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“Virtuosity, Audacity and Joy: The Wellsprings of Political Creativity”

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Good morning, everyone. I hope you all had a good night’s rest, and are ready for another day of excitement. I am so grateful to Carol Crabtree Donovan, Margaret Culgen, Tara Greggs and all the other members of Peacemakers Incorporated who have made this glorious event possible.

I am pleased to be with all of you this week. It is for me a homecoming. I feel so at home with women working for peace, and, as a native Texan, it is a joy to bask in the best of Texas: strong, creative women, and men whose strength is marked by a deep respect for, and delight in, the competence, intelligence, and wisdom of women. I am so fortunate to the daughter and granddaughter of people who embodied that strength. If my parents were alive today, my mother would certainly be here with us in the flesh. As it is, however, I bring her with me, as well as my father, and dedicate these remarks this morning to James and Reta Welch of Dimmitt, Texas, and their lives of virtuosity, audacity, joy and service. The world is a better place because they lived, and because they loved.

In an interview conducted in 1980, the philosopher Michel Foucault gave a poetic invocation of social critique:

“I can’t help but dream about a kind of criticism that would try not to judge but to bring . . . a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply not judgments but signs of existence; . . . Criticism that hands down sentences puts me to sleep. I’d like a criticism of scintillating leaps of the imagination. It would not be sovereign or dressed in red. It would bear the lightening of possible storms.”

I am certain that not only have many of you witnessed criticism of scintillating leaps of the imagination, but I would wager that you are the creators of movements, strategies, and forms of living that multiply signs of existence and bear the lightning of possible storms.

How do we create such empowering criticism? This morning I invite you to join me in exploring two of the many factors that are important in nurturing and sustaining enlivening political engagement.

To begin, I invite you to think of a time in your childhood in which you were well loved. Gather a memory from that time, hold it, cherish it, and let us together, in silence, honor those whose love has enabled us to have hearts open to joy and sorrow, to flourish in the midst of the challenges and opportunities of life.

This is one of my earliest memories, one in which I knew without a doubt that life had meaning and purpose.

“Azure sky, crisp white clouds. Air dry and clear; all is luminous. I am nine years old, the soil, warm, soft and sandy under my bare feet. Lush green leaves, brilliant red cherries, black stems, juice sweet and tart - the delight of savoring them under the watchful eye of my grandfather, relishing his pleasure and my own, bathed in the love

and joy he experienced in sharing the fruit so painstakingly cultivated with a much-loved grandchild.”

How is this related to the work of peacemaking? My first thesis – the creativity of childrearing, of farming, of peacemaking is evoked by connection with the resources that surround us now – relishing, celebrating, nurturing, setting in play the possibilities of soil, sun, work, of vision, connections, talents, and dreams.

When I was first a peace activist, the choices facing us were clear: the limited violence of just war or the renunciation of violence in any form. Now, however, our options are greater and our choices more complex. The debate between advocates of just war and advocates of pacifism is being transformed and augmented by a *third way*: joint efforts to prevent war, stop genocide and repair the damage caused by armed conflict. . Activists and scholars like Glenn Stassen and Lisa Schirch are asking a new set of questions: If war is the last resort, what is the first, second, third, fourth, and fifth response to aggression, domination and exploitation? And, if war is not the answer, what is the answer? In between the last resort of just war and the principled renunciation of violence in all its forms lies a vast expanse of constructive and preventive work. These joint creative efforts go by many names, preventive defense, strategic peacebuilding, and just peacemaking.

Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, describes a global paradigm shift, a move from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention. People throughout the world are working in numerous ways, large and small, to implement nonviolent alternatives to war. There are for example, three promising developments at the United Nations: the ratification of the International Criminal Court;

the implementation of a post-conflict Peace-building Commission, and planning for an emergency peace service.

In a document prepared for the organization to which I belong, Global Action to Prevent War, and for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and the Swedish government, Camille Pampell Conoway and Anjalina Sen describe the growing role of women in preventing violence and building sustainable peace. They describe the work of women in 29 countries in Africa, eastern Europe, South and East Asia, and Latin America. In these 29 countries, women are involved in both traditionally defined conflict prevention measures (early warning and early response to escalating instability) and in structural prevention, establishing the institutional and cultural building blocks of sustainable peace: “negotiating and maintaining peace agreements, promoting human rights and good governance, enhancing justice and reconciliation and facilitating sustainable socio-economic development.”

