

Catalyst for Renewal Dinner

April 4, 2003

Villa Maria Parish Hall

“Peace: our hope, our right, our responsibility”

Mark Raper SJ

“If the times are bad, then let us be better; then the times will be better, for we are the times”.

St Augustine

“... start seriously thinking about making peace or the world will soon be a mess for everyone. Peace in the world is everyone’s right as well as everyone’s responsibility. We do not have a choice. It is a crucial time.”

Kofi Annan

May I first pay respects to the indigenous people of this land. Theirs is the oldest living human culture in the world. In these difficult times, the indigenous leader Pat Dodson, a great advocate of reconciliation in our country, helps us with his words: “You can... retreat into the trenches as a Catholic and hope that the catechism is going to save you, or you can face up to the world and deal with the challenges.”¹

Catalyst for Renewal² was formed to implement Vatican II. Bryan Hehir an astute interpreter of the Church’s social ministry argued that: “...the decisive contribution of Vatican II was to provide a description **of the church’s role in the world** which was properly theological and ecclesial in tone and substance.” Catalyst for Renewal was founded by people who want to face the world as community. You “...prompt open exchanges among the community of believers, mindful of the diversity of expression of faith in contemporary Australia.”

Tonight we talk of peace in a context of war. Today: “War is the biggest story there is.”³ Our media is deluged with ‘embedded’ journalism, scoops, spin, propaganda and intransigence on all sides. In the media frenzy, dialogue is more difficult. Indeed, this war is the tragic human consequence of the failure, despite all our resources, sophisticated technology, and media means, to negotiate a path to peace. It is the victory of militarism and aggression over the respect for humanity and human rights. It is the product of a type of multilateralism that renders the UN powerless. We feel in our hearts the failure of dialogue, and negotiation. Seeing the reactions of some of our fellow citizens we may feel the failure even of our own ability to talk with one another. War is: “... always a

¹ Kent Rosenthal SJ, “Brave New World”, *Australian Catholics*, Summer 2003, p.6

² <http://www.catalyst-for-renewal.com.au/index.htm>

³ Denis Muller, “War is the biggest story there is.” *The Age*, March 22, 2003

defeat for humanity.”⁴ It is: “...a defeat of reason and of the Gospel.”⁵ In such a context we risk to become detached, cynical, and powerless to respond in any meaningful way. Yet, as Pope John Paul II pleaded: “When war threatens humanity's destiny, as it does today in Iraq, it is even more urgent for us to proclaim with a loud and decisive voice that peace is the only way to build a more just and caring society. Violence and arms can never solve human problems.”⁶ How much we do need catalysts for renewal of our faith and of our hope!

Forty years ago this month, on Holy Thursday, April 11 1963, only 2 months before his death, Pope John XXIII released *Pacem In Terris*, an encyclical written for a world that was also greatly divided. The Berlin Wall was just constructed and the Cold War was gathering momentum, there was the brinkmanship of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the struggles between colonialism and independence, and the growing divide between rich and poor nations. Now is a good moment to renew our spirits in the good pope’s enduring message of hope.

On the question of war – its morality, its legitimacy, its efficacy, *Pacem in Terris* was clear. It rejected war and violence:

It must be borne in mind that to proceed gradually is the law of life in all its expressions; therefore in human institutions, too, it is not possible to renovate for the better except by working from within them, gradually. Pius XII proclaimed: "Salvation and justice are not to be found in revolution, but in evolution through concord. Violence has always achieved only destruction, not construction; the kindling of passions, not their pacification; the accumulation of hate and ruin, not the reconciliation of the contending parties. And it has reduced people and parties to the difficult task of rebuilding, after sad experience, on the ruins of discord. (162)

Pacem in Terris denounced the build-up of arms in the world, even for defensive purposes:

Everyone, however, must realize that, unless this process of disarmament be thoroughgoing and complete, and reach men’s very souls, it is impossible to stop the arms race, or to reduce armaments, or...ultimately to abolish them entirely. Everyone must sincerely cooperate in the effort to banish fear and the anxious expectation of war from men’s minds. But this requires that the fundamental principles upon which peace is based in today’s world be replaced by an altogether different one, namely, the realization that true and lasting peace among nations cannot consist in the possession of an equal supply of armaments but only in mutual trust. (113)

Security built upon the amassing of armaments is false security – a message continued to be unheeded by the 5 permanent members of the Security Council,

⁴ Pope John Paul II Address to the Diplomatic Corps, January 13, 2003 www.zenit.org/english/ZE03011301

⁵ Statement of Cardinal Roberto Tucci reported in Philip Pullella “Pope ‘frustrated’ by Iraq conflict, peace envoy says” Reuters, AlertNet, March 20, 2003

⁶ Pope John Paul II, address for 25th anniversary of Italian TV channel Telepace, March 22, 2003, *L'Osservatore Romano* April 2, 2003

also the 5 biggest manufacturers and merchants of weapons in the world.⁷ Diplomacy, debate, and negotiation are infinitely more effective than arms for solving problems between states.

