



Issues

Office of Peace and Social Justice
Diocese of Gary

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Become the peace we seek

The warrior's bow shall be banished, and he shall proclaim peace to the nations (Zech 9:10)

If by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live (Rm 8:13)

Although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike (Mt 11:25)

An article by Israeli author and journalist David Grossman appeared in *The Washington Post*, June 23, 2003, "An Eye for an Eye, Forever?". He described a meeting in London which brought together Israeli and Palestinian supporters of peace who spent three days conferring with the leaders of the formerly warring factions of Northern Ireland. The Irish Catholics and Protestants who had been murdering each other just a few years ago—sat next to each other and spoke the language of peace. They expressed their grave concern that the conflict might easily break out again.

At one point, one of the Israelis asked, "How did you do it? How did you manage to pluck yourselves out of hundreds of years of violence and hatred and put yourselves on the track of dialogue? What was the moment at which you understood that there was no other way?"

David Ervine, a Protestant leader who was once caught with a live bomb in his hands, looked at the man who had been his enemy and said, "There was a moment when I simply understood that this war cannot be won."

I was reminded of Ervine's comment when Rev. Ian Paisley, the hardest of hard-line Protestant Unionists, and Gerry Adams, the very incarnation of militant Irish Catholic republicanism, held their first face-to-face talks and agreed to form a joint

administration of Northern Ireland. Peter Hain, Britain's Minister for Northern Ireland, said, "Today, the clouds have lifted and people can see their future."

In Northern Ireland, it took 800 years to reach the conclusion that "this war cannot be won." Does that mean we have another 700 years like this one to wait for peace between the Israelis and Palestinians? Is there no one in the Middle East who would long to have Zechariah's prophecy become a reality? Imagine Jerusalem as a genuine city of peace—no

longer a place for suicide attacks, car bombings, and retaliatory strikes; all the cities and villages in Israel free of the warrior's bow, the violence of war banished forever!

Today television and newspapers reveal the ongoing horror of it all; the day-in, day-out, brutal conflict between Israelis and Palestinians; the enduring lessons of hatred by word and example; the seemingly endless images of unrestrained grief and anger mingled together. Zechariah, his word of messianic peace proclaimed some twenty-seven hundred years ago, is still read, still proclaimed, still awaiting hearts to receive the message—wherever in our world the "warrior's bow" continues to rule supreme.

In the book, *Living Peace*, Jesuit John Dear,

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respected leader of the ecumenical peace movement, writes, "Perhaps more than anything, our world needs peace. We all need it, within our own broken hearts and broken families, in our bloody city streets and corrupt government offices, and in war zones and refugee camps... As the great pioneers knew [e.g. Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton], we must seek peace at every level of life, beginning within ourselves. Their example summons us to turn to God, allowing God to disarm our own hearts so that we can become instruments of God's disarming love in the world. They have called us to become the peace we seek."

There can be no rejoicing while we continue to resist the call to peace. The prophet's promised messiah comes among us in justice and meekness, forswearing all the trappings of power upheld by force of arms; his dominion extends from "sea to sea, to the ends of the earth." He is the peace we seek and the peace we fear to find because it demands of us complete conversion of the heart. He comes to show us through his words and deeds how peace is possible. And peace is only possible when we "become the peace we seek."

The messiah of peace is not a talisman, a lucky charm, or a magic wand that will change hearts against their will. He surely challenges the habits of fear that extend the wars within us to become the wars outside us. His presence exudes the divine *shalom* come to earth to help us see what our eyes steadfastly refuse to see—that like all things given, the gift is received only with open hands, hands free from clinging to weapons of destruction in the name of an ever-elusive peace that is no peace. Peace that depends upon battles waged and won depends upon the myth of winners and losers. In war, no one wins. All are losers.

Peace is never about "the other" (whoever the enemy of the day may be). Peace is about "us" together. It will never be enough to sit down at conference tables unless we collectively admit the wars and violence that live in us mar life to the core. Peace is about the way we treat one another in our homes, our work places, our schools, our governments, our churches and synagogues and

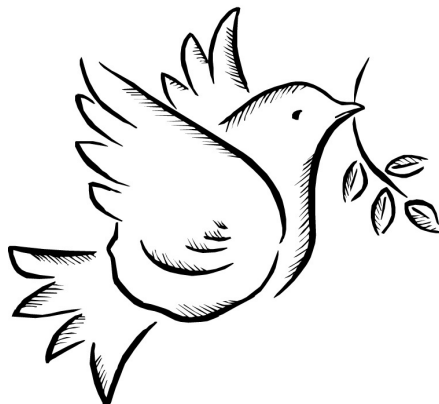
temples and mosques. Peace calls for nothing less than the healing of humanity. Wherever there are signs of such healing, they are but the beginning of a process that shall one day, so God says through Zechariah, reach to "the ends of the earth."

