



THE METHODIST PEACE FELLOWSHIP
with the
FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION
<http://www.mpf.org.uk>

PEACE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

No. 36

July 2010

Peace in our time? Let's be incredible!

Until recently Director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation

Over the past five years the Fellowship of Reconciliation has focused on two specific areas of militarism - the arms trade and more recently, the growing use of armed drones. We have chosen to focus our energies on these issues for a variety of reasons, but perhaps the single most important reason is that working on these issues allows us to speak about the wider issues of how we are to live together in our world today. I'm not for a moment suggesting that our campaigning on these issues is not sincere. Rather, we campaign on these issues because it allows us to speak about the sacredness of life, global security, justice, what it means to be a Christian and how we can build "a world order based on love"¹ as well as the specifics of the arms trade or armed drones.

Pressure

Increasingly however there has been a pressure not to speak about those wider things. Increasingly there has been pressure – from funders, from the media, from sister organisations - to be realistic and to focus on 'what can be achieved'. To me, over the past ten years or so there has been a real shift away from speaking about the big picture – for us war and peace - to focusing instead on small, narrow 'realistically achievable' aims. This is in part, I believe, a reaction to New Labour phenomenon of 'targets' and 'measurable outcomes'. Whilst this way of thinking has brought an important rigour to work for global change, it seems that it has also brought rigidity. While it's very important that we ground ourselves in reality, its equally important that we be unrealistic. By that I mean, of course, that we be prophetic.

In relation to the arms trade for example, there are many good organisations, not least Oxfam and Amnesty International, who are campaigning on the issue. However they will not call for an end to the arms trade itself, not because they do not believe that would be a good thing, rather because it is not realistically achievable in the short-term. They feel, I believe, that to make such a call would lose them credibility with those in power, and they would not be able to report a 'success' to their funders and donors. Far more credible, it seems, to call for reform and regulation of the arms trade, rather than an end to the practise itself. Christian peacemakers too face this crisis in credibility. In order to be a player in the political game, credibility is extremely important and believing and working for an end to war in our world today is literally incredible.

Prophetic

However our calling as Christians and peacemakers is not to be credible in the eyes of the world, but to be prophetic. Our calling is to speak about the division and alienation in the world – what we would term sin – and how we can overcome that sin by loving God and loving our neighbour.

¹ From the FOR Basis - see the MPF membership form online www.mpf.org.uk.

There is of course much more to say about this state of affairs but in the short space that I have I would want to make two brief comments.

Firstly, as Christians we are working to a different understanding of time and time-scales than the world. We know that the principalities and powers have been defeated by the Prince of Peace but it has yet to work itself out in history. Also in relation to time, we, as a community of peacemakers, are part of a movement that stretches itself way back in time and way forward into the future. Our work for peace and justice must have an understanding of that view of time. I am saddened by people who expect – and are then subsequently disappointed – when ‘peace’ is not achieved after a particular campaign, or event or witness. Our work for peace is the work of our lifetime. Indeed we could say that the work for peace is the work of time itself. We long for the ending of time and the coming of the *eschaton*² and our daily work for peace must be seen in that light and not in an effort to gain worldly credibility.

Idolatry

Secondly, as Christians, we know who it is who will bring peace. It is not us and our work alone that will be effective in ending war, violence and conflict. Our human tactics, lobbying and strategising, our organisations and campaigns are created by imperfect fallible, sinful human beings. Our work for peace and reconciliation must be inspired by the Holy Spirit through being rooted in prayer. However we must be careful here. It is not faithful in any way, I believe, to be completely disinterested in the effects of our work. We must simply not make effectiveness into an idol. As Daniel Berrigan said “The good is to be done because it is good, not because it goes anywhere.”

As Christian peacemakers we may sometimes (often!) be out of step with how the world sees peace and seeks peace. I believe that our calling is to be prophetic and to witness to the peace of Christ rather than to be realistic and seek peace in the world’s terms.

Chris Cole.

Chris Cole has recently stepped down as the Director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. He will continue to campaign, write and act for peace. For more details see www.figtree.org.uk.

