



PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM
DE IUSTITIA ET PACE

Annual St. Brigid's Lecture

POPE FRANCIS AND THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL: THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

Parish of St. Brigid's, Derryvolgie Avenue, Belfast
Wednesday 4th March 2015 at 7.30 p.m.

Introduction: your progress towards peace, a source of hope for others!

Bishop Treanor, members of other Churches and ecclesial communities, public representatives, sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ:

1. I thank Fr O'Donnell and the Parish Pastoral Council for their kind invitation to give the annual St. Brigid's lecture, on the theme: "*Pope Francis and the Joy of the Gospel: The Social Dimension*". As President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace I am particularly pleased that you have afforded me the opportunity to make my first visit to the city of Belfast. For many years, images of violent conflict have flashed across the world from this divided city. Today, it is a great joy to witness at first hand the enormous efforts being made in the search for reconciliation and peace among the people of this city and between the islands of Great Britain and Ireland
2. Of course, I realise that you continue to face many challenges. The journey to peace rarely travels along a fast road. It is more likely to meander down narrow paths and double back over difficult terrain. It much requires God's help. I have some personal experience in such matters. I presided over the National Peace Council of Ghana from 2006-2010 and brokered pre- and post-electoral peace processes. As a society, through the combined efforts of many in public, civic and ecclesiastical life, you have managed to keep moving towards peaceful co-existence and political stability.

I therefore welcome this opportunity to express the continued solidarity and prayerful support of the Holy See in your efforts to build, upon the agreements already achieved, a truly reconciled and therefore peaceful future for all. Peace on earth is, after all, a gift to those on whom God's favour rests. I am glad to have this opportunity to learn from you, too. The rest of the world, particularly those parts that continue to wrestle with long-running conflict, look at your journey towards peace with great interest and hope.

3. When Saint John Paul II visited Ireland in 1979, he made a particular point of paying homage “to the countless men and women” who over the years stepped beyond the comfort and security of their own community and traditions “to walk the path of reconciliation and peace”, often at great personal or political risk to themselves¹. From the very outset of his ministry, Pope Francis has emphasized this call from the very heart of the Gospel. We must dare to venture towards the peripheries, towards others whose difference can at first appear to challenge or even threaten us.
4. In this regard, I distinctly recall the meetings of Cardinals (General Congregations) before the last Conclave. Cardinal Bergoglio was one of the last to intervene, and his intervention was one of the shortest. In it he explained how in the Church we often live in a tension between the centre and the periphery. He said that “Evangelizing pre-supposes a desire in the Church to come out of herself. The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery.” Then, in the very last sentence of his intervention, he spoke of the need for the Church to be “the fruitful mother, who gains life from the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing.”
5. During his first year, Pope Francis returned to this theme after the Synod on New Evangelization. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, he echoes the words of Blessed Paul VI, “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord” (§3) and “with Christ joy is constantly born anew” (§1). Pope Francis cannot imagine us experiencing the joy of the Gospel without feeling compelled to break out of the safe and comfortable confines of our own world-view, our own tradition, our own community –what he sometimes refers to as the “sacristy” of the Church. The vocation of the Church and of every Christian therefore is to proclaim the joy of the Gospel in a missionary tone. And the basic mode of such proclamation, as Pope Francis has demonstrated time and time again, is practical witness. “The Lord gets involved and he involves his own, as he kneels to wash their feet... An Evangelising community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelisers thus take on the ‘smell of the sheep’, and the sheep are willing to hear their voice” (§24).
6. Along with “taking on the smell of the sheep”, going out to the peripheries has of course been a hallmark of the ministry of Jorge Bergoglio as a priest, as novice master, as Provincial of the Jesuits and as Archbishop of Buenos Aires. It not only drew him out to the shanty towns and villages of the poorest in Argentina. Critically, it also drew him to build active and respectful friendships with a wide range of individuals and groups who might otherwise have been on the margins of his life had he had the mentality of the Church as sacristy. He developed enduring relationships with representatives of the evangelical Christian tradition, whom he might well have considered his competitors. It compelled him to reach out and to build relationships with other Christian Churches and with representatives of the Argentinian Jewish and Muslim communities. But especially it drew him to visit the slums or *villas miserias* of Buenos Aires, the landless peasants or *campesinos*, the self-employed waste-pickers or *cartoneros*, those struggling to assure basic housing, the victims of human trafficking, and many other marginalized and excluded people.