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus prays, "Father, Lord of heaven and earth, to you I offer praise; for what you have hidden from the learned and clever you have revealed to the childlike" (Mt 11:25). What is it that the "childlike" know that "the wise and the learned" do not? The clue to the answer is in the word child. To be like a child is to face the world in simplicity, wonder, and trust; to be confident that our parent is there to lead the way. It is to hold on to our parent for dear life, risking nothing to offend, yet certain that forgiveness will always be there as we stumble toward repentance. If we were all childlike, we would know our divine parent, God, who, no matter how named or how called by us, is One and the Same.

If we were childlike, we would recognize in our common Life-Source, our sisterhood and brotherhood, that we are truly kin to one another, members of the one and same human family. The inner life of peace means we act from a deep inner conviction about who we are, that each one of us is a beloved child of God, a human being called to love and serve other human beings.

The burden of war and violence weighs down the human spirit. It is the worst form of slavery because it convinces even the wise and the learned that it shall ever be so, that the best we shall do is plug holes in the dam that barely restrains the flood always threatening to overwhelm the world. Jesus invites us to exchange that burden for another—the burden of peacemaking whose example is Jesus himself, the one who is "meek and humble of heart," the one whose love brought him to the ultimate sign of fear's violence and love's triumph—the Cross, the place of contradiction in the heart of contradiction itself.

Nice-sounding words, Jesus' promise of rest, of an easy yoke and a light burden. But what do they mean as we face the harsh truth of human cruelty and hate, knowing that many who did as Jesus asked paid the price with their lives? This world of ours seems



to repudiate such meekness; it lives the paradox of killing the bearers of peace and later erecting memorials in their honor (cf. Mt 23:29-31). Better their death, some believe, than their gadfly presence in the halls of power. Such attitudes fail to reckon with the persistent voice of truth which acts of violence can never silence.

Jesus' promise offers no guarantee against suffering or persecution or death. In the Sermon on the Mount, he told his disciples: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me (Mt 5:9-11).

If there is no promise of protection from persecution and violence at the hands of others, then the question remains: How is Jesus' "yoke...easy, and [his] burden light"? The answer is simple in theory, difficult in practice. It is the yoke of divine love and the burden of compassion for other people. Everything about Jesus was a manifestation of the gift of himself given first to his Father and revealed through his deeds and words of love. This kind of love makes all the difference in the world. It is a love that resides in the heart and has no room for war and violence.

Saint Paul reminds the Christian community in Rome, "You are not in the flesh, on the contrary, you

are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Rm 8:9). Those who come to Jesus because they labor for peace and are burdened with the demands of peace will find in Jesus that "new spirit" which empowers them to wear the yoke of love and helps them to maintain that attitude of nonviolence within themselves. Without this spirit, all their efforts will fall short of their goal. Further on, Paul writes, "If by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Rm 8:13). The "deeds of the body" are antithetical to the search for peace. The spirit must lead the way.

That's it –what Zechariah's "just savior" announces, why he banishes "the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem", why "the warrior's bow shall be banished, and he shall proclaim peace to the nations" (Zech 9:10). This is what Jesus means when he says, "I am meek and humble of heart. My burden is easy and my yoke is light". The exchange of force for the force of love. In Paul's words, love putting "to death the deeds of the body" (Rm 8:13) and, as Zechariah proclaims, declaring the life of peace whose dominion, we believe, "shall be from sea to sea, ... to the ends of the earth" (Zech 9:10).

An eye for an eye—forever?

✠Thomas M. Gannon, S.J.



I-CAN

Indiana Catholic Action Network

Catholics like you can make a difference

Shaping public policy is the responsibility of every person. Our democratic form of government and our Church both call us to become involved.

The Church is not trying to form a religious voting block...nor tell people how to vote. But it is analyzing political issues from a social and moral point of view. Now, through the Indiana Catholic

Action Network (ICAN), you and other Catholics can have a direct impact on legislative action.

Issues important to the Church are selected by the ICC Board of Directors for further research. The ICC staff then researches and drafts a position statement based on the teachings of the Church as well as pertinent secular information.

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How Does I-CAN Work?

I-CAN members can follow the Church's position on each issue and House and Senate activity as it happens. Knowing the Church position and following the legislative process, I-CAN members can contact legislators to voice their opinion. Before a vote on a key issue takes place, Action Alerts are sent through the Network notifying each member to immediately contact their legislators. Networks are groups of people which respond to Action Alerts from the ICC.*

* www.indiana.nasccd.org

What Can You Do?

1. Access the ICC website and read the I-CAN Update to stay informed

2. Become part of a network. Contact Heartland Center to join the Diocese of Gary ICC Network. When alerts are received from the ICC main office in Indianapolis, network members are contacted via Email. If you are already on the network, be sure to notify Heartland Center if you change your Email address!

3. Contact your legislator to voice your reasons for supporting or opposing an issue
4. Give feedback to the staff regarding the ICC issues, positions and alerts

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