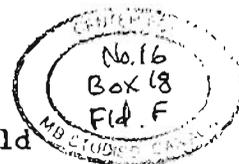


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Being Peacemakers in the World of Unrest

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Seminar Paper: BEING PEACEMAKERS IN THE WORLD OF UNREST

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Introduction

One of the deepest crises of our time is the crisis of violence - personal, social, national and international. Its clearest manifestation is the 120 wars fought since World War II and the subsequent poverty, hunger and oppression of millions of people.¹ The arms race and the threat of a nuclear holocaust expose violence at its worst. News reports carry accounts of violence expressed in terrorist attacks, homicides, labor/management tensions, marital conflicts, child abuse, and church disputes.

In the midst of these crises Jesus' mandates to His followers, "My peace I give you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27), and "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God" (Matt. 5:9) - underscore the role of peacemaking in a world of unrest. They are a reminder that Jesus' peace teaching is central to the gospel and to the church. "The gospel of peace" - restored relationships with God, humanity and nature - is the good news of God's gifts in Jesus Christ. A fractured gospel which announces salvation without wholeness and without peace for all people in all relationships is incomplete. The mission of the church is to announce the good news that in Jesus Christ there is another way of dealing with violence and hostility - the way of peacemaking and love.

If the Mennonite Brethren Church of the World is to fulfill its role as a peacemaker in a world of unrest, it must recommit itself to obedience to peacemaking from Jesus' perspective, and to practical strategies of implementing reconciliation.

I. SOME BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PEACEMAKING

New Testament peacemaking from Jesus' perspective focuses on the dimensions of the kingdom, the church and mission. Paul makes it clear

Jesus is the centerpiece of history, of redemption, of the church and of the future (Eph. 1:15-23). Since Mennonite Brethren stand in the tradition of Anabaptist belief that "all Christians are called to obey all the teachings and examples of Christ and His apostles in all circumstances of life," Christ is the pivotal starting point for all peacemaking discussions.²

This paper assumes that the peacemaking teachings of the New Testament are first applicable to the church, as the called-out people of God. The radical peacemaking theology of Jesus is neither addressed to isolated individuals nor to the entire world. It is public theology, not private theology, but it is the public theology and ethic of the church.³ This does not limit the application of peacemaking to the realm of the church, but it focuses the unique role of God's people as agents of peace nationally and internationally.

A. Jesus Defined Peace and Peacemaking

The word "peacemaker" appears in the New Testament in Matthew 5 and is one of the nine blessings that Jesus gives at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:9-10). What does the word peace mean? What does it mean to be a peacemaker? Jesus speaks of peace helps in his discourse to His disciples just prior to His death (John 13-16). "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world give I to you" (John 14:27). Jesus concludes the discourse with the words, "These things have I spoken to you that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

In Jesus' use of the word peace, three things become clear. First, peace has its origin in God. It is His gift that He gives. In fact, He calls it, "my peace."

Secondly, peace is an inner experience that occurs in the midst of pressure and tribulation. Paul uses the term reconciliation. When Paul gives his own commentary on the word peace in Eph. 2:14-18, he adds the word "reconcile" to explain this peacemaking part of the meaning of the word peace. When 'shalom' is used in the Old Testament (240 times), some 60 references have to do with the resolution of crisis, healing in the midst of crisis, or the sense of safety after the crisis is resolved.⁴

Thirdly, peace also has a result in our lives. Righteousness and justice are the results of peace. "My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27). Two-thirds of the usage of shalom in the Old Testament carried this meaning of peace as a sense of health, wholeness and fulfillment.

Jesus gives His peace to His followers as the basis for fulfilling peacemaking mandate in Matthew 5. The peace we have from Jesus restores the fourfold relationship that makes up a human being: relationship with God, with ourselves, with our neighbors, and with the earth. This is the anthropology of the Ten Commandments and Romans 1. War and the crisis of human sinfulness causes a break in these four basic relationships. It is for this reason that Jesus issued the peacemaking mandate in the Sermon on the Mount, as an expression of our yearning for the resolution of broken relationships with God, ourselves, neighbors and environment.

