Peacebuilding: A theological framework

Introduction and executive summary

Introduction

A possible Tearfund approach to conflict and peacebuilding emerged as a priority area for scoping during the 2014 strategic review process. The peacebuilding team have sought to identify particular areas of peacebuilding work to which Tearfund can add value: where we, as an organisation, can best express and outwork the Christian call to peace and reconciliation, and where peacebuilding is a natural outworking of our own vision. As a part of this scoping it was essential that Tearfund reflect theologically on the topic of peacebuilding. We wanted to explore the work of peacebuilding as a part of the mission of God and to reflect on the way that this connects with Tearfund's own particular part of this mission (as presented in our 2016 *Theology of mission*).

This document lays out a theological framework for Tearfund's peacebuilding work. As such it does not present a single theological position nor a one-size-fits-all approach to situations of oppression, violence, conflict and injustice. Rather, it seeks to outline some of the key theological issues, positions and approaches that are important in the pursuit of peace, so we can refer to them in, and apply them to, our work. This discussion is rooted in our theology of mission, our understanding of the call to participate in God's mission to redeem and restore his creation and, in particular, to achieve the goal of restoring relationships between people. Tearfund believes that the mission of God is essentially about bringing peace: between God and humans, humans and each other, and humans and the wider creation.[1]

Peacebuilding is a Christ-centric activity that contributes to the well-being of the whole world and that is not limited to the Christian community. It bears witness to our faith and to the nature of the kingdom of God, and is, to some extent, aspirational. This is because, while the death and resurrection of Christ have inaugurated the kingdom of God, the kingdom has not yet come in all its fullness, and will not until Christ's return brings into being the new creation. Many of the ideas and concepts discussed in this framework assume that they will most truly flourish within the context of restored relationships between humans, creation and God, but that they will not be seen in their fullness until the new Creation. However, it is the mission of the church to express the nature of the kingdom within the world and to invite others into it,[2] including through the pursuit of peace.

Of course, one does not have to be a Christian to be a peacebuilder. Many of the qualities of the peacebuilder and approaches to peacebuilding discussed will seem universal and universally applicable, reflecting what Reformed theology describes as the common grace of God available to all humankind. But for the Christian, these qualities and ideas are rooted in our understanding of God's character and grace, in

[1] Tearfund, *Theology of mission*
[2] T. Wright, *How God Became King* (SPCK, 2012); Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and World Evangelical Fellowship, *Evangelism and Social Responsibility* (Lausanne Movement, 1982). This is discussed in more depth in *Theology of mission*.

our relationship with him and in our growth in Christian discipleship through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Other religions and philosophies will often describe these qualities differently. As we develop our peacebuilding work we will need to learn more of their ideas - and reflect on how they connect to our own - to be able to talk about our own theology in ways that will help us to build relationships and seek peace across boundaries and despite differences.

This framework will focus on the Christian perspective. The aim is to help Tearfund to develop its work and to position itself within peacebuilding dialogues as a relief and development organisation with a distinctive Christian identity. However, it is important to note that peacebuilding work takes place in contexts where there is a plurality of beliefs (about religion and many other topics), and demands that people seek to build relationships across these divides. In addition, Tearfund's peacebuilding work will take place in many contexts where Christianity has historically been experienced in relation to Western imperialism and colonialism, promoted in ways that created divisions and damaged existing cultures. Given this history, we will need to be cautious of emphasising the importance of our beliefs in ways that may be perceived as privileging them and the cultural norms we may bring with them. This does not mean, of course, that we should not be able to describe ourselves as Christian or seek to express this faith in our work. However, we will need to do so in ways that are sensitive to the local experience of Christianity, are understanding of language about the Christian faith (for example with reference to words such as 'evangelical'), and which emphasise a respect for difference and a desire for a peace that is inclusive rather than exclusion and a disrespect for difference. It will be essential that this framework is reflected on, its ideas used and communicated in the light of each different context in which we participate in peacebuilding.

