Transforming the Center:
Inter-Religious Dialogue, Contemporary Popes,
and a Faith-Inspired Path for Peacebuilding

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Abstract

This article maps two distinct bodies of thought before moving to a synthesis discussion, which proceeds in dialogue with the contributions of Pope Francis to fostering substantive peace. The first section presents select challenges and promises of employing inter-religious dialogue as a tool for peacebuilding. The article then positions papal contributions coupling inter-religious dialogue and peacebuilding. A synthesis section analyzes how Francis is buttressing this connection in particular ways with reference to his notion of building up cultures of dialogue and encounter. The results of this approach will be of interest to nonviolent activists, conflict transformation practitioners, religious studies scholars, and others concerned with dialogue's potential as a path to peace.

Introduction

Dialogue is at the heart of relationships that build peace. Within a basic framing of positive peace, which sees substantive peace as inclusive of, but consisting of much more than, the mere absence of war (cf. Galtung, 1969), fostering cultures of encounter and dialogue falls within the remit of peacebuilding work (cf. Lederach, 2005). Given the hierarchical organization of the Roman Catholic Church and its too frequently unjust treatment of standouts who do not fit in with its tightly defined norms, it is understandable that peace activists and conflict resolution practitioners would shy away from looking to the top of that hierarchy for inspiration, motivation, or sanction for their work. However, when exploring papal teachings on peace and the popes' entanglements with peacebuilding, there is a good deal of material to draw upon in this regard that can serve to shift people, who would otherwise be uninvolved, into action across a range of issues relevant to positive peace. Simultaneously, papal teachings offer support for conflict resolution practitioners by providing unique insights flowing from the Catholic Church's position as both an international diplomatic and transnational actor (see Stummvoll, 2018). Taking inter-religious dialogue as its primary focus, this article evaluates papal teachings and the lived-peace witness of popes for their ability to inspire, make space for, sanction, and enable peacebuilding.

Inter-religious dialogue brought into the service of peacebuilding provides an effective means of unfolding the paradox that religion can be mobilized both to support holy war and foster the proverbial peaceable garden, thus building up cultures of peace (Boulding, 1986, 2000; cf. Gopin, 2000; Swidler, 2016). Inter-religious dialogue as peacebuilding seeks to bring religious energy into the service of fostering substantive peace. This task is facilitated by the fact that most religious traditions recognize peacemaking as a sacred duty (Smock, 2002), even if that duty is sometimes obscured. Nonetheless, there is an all too common disconnect in terms of embodying this duty and there remain significant challenges in employing religious teachings in the service of substantive peace. For instance, a conflict may have been shaded in religious terms for centuries. In this regard, contemplate the Crusades, the history of the Balkans, and the overlapping claims to land on the subcontinent. Yet, there are ample resources for peace activists and conflict resolution practitioners that can be sourced from within world and Indigenous religions. Communicative processes, the ostensibly simple sharing of stories and experiences to enable people to understand one another across otherwise divisive boundaries, is a key method to overcome the type of insularity and isolationism that leads to the ideological justification for religious violence. This is the ultimate *telos* of fostering cultures of encounter and dialogue. To situate that concept within a representative sample of the literature, below, the authors analyze some reflections from peacebuilders and observers of dialogue processes, which demonstrate

how narrative and an accompanying discursive sharing of insights can be employed to help overcome violence in this world (cf. Senehi, 2000).

This article's exploration of the intersections between inter-religious dialogue and the politics of peace begins with Hans Küng's (2005) influential articulation of a framework for dialogue, which is based on two fundamental principles: true humanity and the Golden rule. These principles were stated in the Council of the Parliament of World's Religions' (1993) *Chicago Declaration*, confirmed in Cape Town by the Third Parliament of the World's Religions and then presented in the Manifesto *Crossing the Divide* (Pico et al., 2001) written for the UN Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations. According to Küng's (2005) analysis:

> On the basis of these two fundamental principles, four ethical directives, found in all the great traditions of humanity, have to be remembered:
>
> · You shall not murder, torture, torment, or wound. Stated in positive terms: have reverence for life; be committed to a culture of non-violence and reverence for life.
>
> · You shall not lie, deceive, forge, manipulate. Stated in positive terms: speak and act truthfully; be committed to a culture of truthfulness and tolerance.
>
> · You shall not steal, exploit, bribe, or corrupt. Stated in positive terms: deal honestly and fairly; be committed to a culture of fairness and to a just economic order.
>
> · You shall not abuse sexuality, cheat, humiliate, or dishonor. Stated in positive terms: respect and love one another; be committed to a culture of partnership and equal dignity for all (20).