Jesus' peacemaking not only restores relationships but it produces righteous results. It is interesting that when the Septuagint translators were trying to find Greek words to translate the 250 usages of the Old Testament shalom, they used three: 'eirene', 'telios' and 'soter'.⁵ 'Eirene' basically means "harmony" or "absence of war." 'Telios' means "fulfilled." 'Soter' means "salvation." It is the word from which we get all the salvation vocabulary in the New Testament. Paul's frequent use of the word 'soter' is not only the best translation of what the Old Testament writers meant by 'shalom', but it also demonstrates the inseparability of salvation from peacemaking and restored relationships. Elmer Martens notes that 'shalom' speaks of harmony, health and a satisfying life. It means more than the absence of war, although it includes that too. "'Shalom' means that all is well between a person and God and also between a person and His neighbor."⁶ Jesus reaffirms this concept in His summary of the great commandment, to love God with heart, soul and mind; and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Matt. 23:38-39).

B. Peacemakers as Citizens of the New Kingdom

Jesus came preaching, "the time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is near; repent and believe the Gospel" (Mk. 1:14-15). Any discussion of the Kingdom of God must begin with Old Testament understandings. The Kingdom of God in Jewish Scriptures means the coming of God to rule His people and history. The Kingdom of God means that God is coming to rule, to

bring righteousness and peace. Jesus' pronouncement makes it clear that the waiting is over, that the kingdom has begun, and that God has come in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus announces the coming of God in kingly power to rule. That kingly power of God is present in the person and ministry of Jesus (Mk. 1:15; Matt. 11:12; Lk. 16:16; Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20; Lk. 4:16-30). The evidence of the Kingdom is Jesus: casting out demons by the Spirit of God; liberating the oppressed and bringing eschatological Jubilee.

John E. Toews notes that the Kingdom of God has two significant implications for peacemakers.⁷ First, the Kingdom means holy war with the powers. Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, proclaimed the kingdom. The linkage between Kingdom and Spirit is essential. It is the coming and working of the Spirit in and through Jesus that constitutes the presence of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is in direct conflict with the Spirit of God and the spirit of the demonic. The Kingdom of God involves a war between the powers. Jesus enters a world enslaved by Satan to join the battle in the name of the Kingdom of God. Jesus' ministry is pictured as a battle, a holy war (Mk. 1:23-28; Matt. 12:28; Lk. 11:20).

Secondly, the Kingdom means the church. The primary mission of Jesus in proclaiming the Kingdom was to gather God's end-time people as the visible sign of God's rule. Jesus' mission is to gather the end-time people of God over whom and through whom God reigns in kingly power. As a sign of the Kingdom of God the church has primarily two tasks: 1) to bind the powers of the demonic, present in the world, and to liberate people from demonic powers and structures; 2) to engage in ethical discernment about the shape of the disciple life in the world.

C. Peacemaking Focuses on Missional Activism

Jesus' victorious war with the demonic powers, as evidenced by His exorcisms and His death and resurrection, means that peace has been won. The church, as the Kingdom people living out the peace of Jesus' victory, is to live at peace and be peacemakers. Peacemakers are not marked by mystic quietism, passiveness or isolation in a warring world, but by a missional activism, a rejection of violence, a Kingdom value system, and a proclamation of the gospel of reconciliation.

The shape of the church's peacemaking activity is further explicated by Jesus when He instructs His disciples to give up all resistance against oppression, whether insult, denial of legal rights, or temporary military service (Matt. 5:38-41). He says, refuse to take revenge. But then Jesus moves beyond foregoing retaliation by commanding His followers to "love your enemies" (Matt. 5:43-43). This call moves His disciples beyond a nationalistic hatred for the oppressor to an active love that seeks to transform the enemy. To be a peacemaker is to be a missionary to the enemy and to love him or her into the Kingdom of God. The commissioning of the disciples (Matt. 10) for itinerant travel in order to proclaim the gospel of peace further illustrates the peacemaker's activity.

