

## Finding the Road to Peacemaking: An Essay

November 1, 2006

Peacemakers continue to seek a guide that will lead us all into a world without war. Part of the search for this guide will require a much larger understanding of what peace is. Peace is a human state completely void of violence in all its forms. This definition appears to be drafted as a negation by implying that peace is not of “violence.” We must be careful of this that we do not turn the idea of peace into some abstract idea that becomes unfathomable and hence, something that cannot be sufficiently concrete to be guided. There must be a continuous dialectic of points of view.

Today, there are at least four points of view representing the way people approach peace. Most these have been given expression by the prevailing arguments over disarmament and militarization. Following is a synopsis:

1. The point of view that appeals solely to non-violent action and calls for complete disarmament. To say total disarmament is the guide to peace is neither practical nor sane. This denies the truth about the condition of this world that has been shaped by Thousand's of years of violence used to restore order and with a form of justice that calls for death to offenders. It also implies that thousand's of war planners in every nation, growing up in a war-fascinated world, would all of a sudden have a change of heart and advocate for non-violence as a strategy. A spirit of non-violence is the ultimate goal but ill-serves society if used as a starting point without reflecting first in planning how to achieve this goal.
2. The point of view accepting what is immediately experienced as real or sees as real and demands an either / or strategy (realist) to deal with conflict. This position focuses on the tyranny of the moment and holds a simple practical logic point of view; e.g., either the light switch is turned on or it is turned off – there is no need to debate the illogical notion of the value of a light switch sitting in the middle position. This point of view as a guide to peace is a no non-sense approach in response to an attack with the threatening of a “ten-times” the pain on the other in retaliation (e.g., preemptive and strategic attack); it renounces conflict as useful for creative ends; engenders fear and terror in its own name, and can become the ruler of hate, suspicion and fanaticism.
3. A point of view that embraces the ambiguous reality of humanity. This point of view cannot have it either / or. Nor can it claim a purest approach to non-violence. Such a guide for peace may leave persons in a state of mass confusion having to live in the face of what seemingly appears to be irreconcilable extremes in approaching conflict. Often those in this position find themselves unable to discern right action in the midst of such great extremes. By themselves they might find themselves caught in a desperate paralysis of no action taken.
4. The point of view of the peacemaker, while maintaining his / her defensive capacity (security) acknowledges the creative as well as destructive tension conflict brings. This approach as a guide to peace seeks to take all possible actions to reduce tensions and to work to bring the extremes closer together. This is the work of seeking peace with a justice that brings reconciliation between

## Finding the Road to Peacemaking: An Essay

November 1, 2006

offenders and victims as the ultimate goal as opposed to a justice of punishment (e.g., a focus on harm done and not violation of law only). Peacemakers proactively work to devise strategies for peace and develop plans for getting there. Courses of action and ultimate goals are a synthesis of all points of view.

As can be seen above, how one group approaches peace depends upon their outlook on peace and what for them, peace looks like. Today, however, the prevailing definition of peace seems to be that condition in human affairs where nations are not overtly involved in violent acts against one another – e.g. physical destructive activity, but what about covert violent actions? Some experts submit that this is simply another name for “cold war.”<sup>1</sup>

Many of America’s leaders managing our nation today grew up during the cold war years where the United States and the former Soviet Union stood toe-to-toe raging silently at each other and prosecuted wars in distant lands. These leaders, as a generation were exposed to the post world war II fears of their parents, were raised in front of television sets watching the age-old hero archetypes such as the Lone Ranger and others, and led to embrace the form of retributive violence still believed today as being restorative. This is a false ideology that continues to justify the idea that there are bad people out there that can be dealt with only through violence, and only then can society be at peace. This then justifies the need for maintaining large investments in the capability of force of arms.<sup>2</sup>

The cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union ended. Where then is the peace? Cold peace (cold war) is insufficient in realizing peace. Such a concept relies totally on the threat of or limited use of violence to realize / maintain peace. The amount of violence required becomes the measure for cold peace and that is a false measure of peace. Cold peace requires there be an enemy that can be turned into an object of concern stripping that enemy of its humanity. This then opens the way for justifying the idea of retributive justice, saying, “Violence can make communities whole again.” But the truth is, all wars must end because wars are not sustainable and the violence used ultimately leads all to gaze into the abyss of their own destruction. This is not peace and never restores people / groups / communities / nations in right relation again.

