

Missio Dei

Exploring God's work in the world

Peace Church, Mission Church: Friends or Foes?

Alan Kreider

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Preface

Have peace and mission become the “Jacob” and “Esau” of church practice?

A tension exists in the church between peace/justice and mission/evangelism. It is a real tension, but an unnecessary one. Like estranged siblings, peace and mission need to sit down together and work at reconciliation, as hard as that may seem. For too long they have been at each other’s throats. Neither has taken the time nor effort to understand the mind of the other. Both are afraid of what the other might do to them. Yet both are in desperate need of new understandings. Unless the two are reconciled, the church will continue to find itself divided into separate camps — those committed to mission and evangelism, and those committed to peace and justice. What hope is there for “the twain” to meet?

The two polarities within the church feed off stereotypes of each other. The stereotype of the person concerned about peace and justice, for example, goes like this: the peacemaker is a bleeding-heart liberal who is worldly, concerned more about society than the church, has a low view of Scripture, puts peace issues above God, and winces at the very thought of doing anything that smacks of mission and evangelism. The stereotype of the person concerned about mission and evangelism, on the other hand, is of a Bible-thumping, narrow-minded conservative, who alone has the truth and sneers at the very thought of peace and justice having anything remotely to do with the gospel.

Peace and justice cannot, however, be reduced to liberal causes. They are integral to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Likewise, mission and evangelism are not simply practices for conservative Christians. They express God’s compassionate heart for the entire human race, the world God has so lovingly created. Stereotypes only serve to label, denigrate, and place others at a distance from us. They create a pseudo sense of detachment

from critical issues that various factions within the church must engage in with other parts of the body.

Peace/justice and mission/evangelism need each other to be authentic and whole. Their spiritual passions must mingle together and form a common fire. Without peace and justice, the work of mission and evangelism can become a form of spiritual escapism from the world's problems, focusing on personal salvation without social transformation, and saving the soul apart from the embodied human life. Without mission and evangelism, on the other hand, the work of peace and justice can simply become another form of secular humanism, emphasizing social change grounded in human effort, all the while remaining detached from the good news of God's grace and coming reign.

It comes down to this: Mission without peace is salvation without ethics. And peace without mission is ethics without salvation. Working in mutuality and a spirit of accord, peace and mission can both be strengthened, just as two cords become stronger when they are intertwined.

Reconciling peace/justice with mission/evangelism may be as difficult as bringing Jacob and Esau together. But we must remember that, although Jacob and Esau were at odds with each other, they were brothers nonetheless, members of the same family, children of the same mother's womb. Keeping peace and mission separate as dichotomous realities or, worse yet, pitting one against the other, only robs both of the blessing to be had of working in concert as twins, rather than ending up by stealing the birthright from both.

May we long and strive for that day when peace and mission spy each other coming down the road and run to hug one another, reconciled and made whole in warm, familial embrace.

Leo Hartshorn
Minister of Peace and Justice
Mennonite Mission Network

Peace Church, Mission Church: Friends or Foes?

Alan Kreider

What do you say when someone says, “Tell me about your church?”

- ◆ “It’s on the corner of Third and Jefferson streets.”
- ◆ “Its worship is really meaningful, week after week.”
- ◆ “Its members were helpful to me during my depression.”
- ◆ “I can be real in my church, because people have been vulnerable with me.”

On the other hand, your experience with church may be less encouraging than this.

- ◆ “In our church things are tense.”
- ◆ “There are groups that don’t talk to each other.”
- ◆ “There seems to be no connection between our worship and the real world.”

Whatever words, positive or negative, we may use to talk about our church experiences, it is interesting to note that the word “peace” rarely shows up in our descriptions. We may feel peaceful when we go to church, but most Christians wouldn’t think of describing their church as a “peace church.” Yet this is precisely how believers in the first centuries thought of their churches.

