

Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference

Session 1: Experiences of Nonviolence - Reflection Pietro Ameglio

Pietro Ameglio: Well, very grateful to spirit to continue in this line. I will try to make all one dialogue in my Spanglish.

We have more questions than answers. For me it was very important to listen yesterday, the pope[']s letter, how to stop the hand of the person that is aggressive and [unjust]. I think humankind doesn't know very much how to do it. At least in a country as Mexico where we have a very bad-named drug war. It really is a war against people. It's a kind of war where in every part, there are people of the government, there are people in the gangs, and there are businessmen. It's not a war of government against organized crime, it's war of groups, of gangs, where in every gang there are these identities. So society sees itself in the middle and we have a number of social groups, 103,000 persons killed in six years and something deeper, 32,000 of people disappeared. To be disappeared is much more hard [than] to be killed. It is a situation where the family stops living. Every phone, everything that rings you think is your disappeared familia. So, it's very deep how it breaks the social organization, no?

It that sense I would try to, I have a part, academic, teórico, but I have a part of activist. And I'm in the middle of many troubles also and I'll try to share two or three concepts perhaps of our experience, not teórica, it can be useful to our realities. I think nonviolence needs a place and a time. You can't speak in abstract of nonviolence because the different situations, place and time, changes the strategies and the tactics. Even if we have big principles as someone shared, you two, but some cross situations in life are not so easy to confront. I don't want to give examples of things of action, we have many of them, but, for me what's important, what I heard yesterday about the Holy Spirit and the need to have a prophetic church. I learned from many years from a big Maryknoll priest in Mexico about nonviolence that what Mary of Guadalupe, the Guadalupe Virgin, eh, help me Gerry, la Virgen de Guadalupe? Asked Juan Diego, the indigenous, [what] she meant is two things. And for me are the two main qualities of nonviolence: to be humble and to have audacity. And I think there is a very big challenge, not only to churches but to many of us, to have more audacity. We can't be perfect without audacity.

And in the middle of a war where in Mexico, we are not afraid, we are terrorized. It's different to be afraid than to be terrorized. And it's not so easy to struggle in the middle of terror. Because it happens, I saw it many times in my life, as St. Paul said, "I don't do the good I want, but I do all the bad that I don't want." That happens when you are terrorized, you lost the capacity of thinking, of reflection. Our society is terrorized. I work with victims and I also work in [inaudible] resistance for the land. And it's a different situation because [there] are community victims. But in our drug war it's full of individual victims, families, it's different the way of struggling in nonviolence.

And one thing we learned is that in nonviolence, nonviolent struggle has a direct relation, relación, relation with the adversary. That, it seems a very stupid thing, easy. But the biggest part of our groups, ourself, and in these more or less 30 years, we don't take conscious that our actions have a relation with the actions of the adversary. It seems a very simple thing. So, if the adversary is at the level of disappearing people, killing people, no justice, we can't keep doing marches and letters in the paper. Because it starts being a kind of "simbolation."

Voice: Simulation.

Pietro Ameglio: We simulate that we struggle, but the war process continues. And we must have the courage of making these questions, what we do stoops the inhuman process or not, even if we feel that we are very big activists. But, the level of struggling with our nonviolent actions doesn't have a proportion with the level of the other part. And in that sense in Mexico we learn with police, victim's struggle over the last five six years that's right. Well, we need to go through noncooperation and civil disobedience if we really want to stop this process. Otherwise we are in a big simulation.

In this sense, churches have a very big place because there is a tool in nonviolent struggle that is the moral reserve. Churches have a social force that many of us, we don't have. But not churches in abstract, because priests, [laity], nuns they are in the front, but hierarchy. And that's I hear bishops saying that you didn't run as refugees, our hierarchy runs away at all in our war, they dump their body in some kind of actions, the only thing they do is say to the newspaper, "Oh how terrible is violence." That doesn't help anything because government controls all the medias. So our big challenge is how to push hierarchy of churches in the middle of a real nonviolent testimony against power. Because nonviolent has a constructive problem in one part, as Gandhi said, in the social network. But also has to challenge power to say, "Stop" otherwise the process [inaudible] continues. And there is very important is the weapon, the nonviolent weapon, we call nonviolent weapons, of the moral reserve.

Well. [inaudible]