

Conference on Reconciliation and Change

Opening Remarks by Carlos Saladrigas and Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski

❖ September 14th, 2012, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. ❖
Miami Dade College, Wolfson Campus

Carlos Saladrigas—Introductions:

On behalf of Miami Dade College and the Cuba Study Group we want to thank every one of you for coming here today to listen to what I think is going to be a very important topic for the future of Cuba, and to learn from other experiences in different parts of the world that have led to successful outcomes of important international and national conflicts.

I want to really thank Eduardo Pardon and Miami Dade College for making these facilities available. This is a great room that will enable the kind of participation that we would like to elicit. I think it will be a great setting for this meeting to take place and for all of us to participate as we learn more about the process of reconciliation and change.

In terms of housekeeping, I think it is important to know that this conference will be held under Chatham House rules. Under Chatham House rules, when a meeting is held, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speakers nor that of any participants may be revealed. In other words, you can talk about the conference, you can talk about what is said in the conference, but you cannot attribute anything specifically to any of the participants. This applies to participants. This does not apply to the speakers; the speakers are free in their participation.

You will notice the event is being filmed so that it can be available on the web later. Only the presentations by the speakers are going to be filmed. The participation by the audience is not. And the idea here is to create an atmosphere where everyone feels free and not constrained in any way shape or form to ask a question, to raise an issue, or to present any kind of a discussion.

So having said that, I would like to introduce the speakers and presenters that we are going to have in the course of the day. We are going to start with His Excellency, Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool.

Ambassador Rasool is South Africa's Ambassador to the United States of America. Before joining the embassy, his most recent post included Member of Parliament in the National Assembly, special advisor to the President of the Republic of South Africa, and Premier, which is the Governor of the Western Cape Province. Ambassador Rasool has a long history of involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle, starting in high school and including leadership in the United Democratic Front and the African National Congress. He has had to make sacrifices, like spending time in prison and being under house arrest. His social and political involvement has consistently been faith driven. He has been involved in both the Islamic Movement as well as the Inter-faith Movement and has been active in mobilizing Muslims and the broader faith communities for a deeper understanding of its lands and faith under conditions of oppression [under apartheid] and currently under conditions of globalization. Ambassador Rasool received his Bachelors of Arts degree and a higher diploma

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in Education at the University of Cape Town. He is married and has two children, Ambassador Rasool is landing in Miami at 9:05 this morning and will be with us a little bit later on today.

His Excellency Patrick (Pat) Doherty is a Member of Parliament. Born in 1945, he is an Irish Republican politician and abstentionist member of Parliament from West Tyrone. He has been a member of the Northern Ireland assembly for the same constituency since June 25, 1998. Doherty served as Vice President of Sinn Féin since 1988-2009. Born in Glasgow, Mr. Doherty's parents came from County Donegal in the Republic of Ireland. Doherty moved to Donegal in 1968, shortly before The Troubles broke out across the border. Mr. Doherty is married with three daughters and two sons. He was educated at St. Josephs College, and is a site engineer who likes building stone walls. A special appreciation for Mr. Doherty for being here. He literally traveled all night yesterday and got in at midnight. After traveling from Ireland to London, London to Atlanta, Atlanta to Miami, he's here today. He made it and we are delighted to have him after such an ordeal.

Our third speaker is Dr. Roberto Goizueta. He is the *Margaret O'Brien* Flatley Professor of Catholic Theology at Boston College. Dr. Goizueta is a native of Havana and moved to the U.S. at the age of six. He attended high school in Atlanta, Georgia and graduated from Yale with a B.A. in Political Science. After college he spent a couple of years exploring first a law and then a priestly vocation. Ultimately it was the theology in seminary that fascinated him and he entered the graduate theology program at Marquette University going on to receive an M.A. and a Ph.D. Dr. Goizueta has served as president of both the Catholic Theological Society of America and the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States. He has received honorary degrees from the University of San Francisco and Helms College. The National Catholic Reporter named Dr. Goizueta one of the 10 most influential Hispanic American educators, pastors, and theologians in the United States. His many publications have focused on the importance of religious faith and social responsibility. Dr. Goizueta's 6th book, *Christ Our Companion: Toward a Theological Aesthetics of Liberation* will be published later this year.