In describing the disciples' peacemaking activity as a part of God's new community, Paul echoes Jesus' teaching. "Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse....Do not repay anyone evil for evil....Do not take revenge" (Rom. 12:14,17-19). He urges the church to prayerfully intercede for "all who are in authority that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life with all godliness and reverence," in order that "all men be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:1-4).

Peacemaking is defined by both Jesus and Paul in missional terms, rejecting violence, loving and evangelizing the enemy, proclaiming peace, bringing wholeness to broken people. To be a peacemaker means being a missionary to the oppressor. Love and concern for evangelization replace retaliation against the oppressor. Jesus demonstrates this teaching in his own life and death. He calls His followers in every generation to model the same missional activism and nonviolence.

II. SOME PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR PEACEMAKING

"Blessed are the peacemakers." If peacemaking means wholeness, restored relationships, non-violent activism and a missional focus, what are the practical implications for the church? What specific steps can the Mennonite Brethren church take to be a peacemaker in a world of unrest? The following peacemaking principles can help the church implement Christ's peacemaking mandate.

A. Prayer is Basic to Peacemaking

Jacques Ellul states that the most radical strategy the church of Jesus Christ has in changing society is not political involvement but

prayer.⁶ Peacemakers are soldiers of Jesus Christ, who aggressively battle the destructive forces of evil, with the weapons Paul specifies in II Cor. 10:3-5; I Tim. 2:1-5; and Eph. 6:1-10. Prayer is a declaration of dependence upon God. Prayer is laying claim to the victory over evil which Jesus accomplished in His death and resurrection. Prayer is doing spiritual warfare with spiritual resources. The peacemaker's first call is to prayer.

Pray for peace. Pray for those in authority. Pray for freedom to preach the gospel. Pray for a courageous and faithful witness in the midst of oppression. Pray for God's intervention in the lives of leaders and in the direction of nations.

B. Peacemaking is an Essential Ingredient of True Discipleship

In spite of our Anabaptist peace church tradition, in some Mennonite Brethren churches there is an indifference, and even a hostility to peacemaking teachings. Churches are laudably preoccupied with evangelism, personal piety, family relationships and nurture activities. They are engaged in praiseworthy battles against abortion, pornography, crime, family breakdown, alcoholism and the drug menace. But many of our churches do not seem to be equally concerned about economic injustice, racial prejudice, ecological hazards, and the unthinkable menace of a nuclear war. Waldron Scott astutely observes that the gospel in the Great Commission embraces three inseparable ingredients; mission, discipleship and justice.⁹ To neglect justice is to proclaim an incomplete gospel. y/sk
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The problem is not only our lack of clear teaching on the inseparability of gospel proclamation and peacemaking, but the deeper issue of integrating faith and ethics. We should relate ethics to Christology in the same way that we relate salvation to Christology. We are saved in relation to Jesus and we behave in relation to Jesus. This is a perspective the church needs to rediscover in its teaching.

Separating faith and ethics has several consequences. First, the church fosters a privatized Christian faith which embraces Christ for personal redemption and holy living, but ignores His Lordship in other ethical issues. A second, related outcome is that of a dissonant world-view. If faith is limited to the individual realm, and relationship with Christ is viewed primarily as a "personal matter," the ethical issues of justice, righteousness, and peacemaking in the social, economic and political realms will be ignored by the church. This has led to a perspective in many

churches that the issue of international peace is a "political issue, not a spiritual issue."

The church must recapture in its lifestyle and in its teaching the integration of peacemaking and gospel proclamation. Peacemaking is always multidimensional. It must always include peace between God and man through faith in a reconciling Savior; and inner peace of heart with oneself as a fruit of the Holy Spirit. But it cannot stop there. It includes, as well, peace on every level of relationship - peace in marriages, families, churches, businesses and industries. It must also include peace among the nations of the world.

