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SPIRITUALITY OF PEACEMAKING

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The Bible begins and ends with promises of peace. In the beginning God created a garden of peace. God gave the best to the man and woman God had created. An abode of peace, order and beauty was all they needed for a good life. At the end of the Bible another peaceable community appears. There God dwells with people on earth in a city with peace, security and healing (Rev. 21:11-14). In between, Isaiah and Micah speak of the peaceful era when swords will be hammered into plows, spears into pruning knives (Micah 4:3, Isaiah 2:4).

So the promise of peace is central to the biblical and Christian tradition. Peace on earth, goodwill to humankind is the angels' song at the birth of Jesus. The presence of Christ in our midst is said to bring the peace which passes all understanding (Phil. 4:7). Nevertheless, the Christian tradition has held a whole range of views about peace. And we can spend so much time debating these different views and the split some see between spiritual and historical peace. But let me start with myself.

All my life I have been confronted with structures of injustice that violated my dignity and self-esteem. The church, as well as my mother, taught me not to resist, for this is not Christian and is not the way of peace as they understood it. Until this day, I vividly remember that the only time my mother ever hit me and was really angry with me was when, as a child of eight, I did not listen to her and climbed the fig tree in our backyard and picked figs. She claimed that this made my grandmother angry, and I shouldn't do it. I thought I had as much right to the tree, to my father's and grandfather's property, as my grandmother. I couldn't understand why I couldn't have some figs. It exemplifies for me an understanding of "peace" as submission, relinquishing our rights, resulting in doing violence to others and ourselves.

The rebel in me started searching, agonizing, asking questions, and I kept asking myself: If we say there is that of God in every person, why is it so difficult to see that of God in others? Why is there

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so much evil and suffering in the world? For many years I struggled with this Christian truth, that we are made in the image and likeness of God. I was happy eventually to learn that the indwelling divinity seems to be part of all religions.

“The kingdom of God is within you,” says Jesus. “You are the temple of God,” wrote Paul. “He who knows himself knows God” said Prophet Muhammad, and this was echoed by many Sufis. This recognition of our shared brotherhood and sisterhood convinced me that it must lead to the disappearance of injustices of exploitation, oppression and everything that comes from fake beliefs that justify ourselves at the expense of others. Acknowledgement of our true selves is revolutionary. It must lead to great changes and to peace. Thus the search for peace and the recognition of reality are identical.

In the war of 1948, I was only 8 years old but I can remember very clearly the fears, hiding in the basement, and the Palestinian refugees from the coastal plains of Palestine. My father and older brother, hearing of their plight, took a truck with water and bread and rescued many of the children and women who were running away from the dangers of war but could not go on walking because of the heat, thirst, hunger and pain. Fifty of these refugees shared our house for a period of six weeks. Another hundred camped under our pine trees. Our Friends Meeting House sheltered many families until they found a way of settling somewhere else. I have lived most of my life next to a refugee camp. The war is over but their plight is not over. A fourth generation is born in that camp. Do we have peace?

In 1967 when another war broke out in the Middle East, my older son was 8 years old and his sister 5 years old. We were hiding in a shelter that was partially damaged. Our lives were threatened every minute. Then we moved to another shelter where we were among thirty other children and adults. That day two little girls died from an Israeli air raid in my town. Overnight we found ourselves under the dominance of an alien power. Soon we came to experience that what follows the end of a war can be as bad as — or worse than — war itself.

Three of my six grandchildren were born during the *intifada*. One of them was six years old during the Gulf War. How much longer do we have to live with war experiences from generation to generation? I can share with you hundreds of experiences, dealing with my fears, my children’s, my grandchildren’s, but I do not want to overwhelm you or myself with this exercise.

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Living under military occupation for almost half of my life made me go through deep self-searching, and I have been confronted with three loyalties. The first loyalty is to Christ who calls us to love our enemy. The second loyalty calls us to aid any man or woman in need or trouble. The third loyalty calls us to love our country, its people and its way of life. This loyalty prevents us from being willing to aid our invader. In our situation, those not living our experience cannot set rules for us to follow, but what we can do is to testify that in our experience the spirit of God leads us into the truth and gives us the needed guidance in every situation.