These ethical directives represent a core (or, perhaps, a seed) of the sort that must be in place for cultures of encounter and dialogue between the religions to be fruitful. Küng's ethical directives, or more properly, the basic moral consensus they represent, thus become a significant prerequisite for sustainable and substantive dialogue. Although stated in individualistic terms, these directives are inherently communitarian in their orientation being focused on individual contributions to a social ethic. Further, these directives extend to inter-group and inter-societal relations, pointing to the sort of active tolerance of difference necessary for avoiding the clash of civilizations and building cultures of peace (cf. Sacks, 2003). Küng (2005) goes on to link these directives to a crucial need for dialogue amongst the religions:

> There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions.
> There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions.
> There will be no dialogue among the religions without global ethical standards.
> There will therefore be no survival of this globe without a global ethic (2005, 20).

This framework highlights the need to create spaces for dialogue and their relationship to a basic ethical consensus that connects the individual, social, and religious dimensions of human experience with social justice, intergroup harmony, and world peace. Many of the authors under consideration in this article concur that a vision of substantive peace serves to sustain dialogue, particularly among the religions. Countering the notion that inter-religious dialogue is an elite activity, John Dominic Crossan's (2005) serve to emphasize that the required underlying vision of peace is inseparable from social justice (cf. Paul VI, 1971). Moreover, Crossan (2005) encourages self-examination by religious adherents, as they consider issues of guilt and complicity marking injustices that followers of their traditions have inflicted upon other people (cf. John Paul II, 2001; Madigan and Sarrió-Cucarella, 2017; Khalil, 2017). A cogent example here is offered by one of the most horrific events of the twentieth-century: the Shoah. According to Steven Jacobs' (2005) analysis, reflecting on intergenerational trauma of the death and destruction of the Shoah provides a significant catalyst moving Christians away from evangelical triumphalism towards the humility and repentance necessary for a

situation of peace to come into being between the religions. Specifically, Jacobs (2005) concludes that no dialogue between Jews and Christians can move forward without such a metamorphosis. Transformation in

this mode holds the potential to foster a situation of peace between the religions, even in the face of profound evil, with positive implications for substantive peace.

Based upon his experiences within a minority Christian community in Asia, Wesley Ariarajah (1999) argues that a way to reduce the dominion of such grand manifestations of evil is to enable dialogue not only at level of religious leadership, but also in terms of everyday experience (cf. Varshney, 2002). Ariarajah (1999) sees this as a particularly timely orientation, much needed in the Middle East, wherein violence is perpetuated by a situation whereby ordinary faith-inspired people rarely come together to share in spiritual, social, political, and practical activities (cf. Edwards, 2016; Sehested, 2017). However, when such multimodal interaction takes place dialogue is transformed towards action (Gopin, 2002). When this transformation happens, the limits of discursive dialogue are at once exposed and moved away from exclusionary tendencies, allowing the peaceful results of a multi-dimensional dialogue to spread as a positive contagion throughout a society.

This is one way to understand the commitments to a dialogue of life that can come into being when interfaith and cross-cultural intentional communities are formed around principles of peace. A prime example here being the Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Shalam/Oasis of Peace community where 30 Palestinian and 30 Jewish families who are citizens of Israel live together blending commitments to peace with Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and secular identities in a reflective and spiritually literate manner. This then gives a strong basis for the community to act as safe space for education, dialogue, meeting, and outreach work all geared toward building peace from within what is frequently assumed to be an intractable conflict (see Tuv, 2018). While not discounting a role for spontaneous synchronicity in such contexts, the requisite transformation can flow from quite orchestrated activities of the sort that fall within the purview of professional conflict resolution practitioners. For instance, Maria Power's (2007) work on social action projects in Northern Ireland shows how working together on a matter of common concern, such as the development of a children's playground, has lead increased understanding and cooperation between people divided along the ethno-national cleavages of the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist identities. To cite a further example based on his Alternative Conflict Resolution experience working with faith-inspired actors, Mohammed Abu-Nimer (2002) has discerned a logical progression towards dialogue. Unfolding a practical and sequential approach to initiating transformative dialogue, he suggests meeting in small groups to discuss and jointly study each other's sacred texts. Abu-Nimer (2002) then believes the stage will be set for the formation of deeper connections such as invitations to people's homes and sharing worship time together. The third and fourth phases, he suggests are more of a state of being, wherein the dialogue participants would be able to actively discern and affirm the presence of messages emanating from the different traditions that are beneficial to people living together in community (Abu-Nimer, 2002; cf. Gopin, 2002, Swidler, 2016).

