

A theological reflection

– Anglicans and peacemaking ...

The Most. Rev. Sir. Paul Reeves (Former Archbishop of New Zealand)

The Anglican Church's desire to make its contribution to peace and unity on the Korean Peninsula is impressive. I suspect you will have to walk through a minefield of different opinions, even within the Church.

But that means choices, and faced with choices people need wisdom. Religious traditions are rich sources of wisdom. At our best we are part of a great company of men and women who have stood for justice and compassion, the dignity of individual lives and human solidarity.

Antony, the great spirit of the desert put it well. Our life and our death is with our neighbour. If we win our brother, we win God. If we cause our brother to stumble we have sinned against Christ.

Yet there is a warning. The Bible gives two diametrically opposed images of society; there is Babylon and there is also Jerusalem. Babylon is the city of death; Jerusalem is the city of salvation; Babylon the dominion of alienation, babel, slavery, war; Jerusalem the bride of Christ; Babylon doomed; Jerusalem redeemed. Babylon is distinguished by its materialism, lust and decline of moral values. Above all Babylon places complete trust in its own capabilities and authority.

Jerusalem is the parable for the Church of Jesus Christ, the priestly nation living both within and apart from the nations and powers of this world. Jerusalem of course, is not completely identified with the Church as it is. We know that. But the life of

Jerusalem when we experience or see it is marvelously dynamic, spontaneous, paradoxical, ecumenical, free.

How do we live and act humanly and wisely in the midst of the Fall? That is what Jerusalem grapples with. How do we speak the Truth in the middle of chaos or on a divided peninsula? How do we come to grips with St Paul's words, 'Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind'? How do we confront the noise and falsehood of death with the power of the Word of God? In the words of the Psalmist, 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' (Ps 137).

The Cross reminds us that our deepest blessings may be given precisely at the point where we accept and struggle with the pressures of our limitations. All of us have our treasures in earthen vessels but to Christ it is those who are poor and who suffer who are blessed.

The messenger of the Gospel shares in the sufferings of Christ. God still chooses what is weak in the world to shame the strong (1Cor.1). Christ struggled against all that frustrated God's will but at a certain point he accepted and lived through suffering, thereby overcoming it.

Martin Luther said, 'Living, even more dying and being damned make a theologian; not understanding, reading or speculation'. To say then that the victory is in the struggle means nothing unless you have experienced it. The Cross is not a means of being saved from a situation but of salvation in and through a situation by suffering in it. Here, surely, is another distinction between the two societies.

Babylon makes other people suffer but Jerusalem is prepared to suffer. That is the mystery of our faith.

The Archbishop of Canterbury in his commendation of this Conference quoted the words of Jesus, 'Blessed are the Peacemakers'. Well for four years I have been working in Guyana, South America, a country awash with drugs, where tensions and violence are never far away. We sought to strengthen the Parliament, prepare for a

General election and I had to tell politicians the truth that often they did not want to hear.

But to pursue peace in Guyana is a puzzle. For many it seems a betrayal, settling for less than you would like and giving up power. Peacemakers take risks and they can get killed. We are finding out (and Iraq is a good example) that though we can heal or harm, we can't always win.

Economic super powers believe they last forever but they come and go. If it was Britain in the 19th century, it was the United States in the 20th and now as the United States wanes, China is rising. The point of intersection could be dangerous for North East Asia.

But the great religions of the world emphasize again and again that civilizations survive not by strength but by how they respond to the weak, not by wealth but by the concern they show for the poor, not by power but by their concern for the powerless.

Peace means compromise. We call it negotiation. Nobody gets all they want when they want it. The questions tumble out. Peace can be a painful process. Where do you start? How much truth do we need to know about each other before we begin to reconcile? Can we start before we completely trust each other? Is peace a journey of discovery?

History seems to be an argument that never ends. Archbishop Eames asked what history belongs in the past and should stay in the cupboard or the filing cabinet. But is there not history that continues to destroy us so long as we do not face it? Do we have to revisit everything in our past? My hunch is that we open up all the books provided we have the courage to forgive, to move on and not to get trapped by what happened before.

If we are serious about peace the voice of women must be heard because they are the peacemakers. History shows that tragically men make war not peace.

The search for peace can be slow hard work. It is much better to have modest and reachable goals with some quick gains that could be used to build confidence. A good example is your gift of medical and building supplies to aid flood relief in North Korea.

Christ is often used as the justification of our keen struggle for justice. Yet the Sermon on the Mount is hardly a cry for justice when it says return love for hate, good for evil, blessing for curse.

Christ seems to be calling us to rise above the level of blow and counter blow, strike and counter strike. The level of mercy and love is the only level where justice is even remotely possible.

The Gospel requires us to reach the point where we, and those with whom we disagree, can respond to each other with mutual respect and reconciliation, with forgiveness and love and justice.

If we can't do that we are left with nuclear deterrents, demilitarized zones, massed troops, confused memories and growing resentment. Brutal force solves nothing. Our goal remains Jerusalem, not Babylon.

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