



“And They Shall Make War No More”: Lessons about Peace-Making and Overcoming Conflict from Colombia

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Abstract

This paper describes the background to the last fifty years of violence in Columbia and identifies its causes in inequality, poverty and displacement. It then explores the ways in which the Catholic Church has been prominent in developing processes of peace-building that include “accompaniment” of the victims to include them in structures of citizen participation. It ends with theological and pastoral reflections on how this can be enabled practically in the Colombian context.

Keywords

Columbia, Church, Peace-Building, Citizen Participation, Accompaniment

Colombia’s armed conflict originated with social and political exclusion. May 2014 marked the 50th anniversary of the conflict between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army or FARC-EP. Throughout these years, Colombia has had several enriching experiences of negotiation, demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration of guerrilla groups. In 1991, as a result of the peace negotiations with the guerrilla group M19, a Constituent Assembly began transforming these structures and paved the way for the creation of a Rule of Law State to ensure the path to peace. However, the conflict deteriorated further with particularly negative impacts on civilians. The rise of drug trafficking made the picture much more complex resulting in right-wing private armies, which transformed into paramilitary groups. Rural communities in particular have lived through decades of confrontations that have resulted in more than five million internally displaced people,

hundreds of killings, thousands abductions, and populations confined and surrounded by landmines to the point that Colombia earned the unfortunate ranking of the country with the highest rates of accidents and incidents from mines and unexploded ordnance. This is the framework of the most severe humanitarian crisis in the Western world in recent decades.

Virtually no sector of Colombian society has been free from the consequences of the internal armed conflict. The Church has suffered atrocities through the murders of the Archbishop of Cali and the Bishop of Arauca, the threats and killings of many priests, religious and pastoral agents, in addition to the difficult situations suffered by those who are in the field serving communities and defending their rights through faith.

After decades of fighting, peace negotiations were again initiated in September 2012 with the express purpose of ending the armed conflict that had plagued Colombia for over fifty years. The first step to ending the conflict has seen the Colombian Government enter into negotiations with the FARC guerrillas in Havana, Cuba, on a six-point agenda. The second step will involve negotiations with another guerrilla group, the National Liberation Army or ELN, which are still in their exploratory phase.

Violence, inequalities and vulnerabilities

From an ethical point of view we have to ask about the elements underlying these conflicts, particularly around access to economic, social and political opportunities such as education, health and dignified work. The fact is that the political system in Colombia is constructed in such a way that it is not inclusive but exclusive and that such opportunities are only accessed by a small part of the population. This has made Colombia one of the most unequal countries worldwide and thus, has resulted in opportunities becoming highly concentrated in a small group of people, increasing vulnerability for the rest of the population. Although there has been positive progress between 2010 and 2013 regarding inequality in Colombia the country remains one of the most unequal in Latin America, which itself is the most unequal continent in the world. Indeed, one of the factors that has exacerbated Colombia's social and armed conflict is inequality. While speaking of vulnerabilities and social inclusion it is important to stress that the internal armed conflict in Colombia has developed largely in those areas marked by intra-regional inequalities in terms of socioeconomic development. This issue is one of the most important elements to be addressed in order to build a lasting peace. Communities and people of these regions have historically suffered

a deficit in the opportunities and public services that a state should provide to its citizens.

When we talk about building peace in a context like Colombia's, we cannot ignore the fact that we are facing the challenge of taking on vulnerabilities caused largely by existing inequality. This challenge has to do with human dignity; so, exercising peace becomes a process of building a different style of society. Peace-building has to ask how society ensures human security for all its citizens. Community-level peace-building experiences have taught us that it is necessary to develop a comprehensive plan that includes aspects such as peace education, the creation of a culture of peace, helping to build relationships at all levels, and strengthening public participation to achieve transformations and overcome social inequality. This comprehensive plan should involve those groups that have suffered the conflict in different ways and to whom a response must be appropriate to their needs; one of these sectors is women.