¹ Saint Pope John Paul II, Homily at Mass in Drogheda, Ireland, September 1979

The call to a peaceful and multifaceted culture of encounter.

7. Something started here that has become a defining motif of the pastoral ministry of Pope Francis. It is what he calls in *Evangelii Gaudium*, “the growth of a peaceful and multifaceted culture of encounter” (§220). This “culture of encounter”, just like the “call to the peripheries”, is not an academic abstraction. It is an essential and intrinsic part of the proclamation of the joy of the Gospel. We have seen this at work in his bringing together of Israeli and Palestinian leaders for a joint service of prayer for peace and mutual understanding in the Vatican. We observed it in the moving and powerful vigil of prayer for peace and an end to the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We have witnessed it in the quiet but effective diplomacy he has exercised in bringing new understanding between the Governments of Cuba and the United States. We have seen it in his pastoral visits to strongly Christian countries like the Philippines and Korea, and to weakly Christian countries like Albania, Sri Lanka and Bosnia. Perhaps most importantly of all, we have witnessed it in his daily outreach to those he sees in the crowds, those he meets in Casa Santa Marta, those he meets, writes to, or phones “out of the blue”. We witnessed it in his decision to visit a prison for his first Holy Thursday where, among others, he washed the feet of a Muslim woman. All of these actions reveal a central conviction of Pope Francis, reinforced throughout *Evangelii Gaudium*, that “Evangelisation also involves the path of dialogue” (§ 238) and that “By preaching Jesus Christ, who is himself peace (cf. *Eph* 2:14), the new evangelisation calls on every baptised person to be a peacemaker and a credible witness to a reconciled life” (§239).
8. By word and example, Pope Francis teaches that a follower of Jesus is always to be a missionary, to experience the Love of Christ and feel driven to share it with others, to be drawn by the love of Jesus out to the peripheries of our own existence and to encounters of openness and dialogue. What motivates and inspires this missionary call to encounter? It is based on a prior and vital encounter that makes us followers of Jesus. It is very significant that in the opening chapter of *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis returns to some of the most eloquent and often quoted words of Pope *emeritus* Benedict XVI in his first encyclical “*Deus Caritas Est*”, God is love. “I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: ‘Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction’” (§7). Thanks to new or renewed encounter, Pope Francis goes on to say, “we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption... we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source of all of our efforts at evangelisation. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?” (§8).

Evangelii Gaudium on the social dimension of evangelisation.

9. So, for Pope Francis, as with Pope Benedict XVI, it is ultimately from this primary encounter with the source of all love, the love which gives us true life and meaning, that we are drawn outwards to confident, serene and merciful engagement with the other as brother, sister and friend. And when we seek the common good of the whole human family, we anticipate and prefigure the undivided city of God (Cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, § 7). This theme is developed most fully in the fourth and last chapter of the Apostolic Exhortation, *The Social Dimension of Evangelisation*. “The Kerygma”, the Holy Father reminds us, “has a clear social content: at the very heart of the Gospel is life in community and engagement with others” (§177). This means that human advancement and evangelisation are inextricably linked, two sides of one coin; they are not distinct parts of the mission of the Church, it is incorrect to separate them. Acceptance of the first proclamation of the Gospel, the personal

encounter with the love of Jesus Christ, by its very nature “brings forth in our lives and actions a primary and fundamental response: to desire, seek and protect the good of others” (§178). Citing the examples of Saint Francis of Assisi and Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, *Evangelii Gaudium* speaks of how an authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – “always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it” (§183).

10. As well as committing the individual Christian and the Church to a concern for all that is “related to the social order and the pursuit of the common good” (§182), this social dimension to evangelisation means that the proclamation of the Gospel cannot be “relegated to the inner sanctum of personal life, without influence on societal and national life, without concern for the soundness of civil institutions, without a right to offer an opinion on events affecting society” (§183). In making this point, I know that the Holy Father is giving expression to a growing concern among many Christians, including in this part of the world, that under the guise of secularity, Christianity and religious faith generally is being more and more relegated to the sphere of the purely private. It is as if there is an assumption that secularism, or a society without reference to God, is uniquely qualified to mediate, manage and govern authentic pluralism and diversity. This requires a more thorough and public critique of the view that secularism is a neutral approach to life and that it alone can mediate the public square. It also requires more comprehensive reflection on the nature and role of the Christian in public life, including in political life.