Aspiring to this state of being, which is concomitant with upholding the peacebuilding dimensions of their faith traditions, can also prompt reflection by dialogue participants in relation to the implications of their values systems for living together in community. For example, considering Islamic traditions, John Kelsey (2005) suggests that a dynamic view of *Shari'ah* is paramount as a base to move beyond small talk in order for any substantive dialogue to take place (cf. Merdjanova and Brodeur 2009). To illustrate his point, Kelsey (2005) examines the *fatwah* issued by Osama bin Laden against Western civilization and questions both the declaration's consequences for inter-religious relations and their authenticity in relation to Islamic traditions.

Kelsey's example is indicative of how one of the principle factors blocking dialogue is fundamentalism, which, it is important to emphasize, has both secular and religious manifestations. Most especially in the case of religious traditions, fundamentalism is a destroyer of the very conditions that Küng has set as essential for substantive peace. In many ways, this dialogue-destroying element comes into being because of the exclusivist truth claims made by religious fundamentalists. As Charles Kimball (2005) highlights, when the tenets of fundamentalism are fully applied to a specific religion, the result is that absolute truth is invariably located in a particular tradition or text(s) understood as belonging to a single, exclusivist group. Such a stance precludes the necessary level of hearing required to enable dialogue between the

religions to become an instrument of peace (Kimbal, 2005). As an example of a way to counteract such tendencies towards ethical segmentation, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz (2005) recommends re-examining divisive

pasts so that the oppressor and the oppressed may come together to form a vision for a common future thus breaking of the hold of fundamentalism in its social and religious expressions (cf. Câmara, 1971). In line with the insights emerging from Ronald Young's (2002) case study, co-creating this common future can be particularly effective when the vision is fashioned by members of the historically conflicting groups, including within the lived experience of Diaspora (cf. Young, 2002).

Both Charles Gibbs (2002) and David Steele (2002) advocate that middle-tier elites should be the initial target group for involvement in this process because they share the fate of the larger community but can also serve as faith-inspired multipliers in peace processes (cf. Diamond and MacDonald, 1996; Lederach, 1997; Marshall, 2013). This is an essential move because the future always holds the possibility of successful peacebuilding, with a wide range of constituencies reaping a peace dividend (see Buchanan, 2014). A recent example is the work of Settler-Mennonites on the Canadian Prairies to explore the history of colonialism and violent evangelization in what is now the province of Saskatchewan through justice and reconciliation focussed dialogues with Indigenous partners. This is a significant example of the mixing of oppressed and oppressor identities as the Indigenous partners ancestors were displaced to make space for White Settlers, who themselves were often seeking a life free from oppression. Further, those we were displaced were then subjected to government policies that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) named as "cultural genocide" (p. 1), whose force continues to felt be in Indigenous communities. This is a painful and complex history not the least because Mennonites came to the Prairies keen to live out a life in accord with their pacifist principles. As a result for such dialogue to be successful it had to overcome not only multiple tracks of oppression, notably including women, but also self-aggrandizing narratives and phenomena of selective empathy (Enns, 2015).

Seeing faith in terms of its peacebuilding potential is also necessarily equated with freeing religion from its status as the sole cause or an excuse for conflict (Schneier 2002). When conflict is seen in light of its multiple causes—including ethnicity, political divisions, and economic and regional disparities— religion's suitability as path to help end violence comes more fully into focus. Each of these categories has implications for actively attempting to foster cultures of encounter and dialogue as a solution to conflict (cf. Byrne, 1996; Power, 2007a, 2007b, 2011; Elliott, 2009).

Such a conclusion need not engender neutrality. Working in the area of economic injustice and regional disparity, and recalling similar dynamics to the Catholic Social Teaching concept of the preferential option for the poor (see John Paul II 1987, 1991; Francis, 2013b; Dorr 2016), Daniel Bell (2005) suggests that it is sometimes appropriate for God to be imaged as taking sides if the peace agenda is to be representative of a just outcome (cf. Boff, 2011). Invoking Latin American Liberation Theology, Bell (2005) shows how economic organization and the unfair distribution of wealth may mean that God is most appropriately placed on the side of the oppressed (cf. Guttiérez, 1971/2002; Francis 2013b, 2015a; Dorr, 2016). In these instances, a dialogue for peace may require that the oppressors make sacrifices and share their wealth before any meaningful dialogue can take place (Bell, 2005; cf. Social Affairs Commission of the Canadian Conference of the Catholic Bishops, 2003).