Justin, a second-century teacher martyred in Rome, stated a common early Christian belief: That the vision in Isaiah 2:2-4 — where God anticipated the transformation of swords into plowshares — *had been fulfilled in the church!* According to Justin, Christians had come to Jesus to learn how to live. “We ... delighted in war,” he reported, “in the slaughter of one

another, and in every other kind of iniquity; [but we] have in every part of the world converted our weapons of war into implements of peace — our swords into plowshares, our spears into farmers' tools — and we cultivate piety, justice, brotherly charity, faith and hope, which we derive from the Father through the crucified Savior.”¹

For many early Christian thinkers, God’s peace had come through Christ, and the church was evidence of this.

Justin knew God had done something new for humanity through sending the crucified Savior Jesus. He had caused people from many nations to gravitate to Jesus, the new Zion, from whom a new vision of life has emerged. The result was a people of peace made up of former enemies. People of different tribes and nations, who once hated each other, now shared life together, dismantled things that divided them and cultivated justice and family feeling.

The life of the transnational church was proof that the Messiah Jesus had brought peace, which was being experienced now. Justin kept repeating: Isaiah 2 has been fulfilled in the church, people have been changed, and have converted their instruments of hostility so they might become a people of peace. For Justin, as for Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen and other early Christian thinkers, God’s peace has come through Christ, and the church is evidence of this.²

Acts: The Origins of the Church — and of the Peace Church

Where did Justin get this idea? From the church’s beginnings in Acts! There the founding of the church is the product of God’s peacemaking activity. Pentecost gathered Jews of different cultures and languages, “Hellenists” and “Hebrews” (Acts 6:1-6), who experienced struggle as well as unity in the Messiah Jesus. But the big challenge lay in claiming the Abrahamic promise of blessing to all nations (Genesis 12:3) so that Jews and their Gentile enemies could be reconciled in a “bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Getting this started took a dramatic divine intervention, the story of which shows how central peace was to early Christianity.

The key events are recorded in Acts 10. They are so familiar that they no longer surprise us. But how surprised Peter must have been. Here he is, a Galilean in Caesarea (10:24ff.). Peter, whose friend Jesus had recently

been crucified as a criminal by the Roman occupying forces, is in the headquarters of Roman power in Palestine, a city full of soldiers, violence and idols. Here are Jews among their enemies: Gentiles who are oppressing their country, exploiting it, and tampering with their worship.

Peter and his friends could never have expected to find themselves in the house of a Roman officer like Cornelius. But in Caesarea things “clicked” for Peter. Having listened to Cornelius, and thought again about the visions God had given him of clean and unclean food, Peter describes his “aha” experience: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality” (10:30). This is a Jew speaking! No longer will there be insiders and outsiders, clean and unclean, divided by an insuperable wall. God has a big design: His people are not just Jews, but those of every nation who fear him and do justice.

Imagine how rapidly Peter was thinking, how deeply he was praying, trying to make sense of this. His instinct was to think — and to tell Cornelius — about Jesus (10:36ff.). God, said Peter, had sent to the people of Israel a message, brought by the Messiah Jesus, who “announced the good news of peace.” (Remember, Peter is talking about peace to an occupation officer.) And this Jesus, not Caesar, is “Lord of all.” Peter tells Cornelius about Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. The result of this was that there can be forgiveness and inclusion for everyone — insider and outsider — who fears God and does justice (10:35).

What might Jesus have had in mind as he announced the good news of peace? Peter must have pondered this. He would have thought about Jesus’ life, how Jesus had disconcertingly taught about God’s grand design for people from all nations. Jesus had associated with sinners and outsiders, children and women, even enemy soldiers; he had brought unlikely people together. In doing this, he had threatened vested interests; he had come, he said, “not to bring peace but division” (Luke 12:49). Because he shook people’s prejudices and acted with sovereign truth, Jesus made enemies. And they ganged up on him and crucified him.

But throughout, Jesus had offered people another way, a more radical way of dealing with the political crisis in Palestine than anyone had imag-

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ined — by bringing Romans alongside Jews in God’s family of forgiveness and reconciliation. Both Matthew and Luke record that Jesus gave prominent place to teaching about enemies: In Matthew 5:43ff., it comes as the climax of the “antitheses” in the Sermon on the Mount; in Luke 6:27ff., it comes as Jesus’ first ethical teaching. And in both, the message is the same: “Love them, pray for them,” he said. Jesus himself received a centurion, marveled at his faith, and anticipated the time when people from East and West would join with the lineal descendants of Abraham at table in God’s kingdom (Matthew 8:11).

