

Introduction

I was on retreat when it happened. In 1997, at a Benedictine monastery in Berkshire, I was reading Philippians 1: ‘Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.’

I don’t know how often I had read that verse, but it suddenly was clear to me. Paul, in writing to a church that he valued, blesses them twice: with ‘grace and peace’. Grace and peace – a potent combination. How many epistles, I wondered, began like that? So I began to check, and discovered that almost all of them do. I then paused. If Paul and Peter both began their letters like this, both grace and peace must be important. Are grace and peace equally significant for us today? How many Grace Baptist Churches do I know? Quite a few. How many Peace Baptist Churches? Or peace new churches, or peace Methodist churches, peace Reformed churches or peace Anglican churches? None; none at all.

An image came to me: a one-legged man. He can stand – with difficulty. He can move about – for short distances, by hopping. But he can’t move freely. He’s handicapped. A church that doesn’t emphasise both grace and peace is like that. How much greater freedom, how much greater effectiveness, a church will have when it has two legs – peace as well as grace.

I’ve often heard that peace brings problems to a church. No doubt it does. But I sensed intuitively that the rediscovery of peace, and its integration into the life and practice of grace, can bring immense benefits to a church – a peace dividend! And the problems that will inevitably come will be those of any body discovering how to employ disused members. It will take imagination and hard work to learn the habits of peacemaking, and it may be costly: true discipleship of Jesus always is. But it’s worth it. It’s no wonder that both Testaments persistently talk about the ‘good news of peace’!

This book grew out of such beliefs. Eleanor wrote Chapter 5 and I wrote the first four chapters as a series of articles published first in *Anabaptism Today*. The rediscovery of peace will give new vitality to the life of the church. But how do we do it? These five chapters give both vision and a host of practical suggestions. And every chapter could be expanded greatly

– we’ve just begun to deal with the challenge of being peace churches today. We invite you add illustration and detail to these chapters as your church discovers the excitement of using its peace-leg as well as its grace-leg!

‘May the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus ... make you complete ...’ (Heb 13:20-21) – grace and peace!

1 The Biblical Mandate

What do you say when someone says, ‘Tell me about your church’? ‘It’s near Sainsbury’s.’ ‘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.’

Or our experience of our 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.’

Whether our experiences are positive or negative, it’s unlikely we will use the word peace to describe our church. We may feel peaceful when we go to church, but most of us wouldn’t think of describing our church as a peace church.

But this is how pre-Christendom Christians thought of their churches. Justin, a second-century teacher martyred in Rome, stated an early Christian commonplace: Isaiah 2:2-4, where God anticipates the transformation of swords into ploughshares, has been fulfilled in the church. Christians have come to Jesus to learn how to live. Justin reported: ‘We ... delighted in war, 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 ploughshares, our spears into farmers’ tools – and we cultivate piety, justice, brotherly charity, faith and hope, which we derive from the Father through the crucified Saviour.’(1)

Justin knew God had done something new for humanity through sending the crucified Saviour 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 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 (Gen 12:3) so that Jews and their Gentile enemies could be reconciled in a 'bond of peace' (Eph 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' (Lk 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 imagined – 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. He received a centurion, marvelled 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 (Mt 8:11). But this way was controversial, incomprehensible to some and threatening to others. As Jesus looked over Jerusalem (Lk 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; so 'their enemies' will come, erect siege engines around Jerusalem, smash the city and crush its children. Some years later in the Jewish War this happened: the Romans destroyed the city 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 the 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, multi-ethnic, 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 know about Peter's future – he got in trouble with church leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 11); he went to Rome, helped build a multi-ethnic 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 (Rom 5:1, 10). God has called us to peace (1 Cor 7:15); we are to know 'the peace of God, which is higher than all understanding' (Phil 4:7). Twice New Testament authors urge their friends to 'seek peace with everyone' (Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 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 bringing 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 will 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 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 (Eph 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 Cor 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' (Mt 5:9). In his recent 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 understand what peace means in the Bible: 'Give me some peace and quiet'; 'Thanks to the bomb we've had forty 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 inter-personal. 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 practised peacemaking – and he recognised that this involved conflict. Jesus was explicit about this; he came to bring not peace but a sword (Mt 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 outthought 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 emphasise repeatedly – the means of his peacemaking (Col 1:20, cf. Isaiah 53:5). A peace church ponders Christ's cross-oriented 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', bringing 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 ...' (Heb 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!

Jesus demonstrates the meaning of peace. Jesus is the peacemaker: 'He himself is our peace' (Eph 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 Cor 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' (Phil 4:9).

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' (Col 1:20). Everything and everybody – lions and lambs, Jews and Arabs, Britons and Argentinians, people who like Matt Redman songs and people who don't. 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.

Bible peace is central. 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 multi-ethnic 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 recognise these things, talk about them, learn from them, praise God for them.

But few of our churches call themselves peace churches. Christians, it appears, are more comfortable with 'grace' than 'peace' – 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 characterised 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

And yet, 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 experience with conflict: they don't know how to deal with it, and they don't want any more.
- 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. A deacon fought in World War II; we lost a cousin in the Falklands/Malvinas War. 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 as though nothing is happening, like withdrawing from problems rather than facing them. After all, in the film *The 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 work. 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 ploughshares.' 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 Augustine 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, the 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)

Since Augustine, most Christians in Christendom have believed 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.

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 ploughshares 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 realise 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. As we shall see in later chapters, putting peace on our churches' agenda can bring benefit – an authentic 'peace dividend'. It can transform our churches' 'domestic' life – our way of relating to each other and making decisions. Furthermore, it can deeply affect our churches' outward life – 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.'

2 The Church's 'Domestic' Life

Growing up in a Mennonite church family, I often saw a picture – a seventeenth-century engraving of a man, on the edge of cracking ice, reaching down to save another man who had fallen through and was in danger of drowning. As a child, I didn't understand much about the story. I knew it had taken place long ago in Holland – there was a windmill in the background – and I knew the rescuer's name, Dirk Willems.

But I didn't know what religious persecution was, or that the man whose life was being saved would be forced to arrest Dirk, leading to his burning for heresy. I didn't think about the unfairness of the situation, or why God hadn't protected the life of his servant. I didn't ask whether Dirk did the

right thing; should he have run away so he could survive, even if it meant his pursuer drowning? Above all, I didn't ask why Dirk did it. Why did he, instead of running to safety, turn back?

Since then I have heard, and told, Dirk's story many times – it, and the engraving by Jan Luyken, have become a kind of Anabaptist icon. And the question of 'why' has become ever more powerful in my mind. Why did Dirk turn back? It wasn't that he spent much time thinking about what he should do. People who drown in icy waters don't sink slowly; they go down fast. So when Dirk heard his pursuer's cry, he didn't have time to calculate outcomes or weigh ethical options. He had to react. Dirk's response was absolutely reflexive. And so my question has become: what shaped Dirk's reflexes? How did he develop the reflexes and habits that enabled him to respond to his enemy's need?

Developing the Reflexes of Peacemakers

Reflexes are important. We all, like Dirk, have reflexes – spontaneous responses under pressure. Conventionally these are *fight* and *flight*. But Dirk responded differently, in a surprising and question-posing way. Dirk's reflexes had been trained, probably by two things. One was his decision to follow Jesus. As an Anabaptist Christian he had pondered Jesus' life and teachings. He knew that he, as a follower of Jesus, was called to love his enemies. He may have prayed that when under pressure he would do what Jesus had taught. The other thing shaping Dirk's reflexes was the life of his Christian community. Reflexes like Dirk's are possible in individuals, but they are shaped in a group of people among whom habits are formed and norms become normal. I suspect Dirk responded as he did because he came from a particular kind of church, in which loving the enemy was an expression of loving the Lord who had taught Dirk to love his enemies.

