

Worship and Action Update, 5/30/03

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

Where can engaged and engaging voices of the peaceable kingdom be found in our society and polity? Often messages focused on reacting to the dominant forces of the day reverberate as negative, oppositional and defensive, as merely differing on details. The voices that resonate among Friends call affirmatively to our own vision and experience. Yet we can hear timbres of the peace testimony in many voices in our midst.

Last week we offered the insights of three resonant voices. This week we offer two more perspectives that combine a focus on pragmatism with a basis in faith.

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Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, the Archbishop of Westminster, England, gave a lecture at St. Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace on May 14, 2003, entitled "Christians Confronted by Violence," in which he offered reflections on a faith-centered approach to addressing organized violence in our midst. He spoke of the need for imagination to conceive of "space ... where people in conflict can be invited, and where fear and hatred can safely be laid (for a moment) to one side; and where new possibilities can begin to be imagined, discussed, chewed over, tried on for size."

It seems to me that the closest we have got, in modern times, to a recognition that co-operation, respect for universal human rights and self-determination of peoples, and the rule of law (i.e. justice) as the key to building, and then preserving peaceful co-existence between nations, is the UN Charter. The Charter was signed in 1945 with the express intention, to quote the very first words of the preamble, of saving **"succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind."** This was a noble purpose then. It remains a noble purpose now.... And we should resist the temptation constantly to blame the UN itself for the failures of its members.

My first observation then is that if we do not begin our task with a real sense of humility, whoever we are, I fear those efforts will be doomed to failure.

I greatly admire the St Egidio movement which for nearly 40 years has been working for peace. It began in Rome in 1968 with groups meeting for shared prayer and reflection on the gospel. It now has 40,000 members in 60 countries. It was responsible for creating the space - a safe (I like to think a sacred) space - in which for the first time the enemies of Frelimo and Renamo could meet, in what proved to be the beginning of the end of the civil war that had torn Mozambique apart for so many years. The

beginning of the end of war, the beginnings of the peace was a meeting around a table; a meal in fact. Sounds familiar doesn't it?

The St Egidio community explains that **"the means to this service to peace and reconciliation are the weak means of prayer, of sharing difficult situations, meeting and dialogue."** Andrea Riccardi, its founder, says: **"If you want to make peace you have to try to reason with those making war."**... So how do they do it? Another founder member Mario Marizziti says: **"Our strengths have been an extensive network of personal contacts, credibility from not having a vested interest economically, and no ulterior motives. Our credibility comes from St Egidio's weakness."**

In short peace, and non-violence, is about poverty not power. It's about finding the ways and means to moving beyond prejudice, fear, hatred, vengeance, and the pursuit of self-interest. It is about the common goods of humanity, of communities and peoples. These are goods which, for complex historical, cultural, religious, national or ethnic reasons may require extraordinary patience, tenacity and good will to discover. And then yet more patience, vision and good will to develop to the point where they are accessible, and acceptable, to all sides in a conflict....

It seems to me that we are back again to the requirement - not so much for vision, something about which people, including politicians, talk a lot, and rightly so - but for imagination.... [I]magination will **always** be required if ways - new ways - are to be found to move beyond enmity, hatred and the desire for revenge. You can't have vision if you haven't got imagination. Imagination **prefigures** the unveiling of vision. Before there can be a political process there needs to be the creation of a non-political, or at least non-partisan, space. A space has to be imagined where people in conflict can be invited, and where fear and hatred can safely be laid (for a moment) to one side; and where new possibilities can begin to be imagined, discussed, chewed over, tried on for size.

Something new, unpredictable, and probably risky needs to happen between people before the professional managers of peace processes - diplomats, civil-servants, negotiators and so on - are invited in. St Egidio's Riccardi reflects: ***"How can we change the world if we don't change the hearts of people? We believed the Gospel had those words that could change the hearts of people."***

(Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor's complete lecture can be found at:
<http://www.rcdow.org.uk/archbishop/> .)

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In April, Bob Edgar, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, offered a policy paper, "A Vision of Peace in a Time of War: The Need for a Peace-Centered Foreign Policy," in conjunction with addressing the Joan B. Kroc institute for Peace and Justice. The paper seeks to offer "a practical and activist foreign policy of peacemaking."

In an interdependent world, we need to work with others to reach solutions to the many challenges we face.... We need to mobilize and invest our tremendous resources as a nation on behalf of conflict prevention, rather than conflict reaction. We must adopt a foreign policy based on a civil and faithful respect for multilateral institutions, for human rights and for a fair and sustainable global economy.