And last but not least, because he will follow me here at the podium, is the Most. Rev. Thomas Wenski. Archbishop Wenski was born in West Palm Beach in 1950 and was ordained a priest at the Archdiocese of Miami on May 15, 1976. He earned a B.A. in Philosophy in 1972, a Masters of

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Divinity from the Boynton Bishop Seminary, and in 1993 a M.A. in Sociology from Fordham University in New York. After several posts in very significant pastoral duties here in Miami, especially among the Haitian-American community, Bishop Wenski was appointed the Archdiocese Director of Catholic Charities in 1996. In late 1996, he spearheaded a relief operation that delivered over 150,000 pounds of food to Caritas Cuba for distribution to people left homeless by Hurricane Lily. He was appointed auxiliary Bishop of Miami and on June 24, 1997 he was ordained to the Episcopacy. He assumed the role of the fourth Bishop of the Diocese of Orlando on November 13, 2004. And then, finally, on April 20, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI appointed him the fourth Archbishop of Miami and Metropolitan of the Province of Miami.

Robert Schreiter is a priest and member of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. He has published seventeen books in the areas of inculturation, world mission, and reconciliation. Among them are *Constructing Local Theologies*; *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local*; *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*; and *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies*. Schreiter has chapters in a further hundred books, and more than one hundred-fifty articles in academic and church journals and his publications have appeared in twenty languages.

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He is past president of both the American Society of Missiology and of the Catholic Theological Society of America. In addition to holding guest professorships at universities in Germany and the Netherlands, he has lectured in forty-eight countries around the world. For twelve years Schreiter served as a theological consultant to Caritas Internationalis for its programs in reconciliation and peace building, and continues to work with organizations and groups around the world in peace building.

He lectures in academic and church circles on inculturation, intercultural communication, reconciliation, religious life, and world mission.

I would also like to recognize that Dr. Eduardo Padron had to leave, but he was here early this morning. President Mitch Maidique from Florida International University should be here, if he is not already here. Monsignor Casale from St. Thomas University is also here with us and we thank you for your presence.

Why are we having a conference on reconciliation? I think the answer is fairly simple; we have had to struggle for almost 54 years in Cuba with a major conflict and it needs to be solved. Many attempts, many alternatives, have been used over the years, but we have been at it for several decades and we still don't have a solution.

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Dagoberto Valdes a well known Catholic activist [in] Cuba, mentioned, in one of my more recent trips, "when we close the doors to dialogue and reconciliation, we immediately open the door to violence." And I think he summarized exactly what this conference is all about. This conference is for us to learn what are the processes that take us to reconciliation, what are the doors and the windows that we need to open. It is all about opening those windows and those doors, but we need to learn. We need to learn how this process has happened, we need to learn how it takes place; we need to learn how it is that we can facilitate these processes. They are not easy, as we will hear in the experiences that will be presented today. They are certainly not easy processes, but they are an inevitable process because the alternative to the process of reconciliation is a process of violence. We all need to look at what we need to do. As you will hear Father Schreiter say today, "The logic that created the conflict cannot be the logic that solves the conflict." It has to be a different logic; it has to be a different mindset. And as I like to say, the process will begin the minute we cease to view the Cuba conflict as a conflict to be won and we begin to see it as a problem to be solved. And I think that's what this conference is going to be all about; it's going to be a learning experience. We encourage your participation. This is going to be incredibly important and I think it's going to be a wonderful experience. There is much for us to learn from valuable experiences that will be shared here with us. With that, Archbishop Wenski.

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Archbishop Wenski—Opening Remarks:

I'm trying to be high-tech by having my notes on an iPad. Father Schreiter was here in Miami just three weeks ago and I had the occasion to meet him when we hosted a meeting at The Southeast Pastoral Institute (SEPI) for about 18 bishops from Columbia in which they came to Miami to find kind of a quiet place to discuss peace keeping and peace building in Columbia with the ongoing conflict there. So, happy to see him again here back in Miami—and he's wondering why these conferences are not in February! As we begin this conference, I ask you also to be mindful and to keep in your prayers Pope Benedict XVI's visit today to Lebanon. Given the civil war in Syria, the events in Libya and Egypt, his visit this weekend to Lebanon comes at a very critical time in that region and for the world. 11 years ago, in the wake of the terrorist attacks on America, Americans were told by their priests and their pastors and even their President not to allow these crimes to cause them to become consumed with hate. If we hate, we were told, the terrorist win. Unfortunately, conflicts are seen as zero sum games, and not only do they seem to be, sometimes they are. And the players can be described as *inconditionales* or as *intransigentes*. For example Fidel said, "Inside, the revolution is everything, outside the revolution nothing," and so anything that might suggest cooperation or accommodation is rejected outright.

Consider the U.S. embargo on Cuba to touch on a touchy issue. Looking at it from the perspective of its stated purpose—to affect regime change on the island—we can say that after 50 plus years it hasn't succeeded. But there are those that continue to support the embargo, within the exile community anyway. Many do not do so because they think it is an ineffective means to affect regime change, and even some might admit that its effect has been to support the present regime there. But they support it because it has become for them a symbol of not having surrendered, of not accepting what has been deemed to be unacceptable. In this same way, many people do not envision themselves going back to Cuba to visit or to travel while Castro is still in power because travel to the island would be seen as surrender. Again, everything is seen as a zero sum game. There can be no surrender unless it's the other guy who surrenders, and if he does, and when he does, his surrender must be unconditional.