This framework contains six chapters, looking at where we are now and where it is we seek to go, as Christian peacebuilders; at some of the key concepts that underpin peacebuilding work, including peace, justice, rights, power, diversity and community; at how Christians develop as peacebuilders through the journey of discipleship, including what some of the key characteristics of the peacebuilder are; at some proposed Christian approaches to peacebuilding; and at how we can move from a theology to a praxis of peacebuilding, working with those who do not share our beliefs. This executive summary includes a short overview of each chapter and some conclusions and suggestions for Tearfund's peacebuilding work.

Chapter one: Where are we now?

This chapter places peacebuilding work within the framework of the biblical narrative of creation, fall, and the mission of God to bring restoration and redemption through the call of Abraham, the incarnation of Christ, and the commissioning of the church.[3] It explains the way that the broken relationships at the heart of division and conflict are born of sin and the Fall. Both individual sin and the inherent brokenness of the world are at play, as conflict dynamics have become embedded in our world and relationships throughout history and we are all caught up in them, actively and passively.

It is important that a Christian approach to peacebuilding faces the reality of human sin and our own complicity in the injustice we see in the world today, and that we challenge individual sin and the broken systems that contribute to conflict. This is particularly true for white, Western Christians, who are the heirs of Christendom, colonialism and imperialism, and who – however unintentionally – continue to benefit from this legacy and need to acknowledge this as they engage in peacebuilding activities with others who have suffered because of the same legacy. This is hard work, though, and for many of us the more we know about the complexity and interrelatedness of the problems we face, the less moral responsibility or ethical capability we feel we have to deal with them.[4]

However, as this chapter points out, it is the story of scripture and of God's mission to redeem and restore his creation that gives us the hope that we can and will see peace. In following Christ, we choose to return to a life of obedience and discipleship and come to participate in the mission of God. As we do this we are transformed to become more like Christ and are able to reveal the possibility and nature of a new future - entered through a door that Christ's death and resurrection on the cross has opened for all time.

This mission, revealed in Christ's ministry, is holistic, offering restoration to all areas of human life so that creation can flourish once again. Peacebuilding is a part of this mission, and Christian peacebuilders are well equipped, through this understanding of God's mission, to engage with the psychological and spiritual effects of injustice and conflict, as well as the social and economic legacies of these, in order to help people to heal and to develop new habits that can lead them away from conflict in the future.

Finally, this chapter discusses the importance to the work of peacebuilding of knowing and living in this story of hope and redemption, as it is a story that forms us and sustains our discipleship and pursuit of peace in the face of the world's challenges and complexities. This is discussed more in chapter three.[5]

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[3] C. J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (InterVarsity Press, 2006)
[4] S. Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference* (Baker Books, 2011). 123
[5] J. K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom (Cultural Liturgies)* (Baker Academic, 2009); J. K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom (Cultural Liturgies)* (Baker Books, 2013); W. J. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2010); T. F. Schlabach and R. T. Hughes, eds., *Proclaim Peace* (University of Illinois Press, 1997)

Chapter two: Key concepts

It is important for peacebuilding work that we understand what it means to live in peace and to have justice – and for Christian peacebuilders to understand what is particular to a Christian understanding of these concepts. This shapes the work we do and the outcomes we seek. This chapter discusses our understanding of several key factors and ideas that are important in peacebuilding. It starts with the biblical understanding of peace and justice before looking at how power, rights, diversity and community connect to these ideas.

Peace in the Bible is seen in the concepts of *shalom* (in the Old Testament) and *eirene* (in the New Testament). These words convey a richer, deeper concept of peace than the absence-of-conflict meaning often associated with it in English, incorporating ideas of wholeness, completeness, balance, healing, well-being, tranquillity, prosperity, security and justice. They encompass both a state of being and a way of living in a relationship with God – one which was intended in creation and which God seeks to restore (Isaiah 53:5; John 14; Ephesians 2:14-15). This restoration comes through God's move towards humanity, through Christ, and humanity's move towards God in response. It is a peace that starts with personal peace with God and serenity in the midst of the world and moves outwards as that relationship shapes a life that is active in the world.

