

Internacional Forum on interfaith and transcultural peacebuilding
Daring reconciliation?!
September 19-20, 2024

Divinity, I am a lesbian. Help me to build a church where I can remain in peace.

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Hello! Good morning/afternoon/evening. First of all, thank you very much to the Mission 21 team for the invitation to participate in this interesting event. I will divide my input into three parts, in the first one I will approach the understanding of peace from my experience in different Catholic spaces, where I will speak from a pastoral perspective. Afterwards, I will briefly address some important aspects from a theological approach. Finally, I will answer the question: Is reconciliation possible?

In the Catholic Church I was taught to **forgive without looking at the harm done or asking for retribution for the pain caused**. Apparently, the premise is that if God forgave our sins, we should always forgive. Mexican society taught me that resentment is bad, so forgiveness becomes the way to live in peace individually and collectively. My own life and the accompaniment I have given to women and queer people has given me the possibility to question this discourse: Who benefits from forgiveness? What should be involved in a peace-building process that really accompanies survivors of violence and discrimination?

To be honest, peace as understood by the churches, international organisations and international cooperation makes me very uncomfortable. My Latin American feminist ethic urges me to take a very close look on definitions and processes. If we are talking about biblical texts, rather than forgiving 70 times 7 and seeking to have a kind of 'moral superiority' over those who cannot forgive, **we should remember that peace without justice is a colonising discourse, as it contributes to the subjugation of peoples, women and queer people**. For me, building peace must always involve the pursuit of justice. Until justice and peace kiss, says the Bible.

How to forgive a church that protects paedophiles? Perhaps the way lies in finding strategies for non-repetition. Never keeping quiet and pretending to 'forget' what happened. **To understand forgiveness as synonymous with forgetting is to have chosen the side of the oppressor and to re-victimise those who have experienced violence and discrimination.**

Almost 10 years ago, when I had my outcoming and was expelled from the youth community where I was serving, I was then asked to forgive. The intention was for me to forget what happened and continue serving in the church. In other words, to pretend that nothing had happened and, therefore, to contribute to a situation where more queer youth would go through the same violence. From the point of view of the church, I was only seeking to create discord by asking for a parish free of discrimination against queer people. We cannot pretend to build peace without listening to the experiences of those who have sexual orientations and gender identities other than heterosexual. **Talking about peace involves seeking justice for all people, and that includes us as queer people.**

Later, I migrated to inclusive Catholic pastoral care. Then, the construction of pastoral care, in his understanding, involved that we queer people should reconcile with the parish and Catholic dogma. In his understanding, **reconciliation involves justifying that the Catholic Church cannot currently guarantee safe spaces. The problem is not this lack but is the lack of political will to start building spaces of peace for queer people.** We must be careful, because not having the conditions to talk about an issue does not exempt those who violate, discriminate and deny rights from responsibility. Peace is often understood as forgiveness towards those who violate. However, we ignore the traumatic experiences faced by those of us who have survived these practices. What about peace in the lives of those of us who have survived violence and discriminatory discourses? Talking about peacebuilding must involve the need to address difficult issues and to build the conditions necessary for all people to access our rights and, of course, to be treated as what we are: Beloved Children of the Divine.

Peace should not be understood as homogeneous, it must recognise the intersectionality of people. Inclusive Catholic' spaces in Mexico tend to have terms and conditions. In the small print of such a space was the patriarchy and internalised machismo of my colleagues. Thus, talking about feminism and women in ordained ministry were untouchable topics. That experience led me to recognise that the construction of justice is not homogenous. It also involves the recognition of differentiated oppressions. Thus, the needs of a gay man are not the same as those of a lesbian woman. Likewise, the violence experienced is not the same and, therefore, the needs for the construction of spaces for peace change. **Therefore, talking about peace must involve listening to all voices. Never just the majority.**

Finally, it seems to me that we need theological interpretations which contemplate that to speak of peace is a work of collectively that requires a kiss with justice. Peace and justice are intimately related, so that one is non-existent without the other.

Of course, talking about this relationship requires the recognition of a theology that brings freedom and peace to our discriminated and violated corporalities. This involves the mapping of one's own territorial body and the recognition of God as Vulnerable Herself, present in our violated, discriminated and tortured corporalities.

When I speak of mapping the body as territory, I recognise the knowledge shared by Territorial Community Feminism, which understands that the first territory of defence is the body itself. And, of course, colonialism, racism, ableism and cisheteronorma inhabit one's own body. Thus, our own body is inhabited by the colonial systems that rule the world. Theologically speaking, mapping the territorial body involves the recognition that what *God Herself Vulnerable* inhabits in my body not only affects me individually, but is tattooed on many other corporalities around the world.

Can one speak of reconciliation? My answer will always be that it depends on the context in which one lives. From my perspective, reconciliation is impossible when religious or social spaces do not seek to build peace and justice together. Therefore, reconciliation will always be a gamble (*Red: meaning farce?*), as long as those who live or lived through the violence are not held responsible, but really seek to repair the damage and commit to the non-repetition of the events.