We have gone through circumstances of great privation and anxiety. All this seemed at times to waken my dependence on God, but what joy and hope I gain when I know, wherever I am, whether in affluent circumstances or in poverty, whether I have personal liberty or not, I am under the guiding hand of God, and God has a service for me to render wherever God has placed me.

I am a Quaker, and Friends throughout history have maintained a testimony for peace. War, we say, is contrary to the mind of Christ, and it is laid upon us to live in the virtue of that life and power that wins through love and not through war. This is not an easy testimony for it has three aspects:

1. To refuse to take part in acts of war ourselves.
2. To strive to remove the causes of war.
3. To use the way of love open to us to promote peace and heal wounds.

How can I interpret this testimony to my children and students when we are all victims of violence? How do we deal with the violence of the occupier? How do I interpret the peace testimony to my children when they see that violence seems to bring about change, when they see that non-violence seems to permit our homeland to be given to others? How do I show that our faith, our peace, can be a practical faith, a practical activism for peace?

Here in my spiritual journey I found myself at the crossroads. I could not go on because I did not know which road to take. Neither could I go back because of my new experiences. Sometimes the journey seemed to be too difficult. My life was like a puzzle for which I could not find all the pieces. I have been taught to love my enemy, but at times in my journey these words increased the war within myself. How can I have peace within when I worry about life

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in general and the lives of my family members? How do I have peace within when life has become a burden?

When I have peace within it is not that I approve of the violence around me. It is when I have the strength to endure suffering, the strength to attempt to love all men and women, that I am liberated to work for peace and freedom. Love of one's enemies is recognition that the enemy too is a child of God, for if we deny that, we are denying that they can make the very changes we are demanding of them.

For me this continues to be one of the hardest paths on my spiritual journey. There have been milestones along the way that show me it is possible. There are moments of pure joy when my soul has been washed with peace, when I have been strong and my pacifist approach to life has worked. I believe that even in the midst of persecution we can find ourselves taken over by the power of divine forgiveness. God's forgiving love can burst like a flare even in the darkness of our grief and hatred and free us to love. But there is a subtle pride in clinging to our hatreds as justified, as if no one in human history had known suffering greater than ours.

All along, as Palestinians and as women, we were told to be peaceful, which too often is meant to be passive, nice, to allow ourselves to be walked over. They talked to us about 'peace' that was achieved by pounding the opposition into submission; 'peace' maintained by crushing those who protested against injustice, 'peace' for the rulers at the expense of the ruled.

We live daily as persons and as communities in the midst of violence. We often find ourselves willingly or unwillingly participating in social organizations that practice and embody violence. We may deliberately act in violent or non-violent ways to promote justice. For those who opted for violence against injustice can we say we would rather see you die than defend yourselves? Who will throw the first stone to condemn them? Who is morally superior? When we condemn those who opted for violence, we are demonizing others so we feel good about ourselves, and we can then relieve ourselves of our responsibility for our sin of treating our brothers and sisters as less than human. As we opt for violence or non-violence in our revolution, we know the liberty to choose is not always there. I believe the pacifist and non-pacifist committed to the struggle for a just future should regard one another on most issues as allies. The problem is not between them as much as it is between those who support the oppressive structures of

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the status quo and those on the side of liberation. As Christians the gospel compels us not to support the oppressive structures.

I am a Quaker and I am a woman. What are the teachings of my religious heritage that I can apply to the struggles I am engaged in?

There are many contemporary ideas on revolution, but all these revolutions have only involved surface changes, such as transfer of power from one personality to another or the replacement of one form of tyranny by another. A vital revolution must be concerned with the triumph of human values and human rights.

Christian teachings seem so relevant to ideal revolutions. Although non-violence is the nature of these teachings, it should never be equated with passivity or disengagement in the face of injustice. On the contrary, these teachings are very active, highly political, often controversial and sometimes a very dangerous form of engagement in social and political conflict.

