We live in a strange world. So many people are in favor of peace, and yet many people around the world suffer because they live in situations of conflict and war. I was at an international conference not long ago, with many speakers from various countries, religions, and ideologies. It will not surprise you to learn that all the speakers affirmed the firm desire of their group for peace and offered quite convincing arguments to show that these were not just empty words. They noted that they and their colleagues not only wanted peace, but they were working actively to bring it about. Some cynical part of our makeup might ask, with so many committed and talented persons and organizations working for peace, why peace is so difficult to achieve, why does the lack of peace seem to be an ever present part of the human experience.

Part of the problem is that even though many might be working for peace, it only takes a few to destroy that peace. I have lived for many years in parts of Southeast Asia where the vast majority of people, of all religions, ethnic groups, and walks of life, thirst for peace and come together to take common action to build peace. Generally speaking, there is peace. People live together well and cooperate at the daily level for the good of all. Nevertheless, it only takes a few individuals or small groups, driven by anger, resentment or jealousy, to try to destroy that peace. Moreover, modern technology has made it possible for a very limited number of individuals to destroy the very peace that is desired by the vast majority.

So our world is one which is repeatedly fractured by suspicion, conflict, and war. The causes are many and complex, and the paths to peace difficult to comprehend and to follow. There is a paradox here that we must face. It seems like everyone is in favor of peace, no one ever admits to being against peace, and yet there is very little peace in the world. The problem, I believe, lies in the fact that we are all in favor of peace in the abstract, but without saying in what peace consists, and without examining what is involved in building peace.

Of those religious thinkers of modern times who have attempted to study the concept of peace to explore what is involved in establishing and maintaining peace, I want to compare the thought of two persons who have made a remarkable contribution to the topic. One is a Christian, Pope John Paul II, leader of the Catholic Church, and the other a Muslim, Mr. Fethullah Gülen, affectionately called Hoca Effendi by those inspired by his teaching.

My paper aims at sharing some of the wisdom found in the writings of two living figures, one Christian and the other Muslim. Here I hope to bring together the thinking of these two scholars and religious teachers into a kind of dialogue on the theme: "the ethics of peace." I will do this by summarizing the position of the Pope as the basis or point of view from which I will then read and explain the views of Fethullah Gülen as found in his many writings.
1. Pope John Paul II: The Twin Pillars of Justice and Forgiveness

In his approach to peace, Pope John Paul II follows a statement he made repeatedly over the years: "Peace stands on two pillars: justice and forgiveness." I believe that there is much to be said for this view. It affirms that both of these elements, justice and forgiveness, are necessary to achieve a genuine peace. Focusing on one without the other cannot produce real peace, and peace efforts and negotiations that do not put these two elements at the center of the matters to be addressed will not succeed. One element without the other is not enough for a real peace.

The first element, justice, seeks to redress the wrong done, unfair treatment corrected, material property restored, false judgments rectified, whereas the second, pardon, seeks to repair the human relations damaged and destroyed in the conflict.

Looking at conflicts from the perspective of justice focuses one's attention on the victims of injustice, on their plight, on the effects of violence, strife and oppression on innocent people, on the concrete ways in which their lives have been shattered. People suffer, not because of the forces of nature or biology, but because of the way they have been treated by others. Injustice is not a mystery in that it is possible to trace its sources in the history of human choices. People could act in other ways to others, but they have chosen to act unjustly. In any conflict, there are many victims, in multiple ways, on all sides, but the level of loss and suffering is not the same for all. Some have experienced more bitter injustice than others. It is those who are greater victims of injustice, humanly and materially, who will be obstacles to peace until their injustices are redressed.

Every nation, every religious or ethnic group, can draw up a long list of grievances that they have against each other, of wrongs that their group has suffered at the hands of the others. This is the human burden of the experience of past misdeeds that people bring into their relations with others which complicate the way that groups relate to one another, that give rise to suspicions which can poison all efforts at cooperation and reconciliation and that can flare up into violence the slightest provocation.

I believe that the Pope's focus on the injustice experienced by victims of oppression and wrongdoing, rather than merely on the geopolitical and economic issues which are often at the forefront of negotiated settlements is realistic. The Pope's reasoning is like this. Any real peace, if it is to go beyond a simple "cease-fire" or temporary cessation of hostilities, has to get to the heart of the conflict and try to heal the breach in human relations which was ruptured. When peoples are at war, when individuals are estranged and alienated from one another, they are angry, suspicious, and resentful of one another. They see the other as an enemy to be overcome, defeated, the object of retaliation, rather than a fellow-human with whom one ought to be reconciled. Thus, no talk about peace can proceed effectively without addressing the issue of broken relationships and without taking positive steps to repair those relations.