John Paul Lederach, writing from his long experience in peacebuilding, describes the importance of a ‘new mind-set’ for people who come to a conflict ridden society from outside. “[We need to] move beyond a simple prescription of answers and modalities for dealing with conflict that come from outside the setting and focus at least as much attention on discovering and empowering the resources, modalities, and mechanisms for building peace that exist within the context.” In contrast to the prophet who denounces injustice and proclaims a vision of blessing and promise, Lederach states that the challenge for peacebuilders is to “create the space for vision to emerge from within the setting.”

In addition to widespread international support for peacemaking – bringing hostile parties to agreement, and for peacebuilding – the creation of long term structures for redressing injustice and resolving ongoing conflict - there is increasing support for early intervention to stop genocide and prevent large scale war. People across the political spectrum recognize the need for “the use of third party armed forces to maintain peace among belligerents,” and urge the formation of multilateral *standing* peacekeeping forces under the auspices of the United Nations and other regional cooperation and security organizations.

While peacekeeping forces have been formed on a case by case basis, this ad hoc response to genocide and armed conflict is increasingly seen as unsatisfactory, as is now the case, tragically and unnecessarily in Darfur. As Kofi Annan states, “the United Nations is the only fire prevention agency that has to establish a fire department after the fire has broken out.” There are, therefore, ongoing efforts to establish standing nonviolent conflict resolution centers and permanent peacekeeping forces both at the United Nations and within regional cooperation and security organizations. For example, organizing efforts, like those that led to the creation of the International Criminal Court, have begun for the creation of a United Nations Emergency Peace Service. Such a service would be constituted by up to 15,000 volunteers, medical personnel, lawyers, judges, engineers, construction personnel and trained peacekeepers, and would be capable of being deployed within 48 hours in a crisis situation.

The mandate of peacekeeping forces, while certainly important, is nonetheless limited. Peacekeeping forces do not have the objective of defeating an enemy but have, rather, the complex task of clearing the space where negotiations can either

resume or begin. Such interventions are more like community policing than military campaigns, requiring careful coordination with civil society, and restoring a societies' internal sense of order. And, as the sexual abuse of women and girls by UN peacekeepers has demonstrated, just as is the case with domestic police forces, the peacekeepers themselves must also be carefully trained and policed! This is, to be sure, as daunting a task as the vigilant training and civilian review of domestic police forces.

The complexity, however, of the task of multilateral peacekeeping, the need for thoroughly trained peacekeepers, for stable funding, for civilian and judicial oversight, and of correlative UN reform is only exceeded by its urgency.

The challenges of peacekeeping are daunting, and yet there is great openness to exploring these possibilities, an openness that derives from widespread disaffection with the use of military power.

Let us turn to a second lesson about the wellsprings of creativity, this one gained through my work with conservative students and members of my community

While there is widespread support for the responsibility to protect and multilateral humanitarian intervention, there is an equally widespread disaffection with the legitimacy, morality and even efficacy of traditional military intervention.

In an August, 2006 article in *The Nation*, Jonathan Schell poses the question starkly. Given the results of the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, can we claim, any longer, that the military power that defeats armies, that kills insurgents, which destroys buildings, monuments and infrastructure, is a *lasting* power? Schell claims that we may be seeing not the apotheosis but the dénouement of Empire, of economic and military

security attained through military force, and asks if the United States “has become the fool of force and the fool of history .”

In addition, Schell argues that it is a mistake to think that only power corrupts. Rather, drawing on Hannah Arendt’s critique of totalitarianism, he claims military force is a form of weakness, a futile attempt to coerce where one cannot persuade. Lest we think this merely the wishful thinking of an unregenerate advocate of nonviolence, listen to the nine “representative paradoxes of counterinsurgency” as described in the recently released draft Army and Marine corps field manual:

“The more you protect your force, the less secure you are.

The more force is used, the less effective it is.

The more successful counterinsurgency is, the less force that can be used and the more risk that must be accepted.

Sometimes doing nothing is the best reaction.

The best weapons for counterinsurgency do not shoot.

The host nation’s doing something tolerably is better than our doing it well.

If a tactic works this week, it might not work next week; if it works in this province, it might not work in the next.

Tactical success guarantees nothing.

Most of the important decisions are not made by generals.”