Peace, biblically, gains strength from God's righteousness and justice. The Bible's account of justice is distinct from the Western judicial tradition of *suum cuique* – to each their due. Biblically, justice centres on a restored relationship with God, which encourages his people towards both rectifying justice and righteousness – living justly in ways that will ultimately make the need for rectifying justice obsolete. Justice is secured for us by Christ's death and resurrection, incorporating retribution for sin and restoration to God, so that we can live righteous lives that seek justice for all (Romans 3:23-35). Our theology reminds us that the establishment of peace and justice often involves *cost* on the part of the one who has been wronged, as they forgive in order to restore relationships.

Power dynamics are a factor in every relationship, and are particularly important to consider in peacebuilding. This chapter also looks at the power God gives us as those made in his image, and the way that Jesus models a godly use of his power in relation to humanity, choosing to serve rather than claim privilege – while acknowledging that he had power that he was laying aside for us (John 13:1-16).[6] Seeking justice for others includes using or sacrificing our own power for their good.

Rights are something that are commonly understood to be secured by justice and peace. For Christians, rights are rooted in the fact that all humans bear the image of God, and all are equal before God (Genesis 1.27; Galatians 3:28-29). However, rights understood like this come tied to responsibilities towards others – who also have rights that we must seek. It is also important for Christians to remember that we need to balance the rights and well-being of the individual with those of the community, and to ensure that the pursuit of equal rights does not lead to the flattening of distinctive differences between individuals and communities.[7]

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[6] A. Crouch, 'It's Time to Talk about Power', *Christianity Today* (2013); A. Crouch, *Playing God* (InterVarsity Press, 2013)
[7] R. Williams, *On Christian Theology (Challenges in Contemporary Theology)* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) 280-282

This leads to a consideration of diversity and inclusion, because peace needs to allow for diversity, engage with difference and seek to bring them together within a community. The Bible is clear that all humans possess the image of God, creating universal similarity, but that all are distinctively different. This difference is something that we are called to overcome but not erase in the process of building relationships and an inclusive peace.[8] In the Bible God's people retain their local affiliations even as they enter a relationship with God and give him their primary loyalty.[9] Difference continues to remind us that our unity is found in Christ.

Finally, this chapter looks at community, and the model for it that we find in the Trinity. This is a community that has unity, as God, and difference, as Father, Son and Spirit (John 13:1; 17:1). It is the overflow of love from this community that creates and that seeks relationship with humanity. Our entry into it, in Christ, brings us into community with others, to whom we have responsibilities. Our well-being is connected to those of others in our community (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12), and understanding this helps us to seek justice and peace together in ways that will lead to changes for all parties.[10]

[8] Genesis 11 (Babel, where division prevents humanity overriding God); Acts 2 (Pentecost); M. Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace* (Oxford: Abingdon Press, 2010)
[9] Genesis chapters 12-23 (Abraham); Acts 22:27-28; Philippians 3:4-5 (Paul)
[10] D. Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (Random House, 2000); Williams, *On Christian Theology (Challenges in Contemporary Theology)*. 285-86

Chapter three: Becoming peacebuilders

This chapter looks in greater depth at the way that Christians enter into and are shaped by the story that the Bible tells us about God's mission to restore *shalom*. This happens through discipleship. In this journey we are transformed to become more like Christ, developing not just intellectual knowledge about God and an assent to certain beliefs, but also a particular way of being in the world, focused on God and characterised by a radical love and desire to live in harmony with others (Romans 12).

This is a process that starts when we respond to Christ's call to follow and is developed through our worship. Scripture is full of worship and hymns in which God's people verbalise and remind themselves of God's great goodness and love, identifying themselves as his people, shaped by him for his purposes.[11] Our worship includes prayer, praise and Bible study, and is centred in our participation in the life and worship of the church, and this shapes us for our mission in the world.[12]

The Eucharist (Holy Communion) is of particular importance for peacebuilding, as it is a celebration and commemoration of our salvation, of our membership of the body of Christ, and of the communal nature of that body.[13] In communion we gather in our local churches, in awareness of the global church and in the knowledge that we have confessed our sins, been forgiven, and shared the peace before we eat and drink together. However, this does not mean that we should seek and maintain peace only within the church: we are also called to welcome other people into communion as we have ourselves been welcomed.

