

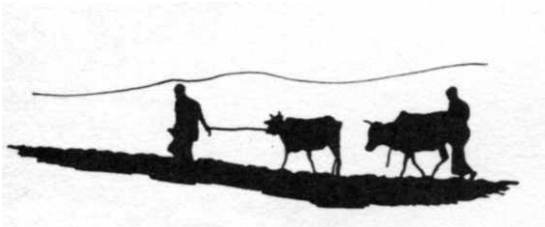
THE TWENTIETH  
JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURE  
1984

**PILGRIMS for JUSTICE and PEACE**

*"If we are to be pilgrims for justice and peace, we must expect  
the desert."*

*— Dom Helder Camara, Archbishop of Recife, Brazil*

**Peter D. Jones**



## THE JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURES

This is one of a series of lectures instituted by Australia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends on the occasion of the establishment of that Yearly Meeting in January 1964.

This Lecture was delivered in Perth on 9 January 1984 during the Yearly Meeting.

James Backhouse was an English Friend who visited Australia from 1832 to 1838. He and his companion, George Washington Walker, travelled widely but spent most of their time in Tasmania. It was through this visit that Quaker Meetings were first established in Australia. James Backhouse was a botanist who published full accounts of what he saw, besides encouraging Friends and following up his deep concern for the convicts and Aborigines.

Australian Friends hope that this series of lectures will bring fresh insights into truth, often with reference to the needs and aspirations of Australian Quakerism.

William Oats  
Presiding Clerk  
Australia Yearly Meeting



Drawing by F. Eichenberg, *The Catholic Worker*.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Peter D. Jones is a member of Melbourne RM and Field Worker for the Australia Quaker Peace Committee. He likes to refer to himself as a "movement baby", since his parents met each other in the peace movement through the Fellowship of Reconciliation. He grew up in the Congregational Church, but joined the Society of Friends in 1966.

Peter's interest in international affairs developed as a result of his parents' involvement in these concerns. In 1969 his mother and father went to live in Africa. This move led to Peter's involvement in the Anti-Apartheid movement with which he has worked closely for many years. He has particularly supported the liberation struggle in Namibia.

Peter has travelled widely in Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and the Pacific. At one stage he taught at the Friends' Boys' School in Ramallah, near Jerusalem, and while there he was accidentally caught up in the Six Day War.

From 1980 to 1982 he was deeply involved with the work of the European Disarmament Movement in East and West Europe. After this period he returned to Australia through the Soviet Union and Asia. There he met with people of many faiths involved in the struggle for peace and justice, some of whom he had met previously on an earlier trip in 1975-76 when he first came to Australia.

He now represents the Asia-Pacific area on the Council of the War Resisters International, writing and speaking extensively on issues within the region. He has also organized a number of workshops for people involved in nonviolent action for social change in Australia and New Zealand.

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## ABOUT THIS LECTURE

Justice and peace issues seem very remote from Australia at times, and there is a marked tendency to overlook our neighbours in Asia and the Pacific, and to focus on Europe and North America. Our concern for peace can lead us to forget basic justice issues that are a priority in Asia. We hear very little about the involvement of the Church in this struggle for justice or the problems that it encounters. At the same time we often feel hopeless, confronting the power of militarism in our own society and the forces of greed and fear that lie behind it.

The *Bible* still speaks to this condition. The first half of the lecture traces the biblical message from the Liberation of the Children of Israel from Egypt to the survey of the Church as viewed by St. John the Divine, while facing repression at the hands of the Roman Empire.

The Society of Friends belongs to a continuing radical tradition in the Church that goes back beyond the Old Testament prophets. We often forget this tradition; the same could be said for the Church in general. A sense of history and an international perspective are vital parts of commitment to social change.

In Asia, Christian witness cannot be divorced from the struggle for physical survival, although not all the Churches accept this. It is not easy to take on the totalitarian state and Peter Jones relates through a series of personal anecdotes some of the issues that Christian groups are involved with, and the penalties they pay.

Finally coming back to Australia, the author looks at some basic justice and peace issues within our own community, and at ways in which we can go forward, locally and within our region.

# PILGRIMS FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

*"The capacity for radical hope is at the core of the Christian vision."  
- Ladislaus Boros, S.J.*

In August 1982 I was visiting East Germany and talking to Christians involved with the independent peace movement. On my last evening there we ended up talking about Hope in a situation where the opposition seems insurmountable as it does to so many people in the European peace movement, East and West. This theme continued with me after I left East Europe to return to Australia through Asia, learning about the seemingly hopeless situation that many people in Asia find themselves in and the odds they are up against.

I would like to explore with you these conflicting messages of hope and despair in the Christian dimension and in a society which represents the small minority of materially wealthy people in our world. It is also a world where Jesus and the prophets explained to us that God has chosen to identify with the hungry and those of low degree for "he has put down the mighty from their seats . . . and the rich he hath sent empty away." <sup>1</sup>

It is a world that is changing so fast that we are giddy with the pace of change. Quite naturally most of us, being comfortably off, have no desire for even more change. At the same time we are conscious that the changes which have brought us material prosperity have also brought us to the verge of extinction as we have tried to play God with the power of the atom. As Albert Einstein remarked in 1945, "The splitting of the atom has changed everything - except our modes of thinking - and thus we drift towards unparalleled disaster."

When the issue of the arms race was raised at the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver last August, delegates from the Third World pointed out that our preoccupation with peace is diverting us from the need for justice. Or as Pope Paul VI put it, "If you want peace, work for justice." The delegates wanted to remind us that true peace can only be rooted in justice, and that for most people in the world, day-to-day survival is an immediate priority. Too often peace is presented in the abstract, as simply being an absence of war or of the threat of war. Our fear of a Nuclear Holocaust can easily distract us from considering our neighbour's more urgent priorities. These in turn are directly linked to the one million dollars a minute which the world now spends on the

arms race, arms mostly made in the wealthy countries and used in the poor ones where 25 million people have been killed in wars since 1945.

The wealthy countries - "the North" - maintain their hegemony over the poor countries - "the South" - through the momentum of the arms race. The Soviet Threat is too often a convenient pretext to justify repression in the name of National Security as well as denial of basic Human Rights.

Disarmament would deprive the Western Alliance and the Soviet bloc of their means of maintaining control over the Third World, its people and resources.

The vision of peace in the Old Testament is firmly rooted in justice. Time and time again the prophets remind us of that theme; that God is not interested in burnt offerings and tithes of mint, dill and cummin, but let "Justice run down as waters, and Righteousness as a mighty stream." <sup>2</sup>

One task for the Christian is to discern the Signs of the Times and in many ways the period we are living through is one rather similar to the time in which the Religious Society of Friends emerged after 1650. Some sections of the community were growing very prosperous, but for others it was a time of wars, famine, inflation, economic calamity, disease and death. Today this pattern is being repeated on a world scale and once again many people have turned to Millenarianism, a belief of the imminence of the Second Coming, to solve all their problems.