Reflecting on Dirk's life and death can help us become a peace church. For, at the deepest level, the kind of church we are – a peace church or another kind of church – is the product of our reflexes. Our reflexes, like our values and our deep convictions, are shaped by the people with whom we share at the deepest level and with whom we have the deepest ties.

Who shapes you? Who trains your reflexes? Your church? Your family and friends? Or commercials on TV, films, soaps? If it is your church, does your church shape you to demonstrate – in your individual reflexes as in your common life – the teachings and way of Jesus to the world?

The Church as a Culture of Peace

The church is called to be a culture shaped by the God we worship and the story we tell. We are not called to be against culture; our life and witness will inevitably take cultural form. But we have an exciting destiny – to become not a moral majority but a prophetic minority. Christians cannot dominate the world any more.

In a multicultural situation in which no culture can force others to do things in its way, we have the opportunity to develop a distinctive cultural identity – growing out of our life in fellowship with Jesus Christ; the opportunity to develop distinctive practices in keeping with his teachings and way.

We can become a 'contrast society'.⁽¹⁾ Whether Catholic or Baptist, Anglican or New Church, we can become 'nonconformists', who are not conformed to other cultural options because we seek to be conformed to Jesus Christ. We can develop new reflexes; we can find new things to be possible or worth working on. It's this kind of church, worshipping this kind of Lord, that enables the term 'peace church' to make sense.

For the church to make a contribution to the healing of the world, we must allow God to change us, its members. God longs for us to be a people who believe that the Gospel is true, and hence who are becoming a people of peace and forgiveness. God invites us, in Christ, to accept his peace and to learn how to be peacemakers. Richard Chartres, Anglican Bishop of London, writes:

At the top of the agenda of every human society is going to be the question of how we relate, how we live peacefully together, and the church as a school of relating ... is very well placed to make a contribution.⁽²⁾

We won't do this by avoiding conflict. We will do it by developing, as Dirk did, reflexes that enable us to deal with conflict positively and hopefully. Through Christ God has made peace with us; and he wants to equip us to make peace with each other – and through this to become peacemakers in the world. The church has nothing to offer to the world other than what it has learned to live in its own 'domestic' life.

But how does this happen? How can we become such a 'school of relating?' How can we become apprentices who are learning the craft of

peacemaking? How can we become a prophetic minority whose reflexes are enemy-loving and peacemaking? How can we become a peace church?

The Disciplines of Peacemaking

Jesus, in Matthew 18:15-20, gives us a clue: we cannot make peace in the world until we have learned to make peace within the church.⁽³⁾ The passage deals with a situation in which ‘another member of the church sins against you’, and establishes a procedure for dealing with this. Jesus assumes there will be problems in the church. In verse 15, Jesus gives instructions about what to do ‘if a brother/sister sins’. He does not indicate that this is surprising. People sin. Indeed, sins in relationships happen when people share their lives on more than a superficial level. In the church people sin; sometimes they sin against us. Of course, we also sin against others – in Matthew 5:23 Jesus reminds us that our brother/sister may ‘have something against us’. There will always be sin and conflicts in the church. The question is: how do we handle them?

Jesus’ instruction is not to make peace but to make conflict. Don’t avoid the conflict, Jesus says; face into it. Don’t talk to someone else, but go directly to the person to point out the fault privately. Don’t gossip. Jesus admonishes his disciples to confrontation – but confrontation of a particular kind. Jesus-style confrontation is marked by good speaking and good listening. Three times he emphasises that the other person listens. Jesus invites his disciples to engage in a process of give and take. When this process begins, we don’t know what will happen. By speaking we may discover a new clarity in our view of the situation; as the other listens she may find a new understanding of herself – and may repent. But we may also discover that the other person has a truth, perspective or pain that transforms our understanding. We may even discover that we have sinned against her, and thus that we need to repent.

If this one-on-one conversation doesn’t lead to right relationships, a process ensues. At every stage, Jesus emphasises listening. We are to take one or two others along, to confirm what is said by listening well, with the goal that the other party will ‘listen’. If they refuse, then we are to ‘tell it to the church’. But if the offender ‘refuses to listen’ even to the church? Then the offender is to be to us ‘as a Gentile and a tax collector’. Jesus is clear that listening is a core value of the community; so that by not listening, the brother or sister has shown that they are outside the community. They do not

honour its core values; they will not allow their reflexes to be shaped by its reflexes. So, says Jesus, treat them as outsiders; treat them as well as Jesus treated Gentiles and tax collectors (with love and hope); but recognise that they are not participants in the new culture of the Messianic community.

Jesus is present in this peacemaking through confrontations: ‘there am I among them’ (15:20). Jesus has promised to be present when his disciples are practising the art of loving confrontation, when we are developing the skill of good listening. So when we are about to speak directly to someone whom we have offended, or who has offended us, we can pray: ‘Jesus, you promised to be among us; please be with us now as we differ and seek your way.’

This is teaching for forgiven sinners. It is not for a pure church, but for a church of people whom God has forgiven. Immediately after this passage in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus reminds Peter that the members of his community are to forgive without limit – seventy times seven (18:21-22). Jesus is telling his disciples: when you go into conflict, go as forgiven people to other forgiven people. You are all debtors; your peacemaking is rooted in grace! So go with humility – but go, because truth in relationships is what the church is all about.

Jesus’ teaching about conflict and peacemaking in the church is basic to being a peace church. He does not promise that this will always lead to ‘success’. Sometimes a direct approach to someone who has offended us will lead to healing self-disclosures and a wonderful repair of relationships. At other times people may refuse to ‘listen’, or we ourselves may abort the process. There are situations in which a power imbalance can make a direct approach difficult. But note that Jesus has constructed a process (‘take one or two others along with you’) that seems designed to deal with power imbalance. It was clearly immensely important to Jesus that his disciples would not be deflected from practising the craft of peacemaking, so that their communities would be cultures of peace in a world of war.

Conflict Is Normal

How revolutionary Jesus was being! He didn’t sweep conflict under the carpet; he was clear that conflict is normal. Jesus’ own peacemaking activities led him into conflict: ‘I have not come to bring peace but division’ (Lk 12:51). And his disciples after the resurrection also had conflict. The composition of their groups led to problems and conflict; it was bound to, for

God was drawing together astonishingly different people – people who didn't belong together – to be members of communities of peace. And, in any event, new religious movements such as the early church always have conflict. It seems a rule that where people are serious about life and issues, differences are inevitable. Conflict was present in the Christian movement from the outset. But the biblical accounts make it clear that this conflict was often important and useful.

A sample of this is Acts 6:1-7, a story of conflict in the Jerusalem church between the 'Hebrews' and the 'Hellenists'. The church's system of feeding people was not working, and the weakest people in the community – widows among the immigrants (Hellenists) – were being neglected. This led to conflict, and a fascinating process ensued. The leaders called the community together, reminded them of their holistic vision (feeding people as well as proclaiming the word), and established an interactive decision-making process in which people were full participants. The result was heartening: they chose men from the weaker community to help with the distribution, so everyone got fed and the word continued to be proclaimed. Here it is clear that friction between differing groups can be productive. God's Spirit works, not just through prophetic words, but through good process. Conflict can be good. And a warning: where conflict is not acknowledged, where people fear conflict or think it is wrong, things will get very unhealthy. The results will be thoroughly unpleasant: anger, depression, explosions, broken relationships, people damaged and alienated from the church.

Our Society Has Trouble with Conflict

We have trouble receiving Jesus' teaching and putting it into practice. We live in an environment that is not conducive to good conflict or peacemaking – a world of polarisation, of adversarial thinking and acting, of winners and losers. The House of Commons has a classic confrontational format, people facing each other across a void and heckling each other. Law courts are as confrontational as Parliament. And churches unfortunately function much like the rest of society.