Local conflicts also highlight that shared vulnerabilities can create tensions. Vulnerability in many cases comes from situations of social exclusion or the lack of opportunities for citizens. Many times those local groups in confrontation do not belong to different sectors, socially speaking, but represent a confrontation between vulnerable groups over scarce resources and other factors. Often we witness conflicts between poor and excluded sectors of the population. The question that arises, then, is about the impact of those vulnerabilities that create violence between such sectors. Experience shows that there are different impacts on women and children in such circumstances. Building peace requires a differential or needs-based approach that can deal with the impacts on women as principal victims of such conflicts, on children, and on ethnic groups who display certain vulnerabilities.

The challenge of peace-building in the middle of the conflict

While women and children are the most affected by the armed conflict, we must also recognise their ability to contribute to the process of peace-building. "Participation, prevention, promotion and protection. These are the 4 'Ps' of the rights of women or, in other words, what they and their organisations require not only for their own development but also for the social success of their numerous and various initiatives of peace building."¹

The documents from the Bishops Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean have helped to deepen the recognition of the

¹ Peace without women does not work. United Nations Development Program. Callejón con salida Magazine, number 51.

specific role of women in the overcoming of situations such as social exclusion, the feminisation of poverty and gender based violence and armed conflict.

Throughout the years of conflict, efforts of peace-building developed at local and national levels have been many and significant. We can say that Colombia became a school of peace-building for the many lessons learnt in these endeavours and by the deep insights that have led or encouraged such processes both at the community and national level. Today we can count on a variety of peace initiatives; Caritas Colombia encourages and accompanies more than one hundred local peace initiatives that are developing a methodology for model-oriented social inclusion and peace building. Perhaps one of the initiatives with greatest national coverage is the Week for Peace, which has been running for over 15 years with a very diverse group of civil society organizations including Caritas Colombia. The dynamics of local peace initiatives are very important even if they do not involve a dialogue between the community and illegal armed actors.

Other recognised peace initiatives in Colombia are the Peace and Development Programs that have spread throughout the country and have successfully managed to articulate the needs of different sectors of society. Development and Peace initiatives promote peace-building in areas of conflict through productive projects to ensure a “Life with Dignity” for participants. They promote a vision of peace as a product of two interrelated efforts: achieving dynamic regional economic development involving and impacting on marginalised sectors, and maintaining a process of rebuilding and recovering public goods and services such as education, health, environment and cultural heritage.

What this has taught us is that we will be unable to tackle the wider conflict if we cannot create processes and pedagogies that address conflict at the local or community level. Pedagogy is not only learning ways of peaceful coexistence, it involves the creation of opportunities for citizen participation.

Local peace-building initiatives have taught us that a major dilemma of participation within the “territorial peace” framework is the issue of legitimacy afforded or not afforded to political institutions and local and regional authorities. In our experience the creation of such legitimacy requires mechanisms for public participation in local development planning, and also in the creation of instances of citizen-monitoring mechanisms that are sufficiently robust to ensure that these processes will be of service to the community. Learning from previous peace negotiations shows that the country has to create processes and frameworks that reflect a truly inclusive society. This applies to the violence stemming from the armed conflict but also to the growing phenomenon of urban violence and conflict that is severely affecting the Latin American region.

Peace-building in complex scenarios: drug trafficking, terrorism and mining

The current peace negotiations with representatives of the FARC guerrillas recognise the fact that injustice is the root cause of the armed conflict and the political challenges facing the country, even though it has become intertwined with other forms of violence. In this context, one can speak of peace negotiations and a path for peace-building that has political participation challenges for those involved with the guerrillas. Another challenge is building communities of peace amid the ongoing threat and action of various armed actors that have no other purpose than the advancement of criminal or illegal activities. As such, we find ourselves faced with two different scenarios that are interrelated; one is the internal armed conflict and the other is the conflict generated by drug trade that contribute to the unravelling of the social fabric in Colombia with profound humanitarian impacts. It should be emphasized that alongside the conflict generated by drug trafficking there is another conflict taking place related to the increase of extractive industries in gold, oil, coal, gas, and various metals as well as the creation of large-scale plantations for the production of biofuels. Colombia, like other countries, is impacted by two types of mining, one exerted by legally constituted companies and one controlled by illegal actors. At this point we turn again to the impact of illegal income generation in armed conflict and its destructive power on the social fabric.