Comparably, it is difficult to conceive of a peace as just if it subjugates half the human population. In this light, if the dialogue between conflicting parties is to be fully emancipatory, it must also confront gender binaries, something that faith-inspired and political actors have not always adequately considered. Yet, religions can still serve as avenues fostering greater gender equality. For example, the non-sectarian Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, whose approach to dialogue radically altered the contents of the Good Friday Agreement (see Cowell-Meyers, 2014). As Valerie Ziegler (2005) argues, even dialogue between the religions holds the potential to be transformed into a resource for women's liberation. However, if any communicative process works towards peace while leaving gender equality issues aside, then that dialogue's validity as a peacebuilding tool must be questioned (cf. Boulding, 2000).

Equality is also a related concern on the geopolitical level. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the United States' social, cultural, and political power, many commentators mention the implications of inter-religious dialogue for understanding and perhaps even shifting conflict-inducing aspects of US involvement in geopolitics (cf. Ruether, 2007). In this light, Musser, Puchalla, and Sutherland (2005) argue that U.S. foreign

policy can be better understood in light of insights growing out of Jewish-Christian dialogue, which address the apocalyptic implications of the example of the Hebrew prophets (cf. Heschel and Heschel, 2011). In a

related manner Martin Cook (2005) has argued that it is imperative to enter into dialogue exploring the validity of Christianity's just war theory in light of the current context (cf. Evans, 2005; Dower, 2009). In looking at the effects of U.S. foreign policy in its own hemisphere, Bell (2005) goes so far as to put forward a crucifixion analogy (cf. Lassalle-Klein 2009), wherein this policy can be seen as unfairly sacrificing the poor of Latin America for the ideology of capitalism (Alas, 2017). John Mohawk (2005) suggests that inter-religious dialogue can remedy systematically violent ills by exposing the liquid foundations of all such ideologies, be they faith-based or secular (cf. Jordan, 2001; Power, 2011).

There are numerous insights to inform conflict resolution praxis that can be harvested from the above-presented theoretical and practical perspectives as they apply to this article's main focus on inter-religious dialogue as a path to peacebuilding. On a basic level, as Dalil Boubakeur, Pierre Lambert, and Daniel Sibony (2004) emphasise, the resources for peaceful coexistence are present within various world religions (cf. The Golden Rule Poster from Scarboro Missions, nd). They simply need to be brought to the surface by emphasizing those facets of faith traditions which are more oriented towards cultures of dialogue and encounter than triumphalism. Lest, along with Samuel P. Huntington (1996) we would doubt such dialogue-based peaceful coexistence is possible across cultures, we can look to the ideals of European Union (Boubakeur, Celier, Lambert, and Sibony 2004). Despite disruption of Brexit, it is now practically impossible to imagine the French government engaging in another war with Germany. In terms of this article's subject, Dalil Boubakeur, François Celier, Pierre Lambert, and Daniel Sibony (2004) see great potential for such transformation towards peace and cooperation to extend to relationships amongst between Jews, Christians, and Muslims worldwide.

On a relatively more micro-level, the literature surveyed above combines to provide an accessible vision for bridging the insight-action gap in fostering the incarnation of substantive peace. Dialogue, given its multi-dimensionality is very accessible: most people have the agency necessary to become peacebuilders through dialogue. That is to say, virtually anyone can opt to start creating the conditions necessary for dialogue to take place in their lives and cultures. Whatever case the likes Richard Dawkins (2006/2016) and his interlocutors may be making for contemporary atheism, it would seem foolish to ignore religion in this process. Positively stated, faith-inspired actors talking across religious and political cleavages represent a path for substantive peace to become more firmly coupled to lived human reality. In this light the mantra, "let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me" (Jackson Miller and Miller, 1955) can be seen as connected to bringing peace about among conflicting parties through dialogue. In short, such a mantra is connected to a vision and ethic for substantive peace. Communication and dialogue are poised to show the way. Simply put, religions and political opponents talking to each other will help guide the journey.