Our Churches Can Learn to Handle Conflict Well

The culture of our churches is notorious for poor conflict. Non-Christians, insofar as they know of us, often make fun of us for strife and hypocrisy. But

it doesn't need to be so. Our churches can become Christian cultures, in which conflict is handled well and is an aspect of peacemaking. The basic skills for handling conflict well are not difficult to understand; but it takes time to learn to practise them well – and this is an ongoing challenge. Learning to be peacemakers will be a task for our churches until the end of time. To work at this our churches need visionary leaders who will teach Jesus' way of peacemaking conflict to all church members. I think of one church – Oxford Road Church in Mexborough, South Yorkshire – where this has happened. In this church there has been severe conflict. But in recent years there has been extensive, practical teaching about how Jesus' Matthew 18 process can be put to work. On the wall of the church are posters reminding members what is involved in peacemaking. One begins: '*The steps to take*. One to one. Tell no one else. If this fails, take someone else ...' This is not a perfect church. Perfect churches don't exist. It is rather a church that is using Jesus' means of dealing with the inevitable imperfections and is finding unity in its life and witness.

Most congregations need not less conflict but more. They need to recognise that the absence of apparent conflict is not the same thing as peace. God hates false peace. The prophets regularly denounced places of worship that proclaimed '*shalom, shalom*' where there was no *shalom* (e.g. Ezek 13:10). When Jesus went to church (the temple) he disturbed the peace – he upset tables and exposed injustice – in the cause of true peace (Mk 11:15-18). God longs for the peace of right relationships, rooted in justice and an expression of truth.

Four Attitudes of Peacemakers

We can be transformed as God teaches us the attitudes and skills that enable us to make peace by having good conflict.

Humility: we expect to hear something of value from the other, who like us is a sinner, but is loved, forgiven and equipped with insight and vision. God's truth is bigger than we have yet seen, and we cannot see it without the other.

Commitment to the 'safety' of others: we observe that people function best when they feel safe in expressing their views without being made fun of. If someone adopts a position that we dislike, we will not call them 'liberal', 'fundamentalist' or 'dinosaur'. We will try not to wound people even when

they are our enemies, because we believe God's business is building friendship out of enmity.

Acceptance of conflict: we learn that conflict is a part of life, in the church and outside it. It indicates that people have real concerns, that they feel passionately about things, and that power issues are involved.

Hope: we believe God is at work making peace, especially in situations of conflict; we believe the Holy Spirit is at work, and that all kinds of creativity can break loose – if we pray trustingly and vulnerably open ourselves to the Spirit's work.

Four Skills of Peacemakers

Truthful Speech: peacemakers are called to learn to communicate truthfully but lovingly, passionately but humbly. This is more than a matter of words. Ephesians 4:15 urges its readers to 'aletheuein in love'. This is often translated to 'speak the truth in love', but its meaning is broader; it means to 'truth in love', to communicate truth with the total loving person, with our body language, facial expressions, actions, decisions as well as our words. Truthful communication will involve being *confrontational* when necessary; being *vulnerable* with one another, expressing our needs, worries and longings; and *encouraging* one another. As we learn to 'truth in love', we will grow up into Christlikeness; and our churches will become cultures in which good communication is taught and modelled.

Expectant Listening: peacemakers are called to learn to listen well. People in conflict care passionately about things, and they want to be heard. So we will develop the skill of really paying attention to what the other is saying. We will want to make sure we understand the other person, that we enter into the thought world and experience of the other. And as we listen, we will want to convey to the other person that we are listening – by our body language, by eye contact, by our reluctance to interrupt. In his book, *Exclusion and Embrace*, Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf, whose family and friends have suffered in the Yugoslav wars, writes: 'We enlarge our thinking by letting the voices and perspectives of others, especially those with whom we may be in conflict, resonate within ourselves, by allowing them to help us see them,

as well as ourselves, from their perspective, and if needed, readjust our perspectives as we take into account their perspective.'(4)

Alertness to Community: peacemakers learn in community about the complex interweavings of human experience. Peacemakers are aware of the importance of differing generations. These are people, like Dirk Willems, whose reflexes have been sanctified by their friendship with the Prince of Peace. They have so much to teach simply by what they are. Their wise sayings and stories are also important. Peace churches must provide settings for elders to mentor 'youngers'. Younger Christians, on the other hand, will have much to contribute to their elders – excitement, a lively memory of what it was like not to be a Christian, a willingness to question and test. It is through this intergenerational sharing that the wisdom, skills and attitudes of peacemaking are taught. Furthermore, peacemakers must not forget that justice and peace are interrelated, that the *shalom* of a community will depend on its willingness to face economic questions. From Acts 6 and 1 Corinthians 11 onwards, church leaders have recognised that it strains fellowship and distorts peace when some Christians are wealthy and others are struggling. Some churches sensitive to economic need are committed to experimenting with radical measures to lessen inequality and to meet need. Where these things do not happen, it is probable that relationships will be ultimately superficial and that economics will undermine the peace of the church.

Good Process: peacemakers contend that a peace church is one that makes decisions in a way that is truthful, just and corporate. I believe that the church meeting – a Baptist and Quaker institution that it has been fashionable to belittle – can be central to the development of a peace church. Of course, church meetings are often scenes for pointmaking, power-plays, and displays of parliamentary prowess. But the distortions are the product of the church being too much like the world – its failure to develop its own distinctive culture. It can be otherwise, when Christians learn to realise 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph 4:3) as they make decisions together. Leaders must believe that the Holy Spirit, who works among the people as well as the leaders, may produce something wiser than they could have anticipated. And when people know that their views matter, they respond with a quality of enthusiasm and ownership that can be breathtaking.

On the Journey: Becoming a Peace Church

It's not clear what it will mean for a church to decide to become a peace church. The changes required will be numerous: new attitudes and reflexes that enable a constructive handling of differences; good listening; truthing in love; expecting God to bring insight through the other's experience; believing that the Holy Spirit is at work to bring about the Jesus way of peace on earth – now. There is no master plan for learning these things. Each church will learn things in its own order, in its own time. But any church that sets out to learn them will be on a journey. Woe to the church that arrives! It will not be a peace church. But in greeting the Messiah, Zechariah was surely right. God's mercy was at work 'to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, [and] to guide our feet into the way of peace' (Lk 1:79). And this way will transform not only the church's 'domestic' life; it will transform its 'foreign relations' – its life and witness in the world. To this I shall turn in the next chapter.

3 The Church's 'Foreign Policy' – Worship

'Grace and peace to you.' What difference does it make to our churches, and to the world, when we take peace as seriously as grace? What difference does it make when we allow 'the God of peace [to] sanctify us', not just as individuals or in bits of our lives, but 'wholly' – making us peaceful, holy, in all the dimensions of our life (1Thess 5:23)?

In the two earlier chapters, I have argued that it makes a big difference when we allow 'peace' to help shape our identity as churches. It changes the way we think.

Furthermore, there is a 'peace dividend' for our churches. This transforms our churches' common life; it helps build communities of people who are learning the skills and disciplines of peacemaking. As I want to demonstrate in this chapter and the next, it also changes our church's witness, our way of living in the world and reaching out to others; it transforms our 'foreign policy'.