As a Christian I believe like Early Friends that the incarnation and intervention of God in History was to proclaim "the Kingdom of God is upon you," that is, a movement towards a new social order based on love, justice, and righteousness. I am appalled by the immensity of the task before us and like the prophet Jonah I constantly want to run away from it. I find the task particularly daunting in Australia which is a country to which immigrants have traditionally come to work hard and enjoy the fruits of their prosperity.

What I would like to do in this lecture is to take a look at the roots of our Christian commitment to justice and peace in the *Bible*; to look briefly at the origins of the Religious Society of Friends some three hundred years ago; and then to move to the present to try and discern the Signs of the Times in the part of the world we live in, to seek together perhaps some guidance in these difficult times in a spirit of faith and community. I particularly want to address myself to the feelings of despair which can sweep over us as we are faced with the apparent

hopelessness of trying to change things, because of the power of the forces entrenched against us.

Just over seventeen years ago I went to work at a Friends' School at the other end of Asia in what many Christians and Jews refer to as the Holy Land. I became very conscious for the first time of the roots of the New Testament in the Old Testament and in the tradition out of which Christianity grew. My year there as a volunteer was abruptly and ironically terminated by the Six Day War when I found myself under fire from two sides both armed by the same country; a country which is nominally Christian though its clients are not, and all in the place where the Prince of Peace first proclaimed His message nearly two thousand years ago. This gave rise within me to an ongoing concern about the global arms trade. Having seen some more of the results of this trade in my recent time in Asia I shall come back later to this theme as it affects us here in Australia. It is also a classic example of an apparently hopeless task where we are outnumbered by the forces arrayed against us.

*"Following Jesus is a response to one who calls us forth into the desert so that we may build a new future for his poor."*

As I sought to understand more about Judaism I came to appreciate the significance of the Exodus which pervades the whole of the Old Testament, and the concept of liberation which goes with it. God saw the suffering of the people under Pharaoh and told Moses to liberate them from Egypt. It is interesting to note that the exit of the Hebrews was illegal in the eyes of Pharaoh; however, if the established order is grounded in the domination of other human beings it should not be respected. Presumably American Quakers thought of that when they assisted escaped slaves along the Underground Railroad in the nineteenth century.

Moses then had a tough task on his hands for the Hebrews, having escaped from oppression in Egypt, wanted instant liberation. On a number of occasions the people grumbled at Moses and said that if they couldn't achieve immediate satisfaction by reaching the Promised Land, then they would prefer to be back as slaves in Egypt.

Here is a fascinating parallel with the situation in many parts of the world today where people seek liberation. It is a process which takes a long time and can

only begin with an awareness of oppression. I remember discovering that although Friends were among the first groups to crusade against slavery, there were initially plenty of Quakers who owned or traded in slaves. They justified it on the grounds that they were kind to their slaves and that their slaves did not want to be free. I expect they were speaking sincerely and that there were slaves who were quite happy as they were, especially if they had no knowledge of an alternative.

In terms of a more recent parallel I was re-reading last year's Backhouse Lecture, *An Adventure into Feminism with Friends*. At the same time I was listening to a programme on the ABC in which a speaker supporting Women Who Want to be Women launched a bitter attack on feminism. I am also reminded of white people who come back from South Africa and say that black people, when asked if they are happy, reply that they are. Usually the black people they refer to are servants, as white visitors seldom meet any other black people.

It is easy to solve the world's problems in theory. Those who do so are sometimes known as armchair revolutionaries. There are also those who call for revolution, but whose behaviour seems very little different from those they seek to criticise. The hallmark of liberation as seen in the life of Christ is the passage in Mark where we read, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give up his life as a ransom for many." <sup>3</sup> This is perhaps what distinguishes us from some other voices for liberation. As Moses knew so well, especially in moments of pain and despair, the touchstone of liberation is Faith. You need to be aware of your oppression and why you are oppressed, and to believe that change is possible. During the forty years in the wilderness the people may have lost their faith in Yahweh, but Moses never did, even when he was told that he would never live to enter the Promised Land.

That in a sense is our difficult task today, to engage people in a struggle for liberation when we may never live to see the end result. As an American Quaker, Rob Tucker, put it:

"The problem is that people cannot readily reconcile themselves to a role of eternal struggle for goals eternally unreachd. Yet that is precisely what is required. Even for the Marxist, a mature understanding must teach that perfection recedes infinitely - if you create the society you thought you wanted, by then you will see a need for further change. For Christians the theoretical social goal is nothing less than universal sainthood and a social order that reflects,



serves and nurtures it. That goal is so lofty that it may never exist except in the Christian imagination as a standard by which to measure reality. It imposes upon Christianity a doctrine of permanent revolution. Christians, then, must reconcile themselves to a revolutionary role that may bear no visible fruit at all in their lifetime. They must understand the need for constant revision of proximate goals. Somehow they must also maintain their revolutionary fervour. It is an extremely difficult balance to maintain." <sup>4</sup>

Our society is geared to instant satisfaction and white Australians are not usually prepared to wait. Similarly it is difficult not to see the world in terms of light and darkness. People love to hear that all their problems are caused by some external agent, ranging from the trade unions to the Soviet Union, but they don't want to hear that to be worthy of liberation they have to get their own house in order as well.

In his first sermon preached in Nazareth<sup>5</sup> Jesus quoted from the Book of Isaiah<sup>6</sup> about the presence of the Kingdom of God. Having cheered the congregation up with this vision of an end to Roman oppression and domination, he went on to infuriate them with the story of the widow in Sidon and Namaan the Syrian, as well as proclaiming his own role. The inhabitants of Galilee had nothing but contempt for their neighbours to the north (Sidon and Syria lie to the north of Israel) so they took him out to throw him over the hill with his critical message which no-one wanted to hear. They would rather have heard a verbal attack on the wicked Romans than one on their own prejudice.

Returning to the theme of the Exodus, the Hebrews eventually reach the Promised Land. Having escaped from the domination of Pharaoh in Egypt they become the new oppressors, not only of other people but also within their own ranks. So God sends the prophets to call the people back to a living faith but invariably their message is ignored. A prophecy is not a prediction, it is a warning or promise. The prophet warns Israel about God's judgement and promises God's salvation. Both the warning and the promise are conditional; they depend upon the free response of the people of Israel. If Israel does not change, the consequence will be disastrous. If Israel does change, there will be an abundance of blessings. The practical purpose of a prophecy is to persuade the people to change or repent. Every prophet appealed for a conversion.

The prophets saw injustice not as a social disorder or an offence to the poor, but as a violation of the divine law and an insult to the holiness of God. The division between individual ethics and social practice is found neither in the Gospel nor even in Judaism. It is the result of persecution and compromises that are still being made.

*"Faith derives its power from the truth of what is believed and hoped for. "*<sup>7</sup>

Like us Jesus lived in an age when it seemed that the world was about to come to an end. Despite differences of opinion about how, why and when, very many Jews at that time were convinced that the world was on the brink of an apocalyptic catastrophe.