If one group or individual is being oppressed or treated unjustly by another, one cannot hope for peace between the two until there is justice. The Pope sees justice in two ways: firstly, as a human quality which a person can acquire and develop with God's powerful assistance, and secondly as a "legal guarantee," that is, part of the functioning of the national and international rule of law. The aim of justice, both as a personal quality and as an element of
the international system of relations among peoples, is to insure "full respect for rights and responsibilities" and to carry out a "just distribution of benefits and burdens."

Justice is thus a first, indispensable condition for peace. Unless one person treats another justly, that is, with respect for the other's rights and duties and by giving them their proper share of what is due to them, there will be no peace between them. The same holds true between social groups, ethnic groups, peoples and nations. Where there is aggression, oppression, occupation, transgression, there can be no peace. First, justice has to be established, then peace can be built.

However, for true peace, justice alone is not enough. Justice can never, by itself, make up for the suffering of people that often has gone on for many years and decades. One can take as an example the case of many groups of refugees around the world. Even in the rare scenario of the possibility for the refugees to return to their land, how can people be recompensed for the years of suffering? In the more frequent situations where a return to one's homeland is not a viable option, what financial considerations could make up in justice for lost decades lived out in the inhumane conditions to which refugees are subjected?

Even if armed conflict passes, how can people ever hope to live together in peace after all the bitterness and violence that has passed between them for so long? Focusing solely on justice will not bring back lost years, lost relatives, lost trust, lost hopes. Something more is needed, on all sides of the conflict.

This is where pardon, the second pillar of peace, comes into play. Whenever violent conflict occurs, the human relations are damaged and must undergo a slow, painful process of healing. Pardon can seem like a "soft" element in the peacebuilding process, something more suited to do-gooders, bleeding hearts, and idealistic religious types than to hardheaded politicians and negotiators. However, forgiveness and reconciliation are just as essential as elements of peace as is the focus on justice, and in fact much more difficult to achieve. This is where many religious and secular NGO programs are providing a critical component of the peacebuilding process. By bringing together those who have lost family and neighbors in shooting and bombing incidents with those from the other side who have similar histories of loss, by facilitating and favoring the sharing of experience of past suffering and discovering common hopes for the future, by enabling people on both sides to see "the enemy" as individuals who are not very different from oneself, these organizations of reconciliation are playing a key role in the long-term effort to build peace.

Forgiveness can seem like weakness to those involved in a conflict. It is, as the Pope states, "a personal choice, a decision to go against the natural instinct to pay back evil with evil." In doing so, it always involves an apparent short-term loss, but brings about the possibility of achieving a real long-term gain. "Violence," the Pope notes, works exactly the opposite: "opting for an apparent shortterm gain, but involving a real and permanent loss." Thus, forgiveness may seem like weakness but, in the Pope's words, "it demands great spiritual strength and moral courage."

It should not be surprising to discover that both Christianity and Islam lay great importance on the notions of justice and forgiveness, if these are to be the indispensable pre-conditions of peace. In the Gospel, Jesus taught his disciples: "You have heard it said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy,' but I say to you 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute
you." In a similar vein, the Qur'an permits vengeance up to the limits of strict justice but no farther, and then always adds: "But it is better to forgive."

Just as those whose primary focus is the struggle for justice must always remember that justice alone can go only so far toward peace, but never all the way, so also peace-builders whose focus is on forgiveness must never forget that no real reconciliation is possible if the sometimes harsh demands of justice are not being honestly addressed and conscientiously requited. I believe that there is much wisdom in the teaching of Pope John Paul II that true peace rests on the twin pillars of justice and forgiveness.

2. Fethullah Gülen: Respecting differences to avoid mutual destruction

Events of the past few years have underscored the importance of dialogue among people of faith for the effective pursuit of peace. Interreligious dialogue is an alternative to the much-discussed "clash of civilizations." Those who do not subscribe to the theory that a civilizational clash is inevitable are proposing instead a dialogue of civilizations, an exchange of views aimed at mutual enrichment, a sharing of insights that can lead all to a deeper understanding of the nature of God and God's will for humankind on this planet.

One of the most persuasive and influential voices in the Muslim community that has called for dialogue as a step to peace is Fethullah Gülen. The movement inspired and guided by Fethullah Gülen is offering Muslims a way to live out Islamic values amidst the complex demands of modern societies and to engage in ongoing dialogue and cooperation with people of other religions.

From its origins in Turkey, the movement has spread rapidly, through its schools in many countries, through its cultural and media activities, and through the social projects and dialogue encounters of Turks in diaspora in Europe, North America, and Australia, to the point that the influence of the Gülen movement is being felt in virtually all regions where Muslims live as majorities or minorities. Gülen's movement is a call to Muslims to a greater awareness that Islam teaches the need for dialogue and that Muslims are called to be agents and witnesses to God's universal mercy. In his support of his views, Gülen employs his broad knowledge of the Islamic tradition to bring together the Qur'anic Scripture, the hadith reports from Muhammad, and the insights of Muslims down through the ages. In this way, he makes a convincing argument that tolerance, love, and compassion are genuinely Islamic values that Muslims have a duty to bring to the modern world.