Local communities in the context of multiple conflicts

Neighbourhoods in districts of cities like Medellín, Bogotá or Cali live a sort of underground gang control that serves drug trafficking interests. There, children and youth continue to be threatened and pressurised into becoming part of networks handling micro-trafficking in cities. The initial use of drugs at an early age, contact with groups outside the law, invisible barriers preventing the movement of people from one district to another, the absence or lack of steady work or employment opportunities for many adults, are some of the elements of a complex conflict situation that must be addressed with new criteria or tools. Finding the correct way to approach and reach the places in which the conflict is most intense, and determining the main needs of these communities, is a great pastoral challenge. There is learning from the experiences of working with rural communities located in the midst of the armed conflict between leftist guerrillas and the state. At an urban level, pastoral responses show that the phenomena of violence is multi-dimensional and therefore may not be subject to simple interventions focused on one aspect of the

violence. The cultural dimension plays a central role in these scenarios and consequently theological and pastoral reflection is called to play an important role. There are two elements to consider: the first one is that in addressing urban violence it is necessary to establish avenues of dialogue between authorities and civil society, as both are necessary to transform the situations that generate confrontations; and the second element is the need to develop a long-term process in the field of prevention, which the Church, schools and community spaces must address with a lot of creativity and clear ideas on intervening in the structural phenomena that generate such conflict and violence.

In Caritas Colombia, we are reflecting on peace-building in the context of a negotiated solution to the armed conflict without disregarding other manifestations of violence associated with the wider conflict. Reflection leads us to question ourselves about the structural transformations the country must undertake in relation to the agreements reached at the negotiating table. Experience has shown that in order to achieve sustainable, long-term processes, the negotiating parties cannot themselves stimulate all the needed transformations; it is up to society as a whole to define them in other legislative or democratic spaces and through local citizen participation, particularly in areas affected by the violence.

Engaging citizens to ensure justice and peace

One of the manifestations of violence faced by rural communities in countries such as Colombia is the loss of land due to dispossession suffered by displaced communities as a result of the armed conflict, drug trafficking and mining activities. Two years ago Colombia passed a law on transitional justice in order to ensure reparation to the victims of the conflict and to facilitate the restitution of their lands; since the law was enacted there have been many investigations into how much land was dispossessed from small-scale landholders, with an estimate of approximately six million hectares of fertile farmland.

A dedicated exercise of peace building requires an understanding of justice as restorative justice or transitional justice, and one that does not separate issues of justice and peace. A tension underlies attempts to balance the need to see justice prevail and the need to restore a climate of peace that has been broken. This tension cannot waive the right of victims to recover what was taken from them in the conflict and the recognition of their human dignity. Peace is stronger when it is accompanied by measures that seek to establish justice for victims, who are undergoing processes of remembering and reparation, and especially when seeking to ensure that the wrongdoings of the past will not be repeated. With rural communities we have learned that the establishment of a climate of peace requires ensuring that land

dispossession and land grab will not continue as well as recognising the right of victims to land restitution and reparation processes.

With regard to urban culture, the peace-building process has its own dynamics as a result of the many social movements seeking to actively participate in the construction of public policies and civic identity. Engagement with the guerrillas has resulted in an enlargement of the group of organisations involved in the political arena. So far, much of society has lived in fear of being disappeared or murdered for their political ideas or simply for being caught up in confrontations for territorial control. With the peace negotiations that fear has begun to fade and the possibility of greater citizen participation emerges. The tendency of the peasant and indigenous movements to join with urban organisations has produced a new expression of social conflict or disillusionment, especially when the lack of adequate responses from the state has provoked more coordinated and collaborative social protests. However, one of the challenges for the state is responding to social protest, to this form of demanding rights, without resorting to violence. What needs to be recognised by authorities is that these new expressions of protest are closely linked to the efforts of peace-building. Now the challenge is to create the conditions for the continuing exercise of this active citizenship.