The refugee experience

Just a year ago I returned to Australia after twenty years of accompanying, serving and defending the rights of refugees. The past twenty years have been marked by cruel conflicts, by violent and massive disrespect of human rights, and by the forced displacement of millions of people. This violence stems from disrespect for the dignity and rights of the human person. Yet the corollary should also be true. From the respect of people will come peace. Or, where people are respected, there will be peace. As we learn from the Old Testament, the treatment of the orphan, the widow and the stranger is the criterion of authenticity of our faith. *Pacem in Terris* laid a ground plan for peace. But who will teach us how to traverse this territory? Who are the real artisans of peace?

“The city of the merely human”, wrote St. Augustine, “is built on love of self at the expense of the other. Whereas the city of God is built on the love of the other at the expense of the self.” And in another place he said: “If the times are bad, then let us be better; then the times will be better, for we are the times.”

Stories of refugees – artisans of peace

May I give two examples of women refugees, themselves artisans of peace, who have inspired me.

Nguyen Thi Lan of Vietnam

In 1981 I was asked to initiate the Jesuit Refugee Service in Asia. Soon after, I went to stay a few weeks on Indonesia's Galang Island, where there were then 12,000 Vietnamese people. With the people at that time was Father Gildo Dominici, an Italian Jesuit and former missionary in Vietnam, who died just a few weeks ago in Rome.

One day when a woman came to see him, Gildo asked if she would tell me her story. I call her Nguyen Thi Lan for the moment. She and her husband had planned to leave Vietnam with their two children, a boy and a girl, but just before leaving she discovered that she was pregnant. Her husband therefore left first, with their oldest child, a boy. When his boat arrived safely in Malaysia he sent word for her to leave. So when the second child was born, a girl, she bought a passage on another small boat for herself, her two daughters and her sister. But the boat was not well provisioned and the leader was no sailor. After some days they ran out of fuel and drifted without power. Her own stock of water and food was soon exhausted, but the boat leader would not share what he had brought. The woman pleaded for the sake of her children who were melting in the heat. He refused. He kept what supplies he had for his own family. Finally her children died in her arms and ultimately her sister, too, died of thirst and exhaustion.

Eventually they touched land and were brought to the camp. Lan was safe, but carried only one thought in her mind: revenge. She would come in the night, with a knife or any other means, to kill the man who had murdered her children and her sister. For weeks she lived in total grief, mad with the desire for

⁷ Pamela Bone “Why the hypocrites are right this time” *The Age*, March 20, 2003

revenge. She talked sometimes to Father Gildo, but he saw that she was unable to listen.

Then one day, with a different face, open and determined, Lan came to the priest and announced that she would forgive the man. "Very well," said Father Gildo, "the Lord accepts your change of heart, and you can put this matter behind you." "No", she said, "I want everyone to know that I forgive him." So she brought that man in the middle of the Sunday prayers - though he was not Christian and she was only then discovering what faith is. She said, "I forgive you."

It was a liberation for her. And what a liberation for him! Everyone knew him as a killer. And what a change took place in the life of the whole camp. Many people took courage from her action.

It is an axiom of our faith that God's grace can overcome any evil. But to be in a situation of evil and see it turned around - that is a powerful experience, a shock. My encounter with Nguyen Thi Lan in that first refugee camp was a revelation. This event and others like it have been for me what the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor must have been for the disciples. During the past twenty years of working with refugees in many places, the courageous example of that woman has reminded me that reconciliation is possible, not only for an individual person but also for a community.

Earlier this year, just before he died, Gildo wrote to me to give me the last address he had for Thi Lan. Until now I haven't found her, but she and her husband were re-united here in Sydney, and they had several more children.

Anne Noeum Yok Tan of Cambodia.

