Moving from the house of fear to the house of love

Frank Kantor

"On the basis of our Christian faith, we work towards a humane, socially conscious Europe, in which human rights and the basic values of peace, justice, freedom, tolerance, participation and solidarity prevail." Charta Oecumenica (Strasbourg, 22.04.2001)

" He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8 NRSV)

1. **Introduction**

It was the late Henri Nouwen who popularised the notion of the journey from fear to love as part of his spirituality of peacemaking. In his writings, he describes this as a movement from a location where we are surrounded by a 'huge network of anxious questions, which begins to guide many, if not most, of our daily decisions,'[i] to one where we are able to reframe these questions from a position of ultimate security – the love of God. He offers Jesus as the example of someone who resisted answering questions raised out of concern for prestige, influence, power and control as they came from the house of fear. Instead, he says, 'Jesus transforms such questions by his answer, making the question new - and only then worthy of his response'. [ii]

Such responses are only possible from the house of love which Nouwen describes as '*the house of Christ, the place where we can think, speak, and act in the way of God – not in the way of a fear-filled world. From this house the voice of love keeps calling out: 'Do not be afraid...come and follow me...see where I live...go out and preach the good news....the kingdom of God is close at hand...*'[iii] Nouwen is not naive about the resistance to such a movement in our cynical, secular Western society and goes to some length to expound a spirituality of peacemaking based on the disciplines of prayer, resistance and community to ground this movement.[iv]

A number of the current questions about human security and human rights appear to emanate from the house of fear. Questions such as: *How can we be assured that we are safe from terror attacks in Europe? How can we make ourselves and our families more secure from criminals? What do we need to do to guarantee our children the same standard of living that we have enjoyed? What rights do I have to protect myself from intruders who threaten my security? How can we prevent more migrants from entering our country/community/city?* Such questions reveal our fearful and misinformed perspective on the things that make for our peace in the West and we

need to urgently discern and respond to the particular *kairos*[v] moment confronting us if we are to avoid the desolation and lament that such failure inevitably brings!

This paper seeks to summarise some of the key points related to human security and human rights based on a shift in paradigm proposed by the Oxford Research Group from what they call a 'control' to a 'sustainable security' paradigm (which provides a practical roadmap for moving from the house of fear to the house of love)!

2. **Sustainable security described**

The Oxford Research Group (ORG) has been analysing the drivers of global insecurity and developing alternative responses to these threats for some years. ORG identifies four inter-connected trends that are most likely to lead to substantial global and regional instability, and large-scale loss of life, of a magnitude unmatched by other potential threats:

- Climate change
- Competition over resources
- Marginalisation of the majority world
- Global militarisation

ORG believes that current responses to these trends can be characterised by a control paradigm – an attempt to maintain the status quo through military means and control insecurity without addressing the root causes. They consider current security policies to be self-defeating in the long-term and propose a new approach based on sustainable security. The main difference between this and the control paradigm is that sustainable security does not attempt to unilaterally control threats through the use of force ('attack the symptoms'), but rather it aims to cooperatively resolve the root causes of those threats using the most effective means available ('cure the disease'). ORG believes that this will best be achieved by developing security policies that employ preventative, rather than reactive, strategies and are global in focus.

ORG has been developing and promoting the sustainable security framework since early-2005 aimed at contributing to a substantial shift in the government and public understanding of the real threats to global security in the 21st century and developing strategies to respond to these threats to ensure sustainable security for all. A sustainable security approach therefore incorporates human security as the basis for policy and action in Europe and abroad. For more information see: http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/projects/moving_towards_sustainable_security

3. **Impact of global trends on human security**

The global threats outlined above presents the vulnerability of human security in multiple contexts which ultimately violates the rights of all. The converging global economic, environmental, energy and food crises are creating security threats in developed and developing countries alike which highlight the need for a coordinated global response based on principles of solidarity, sustainability, subsidiarity and social justice within a human rights framework.

By way of example, the IMF estimates that the impact of the economic crisis triggered by the recent collapse of financial institutions will increase the debts of the developed G20 economies by 40 per cent – those, such as Germany and the UK which suffered a "systemic crisis" saw economic output fall by 27%. That amounts to more than €980bn for Germany and €600 for the UK (£497 billion).