Jesus chose to be baptised by John, another prophet. While others looked forward to the "age to come" when the faithful of Israel would triumph over their enemies, John prophesied doom and destruction for Israel. His message was a simple one. God was angry and was about to intervene in history, to condemn and destroy Israel. This fiery judgement upon Israel would be executed by a human being, just as Jesus later referred to the destruction of Jerusalem in a war with the Romans. John too appealed for social morality, not ritual purity or petty details.

Jesus didn't agree with all John said, but chose at first to identify with him. While John had relied upon a baptism of conversion, Jesus relied upon faith. Although Jesus was what might be called today middle class, he spent most of his time with the poor and oppressed, referred to by the Pharisees as the rabble. In identifying with the mass of people, Jesus was moved by compassion. I would define compassion as a response to suffering. In identifying with sinners, Jesus was dealing with people who believed that sin was inherited so you couldn't change it. Sickness was a consequence of it. To be a friend of Jesus meant implicit forgiveness. Joy was the most characteristic result of all Jesus' activity amongst the poor and oppressed. He stressed the moral and spiritual conditions of liberation rather than precipitating the liberation itself.

We refer to the first four books of the New Testament as the Gospels or Good News. Jesus wanted to prepare, then inaugurate the Kingdom of God on earth. His nonviolence was not a means to reach this end, but rather an obedience

and a witness to God who is love, who alone will establish the Kingdom on earth. When Jesus stated that his Kingdom was in the world, but not of the world, he meant that he was turning his back on current worldly values and standards. In his references to the Second Coming I feel that he was recommending an "end of time" attitude, a state of mind that would strip us of an interest in accumulating possessions, releasing us to respond freely and promptly to the urgent needs of others.

Jesus saw his liberating activity as a kind of power struggle with Satan, a warfare against the power of evil in all its shapes and forms. In the last analysis, goodness is more powerful than evil, even though at times - as at the Crucifixion - evil will appear to triumph. I sometimes feel that there may be times when God calls us to live in such a period of history when everything seems to be favouring the advance of selfishness and injustice, fear and hate. I think then of the words of Dorothy Day (1893 - 1980), co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, "God did not ask us to be successful; God asked us to be faithful." I don't know of any other way in which to explain the faith of people I have met living under some of the absolute forms of oppression I have encountered in Africa and Asia, Central America or in East Europe, especially when I compare their faith with what sometimes passes for the Christian faith in my own society.

*"When shall we have the courage to outgrow the charity mentality  
and see that at the bottom of all relations between rich and poor  
there is a problem of justice?"*

*- Dom Helder Camara*

What concerns me here is why Jesus chose to identify with the poor and oppressed in society, and why he asserted that the meek and humble will inherit the earth. There is nothing nice about poverty; it can be degrading and squalid, it can bring out the worst in human nature just as wealth and power can, and it is nothing to idolise. Nor was the love of Jesus for the downtrodden an exclusive love. It was an indication of the fact that what he valued was humanity, not status and prestige.

To Jesus the poor and oppressed had nothing to recommend them except their humanity and sufferings. He wanted the middle and upper classes to strip

themselves of their false values, of their wealth and prestige, in order to become real people. Such a spirit probably prompted a Quaker businessman, John Woolman, to develop his business to such a point where it meant he could meet his various responsibilities, at which point he declined to develop it any further and sent potential customers to other firms. He used the word "cumber" in his *Journal* to indicate all those earthly concerns that block us off from the things that really matter in this world; that the more we build up wealth for ourselves, the less time we have for service to others.

The Kingdom of God will be a society in which there will be no prestige and no status, no division of people into inferior and superior, no class system or caste system. There will be people who won't like this and will resist it, which is why Christ's analysis of power is so important. He prophesied that the divine political power of the future would be in the hands of the poor and the little ones. The structure of the Kingdom of God will be determined by the power of the spontaneous living service which people render to one another. I know that throughout history when the powerless have taken power, they have frequently behaved no better than their predecessors. That is why Jesus stressed that the need to be worthy of liberation and the need to be of service to others are the hallmarks of his Kingdom.

Yet too often Christians have seized on service to others while ignoring the instructions of Jesus to his disciples, "and He sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal." <sup>8</sup> Everybody loves a healer and usually - though not always - an educator, but a stirrer is something different. The charge sheet read out against Jesus before Pilate reads, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place." <sup>9</sup> He was what we might call a transnational agitator.

Jesus appealed for a new group solidarity, an experience of solidarity with humankind. This was a new emphasis of God's message to Israel which was difficult to accept and nearly split the Early Church. The basis of solidarity or love is compassion, that emotion which wells up from the pit of one's stomach at the sight of another's need. Reflecting on that today I suppose we need to also examine why we seem to get more worked up about one human disaster in our neighbourhood while a few thousand dead across the ocean means very little. Or why a picture of a baby with its ribs sticking out evokes more donations than a preventative health programme that would mean life for thousands of children. Politics also intrudes into compassion when we show our anger over those who died in the Korean Air Lines "incident" in September 1983 but totally ignore

more than 42,000 people who have been killed in El Salvador over the last two years.

Compassion must lead to change as we take on the system that produces the injustice and suffering in the first place. The dignity of the oppressed will only be restored by a total and radical restructuring of society. This is why Jesus appealed for a change of mind and heart, a change of allegiance right up to the top of society. He knew there would be little response at the top but He still made the effort.

Somehow those of us who are prepared to take on the rich and powerful today have to know deep down that to believe in God is to believe that in the end goodness and truth will triumph over evil and falsehood. For some years I have been involved in supporting the struggle for liberation in Namibia or South West Africa as it used to be known. Colonised by Germany after 1884 when they managed to wipe out half the population in thirty years, this mineral-rich territory was given as a mandate to South Africa after the First World War. The white South African regime has used the Namibian people to develop the agricultural and mineral resources of their country for the benefit of white settler farmers and outside investors through a system of contract labour once described by an American judge as twentieth century slavery. It was a system which took them away from their families for over a year at a time, which gave them no choice of work or wages, forbade strikes or free union organising, and certainly gave them none of the basic benefits enjoyed by white workers in the mines and factories and fishing industry.

I believe that the contract labour workers who illegally went on strike in 1971 understood that even if their resistance was futile they were in effect saying that one day what they stood for would triumph over the Apartheid system that had enslaved them for almost a hundred years. Perhaps this was why their leader told the white judge that Jesus Christ had come to make them free, but the contract labour system made them slaves. They must have seemed a bit like the Tolpuddle Martyrs in front of the court in Dorset in 1834 before being transported to Botany Bay; the Methodist lay-preacher up against the Anglican judge representing the ruling class; a handful of ordinary workers against a representative of the all-powerful state, yet they chose to defy it. Namibia may seem a long way from Australia but the products those men mined and are still mining away from their wives and children are advertised every day here. For financial or sentimental reasons many people set great store by diamonds.



*"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea." <sup>10</sup>*

Going on into the New Testament we come to the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles which I once read as an organiser's manual. When I think of the kind of problems the Early Church encountered, I feel a bit better about some of the problems we face in our own churches and organisations, though I suppose it was easier for them at a transnational level, when they had a common language in which to communicate.