I was very struck by the fact that when Saint John Paul II visited Ireland in 1979, he spoke of those “called to the noble vocation of politics”. This is a theme which the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace is studying with a view to articulating the vocation of the political leader: how to give greater support and guidance to those Catholics who are called to witness to the joy and transforming power of the Gospel as elected representatives or public servants. It would certainly challenge the view that a Catholic politician can somehow publicly or privately disregard the teaching of the Church while still claiming to be a committed and informed member of the Church

The four principles of peace in the writings of Pope Francis.

11. A key starting point for such reflection is offered by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*. In the section on *The Common Good and Peace in Society*, the Holy Father sets out what he describes as “four specific principles which can guide the development of life in society and the building of a people where differences are harmonised within a shared pursuit” (§221). Here, in a spirit of dialogue, Pope Francis begins to construct another way of looking at how diversity and pluralism might be mediated and managed from a Christian-inspired but humanly-shared framework of principles and values. It constitutes an important contribution of this incredible document to the wider search for peace and the common good in our world.
12. The four principles for progress in building a people living at peace are that: (1) Time is Greater than Space; (2) Unity Prevails Over Conflict; (3) Realities are More Important than Ideas; and (4) the Whole is Greater than the Part. Their application, he declares “can be a genuine path to peace within each nation and in the entire world” (§221). Let me say a brief word about each one.

The first principle: time is greater than space.

13. This is the principle, Pope Francis suggests, by which we learn how to work slowly but surely for peace and for the good of the world. We must learn not to let go of our ideals and vision for a better future while beset by set-backs. I know that you are already very familiar with this dynamic in your own peace-process. It is easy to get tired. Even cynical steps forward lead to other steps back, to new challenges and difficulties. “Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces” or positions, Pope Francis explains. It involves avoiding the temptation of “obtaining immediate results which yield easy, quick short-term political gains, but do not enhance human fullness.” (§224). It involves openness to suitable processes and concern for the “long run”.

The second principle: unity prevails over conflict.

14. Here Pope Francis recognizes the danger of reacting badly to a conflict that touches us: we might simply try to escape it, or become so immersed that we become totally captive to it. He suggests a “third way”, “the willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process. ‘Blessed are the peacemakers!’ (Mt 5:9)” (§227). In this way, Pope Francis explains, “it becomes possible to build communion amid disagreement”. However, he adds an important caveat: “But this can only be achieved by those great persons who are willing to go beyond the surface of the conflict and who see others in their deepest dignity” (§228). This does not involve “the absorption of one into the other, but rather for a resolution which place on a higher plane and preserves what is valid and useful on both sides” (§228). Peace is ultimately the fruit of a unity brought about by the Holy Spirit that can “harmonise every diversity”. “It overcomes every conflict by creating a new and promising synthesis... a sort of cultural covenant resulting in a ‘reconciled diversity’” (§230).

The third principle: realities are more important than ideas.

15. Pope Francis warns us that “it is dangerous to dwell in the realm of words alone, of images and rhetoric” (§231).² His own life, of course, is marked by an immense practicality, by living what he believes in the concrete realities of everyday life. He alludes to those politicians and religious leaders “who wonder why people do not understand and follow them, since their proposals are so clear and logical” (§232). He suggests that their difficulty is that they “end up reducing politics or faith to rhetoric”, whereas, for both faith and politics, reality is always more important than ideas. Our faith is an incarnate faith, and politics is about the real lives of real people. The principle that reality is more important than ideas, compels us therefore “to put the word into practice, to perform works of justice and charity which make that word fruitful” (§233). Otherwise, “not to make it reality, is to build on sand, to remain in the realm of pure ideas and to end up in a lifeless and unfruitful self-centredness” (§233).

The fourth principle: the whole is greater than the part.