Commenting on this issue in an article published by the EU Observer ahead of the EU Finance Ministers meeting in Brussels on 7 September 2010 in which she calls for the introduction of a financial transaction tax in Europe, Elise Ford, head of Oxfam's EU Office, wrote the following:

'Ordinary people across Europe have been hit hard. Millions of people have been thrown out of work and salaries have stagnated. As tax revenues have fallen, governments have come under pressure to cut public services to balance their books; services such as transport, welfare and care services that are particularly important for the poor.

And it is not just poor people in rich countries who are victims of this mess. Research carried out for Oxfam by Development Finance International found that the 56 poorest countries face a $65bn hole in their finances because of this crisis.

Faced with a potential debt crisis, two-thirds of those where data on social spending is available have chosen to cut spending on at least one of health, agriculture, education or social safety nets. Already without the Europe-style welfare systems that we rely on during difficult times, the world's poorest people face cuts in life-saving medicines, losing the school place for their child or cuts in their crops because they can no longer afford fertiliser.

This blow comes at a time when many poor countries are already struggling to cope with food shortages and the devastating effects of climate change. Our research suggests that by 2015 the average number of people affected each year by climate-related disasters could increase by over 50 per cent to 375 million. This summers' flooding of large parts of Pakistan show the potential for human suffering that lurks behind these statistics.'

For a copy of the full article see http://euobserver.com/7/30736

The above example highlights the moral and ethical crisis underlying the global economic and ecological crises as those least responsible for these crises – the poor and vulnerable – are paying the highest price in terms of their security and livelihoods. The churches in Europe are uniquely positioned to respond to this crisis based on a human rights approach to human security which the remainder of this paper seeks to address

4. **Towards a human rights approach to human security**

The link between human security and human rights is well established. In his article on this subject, Bertrand Ramcharan states: 'Human rights and fundamental freedoms must be respected, assured and protected if the individual human being is to be secure, to develop to the fullness of his or her potential and to breathe the air of freedom.' [vi] He summarises the linkages between individual, national and international security in the following way: 'Individual security must be the basis of national security, and national security grounded in individual security must be the basis of international security. National security and international security cannot be achieved without respect for individual security in the form of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.'[vii]

What is less clear is how to achieve this in 'a world of power disequilibria, of uneven quality of governance, of social and economic disparities, of contending value systems, and of shocking violations of human rights.'[viii] Ramcharan appeals to member states to consider human rights strategies of governance i.e. 'a conscious

decision by governments and subjects that the aim of governance is to advance achievement of the key human rights – civil and political, economic and social and cultural.'[ix] He also recognises that not all states are responsive and responsible to their constituencies and the critical role of civil society organisations in helping to realise this outcome in partnership with the United Nations.

However, the challenges of advancing human security through human rights remains formidable and highlights the difficulty of moving from a discourse on human rights to creating a human rights culture and of understanding the obligations and duties that accompany human rights. This has been considerably complicated by the so-called 'war on terror' and erosion of civil liberties in the US and parts of Europe in the post-9/11 context. The remainder of this paper seeks to identify the distinctive contribution that churches in Europe can make to this process based on our understanding of justice and morality and a theistic grounding of human rights.

5. **Justice and moral action**

As Christians we have a moral obligation to *do* justice (within a framework of mercy and kindness) as the prophet Micah reminds us. This is what Johannes van der Ven calls 'love informed justice'[x] which he contrasts with the justice reasoning of Lawrence Kohlberg[xi] and John Rawls theory of distributive justice based on a well conceived self-interested liberalism utilising the social contract.[xii] Love informed justice (or divine justice as van der Ven explains it), is different from human justice in that is informed by unconditional love and is embedded in universal mercy and solidarity. 'On the basis of this divine justice, informed by love, people are able to act in a just, forgiving, merciful and loving way toward one another. They are able to do so because they are surrounded by God's forthcoming benevolence and solidarity, which precede, initiate, and evoke human beings' care for each other.'[xiii]

Love of God and neighbour is intimately linked within this construct and love of the other is understood as the most fundamental moral virtue. 'This stands in contrast to Kohlberg's conception that justice is the virtue of virtues (Kohlberg 1981, 30). Love is the very essence of God, and thus the very basis, core, and synthesis of morality. God is love, and love is God.'[xiv] Whereas the ability to reason from a moral or justice perspective does not necessarily lead to moral or just action, 'love informed by justice' compels us to act on behalf of the vulnerable other – particularly the suffering other, the poor other, the alien other, the oppressed and persecuted other and the hostile other. This love inspired action should be based principles of solidarity, sustainability, subsidiarity, and social justice within a framework of the common good.

