

# Himalayan Political and Cultural Challenges to Catholic Peacebuilding

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The Himalayas exhibit multiple instances and stages of violent armed conflict and political instability. This paper will consider how the political and cultural realities of the Himalayas complexify the Catholic approach to pursuing a sustainable just peace. Peacebuilding emphasizes a holistic approach to conflict transformation, addressing the underlying causes of violence, while considering the goals and motivations of those involved. As a vital component of Catholic social teaching, peacebuilding articulates a comprehensive approach to reduce violence toward a sustainable and just peace that emphasizes human dignity and a common good. Although Catholic peacebuilding institutions attempt to engage at the grassroots, national, and international levels, they can be restricted to local communities in the Himalayas because of political and cultural limitations. Given the importance and plurality of religion, as well as the marginalization of mountain peoples, in the Himalayas, an emphasis on interreligious collaboration to deconstruct oppressive systems of injustice is essential. Despite a problematic colonial past and small minority of Christians in the region, Catholic peacebuilders have demonstrated an ability to contribute when partnering with actors from other faith traditions. Furthermore, Catholic social teaching provides a framework that is helpful to linking political, economic, and social development with efforts toward achieving a just peace. This research will attempt to identify possible opportunities amidst the challenges at the grassroots level and beyond. Catholic peacebuilding, when accounting for the unique challenges of the Himalayas, is one component, among many, that can contribute to local, regional, and global conflict transformation.

*Keywords:* peace, violence, religion, culture, politics, Himalayas, dialogue

The political and cultural realities of the Himalayas complexify Roman Catholic efforts to achieve a just peace. Catholic peacebuilding emphasizes a holistic approach that engages society at the local, national, and international level, to include perpetrators, victims, government, religious leaders, and civil organizations. Although this method has achieved success in other conflict areas, some foundational assumptions in Catholic peacebuilding may be challenged when considering a contextually specific political reality. Nonetheless, an embrace of interfaith cooperation, liberation theology, and grassroots efforts are essential for working toward peace in the Himalayas. Alternatively, a reliance on indigenous nonviolence, strategic engagement at the national and international levels, and integrating external stakeholders are problematic for the Himalayas.

This paper will begin with an outline of the complexities of the Himalayan context, a summary of Catholic peacebuilding, and a brief analysis of assertions from peacebuilding scholars and institutions that are

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contextually appropriate for this region. The paper will then examine how the cultural and political situation in the Himalayas, while not negating Catholic peacebuilding principles, should be evaluated to determine the most effective peacebuilding strategy, and conclude by identifying potential contextually specific opportunities to mitigate these challenges.

### **Background**

A critical component of understanding the Himalayas is to recognize the influence of mountainous terrain on the people. The several layers of Himalayan identity include a pride in the religious power of the region, a self-consciousness of how mountain life appears to those from the plains, and a sharp awareness of how economic opportunity defines life choices in the region (Whitmore, 2016, p. 31). The rugged geography shapes the outlook of people in the mountains. The unmovable physical barriers across the northern part of the subcontinent are home to a people who treasure their autonomy. Although the Himalayas are marked by a complex patchwork of ethnic and religious identities, the mountains provide a distinctive characteristic that separates mountain communities from their fellow citizens in the lowlands (Kaul, 2020a). The distinct identity and geographical separation, however, has negative effects, as the Himalayas are marginalized from and exploited by the regional centers of political and economic power.

Political violence is a persistent plague for much of the Himalayas.<sup>1</sup> The region exhibits various stages of politically motivated conflict, including simmering insurgencies, active counterinsurgency operations, terrorism, and post-conflict transformation. Mountainous regions promote violence and facilitate insurgent activity, as high-altitude areas are home to more than 80 percent of the world's armed conflict (Matloff, 2017, p. 7). Geographic separation and cultural biases contribute to the political and economic marginalization of mountain peoples, which can lead to a belief that violence is the only feasible option for gaining a voice. Several characteristics of the region reinforce the likelihood of conflict, including minority ethnic groups, a sacred attachment to the land, poverty, contested water resources, and terrain that is conducive to insurgent warfare (p. 152).