A Departing Reflection

Ex-Secretary of the Methodist Peace Fellowship

I almost called this “A Parting Shot” but thought better of it. Apart from the military connotation it suggests I am retreating defeated. Chris’s word is very timely since he has set a lofty view of what it means to be victorious in Gospel peace-living terms rather than worldly ones. As Paul wrote, “when I am weak then I am strong”. It is a paradox that attaches to non-violence and the like and finds its basis in the Cross.

You all know how difficult it has been finding my successor therefore I am glad to commend Rev. Marie Dove to you and Mr. John Cooper who will take over the P21C responsibility. Marie has an impressive record in peace matters and is proud to mention her association with Donald (Lord) Soper. John Cooper currently holds two part-time jobs. The first sees him employed by the Methodist Church to work for their ecumenical team working in public issues, the second sees him in employment with the FoR where he raises funds for the International Peacemakers Fund, which enables practical peacemaking overseas. You may well see an improvement in the layout of P21C as he is more computer-literate than I am. We welcome suggestion of subjects and writers for future editions.

² From the Greek meaning “end” and used technically as the end of this age when the reign of God is established and often represented dramatically by Christ’s return in glory.

As I look back I see that we have been involved in various wars on my watch! Afghanistan and Iraq I believe were mistakes and in many ways have made things worse. I recently reviewed a book for the Methodist Recorder called “Peacemakers - Building Stability in a Complex World”. Peter Dixon gives a fair treatment of the Just War and adds a welcome third criterion to *Jus ad Bellum* (rules about embarking on war) and *Jus ad Bello* (about the conduct of war), *Jus post Bellum* (after the war). Nevertheless we believe it is a blunt instrument where real peace is the aim. Apart from all the arguments about the legitimacy of the war in Iraq the failure to prepare for the aftermath of the invasion was criminal. Afghanistan will probably prove to be as ill-advised and no more successful than previous incursions. Only today I heard there are “trillions” of pounds of minerals in the country. Could they be Afghanistan’s “oil”? The Chinese are there making a start on their exploitation. The conflict in the Balkans was so complicated I cannot claim to understand all the issues or judge the outcome, but a lot of people died in feuds whose roots were in the distant past and involved religion and ethnicity. Paddy Ashdown’s book “Swords into Ploughshares” sheds some light but also highlights how difficult peacemaking is, especially after a bitter conflict. Sierra Leone is a case perhaps giving some credibility to intervention (more about that in Peter Dixon’s book) and points to possibilities of a better use of a skilled force in restoring peace when invited.

I find myself wondering how we can ensure young people today face up to the challenge of the Gospel in the matter of peace and war. I am the last secretary of MPF to have been a Conscientious Objector. When I was 17 we had a Methodist Home Mission Caravan Campaign in Dawley. One of the young ministers was a convinced pacifist. I remember being challenged by him on top of The Wrekin, a prominent hill in Shropshire, and then thinking seriously about it. I read “Enthronement of Love” by John Ferguson which influenced me and when I was doing Local Preachers’ exams or shortly after I read Professor G H C MacGregor’s book “The New Testament Basis of Pacifism”. I was convinced. I had already registered for National Service. It was fairly simple to indicate whether you were prepared to go into one of the services or to be considered as a CO but I threw the local official into a tiz by announcing I wished to change my registration from one to the other! There was much consulting but finally it was accepted, I had my tribunal and was allowed to work for two years on a farm. How can we replicate the challenge then faced by eighteen year old men? I am pleased that through the R. J. Barker Fund we have enabled a good number of young people to experience the issues of peacemaking, conflict resolution and reconciliation. We don’t know however, in most cases, whether the Gospel challenge of pacifism was faced specifically. We used to have a contact person for Colleges and Universities but failed to maintain that, on my watch. It seems to have gone off the road which reminds me that on the way to speak to students at Nottingham University on peace I blew a cylinder-head gasket at Cannock and never got there! Truly we can say without a vision the people perish and will continue to do so. How then can we help people to catch this vision? Chris has already quoted from the FOR Basis and it is worth adding a longer quote

“That, in order to establish a world order based on Love, it is incumbent on those who believe in this principle to accept it fully, both for themselves and in relation to others, and to take the risks involved in doing so in a world which does not yet accept it.