Living in a World of Multidimensional Conflict

Twenty years ago, many people in the West were frightened. They were living in a polarised world of Cold War, divided between two power blocs, both of whom had nuclear arms. Now, post-Cold War, nuclear weapons still loom over our world, but the conflicts of the world seem more complex than they did. It's not a world divided between vast alliances or among nation states. Rather it's a world divided among intermingling cultures, tribes, ethnic and religious groups. Throughout the Cold War this multicultural world was there, but it had been suppressed; now it has emerged, with cultural identities that fragment nation-states and that ignore political borders. These cultural groupings – the Serbs and the Albanians, the Palestinians and the Israelis, the Kurds and the Turks – often elicit immense passion and lethal violence. And it is not 'out there'; for many of us, it characterises and enriches our own neighbourhoods. Ours is a multicultural world, and it won't go away. We have to learn to live with it, and that means living with complexity and conflict.

So this is the setting for our churches' witness – our 'foreign policy'. And my belief is this: as we discover how to be a peace church, we can have an impact for God and for good on our world. In this chapter I show how this will deepen our worship; in the next chapter I shall show how this will transform our approaches to areas of work, war and witness.

Peacemaking Worship

Is worship a part of the church's 'foreign policy'? Isn't worship an intramural activity of the Christian family? Granted, worship services often do have nothing to do with the world. Worship services at times remind me of the first astronauts, just back from the moon, who were put into quarantine. Nobody wanted the moon to contaminate the earth. That's how it often is with our churches' services; the world is quarantined; we don't want it to contaminate what happens in the church. This leads to unreality, and to phoney worship. The worship of the church should be a truthful encounter with the God who loves the world and who wants to empower his people to participate in his mission to the world. God is a personal God, and he is eager to meet with us. But God is also Lord of history, and he is serious about being Lord of all peoples and nations, principalities and powers. Furthermore, worship is a meeting with other people in God's presence. Through

this meeting with God and with each other, we see the world in a new light – and things happen. We change; adoration transforms us, so we are ready to do God’s work in a difficult situation. And somehow, mysteriously, things change too on the earth and in the heavens. Worship is the motor of history; it is an engine of peacemaking.

We acclaim Jesus as Lord. When we gather to worship God, we gather ‘in Jesus’ name’ to confess that ‘Jesus is Lord’. This is powerful. We are asserting that – although there are lesser lords – our ultimate loyalty is to him. If there is a conflict of sovereignties, it is Jesus whom we will obey. So his teaching is authoritative for us, and his way is normative. As we gather, we open ourselves to seeing the world from his perspective. In worship, we use our Lord’s words and tell his stories. By doing this we will come to see reality in such a way that Jesus makes sense. And if Jesus makes sense, a lot of things that pass for common sense in our culture won’t make sense. Jesus’ teaching on wealth, peace, truth, enemies, sex and trust is not good twenty-first-century English common sense; in worship, God gives us ‘liberation from common sense’ and encourages us to ‘cultivate holy madness.’(1) So when a peace church worships, there will be a *yes* and a *no*: a choosing of God’s way and a rejection of much of the sensibleness of our age. In the worship of peace churches, we will seek the perspective of our Lord, and we will discern what in our life and experience is in keeping with the way, truth and life of Jesus, who shows us the Father. What, in contrast, is worldly wisdom which God wants us to unmask and discredit?

We affirm solidarity with God’s global family. Because there is one Lord, ultimately there is one people who acknowledge his gracious rule. By grace we are adopted as children of the same King, and hence we are brothers and sisters in an incredible family made up of people from every tribe and nation. Wherever around the globe Christians gather, we acknowledge this fundamental fact – in Christ we are one in our praise and one in our belonging. The implications of this are prophetic; our worship is a reminder to the world of ‘the arbitrariness of the divisions between people ...’(2)

Why should this be surprising? Because society programmes us not to think of people as Christians who are one in Christ, who are made brothers and sisters by his grace, who share bread and wine at his table; society programmes us rather to think of people above all according to their race or nationality – as Serbs, not as Orthodox or Baptist Christians. A symbol of

this is the nuclear bomb that in 1945 destroyed Nagasaki. It was dropped by a US plane, piloted by Catholic crewmen who were given spiritual support by Catholic padres, upon a target whose epicentre was a Roman Catholic cathedral at the heart of the largest Christian community in Japan; the bomb wiped out two orders of Catholic nuns. War causes pain in the body of Christ.

The worship of peace churches repudiates these values. So, to make the desecration of God’s family more difficult, peace churches seek ways to remember the big picture. They keep in touch with Christians around the world, exchanging letters, photos, and e-mails; when foreigners visit our churches we listen to them with expectancy.

We tell God’s story. Worship in the Bible more than anything else tells the story of God’s actions. From the song of the sea (Exodus 15) through the psalms and Passover rituals to the table worship of the New Testament churches, the emphasis of worship is on remembering. All of these are means of telling the story of God.

Why is this important? Because we as humans are people whose identity is primarily shaped by the stories that we tell. Our beliefs and our sense of selfhood are rooted in our experiences, and in the stories that we have discovered to be true.

The biblical writers knew this. They knew that the story of God and the people of God was strange. From the calling of childless Abram and Sarai to be the parents of multitudes if they would leave their securities to the breaking down of insider/outsider barriers through the work of Jesus Christ – this is a countercultural story. Its themes and values are odd. Christian worship is designed to instil that story deeply into our consciousness. So we tell the story, ponder on its depths and ambiguities, celebrate it – and by God’s grace continue it.

In every era Christians face the temptation to replace the story of God by other, more sensible, stories that make powerful humans feel better about their wealth and violence. Some of these stories are fundamental, underlying many others. Two such deep stories are ‘the myth of redemptive violence’ and ‘the metanarrative of military consumerism’.(3) What do these mean in ordinary English? ‘The only thing that works is force.’ ‘I deserve to be better off than my parents were.’ ‘Well, the armaments industry provides lots of jobs.’ ‘We’ll give the people a choice; either they follow our leadership or they can go elsewhere.’

We are constantly fed a diet of spin, which is designed to shape us to the dominant story of our society and make us good, pliant, well-adjusted, inwardly violent consumers. If we buy this story, there's not a chance of our churches being peace churches.

That's why it's so important in our worship to tell, ponder and celebrate the story of another kind of God. Think about it: does your worship tell the story? Children's stories, Bible readings, testimonies about God's activities today, stories from the world church and church history, sermons, the words and rite of the communion service – all of these can help us to remember and inspire us to praise – and also to live differently. If we tell God's story, we'll be less likely to be choked by our culture's diet of spin.

We cry out to God for the world. The biblical writers urge us to intercede – for the peace of Jerusalem, for kings and all people, that God's kingdom may come and God's will be done on earth. We come to worship as people who know God's peace and whose churches are coming to be cultures of peace; so the places where peace is denied cry out. We hear the cries, and we join in them – to the God of peace who hears the groans of the inarticulate and receives the prayers of his people. God's Spirit helps us in our praying (Rom 8:26-27); and our prayers make a difference on earth (Rev 8:3-4). We struggle with evil in our prayers – 'against the rulers, against the authorities and the cosmic powers of this present darkness' (Eph 6:12); we contend with powers that diminish and dehumanise people, and that express themselves in injustice, war, victimisation, scapegoating, persecution.

This prayer can have astonishing effects. Fifteen years ago, no one would have thought the following things to be possible: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War, the end of apartheid without massacre, the Irish peace process. But some churches prayed for these with persistence and passion. 'He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire' (Ps 46:9). When we pray, we are entering into the work of God. We are praising God for all the places where his peacemaking is happening in new and exciting ways. We are interceding for human peacemakers – including some of our own members whom we commission – whose power is minimal save in the power of God. And somehow, through our prayers and the prayers of many others, God can change the world. 'History,' wrote Walter Wink, 'belongs to the intercessors, who believe the future into being.'⁽⁴⁾ What impossibilities are we praying for at the moment? Right relations between Serbs and Kosovars?

A worldwide abolition of nuclear weapons?⁽⁵⁾ Can there be a peace church without intercession as an integral part of its worship? It's unthinkable!