If love informed justice provides the basis for moral action, then a theistic grounding of human rights provides the rationale for treating other people in accordance with the inherent worth bestowed on them by virtue of them being created in the image and likeness of God.

6. **Theistic grounding of human rights**

In his illuminating book of justice and human rights, Nicholas Wolterstorff examines whether it is possible, without reference to God, to identify something about each and every human being that gives him or her a dignity adequate for grounding human rights.[xv] He concludes that attempts at a secular grounding of human rights in the capacity for rational agency (Kant) or the dignity-based approach of Dworkins are bound to fail as they cannot account for the inherent or intrinsic worth of human beings where their capacity for rational argument or creativity is severely impaired such as people with dementia. He believes that the same difficulty applies to a

theistic grounding of human rights based on the *imago Dei* interpreted as dominion or as inherent worth based on human nature.[xvi]

Instead, Wolterstorff posits that a theistic grounding for human rights is realised in bestowed worth based on God's love for each and every human being regardless of their mental or physical capacity or their status in society.[xvii] This love renders human beings as irreducibly precious with a bestowed worth based on God's love in the mode of attachment. This love grounds natural rights - they inhere in the worth bestowed on human beings by that love - and requires a response expressed in love for God and neighbour and a respect and recognition of the rights that such a relationship incorporates.[xviii]

The grounding of natural human rights in the worth bestowed on human beings by God's love is available to all those who hold to the theistic convictions and locates us in the house of love which Nouwen identifies as the house of Christ. From this perspective we are able, not only to reframe the fearful questions about human security, but advocate passionately for a rights based approach to human security based on the understanding that such rights are grounded in the worth of human beings as loved by God.

7. Application and implications for human security

Applying this understanding and perspective to the global security threats identified in this paper provides Christians with a compelling rationale and distinctive response to the discourse on human rights and human security. Some examples are listed below as a means of engaging European churches and faith groups in this discussion:

a) *Work against fear, addressing ignorance* – as those who understand the inherent worth of human beings loved by God, we need to be creatively seeking to reframe the current discourse on human security in Europe which is based on fear and ignorance. This pertains in particular to the discourse and response to the so-called 'war on terror' based on constantly heightened security alerts and stereotyping of people from non-Christian faith groups (particularly Muslims), the 'fortress Europe' mindset related to migrants and asylum seekers, and the false premise that introduction of Western style democracy will cure all social ills in society. A human rights approach requires us to understand how our fear and prejudice is not only wronging others by denying them a legitimate claim to the good of being treated in a certain way by persons of rational action, but is *under-respecting* them as people loved by God and bestowed with inestimable worth. Our interreligious and cultural exchanges must move beyond dialogue to meaningful engagement on these issues.

b) *Addressing social and economic exclusion* – in the economically constrained environment of Europe (occasioned by the raft of austerity measures which respective countries are initiating in response to the global economic crisis) we need to be identifying those on the margins who are facing social and economic exclusion such as the Roma in France and other European countries whose rights and freedoms (particularly those related to security and freedom of movement) are being grossly abused. To gain the perspective of the socially excluded, churches in Europe need to reposition themselves from the centre to the margins of society where we are called to discern God's activity in the excluded and suffering other.

c) *Addressing nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction* – as churches we need to continue campaigning for a world free of nuclear weapons based on the demand from the vast majority of states and WCC member churches for discussions on achieving a global zero at the recent NPT Review Conference in New York. Renewal of nuclear deterrents at the cost of billions of dollars when

cuts are been made to public services, jobs and benefits is immoral and unjust and needs to be challenged on moral, economic and common security grounds.

d) *Addressing the discourse on just war and erosion of civil liberties, privacy and patriotism in Europe* – as Christians we need to analyse and challenge the Church-State relationship based on a Christendom paradigm which has framed the discourse on national security for centuries. This paradigm has espoused the just war theory as a Christian response to war since the time of Augustine and was refined by several medieval thinkers including Thomas Acquinas.[xix] This contrasted significantly from the position of Christians in the first 170 years of church history when most believers were pacifists and the church's self-identity was a peaceful fellowship of those who followed the Prince of Peace. As we enter a post-Christendom era in much of Europe, we are being presented with a unique opportunity to shift the discourse on security and waging war from a 'control' to a 'sustainable security' (or common security) paradigm based on a moral rights discourse. This discourse also needs to address the Christendom interpretations of patriotism and reclaim the truth that we must obey God rather than man in defending civil liberties and the right to privacy enshrined in dignity befitting our bestowed worth as children of God.