16. Pope Francis teaches that: “We need to pay attention to the global so as to avoid narrowness and banality. Yet we also need to look to the local, which keeps our feet on the ground!” (§234). He continues, “We constantly have to broaden our horizons and see the greater good which will benefit us all”, while at the same time, “we can work on a small scale, in our own neighbourhood, but with a

² Cf. Benedict XVI in *Africae Munus*: passing from ideas to action

larger perspective.” (§235). The Holy Father uses a fascinating image to explain this: “Here our model is not the sphere, where every point is equidistant from the centre, and there are no differences between them. Instead, it is the polyhedron, which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness” (§236). In this arrangement, there is a place for everyone, to which he adds the interesting comment, “even those who can be considered dubious on account of their errors have something to offer which must not be overlooked.” He then concludes that “it is the sum total of persons within a society which pursues the common good, which truly has a place for everyone” (§236). In other words, it is not the domination of one group over others that assures peace anywhere, but the successful mediation of the part within the whole, in which the whole is greater than the part but depends on and creates appropriate space for the individuality of the part.

17. Again, I suspect you have seen this principle at work in your own peace process. For example, there are on-going tensions about symbols of identity and parades. How do we accommodate for differences while we pursue the greater common good? In the polyhedron image, the parts are distinct while the whole maintains its integrity. Further, attention to the economy can help to maintain a shared commitment to the common good. Other Governments can also help to keep the goals of peace and sustainable prosperity in view when preoccupation with the local has threatened to derail what has already been achieved.

The common good is the responsibility of all, and involves all.

18. Pope Francis concludes his presentation of these four principles by underlining a key point. It is the responsibility of the State to encourage and safeguard the common good of society. But it must do so in accordance with subsidiarity and solidarity, basic elements of Catholic Social teaching, and “fully committed to political dialogue and consensus building” (§240). The State is the servant of peace-building and development. “The principal author, the historic subject of this process, is the people as a whole and their culture, and not a single class, minority, group or elite. We do not need plans drawn up by a few for the few, or an enlightened or outspoken minority which claims to speak for everyone. It is about agreeing to live together, a social and cultural pact” (§239).
19. Those in political or public systems run an ever present risk. Politicians and civil servants can easily lose touch with the wider social and political capital that is vested in civic and voluntary organisations, in Churches and faith communities, in business and enterprise, and in those who work most closely with the vulnerable and disadvantaged. The common good is best served when politicians and the structures of Government find ways of developing effective partnership and collaboration between all the sources of social, economic and bonding capital in a society. This is especially true when a society is trying to rebuild its social cohesion after a period of violent conflict. In this regard I note the calls that have been made by Bishop Treanor and other Church leaders for a wider culture of civic dialogue and engagement to be developed as an intrinsic part of securing peace and building reconciliation. Churches, community groups, business leaders and entrepreneurs all have vital sources of experience, wisdom and influence that can assist and contribute to the political effort to build a cohesive and reconciled society. Pope Francis alludes to this when he speaks of the difference between the “sphere” and the “polyhedron”: “Pastoral and political activity alike,” he explains, “seek to gather in this polyhedron the best of each” (§236). There is mutual benefit when politicians in all parts of the world work in close partnership with all the vital sources that contribute to the common good.

