

Pieces of Peace: Until Lambs Live with Wolves

Personal Reflections

Rachael Weber

Hobbes and Calvin stand in the yard with dart guns and helmets. Hobbes asks, "How come we play war and not peace?" Calvin replies, "Too few role models." After assigning sides, Calvin explains the roles "We're at war, so if you get hit with a dart you're dead and the other side wins, ok?" Hobbes understands and they point their dart guns at each other; both shoot at the word "go". The scene ends, Calvin contemplates, "Kind of a stupid game, isn't it?"

Comedy often best reveals tragedies; as in the above scene from the comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes* by Bill Watterson, sometimes we are able to illustrate truths much better through the eyes of a child. Isaiah prophesies, "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them" (Isaiah 11:6, NIV). The innocence of a child and the wisdom of the elderly - can we combine them with a view of history and vision for the future to connect the pieces of peace?

Origins

"Mankind must put an end to war, or war will put an end to mankind...War will exist until that distant day when the conscientious objector enjoys the same reputation and prestige that the warrior does today." John F. Kennedy, Speech to UN General Assembly, Sept. 25, 1961

As children, my brothers and I were not allowed to have water guns (if they were shaped realistically as guns) nor army figurines, etc. My parents desired that we not trivialise or glorify weapons or war in innocent play. Adventurous games and brave imaginings could take other forms, but not at the expense of "death" to figurines representing humans. My parents had faith behind their stance, that all violence, within the family and personal circles, or broader, as a result of war, was wrong. I grew up in both the Mennonite and Brethren Churches, two of the three historical peace churches (along with the Quakers). All three of these churches emphasise a pervading peace, which includes resolutions that all war is wrong.

The Mennonite, Quaker, and Church of the Brethren denominations all emerged as a part of the Anabaptist movement during the Reformation. Among other reforms, the Mennonite, Brethren, and Quaker



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churches were committed to nonviolence and believed in religious tolerance. As a result of their beliefs in separation of church and state and commitment to nonviolence in all aspects of life (including resistance to military service), all faced persecution from the state sponsored churches throughout Europe, and many left for the United States and other parts of the world. Menno Simons, seen as the founder of the Mennonites, spoke of the call of the church, "We who were formerly no people at all, and who knew of no peace, are now called to be ... a church ... of peace. True Christians do not know vengeance. They are the children of peace. Their hearts overflow with peace. Their mouths speak peace, and they walk in the way of peace."

Stepping even farther back, it seems the early Christian church did not participate in war until after Constantine. Justifications for war and violence came as Christianity became the official religion in many areas, tying its practices with state power (or vice versa). As Christ admonished Peter's defense in Gethsemane, so the early church refrained from violent response, dying for their faith. On the cross, He cried, "Forgive them, they know not what they do." Reflecting upon Ivanovich Karamazov's monologue about the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky's *Brother's Karamazov*; would, or do our lives and churches kill Him again?

When Military Service is Mandatory

"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace" Luke 19:42

Differing from many European countries, all 18 year-olds in the US must register with the military, but military service is only mandatory during times of draft, when the voluntary army is not sufficient for

the national government's demands. The last draft occurred during the Vietnam war. In the US, members of the peace churches do not have to join the military in times of draft, but have to do other forms of service. The military does not always accept one's word or church creed only, but sometimes sends a board of people to interview friends, family, etc, to see if one truly does have a peaceful lifestyle before accepting exemption from military service. My grandfather had to go through one such draft board, and was exempted.

At a Brethren youth gathering, Baptist pastor Tony Campolo gave a touching speech about how the gospel of peace influenced him. Tony also stood before a draft board, but was not a member of one of the historical peace churches with an official theological stance to fall upon. He, however, explained to the board, "As a Christian, I am called to live my life as Jesus did. I could train with the other soldiers. I could fly a military helicopter, but when given the order to push the button to drop the bomb, I would have to ask myself, what would Jesus do? And I couldn't do it." The leader of the draft board exploded, "Of course Jesus would not!" and Tony was exempt from military duty.