Soon after that, in Phanat Nikhom camp in Thailand, I met a Cambodian woman, Anne Noeum Yok Tan. There she was looking after an unaccompanied child while awaiting her resettlement in France. Ten of Noeum Yok Tan's children had died under the Pol Pot regime. One by one, her husband wrote a little poem or reflection on the back of each one's baptismal certificate. When he too was killed by a Khmer Rouge cadre, she gathered the precious folios together and fled. On the way, in the jungle, she met by chance with her two surviving children, and proceeded on to the border. Ultimately the collection of poems were published in a book dedicated to the martyrs of the Cambodian Church, called *Veilleur, ou en est la nuit?*, or "Watcher, What of the Night?" and subtitled, "The Little Book of the Dead". In her introduction she wrote the following words.

With this book I have given you what is dearest to me. My life is not easy now, but I do not despair. I hope in God. I believe God is my Father and will not abandon me. One day I shall join my husband and my children and we shall be all together again. Ten of my children are dead, and my husband has been killed, but I do not hold it against anyone. I have no spite against anyone at all. Nor did my husband hate the Khmer Rouge. He did not want to avenge himself for the evil they had done. I am like him. If I meet the one who killed my husband, I will not hate him, for I have no hate in my heart: I have accepted to strip myself of everything. In any case, I am not the only one to suffer. It is a whole people, a whole country that suffers as well. But one day, I am sure, Cambodia will once again know happiness.

Meeting these two women so early in my time of working with refugees was providential. What precious lessons they demonstrated for me. They taught me

how valuable it is to accompany and listen to the refugees. But also they taught me that women are natural artisans of peace.

The global refugee situation

Among all the reasons for war, one cannot easily site bad luck. We witness not simply natural disasters, but tragedies created by the hands of people. If there is human cause, then human response is called for. This world needs artisans of peace. The signs and needs of our times invite us to this response.

Refugees demonstrate the worst in human society, and the best: the willingness to oppress others and the willingness to assist. Refugees are drenched in human value. Only a society without values will ignore refugees. It is in our national interest that Australia treats refugees justly. The suffering of refugees is a 'shameful wound of our time', "a wound which typifies and reveals the imbalance and conflicts of the modern world", said John Paul II.⁸ Refugees are not new. For as long as intolerance and oppression have been part of human history, there have been refugees. And there will continue to be refugees as long as conflicts continue. In this era of globalisation, it is ironic that although most wars are internal, the forces of globalisation make refugees too a global matter. The modern means of transportation and communication, as well as the dramatic flows of capital and the shifting needs for labour forces, all tend to globalise the refugee problem.

Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers

In 2002 Iraqis were the largest group of asylum seekers in the world with 51,000 applications registered.⁹

Even before this war, UN and humanitarian groups estimated there were up to a million internally displaced people in Iraq and between 1 and 2 million refugees outside the country. UN agencies predicted that this war could displace an additional 1.1 million people inside Iraq and 900 000 would become refugees outside the country.¹⁰ The neighboring country of Iran already hosts the world's largest refugee population.

John Howard has appealed to these concerns in order to justify Australia's involvement in the war. Alexander Downer actually quoted Human Rights Watch in making the case. Blind Freddy can see that the Iraqi refugees seeking safety in Australia are testament to the brutality of Saddam's regime. Since 1999, there have been over 4000 Iraqis who have come to our shores to seek Australia's protection, with 97% of them found to be refugees.¹¹ Yet our government's sympathy quickly dissolves in the face of these desperate people. As if to continue the persecution begun by Saddam, they are detained for months on end in remote desert or in Pacific island camps, Australian defence personnel drive them away,

⁸ *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1987, # 24

⁹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) *Asylum Applications Lodged In Industrialised Countries: Levels and Trends, 2000-2002*, Geneva, March 2003 p.5

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper: "Iraqi Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Displaced Persons: Current Conditions and Concerns in the Event of War", February 13, 2003
<http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/mena/iraq021203/>

¹¹ Frank Brennan SJ *Not in Our National Interest: A Comment on Australia's Involvement in War*; March 22, 2003 http://www.uniya.org/docs/Brennan_War.doc

contemplated even sabotage to their boats, and they are vilified as queue-jumpers, illegals and not the sort of people Australia wants in this country.

As a greater number of refugees begin to flee the destruction and terror of the current war, neighbouring countries, boosted by the Australian example, are blocking their borders or making it difficult for refugees to access humanitarian assistance. Ruud Lubbers, head of UNHCR expressed this concern:

*We must do everything we can to alleviate that suffering, including keeping borders open so that those fearing for their lives can reach safety in neighbouring states.*¹²

The Australian government, a willing party to the 'shock and awe' bombardment of Iraq, is unmoved in its determination to prevent Iraqi people from seeking asylum in our country.