Peace rightly understood, therefore, is a discipline in its own right and deserves to be elevated to the same level of status as war, or use of violent retributive justice. Peace

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<sup>1</sup> The Nature Of Peace and Its Implications For Peace Education, Leo Sandy and Ray Perkins, Jr., Plymouth University, 2001 An Essay.

<sup>2</sup> Merton, Thomas, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, Orbis, 2004. Merton outlines Augustine’s perspective on the collective nature of nations on pages 39 and 40. Here he cites Augustine’s assessment that *peace is the tranquility of order ... but the notion of order in any given society depends on the love which keeps that society together...that earthly society (in contrast with a heavenly society) in its common pursuit of power, and gain has only an apparent order – it is the order of a band of robbers in cooperation with one another. Seems then that nations can collectively be likened to a band of robbers in alliances for self-serving ends. Even so, says Augustine, order is better than disorder.*

## Finding the Road to Peacemaking: An Essay

November 1, 2006

rightly understood is proactive and seeks collaborative methods to build bridges between enemies. This kind of peace might be named “hot peace.”<sup>3</sup> Hot Peace to be real must address societal needs for safety, sanitation, and security and acknowledge the truth about our human condition – that in the dance of life we step on one another’s feet and bump into each other as we twirl to life’s music.

Such life is filled with conflict and hot peace embraces the reality that conflict is a requisite for evolutionary growth of all societies and seeks to openly manage conflict to creative and good ends. This kind of peace calls for methods and disciplines that are concrete and particular and work within the context of human relationships. This requires that peacemakers connect the spiritual and the material aspects of all humanity and their processes.

A part of being human is wrapping your life around systems of belief. These beliefs become the systems that shape the corporate story of the community in which we live. Such beliefs over time become the stories that give identity to the community and also brings shape or form to the inner life or soul of individual persons. Our living out these beliefs and story gives definition to the spirit of who we are. “We are not the sole authors of our own story and what does come out from us are the decisions we make in the face of the graces (gifts or blessings) we receive.”<sup>4</sup> Some say grace and goodness comes from God; others say from family and / or society. The point is, we are shaped by someone, something – a context outside ourselves that has and continues to engage us in conversation through experience.

These experiences then become the stuff of religion for religion is that human institution designed to help realize the life experienced in the soul of the person as well as the soul of society. It must be understood that the “law of the soul is every bit as demanding as the law of society.”<sup>5</sup> If not this, religion becomes ritual and ultimately violence. However, most experiential processes forming the person and people begin with a system of beliefs that are fundamental to the identity of the group. These beliefs provide a lens through which to understand (1) one’s place in the group, (2) standards for behavior, and (3) location out of which to self- actualize.<sup>6</sup> Many people do not get past the first two steps.

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<sup>3</sup> ibid

<sup>4</sup> Chittister, Joan, O.S.B., *Rule of Benedict*

<sup>5</sup> Sanford, John A., *Dreams, God’s Forgotten Language*, Harper San Francisco, 1989, page 36

<sup>6</sup> Self-actualization requires a desire to wrestle with the inconsistencies of life lived in community. Why? Belief is inadequate to interpret life’s experience by itself. Needed is a process to take the initiate in society from a sense of certainty to a matter of faith (the role of religion) whereby the person can live life in the face of uncertainty, no longer relying on just believing but reaching. This is how one grows. When persons are unwilling or are not permitted to differentiate their beliefs they are likely to turn their systems of

## Finding the Road to Peacemaking: An Essay

November 1, 2006

Religion and its defining roll must be celebrated as a source for healing conflicts that have become dysfunctional, even though some have used it for unholy ends. Religion as the bedrock of human identity and connection with something or someone greater than themselves possesses a great capacity that can give birth to the forces of healing and transformation. Therefore any peacemaking guide must include partnering of religious leadership (spiritual) with secular leadership (material).

Sovereign nations by themselves do not possess the character to be peacemakers.<sup>7</sup> They do not possess the spiritual or material energy or resources to accomplish the task. They are too easily ruled by fear and thus react out this fear in dysfunctional ways contrary to the goals that can realize peace. Peacemaking is a spiritual discipline.