C. The Church Must Unambiguously Denounce and Renounce War

This begins with the church modelling alternatives of peace, reconciliation and forgiveness as ways of settling differences, rather than resorting to force or violence. Peacemaking begins at home. Peacemaking begins in the church among the people of God. If Christian families, businesspersons, and churches cannot peaceably settle differences, quarrels, and disagreements through Christ's peace, denunciation of war on national or international levels will have little impact.

The church's denunciation of war is anchored not only in her respect for the sanctity of human life and her evangelization mandate, but in her prophetic witness against all manifestations of hatred, evil and injustice in society. It is difficult to comprehend the dramatic increase in military spending worldwide in the past decade—almost 20 times pre-World War II budgets.¹⁰ The United States and the Soviet Union lead the way in the arms race. Together they comprise 11 percent of the world's population, but account for over half of the world's military expenditures. The two superpowers spend around \$300 billion annually for defense. The budget of the U.S. Air Force alone is larger than the total educational budget for 1.2 billion children in Africa. Latin America and Asia, excluding Japan.¹¹ The Soviet Union in one year spends more on military defense than the governments of the developing countries spend for education and health care for 3.6 billion people.¹² Additionally, the role of industrialized countries (especially the superpowers) in providing arms to unstable Third World countries is well documented.¹³

Most of the world's hungry, poor and refugees are in the Third World. And that's where the wars, revolutions and conflicts are. It is no

coincidence. War and revolution cause hunger, poverty and refugees. Poor and hungry people also cause revolution. The two are intertwined.

The church has not always seen the devastating effects of military spending on the global economy. In a recent book, Duane K. Friesen lists four inhibiting effects of military spending on desired economic development: "It increases inflation, it uses up scarce materials, it absorbs a large portion of the world's scientists and engineers, and it diverts capital from poor countries who need that capital to solve basic economic and social problems"¹⁴

The church in obedience to her Lord, is to "seek first the kingdom, and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:43). Surely, in the name of righteousness and justice, the church must raise her voice to protest the fact that the money required to feed all of the poor in the world, to give them clean water, to give them an education, to give them access to health facilities and support, to give them decent housing for an entire year is equivalent to what all nations spend in two weeks on the arms race.¹⁵ The issues of poverty and weaponry are inexorably coupled; we cannot uncouple them. The church, particularly in democratic countries, must mobilize available political and communication resources to oppose those forces, ideologies, and institutions that foster an anti-peace mindset and a pro-war mentality.

Having said this, as Christians and churches we entertain no illusions with respect to a permanently warless world until the King personally establishes His Kingdom. However, we do believe that God wills 'shalom' here and now. We work for peace just as we work for evangelization, adequate health care and the elimination of poverty even though these goals are not fully realized in a fallen world.

D. The Church must Refocus its Mission from a Kingdom Perspective

A Kingdom perspective delivers the church from several pitfalls. First, it reminds us that the church, as a symbol of God's kingdom is global, transnational, and transcultural. It means that Christians work together across national, international, racial, caste, tribe and class lines. To begin embracing the globe with relationships across these barriers would also make it easier for governments to negotiate their differences. The Christian community in prayer and sharing has the tremendous possibility of changing the direction of the nations if we clasp hands with Christian people around the world.

Secondly, a Kingdom perspective keeps us from an uncritical and idolatrous nationalism, which prioritizes defending national self-interest over commitment to the people of God. While as Christians we can be grateful citizens of a particular country, we must remember that we belong to a kingdom that is global. This means our first priority is to our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is with these people that we are reconciled as one in Christ, regardless of language, color or nationality. The church of Jesus Christ, because of its multi-national character, should by definition be the strongest agent for world peace.