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But this way was controversial, incomprehensible to some and threatening to others. As Jesus looked over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41ff.), he wept because people “did not know the things that make for peace.” People rejected his announcement of the good news of peace. And so, Jesus predicted, “their enemies” would come, erect siege engines around Jerusalem, smash the city and crush its children. Some years later in the Jewish War this actually happened when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and its temple with great loss of life.

But here, in enemy Caesarea, Peter asserts: Jesus Christ, in his death on a Roman cross, forgave the sins of his enemies and made peace. And that’s not the end: In the resurrection, God declared his son to be “Lord of all” (10:36). God vindicated the foolishness of his peacemaking Son. As Peter speaks, the Holy Spirit gives a loud “Amen,” pouring out upon outsiders the same gifts as those known to insiders (10:44). Because of the work of God in Christ and the active reality of the Holy Spirit, peace is possible between estranged humans — Gentiles as well as Jews.

So Peter is doing what Jesus had wanted. He is making peace with a Roman. The nations of Peter and Cornelius are heading for war, but in Jesus they stand together as brothers, the nucleus of a new transnational people of peace. God’s family will be multicultural, multiethnic, drawn from those in every nation who “fear God and do justice” — who are open to God’s reconciling work. This family will be a household of peace, an assembly/church in which unreconciled enemies are reconciled, in which unforgiven people are forgiven, with a common mission

— to share the good news of peace with all nations.

This was a specific event. We don't know whether Cornelius stayed in the legion or whether he left; we don't know what his friends and relatives did. We do know something about what happened to Peter — he got in trouble over the matter with church leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 11); he went to Rome, helped build a multiethnic church and was apparently crucified.³ What is clear is that the New Testament writers, both theologically and practically, developed a messianic way of peace in harmony with Peter's breakthrough message in Caesarea.

Facets of Peace in the New Testament

Peace is central to God's work and will. Repeatedly, writers call God "the God of peace." Routinely, they refer to "the gospel of peace." In the New Testament — as in the Hebrew Scriptures — peace is literally all over the place. God has justified us by faith, giving us peace with God. Through the work of Christ on the cross, peace has been made between us and God (Romans 5:1, 10). God has called us to peace (1 Corinthians 7:15). We are to know "the peace of God, which is higher than all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). Twice, New Testament authors urge their friends to "seek peace with everyone" (Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 3:11). Paul, like Peter, in letter after letter begins with the expression "grace to you and peace" — a potent coupling.

Grace and peace — Paul develops these interlocking, interdependent, essential New Testament themes in Ephesians 2. By grace God has saved Jews and Gentiles, insiders and outsiders ("we" and "you"). The result is peace: You Gentiles were beyond the pale, aliens and strangers; but in Christ Jesus you outsiders have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Indeed, "he is our peace" (2:14). He came and announced peace to outsiders and insiders (2:17); he died on the cross, giving his life for others, thereby putting hostility to death (2:16). The result was the breaching of the wall between outsiders and insiders that made them enemies; and through the breached wall one new humanity has emerged, comprised of former enemies — "the household of God" (2:19). The process of bring-

New Testament writers call God "the God of peace." They refer to "the gospel of peace." Peace is literally all over the place.

ing it into being Paul calls “making peace.”

This passage spells out understandings present throughout the New Testament. That peace is central to God’s work and would have made perfect sense to Peter and Cornelius on their day of breakthrough in Caesarea. But the implications of Christ’s peacemaking way would not always have been clear for each Christian community; the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) and the epistles continued to struggle with practicalities. But the churches knew they were households of peace. Peace was central to their identity. They did not have peace committees, which

The first churches did not have peace committees. They were, quite simply, peace churches, in which peace was important to all members.

socially concerned members might attend on Monday nights, or peace fellowships on the fringes at church assemblies. The churches were *peace churches*, in which peace was important to all members because the peace they knew was rooted in their fundamental experience as Christians. For them peace was at the heart of the gospel.