A foreign policy of peacemaking must be rooted in some simple but fundamental principles. A peace-centered foreign policy must be:

- Internationally engaged;
- Rooted in multilateral cooperation;
- Committed to collective security through arms control, deterrence, disarmament and international cooperation;
- Dedicated to our best principles;
- And, perhaps most importantly, proactive not reactive.

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In the aftermath of this war, in addition to engaging to win the peace in Iraq, where does a policy of peace take us? ... I believe there are three particular campaigns we need to wage: 1) We must thoroughly rebut and prevent a recurrence of military action according to the preemptive war doctrine. 2) We need to articulate our vision - and take action - to engage proactively in peacemaking to prevent conflicts like this in the future. 3) We need to mobilize a broad peace coalition, drawing on faith communities and other advocates for peace and justice, to build support for a foreign policy of peace, rather than a foreign policy of military preemption.

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For many of us the past few weeks have been a harsh reminder that our vision of peace is not yet the dominant view in our land. But I have been encouraged by the tremendous outpouring of concern we have witnessed. The past nine months have been a time when the voice of faith has been heard in the land. Many of us have emerged with our faith tested and

strengthened, our resolve to be a prophetic voice undiminished, and our organizational capacity enhanced....

As a person of faith, I believe we must first of all pray together for an end to the policy of seeking violent solutions to the world's problems.... Then empowered by prayer, we need to work for peace in practical ways to make a just and lasting peace a reality. Our system of government is responsive to those who organize and publicly express their views. Those of us who want to make a foreign policy of peace a reality must work to translate our views and hopes into politically relevant actions.

(The complete policy paper is available at: <http://www.nccusa.org/news/03news47.html> .)

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Friends in NYYM and friends everywhere continue to witness and worship for peace. Activities in the coming weeks include:

- Steve Baumgartner, Director of Pendle Hill, speaks at Poughkeepsie Meeting on Sunday, June 8th , following the 10:00 meeting for worship, on "A Quaker-Led Interfaith Peace-Building Network." Further information, such as travel directions, is available by contacting Viola Hathaway at 845-255-8145.

- Powell House offers a retreat/workshop on "Peace Within and Without" on June 13-15, led by Michael True and including meditation, reflection and discussion on the contributions of psychology, history and literature for deepening a spiritual base for resistance and renewal. Information is available by calling or emailing Powell House - 518-794-8811 or www.powellhouse.org .

- 15th Street Friends Meeting hosts a discussion on "National Policy in a Time of Crisis: How Do Quakers Respond?" with Kathy Guthrie, Field Program Secretary of Friends Committee on National Legislation, and Tim Barner, FCNL's National Director of Area Campaigns, on Sunday, June 29th , at 12:30 PM (following meeting for worship at 11:00 AM), at 15th Street Friends Meeting. For more information contact Christiana Sutor at 212-662-8977 or at csutor@sutor.com . (Or see the flyer on the NYYM website at www.nyyym.org/events/15st-fcnl29jun03.html .)

- Amnesty International's Urgent Action Network (UAN) is a global network of citizens who are available 24 hours a day to intercede on behalf of prisoners of conscience. To mark its 30th anniversary, a donor has agreed to donate one dollar to Amnesty International for every new sign-up to Amnesty USA's Human Rights Action Center (HRAC), which was launched in 2000, based on the 30 years of experience with the UAN, utilizing new technologies to mobilize more people, more quickly via email and the Web. Joining costs nothing, and \$1 will go to Amnesty in your name. Join at <http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org/ctt.asp?u=249653&l=5573> . (More about the Urgent

Action Network is available at:
<http://takeaction.amnestyusa.org/ctt.asp?u=249653&l=5574>)

Peaceable greetings,

Linda Chidsey, Vicki Cooley, and Fred Dettmer
NYYM Worship and Action working group

*How happy are the poor in spirit;
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Matthew 5:3 (The Jerusalem Bible)

The first generation of Friends did not have a testimony of simplicity. They came upon a faith which cut to the root of the way they saw life, radically reorienting it. They saw that all they did must flow directly from what they experienced as true, and that if it did not, both the knowing and the doing became false. In order to keep the knowledge clear and the doing true, they stripped away anything which seemed to get in the way. They called those things superfluities, and it is this radical process of stripping for clear-seeing which we now term simplicity.

Fran Taber, 1985