While much of the subcontinent seems perpetually afflicted by poverty, instability, and natural disasters, there is a heightened impact of these crises on the high-altitude regions of the Himalayas. The echoes of shaking and pounding rock from earthquakes and landslides reverberate both physically and in the minds of the inhabitants. Mountain populations are uniquely vulnerable to natural disasters because of the terrain that isolates the poor and socially marginalized in terms of transportation infrastructure, neglect during disaster-mitigation responses, and failure to account for the history, culture, economy, and politics shaping the vulnerability of these communities. Furthermore, global and regional economic and political powers commonly exploit crises, including natural disasters, to dominate the peripheral spaces of disaster-affected mountain communities.

The terrain has historically insulated many Himalayan communities from full connection to larger social and political formations. The local populations are constructed as marginal to the nation-state and “often stigmatized as isolated, primitive, and opposed to development and modernization” (Kingsolver & Balasundaram, 2018, p. 83). Judith Matloff, for instance, refers to Kashmir as a “vertical island” (Matloff, 2017,

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<sup>1</sup> The Himalayas separate the plains of the Indian subcontinent from the Tibetan plateau. This paper will primarily consider the western half of the range, from northern Pakistan, through Kashmir and northern India, to Nepal, and the portions of Tibet adjacent to these areas.

p. 153), which is culturally detached from the rest of India. These sparsely populated areas have little political capital in the democratic systems of South Asia because of the relatively small population. Furthermore, the impact of India's Hindu-nationalist and neoliberal policies extends into much of the Himalayas, to include Kashmir and Nepal. The Modi government has invested in reframing the historicity of border communities in the Himalayas by constructing their ethnic identities to portray them as indigenous Hindus, regardless of their faith tradition (Bhan, Duschinski, & Zia, 2018, p. 28). Regional efforts to promote growth and development neglect the impact on the health and well-being of the mountain communities.

While having fueled global economic development through the extraction of vital natural resources and labor for centuries, communities in mountain regions have been stigmatized, silenced, and displaced. Although they appear to be metaphorically large in the popular imagination of most South Asian societies, the Himalayas remain marginalized in almost every other respect (Singh, 2019, p. 27). The systematic exploitation of the Himalaya's rich natural resources is an indicator of their political marginalization. The Himalayan regions in northern India, as well as Kashmir and Tibet, remain distinct from the heavily populated plains areas by politics, culture, and religious practice. Thus, they have argued for political autonomy because they require local governance familiar with local conditions to prevent unproductive and exploitative development (Whitmore, 2016, p. 28). Despite the political, cultural, and religious marginalization, it is the wealth of resources, natural beauty, religious importance of the Himalayas that makes the region desirable. Consequently, an examination of Himalayan religiosity is essential to understanding the regional context.

The Himalayas are considered sacred to virtually every inhabitant and faith tradition of the region. Mountains have become associated with mystical, self-transcending experiences, which help to explain the appeal of mountains in the history of spirituality (Lane, 1998, p. 39). A mystique has evolved around the Himalaya, linking them to mainstream beliefs of formal Hinduism in South Asia. Megan Adamson Sijapati, who specializes in religious traditions of Nepal and North India, notes that as home to a variety of religious traditions, "religion has long been a powerful social, political, and cultural force in the Himalayan region" (Sijapati, 2016, p. 3). Religious practice is pervasive in the daily lives and worlds of Himalayan peoples. Importantly, however, this category must be considered with the boundaries and bridges created through citizenship, gender, nationality, ethnicity, language, and economic status (p. 4). Furthermore, the fluidity of religious boundaries complexifies any analysis of this practice.