The Book of Revelation also carries some interesting parallels with our own age. Though John adopts the apocalyptic\* form he claims to be a prophet, and in this tradition God has instructed John to warn his fellow Christians about an impending crisis. John was expecting heavy persecution of the Church, probably towards the end of the reign of Domitian (AD 81 - 96). Domitian's edict on worship of the reigning emperor led John to see the emergence of a new totalitarianism. In fact Domitian was assassinated in AD 96 but John's letters constitute a visitation of the churches to see whether they are in a fit state to face the coming crisis, a struggle for survival.

\*Apocalyptic refers to a revelation given in an "end of time" framework, using frequent symbolism.

The Book of Revelation assumes you've read the rest of the *Bible*, and is witness to the fact that despite evil in the universe, injustice will not triumph in the end. John was a realist in his appraisal of the churches with their little strength and their variegated weaknesses, so realistic that we can still recognise in them the churches to which we ourselves belong. He was a realist in his grasp of the power and splendour of Imperial Rome and of her ability to crush the church, in his analysis of the real nature of the forces that were devastating the earth; so realistic indeed that his world, once we understand it, is very little different from our own. Yet he never doubted that in the battle between the Monster and the Lamb (the Lamb is the symbol of self-sacrificing and redemptive love), the

ultimate victory would go to the Lamb. Maybe Early Quakers understood this concept better than we do because they frequently referred to the Lamb's War. We would probably feel embarrassed to use this term today.

I draw strength from such a vision when I contemplate the power of the military or multinational corporations or the nation state, and the human fear and greed that underpins them. Some of my friends around the Pacific refer to this connection as the Tridents within us, making the link between the new missile-carrying nuclear submarine deployed in 1982 and those forces like sexism, racism and greed in ourselves. The author of Revelation also spoke from experience as one who had stood in a Roman court of justice, fortunate to escape with his life, and he believed that countless other Christians must stand where he stood.

In the New Testament the specifically new element is that the people of God transcend national boundaries. That is why for the Early Church oaths of allegiance to Rome were forbidden, for the state in its oath claimed an allegiance that ought only to be given to Christ. This is why John's resistance was focused on opposition to emperor-worship although once you had taken the oath you could go home and practice your Christianity without hindrance. The parallels still hold good today.

The nation state does not simply contain the potential of evil; the core controlling power in the state is evil. The power behind the state is traced back to "the principalities and powers" or "the beast" of Revelation. This allegiance to such a state is really devil worship or idolatry, especially when it turns us against millions of other people simply because they are inhabitants of another state and our "enemy."

As Daniel Berrigan, the American Jesuit poet and dissident, once remarked: "There are very few of us in America who are able to see the faces of Soviet children ... of Soviet workers, or old people, or students. Let us see the faces of one another, especially the faces which are forbidden us, forbidden our eyes and forbidden our hearts." We can just as easily substitute Australia here for America.

The state operates in terms of power, hierarchy, wealth and violence; the church operates (or should) in terms of submission, unity, sharing, love and peace. The State cries, "Blessed are the Conquerors," while Jesus said, "Blessed are the Peacemakers."

The cold political realists tell us, "Peace is stabilised with cannons and bombers, humanity with concentration camps and pogroms. We're living in a time when all standards are turned upside down. Today the aggressor is the shepherd of peace and the beaten and hunted are the troublemakers of the world. What's more there are whole races who believe it." <sup>11</sup>

Jesus preached primarily in relation to the coming of the Kingdom of God, and the task of His followers is to promote the values of this type of community. To be in the world but not of the world is a difficult balance to achieve, but the church is a prophetic community, and the ongoing life of the Church as a process of liberation is an essential tenet in Christian dialogue.

*"Would God that all the people were prophets."- George Fox  
quoting the aspiration of Moses.*

To be involved in a long struggle is exhausting so it is not surprising that the history of the Church is constantly interrupted by renewal movements; just as social and political revolutions are necessary to restore a justice of God that is always deteriorating.

The Religious Society of Friends grew out of turbulent times in the middle of the seventeenth century in England. Many Early Quakers were drawn from those who had perceived that the new rulers after the execution of the King (1649) were no better than their predecessors in earthly terms, let alone spiritual ones. Many had turned to religion after their radical movement for change had been crushed by Cromwell's conservative military dictatorship. They brought their radical political and economic witness with them which has continued to infuse the Society, that incidentally then referred to itself as Publishers of Truth or Children of the Light, whatever their detractors called them. In those days if you weren't despised by the bench simply as a Quaker, the disreputable equivalent of being called a Marxist or Pinko today was to be called an Anabaptist, a Ranter or as one pamphlet attacking Quakers put it, the Romish spawn of Popish frogs.

The Quaker egalitarian message spread rapidly in England and Wales, and was met with heavy repression. After forty years the new movement was exhausted and following the Act of Toleration slipped into a century of quietism. This is perfectly understandable. All I want to stress here is the radical tradition that Quakers come from, as indeed does the whole Church. Three hundred years ago Friends testified ahead of their time around issues, such as Education, the



Equality of Women, Slavery, Honesty in Business, the recognition of the Rights of Native People in North America, and against War. Today there is an unfortunate tendency to still live on past laurels instead of considering where new concerns for prophetic witness lie, both at home and overseas.

Sometimes we forget our roots and the repression that such witness brings, for even the most political of First World theologians have never seriously had to face the threat of long-term imprisonment or death since the 1930's in Germany. A genuine political theology is by definition a threat to the status quo. It is in line with the biblical experience of the Prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus and the Early Church.

To find that witness today we have to look north to Asia or to Africa, Latin America and East Europe. I feel the time may come, though, when that witness will need to be found in the Church in Australia as well, which is why I drew the parallel with Revelation. That is why I would now like to share with you some experiences from our own region, from Asia, where fifty-six per cent of the world's population lives in an arc from Japan to Afghanistan. Here the persecution is well under way.

*"Being the Church of the Poor does not mean that the rich are excluded. The Church is for everyone. Our task is to convert the rich to become the Church of the poor."*

*-Bishop Julio Labayon, Prelate of Infanta, the Philippines.*

There is no one religious faith prevailing in Asia. Christianity is very much in a minority position, although it began there as did other world faiths. Traditionally where Christians have been a small minority they have kept a relatively low profile to avoid persecution and tended to steer clear of social and political involvement. The only country in East Asia where there is widespread open dissent is, not surprisingly, the Philippines which is close to ninety percent Roman Catholic.

In the countries which I have visited I have had the opportunity to meet Christians concerned with social justice as well as evangelism, although few are prepared to risk such involvement. This is hardly surprising when you consider the repressive nature of the regimes concerned. These men and women have realised that when Christians perform their prophetic task, when they point out that money or the existing political system is not a god, then their remarks take on a subversive tone and they are - like the early Christian martyrs - once more dragged into the arena.