The Australian approach to burden sharing is revealed in a recent court decision on Iraqi asylum seekers. On March 20, a ruling by Justice Emmett of the Federal Court stated that the Court is powerless to end the detention of a group of Iraqi asylum seekers who have spent years in Australian detention.¹³ He ruled that: "...unfortunate though it may be from a humanitarian point of view..", the Migration Act allowed the Government to keep failed asylum seekers in detention for as long "as the detention is for the purpose, ultimately, of securing the removal of the unlawful non-citizen". One of the Iraqis involved in the action, 50-year-old Shaker Aziz Al Toubi, has been in detention since August 1999. Three of his brothers have been accepted by the Australian and Canadian governments as genuine refugees, and one is now an Australian citizen. Philip Ruddock said that making special allowances for Iraqis would "degrade the integrity of arrangements" in place for refugees in Australia".¹⁴

Currently there are thirty-nine Iraqis being held in on-shore detention centers with 28 of them "awaiting removal". There are 113 in offshore centres, most of whom are determined not to be refugees.¹⁵ As Adele Horin of the *Sydney Morning Herald* writes: "We have locked them up for longer than Saddam did."¹⁶ The haste with which Australia coerced Afghan refugees to return to their destroyed and insecure country after the fall of the Taliban regime bodes ill for these Iraqis.

David Marr and Marian Wilkinson in their book *Dark Victory* highlight the duplicity of Australia's policy towards Iraq. Describing Canberra directives to the Commander of the *Adelaide* not to unload hundreds of Iraqi refugees on Australian soil, they wrote: "*When dawn broke off Christmas Island, the Adelaide's commander was in a quandary. He had an urgent message from Defence headquarters ordering him to return to his fleet base as soon as possible and prepare to leave for the Middle East. The Adelaide was needed to relieve*

¹² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) CrisisBrief: *UN Humanitarian Briefing on Iraq*, March 20, 2003

¹³ NAGA v Minister for Immigration & Multicultural & Indigenous Affairs (2003) FCA 224
20 March, 2003

¹⁴ Cynthia Banham, 'Court Cannot Help Detainees', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 25, 2003

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ Adele Horin, "Sure, we'll save Iraqis – if they remain in Iraq" *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 22, 2003

*United States' warships enforcing sanctions against Iraq's Saddam Hussein. For Banks, it was an exquisite irony. Before he could join the operation against the Iraqi dictator he first needed to stop a boatload of Iraqis fleeing Saddam from setting foot on Australian soil".*¹⁷ He (Commander Banks) later reassured his crew of the rightness of their actions in saving the Iraqi refugees despite the criticism by Canberra: *"These people are indeed human beings first, (and) whilst we could not understand their plight, we had to treat them as refugees."*¹⁸

Consistency in the value of human life

Issued in the midst of Vatican II, *Pacem in Terris*, sought to move the council towards a new perspective, that of the equal value of every human being. In John XXIII's words:

Any human society, if it is to be well ordered and productive, must lay down as a foundation this principle, namely that every human being is a person, that is her nature is endowed with intelligence and free will. Indeed, precisely because she is a person she has rights and obligations flowing directly and simultaneously from her very nature. And as these rights are universal and inviolable, so they cannot in any way be surrendered. (9)

In plain words, the life of the child sheltering the bombs in Basra or Nasiriyah or Kerbala has equal value to the life of the child in Baxter or on Nauru, and has equal value to that of the child at St Joseph's Hunters Hill, or your own child.

***Pacem in Terris* and the United Nations**

Peace is about a way of living as a human community. Upholding the principles of *the common good*, *Pacem In Terris* put its faith in the organization of United Nations, which 40 years ago, was still quite young and faced different challenges.