### **Catholic Peacebuilding**

Peacebuilding, a vital component of Catholic social teaching, articulates a comprehensive approach to reduce violence toward a sustainable just peace focused on human dignity and the common good. Peacebuilders work toward building and restoring conditions of peace by addressing structural injustice and encouraging reconciliation. Raimon Panikkar describes peaceful coexistence as one form of political strategy, preferable to war, which is used for maintaining the status quo (Panikkar, 1999, p. xix). Unfortunately, this approach fails to consider the terms of the status quo, giving preference to those in power. Thus, Catholic institutions, such as Caritas Internationales and the Catholic Peacebuilding Network,<sup>2</sup> seek to address unjust structures that are the root causes of conflict, strategically engage at all levels of society, protect and defend human dignity of the

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<sup>2</sup> The Catholic Peacebuilding Network is an international organization of Catholic universities, Bishop's conferences, and institutions engaged in global peacebuilding efforts. Information on publications, instructional material, and peacebuilding criteria can be found at <https://cpn.nd.edu>.

most vulnerable, identify indigenous non-violent approaches, and pursue practical and spiritual conflict resolution.

As with any global ethic, Catholic peacebuilding must be adaptable to political, geographical, and cultural specificity. Therefore, a starting point for the Himalayan context is to identify Caritas' focus in India, Pakistan, and Nepal. Peacebuilding is a core program for Caritas India, focusing on cooperation and coherence among actors with an aim to resolve conflicts by building societies, institutions, policies, and relationships that are better able to sustain peace and justice.<sup>3</sup> Caritas Pakistan engages in dialogue, cultural exchange, and raising awareness, with a focus on youth, communities, and interfaith cooperation.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Caritas Nepal focuses peacebuilding efforts on social justice issues oriented toward youth programs.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, these regional organizations fail to (at least publicly) engage beyond the grassroots level.

A just peace must account for protecting all aspects of human life through sustainable structures beyond the narrow state interests of the absence of violence or maintaining order. Catholic peacebuilding seeks practical methods to reduce violence and unjust systems by engaging with all stakeholders, especially the relevant political apparatus. Thus, justice should take shape within existing social relations, giving due consideration to the contextual location (Jenkins, 2013, pp. 116-117). Lisa Sowle Cahill prescribes a "networked reinforcement of conditions of peace" that involves all levels of civil and governmental actors, international organizations, and interreligious partners for this process (Cahill, 2013, p. 294). This description of peacebuilding, which aligns with the principles outlined by the Catholic Peacebuilding Network, illustrates the importance of integrating religion and politics. Alternatively, others, such as Paul Kahn, argue that linking politics to religion is likely to prove counterproductive or dangerous (Kahn, 2011, p. 4). While this claim may possess some truth, especially given the cultural and religious ignorance of most politicians, an effective approach to peacebuilding in the Himalayas requires careful navigation and assimilation of the religious and political spheres.

### **Effective Components of Catholic Peacebuilding in the Himalayas**

Despite its troubling colonial past and scant presence in the region, Christianity can contribute to a just peace in the Himalayas. Before addressing the problematic areas of peacebuilding for the Himalayas, it is important to note the Catholic peacebuilding approaches that are appropriate for the mountains of northern South Asia. While the Catholic Church does not have a specific document that defines peacebuilding criteria, institutions such as Catholic Relief Services and Caritas rely on guidance from various magisterial documents,<sup>6</sup> input from scholars, and lessons learned from previous conflict transformation efforts. The emphasis on an interreligious and grassroots approach is essential given the religious and ethnic plurality of the Himalayas. Furthermore, consideration of liberation theology among peacebuilding scholars is relevant for addressing the economic and political oppression to the marginalized groups of the region. Although some foundational assumptions for Catholic peacebuilding are challenged by the Himalayas, the overall approach and principles remain valid if considered with contextual specificity. The subsequent paragraphs will briefly analyze each of these three areas.

<sup>3</sup> Caritas India, "Peacebuilding", <https://www.caritasindia.org/peacebuilding>.

<sup>4</sup> Caritas Pakistan, "Peace and Social Harmony", <https://caritas.org.pk/what-we-do/peace-and-social-harmony/>.

<sup>5</sup> Caritas Nepal, "Social Support", <https://www.caritasnepal.org/social-support/>.