On this journey, we have realised that many communities are often not aware of the mechanisms for citizen participation that they are entitled to under Colombian legislation. There exist many legal mechanisms that should be carried out at the municipal level, yet there is a lack of awareness or little belief in their effectiveness. Peace-building takes its strength from civic participation, pluralism, and citizen dialogue, channelling new demands to be included in the discussion of public policies adopted by the state. The complexity of the current conflict which is marked by social and political exclusion, phenomena such as drug trafficking and the increasing presence of mining activities, reflects new sources of conflict but also new scenarios; scenarios that should also be an opportunity to think about new ways to address the challenges to peace in the world.

Options for the poor and victims

Over time we have designed a methodology for community participation on the basis that peace must be built from the bottom up. In the conflict between top-down approaches, driven by negotiations to end the armed conflict, and peace built from the bottom-up, we have stressed that our contribution as the Church is in strengthening communities to make peace-building an exercise derived from the community level, while political agreements to end the conflict are developed by the Colombian state and guerrilla organisations.

Where is the Catholic Church located in this context? The Episcopal Conference of Colombia has made several types of intervention in the armed conflict. The Presidency of the Colombian Episcopal Conference has echoed the prophetic pronouncements and permanent calls for peace made by the Colombian Assembly of Bishops. The Colombian Church is well known for consistently speaking out and calling for a negotiated end to the armed conflict as well as lobbying for the continued efforts of the negotiating parties in Havana since the peace negotiations were begun between the Colombian government and the guerrillas. Numerous Episcopal statements and communiqués have emphasised the need to resolve the humanitarian crisis and have insisted on citizen participation in peace-building efforts. In addition it has issued calls for days of prayer for peace and reconciliation and has promoted forums and spaces for reflection on the process of peace building. Furthermore, continued efforts have been undertaken to ensure the adoption of public policies in favour of victims and peace-building. It is important to note that the various bodies of the Episcopal Conference, when engaging with national authorities and lobbying for the recognition of the suffering of victims and for steps to be taken to restore their rights, have succeeded in raising the cry of those who are suffering and have also channelled and promoted proposals for the adoption of public policies on peace-building.

Building peace in contexts marked by violence requires the Church to assume the option for the poor and for victims, while maintaining its autonomy in the face of local power dynamics. In the regions of Colombia that are most severely affected by illegal armed groups, drug gangs and organised crime that have weakened state structures, the Church has had to reflect carefully at all levels of the church community, from the parish to the diocese, on how it can retain its autonomy and ability to stand alongside victims. At the same time, there has been an urgent need to establish alliances with social groups to ensure an adequate response to such problems. In many instances the only voices left after the violent onslaughts by armed actors are the faith communities and their leaders who have the complex task of listening to those who have nowhere else to go in search of safety and a space to speak about their fears. Amid the risks and stigmatisation, listening allows bridges to be built and strengthens the objective of maintaining a rights-based approach.

When we talk about state capture by legal or illegal actors, who use public institutions to further their own interests or their violent ends, we are referring to a situation that can destroy public institutions and can commandeer the economy, social life and even organisations with humanitarian objectives. Much money is spent on trying to control society and its representative institutions, from direct threats against those who maintain ethical principles so they can achieve their goals.

Fraternity as a foundation and path to peace

Dialogue has been essential for creating foundations for peace-building. The Colombian Church has maintained a permanent dialogue with representatives of the international community, national authorities and representatives of various social organisations.

The Episcopal Conference has been operating at the national level. Listening to representatives of civil society in the Assembly of Bishops and dialoguing with organisations dedicated to working for peace and human rights at the regional and local levels as well has been a key factor in understanding the social and armed conflict. What has been learnt is that it is necessary to link the teachings of the Church to the perspective and vision provided by social movements and grassroots organisations. The experiences of pastoral agents who are in permanent contact with the hopes and suffering of communities, with social movements and with reflections on the reality that are derived from other social disciplines, allows for the construction of alternative proposals developed along three core approaches. Firstly, deepening the understanding of the dynamics at play in social structures; secondly, recognising alternative responses for overcoming the existing humanitarian crises; and finally, creating consensus and providing the space for working together towards the major changes required by society.