Peace is our response to God’s action. God has forgiven us, reconciled us, and given us peace. Each aspect of our experience of God elicits a consequence. We have been forgiven; therefore we are to be a people of forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32). We have been reconciled with God; therefore we are to be reconciled with our enemies and are given a ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18). We have received God’s peace; therefore, we are to be peacemakers, expressing God’s character – “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called God’s children” (Matthew 5:9).

In his book, *Exclusion and Embrace*, Miroslav Volf has rightly seen how central this theme is to the New Testament: “Inscribed on the very heart of God’s grace is the rule that we can be its recipients only if we do not resist being made into its agents; what happens to us must be done by us.”⁴ We are recipients of grace; God, the gracious one, calls us to be agents of grace. Likewise, if we want to know the peace of God, we’ve got to be agents of peace – peacemakers.

Peace is big. We often use “peace” in ways that don’t help us under-

stand what peace means in the Bible: “Give me some peace and quiet.” “Thanks to the bomb we’ve had 40 years of peace in Europe.” But biblical peace is not simply absence of noise or war. Behind the Greek term *eirene* that Peter used was the Hebrew word *shalom*. *Shalom* was all-embracing wholeness. It was a relational term, connoting right relationships with God, with other people, and with the natural order. There is no shalom where relationships are broken, where people are out of harmony with God and each other, where injustice, hatred and fear prevail. When Jesus came proclaiming peace, he was announcing something big and beautiful. It was personal, but also interpersonal. It had to do with God’s healing work, reconciling, restoring relationships, bringing enemies together into a new social reality. In Jesus’ teaching, and in its outworkings in Acts and Ephesians, this peace was an active reality, making former enemies into friends.

Peace has to be made, and it is made painfully. Jesus proclaimed the good news of peace, he blessed peacemakers, he practiced peacemaking — and he recognized that this involved conflict. Jesus was explicit about this; he came to bring not peace but a sword (Matthew 10:34). Without conflict, justice is fixed and unchallenged, and there is no hope. So Jesus entered into the conflict that makes peace: He set his face to Jerusalem. He caused an uproar in the temple, the heart of his nation’s religious establishment. He out-thought the religious leaders. And he paid the price: The cross is central to Christ’s peacemaking work. It is the product of his peacemaking. It is also — New Testament writers emphasize repeatedly — the means of his peacemaking (Colossians 1:20; cf. Isaiah 53:5). A peace church ponders Christ’s crosswards life and saving work on the cross. And it opens itself to take up its cross, leading it into the adventure, risk and suffering of peacemaking conflict.

Peace, painfully made, results in surprising things. In the ancient world, few things would have been more surprising than Peter in a centurion’s house. To most observers, the idea of a “new humanity,” bring-

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ing together Romans and Jews in a global messianic family, would be intensely surprising. It would seem a strange mingling of incompatible communities, not a creative new solution to an intractable problem. How odd, how surprising, these messianic nonconformists were who believed that through Christ the enemy had become a brother. To claim this had happened because of “the cross,” in which curse mingled with cruelty, risked being dismissed as foolish, unrealistic and uncouth. So instead of facing into surprise, many Jewish people chose to prepare themselves for something more comprehensible — revolutionary war against the Romans, which duly broke out in 66 AD.

Peace is made through God’s power. The peacemaking work of God is manifested in resurrection: “They killed Jesus but God raised him.” The resurrection of Jesus shows God’s determination to ratify the way of peace: “May the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus ...” (Hebrews 13:20). Death cannot stop the peacemaking God. And God’s Holy Spirit is sovereignly instrumental in creating the community of peace. The Spirit, as at Joppa and Caesarea, is the midwife of new possibilities. The Spirit falls on Romans, oppressors, enemies, the weak and those asked to do humanly impossible things. It is only because of resurrection and the Holy Spirit that God’s people can be peacemakers!