The natural consequence of this formation is that we become more like Christ (Philippians 2:1-11) and can be 'non-conformed' to society (Romans 12:1-2). Becoming more like Christ brings out certain characteristics or attitudes in us (Matthew 5.2-11; Philippians 2:3-11), shaping our character and our ways of being so that we engage with the world in Christlike ways that are a part of God's story - rather than by setting fixed rules that we must follow. This enables us to imagine and seek a different future to the one that the world tells us we can expect, and to live in ways that help to bring it into being.

[11] Exodus 15:11; 1 Chronicles 29:10-13; Psalms 72:18-19; Romans 11:36; Hebrews 13:20-21
[12] S. Hauerwas and S. Wells, *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (John Wiley & Sons, 2011); Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom (Cultural Liturgies)*. 155-214
[13] John 6:53-59. W. T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008); Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom (Cultural Liturgies)*

Chapter four: Characteristics of a peacebuilder

This chapter builds on the discussion of discipleship by looking at the characteristics of the peacebuilder. It focuses on attitudes and approaches to the world, notably humility, hospitality, courage, imagination, and comfort with complexity, rather than more technical skills like negotiation. These attitudes are characteristics that all Christians should be looking to grow in as they seek the kingdom, but they are also to be found in many other people,[14] and should characterise those with whom Tearfund works in peacebuilding.

The clearest statement of humility as a part of peacebuilding is in Paul's description of Christ's laying aside of his own power in order to make peace between humanity and God possible (Philippians 2:5-8). It acknowledges that *I* am not more important than *you* or *us*. However, humility is not about self-abasement. Christ knew who he was, even on the cross, but chose to lay aside the pride and power that he held in his identity as God.

Hospitality is an attitude as much as an act, an approach to the world and to other people that welcomes, listens, and responds. Hospitality was an ethic and law of Israel (Exodus 22:21). It is important that the Christian develops a willingness to be *hosted* (as Jesus was, for example by Zacchaeus - an attitude that acknowledges that we are also recipients of God's hospitality.

Often humility and hospitality involve the willingness to take a risk, especially in conflict situations. This is seen in the story of Abigail's move to reconcile with David after her husband rejects him (1 Samuel 25). This risk-taking is not foolhardiness or certainty of our own rightness, but courage to face uncertain situations or to stand with people or speak out on particular situations in pursuit of peace. This was normal for the earliest Christians, who were always at risk from the Jewish and Roman authorities.

Courage is important because peacebuilders operate within great complexity, where (as we noted in chapter one) no one is wholly innocent of being part of conflict. A peacebuilder needs to be able to move forward in a situation knowing that no single step will solve everything and that no one rule, beyond love, should be applied unilaterally. In reading the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15), Volf points out that the father breaks the normal rules in order to restore his relationship with his son because of his love for his son.[15]

Finally, the peacebuilder needs the ability to imagine a different future than that which currently seems possible, and to imagine ways of getting there. For Christians this is not an imagination akin to making up fantasies or fairy tales, it is an imagination driven by the hope, vision and promise of a different future, of the coming kingdom of God. It is the imagination of Moses, rooted in the vision given to him by God, to see Israel freed from slavery.[16]

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[14] N. T. Wright, *After You Believe* (Harper Collins, 2010)
[15] M. Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*. 157-165
[16] W. Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination* (Fortress Press, 2001). 3, 6, 14-17

Chapter five: The journey

This chapter looks at four approaches to peacebuilding that have been put forward by Christian thinkers. These are Henri Nouwen's move from *hostis* to *hospes*, John Paul Lederach's moral imagination, Miroslav Volf's embrace, and the ideas of just war and non-violence.[17]

In discussing the way enemies become friends, Nouwen focuses on the creation of the hospitable space, in which change can happen. The most important features of this space are receptivity to the other, and confrontation through the expression of yourself – in a way that is willing to accept that your perspective is limited while at the same time valuing that perspective. Everyone should be themselves, respecting the space and the others within it, but without depreciating themselves. This enables all to develop new ways of being together at peace without demanding that all become the same.