<sup>6</sup> These include papal encyclicals such as *Pacem in terris* (1963) from John XXIII, *Populorum progressio* (1967) from Paul VI, and *Fratelli tutti* (2019) from Francis, as well as Vatican II documents like *Gaudium et spes* (1965).

An interreligious approach is crucial for all perspectives of Catholic peacebuilding. Almost every region of the Himalayas embodies religious plurality with primarily Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists, but also Christians and other faith traditions. The Indian Jesuit Michael Amaladoss identifies how the social reality of South Asia can prevent the Church from direct involvement in peacemaking, but it is able to join other nongovernmental organizations in attempts to bring truth and justice in preparing people of different religious groups to understand and accept each other (Amaladoss & Tan, 2017, p. 220). The Christian response can link the inspiring message of the gospel to cross-cultural and interreligious cooperation that strives to change both local and global realities of human inequality, poverty, and violence. Pursuing a sustainable just peace requires engaging across different countries, religions, cultures, and between combatants and noncombatants. Catholic models for peacebuilders who emphasize shared moral values of love and mercy, structured by and seeking justice, capture this principle of crossing boundaries (Cahill, 2013, p. 303). Interreligious dialogue and cooperation offer an opportunity to capitalize on common moral virtues between traditions. These elements allow Catholic peacebuilders to effectively contribute to interfaith peacebuilding.

Grassroots efforts for building peace start at the most basic levels in communities to counter systems of injustice that promote conflict. This concept allows for the development of cooperation that is based on ethical and political common ground. Thus, using community-defined needs as the foundation and involving as many stakeholders as possible will help to generate a sense of involvement (Headley & Neufeldt, 2010, p. 131). Community participation in cooperative political institutions or agreements can enhance the value of shared perspectives. Peacebuilding must start at the ground, where it builds and gains momentum to increase pressure on more powerful figures and institutions in local, national, and international communities. Cahill describes how the different sides meet “to build or restore conditions of peace by working for structural justice and reconciliation at the grassroots level” (Cahill, 2013, p. 294). Catholic Relief Services and the Catholic Peacebuilding Network emphasize the success of this approach in Christian majority Liberia, Latin America, and the Philippines. While there is demonstrated success in Christian dominated conflict areas, there can also be a contribution from Catholic peacebuilders in Muslim or Hindu majority regions. A focus on grassroots peacebuilding is the starting point for Caritas in South Asia but can be the limit in the Himalayas because of political limitations that restrict most Catholic institutional efforts beyond the local level. These challenges will be addressed later in this paper.

Peacebuilding responds to the root causes of violent conflict, which includes unjust relationships and structures. Thus, incorporating of liberation theology, with a preferential option for the poor and marginalized, is a useful element in working toward peace in the Himalayas. Cahill argues that for Christian ethics to have practical force it must emphasize Jesus’ preferential option for the poor and break with oppressive social practices (p. 151). While the poor and marginalized are most impacted by the devastation of warfare, liberation theology is a shared concept within Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim traditions that seeks to empower the lowly.

Islamic and Buddhist approaches to liberation in a peacebuilding context are linked to cooperation with government officials. This corresponds to Catholic peacebuilding objectives but can attract suspicion from some victimized elements of society. For example, the Sarvodaya Sramadana village level liberation and peacebuilding movement in Sri Lanka was criticized because of too close collaboration with the government (Amaladoss, 1997, p. 73). In contrast, Islamic principles of liberation and peacebuilding argue for societal leadership to take responsibility for the betterment of society. For Muslims, the training of good leaders and their taking responsibility for society is a basic requirement of liberation and a sustainable peace (p. 109).