We sing our theology. Our songs and hymns are important. We may talk theology, but we really believe what we sing. There is power and potential here for the energising and envisioning of peace churches. But there is also danger. The danger is in part the 'music wars' that characterise some congregations – what we sing can be a source of conflict that, if handled badly, can be a source of destructive division. More seriously, the danger can be that one side will win. Some churches triumphalistically reject the old and, in the guise of piety, are tempted to sing the world's theology of power and domination. Other churches defensively repudiate anything that seems emotive or new. Both of these approaches truncate the life and discipleship of the church. Peace churches need to draw upon the artistic fruits of God's Creator Spirit both across the centuries and now – they need to 'bring out of their treasure what is new and what is old' (Mt 13:52). And they must pray to God for songwriters who, inspired by the vision of *shalom*, will give poetic and musical expression to a theology of peacemaking. What we sing is what we internalise – it will be with us when we're weakest, when we're old and are dying. Let's choose wisely what we sing!

God reconciles us and forgives us. When we worship God, God is the main actor. God is at work pursuing his kingdom goals of 'justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom 14:17). God is at work reconciling us to himself, healing us of our sicknesses of body and spirit, forgiving us our sins, restoring our inner motives and our priorities. Worship is one of the main tools in God's workshop – it is an activity that is God's gift, which God uses to refashion us in the divine image and to end our alienation. This is glorious and gracious, a source of endless wonder and thanksgiving.

The worship of the peace church will not stop there. It will observe that, throughout the Bible, God does not simply plead with people to accept his forgiveness; he urges them to act forgivingly to others. God's concern is not simply to be reconciled to people; it is for them to be reconciled to others. Paul put this so economically: 'Accept one another, just as Christ has welcomed you' (Rom 15:7). Miroslav Volf has commented: Paul's injunction 'is to make the pattern of divine action toward us a pattern for our actions toward the other'.⁽⁶⁾ According to this vision, every church that experiences and celebrates the reconciling and forgiving love of God is

called to be a peace church. It is called, not to hoard the reconciliation, but to pass it on. This is why the early Christians developed the rite of ‘the kiss of love’ (1 Pet 5:14); it was a means, within their worship, of celebrating the peace of God and where there were broken relationships of restoring them.(7) Jesus told his disciples that making peace between brothers who are at odds with each other is incredibly important, certainly more important than the offering (Mt 5:23ff). A peace church will be asking always: in our worship do we allow God to reconcile us to himself, and to each other – and to be empowered to be his ambassadors of reconciliation in the world?

God feeds us, making us a people of sharing and nonviolence. Communion is central to the life of the peace church. No place was more characteristic for Jesus to be with his disciples than at table. In our day it is also at table that we meet with Christ, who breaks the bread and pours out the wine and reveals his presence to us. At this table we all are equal. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23); and all of us are offered the same quantity of Christ’s limitless food and drink. Communion is thus an expression of the radical egalitarianism of the gospel. It is also an expression of the gospel’s nonviolence. Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Remember me. Remember my sacrifice for you. Remember my way of dealing with my enemies. Remember my teaching.’ Communion offers us a rite by which we can keep from forgetting that Jesus has made things new. He was the last scapegoat; after him there is no need for further violence.(8) Peace churches will use the communion meal in many ways to keep us filled with, and in tune with, our peacemaking Lord.

God shapes our vision and mission. Steve Finamore has proposed a life cycle of worship and mission.(9) First, when we gather for worship, we bring ‘reports from the front.’ We bring the experiences and hurts and longings from our involvement in God’s kingdom work in the world. We reflect the violence, are agonised by the hardness and are scarred by broken relationships. Second, in worship we encounter ‘the God of peace who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Heb 13:20). We tell the story of God and celebrate it. We learn the ways of God and come to view these as the path to abundant living. We praise God, give thanks, intercede. Worship thus functions as a filter; it purifies us, clarifies our vision. And it empowers us: it restores our belief, re-inspires us with God’s grace and vision for the world. Third, this equips us for mission. Re-visioned by our

encounter with the God of peace, we go back into the world equipped with hope and vision and spiritual energy. We will be in the struggle with principalities and powers. But we will find God at work, calling people to faith, suggesting new ways forward in intractable situations, and doing the new thing. We will not go unscathed, but the God of peace will be with us. We will fail, and the tasks will be too large. So we will come back to worship, bringing our brokenness and stories of God’s grace. And the cycle will continue. This cycle of worship is a *sine qua non* for a peace church: it heals us, energises us, and keeps us on course. It links God’s love with our lives, and with God’s world, in a swirl of new creation. Worship can thus be anything but quarantine: it is the heart and soul of the peace church’s foreign relations.

4 The Church’s ‘Foreign Policy’ – Work, War, Witness

A peace church is possible! Although Christians have often been wary of peace, peace is at the heart of what our churches are meant to be about. We are passionately committed to grace; if we wish to have biblical priorities we also will be passionately committed to peace. New Testament writers habitually began their letters by coupling these together: ‘grace and peace’ (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; etc.). What happens when our churches, like those of the New Testament, rediscover this coupling? It changes our theology and way of thinking. It deepens and enriches our churches’ common life – our ‘domestic policy’. And rediscovering peace transforms our churches’ ‘foreign policy’: our worship takes on new reality and depth, and our approaches to work, war and witness are opened up to new creativity and hopefulness.

Peacemakers at Work

Most of us – those who are unemployed or at home with children as well as those in paid employment – have the opportunity to work, to invest our creativity, skills and sweat for the good of others. When our churches

become peace churches, we discover that we have new things – life-giving things – to offer in our work.

We bring peacemaking habits, attitudes and skills. As I noted in Chapter 2, in a peace church where Christians are learning to follow Matthew 18:15ff procedures, to practise ‘truthing in love’ and to see with ‘double vision’, a distinctive kind of Christian is formed.(1) Such people are humble, because they know they are forgiven sinners; unafraid of conflict, because they believe God can use conflict to bring peace; committed to good speech, good listening and good process; good listeners, who don’t interrupt or compete; people who really believe it is important to see through the eyes of others as well as themselves. These habits, attitudes and skills are immensely useful in the world. They enable things to happen better. I have begun to collect samples of Christians who in many work situations are peacemakers. An IT consultant from Yorkshire recently wrote to me, ‘By facilitating dialogue, or acting as a go-between, I was in fact mediating peace and encouraging relationships to develop. God is not only interested in my work, but even in acrimonious business meetings God wants to work through me to establish the values of his Kingdom there.’

We bring peacemaking imagination to our jobs. As a result, new possibilities spring to mind. Peace church Christians get new ideas. They are less likely to sit back and be conventional. They believe God is at work in the creche as well as the boardroom, and that God is in the business of peacemaking and thus can change things. So a peacemaking imagination can transform our work, altering the parameters of the possible, and inspiring us to try precarious new things. It’s important for peace churches to tell stories of how this has happened. Some are well-known, such as the peace church sculptors who recently created a massive swords-to-ploughshares sculpture for Judiciary Square, Washington, DC, made of over 3,000 decommissioned handguns. Some have led to major changes in judicial practice, such as the restorative justice procedures that grew out of the hunch of two Canadian Mennonite probation officers that justice involves a restoration of relationships.(2) Some, such as the ‘Empowering for Reconciliation with Justice Project’ in South Africa, are massive in scope: in the early 1990s the ERJ trained over a thousand people with the skills of mediation and peacemaking.(3) Some, such as the quiet efforts of Christians in the Parades Commission in Northern Ireland or of student mediators in schools, are

unsung. Nobody involved in these initiatives would say that carrying a peace church vision into the workplace makes things easy. But it brings hope and new possibilities.