As is known, the United Nations Organization (U.N.O.) was established on June 26, 1945, and to it there were subsequently added specialized agencies consisting of members designated by the public authority of the various countries with important international tasks in the economic, social, cultural, educational and health fields. The United Nations Organization had as its essential purpose the maintenance and consolidation of peace between peoples, fostering between them friendly relations, based on the principles of equality, mutual respect, and varied forms of cooperation in every sector of human endeavor. (142)

It is for us to build and support the structures and institutions of peace. The hope behind the UN weapons inspection regime in Iraq, as troubled and flawed as it was, was that multi-lateral cooperation and consensus, the united will of disparate nations, would be able to avert war. The way in which the UN members were overridden is another dangerous development in this war. The UN was born in the ashes of devastating global conflict. Although an imperfect institution, the charter and the idealism that the UN enshrines are too precious to be jettisoned. The conflict and contradictions within the UN do diminish it, but the alternative, no UN or equivalent global forum in which nations can debate

¹⁷ David Marr & Marian Wilkinson, *Dark Victory*, Allen & Unwin, NSW, 2003 p.190

¹⁸ *ibid.* p.192

matters of international concern, is too bleak to contemplate. Genuine cooperation requires give and take, compromise for the collective good.

Kofi Annan in January 2003, wrote about peace to a meeting of Jesuit alumni/ae in Kolkata:

Without it, we limit not only ourselves, but the collective progress of humankind. We need to act on what unites us, so that we can seize common opportunities while defending against shared threats. We must counter resolutely the forces that would seek to divide us by forging a new fabric of solidarity.

That means we need to build a genuine understanding of our universally shared values. The ethical foundations of international cooperation must be strengthened and the interface between values and national interests better managed and understood. In our globalising world, mutual understanding is our best defence against hatred and distrust, and the surest pathway to enduring peace that will allow every member of the human family to live in dignity and in safety.

Security

Western affluent nations are fortressing themselves against the calls of the great majority of people who are unable to meet their basic needs. In these same countries, policies towards refugees are constructed to obstruct and defend against any who would penetrate borders seeking safety. Increasingly refugees are being viewed from a security perspective, public fears are fed by government rhetoric linking those seeking asylum in Australia with the very terror they have fled. Instead of a humanitarian response, an enormous cost is incurred to shift to a security response. *Pacem In Terris* challenges the assumptions about the human person, and thus about human security, on which this trend is based.

Pope John Paul II states that: "...the criterion for determining the level that can be sustained cannot be based solely on protecting their own prosperity, while failing to take into consideration the needs of persons who are tragically forced to ask for hospitality."¹⁹

Catalyst for Renewal, Catalysts for Peace

Tonight over dinner we are reminded of the humble beginnings of the conversation which planted the seed for your movement. Your promise to one another, your mission, the promotion of communication across peoples, beliefs and cultures, is ever more urgent today. Your vision, the way you connect the integrity of your own lives with that of your local communities and with the universal church, gives you an immense privilege and an immense responsibility.

'Think globally and act locally', the saying goes. But I would also say think and act globally. Every action, even the smallest one, has value in the wider framework.

Secondly, pray. You may be helped as I was by this prayer of Leunig:

¹⁹ Pope John Paul II *Message Of the Holy Father For The 87th World Day Of Migration*, February 2, 2001

Dear God, We pray for balance and exchange. Balance us like trees. As the roots of a tree shall equal its branches, so must the inner life be equal to the outer life. And as the leaves shall nourish the roots, so shall the roots give nourishment to the leaves. Without equality and exchange of nourishment there can be no growth and no love. Amen.

(Michal Leunig, A Common Prayer)

Thirdly, live what you pray:

Listen to this quotation from a sermon of St. John Chrysostom:

Would you honour the body of Christ? Do not despise his nakedness; do not honour him here in church clothed in silk vestments and then pass him by unclothed and frozen outside. Remember that he who said, 'This is my body', and made good his words, also said, 'You saw me hungry and gave me no food', and, 'in so far as you did it not to one of these, you did it not to me'. In the first sense the body of Christ does not need clothing but worship from a pure heart. In the second sense it does need clothing and all the care we can give it... Learn to be discerning Christians and to honour Christ in the way he wants to be honoured. It is only right that honour given to anyone should take the form most acceptable to the recipient not to the giver... So give God the honour he asks for...

In a report from Christian peacekeepers in Baghdad, Jane Pritchard writes: "The team says that Iraqis are not shocked or awed by what they have seen. While the bombs are coming from on high, they look up and say that God is higher."²⁰ Can we have a similar faith?

"... start seriously thinking about making peace or the world will soon be a mess for everyone. Peace in the world is everyone's right as well as everyone's responsibility. We do not have a choice. It is a crucial time."

Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations

²⁰ Dr M. Jane Pritchard, MD, "Report from Christian peacekeepers in Baghdad" *Independent Catholic News*, Toronto, March 24, 2003