Hindu concepts of liberation have included the bhakti movement, Gandhi's goal for integral liberation, which also corresponds to Catholic peacebuilding principles of nonviolence, and Agvinesh's advocacy for revolutionary social change (pp. 58-65). Alternatively, different interpretations of religious traditions can lead to further oppression. Ambedkar identifies some religious and social principles of Hinduism as providing divine support and justification to the doctrine of inequality in the social, cultural, economic, and religious spheres (Ambedkar, Thorat, & Kumar, 2008, p. 8). This critique can be applied to other religious traditions as well, such as the prosperity gospel in Christianity. Nonetheless, for Catholic peacebuilders, the Virgin Mary's support of the lowly and warning to the powerful in the Magnificat is one example that speaks clearly against the prevalent abuse of political power in the Himalayas.

### **Himalayan Challenges to Catholic Peacebuilding Assumptions**

There are impediments to some of the core peacebuilding assumptions in the Himalayan context. The first set of problems is related to cultural and political limitations in both local and strategic engagement. Catholic peacebuilding relies on the assumption that religious figures will be respected at the local level. Cahill asserts that religious peacebuilders are "uniquely well-positioned to gain access to local leaders" and build trust in communities (Cahill, 2013, p. 302). Although this is true in some circumstances, there are often situations in which religious actors are not welcome or are met with suspicion. The Catholic Church contributes to peace and social welfare in South Asia, yet its history of colonialism and association with the West results in some persistent skepticism. Furthermore, most Himalayan communities embroiled in conflict are marginalized within their respective faith traditions. Sijapati notes that "across the Himalaya, religious communities possess an acute awareness of being part of longstanding, locally grounded religious traditions that are perceived by their own members or by others to be at the political, cultural, economic, and geographic margins" (Sijapati, 2016, p. 9).

A more significant obstacle is when religious figures are perceived as complicit in the violence or oppression. Christian peacebuilders may be associated with historical Western colonialism or contemporary imperialism. In Kashmir, Hindus are deemed complicit with the oppressive Indian government while Muslims are accused of links to terrorist activity that ostensibly emanates from Pakistan. In other parts of the Himalayas, Buddhist monks can be looked at with suspicion, sometimes unfairly, for not following nonviolent paths in their political, social, and similar struggles given their participation in religious wars in other parts of Asia and the militarized monasteries in Tibet (McGranahan, 2010, p. 189). These examples complicate the influence of religious figures on a local peace process.

Political limitations and sensitivities are a significant hindrance for peacebuilders to strategically engage at the national and international level in the Himalayas. Local bishops, who may be concerned with the survival of their church, must balance between defending their flock and values with sustaining a relationship with the state power, who perceive their intervention as a further example of colonialist interference. Messaging from the Vatican, which is notably absent in the case of Tibet or Kashmir, could be related to possible backlash on local Catholics. Nonetheless, input from the magisterium must account for the power imbalance between governments and militaries with the marginalized. While dialogue for a just sustainable peace must include all possible stakeholders, it is imperative that reconciliation be on the terms of the victims, not the powerful. Unfortunately, Catholic peacebuilding scholarship does not effectively articulate how this might occur in a Himalayan context.

Catholic peacebuilding principles stress engagement at all sectors and levels of society, to include government and educational, as well as international scholars and organizations. Cahill asserts that Catholic universities and institutions are well placed to integrate dialogue and nonviolent collective action (Cahill, 2019, p. 328). Realistically, it is unlikely that the Chinese or Indian governments will allow this integral component of peacebuilding. For example, the Indian government is sensitive to criticism of its overly forceful and oppressive behavior in Kashmir, regularly expelling scholars who might prove embarrassing (Matloff, 2017, p. 157).<sup>7</sup> While this creates a challenge for Catholic intentions to incorporate all possible stakeholders, it is incumbent upon peacebuilders to determine feasible methods of engagement across the political and social spectrum.

A third problematic assumption is the desire to embrace and build on indigenous nonviolent approaches to conflict transformation and reconciliation. Catholic peacebuilders encourage the Church to connect the dialogical and civil-resistance modes of nonviolence that exist in local communities (Cahill, 2019, p. 328). The problem with this approach arises when communities exhibit a proclivity for violent behavior in opposition to the idyllic peaceful nature that peacebuilding tends to assume.