That therefore, as Christians, we are forbidden to wage war, and that our loyalty to our country, to humanity, to the Church Universal, and to Jesus Christ our Lord and Master, calls us instead to a life-service for the enthronement of Love in personal, commercial and national life.”

We also have to compete with the claims of the military. The previous Government introduced Armed Forces Day (today as I write). It was feared the country, because it was not sympathetic with some of the campaigns, was not supporting the forces. The terrible injuries (not always reported) and deaths have highlighted the price many have paid. It is right we should support casualties and their families. The new Prime Minister has indicated his policy is to crank this up and talks of success (sic). It is difficult to make the case against militarism as a means of solving problems and to campaign against the arms trade, as represented

by BAE systems and its dabbling in corruption to further sales, when support is being drummed up for the military.

Dr. Alan Litherland whose idea and vision P21C was hoped that those who started off reading it would want to go on to embrace pacifism and join MPF while he respected those who find that extra step one too far. After all Jesus said somewhat enigmatically, "whoever is not against us is for us" (*Mark 9:40*). He put in immense work to compile a mailing list of 1700+ without the use of a computer! He wrote to Local Preachers and Ministers all over the Connexion and many others, some outside Methodism. But a list like that decreases through death, old age and illness and that has happened. One of the things I have been able to do is to introduce computing into the MPF administration so that a considerable number of people now receive it by email which saves postage. Those who give me an email address may end up receiving P21C! I am pleased to claim to have designed the MPF logo though I am not quite sure how I did it since I have been unable to reproduce the process! Email means that Agendas and Minutes go to a wider number of people.

Could those who are already readers of P21C commend it to others, forward it by email and put it into the hands of young people. There are usually spare copies for those without email. A number receive several for copies for fellow LPs etc. The church or circuit photocopier provides the opportunity to produce more copies locally - there is no copyright! Put them into local schools and libraries.

I have to bring to you the uncomfortable fact that it costs money, something like £1000 per issue. Most writers write for nothing though we have made donations to organisations they represent or the cause they espouse; so it is primarily printing and postage. The latter has increased. We do not know how many people we reach by having them available on our website.

This brings me to the point. We do not have much money in the pot at the moment and John Young, our treasurer has asked me to make this special appeal. It cost £4,000 per year and we have around 1500 readers. Some are not able to contribute and we do not want cost to be a barrier to anyone receiving it so we are grateful to those of you who contribute more. It would be a pity if John Cooper's tenure of office was very short!

Thanks for all the encouraging and appreciative messages and letters you have sent me over 14 years.

Love and peace **Maurice**

Prayer

Father of us all, God of love, justice and mercy, help all who seek to understand peace-living as an authentic expression of the Gospel in our violent world. When you wanted to speak to us in our own language you did so in Jesus, of you but one of us, who was recognised as the Prince of Peace riding a lowly ass and not a war-like horse. May we ever see in the Cross the way of non-violence and triumph of weakness over the might of empire. So give us hope and by your Spirit help to be "incredible". **Amen.**

Thanks to Chris for his contribution this time. We have been a bit afraid of Pacifism. A few years ago the late Rev. Douglas Wollen resigned from MPF because we were not pacifist enough. Chris has served FOR well and been a great support to us when we have asked.

The new Secretary is Rev. Marie Dove MA, 17, Fangdale Court, Bridlington, YO16 6RS Tel: (01262) 679612. Email marie.dove@g.mail.com. John Cooper may be reached via FOR office, 01865 250 781 and cooperj@methodistchurch.org.uk. The MPF membership leaflet and back copies of P21C can be found on our website for those able to access it. It is www.mpf.org.uk.

Donation may be sent to John Young, Shalfleet, Dunston Heath, Stafford, ST18 9AN

I enclose £..... as a contribution towards the costs of "Peace in the 21st Century". [Cheques payable to the Methodist Peace Fellowship, please. If you would like a receipt, please tick here.....]

Name..... Address:.....
.....Email/Tel.....