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Perhaps some of these attitudes have been influenced in our times by the history of World War II. World War II was a total war, and the Allies determined that the only acceptable outcome was the unconditional surrender of the Axis

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powers. One can only speculate about what might have happened if somehow signals had been sent to the German generals that a negotiated surrender, without Hitler, could be possible. Could the war in that case have ended sooner? Before a majority of the Jews were exterminated. Before the Soviet Union was in a position to seize half of Europe at Yalta. These are questions that will never be answered.

Turning to Cuba, too often both here and on the island, because of these zero sum calculations, the word *reconciliation* has been a bad word—as bad or worse as the word *dialogue*. And these words have been given this bad connotation because for too many these words evoke surrender and unacceptable accommodation with evil. The movie *Bitter Sugar*, about Cuba in the early 1990's has a scene in which a communist teacher, in attempting to come to grips with the fall of the Soviet Union,

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and the special period that was then unleashed in Cuba, asked, “What am I supposed to do? Go to Miami and admit to my relatives that I was wrong?”

Father Schreiter will help clarify for us what reconciliation is and what it is not, but because of the nature of life under a totalitarian regime, everyone has been or believes they to have been, betrayed by another- by the neighbor down the street in the CDR or even by a relative. And this I would say is where reconciliation has to happen, this is where it has to begin. It’s the social trust that makes civil society and a society that is civil possible, if that social trust is to be restored. The Church claims to be expert in humanity per Pope Paul VI and in a world of fragile peace and broken promises, the Church must show in her own life what a reconciled world looks like. The Church gathers people from all nations and from all languages. There are no borders in the church.

Before Vatican II, a common saying that justified the intransience of some prelates towards heretics or others outside the Church was that “error has no rights.” Vatican II didn’t change that, but through its documents on religious freedom and elsewhere, the Church Fathers insisted that if error has no rights, people do. People do. The Polish bishops during the Second Vatican Council gave an example of this. At the Second Vatican Council, the Polish bishops had the opportunity to meet for the first time bishops from Germany and they began a delicate process of reconciliation with themselves. And when the Polish bishops went back to Poland, they issued a pastoral letter in which they said that they forgave the Germans for what had happened to them in World War II and at the same time they asked forgiveness from the Germans for what they might have done to them.

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This caused a great stir, a great controversy in Poland at the time of the mid-1960’s. In fact, the communist government of Poland tried to turn the people away from the Church because of this stance of calling for reconciliation between the Polish and Germans. The Polish communist would say “We have nothing to ask forgiveness

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for because those Nazis did these monstrosities to us.” But the bishops insisted and the bishops had enough credibility with the people to prevail. Recently, we have seen them doing something similar. In the last month, bishops in Poland have met with Orthodox bishops from Russia in which they again are proposing reconciliation between the Polish and Germans. And there are hundreds of years of history that would argue about the impossibility of such a thing happening, but it’s a courageous and prophetic step. And the bishops of Cuba and the Church in Cuba, which is certainly larger than just the bishops of Cuba, have been speaking about reconciliation for many, many years. But more importantly, not only have they been speaking about reconciliation, they have been living it. As the hymn to Our Lady of Charity for this 400th anniversary of her presence among the Cuban people, pleas the urgency of charity: *que seamos hermanos*, that we be brothers. Change will come to Cuba, in fact some change is already coming to Cuba, and what we have to work for is what I called, even when I was preaching in Havana, is what I called a *soft landing*. Now whether or not Cuba has a soft landing in its future remains an open question. There are certainly a lot of scenarios that can play out. Will transition be as smooth as

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it was in Poland for example, or as violent as it was in Romania? Any scenario can be played out. However, if a soft landing does occur in Cuba, it will only happen because reconciliation makes it happen.

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Pope Benedict’s words on his departure from Havana last March asked that Cuba be a home for all Cubans. I think that sense of being at home describes what the end product of reconciliation is. The old adage “To err is human, to forgive is divine,” suggests that reconciliation is something that lies beyond ourselves, or at least beyond our own human powers. That is true, reconciliation is a grace. It is a gift, a gift from god, but it is also a task entrusted to us and it is about this task that we are about today. May God grant us the gift of His Holy Spirit so that, so that guided by His wisdom, our task to become reconciled, to become brothers, may reach its successful conclusion through Christ our Lord. Amen.