Thirdly, a Kingdom perspective makes it impossible to isolate world evangelization from other global agendas which concern the people of God. Global evangelization is clearly the mandate of the church (Matt. 28:18-20). However, to be evangelized people must be alive. War and poverty both curtail the church's mission. The destruction of human life by the bomb or by starvation precludes response to the message of reconciliation. Therefore, the church can never ignore the larger issues of war, poverty, injustice, starvation, if it is faithful to the evangelization mandate which always seeks the reconciliation of peoples to God and to one another.

E. Every Church Must Contextualize the Gospel of Peace in its Culture

While I concur with John E. Toews' observation that peacemaking in the New Testament is distinctly missional activism rather than political activism,¹⁶ the church cannot avoid being political in this world. Like Christ, the church's politics will be demonstrated through love, service, peacemaking and righting injustice. In so doing the church must avoid the extremes of both the Sadducees (being blind to the injustices of their times) and the Zealots (wanting to right the injustices with violence). Inasmuch as cultures and political systems differ in different countries, the church must determine from the Scriptures and its national context the appropriate strategies for initiating change and dealing with injustice. Cross-cultural missionaries fulfill their calling best by modelling peacemaking and engaging in missional activism. The church under national leadership is in much better position to discern peacemaking strategies on socio-economic-political levels.

F. Peacemaking Always Makes the Church Counter Cultural

The price of being a peacemaker is to be "a sheep among wolves." It involves vulnerability, misunderstanding, rejection and even death. Jesus said, "If the world hates you, know that it hated Me before it hated you...if they persecuted Me they will persecute you" (John 15:18-20). To be faithful to Christ we must deal with both personal and corporate sin in the church and in the world. We should not expect, even in democratic countries, that challenges to the present military policies of the superpowers will be popular. The words of Senator Mark Hatfield present an urgent appeal to repentance to churches in democratic countries which have become the defenders of national, economic, and political policy by refusing a peacemaking stance. He writes, "By absence of voice or by our supportive voice to national policies, we are committing corporate sin....We are committing sin when we permit the continuation of policies that deny the bare necessity of existence of human life while we waste and squander our resources, continually escalating our resource expenditures into life-destroying endeavors."¹⁷

G. Seek to be an Agent of Shalom in all Personal Relationships

God reconciles through reconciled people. Peacemaking must become descriptive of our total way of life. As Christians and churches, we must seek application of this teaching in our homes, schools, churches, in labor relations, race relations, domestic (family) relations, professional relations, as well as in military programs. One of the best models of peacemaking in a pro-active stance is the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP).¹⁸ VORP is an alternative to relegating the righting of injustice to the court and penal systems. At the initiative of a trained mediator, the victim and offender are brought together to discuss the grievances, loss, personal feelings and responsibility for the offense. Together they work on a just settlement of the case with an agreement on the terms of restitution.

The Christian Peacemaking Team (CPI) proposal which emerged from the Mennonite World Conference in Strassbourg (1984) is another potential model. The stated purpose of CPT is "to witness to Jesus Christ as we seek to identify with the suffering, promote peace, reduce violence, identify with those caught in violence and oppression, and foster justice by using techniques of non-violent direct action. In situations of conflict between

nations or societal groups within nations, CPT would place a body of praying, well-trained Christians in the midst of warring parties or groups in order to foster shalom."¹⁹ While such a proposal needs to be implemented nationally before it is developed internationally, it does have potential as an alternative to war.

Conclusion

Peacemaking in a world of unrest concerns itself primarily with the church's renewed obedience to Jesus' teaching and to her responsibility to model reconciliation in all relationships - with God, ourselves, neighbors and the earth. To follow Jesus in being peacemakers means that we reject violence in all forms, we are missional to all peoples, and we bring wholeness to all peoples. The challenge facing the Mennonite Brethren Church of the World today is to continue to proclaim "the gospel of peace" (Rom. 10:15) and to demonstrate the reconciling power of God in the midst of violence, brokenness, injustice and chaos.

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