e) *Culture of enough* – the financial crisis and ensuing global economic recession has exposed the culture of greed and excess at the heart of the financial system and Western culture based on the global economy of scarcity and fear (which is counter to God's economy of grace and sufficiency). During the Asian financial crisis in 1999, churches at an ecumenical conference in Bangkok wrote a public letter to the churches in the North addressing our deficit of contentment and well being. The following quote from this letter is most revealing:

"Next to the pain and suffering here in the South, there are the threats in the North. We heard about poverty, coming back in even your richest societies; we received reports about environmental destruction also in your midst, and about alienation, loneliness and the abuse of women and children. And all that, while most of your churches are losing members. And we asked ourselves: is most of that not also related to being rich and desiring to become richer than most of you already are? Is there not in the western view of human beings and society a delusion, which always looks to the future and ants to improve it, even when it implies an increase of suffering in your own societies and in the South? ***Have you not forgotten the richness which is related to sufficiency****? If, according to Ephesians 1, God is preparing in human history to bring everyone and everything under the lordship of Jesus Christ, his shepherd-king – God's own globalization! – shouldn't caring (for nature) and sharing with each other be the main characteristic of our lifestyle, instead of giving fully in to the secular trend of a growing consumerism?"*

Clearly, and to our shame, we failed to heed this insightful warning from our Asian brothers and sisters and are now facing the dire consequences of our consumptive lifestyles in the North in the form of the converging global economic, environmental and energy crises which is threatening human security in every part of the world (with the poorest nations once more paying the highest price). Love informed justice demands an urgent response in terms of lifestyle change and it is contingent on those of us living in the affluent countries of Western Europe (and other parts of the world) to live more simply and sustainably so others can simply live. As churches we have a particular mandate to do justice (as we have established) and this needs to be based on careful analysis of our social, economic and environmental trends to address the root causes of these crises in partnership with other organisations. We also have a prophetic mandate to speak truth to power and to advocate on behalf of those who lack a voice in the public square. Finally, we also have a pastoral and priestly mandate to care for the

victims of these crises and to pray without ceasing for the righting of wrongs in our domestic, national and international affairs.

f) *Culture of conflict resolution and peace-building at local level* – the vision of Shalom which the Hebrew Scriptures outlines for us is the setting where all "*shall sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no-one shall make them afraid."* This reflects a context of total well-being and security where all are situated in the house of love. However, as we reflect on the social reality of the communities of which we are a part in Europe, we realise that we have a long way to go to achieve this quality of life and well-being. Yet we are encouraged that this is the fullness of life which Jesus came to bring and as his followers we are given the task of building peace and reconciliation in our churches and communities. As churches, we also have a key role to shift the discourse of human security in Europe from a national to a people-centred view of security, which is essential for national, regional and global stability and security. This approach must emphasise the need to identify the core principles of human security within the framework of protecting people, their basic rights and freedoms and people's ability to act on their own behalf and on the behalf of others. Beyond this, we need to develop creative strategies to help facilitate the transition from the house of fear to the house of love in our communities using conflict resolution and peace-building tools and processes to achieve greater community cohesion, respect for difference and reconciliation at all levels – with God, humanity, non-human creation and within ourselves (for as Francis of Assisi reminds us, "*While you are proclaiming peace with your lips, be careful to have it even more fully in your heart."*

[1] Nouwen, H., *In the House of the Lord – The Journey from Fear to Love,* DLT, 1986, p.4
[1] Ibid*.* p.6
[1] Ibid. p.7
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[1] Ibid*,* p.40
[1] Ibid, p.40
[1] Ibid, p.41
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equality. Although it does not require an equal distribution of income and wealth, it permits only those social and economic inequalities that work to the least well off members of society.' (Michael J. Sandel, *Justice, What's the right thing to do?* Penguin Books, 2009, p143)

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[1] Wolterstorff, N., *Justice – rights and wrongs,* Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 324

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