Through his movement, Gülen invites non-Muslims to move beyond prejudice, suspicion, and half-truths so that they might arrive at an understanding what Islam is really about. Someone whose knowledge of Islam is limited to the headlines of the daily newspapers is likely to believe that the religion teaches terrorism, suicide attacks, oppression of women, and hatred for those outside its community. However, the movement associated with the name of Fethullah Gülen seeks to live out an interpretation of Islamic teaching leads the believer to truly spiritual values like forgiveness, inner peace, social harmony, honesty, and trust in God. In expressing the Islamic values derived from his vast knowledge of the Islamic sources and tradition, Gülen not only calls Muslims to engage in dialogue and to work for peace, but he engages the non-Muslim in a discussion of commonly held ideals.

On 8 February 1998, Gülen traveled to the Vatican to visit Pope John Paul II. This was a courageous act for which Gülen was much criticized in his native Turkey. In an interview
which he gave the following April after the visit, Gülen defended his daring act in terms of seeking world peace and affirmed that he was acting in line with the behavior of the prophet Muhammad, who accepted terms of peace that some of his companions felt were disadvantageous. In the interview, Gülen said:

“Our age is a time of addressing intellects and hearts, an undertaking that requires a peaceful atmosphere with mutual trust and respect... In the peaceful atmosphere engendered by this treaty [Hudaybiyya], the doors of hearts were opened to Islamic truths. We have no intention of conquering lands or peoples, but we are resolved to contribute to world peace and a peaceful order and harmony by which our old world will find a last happiness before its final destruction.”

Gülen is convinced that working for peace is demanded as the proper expression of an Islamic way of life. It is commanded by the Qur'an as the better way. It is the starting point of dialogue. It is the precondition for serving both society and humanity. As Gülen stated in 1995: “If we start our efforts for dialogue with the belief that "peace is better" (Al-Nisa' 4:128), then we must demonstrate that we are on the side of peace at home and abroad. Indeed, peace is of the utmost importance to Islam; fighting and war are only secondary occurrences which are bound to specific reasons and conditions.

In that respect, we can say that if an environment of peace where all can live in peace and security cannot be achieved in this land, then it would be impossible for us to do any good service for society or for humanity.”

It is interesting to compare Gülen's views on the role of forgiveness in peacemaking with the above-cited words of John Paul II. In 2002, the Pope stated that forgiveness implies a short-term loss aimed at a long-term gain, the repair of damaged human relations, whereas violence is an apparent short-term gain which entails a long-term loss. In a 1996 article, Gülen encouraged Muslims to dialogue and tolerance with very similar words, stating: "I would like to stress the fact that Muslims will lose nothing by employing dialogue, love, and tolerance. Muslims continuously seek the approval of God. This is the greatest gain of all. In that respect, things that may appear as losses to some people are seen as gains by Muslims which certain other events may actually be detrimental even when they appear to be lucrative."

He goes so far to say that "Peace, love, forgiveness, and tolerance are fundamental to Islam. Other things are accidental." Although according to specific circumstances, recourse to war might sometimes be justified, this "lesser jihad" of the sword is secondary to the essence of Islam, summed up in the terms "peace, love, forgiveness, tolerance."

Gülen accuses those who advocate war and violence of having been misled by a grossly literalist reading of the Qur'an. As a consequence, they misunderstand the nature of Islam. He states: "It is necessary to give priority to basic Muslim issues according to their degree of importance. Unfortunately, those who ignore the essence and do so without taking into consideration the reasons for secondary rules and regulations, those who (by reading the Qur'an in the manner of a crude kind of superficial literalism) emphasize violence - these people have not understood the rules, the reasons for them, nor their source, nor have they understood Islam."
Ultimately, for Gülen, peace comes down to respecting the legitimate differences among peoples. Anything less means self-destruction. In a 2002 book, Gülen states: "The peace of this (global) village lies in respecting all these differences, considering these differences to be part of our nature and in ensuring that people appreciate these differences. Otherwise, it is unavoidable that the world will devour itself in a web of conflicts, disputes, fights, and the bloodiest of wars, thus preparing the way for its own end."

We all have much to gain from the insights on peace offered by these two frontrunners. Their teachings go hand-in-hand and complement one another. In their thinking, we find evidence that Christians and Muslims have much to learn from one another and that, when their respective faiths are deeply reflected upon, can lead to truly surprising coincidences of thought.

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