

MAKING PEACE

The Year 2000 has been designated International Year for the Culture of Peace -'to promote values, attitudes and behaviours in people so that they will seek peaceful solutions to problems'. At the start of 2000 there were 38 major armed conflicts in the world. And inter-personal violence seems increasingly visible in many cultures, including our own.

So is this 'Year' wishful thinking? Or even worse, a sick joke? It may seem so, but in fact there are ways in which peace is being 'made', and the Year celebrates these.

Agencies, like World Vision, which are closely involved in assisting people affected and displaced by violent conflict have learned that if we want to help build peace, we must understand what peace is, why human conflicts begin and how they escalate into violence. We need to tackle not only the effects but the root-causes of conflict. This is as true for conflict at the inter-personal or community level as it is at national or international levels. Caring Australians, and especially Christians, can help bring peace at many of these levels.

What a waste!

Since 1983, a staggering two million of Sudan's 28 million people have died as a result of the conflict. The genocide and insurgency in Rwanda over the past decade have killed another million. An estimated half million people have died in Angola's 25-year civil war, several hundred thousand more have been killed in Burundi; and Liberia's civil war took another 150,000 lives. Similar tragic statistics are recorded for other long-running conflicts, such as in Sri Lanka, Columbia, Argentina and Indonesia.

Millions more people have been displaced, their homes burned to the ground, schools destroyed and converted to bunkers, roads and hospitals bombed, crops abandoned as farmers fled for their lives, children kidnapped and forced to become soldiers.

Apart from the senseless suffering and death, wars paralyse development and worsen poverty. Wars 'kill twice' by consuming resources that might otherwise be invested in social and economic programs. The billions spent on weapons could have bought vaccines or clean water.

On top of this are the post-war costs of restoring damaged facilities and the environment, clearing thousands of landmines, retraining ex-soldiers for civilian employment, resettling refugees and providing for the disabled.

Finally, violence wounds the human spirit, leaving both perpetrator and victim traumatised, fearful, and often leads to further violence.

What is peace?

Peace is not just the absence of war or violence. In a statement that might shock some Australians, an indigenous Australian speaking recently at an international peace conference in The Hague said: 'There is no peace in my country.' The Biblical concept of peace, shalom, means well-being in its fullest sense Brian Wren, the noted poet/hymn writer, reflects on this in 'Praising a Mystery':

Say NO to peace

if what they mean by peace

is the quiet misery of hunger,

*the frozen stillness of fear,
the silence of broken spirits,
the unborn hopes of the oppressed.*

*Tell them that peace
is the shouting of children at play,
the babble of tongues set free,
the thunder of dancing feet
and a parent's voice singing.*

Tackling the roots of conflict

Conflict is an inevitable part of human life. But violence does not solve problems - it only creates more. Any momentary satisfaction we gain from getting even' is soon eclipsed by our uneasy conscience or by fear of retaliation from the one we have injured. As for people, so for nations. We must see conflict as an opportunity - to learn, to grow, to negotiate and find creative solutions to problems.

From "GRID" a quarterly publication from World Vision.

Many years ago I heard the former Archbishop of Cape Town, Bill Burnett say: "*We will only have a renewed society to the degree that the hearts of men and women are renewed*". When he says *a renewed society*, he is speaking of a society where peace - *shalom* - exists.

Leo Tolstoy once said: *Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.*

You may also remember the famous letter that G. K. Chesterton wrote to the editor of the London Times in answer to what was wrong with the world: "*Dear Sir, I am!*"

We have at times sung a song in this parish called Let There Be Peace on Earth which starts out like this:

*Let there be peace on earth,
and let it begin with me;*

So be it!

RKF

SOME BE-ATTITUDES

Blessed are those who can laugh at themselves,
they will have endless amusement.

Blessed are those who can tell a mountain from a molehill;
they will be spared a lot of trouble.

Blessed are those who can go to bed and fall asleep without
looking for excuses;
they will become wise.

Blessed are those who know when to shut up and listen;
they will learn new things thereby.
Blessed are those who are intelligent enough not
to take themselves seriously;
they will be appreciated by those around them.
Blessed are those who are attentive to the call of others
without thinking themselves indispensable;
they will be sowers of joy.
Happy are you if you know how to take small things seriously
and large things peacefully;
you will go far in life.
Happy are you if you can admire a smile and forget a frown;
your path will be sunlit.
Happy are you if you can keep quiet and smile,
even when someone cuts you off in mid-sentence,
when someone contradicts you,
when someone treads on your toes,
the Gospel is beginning to penetrate your heart.
Blessed above all are you if you can recognize the Lord
in everyone you meet;
you have the true light and true wisdom.

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