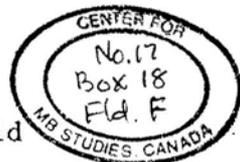


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Seminar Paper: BEING PEACEMAKERS IN THE WORLD OF UNREST

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Introduction

Often in the world, Christians are confronted by systems of social injustice, divisions, struggles, troubles, hatred, violence, killings, etc. In view of these practices, many souls are not at peace. But the Gospel carries a message of love, unity and peace. Jesus said, "This is my commandment; love one another as I love you" (John 15:12).

I. DEFINITIONS OF PEACE

The peace of the Bible has a richness and a diversity of great meaning. It signifies as well the opposition of the state of war to the state of the soul that lives in communion with God. To live in peace is to live in harmony, in understanding with our brothers and sisters, near and far. Paradoxical to this definition, peace means also the state of a person or a country preparing for war.

According to the Holy Scriptures, peace is a grace offered by God. It is a gift of God. Peace is Jesus Christ Himself. He is our Peace. (Eph. 2:14-17) "Being justified by faith, we have peace through our Savior Jesus Christ." (Rom. 5:1) He established peace by the blood of the cross. (Col. 1:20) Jesus Christ is Himself the content and the vehicle of peace.

According to the human concept, it is said that the one who prepares war prepares peace. We all know that one can extinguish fire only with water and not with fire itself. Jesus had also said that all would know you are my disciples, if you love one another.

"You have heard it said: you must love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:43-44).

Jesus teaches us that one must not return evil for evil. He has suffered more than us. But He is the carrier of peace and He loves everyone without avenging Himself against His enemies. He is the true path to peace.

Every language in the world has its manner of expressing it, for peace is a permanent and constant need in the heart of each Christian since His existence on this earth. Each person, each family, and each ethnic group of the world wishes and wants to live in peace.

Unfortunately, among those about whom we have just spoken, in each epoch of history, in families and in the Christian communities, there spring up people who because of their bad behavior, their ambitions and their tendencies, cause trouble, war, and division. All these elements put peace to the test.

II. SOME ELEMENTS WHICH THREATEN PEACE

(Times of troubles, of unrest and of divisions)

We have just said that in each epoch of history, there rise up people who, because of their human desires, their behavior and ambitions, try to provoke troubles, struggles, and unrest, etc.

A. Death

In the Old Testament, looking at the family of Adam and Eve, we there find a very tragic event. Which is it? It is the death of Abel. Cain was the first person in the history of mankind who shed blood in killing his brother Abel. (Gen. 4:8) Cain should have used a divine method for solving this conflict. Unfortunately, in him resided hatred, jealousy, and finally it proceeded to killing.

B. Enmity

"Men become enemies of one another. They quarrel and are jealous. They are divided by anger and rivalries. They divide themselves into opposing groups" (Gal. 5:29-20). In the families in our Christian communities of Zaire, we find a multitude of problems. In our churches there are groups of people in opposition, enemies, jealousies, and lack of unity. The great obligation of a peacemaker is to bring the message of peace.

C. Power-hungry Christians

In our churches there are certain brothers and sisters who are discontent with the work (tasks) that the church has given them. We notice in our churches some Christians who are not happy with the work the church has given them. They become irresponsible of their responsibilities.

Often they covet positions of responsibility. They are unsatisfied, trying to gather a group of people to support them. These ambitious ones are supported, even when they are not in the right. At the end of their efforts there are struggles, power, troubles, and unrest among the brothers and sisters in Christ. The calamity exists at the heart of the church. It (the calamity) kills more than a firearm.

D. Tribalism

Tribalism is a tribal organization which has as its base the tribe. Tribalism is a great plague for the Mennonite brothers and sisters of Zaire. It is to be noted that in the midst of the Mennonite Brethren of Zaire, there are 12 or more tribes. Tribalism manifests itself when the church has a function or a task which requires the choosing of someone to accomplish it. At the moment of electing this person, those who are to do the electing divide themselves into tribal groups. They sometimes forget Christian principles, and at that moment it is difficult to find the solution.

Because of this tribalism, we notice also that it becomes difficult sometimes to correct or to bring back a brother or sister who has erred. For example, the brother who has erred is supported by his tribal group. From that moment on, there are divisions, lack of dialogue, and separation: Christians cannot greet each other. It is a difficult moment. It is the birth of a climate of separation and of lack of dialogue among the children of God.

E. Lack of Dialogue

Dialogue means conversing, getting people together to speak to each other. In a Christian community, it is very necessary to maintain the spirit of dialogue.

Within our churches there are tensions which exist among the parishioners, committee members, deacons and leaders. The Christians cannot get together or converse. One must recognize that these dialogue crises are born from day to day.