Peace is for the church. Disciples who learn from Jesus how to live and pass this on do so in communities of faith. The nature of the vision presupposes a corporate reality: You can’t experience forgiveness and reconciliation alone! And the church, made up of people reconciled to God and to each other, is a sign of God’s intention for creation. God’s plan is to “reconcile to himself all things” (Colossians 1:20). Everything and everybody — lions and lambs, Jews and Arabs, blacks and whites, Americans and Iraqis. God “has made peace between them through the blood of the cross.” The church is from diverse backgrounds, as Peter and Cornelius were, but we have been reconciled to God and each other — as a foretaste of God’s kingdom. Now, in Christ, we are learning to live God’s reconciling purposes, as someday everybody will live. By our common life, our words and actions, we bear testimony that God is the God of peace.

Jesus shows us what peace means. Jesus is the peacemaker: “He himself is our peace” (Ephesians 2:14). To know what peace means, we look at him. The church’s task, from generation to generation, is to pass on Jesus’ ways. Paul saw his task in this light — to invite people to “imitate me as I imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Jesus’ ways, lived by his followers, would become ways to be copied by others. As Paul said to Christians in Philippi, “Keep on doing the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9).

Bible peace is not an extra-cost option. It is central, and it is for the whole church. So peace is a word we could use to designate our churches. When people say to us, “Tell me about your church,” we could respond: “We’re a peace church. God is a God of peace, and we’re learning what peace means. It’s exciting. Want to come and see?”

Finding Peacemaking — and Celebrating It

All of us know churches in which God’s peacemaking work is present. It is a useful discipline to ask each other, in our churches and when gathering together with other Christians, “Where have you seen God making peace recently?” We will hear stories of the patient endurance of Christians working for multiethnic congregations. We will hear of people learning to work through severe conflict. And we will hear of Christians who, in their work and in society, have learned to be peacemakers and who have seen non-Christians serving God by making peace. Since God is the God of peace, it’s not surprising that peace is being made all the time, in many places, by many kinds of people. We need to recognize these things, talk about them, learn from them, praise God for them.

Yet few churches today actually call themselves “peace churches.” Christians, it appears, are more comfortable with “grace” than “peace”

When people say to us, “Tell me about your church,” we could respond: “We’re a peace church. It’s exciting. Want to come and see?”

— even though Paul and Peter held them together. Christians seem to have difficulty talking about the peacemaking that God is doing within the church and beyond it. Sometimes our churches are characterized by broken relationships, power plays and manipulation. In these churches it is understandable why people talk so little about peace.

Why Rejecting Peace Makes Sense

Amazingly, even in many healthy churches, talk about peace is rare. If someone seeks to put peace on the agenda, it seems strange, beside the point, or deeply unwelcome. Why? Some possible reasons are:

- ◆ Peace will dilute the gospel, or divert attention from evangelism.
- ◆ Peace will bring politics into the church, and politics brings conflict. Many Christians have had bad experiences with conflict. They don't know how to deal with it, and they're not looking for more of it.
- ◆ Peace sounds like "pacifism," which, to some, has a bad feel to it. Human experience shows it is necessary for Christians to resist tyrants. After all, what if we hadn't stood up to Hitler?
- ◆ Talking about peace deprecates experience and suffering in war: "My great uncle fought in World War II." "I lost a childhood friend in Vietnam." Or we may have experienced good things in the military: "I was converted in the navy." "I'm so grateful for the army, which gave me the chance of an education." Talk of peace seems to demean experience in war.
- ◆ Peace is boring. It seems like nothing is happening, like withdrawing from problems rather than facing them. After all, in the film *Witness*, the barn-raising scene is a beautiful example of shalom, but things only really get interesting when Harrison Ford starts using his fists!
- ◆ Peace is unrealistic. It doesn't work. Violence does. What changes things is violence. It may not be nice, but it is necessary. Talk of peace is idealistic, and talk of a peace church is unreal. And we Christians are called to be real.