Himalayan examples of communal violence can often counter accepted narratives that shape peacebuilding assumptions. The evidence that conflict is more likely in mountainous regions indicates that a presupposition of nonviolence is problematic. Those who live in high-altitude regions can be inclined toward violence due to their neglect and isolation from dominant culture and governments (Matloff, 2017, p. 10). The widely accepted narrative of Tibetan Buddhists as one of peaceful nonviolence, while valid today, does not hold up to historical scrutiny. Carole McGranahan identifies the “persistent global images of Tibet and Tibetans as a nonviolent struggle and people ... as practiced and prescribed in specific historical, political, and cultural contexts” (McGranahan, 2010, p. 186).<sup>8</sup> At the grassroots level, a disposition toward violence can be an ingrained defense mechanism against external oppression. Mona Bhan describes how Indian state military violence against Kashmiris provokes a violent response in their fight for autonomy, freedom, and defense of their families (Bhan, 2015, p. 7). Therefore, it seems counterproductive for peacebuilders to assume that Himalayan communities will naturally adopt nonviolent methods to address conflict.

Institutional Catholic peacebuilding efforts unite development with a just peace, as demonstrated by the organization of Catholic social institutions and magisterial documents. It is essential, however, that they avoid conflating concepts of peace related to order, stability, and profit with those that emphasize justice, equality, and human flourishing. The links between economic and social development, with both peacebuilding and militarized political narratives, are a considerable complication for strategic engagement. Although religious peacebuilding can serve as a counterweight to the political appropriation of religious narratives (Cahill, 2013, p. 302), careful attention to terminology is essential. Interreligious cooperation and dialogue can be a helpful asset for considering the similar narratives in support of development between peacebuilders and powerful political forces.

As the Church attempts to balance relationships with the state and defend the most vulnerable, it must navigate the divergence in methods that ostensibly seek the same goal of peace. Kashmiri political scientist and economist Nitasha Kaul notes that “in armed conflict, the vested interests entrenched in profiting from conflict

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<sup>7</sup> Articulated by Kashmiri scholar Nitasha Kaul in an address at Villanova University on February 17, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> While this narrative is contextual, it is the present reality that offers an opportunity for peacebuilding despite the historical violence that has occurred in Tibet and among Buddhists.

seek to limit the range of possible political options that might lead to demilitarization, dialogue, conciliation, a just peace, and eventually resolution” (Kaul, 2020b, p. viii). This mentality contradicts peacebuilding objectives despite a mutual goal of development. The Indian government argues that development will help to eliminate terrorism and build stability. Alternatively, Bhan argues that Indian development efforts are “lived contradictions of an occupying power” where humanitarian policies of the state and military that emphasize compassion and goodwill “seamlessly morph into heartless tactics” of militarism disguised as democracy or development (Bhan, Duschinski, & Zia, 2018, p. 14). Such “lived contradictions” also apply to other South Asian governments that pursue development to improve state economies, often at the expense of indigenous livelihood, which can then provoke further violence. Thus, peacebuilders must carefully consider the narratives of their strategic engagement.

### **Opportunities for Overcoming Challenges**

Many obstacles for Catholic peacebuilding in the Himalayas can be attributed to the Western-centric worldview that produced the assumptions and principles of scholarly and institutional approaches. To account for the contextual cultural and societal realities can mitigate mistakes or impediments that arise from suspicion of religious actors, the political sensitivities at all levels, faulty assumptions of nonviolence, and attempts to navigate between development and stability. For example, a separation of church and state, which seems natural to Western observers, will not be an effective starting point for peacebuilders in the Himalayas. Jason Keith Fernandes argues that any narrative of Hindu-Catholic encounters must speak of encounters between Catholics and the Indian state, as Hinduism has become an ideology of—and is sustained by—the Indian state (Fernandes, 2021, p. 93). The influence of Hindu nationalism extends beyond India’s borders into other parts of the Himalayas, while Islamic influence in Pakistan does not correspond to the Western understanding of separation of church and state.