This can change our vocation. Sometimes we discover that habits, attitudes and skills we are learning in the peace church make trouble in the workplace. Sometimes our bosses or workmates reject the peacemaking imagination we bring to our jobs. And sometimes we realise, with surprising clarity, that our jobs are incompatible with our worship of the God of peace. For any of these reasons, members of peace churches may find themselves retooling for new vocations. A engineer friend of mine, after many years in a defence electronics firm, has enrolled in the MA course in Peace Studies at Bradford University. Dave was a Christian on a journey. He was moved by visiting the Nazi concentration camp at Dachau; he cared deeply about the Yugoslavian crisis and felt unable to do anything about it; he heard God inviting him to a new vision of his life through Isaiah 58:6-9; and he saw peace church Christians doing new things in the area of conflict resolution that gave him hope. Dave is a loss to the electronics industry, but he is now working at something he really believes in – becoming a mediator. He is an example of what happens when the God of peace works in our lives. God changes us; he may also change our jobs.

War and Violence

A peace church is not necessarily a church in which all members are pacifist. There will be some pacifists in a peace church; indeed the Mennonites are a peace church in which most members are pacifist Christians. But a peace church is not defined by the pacifism of its members, or by the positions adopted by the church’s central bodies. You don’t become a peace church by making statements! You become a peace church by being genuinely committed to the gospel of peace, by learning to put peace on the agenda, by trying to live the life of God’s peace together in the church, and by carrying this, as best you can, into all areas of life.

This leads into the world of war and violence. Most of us most of the time are not involved in war (although we may be involved in military-related industry); but many of us are surrounded by violence. Especially those of us who live in cities: fights and muggings are part of our world. How do we cope with violence? Not everyone in a peace church will

necessarily agree that they will never, under any circumstances, knowingly inflict lasting psychological or physical harm on another (pacifism); some may feel that in emergencies, when stringent criteria are met, violence is necessary and that they must support it even by their action ('just war'). But in a peace church everyone will agree: the church must talk about peace, think about peace, work for peace, evangelise peace, and learn the attitudes and disciplines of peacemakers.

Reflecting on the Bible. In interpreting the Bible it makes a big difference what presuppositions we bring. If we assume the gospel is a gospel of peace, and if we begin to take risks as a result of this reading, we will make surprising discoveries. For example, it's not accidental that the Gospels are full of references to crucifixions, tax-collectors, zealots and soldiers. God sent Jesus into a situation of Roman military repression and anti-Roman agitation. Jesus' teachings and actions, read against this background, give fascinating insights into alternative responses to violence today. Walter Wink's study of Matthew 5:38-42 has shown that the way to love one's enemies is not through 'non-resistance' (an incorrect reading of the text) but through 'nonviolent engagement' – resisting enemies lovingly, surprisingly and imaginatively.(4) This exposes the truth of a situation – at times with high humour – without hurting people and invites people to change. When read from a peace church perspective, the 'problem passages' – even Romans 13:1-6 – suggest new solutions. These verses are 'perhaps the most influential part of the New Testament on the plane of world history'.(5) Why? Because rulers and church leaders have used them to force Christians into being obedient citizens who fight wars. But Paul wasn't urging Christians in Rome to fight for the state if asked; rather he was telling them to believe, apparently against the evidence, that God could use even an oppressive Roman state for good.(6) As our churches become peace churches, we can expect the Bible to speak with an authoritative voice, often challenging platitudinous pieties – and bringing us divine revelation.

Thinking about violence – and training. Peace churches will be alert to the violence in our society. It's helpful for Christians to ask themselves: what would you do if someone attacked you? This perennial anti-pacifist question is an important one. Peace churches are natural settings to think about responses to violence.(7) Peace church Christians can develop alternative responses to urban violence; they can learn forms of creative, nonviolent

resistance which can be taught by training and role-play.(8) They can tell stories about their experience, developing a fund of unconventional wisdom about how Christians have responded to violence. What violence have our members experienced? How did they respond? What techniques did they find useful? What still needs to be learned? What was the role of prayer in the conflict? The Mennonite Church in North America has published some stories; we need a comparable collection from Britain and Northern Ireland.(9)

Thinking about war in peacetime. Traditionally churches almost never talk about war, except on Remembrance Sunday. Talking about war is painful for many members; they have lost friends and family members and may themselves have been through the trauma of battle. So it's only when war is about to be declared that Christians begin to talk about war. Then they generally say, with their government, 'there is no alternative', and think and behave like everyone else. Take the widespread assumption of British Christians that they believe in 'just war'. But 'just war' isn't a way of reassuring ourselves that the wars our country fights are just; it's a method of deciding, by carefully developed criteria, in each case whether it is just to wage war, and if so how one can wage war without fighting unjustly.(10) This takes a lot of education: how else can Christians discern whether a war is just or not? And the church virtually never equips people to make these decisions. If a peace church is willing to say that pacifism is the norm for its members, this may not be necessary. Otherwise, a church that wants to put peace on its agenda should, at a very minimum, teach its members what the just war criteria are: just cause, right intention, last resort, discrimination (noncombatant immunity), proportion. When our nation's leaders decide to bomb other countries, church leaders can use these current events as opportunities to teach about just-war thinking. I know of one church whose pastor, in 1998 after the American bombing of Sudan and Afghanistan, brought a full-scale model of a cruise missile to church. He asked the children's meeting, 'Was Bill right?' teaching the children (and their parents) to think with just-war criteria. Nobody dozed!

Developing a different view of global politics. When you develop the reflex of listening to people you disagree with, it becomes easier to think that most disputes, even those between nations, have two sides – and it becomes harder to think of killing your opponents. So in peace churches name-calling and

stereotyping are unacceptable; they are contrary to the community's basic values. A peace church will stand for justice; but it will not think justice can be secured by violent solutions – e.g., 'taking out' the hate figure of the moment. Justice is made through building right personal and economic relationships, not by means of quick military actions.

Danilo, an elderly Serbian Christian, grew up in the only Serb family in a village. Early in World War II his father was killed by a German bomb. His mother became a refugee, wandering with Danilo and his brother in search of food. When the Yugoslav civil war began in 1991, fracturing relations between Serbs and Croats, instead of becoming afraid of the 'other side', Danilo immediately volunteered to work with 'Bread of Life' – the Yugoslav Evangelical relief organisation – to help the innocent who were suffering. During the Kosovo crisis, Danilo, concerned by the manipulative behaviour of the Serbian media, said: 'Don't let the media poison your minds. Rather, think concretely; imagine how you would feel if you were an Albanian mother in Kosovo ... Don't become angry at what the media says the other side may have done to us. Instead, remember the Good Samaritan and act concretely to help our neighbours who suffer.' Danilo is a Serb who lets the New Testament shape his approach to his nation's enemies.(11) This isn't the kind of Serb whom we hear about in the news; and his empathy, and his practice of 'double vision' shames most Christians in the UK. When we, like Danilo, learn to think independently and empathetically about war and enemies, we are on the way to becoming a peace church.

Action for peace. The life of the peace church isn't a cop-out in wartime; it's a ministry of reconciliation, justice and truth. It calls to mind unpopular realities (e.g. the Western 'Christian' maltreatment of Middle Eastern Arabs, many of whom are Christians). It also dares to act in repentance and hope. The Reconciliation Walk, in which Western Christians over a four-year period have retraced the steps of the first Crusaders to apologise for the Crusades, is a sample of this. So also is the New Abolitionist movement among American Christians, who remind a world that would rather forget that nuclear weapons have not gone away, and that in this post-Cold War period God is giving the world a 'gift of time' in which universal nuclear disarmament is possible.(12) Occasionally peace church Christians will act in demonstrative ways, like the prophet Jeremiah, to make a point dramatically – they will be publicly inconvenient and may be arrested for their troubles.