Then we have the regional level. There are many interventions being carried out at the regional level from the diocesan offices, which include measures and programmes that seek to provide protection for vulnerable populations such as Human Rights Defenders, and that seek to maintain hope in communities hit by violence, and that strengthen ties with other social actors working in peace-building. Regions undoubtedly occupy a central place in peace-building because, ultimately, armed conflicts tend to have very specific regional expressions and their actors act differently depending on the circumstances they find themselves in.

At the local level there have been varied and complex peace-building processes taking shape. As a consequence of the long-term armed conflict, many regions have been modified either by forced displacement which has coerced many to leave everything behind in order to start a new life in unknown areas, or because the dynamics of conflict are causing the social fabric and community structures to disintegrate. This transformation of social, cultural and regional relations has required a new form of inclusive responses in areas that have seen the influx of displaced communities, such as challenging the indifference and suspicion faced by victims. Transformations generated by armed conflicts in community life are deep and require very close pastoral care. Initially, our idea of accompaniment was based on our physical presence in territories to prevent forced

displacement and the exercise of pressure by armed groups over indigenous, Afro-Colombian and peasant communities; Eventually, we realized that support has a much more complex dynamic and, in a context of armed conflict, it requires the strengthening of community organisation, identifying historical ways to resist violence, defining roles in community services and the ability to raise a joint voice to engage with the Catholic Church at the regional and national level so that they will speak out about the marginalised and the poor.

Accompaniment has a deep psycho-social dimension that can help to answer difficult and sensitive questions. When the opportunity of returning to their land was given to a community that had suffered massive displacement, Caritas Colombia had to take on the challenge of answering to those who had left and to those who had remained in spite of the presence of an illegal armed group: how were you able to have your life respected? How did you survive in spite of what happened? Were you linked to the armed actor? Months later, we would understand that those carrying out pastoral work were the ones who would also need someone to listen and accompany them, given what they had seen and heard. Accompaniment is an on-going task requiring sensitivity, and to ensure that one doesn't just look for easy answers, it has to penetrate into the depth of the suffering of a wounded community.

In addition, we have learnt that accompaniment is the ability to transmit early warnings to appropriate authorities when threats are serious, and it relies on protection-mechanisms where the community itself plays a role of autonomy or defence against armed groups. Accompaniment is helping to identify principles and commitments guaranteeing the unity of the community against the threat of the conflict.

An armed conflict tends to invade every aspect of personal, family and community life. Its dynamic often means that communities live in an environment marked by fear and mistrust; thus, it is very important to work on the cohesion of communities so that it prevails beyond the conflict. The breakdown of solidarity in communities that were identified historically by common values and strong relationships can happen due to the pressure of physical or psychological threats, corrupting influences, or when there are disputes over development issues where one takes a different view from the rest of the community. Due to these multiple threats, the surest form of support is through a strategy of accompaniment and close association so as to foster dialogue and allow for the rebuilding of trust.

Walking the same path, sharing life

A little over twenty years ago the Episcopal Conference of Colombia decided to do research into what was at that stage a socially and

legally unrecognised humanitarian issue: the serious issue of forced displacement that now affects more than five million people. The research had a huge impact and led to further reflection on the accompaniment model required by these victims. After reflecting on the gravity of isolation, violation of rights suffered by the victims and collective indifference to this situation, the book of Ruth was identified as the best spiritual reference point for defining the accompaniment of local and national pastoral agents. When community links have been destroyed and the decision to abandon one's land is the only option for survival, it creates a type of situation that the book of Ruth addresses very well (Ruth 1.1–5).