Do these paradoxes mean what we think they mean? Listen to the description by Colonel Crane, the director of the military history institute at the Army War College and one of the writers of the new doctrine, of their genesis: “In many ways, this is a bottom-up change...The young soldiers who had been through Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo,

and now Iraq and Afghanistan, understood why we need to do this.” Listen, too, to a fuller explanation of some of the more startling claims:

The more force is used, the less effective it is.

Using substantial force increases the risk of collateral damage and mistakes, and increases the opportunity for insurgent propaganda.

The more successful counterinsurgency is, the less force that can be used and the more risk that must be accepted.

As the level of insurgent violence drops, the military must be used less, with stricter rules of engagement, and the police force used more.

The best weapons for counterinsurgency do not shoot.

Often dollars and ballots have more impact than bombs and bullets.

Tactical success guarantees nothing.

Military actions by themselves cannot achieve success.

In my work with conservative students, despite their reservations about the efficacy and morality of military force, I find that many are not persuaded by our plans for the peaceful resolution of entrenched conflict. It is not that they doubt either our compassion or our conviction. No – their concerns are more troubling. Just as many conservatives suspect that we underestimate the depravity and resolve of those perceived as enemies, so they suppose that we overestimate the virtue and competence of peace activists and peacekeepers. These concerns are not misplaced.

While the use of armed forces can be counterproductive, strategic peacebuilding may also have unintended negative consequences. Lisa Schirch of the Eastern

Mennonite center for justice and peacebuilding gives us a stark reminder of the complexity of this task: “Peacebuilding programs do not always contribute to peace.” Not only are there technical challenges in coordinating short-term and long-term efforts, but all of the tasks of intervention are complicated by “Ideological differences, ego-driven efforts to monopolize peacebuilding programs, and competitions for resources.” Catherine Barnes, drawing on her analysis of global peacemaking efforts, affirms Schirch’s critique. She also points to the destructive effects of tensions between the goals of external agencies and the aspirations and expertise of local people and groups. Furthermore, Barnes claims that the work of both ‘insiders and outsiders’ falters when they ‘involve only those predisposed to peace’ and fail to include in some meaningful way ‘those who instigate’ or support violence.

In these reflections on the challenges of peacebuilding, we find a compelling story: a firm commitment to nonviolence and the prevention of armed conflict, yet a sober recognition of the limits of peacebuilding and the fallibility of peacebuilders, makers and keepers.

Can we learn to anticipate and learn from these failures, with humor, generosity, rigor and integrity? Let me tell you another story. When I was a child living on the farm in West Texas, summer days were full of hard work in the fields, and rollicking dinners (that’s at noon in the farm world) with cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents- relishing bounty of the food raised and preserved by all of us, and regaling each other with stories of the days exploits and mistakes. One hot, sunny day, Grandpap strode into the room, boiling with anger. He had been plowing all morning one of the largest fields – over a hundred acres of cotton, with the simple task of plowing up the weeds between the rows.

In a moment of carelessness, he set off across the field, plows precisely placed right over the cotton. He didn't realize what he had done until 100 acres later, at the end of the row, he saw the weeds still standing and the ground once lush with the flourishing crop, now as bare as only freshly plowed field can be. "Dagnab it!" he exploded. "and I can't even fire myself!"

We make so many mistakes in our work of cultivating all that is glorious in life, mistakes due to carelessness, to pettiness, ill will and ego, to lack of imagination.

I speak today with those peacemakers who are acknowledging that we really do not know how to bring peace, reconciliation and justice. The solutions that seem so promising in theory prove to be surprisingly complex and ambiguous in actuality. Those of us who are working for peace are not a righteous vanguard. We can, and will, abuse cooperative power and need our own Trickster stories to remind us of our flaws and excesses. Wisdom, ongoing self-critique and accountability are required of all of us, not just the imperial others, in the exercise of social, cultural, economic and political power.

We have in the past found metaphors for work for justice, that, although partial, were evocative: "sisterhood is powerful", "workers of the world, unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains", "a dream deferred is a dream denied", "let justice roll like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream."

How do we express most vividly our appeals *now*, not just to sisterhood and to workers, but to all humanity for sustainable peace, for enduring security and for nurtured dreams? I conclude with a metaphor for the task that is ours: let us be artisans, artisans of hope, artisans of wonder, working with the clay of human striving, of our capacities for exclusion, vengeance and fear, as well as our capacities for generosity, courage, and

forgiveness, crafting together flourishing communities of honesty, inclusion, self-critique and hope.

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