The point is not to be dramatic, but to bear witness to the God of peace in as many ways as possible.

A Witnessing Church

We live in a world that is post-Christendom and postmodern. People do not flock to church because being Christian is good for their career or business, or because peer pressure sweeps them along. Instead, as never before, we are surrounded by a critique of Christianity. Church history shows the Christian faith is intrinsically violent, we are told; and there are New Age alternatives that can wonderfully move us from the violent Age of Pisces to the tolerant, loving Age of Aquarius. Anyway, there are lots of options, each with its own arguments. Why in this world be Christian?

What counts, it seems to me, is demonstration. The question is not: does the church have an alternative message? Nor is it: is the church saying the correct things? Rather the main question is this: is God alive among the Christians, enabling them to live convincingly, interestingly, hopefully? In our post-Christendom, postmodern era, Christian witness cannot be divorced from the way of life of a community that worships the God revealed in Jesus Christ. So how we live matters; what we do counts. The question is not so much does it make sense, but does it work? Does it bring abundance of life – and new possibilities?

In this world the peace church has a special witness that can be important to the entire Christian church, in four areas.

The character of our missionary God. The God whom the Bible reveals is a God who has a mission. God, in overflowing love, has a project – to bring wholeness to creation and to reconcile former enemies. God implemented this by sending Jesus, living in solidarity with suffering people and embodying and teaching an alternative authority that is just and peaceable. Although Jesus coerced nobody, he threatened religious and political leaders who killed him; God's mission leads to the cross. But God vindicated his Son in resurrection, and poured out the Holy Spirit on those who acknowledge him, so that as the Father sent the Son (in vulnerability, truthfulness, non-coercive love) the Son may also send us, his followers (John 20:21). The result is a people, a 'God movement', that extends the way of Jesus throughout time and throughout the world. This people is a peace church. It

is not an end in itself, but an instrument in God's mission of reconciliation and peace.

The character of Christians. Character matters immensely. Who we are as individuals and as communities will either be instruments of God's mission and evidences of God's character; or we will be impediments of God's mission – and will give God a bad name. As Marva Dawn has written, 'The vitality and faithfulness of our personal and corporate Christian lives and the effectiveness of our outreach to the world depend on the character that is formed in us.' (13) It matters how we live, what our priorities are, how we transact business and what skills we develop. It matters how we are reflexed, how we handle conflict. Because our witness is rooted in our character, this will determine what people think of God (1 Pet 2:12).

This is true of individuals. Our lives pose questions: 'That Susan, she tells the truth; I can count on her; she doesn't always try to win an argument, but she listens and cares about justice. I wonder why.' It is also true of churches, whose common life poses questions: 'The Grace and Peace Baptist Church has been useful in our school. They have produced a disproportionate number of mediators. They have a self-effacing, non-coercive way of telling the truth. I asked about it, and they said, "Well, our church has had a lot of conflict in the past, but God has taught us a lot and we're very grateful. Are you interested?" And I am.'

Missiologists such as Robert Warren are recognising this: 'We stand faced with a great new opportunity to speak the good news of Christ into our culture by the way we live that truth in the life of the local church ... The church is called to be the pilot project of the new humanity established by Christ ... Not least is the world looking for models of handling conflict ... Conflicts in the church can seem such a distraction from getting on with the real work; but this is the real work. When people come near such a community they will instinctively know how real the relationships are.' (14)

Words, ideas, actions. There is endless scope for the witness of peace churches. Locally, in our schools and places of work, we can emphasise listening and reconciliation, not power plays. When people ask why we have helpfully odd ideas about conflict, we can tell them about Jesus. Nationally, in debates about policy and in letters to MPs, we can write words of caution and sobriety, recalling that violence never produces the results people anticipate and that violence is always self-justifying. We can inject new

ideas. In peace churches, where the gospel is preached and the Spirit is alive, new things become thinkable: church members can volunteer to do conflict teaching in school assemblies; they can help apply restorative justice principles to dealing with sexual offenders. Demonstrative actions also become part of the peace church's witness. At times, working with non-Christians, followers of Jesus can link arms in the chain of witness at Jubilee 2000 or sit in the road at an Arms Bazaar.

Throughout the foreign relations of the peace church, one thing stands out:

Fascination. In many churches today there is a strong emphasis upon evangelism – equipping people to share the good news of Jesus. There are programmes to train people for this, to help them deal with the questions of postmodern people, to help them persuade people of Christian truth so they will want to become Christians.

Five years ago I was doing research into evangelism in the church of the first three centuries. And I was puzzled: the early church was growing rapidly, but in early Christian literature there are no training programmes for evangelism and practically no admonitions to evangelism. Why? I concluded, not least through reading what early Christians themselves said, that the church before the conversion of Constantine was growing because it was living in a way that fascinated people. It spoke to their needs; it addressed their questions; and it didn't so much persuade as fascinate people into new life. (15) Early Christians believed that, in Christ, God had begun a vast movement of reconciliation that had incorporated them; so they had renounced violence, converted their swords into ploughshares, and stopped studying war. This was something they had experienced, and that had given them a new way of living.

This was true of the New Testament: the church was 'the light to the nations' (Luke 2:32). The church was good news, and it grew by fascination as well as by words, by its creative distinctiveness, by its radiant Jesus-likeness, by its sheer hopefulness (1 Pet 3:15). This is still possible today. It is possible for the church to be, not the last bastion of conservative Britain, but the centre of new thinking in which intractable problems are dealt with in Jesus-like ways. It is possible for churches to grow because the culture of Christian congregations has been shaped by the gospel of peace. It is possible to grow because people discover that the way of Jesus Christ is abundant, and that it leads to new possibilities for all. The rumour gets out: 'You know,

those house church Christians used to have a reputation for conflict, but they've learned to deal with it; they all talk about peacemaking – maybe they could be a resource for us.'

The news of this peace church witness gets out little by little. It is hidden and always partial. Historical change involves little events, seemingly unconnected, which fit into a larger pattern. Our churches' learning and action, our individual witnesses, our new initiatives fit together and enable something new. We are always sinful and always incomplete – so we point to the grace of Jesus Christ. But we are also captivated by the possibility of newness that we have begun to experience – we point to Jesus Christ, our peacemaker and teacher. And, by God's unfathomable mercy, we point to the church as a sign of his saving power in history. The peace church is a 'nonfinal reconciliation in the midst of struggle'. (16) It is on the road with its Lord. As God changes us and as we learn how to be a peace church, we declare confidently and with deep gratitude – God is a God of peace, and God is good!

5 Praying for Peace

The centrality of peace to the kingdom of God is not usually a subject of dispute. Paul said it well: 'The kingdom of God is justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom 14:17). But what about the centrality of peace in the life, worship and prayers of the church? The question often elicits silence. Or incomprehension. Or resistance. On the other hand, some churches visibly have biblical peace at their heart.

I remember such a place, a modest church building in the north of England. From the moment I walked in, I knew that this church had its sights wide across the globe. Christian Aid posters drew attention to African and Asian connections. Children's paintings illustrated 'days of creation'. A notice board overflowed with 'holiday' snaps of church expeditions with relief supplies to Eastern European countries, of youth camping trips made with inner-city children, and of missionaries and service workers in various countries. Biblical peace, the many-sided peace that God wants to bring to his creation and to humanity – peace was the visual subject of the notice board and the walls of that little church.

Many churches have attractive notice boards illustrating the activities of the church. It would be natural to expect such concerns and commitments to be mentioned in the prayers of the Sunday worship. But that isn't necessarily true. In one church I asked why there were no intercessory prayers in a certain Sunday morning worship. They said they had a special prayer group that did that kind of praying on Monday nights. Sunday morning for them was time for praise and teaching. I believe that intercessory prayers are a necessary part of corporate worship because in them we listen to God's heartbeat and we join God's yearning for his many-sided peace. When else do we obey the injunction of 1 Timothy 2:1-2 to pray for all people, kings and those in authority?