As organic human entities, nations fall prey to institutional survival instincts and too quickly forget whom they are called to serve – of course there are those institutions that have been created to serve their own idolatry.<sup>8</sup> Even so, it is safe to say that national government behavior, on an international level, can be likened to a functioning family of dysfunctional siblings. This is why an agreed upon peacemaking guide (rules of the household) is important as well as an adjudicating adult body politic. Without this, planning for peace will always be at the expense of fighting over turf.

Nations plan for war, prepare and practice war. Such an energy consuming process creates a capability that provides purpose for its people. Nations do not plan for peace; therefore they will find no purpose in making peace. As such, nations will act out their conflicts through the means that actualizes their highest purpose – in this case, war or threat of the use of armed force.

On the other hand if nations have a spirit of planning for peace, acts of violence both outside and inside their borders could be minimized. Such a statement does not deny the need for the armed capability as a form of security – but refuses to accept that security serves a purpose other than as an instrument of peace and only peace.

It is not possible to achieve peace without also achieving security. *Peace* and *security* are two sides of the same coin and *truth*, *mercy*, and *justice* are the elements that comprise the alloy of the coin. The challenge is the proper mix of the ingredients ... too much of one and not enough of another and the coin is either too soft or too brittle.<sup>9</sup> The operational dynamic here is a balancing of *power*, *pleasures*, and *possessions*<sup>10</sup> – all

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beliefs into their ultimate concern (ritual). When this happens, the community begins to fizzle.

<sup>7</sup> Please refer back to footnote number 2 for some of the rationale for this assertion.

<sup>8</sup> Nationalism is a form of worship. It is worship of nation and national identity.

<sup>9</sup> Insights gained by serving on The Peace and Global Security Task Force of The Virginia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, chaired by Bishop Charlene Kammerer (2005-2006).

<sup>10</sup> For more on this see *A New Day*, by Chester Michael (The Open Door, Inc) where he reflects theologically on the gifts of power, pleasures, and possessions.

## Finding the Road to Peacemaking: An Essay

November 1, 2006

necessary and good but operationally dysfunctional when used to exploit a majority for the good of the few.

Peace or security does not result from a flip of the coin. In many ways the fullness of our humanity is imprinted, gnarled, engraved, and / or etched in the metals used. It is in how we look at the coin that may cause tension among us. Although we as a culture might choose to address these concerns on a personal level, our humanity calls us to speak as a community filled with the expectations of peace and we are invited to this task called conferencing – to “be in conference” with one another and never giving up. Warriors conduct wargames as means for conferencing – peacemakers might want to look into peace games as a means to evaluate their strategies and to assess their operations.

Security, then, is an operation that creates the safety of space where the principles of *Just Peace* can be realized. In this framework, use of force is justified only to the end of optimizing the integration of the measures of the peacemaking guide recommended here, called Just Peacemaking.

*Just Peacemaking, or Just Peace* as a theory can be realized as an art that links restorative actions to strategy and pushes against the forces that abstract (dehumanizes) human life. Operations of *Just Peace* seek to provide a safe environment where people can collaborate on courses of action resulting in solutions maximizing their potential lived out in context of community. *Just Peacemaking* asks Pacifists to fulfill what their name implies (peace making) and calls Just War theorists or war-planners (often mis-identified as hawks) to identify what must be tried before “last resort” of engaging in war and define “intention” of using force to restore a just and lasting peace.<sup>11</sup>

Taking the Just Peacemaking theory and, turning the nouns into verbs, it becomes possible to turn theory into practice. The resulting framework, based on several ingredients, becomes a framework for listening and guide for peacemaking: desire for mercy; a vocation of humility; responding out of compassion (willingness to engage suffering honestly); doing justice as an act of love for the other (seeking to restore victim and victimizer in new relationship); inviting; seek to be concrete and particular (human rights); and seek to understand the historical formational contexts.

People have a desire to believe in their institutions that are called to serve the greatest social needs. Most place their faith in them, but true faith is “believing” grounded in experience, tested by reason and tradition. Experience proves that institutions, being fraught with human passion, choose to deny that passion and serve only through reason. Such reason sees only the objects of need – material resources, and turns a deaf ear to the greatly needed spiritual side of human life lived out in context of conflicted community. What does it profit a peacemaker to gain the world and in so doing lose the soul? Peacemakers will find that the guide to making peace requires an integration of the spiritual and the material. The principles of Just Peace, above, can help to light the way.

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<sup>11</sup> *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices For Abolishing War*, edited by Glen Stassen. The Pilgrim Press, 2004. Page 13.