dealing international debt, we are working for a culture of peace.

In the words of the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn:

Although we walk all the time, our walking is usually more like running. When we walk like that, we print anxiety and sorrow on the earth. We have to walk in a way that we only print peace and serenity on the earth. We can all do this, provided that we want it very much. Any child can do it. If we can take one step like this, we can take two, three, four, and five. When we are able to take one step peacefully and happily, we are working for the cause of peace and happiness for the whole of humankind.

Thich Nhat Hahn
Peace is Every Step, Rider, 1995, pp 28 – 29.

4. One Personal Action

A group of Nobel Peace Prize Laureates drafted Manifesto 2000 on the occasion of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council has become a Messenger of the Manifesto 2000 and is helping UNESCO to collect 100 million signatures. By signing the Manifesto each one of us can express our commitment to making a personal contribution to a culture of peace on a daily basis. This action, initiated in 2000 remains just as relevant today.

Contact the ACSJC for posters and signature sheets or sign up on line at www.unesco.org/manifesto2000/default.asp?part=NGO/AUL/004/IUI

MANIFESTO 2000

Because the year 2000 must be a new beginning, an opportunity to transform – all together - the culture of war and violence into a culture of peace and non-violence.

Because this transformation demands the participation of each and every one of us, and must offer young people and future generations the values that can inspire them to shape the world based on justice, solidarity, liberty, dignity, harmony and prosperity for all.

Because the culture of peace can underpin sustainable development, and environmental protection and the well being of each person.

Because I am aware of my share of responsibility for the future of humanity, in particular to the children of today and tomorrow.

I pledge in my daily life, in my family, my work, my community, my country and my region, to:

1. **Respect all life.** Respect the life and dignity of each human being without discrimination or prejudice.
2. **Reject violence.** Practice active non-violence, rejecting violence in all its forms: physical, sexual, psychological, economic and social, in particular towards the most deprived and vulnerable such as children and adolescents.
3. **Share with others.** Share my time and material resources in a spirit of generosity to put an end to exclusion, injustice and political and economic oppression.
4. **Listen to understand.** Defend freedom of expression and cultural diversity, giving preference always to dialog and listening without engaging in fanaticism, defamation and the rejection of others.
5. **Preserve the planet.** Promote consumer behaviour that is responsible and development practices that respect all forms of life and preserve balance of nature on the planet.
6. **Rediscover solidarity.** Contribute to the development of my community, with the full participation of women and respect for democratic principles, in order to create together new forms of solidarity.

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Culture of Life

- * right to life
- *welcoming new life
- * protecting the most vulnerable lives
- * survival of the planet
- * rejection of killing & all that leads to death

Culture of Human Rights

- *civil and political rights
- * economic, social and cultural rights

Culture of Peace

- *respect for all life
- * reject violence
- * valuing diversity
- * share with others
- * Listen to understand
- * preserve the planet

Nested Paradigms: based on the ideas of Bishop Antonio Ledesima

A Decade to Overcome Violence

Cultivating a Culture of Peace...

Partially in response to the United Nations' International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001 – 2010), the World Council of Churches has declared a Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) for this same time period. The emphasis of the DOV is on 'overcoming' rather than on 'violence' and it is hoped that the Decade will highlight and network efforts by churches to overcome different types of violence.

THE UN DECADE FOR A CULTURE OF PEACE

The UN General Assembly adopted a "Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace" on 13 September 1999. This Declaration defined a culture of peace as a set of values, attitudes, traditions and modes of behaviour and ways of life based on:

- **Respect for life**, ending of violence and promotion and practice of non-violence through education, dialog and cooperation;
- Full respect for the principles of **sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of States** and non-intervention in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State, in accordance with the Charter of United Nations and international law;
- Full respect for and promotion of all **human rights and fundamental freedoms**;
- Commitment to **peaceful settlement of conflicts**;
- Efforts to meet the **developmental and environmental needs** of present and future generations;
- Respect for and promotion of the **right to development**;
- Respect for and promotion of **equal rights of and opportunities for women and men**;
- Respect for and promotion of the rights of everyone to **freedom of expression, opinion and information**;
- Adherence to the principles of **freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, pluralism, and cultural diversity, dialog and understanding** at all levels of society and among nations; and fostered by enabling national and international environment conducive to peace.

THE GOALS OF THE WCC DECADE TO OVERCOME VIOLENCE ARE:

- **Addressing holistically the wide varieties of violence**, both direct and structural, in homes, communities, and in international arenas and learning from the local and regional analyses of violence and ways to overcome violence.
- **Challenging the churches** to overcome the spirit, logic, and practice of violence; to relinquish any theological justification of violence; and to affirm anew the spirituality of reconciliation and active non-violence.
- **Creating a new understanding of security** in terms of cooperation and community, instead of in terms of domination and competition.
- **Learning from the spirituality and resources for peace building of other faiths** to work with communities of other faiths in the pursuit of peace and to challenge the churches to reflect on the misuse of religious and ethnic identities in pluralistic societies.
- **Challenging the growing militarisation of our world**, especially the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

(A Basic Framework for the Decade to Overcome Violence: working document adopted by the Central Committee of the WCC, 26 August – 3 September 1999).

Catholic and ecumenical gatherings in the Asia Pacific region have confirmed that cultivating a culture of peace is an urgent priority for our region, and it is from our region that the language of cultivating a culture of peace has been adopted.