Dialogue and the Contemporary Papacy

Dialogue, then, is an enabler of positive peace, and dialogue between the religions is essential given that the vast majority of the world's population identifies with a religious tradition, often as a key aspect of their core identity (Pew-Templeton 2015). Without dialogue and the encounters it engenders, peace can never be substantive. In Northern Ireland, if faith-based groups had not communicated with one another in a meaningful and honest manner, then the transformation of society necessary for peace could not have occurred (see Power 2007, 2007a). The popes, leaders of over 1.2 billion Catholics with influence on every continent (Pew-Templeton 2015), provide multiple endorsements of the value of dialogue for moving across barriers that perpetuate conflict and uphold the importance of synchronicity among religious traditions and international diplomacy in the service of peace (e.g., Benedict XVI 2005, 2006, 2006b). One of the key issues at stake in participatory transformative peacebuilding is the provision of adequate spaces for multiple dialogues among people of varying cultural, political, religious, class, gender, social, and ethnic identities in any given society. As the peace theorist Ho-Won Jeong notes, during his discussion of the possible sources of social conflict:

the absence of social space for facilitating dialogue between diverse identities and values facilitates violent struggles. To prevent unrestrained violence against innocent victims,

members of different communities need assistance in recognizing shared interests in survival and long-term prosperity. Solutions to the conflict would eventually have to be grounded in structural arrangements that respect the cultural and political autonomy of different members of society (Jeong 2000, p. 74).

There is an often a crucial role for peacebuilders in facilitating such dialogue. However, it is also important to note that these dialogue-fostering peacebuilders can, and perhaps more fruitfully should, come from a creative or motivated minority within the affected communities themselves (see Buchanan, 2014; cf. Power 2007a). As such, echoing an insight unfolded above, it is perhaps not surprising that the popes frequently turn to the subject of multiple levels of responsibility for fostering dialogue in their World Day for Peace Messages and in other documents that address the Christian imperative to nourish peace in this world. This focus often contains exhortations and reflections that touch on the role of inter-religious dialogue in peacebuilding. This article now moves to analyze a representative selection from these teachings, with a goal of demonstrating how papal statements can provide an impetus for a transformative shift, affecting people who might otherwise remain unmoved.

In his encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*, addressing the Catholic Church's relations with the world, Pope Paul VI (1964) argued for the importance dialogue as a method, including in the above-identified areas of ethics-based cooperation with other-than-Christian religious traditions:

> But we do not wish to turn a blind eye to the spiritual and moral values of the various non-Christian religions, for we desire to join with them in promoting and defending common ideals in the spheres of religious liberty, human brotherhood [sic.], education, culture, social welfare, and civic order. Dialogue is possible in all these great projects, which are our concern as much as theirs, and we will not fail to offer opportunities for discussion in the event of such an offer being favorably received in genuine, mutual respect (§108).

That same year, Paul VI established the Secretariat for Non-Christians, which John Paul II rechristened in 1988 as the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue. This office of the Holy See has the following remit: "1) to promote respect, mutual understanding, and collaboration between Catholics and the followers of others religious traditions; 2) to encourage the study of religions; and 3) to promote the formation of persons dedicated to dialogue" (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 2018). To this effect, for instance, they issue messages on the occasions of major festivals in Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist festivals, welcome religious leaders from non-Christian and non-Jewish traditions to the Vatican and support interreligious events (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 2018). In 1965, teaching on behalf of the council fathers, Paul VI went even further than the reflection contained in *Ecclesiam Suam*, explicitly coupling this dialogical orientation to a peacebuilding imperative and extolling the need for dialogue and cooperation between Catholics and all those "thirsting for true peace" (Paul VI 1965b, §90). Remarkably, in the geopolitical context of the Cold War, when the Catholic Church's political position was challenged on several fronts due to certain communist governments policies, *Gaudium et Spes* asserts that Catholics should work "even with those who oppress the Church...together without violence and deceit in order to build up the world in genuine peace." (Paul VI 1965b, §92). Perhaps, most importantly, Paul VI also promulgated *Nostra Aetate*, the conciliar document that built on momentum generated for inter-faith dialogue during John XXIII's pontificate in order to encourage all the members of the Catholic Church "through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, ...[to]... recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among" the adherents of other religions (Paul VI 1965a, §2).

This general imperative for multidimensional dialogue was given differentiated expression in the writings of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. For both these popes, dialogue was one of the foundation

stones of their definition of positive peace. This connection is reinforced in John Paul II's linking of dialogue with more obvious peacebuilding issues. For instance, in his World Day for Peace Message for 2002 John Paul II states:

> The various Christian confessions, as well as the world's great religions, need to work together to eliminate the social and cultural causes of terrorism. They can do this by teaching the greatness and dignity of the human person, and by spreading *a clearer sense of the oneness of the human family*. This is a specific area of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, a pressing service which religion can offer to world peace (John Paul II 2001, §12. Emphasis in the original).