20. In your own peace process, many individuals and groups working at a local level have made an essential contribution over the years. They worked day in and day out on making the idea of peace and a reconciled future a reality, as Pope Francis suggests. I know that in the early stages of the Troubles, many from the different Christian Churches took enormous risks to create safe spaces marked by the culture of encounter and privileging dialogue as the form of encounter. Brave individuals drew on the depth of their faith in Christ uttered the most incredible and transforming words of forgiveness and understanding in the midst of the violence. Flowing from the rock of the Gospel, it was such dialogue between Church leaders and others that helped to carve out a vocabulary of reconciliation, mutual respect and patient negotiation. Thus they kept building and sustaining the framework for negotiation and settlement taken up and developed by public representatives. Anyone who is open to the constructive role played by the Churches and by the faith in helping to build the peace, will notice important similarities with the four principles for a more peaceful and reconciled world set out by Pope Francis.
21. Running through the four guidelines, may I suggest a final theme central to the Social Dimension of Evangelisation in *Evangelii Gaudium*. This would be everyone's concern for the poor and for the vulnerable, upon which Pope Francis insists so much. "Jesus, the evangeliser par excellence and the Gospel in person, identifies especially with the little ones (cf. *Mt 25:40*). This reminds us Christians that we are called to care for the vulnerable of the earth" (§209). Now "new forms" of poverty and vulnerability are emerging along with persistent ones; it is essential that the Church reach out to new and old forms of vulnerability. Pope Francis mentions the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned, discarded like so many of our unborn in what he has so aptly and repeatedly described as our "throw-away" culture. However, one group receives his particular attention. "Migrants", he explains, "present a particular challenge for me, since I am the pastor of a Church without frontiers, a Church which considers herself mother to all" (§210).
22. On this theme, Bishop Treanor has written an excellent pastoral letter based on the Holy Father's recent message for the World Day of Peace, entitled "No longer slaves, but brothers and sisters". Bishop Treanor highlights ways in which the local Church in Down and Connor can take up the Holy Father's call to develop a culture of "generous openness... capable of creating new forms of cultural synthesis" (§210). In commending this excellent letter to your reflection, may I also commend the overview of all the messages for World Day for Peace that has been included in the publication of Bishop Treanor's letter. As the Council which has particular responsibility for preparing these messages, I want to acknowledge the excellent resource that has been created. I hope it will serve as a useful tool in the years ahead.
23. Fr Bartlett has also drawn my attention to an excellent report prepared some five years ago by the Catholic Council for Social Affairs, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Mary's University College here in Belfast on Child Poverty. I have to say that I was shocked to learn that Northern Ireland has some of the highest level of childhood poverty in the whole of Europe. Addressing the needs of migrants, addressing the high levels of childhood poverty, these are concrete and essential ways by which we can give practical witness to the joy of the Gospel and to its transforming, healing power. In the words of Pope Francis at the inaugural Mass of his Petrine Ministry: "We must not be afraid of goodness, of tenderness... To protect creation, to protect every man and every woman, to

look upon them with tenderness and love, is to open up a horizon of hope; it is to let a shaft of light break through the heavy clouds; it is to bring the warmth of hope!”

Conclusion: how beautiful are the feet of those who announce the Gospel of peace!

24. In giving this lecture in honour of St Brigid, Mary of the Gael and patroness of Ireland, I am conscious that I have come to a country which, since the time of St Patrick, has given much to the rest of the world in terms of “proclaiming the Gospel in a missionary tone”. May God bless you for that living flame of missionary faith which so ignited the hearts of Christians here in Ireland. Please count on the solidarity and support of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace as you work and pray for a renewal of evangelical zeal in every Christian heart. I encourage you to return again and again to *Evangelii Gaudium* as a deep reservoir of wisdom and light offered by Pope Francis. It reminds us that the words of Gospel are ever fresh and ever new. It reminds us of the blessing of peacemakers. “How beautiful on the mountains,” the Prophet Isaiah declared and St Paul repeated, “are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’” (Is 52:7).
25. Yes, the Good News of reconciliation, justice, love and peace *is* beautiful. It transforms, it heals, it renews, it brings hope. One messenger who was fired up with the joy of the Gospel, eager to bring the beauty and peace of the Gospel to far-off lands, was Saint Columbanus. With his monastic companions he left from Bangor, not far from here, on the shores of Belfast Lough. His feet brought the good news of the Gospel and sowed seeds of the great peace project we know today as the European Union. This year Christians in Bobbio and across Europe, in Ireland and this Diocese of Down and Connor, will commemorate the 1400th anniversary of his death. In his fifth letter to Pope Boniface, Saint Columbanus anticipates the sentiments of Pope Francis. He places the work of peace, first and foremost, in the encounter with Christ who takes us beyond our self-centredness to the peaceful encounter with the other, in the tenderness and joy of the Gospel. Let me make his words our prayer in conclusion:

Then quickly, my dearest friends, agree and meet together and refuse to argue over ancient quarrels, but rather hold your peace and commit them to eternal silence and forgetting; and if any things are doubtful, reserve them for God’s judgement; but the things that are clear, on which men can make decision, decide these justly without favouritism, and let there be *peaceful judgement in your gates*, and pardon one another, that there may be *joy in heaven* and on earth, for your peace and concord” (*Letter V, 12*).

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson
President