This biblical text confronts us with the dilemmas arising from the moment one has to forcibly leave everything behind, integrating oneself or not into another culture, surviving or sinking to successive irreparable losses and, finally, returning or not to the land where one came from. The book of Ruth explores the great dilemmas involving irreparable losses such as the death of a spouse and children, losses that force people to take crucial decisions such as those faced in the everyday life of communities confronted with violent situations.

As a result of the pastoral experience of the Catholic Church in Colombia, we have reflected on the dilemmas that profoundly impact on the kind of accompaniment required in a context where communities have to face questions about how to deal with loss and how to ensure conditions of dignity, human security and stability when they return to their land.

In many cases families affected by dispossession and displacement are transformed, incorporating new members and growing as a unit in the locations they have arrived at after escaping from violence. This situation leads to discussions and uncertainty over whether to return to restore their rights and to demand the return of what has been taken away from them or whether to take the perspective that comes from those who believe it is better not to return. In the book of Ruth, Naomi's first request to her new family puts the dilemma of continuing the progress that has been undertaken or turning back with legitimate reasons. "Go back, each of you to your mother's house. May Yahweh show you faithful love, as you have done to those who have died and to me. Yahweh grant that you may each find happiness with a husband!" (Ruth 1.8–9). To this request, the answer is unanimous: if you decide to return we will not abandon you. To this answer, her insistence makes clearer the bleak panorama the future offers to those who wanted to accompany her so far. The dilemma is expressed in terms of bearing uncertainty and despair, of returning to the original land of Naomi, a strange land to her companions, or staying to create a new family and to have the certainty of a land of her own. The cry of the women facing these dilemmas represents how hard it is to opt for accompaniment in situations of risk and

uncertainty. Orpah defines the situation: she has made a pilgrimage of accompaniment but with a kiss closes the process and returns to her place. Her judgment is that she should not continue. Orpah has spent a long time accompanying and considers her strength is no longer enough; the defiance and despair expressed by Naomi have a lot of resonance. “They started weeping loudly all over again; Orpah then kissed her mother-in-law and went back to her people. But Ruth stayed with her” (Ruth 1.14). Accompaniment has a limit in this case: safety and rest in her own land.

Ruth embodies the other option. She speaks the phrase that inspired us to choose to accompany those who suffer:

Do not press me to leave you and to stop going with you, for
 Wherever you go, I shall go,
 Wherever you live, I shall live.
 Your people will be my people,
 And your God will be my God. (Ruth 1.16)

The decision to accompany is sincere, committed and sufficient to overcome the obstacles that may present themselves in the future. Ruth has decided to accompany and place herself in the path of those who have lost everything. She not only lost her property but her husband and children, and now returns not only physically but with a profound gesture of recognition that blows away everyone else. So today we find ourselves accompanying those who return amid big questions, amid the astonishment of those who see them arrive, amid unanswered questions and facts. “The two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. Their arrival set the whole town astir, and the women said, ‘Can this be Naomi?’” (1: 19) Returning is always a deeply moving spiritual experience, but one full of new uncertainties.

Accompaniment, as described in the book of Ruth, is supportive, unlimited and able to overcome the challenges of the environment in which we live. But above all it is a spiritual attitude, it is a profound choice for the victim and for the vulnerable, it is a radical option in the presence of the Lord of Life who does not abandon the poor, the orphan or the widow.

Accompaniment and encounter

The mandate of accompaniment is a community one, not one destined to be carried out by a small or select group of people. It is the community that must accompany, moved by the Spirit who motivates them and makes itself present. The accompaniment can be personal,

like that carried out by the Good Samaritan (Lk 10.30–36), but it can also be collective like the appearances of the Risen One, particularly the text about the Emmaus road (Lk 24.13–35). However, the community does not always have the potential to provide accompaniment due to the divisions and fractures caused by violence. The primitive community went through these stages led by Jesus, from feeling helpless to building a perspective and being sent out to proclaim and accompany (Lk 10.1–9).