In this struggle, means and ends should be consistent. I cannot endorse the bloody powers in my day-to-day confrontations and at the same time be taken seriously when I speak of a future of wisdom, sensitivity, fairness and compassion. The peculiar strength of non-violence comes from the dual nature of its approach—the offering of respect and concern on the one hand and defiance and non-cooperation with injustice on the other. Together these seemingly contradictory impulses, to rage against yet to refuse to destroy, combine to create a strength worthy of nothing less than revolution—true revolution, not just a re-shuffling of death-wielding power.

In the last few years, first in Madrid and then in Washington, we watched anxiously as the Mideast peace process unfolded. We should not forget the real issue in these talks is Palestine. The Palestinian people have accepted an extraordinary set of compromises, required of no other participant. Israel is not committing itself to withdrawal, no end to settlements, no negotiation on Jerusalem, no compromise on Palestinian self-determination. The peace that Israel is ready to offer we call surrender of our national identity, political rights and the remaining land on which we live. But such a vision is a formula for unending conflict.

No one can suppose that having resisted Israeli rule for decades that we're about to give up. The realities on the ground for us are too tragic, too violent. Cosmetic peace for us is not enough. We have few allies, but we do have hope. We do have a more just picture

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of the future than Israel, built on reconciliation and peace. The answer to peace is not exclusivism and hostility unending. Rather, it is reconciliation, sharing and community. There is no military option for Palestinians and Israelis. We should live together and discover how to share the land together.

We have agreed to work for peace. We have cooperated with the conveners and the Israelis. What worries us is the silence and indifference to our plight—mainly in the United States. The issues are clear, and the dangers are obvious. Peace is for everybody, not just for the powerful. We cannot have peace if we continue to recite our litanies and past fears. We should deal with our present time and the future of our children and humanity. We should build with different materials that are not combustible, that will not produce other wars! It depends upon all of us to remove the causes of war, but we do not seem to realize that. We are indifferent. We have three meals a day. We have our jobs, our positions, our titles. We do not want to be disturbed. We may talk about peace, hold conferences, but if we are not transformed inwardly, if we still want power, position, if we are motivated by greed, if we are nationalistic, if we are bound by dogmas and beliefs for which we are willing to die and destroy others, we cannot have peace in the world.

But what is peace? Is it the absence of conflict? Conflict is an inevitable fact of daily life—internal, interpersonal, inter-group and international conflict. Peace consists in creatively dealing with conflict. Peace is the process of working to resolve conflicts in such a way that both sides win, with increased harmony as the outcome of the conflict and its resolution.

We greet one another with peace. We pray for peace. We are called to be peacemakers. We were told the mission of the Savior is to be a deliverer of peace.

Peace is a state of respect, cooperation and well being.

Peace is the presence of social justice.

Peace is the absence of war, poverty and hunger.

Peace is the freedom from sickness and disease.

It is employment and health.

Peace is hope for our future and the future of all God's children and God's world.

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Peace is when we have no fear to assemble, to worship, to work, to publish and to say the truth even to the powerful.

Peace is Salam, well being for all, equality and respect for human rights.

Peace is when everybody feels at home and accepted, no barriers of age, class, sex, race, religion or nationality.

Peace is action that is dynamic and positive.

Peace is that fragile harmony that carries with it the experience of the struggle, the endurance of suffering and the strength of love.

Through the ages, people have engaged in a universal search for this kind of peace, for ultimate meaning in life, but have turned this struggle into wars, to death to gain dominance for a particular ideology, religion or nation. Our age of unparalleled advancement in education, science and technology has been an age of enormous violence in corners of the world. Meanwhile the need for imaginative understanding, simple trust and creative cooperation among people has never been more urgent. The time has come when a fresh exploration should be made of the role that our religious experiences and spiritual insights could play in promoting the harmony of humankind and in affirming the Presence, the Presence of a spirit of hope and compassion available to all by which our lives may be made more whole, more harmonious as we draw directly upon that power around us, within us and within all life.

We cannot live a day without saying yes or no for death or for life, for war or for peace. The choice is ours. There is no compromise in the matter. To postpone decision is to decide. To hide the matter is to decide. To compromise is to decide. There is no escape and this is our challenge.

May the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord lift his countenance upon you and give you peace—and give you peace.