*"The language of Jesus' cross was the language of the suffering of the Korean people."*

I was walking down a street in the centre of Seoul, capital of South Korea, with an Australian friend one evening in November 1982 when we saw several busloads of well-armed uniformed men waiting around just off the roadway. We were rather puzzled by this display of force until we met a Korean friend who explained that there was a theology lecture on that evening. That was what had prompted this show of armed force by the state.

A couple of days earlier I had attended a church service for young women who had been sacked or locked out from two plants in an industrial area of Seoul. Outside the church were the men in uniform along with security agents there to monitor those who went to the service. After that I visited the Urban Industrial Mission and met the minister there, who had himself been jailed three times. Many of the young women were staying there during this period. He explained to me how the Mission got involved in the struggle of the workers, after originally just going into the factories to evangelise.

Many Korean Christians have been arrested and jailed under a succession of military-backed regimes since the time of the Korean War. This has usually been justified in the name of National Security and the need to maintain vigilance

against the atheistic hordes waiting over the border in North Korea, backed either by the Soviet Union or China or both of them.

Korea is sandwiched between three great powers, Japan, China and the Soviet Union, and it has a long history of foreign domination. Korean Christians are now seeking to develop a contextual theology in Asian terms, a Korean theology for the future and of the future which is emerging out of the reflections on experiences of the Korean reality at this particular time in history. It is a theology still in the making; not an imported theology for that politically would be an anathema and would have no appeal to people on the street. The oppression of Israel in the Old Testament is now a living experience for the people of Korea in a context which they can understand, for theology is simply defined as faith seeking understanding.

They call it Minjung Theology which is a hard word to translate but it is a combination of two Chinese characters "min" and "jung." Min may be translated as "people" and jung as "the mass." Thus minjung means the mass of the people, or mass, or just the people. It grew out of the Christian experiences in the political struggle for justice over the past decade or so. It is an accumulation and articulation of theological reflections on the political experiences of Christian students, labourers, the press, professors, farmers, writers and intellectuals as well as theologians in Korea in the 1970's.

The theology of minjung is a creation of those Christians who were forced to reflect upon their Christian discipleship in basement interrogation rooms, in trials, facing court martial tribunals, hearing the allegations of prosecutors and in making their own final defence. This is the way in which Korean Christians have seen themselves living-and acting, preparing and participating in the Lord's Supper.

I found a similar lone witness being made by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, whose General Secretary is serving a seven year jail sentence. As in South Korea, rapid industrialisation has created many problems and the church has taken on the risks of speaking out. They had drawn attention to the abuse of Human Rights in 1977 and two years later had issued another appeal to the government, "The economy of Taiwan has grown and developed very quickly, and it has, of course, brought with it an affluent society, but it has also brought a loss of personal worth, moral decadence, rampant pollution, a wide gap between peace and order." They have also more recently been the only church to speak out against the dumping of nuclear waste on a small offshore island inhabited by

3,000 Aborigines. These people are the original inhabitants of Taiwan before the Chinese arrived from the mainland.

As the Asian Theological Conference put it in 1979:

"Here in this statement is a confluence of problems of human rights, social justice and ecological concerns precipitated by the problems of economic development in the developing and underdeveloped countries. People in Taiwan need a contextual economic theology and practice to protect the intrinsic value and to develop the potential energy of man\* and nature as created and loved by God. This is evidently a common issue and task of all Asian communities."

\*A problem faced by a writer such as myself who is aware of the oppression of sexism is that many sensitive Christians in Asia and elsewhere do not have the same awareness of sexist language. Where it is necessary to quote passages containing sexually exclusive language I have adopted the practice of indicating my dissent by the insertion of the word "sic" after the first occurrence in each quotation. I hope this is sufficient to raise an awareness in the reader.

*"We can't evangelise individuals without evangelising their environment. "*

This task is all the harder in those countries where industrialisation has not proceeded so fast and where most of the people still live in rural poverty. Christians have understood that God is revealed in our neighbour and in the poor, although there are still other Christians who believe that God is only revealed within the soul of the individual. A more complete understanding shows that God emerges through day-to-day history, and so evangelism can never be divorced from social justice. Only a relevant local theology which speaks to their condition makes any sense.

I saw several good examples of this in the Philippines, that sprawling archipelago of more than seven thousand islands and over fifty one million people. It is a classic example of a Third World society where a small elite live in great opulence, while the vast mass of rural and urban poor continue to suffer in great poverty. The same difference existed in most other countries of Asia that I visited.

In the Philippines I stayed with friends committed to the Church of National Liberation - an informal movement within the Roman Catholic Church -

whose founder, Father Ed de la Torre, is still in prison. We went down to the industrial zone to talk with women workers at a German textile plant whose products I saw marketed all over South East Asia. Outside a plywood factory I attended a meeting of workers who had been on strike for over four months because the local owner refused to recognise their union as a negotiating body for improved conditions and pay.

Later I talked to prostitutes who provide their services for the American military and local base workers adjacent to Clark Air Base and Subic Bay Naval Base; women who despised what they were doing but had no other way of supporting themselves or their families. Many were so ashamed of what they were doing that they would travel a great distance to another town to send a money order home, so that their families would not guess their real source of income.

A large proportion of the entertainment centres in Angeles next to Clark Air Base are owned by Australians and there is no need to remind you that many of the warships that call into Australian ports, especially Fremantle, are on their way to or from Subic Bay. Australia also has investments in the Bataan Export Processing Zone which uses cheap labour under repressive conditions for foreign investors, primarily Japanese and American. As in South Korea, Japan has also used the Philippines to erect polluting industries like the Kawasaki sintering plant on Mindanao, because citizen's protests in Japan have driven them abroad. We sometimes forget that in order to maintain our high standard of living we can remove the eyesores, but others out of sight must continue to suffer.

I attended a day conference organised by the Churches to consider the increasing state repression they were facing. At this conference I heard a series of reports by various delegates about "salvaging" by the military, and about the arrest and detention of both foreign and local church workers like Father Brian Gore from Perth. Salvaging is a Filipino word for the arbitrary killing that goes on day after day when bodies are just dumped by the road or in the fields. The victims of this practice are people who have been killed by the police or military, sometimes openly, sometimes secretly.

I heard Bishop Labayon speak and I learned how he responded when asked why many bishops in the Philippines are engaging in social action projects and developing a church of the poor: "What good does it do to put beautiful fish in an aquarium if you do not keep the water clean?" Later on he asked how it was possible to bring the good news of the Gospel to the Philippines where structures promote "a world view that singles out the powerful and wealthy as a privileged

class; a world view that is shot through with materialism and profit for profit's sake? Poverty is a symptom that God's kingdom is not being realised, and poverty is man-made (sic). It is produced by the way man organises his society."

As the Evangelical Mission theologians of the Two-Thirds World put it at their conference in Bangkok in 1982, "Two-thirds of the world's population live in situations of poverty, powerlessness and oppression. To proclaim Jesus Christ among them it is always necessary to reflect on the biblical passion for justice, the biblical concern for 'wholeness' of salvation and the biblical concept of the universality of Christ."