In 2006, one columnist for the Boston Globe argued that if the US had instituted the military draft for the war in Iraq, it would have ended much quicker as many more young people within the US would have been affected. She correctly wrote "[a] key difference between Iraq and Vietnam is the country's ability to keep this war at a convenient distance."² And this seems to be the problem with all wars and forms of violence. Do we see our enemies as humans also?

When Hannah Tervanotko, the former regional secretary returned from a trip to the Global office in Geneva, she told me about a pin someone showed her. During WWI, WSCF distributed these pins to SCMer's to wear on their uniforms. Then when they met in conflict, on either side of the lines, they would recognize that they came from the same Christian organization.

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Truth and Inherent Value

Calvin looks up to his father; he is reading the newspaper in his armchair, “Dad, how do soldiers killing each other solve the world’s problems?” His dad looks up from his paper, clearly puzzled and out of creative answers. Calvin continues, “I think grown-ups just ACT like they know what they’re doing.”³

At the WSCF-E conference, *Religion-Source of Peace or Violence*, we began with a role-play as an “appetiser” to introduce the topic. We were asked to draw a picture that describes ourselves and then to share about them. After explaining them, we were to exchange papers with someone else in the group. Then, the leader instructed us to ruin the pieces of paper.

Most of us listened, and we crumpled up the paper, though no one tore them to pieces. One person refused to destroy the drawing. Personally, I did not place much value in the icebreaker game or in our personal colored pencil sketches on the piece of paper, so despite a little hesitation, I did not mind crumpling it up. But, the person in our group who refused to crumple it, valued the sketch as an expression of its artist, and had a larger vision, speaking up both against the requirements of the game and the violence of destruction. This activity led to discussion about religion, peace, and violence. What do we value? We concluded with the idea the faith itself is a source of peace, but that religion is misused and turned into a source of violence.

Where do we place value? Do we see the image of God in the government? Or in each individual human being

fighting on the other side (and on our side)? Murder is considered wrong, one human against another, but in the context of nation on nation, society finds it justified and noble (and holds governments but not individuals responsible).

Defense is a natural reaction, yet violent defense is not necessarily justified. The Pharisees were ready to fulfill the law, stoning the adulteress, and Jesus stood, drawing in the sand. Reality and ideas are intertwined, the truth, if truth, should not need violent defense, but should naturally come when one seeks. Our defenses seem to grow stronger when we are afraid of differences, yet truth does not change, only human understandings of truth.

In *Lilith*, George MacDonald vividly describes the earthly cycle of war and redemptive violence. Mr. Vane, the main character, finds himself in a battle field of skeletons. They fight each other, “not one fell or ceased to fight, so long as a single joint held two bones together.” They fought on top of skeletons in a cycle of madness; he continues: “The holiest words went with the most hating blow. Lie-distorted truths flew hurtling in the wind of javelins and bones. Every moment some one would turn against his comrades, and fight more wildly than before, *The Truth! The Truth!* Still his cry...None stooped to comfort the fallen, or stepped wide to spare him.”⁴

This cycle continues, even in wars we feel are justified. In our world today, it seems the escalation of weapons is the surest way of governments to preserve peace. But violence begets violence (are we learning from Gethsemane, Afganistan, Iraq, and the violent conflicts throughout history?).

Yet, throughout history, religions, individuals, etc. have used the truth as justification for war, death and the majority of society in given settings goes along with it. As Herman Goering, a Nazi war criminal, said, "Of course the people don't want war. But after all, it's the leaders of the country who determine the policy, and it's always a simple matter to drag the people along whether it's a democracy, a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism, and exposing the country to greater danger." As an American and a pacifist in the US when the Iraq war was "sold" to the population, this feeling rang true.

Swords and Plowshares

They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will no longer fight against nation, nor train for war anymore. Isaiah 2:4

Living peacefully does not mean living passively; the resistance to war and violence should not be because of fear of one's life or injury but because of fear for the other's life or injury. Christ says: "Blessed are the peace-makers"; those who make peace, not merely live in peace. I walk down the street to work

and try to stay unnoticed. I desire to stay out of conflicts in the work place or among friends. But this is different from actively seeking peace and pursuing it (Psalms 34:14). The call to peace is a call to action. Peace is not separated from justice.