Heaven on earth?

Jesus put it ever so briefly in one line of the Lord's Prayer. We can all too quickly slide over it: 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.' God longs for peace, longs to give it to his creation and to humanity. Jesus teaches us to join in God's longing and in his work for reconciliation and renewal. Jesus hints at what this kingdom peace, shaped according to God's will, looks like. He says we should pray that our earth will be like heaven – the place of God's peaceful reign of justice.

What did he mean – on earth as in heaven? Maybe he meant it to be about worship. Should our earthly worship be like heavenly worship? Many churches do delight in the idea that in worship they literally join in the festivities of the celestial throne room. Filled with joy, they are already in heaven, where God's will and rule are fulfilled. Christ is enthroned in majesty. Gathered around the throne, humans still on earth join the saints and angels to adore and glorify Christ, ascended and reigning. Charismatic Christians join the Orthodox in this exalted view of united earthly and heavenly worship.

But at the same time we are still squarely grounded. We are physically in our Sunday meeting at New Road Church or at the rented hall in Marston Road School. Both perspectives are true. Our worship goes on in two planes of time at once – the 'already' of worship in the heavenly throne room and the 'not yet' of our prosaic meeting rooms. We are fully aware that we haven't got all the answers, we find ourselves at odds with each other, our best plans falter, and our singing may not be all that wonderful.

But in the presence of God and the whole company of heaven, we come together to worship. We sing, we adore and we pray. 'Your will be done on earth as in heaven.' Jesus puts these prayer words into our mouths week after week, helping us to make connections between the two realities of earth and heaven – of God's reign which is already here among us and is yet to come in fullness.

Jesus' prayer helps us yearn for peace, justice and joy – hallmarks of God's kingdom. We never need to feel hypocritical or apologetic about praying such a big prayer. We are praying God's vision into reality. We are singing our own dreams for creation to be healed, relationships restored, sins forgiven, crops harvested, enemies reconciled, houses built, tears dried and banquets laid.

Where else in modern life do we find a glimpse into heaven? Where else do people sing and dream for justice, peace and joy – right here on our own earth? Listen to this impassioned description of prayer for God's kingdom to come:

We sing with God's own tears on our faces, because we, along with our God, yearn for a 'heavenly' earth which doesn't yet exist. In worship we feed our imaginations for peace. In prayer we keep shocked silence or we shout in protest at the human systems which block reconciliation. We plead, we weep to God on behalf of the outcast and immigrant. In worship we determine to empty our pockets of money and reschedule our diaries so we can support and stand with the weak and the prisoner. In worship we lay plans to plant trees, to protect sources of clean water, to make our urban deserts bloom.(1)

Do we? Is that what we do in worship? Does that describe the prayers of my Sunday church service? I suggest that the Lord's Prayer leads us precisely into that kind of impassioned engagement of emotion, heart and dreams. It propels us into the kind of determination of the will and decisive action that bring into being 'signs of the kingdom'.

Kingdom sparklers

Kingdom sparklers – that's what a friend of mine calls such kingdom signs. They are brilliantly illuminated glimpses into the qualities and values of God's will brought to pass here on earth. They may not themselves be the

kingdom, but they are markers, reminders of what we are looking forward to. They are 'trailers' for the kingdom of God.

I have a friend who makes it his business to go around looking for kingdom sparklers. Whenever he sees one he says, 'Look at that. God is doing it. God is here.' It may be a loving woman comforting her little grandchild on the bus. It may be people standing in the street, pointing to a double rainbow. It may be a volunteer in the soup kitchen, up to his elbows in suds, washing up the pots. It may be a group of young people of different colours and cultures enjoying a social evening. It may be the hushed moment in worship as Christians wait to hear the word that God has for them. It may be the splash of baptismal waters with its joyful accompanying song. It may be a snippet on the evening news, showing former political enemies now willing to talk to one another. It may be school children planting a dozen trees in the local park. 'Look at that. God is doing it. God is here.'

Kingdom sparklers glimmer all around us. Do we see them? Even more, do we take these perceptions into worship, to give thanks, to take heart, to inspire and comfort each other?

Praying for peace is the biggest prayer of our worship. That's because we tap into God's own heart for the new creation. As we prepare for leading prayers, as one theologian has said, we hold the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other. We can lay the foundations for our prayers upon Scripture across both Testaments. And then we can add the fuel that is made up of all the particulars of our concerns for justice and peace. The Spirit strikes the spark that will set the prayer alight in ourselves, in our churches and in the world that we pray for.

Here is a selection of specific ideas for including peace concerns in worship:

- Teach or preach specifically on the church's vocation to peace.
- Celebrate a Peace Sunday every year.
- Plan a church weekend retreat around the theme of peace.
- Keep racial justice concerns to the forefront in prayers. Find ways to do this positively, linked to local happenings.
- Keep track of your public prayers for peace concerns, making continuity from week to week.
- Pray for national enemies. Help people learn how to pray for their personal enemies, to bless them, and pray for their good.
- Ask the children to prepare peace posters or a mural.

- Keep connections in public prayers between forgiveness, personal peace with God and more global yearnings for peace in the community and among nations.
- Find out from special interest groups more detailed information about places of conflict so that you can make your prayers specific.
- ‘Adopt’ Christian peace mediators by name; tell them you are praying for them.
- Include testimonies of ‘kingdom sparklers’ in connection with intercessory prayers.
- Introduce hymns and songs with strong peace and justice texts.
- As a project for the whole church, memorise the great peace texts of Scripture and include them regularly in worship.
- Report on and pray for ‘secular’ groups that aid immigrants, refugees and needy people.
- Name, and pray for, local members’ efforts in environmental restoration and community renewal.
- Ensure that communion services include the recognition that we are a forgiving, reconciling people. This is the meaning of the ‘Peace’ greeting.

Notes

1 The Biblical Mandate

1. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 110.2-3.
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3. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.25.6.
4. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 129.
5. Wink, *Engaging*, 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), 184-209.

7. Augustine, *Enarr. in ps.* 45.10. See also *Enarr. in ps.* 48.17.
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2 The Church’s ‘Domestic’ Life

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3 The Church’s ‘Foreign Policy’ – Worship

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3. Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 13; Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 718.
4. Wink, *Engaging*, 304.
5. For the post-Cold War ‘gift of time’ in which nuclear weapons might be disarmed and banned, see Jonathan Schell, *The Gift of Time: The Case for Abolishing Nuclear Weapons Now* (London: Granta Books, 1998).
6. Miroslav Volf, ‘The Clumsy Embrace’, *Christianity Today*, 26 October 1998, 69.
7. Eleanor Kreider, ‘Let the Faithful Greet Each Other: The Kiss of Peace’, *Conrad Grebel Review* 5 (1987), 29-49.
8. Clapp, *Peculiar People*, 110-111.
9. Steve Finamore, ‘Worship, Social Action and the Kingdom of Heaven’, *Theology Themes* 4.2 (1997), 8-12.

4 The Church's 'Foreign Policy' – Work, War, Witness

1. Volf, 213, 256.
2. John Bender, 'Reconciliation Begins in Canada', *Mennonite Central Committee Peace Section Newsletter*, 16 (Jan-Feb 1986), 1-3.
3. Walter Wink, *When the Powers Fall: Reconciliation in the Healing of Nations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 62-63.
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15. Alan Kreider, *Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom*, Alcuin/GROW Joint Liturgical Studies, 32 (Cambridge: Grove Books Ltd, 1995).
16. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 109.

5 Praying for Peace

1. Quoted from the writings of Eleanor Kreider.