I spent an evening with four Catholic nuns in Bajong Bario where 150,000 people live in one of the largest slums in Asia. They had obtained electricity only that year, but still had no water. You bought it at forty cents a drum. Most of the 16,000 families lived on one small meal a day; rice, vegetables and a little fish. They said it was better than being in the rural areas, although many of them come from fertile islands like Mindanao. The landlords are hostile to the idea of people being self-sufficient in rural areas and prefer to develop agribusiness and plantation crops, driving the people off their land, and then exporting the food while the people go hungry.

Sister Lydia had lived in the Barrio for five years. She worked to develop basic Christian communities and train leaders. They talked to people about what the *Bible* teaches related to concrete situations on human rights and relationships. Education must flow into practice, she told me. They try legal means in the due process of the law, but what happens when the law exists only to protect the privileges of the elite? Their liturgy is related to the situation, so they can pray for the people and their needs there. I noticed that they were developing a herb garden as part of a campaign for preventative medicine, because no-one could really afford to go to a doctor. Tuberculosis is the main disease they told me, caused by poverty, bad living conditions and malnutrition.

Other problems are the maldistribution of land, inadequate housing, unemployment and unfair labour practices in the fifty factories, mostly owned by Taiwanese businessmen. In such a situation crime and drug addiction flourish. The people in the slum are badly affected by the economic recession and now the authorities want to demolish their little homes. The municipality wants to relocate the people in useless areas in order to make a park in the barrio, wider streets, a cemetery, and generally to beautify the city to impress visitors. When the slum dwellers refused to move, fire-trucks were brought in. The sisters told me

how they had sat down with the people who refused to go without reassurances on land, employment, job accessibility, help with moving and warning time. Sometimes they won, Sister Lydia said, sometimes they didn't.

*Satyodaya, Dawn of Truth.*

The sisters' simple little home reminded me of another community I stayed at in Sri Lanka, perched high on the hillside above the city of Kandy. Father Paul Caspersz started his work there in 1972 to develop Christian-Marxist dialogue, but before long he became uncomfortably aware of the fact that Indian Tamils who had been working on the tea plantations in the centre of his country were now starving in the streets of Kandy. They had been driven out by the new Sinhalese plantation owners when the land was taken over from foreign owners by the Left Front government in Colombo. He responded as best he could to their needs and much to his dismay found he was being regarded as an expert on the problems of the plantation workers.

From this initial response, various individuals Buddhists, Christians and Hindus - came to live and work with Paul, and his community became the home of the Coordinating Secretariat for Plantation Areas. More organisations, including trade unions and political groups, became involved and after more communal riots they set up the Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality.

Their work today on the tea estates consists of practical help for the plantation workers. Groups of young people come to Satyodaya for leadership training, where they cover areas like basic education, nutrition, the rearing of pigs and poultry, and preventative medicine. I stayed with one couple, a Hindu married to a Roman Catholic, who had chosen to go back and live on one of the more remote tea estates. The wife, Veronica, is a doctor and could easily have made her fortune in the town like most other doctors do. They have chosen to serve the people, and so she was the first doctor the estate workers have ever had living with them.

The victims of oppression on the estate were originally brought over as cheap labour from India by the British in the nineteenth century (twenty-five percent of them died on the way). They are now exploited by their new Sinhalese

masters, since the nationalisation of the plantations. The members of Satyodaya have chosen not only to care for these workers, but they have also opted to point out where the roots of oppression are. Their political and economic analysis extends from the exploitation of women tea pickers who labour up to eight hours a day for fifty cents, right through to the agents and on to the multinational corporations, who control the shipping, insurance, packaging, advertising and marketing of tea. Enthusiastically Paul commented to me one afternoon, "If only there were hundreds or thousands of communities like Satyodaya, then things might begin to change."

One of the other organisations involved in the Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality in Sri Lanka is the Centre for Society and Religion, based in some old church buildings in downtown Colombo. There I met another Catholic priest, Father Tissa Balasuriya, again working in an organisation of people committed to different faiths, for Sri Lanka is predominantly Buddhist while most of the Tamils and Moors are Hindus or Moslems.

Speaking in Melbourne in 1980 at the World Conference on Mission and Evangelism, Tissa Balasuriya defined the mission of believers in Jesus and of the organised churches as to announce the Kingdom of God, to work towards it, and to celebrate it as a foreshadowing of its final realisation at the end of time. He defined the reign of God in the New Testament as meaning healing, freedom, the restoration of human dignity, the fulfillment of the most essential human needs and integral liberation.

Quoting from the *Bible* he then said that God wills that all people may live and have life abundantly. We need to care for others around us and we dehumanise our selves by taking too much. The rich like Zaccheus must make restitution several-fold as these riches are the accumulated fruits of injustice and plunder.

I wonder what that might mean for a wealthy country like Australia whose national wealth was to some extent built on the plunder of people within Australia and abroad?





*"We need to liberate the poor from their misery and servility, and the rich from their greed and arrogance. "*

*- Bishop Lakshman Wickremesinghe.*

There is no solution to our current problems without a deep commitment to a radical transformation of values and structures in our societies, based on justice. No genuine love of God is objectively possible without a concern for justice on earth, among our neighbours. Both the Apostles John and James emphasise that to love God whom we cannot see means nothing if we do not love our neighbour whom we do see.

You might think that in my constant stress on the poor and oppressed I am being very one-sided. I would like to quote one of the most inspiring people I have ever met, Colin Winter, the Anglican Bishop of Damaraland, better known as Namibia. He was deported from his diocese by South Africa in 1971, but remained Bishop-in-Exile until his premature death ten years later, literally worn out by his work.

"After all, there are kind, nice and good rich people. We know dozens who are. Am I not guilty then of speaking of the poor as a special case and in danger of making them always the goodies and the rich the baddies? Is this not an absurdity, something which militates against logic and is plainly untrue? After all, the poor are just as capable of murder, cheating, lying, swindling, violence as the rich, so why treat them as though they are a special case? The simple answer is because God does! This is the clear biblical message, from the beginning. Because the poor are the victims of injustice, God in Jesus has made them a special case. He has opted for them. The poor will inherit the kingdom." <sup>12</sup>

He went on to say that in the *Bible*, poverty was not something to be applauded, "It is in fact a wretched condition." Nor is poverty so much an absence

of possessions as a condition of powerlessness. The Old Testament stresses the poor as victims of oppression and injustice, while Jesus said in his sermon at Nazareth, "He has sent me to bring good news to the poor ... to proclaim the Lord's year of favour." <sup>13</sup> He had come to take up the cause of the weak, the helpless, those whom society rips off. That gap may be more obvious in Asia, but if we measure poverty in terms of powerlessness it certainly applies here in Australia.