As with many frameworks, not every principle needs to be applied to achieve success. The list of peacebuilding criteria outlined by Catholic Relief Services and the Catholic Peacebuilding Network should be treated like a menu rather than a checklist. While there are some components that might not be appropriate for a Himalayan context, there is an opportunity to capitalize on those that appear helpful. In the case of Kashmir, Tibet, Nepal, or other Himalayan communities undergoing conflict or conflict transformation, the concepts of interreligious cooperation, attending to the underlying causes of violence, liberation, and engaging at a grassroots level are essential. This does not mean that we should reject those aspects that appear as obstacles in the Himalayas, but we must reconsider how they are applied.

Suspicion, or distrust of religious actors, is not an insurmountable obstacle for Catholic contributions to peacebuilding. At each level, they must discern their appropriate role while assessing the best approach for contributing. Nonetheless, interreligious cooperation and collaboration is equally essential. For local Catholic actors, it is conducive to work through and with community religious figures and organizations to ensure that their contribution is not perceived as outsider meddling. Fortunately, most grassroots organizations have established relationships with the relevant actors.

While this endeavor becomes more of a challenge at the national and global levels, the Catholic Church has clearly articulated the obligation for its leadership to engage toward a just peace. In “Pacem in terris”, Pope John XXIII directs the Church to give “serious thought” to the problem of peaceful relations between world political communities through “mutual trust, sincerity in negotiations, and a faithful fulfillment of obligations”

(Pope John XXIII, 1963, §118).<sup>9</sup> He offers a framework for the international level approach to peacebuilding that is missing from ongoing efforts of the Catholic Church. The pope's admonishment should serve as the impetus for Bishops and the Vatican to diplomatically engage with appropriate messaging and dialogue. The magisterium must navigate between the survival and flourishing of the institutional Church and standing up for the values outlined in the Beatitudes. Their statements need not attack any government and should account for the intransigence, history of violence, and acts of terrorism that provoke military action and oppression from the state. Moreover, they should highlight the tension among development, stability, and just peace while, at the same time, consider solidarity, the common good, and a spirit of cooperation. Catholic social teaching from the past century provides a framework to link political, economic, and social development toward a just peace.

Although Catholic peacebuilding's assumption of relying on indigenous nonviolence may be misguided, an appeal to peaceful and nonviolent narratives and examples across religious traditions is possible. Abdul Ghaffar Khan, a Pashtun activist who advocated nonviolent opposition to British colonial rule, also encouraged Hindu-Muslim unity (Gandhi, 2004, pp. 265-271). Likewise, Gandhi advocated the same for Hindus, while the Dalai Lama has articulated a nonviolent approach for Tibetan Buddhists against state oppression over the last several decades. Incidents of violence will continue to occur in the Himalayas, often as a reaction against perceived or real oppression and state violence. As the Second Vatican Council articulated, "if peace is to be established, the primary requisite is to eradicate the causes of dissension" (Pope Paul VI, 1965, §83). Violence is more than the use of force, but includes patriarchal and ethnic oppression, gender-based-violence, and other forms that result from power imbalances. Therefore, Catholic peacebuilders should encourage the nonviolent narratives of other traditions while embracing grassroots efforts to deconstruct the root causes of violence.

### Conclusion

This paper argues that Catholic peacebuilding's reliance on indigenous nonviolence, strategic engagement beyond the community level, and affiliation with economic development could face obstacles in the Himalayan context. As illustrated by success in other parts of the world, these difficulties do not invalidate the assumptions of Catholic peacebuilding but highlight the importance of cultural specificity. The Himalayas challenge these three assertions but also offer opportunities for a more nuanced approach to make peacebuilding efforts more culturally relevant and successful. This paper does not intend to solve the problems that lead to political violence but to identify some areas for the Catholic Church and its institutions to reconsider its approach to peacebuilding from the grassroots to global levels.

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<sup>9</sup> This document marked for the first time that an encyclical spoke to "all men of good will" rather than only to the Catholic Church, which was a harbinger of plurality that would be seen in the conciliar documents of the Second Vatican Council.

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