Earlier, in another of his World Day for Peace messages, John Paul II correlated (1) the task of inter-religious dialogue in the service peacebuilding with (2) efforts to achieve trust, cooperation, and understanding, rather than an artificial agreement on points of divergence:

> In recent years much has been accomplished in the realm of inter-religious understanding to promote an active cooperation in the common tasks facing humanity, on the basis of the many values shared by the great religions. I wish to encourage this cooperation wherever it is possible, as well as the official dialogues currently underway between representatives of the major religious groups (John Paul II 1990, section IV).

After his controversial Ragensburgh Address (Benedict XVI, 2006a), Benedict XVI affirmed the importance of authentic dialogue to overcome socio-political tensions by stating, "inter-religious dialogue is a vital necessity on which, in large measure, our future depends" (2006b). Here, an ethic and method of peacebuilding through the medium of inter-religious dialogue, which is developed by John Paul II and continued by Benedict XVI, can be discerned. Therein, whilst both commonalities and differences ought to be discussed, points of disagreement should not be allowed to act as 'roadblocks' in the quest for peace. Peacebuilding and work for social justice, rather than the quest for visible religious unity, were upheld as ideal foci for inter-religious dialogue. This, John Paul II, in particular, argued was the more fruitful path, leading to a substantive peace that would respect difference but which had to be achieved through an active dialogue aimed at cultivating trust and eventually leading to tangible and long-lasting ethical results. For example, in the World Day for Peace Message for 1991, he couples inter-religious cooperation, dialogue, and peace by teaching that:

> When undertaken in a spirit of trust, and with respect and sincerity, inter-religious cooperation and dialogue make a real contribution to peace. … This common search — carried out in the light of the law of conscience and of the precepts of one's own religion, and confronting the causes of present-day social injustices and wars — will lay a solid foundation for cooperation in the search for needed solutions (John Paul II 1990, §13).

Here, Benedict XVI (2006b) adds "in this area our contemporaries expect from us an eloquent witness to show all people the value of the religious dimension of life."
As a natural extension of this emphasis in inter-religious dialogue, throughout their pontificates, both John Paul II and Benedict XVI performed a number of symbolically-charged gestures that underscored this commitment and, in doing so, raised consciousness about nodal connections between inter-religious dialogue and peacebuilding. To amplify this effect, they often did so at sites associated with either peace or conflict in the popular imagination. For instance, during the first Apostolic Pilgrimage of his pontificate to Poland in 1979, he prayed in the cell of Maximilian Kolbe in Auschwitz. Kolbe was a Franciscan Priest, who was canonized in 1982, and whose spiritual message that love is stronger than all acts of aggression, led him to give his life in the place of a Jewish man with a young family. As alluded to above, he also notably prayed publically at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, following the Jewish tradition of placing a written version of his petition into one of the spaces in the masonry, this time on Papal letterhead that was easily captured by press

cameras during the final day of his March 2000 Jubilee pilgrimage to the Holy Land. On that occasion he prayed for peace amongst Jews, Christian, Muslims employing a framing of common Abrahamic heritage and covenant:

> God of our fathers,
> you chose Abraham and his descendants
> to bring your Name to the Nations:
> we are deeply saddened by the behaviour of those
> who in the course of history
> have caused these children of yours to suffer,
> and asking your forgiveness we wish to commit ourselves
> to genuine brotherhood
> with the people of the Covenant (John Paul II, 2000).

By undertaking such symbolically-charged gestures, which can be read as acts of peacebuilding (cf. Schirch, 2004), John Paul II was emphasizing a commitment to seeing shared human traditions as a nexus between faiths, which is underpinned by a message of substantive peace based upon active nonviolence as represented sharply in his invocation of Kolbe's example (cf. Jahanbegloo, 2013). Grounding Küng's (2005) framework, John Paul II (1986) further underscored his respect for the true humanity and message of peacebuilding found in all religions when, in 1986, he invited religious leaders from around the world to Assisi in order to come together, dialogue, and pray for peace and, in so doing, share an experience of unity. Attendees at this event, included the Dalai Lama and the Patriarchs of Constantinople, Moscow and Antioch, who all affirmed a common spiritual and practical commitment to peace (Foldvari, 2016). This commitment was further augmented when John Paul II publicly kissed the Qu'ran in 1999. Such gestures were also made by Benedict XVI, who like his predecessor, but with perhaps less charisma, visited synagogues, mosques, Auschwitz, and employed the geography of peace associated with Assisi to host a gathering of leaders of the world's faith traditions.