There is a strong commitment to humanistic socialism among many Christians in Asia. Few have any time for private enterprise or capitalism as a way to secure economic and political justice. On the other hand, they are well aware of the deficiencies of state socialism or communism. In a talk in Sri Lanka in 1982 one speaker observed, "Communism has failed - an end to alienation, a new relationship to work, new human relationships and forms of life, the end of crime, a new culture, new people, a new society - nothing of this exists in East Europe. If it were not the doctrine of state of a major power, it would be of no more than historical interest." He went on to say that the creative further development of Marxist-Leninism had passed into the hands of outsiders and deviationists; it reminded me of the old dictum that "Heresy is the lifeblood of the church."

In Rangoon I talked to one of the staff of the Burma Council of Churches who had prepared an analysis of Burmese Socialism which he shared with me, "The Church is forced to distinguish between the biblical social revolution which seeks justice based on self-emptying servanthood and the ideology of socialist revolution which interprets justice based on economic development programmes."

Our talk rather reminded me of the emphasis on service to others as the hallmark of Christian discipleship, and of a discussion I had on power with Gabriele Dietrich at the Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary in South India. We were talking about the way in which the image of Jesus had been transformed in Western culture, and she pointed out to me the difference between the Messianism of the Conquering King, and the Suffering Servant. The former is the Jewish-Christian symbol of charismatic leadership, vested with kingship and power, but the biblical image is informed by the prophecy of the Suffering Servant and Isaiah's portrayal of the man of sorrows much acquainted with grief, but bringing forth justice to the nations. To live in the spirit of the Suffering Servant means to share the life of those who are sorrowful, despised, rejected, oppressed and afflicted, and to join in the movement of history in which they bring about justice through their struggle.

One of the more progressive Anglican bishops in Sri Lanka, Lakshman Wickremesinghe, Bishop of Kurunugala, stressed that in speaking of justice he was not seeking to identify Christianity with or re-interpreting it as social activism committed to implement certain socio-political ideas. He added that certain sets of socio-political ideas are morally better than others, because they are necessary implications of the Christian understanding of our nature and destiny. Creative power is released through forgiveness and renewal in Christ, and valid socio-political ideas serve as guiding perspectives, indicating where the merely possible will be challenged by what is morally more desirable. The Kingdom of God comes on earth when not only individuals are converted to Christ but also society lives more in accordance with the values of this kingdom.

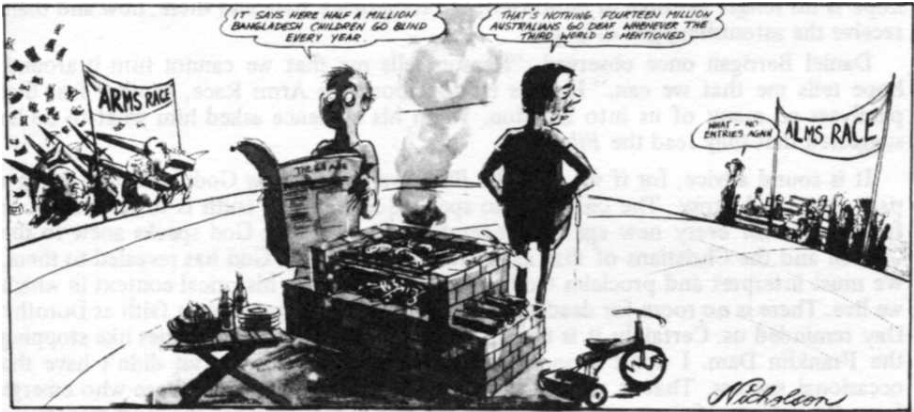
Bishop Wickremesinghe referred to Jesus and the twelve as a counter-community of disciples which had an egalitarian economy and distributed according to need as well as discouraging private property. Such communities do not always last or succeed, but they inspire others, like the sharing in the Early Church referred to in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>14</sup> Jesus asked for a total and general sharing of all material possessions. He didn't idolise poverty, but asked us to give away our excess goods. Sharing is only possible in a community, and any society that is so structured that some suffer because of their poverty, and others have more than they need, is part of the kingdom of Satan.

*"If you expect to see the final results of your work, you have not asked a big enough question. "*

*- F. Stone.*

Considering the idea of community leads me to look at the situation within Australia, as well as our relations with the wider world community.

Australia is not a country noted for popular concern about its own poor or the poor overseas. I think of Nicholson's cartoon in *The Age* (4.xi.78) which showed a couple of men by their barbecue, one reading the paper and saying, "It says here half a million Bangladesh children go blind every year," and the other responding, "That's nothing. Fourteen million Australians go deaf whenever the Third World is mentioned."



Drawing by M. Nicholson, *The Age*.

Many Australians don't even seem aware of poverty in their own country and few can have read or cared about the reports of the Brotherhood of St Laurence or the Australian Council of Churches on the subject. The latter's statement to the National Economic Summit Conference<sup>15</sup> admitted that "we are conscious that those who suffer in society are generally powerless and that their voices are rarely heard," and went on to say that the churches aim to be an advocate for such people.

On a world scale we belong to that six percent of the population who use eighty percent of the non-renewable resources consumed each year. Even in Australia fifty percent of the wealth is owned by ten percent of the population, while twenty percent own next to nothing. The number of Australians living at relative poverty levels is at least 1.7 million, according to Federal Government estimates and perhaps as high as 3 million according to another estimate.<sup>16</sup> Yet "Australia has sufficient wealth to ensure an adequate standard of living for all its people. The only lack is the political will in Australians to share this wealth."<sup>17</sup>

To talk about sharing our wealth is no easy task, for it threatens many interests in our society. My concern is how we can act on our convictions in a prophetic way and how we can overcome those feelings of hopelessness that sometimes overwhelm us. As the Trappist Monk, Thomas Merton, once put it:

"The desert is the home of despair  
And despair, now, is everywhere.

Despair is an abyss without bottom  
Do not think to close it by  
Consenting to it and trying to  
forget you have consented."

When I think of the ways in which we have acquired our national wealth and the ways in which we now seek to defend it, I think we may be past redemption. Yet I cling to the gift of Faith - and with it a glimmering of its twin sister Hope - because I know that it represents the only way forward. As the Jewish writer Elie Wiesel put it, "In the modern world the world after Auschwitz - only he (sic) who knows that hope is no longer possible or permitted, can sometimes, here and there, now and then, receive the astonishing gift of hope."

Daniel Berrigan once observed, "Reason tells me that we cannot turn it around; hope tells me that we can." He was talking about the Arms Race, another fear that paralyzes so many of us into inaction. When his audience asked him what to do he suggested that they read the *Bible*.

It is sound advice, for if we read the *Bible* we can see how God is indeed forging a path through history. The only way to speak God's eternal truth is to reiterate it in fresh terms for every new age and generation. In every age God speaks anew to the Church and the Christians of that age must proclaim what God has revealed to them. We must interpret and proclaim God's revelation from the historical context in which we live. There is no room for dead traditionalism. We must act now in faith as Dorothy Day reminded us. Certainly it is useful to achieve small human victories like stopping the Franklin Dam. I don't suppose most of us would go on if we didn't have the occasional success. That is why I marvel at the unshaken faith of those who emerge from the prisons of the world and continue their witness against the most impossible odds, hoping against hope. I wish I could introduce you to some of the people I have met not only in Asia, but in Africa, Latin America and East Europe, because you could then share the lives which give me such inspiration.