There is some validity to these statements, and if we care about peace,

we must listen deeply to reasons why people have problems with peace. We may not agree with what they say, but they may point to things that we must take seriously. For example, “peace will dilute the gospel” seems incoherent if the gospel is, as many New Testament passages indicate, a gospel of peace. But the objector may be referring to Christians who have been more interested in peace than in Jesus, or in reconciliation with the Germans more than in reconciliation with God. Objections invite us all to think further.

Augustine Says Peace is Unrealistic

To me, the fundamental objection is the last. Life as many people experience it, and as we read about it in newspapers and see it on TV, is marked by the competitive and often violent interplay of selfish people and groups. It is violence, or the threat of violence, that brings change and that preserves justice. This view, which Walter Wink has called “the myth of redemptive violence,” seems in keeping with reality, with “common sense.”⁵

Responding to this reality, Augustine of Hippo in the early fifth century gave theological ratification to the church’s departure from its earlier sense of being a peace church. Not once did he comment on the verse that was so important to earlier Christians: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares.” Gerhard Lohfink surveys the use of the Isaiah and Micah passages in early Christian writers, and notes their absence in Augustine.⁶ But several times he commented on Psalm 46:10, “He makes wars to cease to the ends of the earth,” observing: “This text has not yet been fulfilled. There are still wars. Peoples still fight against each other for dominance. There are wars between parties, wars between the Jews, the pagans, the Christians, the heretics. Some fight for the truth, others for falsehood. ... Perhaps sometime this text will be fulfilled. Has it perhaps nevertheless been fulfilled? Yes, in some people it has been fulfilled. In the ‘wheat’ it has been fulfilled. In the ‘tares’ it has not yet been fulfilled!”⁷

Ever since Augustine, most Christians in Christendom have believed

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deep down that peace is possible only in our hearts and after we die. But peace on earth — between people groups and within the church — *that* is impossible, and Christians must reluctantly befriend violence in the cause of justice. It is not surprising that the dominant Western Christian traditions stopped talking about peace. It is also understandable that at this time, Augustine and Ambrose introduced the Christian “just war” tradition as a means of limiting violence. Talking about peace didn’t fit their understandings or experience.

Today, for lots of reasons, Christians once again are discovering that peace is central. They are attracted to Jesus and to an alternative approach to conflict.

Across the centuries there have been, of course, other approaches to this: We know about St. Francis, the Quakers, the Catholic Worker movement. And Anabaptist groups quickly moved to see peace as a central part of their identity. Menno Simons, for example, in 1537, saw this as a sign of the true church: “They are the children of peace who have beaten their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and know war no more.”⁸ What these groups have in common is significant — a sense that God has spoken definitively through Jesus, that the early church was on to something life-giving, and that the churches of Christendom have lost their way and become conventional.

Rediscovering the Gospel of Peace as Good News

Today, for lots of reasons, Christians once again are discovering that peace is central. They are attracted to Jesus and to an alternative approach to conflict. They are discovering that Christians — in the name of Christ — have committed horrendous atrocities from which they wish to dissociate themselves. They are querying whether, in any real sense, violence does work and realize the purposes of God. For these people, the peace church is emerging as a real possibility in our post-Christendom era.

These people are discovering new dimensions of the gospel. They affirm that, through the cross and resurrection, God has forgiven them and made peace with them; but they are finding that, as a result, they have the privilege of belonging to a movement that forgives and makes

peace with others. They don't want to hoard the peace God gives them; they want to share it, pass it on, let it transform the way they deal with enemies.

This may at times lead them to make statements about political issues, but that is not the heart of their calling. Their primary task is to be "in Christ" and, because they are in Christ, to learn how to become a people of peace who make peace. They know Jesus doesn't call us to be unreal. Jesus was in touch, and he knew that to take the hostility, anger, injustice and violence of the world seriously would take him to conflict and the cross. And that's what he promises all who follow him.