It is in this kind of space that people will be able to share their experiences of conflict and oppression, and to hear and recognise the stories of others. It is the kind of space that approaches and processes for peacebuilding, like those proposed by Lederach and Volf, may be able to take place, because it is a space in which the active nature of giving and receiving hospitality, in which all participants are aware that there are behavioural expectations and etiquette, can enable and safeguard communication and relationship building.

Lederach believes that peacebuilding is about making constructive change, and that the moral imagination directs that change. His moral imagination has four key elements:

1. An imagination of ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies.
2. A curiosity about the world that embraces complexity over dualistic polarity.
3. A belief in and pursuit of the creative act, inherent in us as God's image bearers.
4. A willingness to risk stepping into the unknown to see if transformation can happen.

It is these qualities and steps that enable people to love their neighbour, and Lederach advocates encouraging this kind of approach to peacebuilding. All this takes time and effort, and demands that rather than 'forgiving and forgetting', the different parties in a conflict remember together in order to maintain their commitment to peace.

The way that conflict is remembered is important in Volf's approach as well. Embrace is the metaphor that he chooses for peacebuilding, believing that it reflects the way that Christ opens his arms on the cross to make reconciliation between God and humans possible. There are four key aspects to the embrace: repentance, forgiveness, making space in oneself for others, and healing of memory. These are expressed in the opening of the arms, the wait for a response, the closing of the arms in gentle embrace, and the release to continue in life, reshaped by the embrace. Offering an embrace always risks rejection, and our model for this, again, is Christ.

The movement towards the embrace is a journey that both sides of a conflict need to make. They can journey on their own - as part of their own healing process, moving towards repentance or forgiveness as is relevant - but ideally, they will journey in sight of the other, coming to hear what the other has experienced and understand their perspective on a situation. At this point Volf brings us back to the question of how to

[17] H. J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out* (Zondervan, 1998); J. P. Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford University Press, 2010); Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*

remember injustice, oppression and conflict, in ways that allow healing and avoid the oppressed from becoming an oppressor in turn. The memory is important for preventing the past conflict from repeating, but it must be remembered in the context of God's offer of grace and salvation for all. If we have experienced love and forgiveness it is easier to offer it, and it is an offer that is demanded of those who have accepted reconciliation with God.

Finally, this chapter looks at the possibility of just war and the validity of non-violence as approaches to conflict and peacebuilding. It notes and discusses three historic Christian perspectives on war and peace: pacifism, just war, and crusade, in which just war is often seen as a strategy for responsible love and service to the weak.[18] It also considers arguments for pacifism and active non-violence (in the Martin Luther King model) and about the complexities of engaging with the reality of the world in ways that are both faithful to God's call to peace and to our love of our neighbours, who may be at risk of violence.

[18] W. R. Marty, 'The Liberal Protestant Peace Movement between the World Wars', in *Proclaim Peace* (ed. T. F. Schlabach and R. T. Hughes; A Realist Critique; University of Illinois Press, 1997), 185–203. 185-188

Chapter six: From theology to praxis

As mentioned in the introduction, peacebuilding work usually takes place in contexts where there are a plurality of religions and beliefs, and where Christianity is often a minority and sometimes mistrusted presence. It is important to think about how our theology plays out in practice in these situations, and – in this framework – to reflect theologically about how, as Christians, we build peaceful relationships in the context of religious difference, without conceding our belief in the truth of our faith.