Pope Francis: Dialogue as a Path to Peace

Bringing forward many of the most promising elements of the reflections and actions coupling inter-religious dialogue and peacebuilding mapped above, Pope Francis (2013b, 2014a) has explicitly put cultures of dialogue and encounter at the center of his exercise of the papal office. In this regard, Francis connects the concern for social justice identified by Crossan (2005) with communication reaching across barriers, when he stipulates that members of the Catholic Church are called to be "at the service of a difficult dialogue," which overcomes segregation and violence through bridging the gap between (1) "people who have the means needed to develop their personal and family lives," and (2) those who are denied access to socio-political opportunity structures to the point they become "'non-citizens', 'half-citizens' and 'urban remnants'" (2013b, §74).

Francis continues, "a culture which privileges dialogue as a form of encounter, … [devises means] for building consensus and agreement while seeking the goal of a just, responsive and inclusive society." (2013b, §239). Mitigating against the manifestations of conflict that serve to fracture integral relationships, and in line with both the teaching of his predecessors and the reflections of Sacks (2003) on the dignity of difference, Francis's "culture of encounter" actively seeks to foster respect for diversity (2013b §226). The pope takes this ethic of encounter and dialogue further in his landmark encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. In the opening of his first social encyclical, Francis expresses a personal desire to "enter into dialogue with all people about our common home" (2015b, §1). He employs this framing to help unite people in the service of a "dialogue and action, which would involve each of us as individuals, and also affect international policy" (2015b, §15). Such transformation has implications that spill over into inter-religious relationships. As Thomas Berry (2009) argues, this shift necessarily involves something far beyond concluding that other religions have access to forms of natural reason (cf. Paul VI, 1965a). Indeed, Berry posits that it is only through deep dialogue with other spiritual traditions, a dialogue in which the "floods of light" of other revelatory experiences are mutually recognized, that Christians will ever approach a fuller understanding of the inspiration for human religious life (Berry 2009, p. 16). Francis (2015b) supports this proposition, and like

Berry, specifically notes the need for an embrace of deep diversity: "Given the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we need to realize that the solutions will not emerge from just one way of interpreting and transforming reality. Respect must also be shown for the various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality" (§3).

Here, taking a new direction in relation to the literature surveyed above, Francis brings a green perspective into the inter-faith conversation when upholding the importance of dialogically-informed respect for diversity in the transformation of problematic realities in this world. It is telling in this regard to consider how Francis' employed the medium of a homily to address the principle of dialogue and its connection to peacebuilding, while celebrating a Mass in front of some 60,000 people in Sarajevo:

> Peace is God's dream, his plan for humanity, for history, for all creation. And it is a plan which always meets opposition from men and from the evil one. Even in our time, the desire for peace and the commitment to build peace collide against the reality of many armed conflicts presently affecting our world. ...Within this atmosphere of war, like a ray of sunshine piercing the clouds, resound the words of Jesus in the Gospel: "Blessed are the peacemakers" (*Mt* 5: 9). This appeal is always applicable, in every generation. He does not say: "Blessed are the preachers of peace," since all are capable of proclaiming peace, even in a hypocritical, or indeed duplicitous, manner. No. He says: "Blessed are the peace*makers*," that is, those who *make* peace. Crafting peace is a *skilled work*: it requires passion, patience, experience and tenacity. Blessed are those who sow peace by their daily actions, their attitudes and acts of kindness, of fraternity, of dialogue, of mercy. ...These, indeed, "shall be called children of God," for God sows peace, always, everywhere; in the fullness of time, he sowed in the world his Son, that we might have peace! Peacemaking is a work to be carried forward each day, step by step, without ever growing tired (Francis 2015b. Emphasis in original).

In addition, the pontiff has incarnated an inter-faith dimension to dialogue and prayer for peacebuilding. For example, Francis joined with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, Mahmoud Abbas, and Shimon Peres, to plant an Olive Tree in the Vatican gardens symbolically grounding hope for political solutions supporting peace in the Middle East. Then, the Pope and Ecumenical Patriarch, along with other Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders, recited multi-linguistic prayers together for "peace in the Holy Land, in the Middle East and in the entire world" (Francis, 2014b). On what was a remarkable day, Francis spoke of peacebuilding in a way that resonates well with the conceptual underpinnings of inter-religious dialogue as a path to fostering positive peace:

> Peacemaking calls for courage, much more so than warfare. It calls for the courage to say yes to encounter and no to conflict: yes to dialogue and no to violence; yes to negotiations and no to hostilities; yes to respect for agreements and no to acts of provocation; yes to sincerity and no to duplicity. All of this takes courage, it takes strength and tenacity (Francis, 2014b).