But through the conflict and adventure of following the Prince of Peace, God is at work. Putting peace on our churches' agendas can bring benefit for our churches — an authentic "peace dividend." It can transform our churches' "domestic" lives — our way of relating to each other and making decisions. Furthermore, it can deeply affect our churches' outward lives — our approaches to worship, work, wealth, war and witness. In all of these areas, Christians are learning that the God of peace uses many ways to make peace. And as we experiment with these, gain new insights and habits, and learn to say, "We're a peace church," God smiles and gives us his benediction: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for you will be called the children of God."

Notes

1. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 110.2-3, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1.
2. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 4.34.4; Tertullian, *Adv. Marc* 3.21; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.33; Cyprian, *Ad Quir.* 3.18, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vols. 1, 3 and 5. See also: Henry Chadwick, ed., Origen, *Contra Celsum* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1953).
3. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.25.6, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 1.
4. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1996), p. 129.
5. Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), pp. 13ff.
6. Gerhard Lohfink, "Schwerter zu Pflugscharen": De Rezeption von Jes 2, 1-5 par Mi 4, 1-5 in der Alten Kirche und im Neuen Testament," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 166 (1986), pp. 184-209.
7. Augustine, *Enarr. In ps.* 45.10; see also *Enarr. In ps.* 48.17, in S. Hebgin and F. Corrigan, eds., *Ancient Christian Writers* 29-30 (Newman Press, 1960).
8. Menno Simons, "The New Birth" (1537), in J. C. Wenger and L. Verduin, eds., *Complete Works* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1956), p. 94.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What, in your mind, is the relationship between *peace* and *the gospel*?

Respond “yes” or “no” to each of the following statements:

- ◆ Peace is a fruit of our response to the gospel.
- ◆ Peace *is* the gospel.
- ◆ Peace and the gospel have nothing particularly in common. They are two different concepts.
- ◆ The close relationship of peace to the gospel is an “ethnic Anabaptist/Mennonite thing,” and doesn’t necessarily apply to other Christians.
- ◆ The gospel is concerned mostly about our “personal peace with God,” rather than peace in human relations.
- ◆ Once the gospel of “personal peace with God” has been preached, peace in human relations will automatically follow.
- ◆ Working for peace in the world is the principal task of the church. When we do this, we are proclaiming the gospel.

2. Someone has said, “I’d rather live in a peaceful world of atheists than live in a bloody world of believers.” What lies behind this statement? Is there a message here for the church?

3. Kreider suggests (p. 11) that when people say to us, “Tell me about your church,” we could respond: “We’re a peace church. God is a God of peace, and we’re learning what peace means. It’s exciting. Want to come and see?” Would you consider trying Kreider’s suggestion? What do you anticipate might be the response?

For Further Reading

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- ◆ SCHERTZ, Mary H., and FRIESEN, Ivan, eds., *Beautiful Upon the Mountains: Biblical Essays on Mission, Peace, and the Reign of God* (Elkhart, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2004).
- ◆ YODER, John Howard, *When War is Unjust. Being Honest in Just War Thinking* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984).
- ◆ For stories and insights about living peacefully, visit "Peace Blend" on Mennonite Media's web site, *Third Way Cafe*. www.thirdway.com

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Peace Church, Mission Church: Friends or Foes?

Alan Kreider

If you are one of those who thinks that mission-minded churches and peace-passionate churches have little or nothing in common, then you are about to make a wonderful discovery. By examining the story of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10) and other key biblical passages, Alan Kreider argues convincingly here that “mission” and “peace” are inseparably bound up together in God’s purposes for the world. “In the New Testament,” writes Kreider, “peace is literally all over the place.”

Peace all over the place. For many people today, weary of war, conflict and violence at every turn, this would almost sound like good news. And that, according to Kreider, is precisely what it is. The good news of the gospel of peace!

Alan Kreider is associate professor of church history and mission at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind. He also works with his wife, Eleanor, on occasional writing and speaking assignments as mission educator for Mennonite Mission Network. From 1974 - 2000, Alan and Eleanor served as mission workers in England with Mennonite Board of Missions, a predecessor agency of the Mission Network. Alan has lectured and written extensively on a wide range of topics, including church history, worship, mission, peace and Christian discipleship.

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