So, this chapter discusses the importance of articulating our beliefs (as expressed in Tearfund's *Statement of faith* and *Theology of mission*) with both confidence and humility, and notes that in our experience being honest about our faith and motivations can enable a shared appreciation for the importance of faith and create acceptance for us and our work. It recognises the dangers of privileging or being perceived to privilege our own beliefs over those of others, especially in contexts where Christianity has historically been experienced in connection with colonialism and imperialism, and it emphasises our belief in every person's right to have free choice about their religion. It argues that these two points need to shape the way that we express our beliefs in each context, sensitive to the local experience of Christianity. This is not new: as McGrath has pointed out, Christianity has always existed in a world with multiple religious options, requiring Christians to engage with the other faiths and cultures as they develop ways of life and witness as disciples.[19]

The chapter then turns to look at how we build relationships where there is disagreement – between both denominations and faiths. It picks up on the idea of an *irenic* (peaceable) approach, seeking common ground and valuing unity within diversity and diversity within unity.[20] It also discusses the idea of 'principled' or 'confident' pluralism, which accepts the existence of the pluralistic modern nation-state and reflects on how Christian ethics operate within this space. It is a principle that allows diverse traditions to self-define and disagree, but also to find common cause in pursuit of the common good.[21]

Finally, the chapter suggests that the 'golden rule' ('Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'), the awareness that faith shapes lives, and the desire to forge relationships across divides – including religious divides – can provide the common ground for the relationships and alliances we pursue in our peacebuilding work. While there are differences between Tearfund and other denominations and faiths that we will need to learn to navigate, we do not think that these differences preclude us from working with them, and we are comfortable doing so to achieve our aims where we share these same goals.[22]

[19] A. E. McGrath, *Christian Theology* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1994). 446
[20] R. E. Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief* (InterVarsity Press, 2016). 24
[21] J. D. Inazu, *Confident Pluralism* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).
[22] In Tearfund's language and practices there is a distinction to be made between working *with* others and working *through* others, for example in our partnership and grant-making relationships.

Some conclusions

Finally, the framework draws some conclusions and suggestions for Tearfund's peacebuilding work.

(1) It is fundamental that we understand what we, as Christians, mean when we say we are seeking peace and justice. This helps us to understand the distinctive role of the church in peacebuilding, and – set alongside Tearfund's own mission and vision – helps us to see what can be distinctive about *Tearfund's* response to conflict.

(2) Peacebuilding is a long-term process, pointing out that for Christians we will not experience the full restoration of *shalom* until Christ returns. However, it also makes clear the possibility of moving forwards towards peace in the present through processes that take steps to pursue justice, enable forgiveness, and see restored relationships grow.

(3) One of the most important factors in a peacebuilding process is the establishment of a safe relational space where people can come together, be themselves, tell their stories and grow together. This is the kind of space in which Tearfund can support the development of principled or confident pluralism and restored relationships, and can seek reconciliation.

(4) Building peace is not about creating 'winners' or 'losers' but about coming together across boundaries and divisions to think and dream about what it means to not only be free of oppression and conflict but also to flourish *together*, and to acknowledge that there will be some sacrifice involved on each side to build this future.

(5) Those best able to build these relationships may often be found on the fringes of communities and groups who are a part of conflict situations; they are within those groups and can speak to them, but are able to see them in a different way and influence them.

(6) Our own discipleship is an essential part of the peacebuilding process, as we learn to live in the world in ways that reveal the kingdom of God. This makes the spiritual formation of staff, as well as (Christian) partners and allies, an important part of Tearfund's peacebuilding process.

(7) Finally, our participation in peacebuilding will contribute to the formation and development of Tearfund. It is particularly likely that it will challenge the way we articulate and understand the outworking of our theology and our mission in our practice. This is because the new relationships we build and contexts we spend time in teach us more about being both confident and humble in our expression of our beliefs in relation to our work. If we are not aware of this possibility it will happen without us knowing it, which poses a greater risk for Tearfund's distinctive identity and reputation. However, the things we learn and the way we develop as a result of this work also has the potential to improve our work in general as we develop our ability to build relationships and communicate across divisions. It may also help us to speak into the challenges - particularly the religious challenges - facing aid and development work in conflict areas, and to advocate for faith-based development and the participation of Christian organisations in this space.

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