



**THE METHODIST PEACE FELLOWSHIP**  
with the  
**FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION**

## **PEACE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

No 24

Spring 2007

### **“Peacemaking: A Christian Vocation”**

An introduction by Rev. John John Johansen-Berg

#### **The Report**

This Report on Peacemaking was produced in 2006 by a joint Methodist-URC working party, which consulted with people of other denominations. Its remit was to produce a report that would assist church members and church leaders to reach ethical conclusions on the complex issues surrounding action on issues relating to war and peace in the 21st century. The group included some who had seen service in the armed forces, a military chaplain, experienced peace activists and several academic theologians. There was then plenty of scope for lively debate but the result was to find a surprising consensus on the Christian vocation to peacemaking.

The background to our discussions included one of the most destructive centuries in human history, the 20th century with its two world wars, many other conflicts and the advent of nuclear weapons. We entered a new millennium with hopes for global peace, following the end of the Cold War but all too soon there were acts of violence and the declaring of a "war on terror", with dire threats of a clash of civilizations. In February 2003, the largest ever mass demonstration took place in 800 locations, uniting faiths and nations in a global opposition to the planned invasion of Iraq. Church leaders and councils in the UK had opposed going to war without the support of the United Nations and many people supported this stand. The invasion went ahead and results are still being assessed by military, civic and ecclesiastical authorities.

#### **The Bible**

Clearly an important aspect of our study and discussion revolved around teaching found in the Bible and we saw the main emphasis as affirming that the will of God for his people is justice and peace but we acknowledged that there are many problematic texts, including many illustrations of military conquest and even some horrifying massacres. We were quite clear that the account in I Samuel 15, v.3. of Saul slaughtering the Amalekites "both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey", cannot be used to excuse or justify such widespread killing in today's world, since it would be described as genocide and condemned. There are also some New Testament texts that need some explaining if we are presenting a case for non-violence. References to swords and to conflict, even within households, and the violent imagery of war in the Book of Revelation, all remind us that there are problem texts to be evaluated and that the New Testament testimony is not to a superficial concept of peace at any price but a commitment to peace which challenges injustice and seeks to express God's reign.

#### **The Church**

Another important subject to study was the change in attitude in the early Church. In the first three centuries most Christians were opposed to the use of violence and did not join the Roman army for this and other reasons. From the fourth century when the Emperor Constantine was converted,

Christianity became the established religion in the Roman Empire. Christians now had a stake in the State and so many were willing to serve in the army. Some of the early theologians in the Church, such as Ambrose and Augustine and later Aquinas and Grotius, drew up principles to limit the worst excesses of war and to give guidance on the declaration and conduct of war. This new approach and the acceptance of "Just War" principles, now the majority view in the Church, could lead to excessive use of violence as in the Crusades with the appalling violence towards Muslims and some Christians in the Holy Land. On the other hand the Church has never lacked a witness to pacifism, through the Mennonites, Society of Friends and some within mainstream denominations. In the world of today we find this witness to peace and justice as the will of God expressed in a variety of religious faiths. The concept of the Just War has been challenged especially since the horrific violence of the Second World War and the advent of nuclear weapons. Though the Group regarded the principles of the Just War as an important area of study we were also mindful that there was an Anglican/ Roman Catholic Study group on this subject in the period in which we were meeting and that they would cover that subject in greater detail than was possible for us. We arranged for their Secretary to speak at one of our meetings and shared views. Our deliberations led clearly to a conviction that there is now a deep desire to find effective ways of overcoming oppression and maintaining peace without resort to war.

### **Peacemaking and discipleship**

Practical peacemaking as part of Christian discipleship takes many forms including preaching and prayer, non-violent demonstrations and long term campaigning, political lobbying, support for organizations working for reconciliation in areas of conflict, and acting alongside people of other faiths on peace issues. One other vital area in the current situation is involvement in environmental issues. Competition for resources will become a major source of conflict; oil and water are the two that are in the public mind as oil guzzling nations look for new supplies and the appropriation of water from Palestinian areas by Israeli settlements is a matter of bitter dispute. Global warming, already at crisis point, because of the heavy carbon footprint of the developed world, threatens the future of the whole planet. Small island communities that have done nothing to create the hazard will be amongst the earliest victims, being forced to leave their place of birth. The stark warnings of the prophets and their call for justice and true peace were never more needed.

### **The Christian and the State**

Some in our group saw themselves as "critical companions" of the State, which has to prepare for defence needs ahead of possible scenarios. Following the teaching of St. Paul there is a role of praying for and supporting the State officials when they are rightly exercising their role. Whenever there is a perception that wrong decisions are being taken or wrong action suggested, then there is a moral responsibility to express disagreement. The replacement of Trident is an example of this. Our working group felt that the churches should argue against it so opposition to the replacement of Trident became one of the strong themes emerging from our Report. The protection of citizens is seen as a rightful role of government and this in most modern States includes police and military provision. Whilst most in the churches are willing to support this role, they expect the highest standards of moral integrity in both armed and unarmed units.

### **The Practice of Non-violence**

The working group recognized that in affirmation of the God of peace, most church members are able to unite around a focus on non-violent solutions to pressing problems. Gandhi is a fine example of teaching and practice based on Satyagraha (truth force) to signify the non-violent route to justice and peace in India. Martin Luther King used the same approach to obtain civil rights for the oppressed black people in the American South. There are now many examples of non-violent transition from oppression to freedom, such as Poland, the Ukraine and the witness of individuals

such as Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma and Thich Nhat Hanh in Vietnam. The New Testament gives a basis for non-violent action in Jesus' way of non-violent resistance that expresses strength of character in the expression of love. If we approve this way of non-violent conflict transformation we should urge the provision of resources for it both from Government and Non-Governmental Organizations.

