

**HOMILY AT OPENING MASS
CEAP NATIONAL CONVENTION**

21 September 2011
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The Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians (4:1-7,11-13), our First Reading on this feast of the Evangelist St. Matthew, underscores the importance and relevance of evangelists and teachers in the building up of the Body of Christ, the Church. We call this Church activity the ministry of education and formation.

Through the years in our country and here in Mindanao we have been building up the Church through our respective ministries – we as bishops, you as educators, teachers and formators.

For the past 19 years of the so-called peace process officially launched by President Fidel V. Ramos in September 1992, the dioceses in Mindanao have been actively engaged in this peace process through the activity we call The Culture of Peace. We have been doing this through what we also call the interreligious and ecumenical dialogues or interfaith dialogues with fellow Christians, Muslims and Lumads in many sectors of society.

As one of the peace advocates and peace promoters, I am happy that our National Convention is focused on the theme of the culture of peace. In this brief homily I would like to share with you a reflection on the peace process and to suggest where to put our contribution in the promotion of the culture of peace.

For the past 19 years the culture of peace in particular and the peace process in general had two stages. The first stage is what I call the eirene stage. Eirene in the Greek language and culture is the word for peace. This peace was understood as referring to a situation wherein there is an absence of war. In modern terms it means ceasefire or in diplomatic lingo cessation of hostilities or when the guns are silent, so to say. Here in Mindanao on the issue of the Moro rebellion there have been committees organized to keep and maintain the ceasefire. Even foreign countries like Malaysia and Brunei sent their military men to be part of the so-called CMT or Ceasefire Monitoring Team. In spite of this there have been skirmishes between the Government and the rebel forces. But generally ceasefire is holding and being maintained as agreed by the parties.

The second stage is what I call the pax stage. In the Roman culture and language peace is pax. This word refers to a greeting “Pax tecum” – “peace be with you,” or to an accord or an agreement on paper, or the redundant expression “peace pact.” Peace talks and negotiations of the peace panels on both sides were about this stage. The Government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) had reached and signed an agreement but still is considered poorly implemented. Now we have the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a splinter group of the MNLF, trying to come up also with their own agreement with the present Government. The ceasefire committee is now augmented with the group of foreign government officials constituting the so-called International Contact Group or ICG. In spite of the efforts of many sectors, foreign and local, the agreed draft is still nowhere to be seen.

So this is where we are now. Peace is still elusive in spite of millions and millions of money, time and efforts spent on the peace process and the intensive promotion of the culture of peace. Something is lacking, and I believe we in the Church, especially our educators and our own peace advocates, have the right solution to the problem of an

authentic and lasting peace. And this is the third stage wherein CEAP should actively engage.

I call this stage the shalom stage. As you already know shalom is the Hebrew word for peace and personalized or exemplified in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, according to St. Paul (Ephesians 2:14). Shalom is the root word for salam, the Arabic word for peace. Islam, the religion of peace, is a derivative of salam.

Now shalom refers to the idea of wholeness, integrity, harmony, orderliness in the individual and the community. Bringing about or training people of this type is the main objective of Catholic education and formation where we balance the training of the mind and especially of the heart. For, I believe with Pope John Paul II that “the peace of the heart is the heart of peace.”

To me this shalom stage is the main focus of Christians and Islamic religious leaders and peace advocates’ interfaith projects and activities. This concept is the correct understanding of peace and has been terribly lacking or taken for granted in the eirene and pax stages of the peace process. To make a difference in the promotion of the culture of peace, we in the Catholic Church and in CEAP have to study how shalom ideas can create shalom values, and how shalom values create shalom culture within Filipino cultures. In other words, faith, culture and dialogue have to be studied in depth and practiced in fact and in reality. To us this is the only way to lasting peace.

Now one important and indispensable aspect of shalom ideas and values is the cross of Jesus whose many symbolisms can help in the education and formation of persons of wholeness, integrity, harmony and order. From these come true and genuine peace. “Ang kalinaw nagagikan sa kahusay.” “Ang kapayapaan ay galing sa kaayusan.” This is the reason why Jesus is called the Prince of Peace, and the

Blessed Virgin Mary the Queen of Peace – two persons without moral and psychological disorders.

So the culture of the cross, an integral part of the culture of shalom or peace, is a unique contribution to the peace process. And mind you, this is a subversive culture because it will undermine the ideas and values of materialism, consumerism and hedonism which today underpin many projects of government and many bills in congress. But, of course, we should not mind at all. We have no choice. It has been predicted by Jesus. We have to live, not just celebrate, the paschal mystery of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection to new life if we have to be true Christians. Like Jesus true and genuine peacemakers ended up on the cross. So shall we. For this we were baptized as lay faithful, and like Matthew, called personally to follow Jesus, ordained as priests and consecrated as religious to build the Church as teachers and evangelists.

May God give us light and strength. Amen.