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF A PEACEMAKER

Here we want to speak of several characteristics required of a peacemaker.

Following the model of our Lord Jesus Christ, a peacemaker must live the elements of the new world. ("The new world" meaning here the new people of God who form the Church of Jesus Christ.)

A peacemaker is a man of love, of pardon, of gentleness, of peace, of unity, of dialogue, of brotherhood, of truth, of harmony and of non-violence, etc.

The servant of God is called to practice all we have just mentioned above. Jealousy, racism, cold war, violence are avoided in the church.

The duty of a peacemaker

The church is the community or assembly of these who have believed in Jesus Christ as being their Saviour and Lord. Christ Himself is the head. The peacemaker is a man justified, sanctified by God. His duty is that of sharing justice and the peace of God with his brothers and sisters in Christ. He must maintain a relationship among the Christians by reading each day from the Word of God, praying and fraternal meetings.

Love is the great principle which Christ has given so that the world sees us as carriers of peace and reconciliation.

IV. HOW TO ESTABLISH PEACE IN OUR CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN CONFLICT

The way of the cross requires the building of bridges and not the destroying of bridges among the Christians. The resolving of conflicts between children of God requires a spiritual battle.

A. The origins of combat: Isa. 14:12-15; John 8:44

"You have as a father the devil and you want to do what your father desires..." There are rebellious spirits. We must struggle against these spirits. Satan is the prince of this world (Luke 4:6).

B. The weapons of Spiritual combat

We have already said that there are conflicts, divisions, violence and lack of unity among Christians. To return peace to those who are troubled, one must utilize several biblical means to resolve the conflict.

"The night is spent, the day approaches. Let us reject therefore the works which are done in hiding and let us take up the weapons which allow a struggle in the light" (Rom. 13:12).

The peacemaker must in all places be armed for fighting the spiritual combat. Here are several weapons that the peacemaker must possess: truth, justice, zeal for the Gospel of peace, faith which serves to quench dangerous arrows, the Word of God which helps him as the means of spiritual attack.

C. Difficulties which a peacemaker faces

Jesus Himself proclaimed truth and denounced hypocrisy. In wanting to resolve conflicts or to establish peace, the peacemaker will meet with many difficulties. He will be mistreated, accused by false witnesses, and will sometimes be put in prison.

D. The two methods

Often when there are problems among persons, the people try to solve them by two methods. There are those who want to render evil for evil; and there are also those who want to solve problems in brotherliness and in love.

The first method of returning evil for evil is the first method which we call the method of Cain. This method consists of rendering evil for evil. It has as its end dividing, killing, causing hatred, encouraging jealousy, lack of unity, etc.

The second is the method of the cross, or of Golgotha. This method carries a message of love, unity, fraternity, truth and non-violence.

The method that a peacemaker must utilize is the second, the method of the cross (of Golgotha). But one must know that this method costs dearly. It is not easy.

This is why a Christian who wants to establish peace where there is trouble and lack of unity must suffer himself instead of causing other Christians to suffer. He must create a new personality among the people of God who will then form a community of love.

V. SOME REFLECTIONS

The Mennonite Brethren of the world have a great duty, that of looking for the way of peace. We know that the men forming the Christian communities wish for peace but they do not want to live it. When we have accepted Christ, God has given us His peace. In practice we don't live it in our churches. If all Christians could truly believe in God and practice His recommendation, there would be peace among us.

What we notice is that the same Christians who preach the Good News of salvation and peace practice hatred, vengeance, cold war, rivalries, jealousy, divisions, racism, etc.

Conclusion

As Christians our contribution in following the method of the cross should be as follows:

1. We must announce the Gospel of love so that the children of God will be united (John 15:12).
2. We must teach those who have not yet understood that spiritual combat of great worth. In spite of suffering we must struggle in utilizing the method of the cross (of Golgotha).
3. If we want to carry peace to others we must suffer rather than cause others to suffer.
4. We cannot render evil for evil (Rom. 12:12).
5. We must forgive instead of looking for vengeance; pardon the debt rather than claiming payment.

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, the peacemaker must follow the method of the cross (of Golgotha). With this method we can transform the world. By following the method of the cross we carry the elements of the new world (the church) which are: love, meekness, forgiveness, peace, unity, truth, non-violence and trust.

We recall that love was the foundation of the Christian life, we must avoid misery, vengeance, cold wars, social injustice and racism. This is why where there is love there is also peace and where there is no love there is no peace.

We invite the Christians of the world who form the church of Jesus Christ to avoid those who threaten human life and who cause insecurity in the world. Let us utilize the method of the cross for resolving the conflicts in our respective Christian communities.

"Happy are those who obtain peace for they will be called the sons of God" (Matt. 5:9).

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