

PEACE MAKING

The Peacemaking packet arrived and with its arrival many thoughts, memories and concerns about the role of Presbyterians in peace keeping were stirred. Of course, as usual, the materials in the packet were first rate. The peace making offering and its uses were explained. Also, the packet contained a splendid Manual, a Peacemaking study based on Isaiah. The Manual provides a detailed guide which makes the study challenging for both adults and youth. In fact a group consisting of both adults and youth would find it interesting and informative.

But beyond the materials of the Packet, memories and thoughts about the role of Presbyterians in support of peace, and law and order were stirred. A historian once said that, "John Calvin settled America..." Perhaps that was a bit of overstatement, but it is a fact that followers of Calvin performed a marvelous role in creating the social, economic, and governmental climate of this country. For example, as the settlement of the Country moved from East to West, Presbyterian leaders were always on the scene to help new communities establish law and order facilities, churches, schools, and hospitals.

In turn, we are reminded that it was the 'congregations' that dispersed the social energy of Presbyterianism! The congregations provided the spirit, the conviction, the energy, the will, and the ability to facilitate the social concerns. Somewhere along the way we lost some of that 'congregational social energy and zeal' and by the 70s we were undergoing membership and financial loss. The source of Presbyterian strength has always resided in the congregation.

That is the 'Calvinistic taint' that has always guided the Church! The Presbyterian 'ethos' tends to involve members in social, economic, political, and religious realities. The degree of this involvement tends to vary from time to time. Since the mid 70s we have been in a 'low slow mode'. There are some signs that this is changing.

The lack of peace in the world may account for some of the change. War! Wars and rumors of war! Is war a necessary or inevitable evil? Is there such a thing as a 'just' war? I was in a conference where a noted Presbyterian was speaking. He said, "It is true that the wicked flees when no one pursues, but he makes better time when someone is after him..." The speaker was talking about WWII and the necessity of removing Hitler. Is it possible to even imagine what Europe and even the world would be like if Hitler had not been stopped? Hitler would have eliminated the Jews and all non-conforming religions. I clearly remember a young German soldier, in a group we were rounding up, approaching me and pointing to the Cross on my uniform saying: "I don't like that..." As long as we have dictators supported by armies, we face the prospect of war or slavery.

Recently I read in the misery sheet (Newspaper) that I often read, about a conference composed of three different religious groups. They were discussing war and they were all opposed to the war in Iraq. The main speaker is reported to have said: "Peace among religions is the only way to peace..." That is a lofty idea and it might work, but it isn't going to happen soon nor as the result of circulating a petition. It is just possible that the peaceful religions might have to declare

war on a raging 'dictator'. At least one segment of the peaceful religious group might be disturbed by a declaration such as that of the President of Iran, declaring that Jews should be blasted from the face of the Earth! One member of the 'peace among religions group' said: "We're trying to start a new expression of what religion is about..." Do not place too much hope in the achievement of the goal of such groups. We live in a world where some religions teach that the most direct road to heaven is that of strapping on a bomb and blowing up yourself and a group of others. The road of peace and religion is, indeed, a rough one!

One of my duties while in Germany, WWII, was that of checking the outgoing mail of soldiers. The purpose was to see that the positions of troops and military plans were not revealed. I never encountered anything of that nature. But the remarks of one soldier, in a letter to his wife, I have never forgotten. She was nagging him about something and he was asking her to stop the nagging. His plea concluded with: "... I want to enjoy this war in peace..." Joy, peace, and war, what a combination! But the soldier's remarks actually revealed the huge dichotomy of the in-depth meaning of "Peace".

Jesus Christ is reported to have said to his followers: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you..." (Jhn 14: 27) It is also reported that Jesus Christ told his followers that they would encounter wars, and rumors of war and would be personally persecuted but 'peace' would not depart from them. Like the soldier's plea for peace while at war, Jesus Christ was speaking of a complex and redemptive concept of PEACE. Jesus also said, "I and my

Father (Creator) are one..." He was speaking of a 'time and eternity' relationship. He was speaking of more than mental peace, he was talking about 'soul' peace... Not as the world gives!

Now, back to Presbyterians and the pursuit of peace. We are best at it when congregation are chief activists in the efforts. Likewise, Pastors and Sessions are the chief motivators and inspirers of congregations. Contemporary conditions of the Church are emphasizing congregational activities. And an encouraging fact is that congregations are responding! Across the Church significant outreach programs are being sponsored. Riverside Presbytery has congregations that are promoting peacemaking activities. They may not be called by that name, but remember, peacemaking is in the sharing of a component of the Gospel. Peacemaking is redemptive. Be sure to tell the Magazine, Presbyterians Today, about your outreach activity

"Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles."
Emerson

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