Throughout history, one can read powerful examples of peaceful resistance and revolutions that changed history, from Christ to Ghandi, from the abolition of the slave trade in the UK to the ending of apartheid. One, obviously, does not have to be a member of these historic peace churches to live peacefully, follow peace theology, etc. Many organizations, denominations, faiths, gather formally or informally and stand for peace.

To give one example, with other partners, the Mennonite, Brethren, and Quakers together formed Christian Peacemaker Teams, which make it their goal to personally "get in the way" to prevent violence.⁵

At my orientation with the Brethren Volunteer Service, we visited a Jonah House Community in Baltimore, a member of the Plowshares Movement working for nuclear disarmament. In this house, Christian activists of all ages lived together in community. Carol Gilbert, a 59 year old Dominican nun, had recently completed a sentence in prison for demonstrating against the US's stockpile of nuclear weapons. Together, with two other sisters in their seventies, they cut a single row of links in a fence to enter a missile silo in Colorado, housing a weapon illegal under international law, and using baby

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bottles of their own blood, drew crosses throughout the facility. They wanted to raise awareness of the large stockpile of weapons stored in Colorado during the time when the US was searching for weapons in Iraq, feeling they needed to symbolically spill their own blood in a symbol of solidarity with those who might die as a result of the weapons. She spoke about her reasons for this type of demonstration, the court trial, and the time in prison. The three nuns refused to pay the court ordered restitution to the air force, knowing the money would support the military, and, at the time, Carol was unsure if this would mean more jail time. Meanwhile, she was living in the Jonah house and “instead contributed hours working in the prison laundry, hours knitting scarves, mittens and sweaters for the poor, and continued running their free food pantry for the hungry”.⁶ A startling statement, seeming foolish and yet radical and raising awareness. Ezekiel lay on his side for over a year as a sign of the injustices Israel committed; Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow. Prophet after prophet dramatically challenged the status quo of society. Overturned tables in the temple were not appreciated either.

What is our call as Christians in the face of violence? When faced with violence or injustice, can we ask ourselves the somewhat clichéd question in today’s media and pop culture, but a question that should challenge to the extreme and that we should reclaim, “What would Jesus do?” His nonviolent response still changes lives and history. But he also warned that we must “count the cost” (Luke 14:25-34).

In Christianity, we have promise of hope in the result of nonviolent action through the resurrection.

Christ stood for unconditional love and nonviolence with the assurance of resurrection, prophesying to those who did not yet understand that he would rise again after his death. This hope in resurrection, seen in the illustration of His ultimate use of nonviolent power, gives the peace stance its ultimate lasting power. His extreme love of his enemies led to his death, but still resulted in life.

Isaiah prophesies that one day they will “pound their swords into plowshares”, turning them from weapons to tools of harvest. Wars emerge when one nation wants or needs something that someone else is protecting. There can never be peace while the majority of the population of the world is starving and a small portion is obese (whether we are referring to food, money, resources, etc).

At a recent gathering of the volunteers from the Brethren Volunteer Service, one volunteer in Northern Ireland mentioned a group of protestors doing the “peace wiggle.” We looked at her, “the peace wiggle?”

“You know it—all of you must know it. It’s what you do when you are arrested.”

We stared at her with blank faces. Others in the group may have, but I had never protested anything to the extent that I might risk arrest.

“You know, if they arrest you when you are protesting. You lay limp, not resisting, not helping them move you. It’s very difficult to be moved, especially if you wiggle a little.”

In Jesus’ parable, as the persistent widow received justice from the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8), we need more persistence. Perhaps we need a bit more of the “peace wiggle” in our societies or daily lives.

(Endnotes)

1 My description of the illustration of a comic strip by Bill Watterson, the quotes are his!

2 http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2006/06/22/a_military_draft_might_awaken_us/

3 See end note i.

4 Macdonald, George. *Lilith*.

5 <http://www.cpt.org/>

6 <http://www.jonahhouse.org/Nuns/rcassieOct06.htm>

http://www.jonahhouse.org/sacred_earth.htm

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Peace as a lifestyle – Rachael Weber: Reflections on Peace



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