Accompaniment must be carried out by those who know how to get to the deepest experience of those who are being accompanied, to their most radical questions, their aspirations and needs. Accompaniment is presence among communities which often in their suffering have not asked for anything and, like the Samaritan, are looking to quench their thirst silently. There, accompaniment acquires the spiritual and theological dimensions that make it specifically pastoral and illuminating of life and the path ahead; the opposite would be an accompaniment which does not touch the deepest fibre of suffering to allow a perspective of hope. Accompaniment is related to a personal and community life-project and the interpretation of this project. The key is to start from the encounter with Jesus, letting the Spirit strengthen the process of development, and so make it a key to the revelation of the mystery of God's plan. Accompaniment discovers the presence of the Lord in the midst of the story of suffering that we live to transform into a story of resurrection and hope.

Going back in pain to the place of departure, returning to the place of the first meeting, to Galilee, marks the accompaniment of Jesus that has to do with recovering the history of a deeply personal encounter with him and his community. Scripture tells us that it all began in Galilee (Mt 4.12). It was there that the disciples heard the first call (Mt 4.15) and there that Jesus promised to gather them again after the resurrection (Mt 26. 31). Reuniting them was preceded by a call to go to the mountain, that mountain reminiscent of Sinai, which commemorates the place where Elijah discovered the meaning of his mission, the site of transfiguration. For anyone who has suffered a big trauma, the mountain becomes a climb to the top to see the path travelled and to re-make their life's plan. Whoever wants to accompany those who suffer must be willing to get on the path to that mountain of the encounter with the Lord; there, the path travelled is rediscovered and further possibilities are discovered of walking with others on a new path of hope are.

However, accompaniment does not always guarantee that the accompanied will be sure of the Lord's presence or will understand the importance of walking the road. Understanding and assimilating this new presence of the Risen Christ, which breaks the paradigms of fear and trauma, takes time. Those who have been sent to energize community accompaniment must feel the certainty of God's presence

that Moses had when he was sent to free his people: “I shall be with you” (Ex 3. 12). They should be aware that the promise is being fulfilled: “And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time” (Mt 28. 20). Jesus guides this story and, as painful as it may seem, he is the victor we must follow. We are, at the same time, walkers following someone and companions of our brothers.

Mysticism and accompaniment

To make accompaniment effective, it is important to use the methodology described in the text of the Road to Emmaus along with the ability to enable communities to recover their memories, deepen their questions and be able to discover alternatives. One goal of accompaniment is the active participation of communities in decision-making and strengthening their life-plans to deal with situations of violence, while being in pain and reflecting on the irreparable losses of loved ones who have died, been displaced, kidnapped, etc.

Experience shows that pastoral companions need training and people around them who support them in their work. In a climate of violence and constant attacks it is always possible to be discouraged, to be filled with despair and to lose focus.

Fraternal mysticism is something we learned from Pope Francis from the beginning of his pontificate. His first message on World Day of Prayer for Peace was about fraternity and addressed those who live in situations of armed conflict.

Today, when networks and tools of human communication have reached unprecedented developments, we feel challenged to discover and convey the mystique of living together, to mingle, to meet, to take arms, to support us, to participate in this tide somewhat chaotic that can become a real experience of fraternity, a solidarity caravan, a holy pilgrimage. (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 87)

Walking alongside communities in accompaniment creates an environment of participation in processes shared with fraternity, collective learning, spiritual growth and mysticism of brotherhood. This strong idea of a fraternal mysticism, in response to a “throwaway culture” and in support of a “culture of encounter”, is precisely the key to pastoral accompaniment, because support is only possible where there is encounter in the deepest sense that allows us to discover again and again a sense of human dignity in the sisters and brothers we meet. Building peace in a “culture of encounter” opens a human potential that exceeds the silencing of guns and pushes us towards the face of the victims and their victimizers. This mysticism should lead us to suggest the urgent need to open spaces of forgiveness. As a victim of kidnapping told us: “We must forgive the unforgivable to have

reconciliation; they are still thinking that it is the state who forgives, when it should be the victim who must do it,” (Oscar Tulio Lizcano, first political hostage of the FARC. Manizales, February 2013).

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