Helping to motivate such courage, which facilitates the crossing inter-religious boundaries, Francis also engages in symbolic actions to promote cultures of encounter and dialogue. Indeed, after being elected bishop of Rome in 2013, Pope Francis' first pastoral trip outside of central Italy was to the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa. Located only 70 miles from Tunisia but in Italian territorial waters, the island is home to a camp where Africans trying to reach Europe are frequently detained after arriving at Lampedusa's port in rickety vessels. At that camp and while overlooking a graveyard of migrant boats, Francis said an open air mass. He employed a multi-colored dinghy as his altar and carried a cross, crafted with wood salvaged from a vessel used to transport migrants. That day, he preached a homily calling for compassion for migrants, most of whom are from other-than-Christian faith communities and Francis call for an end to a culture of indifference that is unmoved by migrant deaths as they seek a better life for their families (Francis, 2013a). Here, Francis is firmly connecting the culture of encounter and dialogue with ethical responsibilities towards migrants, thus adding a new dimension to the literature surveyed above. This theme was continued in March 2015 when, during Holy Thursday Mass, Francis washed the feet of male and female Muslim, Catholic, and Hindu refugees from Nigeria, Mali, Syria, India, and Pakistan. Such a gesture

embodied a key principle supporting inter-religious dialogue as a path for peacebuilding, namely, that all cultures and religions are worthy of deep respect precisely because they are understood to thirst for peace. As the Pope stated afterwards: "We have different cultures and religions, but we are brothers and we want to live in peace" (Francis quoted in Matharu, 2015).

Inter-religious dialogue and peacebuilding between (1) what are frequently called the "world religions" and (2) Indigenous integrative religions is largely overlooked in the academic literature surveyed in this article. On the level of principle, it seems logical that the process of dialogue advocated by the selected scholars should extend to form connections with integrative Indigenous religions. In harmony with that instinct and in what is a welcome addition not often found in the literature on inter-religious dialogue, Francis also proposes something akin to a preferential option for Indigenous peoples, especially when first peoples are being displaced from their lands in the service of agricultural and mining enterprises that harm socio-ecological flourishing, stating, "it is essential to show special care for Indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners" (Francis 2015b, §146). As a prime example of a fruit of dialogue in this regard, invoking John Paul II and the Gospel call to peacemakers Pope Francis (2015c) apologized for the sins of colonialism perpetrated against Indigenous people in the name of religion during the conquest of the Americas.

Given that Indigenous cultures and religions are frequently inseparable, here we see a prime example of how Francis is both a synthesizer and an innovator in his treatment of the inter-religious implications of cultures of dialogue and encounter. It is also significant that the call for all people to build up a positive peace is never far from the surface in this aspect of Francis' teaching and lived example. The question this article now turns to address in its conclusion is how this dialogical imperative is received amongst Catholics.

Conclusion: Shifting the Center

In parallel with the discussion of fundamentalism above, most peace activists will always be doves and it may be hard to soften the hearts of ardent hawks. However, there is a large constituency of Roman Catholics, political leaders and international diplomats amongst them, who fall somewhere near the center of this dichotomy. This group can be reached and persuaded to act by the teachings and lived example of their popes. For such Catholics, a major issue can be the catholicity of working for peace. Here is where the magisterial teachings and lived examples mapped above come in their own, helping to firmly situate the building of positive peace within the category of Catholic moral orthodoxy. By adding the weight of the papal voice to an endorsement of the importance of cultures of encounter and dialogue in the service of peacebuilding, the popes remove the tinge of radicalism that otherwise skeptical centrist Catholics may feel, moving them beyond their comfort zones when confronted by a hugely jarring narrative of positive peace with all the moral responsibilities that it entails. As a result, this movement disrupts the prevailing culture of violence and war that, as contemporary popes have helped to demonstrate, is ubiquitous within society. Such consciousness-raising disruptions can prove fertile ground for growing a holistic peacebuilding ethic. This grounding of an otherwise lofty moral imperative brings into focus one of the most promising potentialities of the contemporary papal endorsement of dialogue between conflicting parties as an important a path toward substantive peace—transforming those who might otherwise be unmoved into peacebuilders.

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