### **Reconciliation - The Church and Non-Government Organisations.**

The Report gives examples of NGO projects, including the work of the Centre for Peace, Non-Violence and Human Rights in Osijek, Croatia, which has a listening project to build trust in the community. I have visited this Centre because we have a partnership between the Community for Reconciliation through its work in CFR Footprints and its project "Touch of Hope" led by Clive Fowle, a Methodist minister; the project aims to heal the hurts of war by training programmes across cultural divides. Another example is the work of Peacebuilding, Healing and Reconciliation Programme (PHARP), led by its Director, Felicien Nemeiyimana, a Baptist Minister, a programme of training in the Great Lakes area following the genocide in Rwanda and Burundi. This too has a partnership with CFR and having shared in Courses in Nairobi and Kigali, I can vouch for the Christian and practical basis of this training which seeks to transform situations of conflict into new ways of co-operation through a process of forgiveness and new beginnings. Another example is the support given by Methodist and UR Churches to the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel. Such work is extremely challenging and its Christian basis and provision of practical resources are keys to its effectiveness.

### **Terrorism**

In the contemporary situation the response to terrorism is an important area; the Group were clear that war is not an effective response. It is more appropriate to examine the root causes of terrorism and to address them. Where there was a great degree of agreement was in the area of arms limitation, especially observing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in an even-handed way and maintaining a ban on anti-personnel land mines and cluster bombs. We recognized the complexity of situations like Rwanda where the deployment of a more adequate UN Peace-keeping Unit might have prevented the grim genocide of which warnings were given before the event. We recognized too that sometimes a military unit can be in a place and time where quick and effective action can be taken in a situation where lives can be saved as in the example of Sierra Leone where a British military unit intervened to rescue a UN Peace-keeping unit, disarmed and captured by rebels.

### **Conclusion**

It is inevitable in a group as representative of mainstream churches as ours that we could not come down as firmly as many would wish one side or the other in the varied responses to war and peace issues. On the other hand we did reach a remarkable degree of consensus on the tasks before the Church in the Christian vocation to peacemaking.

In summary, we identified four areas; to foster just and peaceful relationships; to be active in resolving conflicts; to support strategies for preventing violent conflict; and to engage with political leaders about how and when force might be threatened or used. These are spelt out in some detail in the Report and a discussion guide has been produced to assist any churches wishing to follow up the Report through discussion in informal groups or church meetings.

I am satisfied that if the Report can be seriously studied and its way of peacemaking adopted by our Churches, we shall have moved a long way in the direction of becoming peace churches with a commitment to following the teaching of Jesus.

**John Johansen-Berg.** (Co-Convener of the Joint United Reformed Church and Methodist Working Group which produced the Report "Peacemaking: A Christian Vocation.")

The full report is available at £3.50 from the Methodist Publishing House - Mail order 4, John Wesley Road, Peterborough PE4 6ZP. Tel 01733 325002 to order. Online catalogue; [www.mph.org.uk](http://www.mph.org.uk). P&p 1.50 for 1 £3 for 2+

### **Prayer**

"God blesses those people who make peace.  
They will be called his children!  
God blesses those people who are treated badly for doing right.  
They belong to the kingdom of heaven."

*Matt 5:9-10 (CEV)*

God of peace and harmony help all your people to see that making peace is better than preparing for war. May those who accept the role of peacemaking as disciples of Jesus the Prince Peace know the blessing of being your children.  
Lord Jesus Christ, by your suffering you reconcile those who have been enemies and estranged, bringing peace to people far and near. Give strength to those who suffer and are persecuted because of their work for peace and justice.  
Holy Spirit, inspire in men, women and young people visions of a new and peaceful world. May the fruits of love, peace and kindness flourish in their hearts.

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### **Note from the Secretary of the Methodist Peace Fellowship**

Those of you who get this by post will recently have received Peace by Peace from the Fellowship of Reconciliation and I hope you think it is a good magazine. With it was a letter explaining that Alan was taken ill just over 12 months ago. Some may not know that he is nearly 92 but until then had the energy and sharpness of mind of someone much younger. He is no longer able to undertake P21C but I have had a cheerful letter from him recently. The MPF Executive has been considering how we should continue and this is the first of the new series commissioned from different writers.

Some readers of P21C receive it by email. They will not have received a copy of Peace by Peace. This may be viewed on the FOR website, [www.for.org.uk](http://www.for.org.uk) and I will try and attach an electronic copy with this.

We are badly in need of some younger members for our Executive. I hope some of you may consider joining MPF and volunteering! The AGM and evening meeting, which this year will be a musical offering are at Bispham Methodist Church, Blackpool, Monday 9<sup>th</sup> July, 4.30 p.m. followed by tea and the meeting at 8.00 p.m. with Rev. Peter Sharrocks and Rev. Dr. Andrew Pratt, the meeting to be led by Rev. Dr. Kenneth Greet.

Requests for more copies, notification of change of address etc. to Rev. Maurice Wright (MPF Secretary), 3, Cornwall Drive, Bayston Hill, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY3 0EP, 01743 873633 [mhw@surf.free.co.uk](mailto:mhw@surf.free.co.uk). If you have email and would prefer to receive P21C that way please ask, it will save postage. Donations to cover costs should now be sent to Mr. John Young, Shalfleet, Dunston Heath, Stafford, Staffs. ST19 9AN. As we commission articles from different people, not all Methodists, there may be fees in addition to postage and printing.