I spend a lot of time reading and talking about the latest weapons systems that the finest brains in the world are devising to blow God's creation sky-high. Thomas Merton, writing about the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem, wrote, "We rely on the sane people of the world to preserve it from barbarism, madness, destruction. And now it begins to dawn on us that it is precisely the sane ones, who can without qualms and without nausea, aim the missiles and press the

button that will initiate the great festival of destruction . . . Psychotics will be suspect. The sane ones will keep them far from the button."

As I understand the story of the creation in Genesis, we are here on earth as stewards. The planet is in our trusteeship, but the people who can really grasp this concept and practice it we refer to as primitive. I suspect that this is what God is driving at when we are told that the meek and humble will inherit the earth; we, the civilised ones, seem more intent on destroying it.

*"Afflicting the Comfortable"*

I was listening to a church service on the radio in September and as I heard the preacher praying for those who defend our country, and then praying for peace, I recalled some more words of Thomas Merton:

"If men (sic) really wanted peace they would sincerely ask God for it and He would give it to them. But why should He give the world a peace which it does not really desire? The peace this world pretends to desire is no real peace at all."

"To some men peace merely means the liberty to exploit other people without fear of retaliation or interference. To others peace means the freedom to rob others without interruption. To still others it means the leisure to devour the goods of the earth without being compelled to interrupt their pleasures to feed those whom their greed is starving. And to practically everybody peace simply means the absence of any physical violence that might cast a shadow over lives devoted to the satisfaction of their animal appetites for comfort and pleasure."

"Many men like these have asked God for what they thought was 'peace' and wondered why that prayer was not answered. They could not understand that it actually was answered. God left them with what they desired for their idea of peace was only another form of war. The 'Cold War' is simply the normal consequence of our corrupt idea of a peace based on a policy of 'every man for himself in ethics,

economics and political life. It is absurd to hope for a solid peace based on fictions and illusions!"

"So instead of loving what you think is peace, love other people and love God above all. And instead of hating the people you think are warmakers, hate the appetites and the disorder in your own soul, which are the causes of war. If you love peace, then hate injustice, hate tyranny, hate greed, but hate these things in yourself, not in another." <sup>18</sup>

Our first task in Australia is to understand the military and economic framework in which we find ourselves, principally allied as a junior partner with the United States and Japan. Since the Second World War, and especially since Britain joined the European Economic Community. Australia's future has been linked with the Pacific Basin Economic Strategy - the prospect of the richer Pacific Rim countries using the developing countries of East Asia as a source of cheap labour and raw materials (Australia would also provide mineral resources and timber). In these East Asian countries authoritarian governments rule in the name of an elite and keep the majority of the people firmly under control while allowing a little of the wealth to trickle down to some of them. Tourism also provides a part of this scenario while much of the income generated still finds its way back to the wealthy countries through the role of multinational services provided. Cultural genocide goes hand in hand with economic exploitation.

Underpinning these economic arrangements lies the ANZUS alliance, joint military exercises and training programmes with the ASEAN countries, and the role of Australia and Japan as a proxy for the United States in the Western Pacific. All this is justified in the name of containing "the Soviet Threat" but most of our friends in South and East Asia would suggest that is really to maintain political and economic domination, as well as the flow of raw materials to the wealthy countries.

We have to examine our fears of that other unjust great power, the Soviet Union, to see if there are other ways to live together in the world, or ways to resolve conflicts that do not result in us wiping out the whole creation or badly mutilating it. It is no good piously hoping for peace and disarmament unless we understand the dynamics of the arms race, and our part in it - to be as wise as the serpent, and gentle as the dove.

Occasionally I think that the leaders in Moscow and Washington D.C. could be the agents of God's judgement upon our greed and worship of false idols, like the rulers of Babylon in 587 B.C., but that is in God's hands. For the time being our task is clear in trying to stop this rush to Armageddon. We have no right to destroy God's creation.

I prefer to think of how Australia could work with other small countries to develop new concepts of national security or how we could turn our swords into ploughshares and our spears into pruninghooks in a constructive partnership with our neighbours in the Pacific and Asia. Because of our geographic position we are in a unique place to develop the kind of North-South partnership that the world so desperately needs, rather than escalating violence born of envy and frustration. We could be a mirror for the world rather than a mirror of the world.



*“The transformation of society will not happen without struggle in our lives. It is no accident that wealth and power in Australia are not shared fairly or that alienation occurs. The roots of injustice in Australian society lie within us and the social structures we create and support.”*<sup>19</sup>

I don't know if time is on our side. That is something I can only leave in God's hands. It is not an excuse to do nothing to say that - on the contrary such a relationship based on trust empowers me to go on.

When the government of this country decides to promote Australian defence equipment in South East Asia and the Pacific as a way of boosting our economy in a time of recession, then it is acting in precisely the kind of way that we as Christians are called on to oppose. It doesn't take long to understand that those weapons are not there as a counter to the alleged Soviet Threat, but to be used against those forces for social and economic justice that I have been talking



about. Few Australians seem to realise that this country stands twelfth in the world list of arms exporters, predictably headed by the United States, the Soviet Union and France.

East and West seek security through the accumulation of power - from the barrel of a gun and from economic domination. Christians say peace does not come from the concentration of military or economic power but from the achievement of justice - in sharing the goods of the earth rather than in concentrating them.

The socialist bloc countries in Europe are also a part of the rich world, but the fact is that Australia is culturally, economically, militarily and politically a part of the capitalist world dominated by the United States. That is where we have to start from, and where we can be most effective as agents for change. We have to start with the beam in our own eye while continuing to show concern for the victims of injustice and oppression wherever else they may be. It is always easier to point to the faults of someone else than to look at your own. That is why we need to be aware of "the Tridents within us". International communism is invariably held up as the great bogey - "that empire of evil" - but communism only thrives on injustice. Why do we always seem to be giving support to those wealthy elites whose power is built on injustice and repression?

Talking about justice and a redistribution of wealth will invite abuse and attacks from vested interests, but if you were not getting such criticism you would probably rank as totally ineffective. The more the attacks mount, the more successful you are. What we suffer is mild compared to those prophetic voices in Asia. That is why I rejoiced to see a whole page of the military house journal, *Aviation Weekly and Space Technology*, taken up in an attack on the Catholic Church in the United States, especially the bishops. This was because of their warning of the escalating dangers of the arms race and the campaign at the time to get the US Navy to change the name of a nuclear powered attack submarine which the military proposed to name "Corpus Christi", the Body of Christ.

*"Building a new society in the shell of the old. "*

In seeking new ways in which to redistribute our wealth here in Australia I am well aware of the attacks we shall face as we threaten the rich and powerful, attacks which have already begun. While stressing the urgency of the situation I feel unable to offer any shortcuts to change; I believe we are in for a long haul. That is why I used the warning from the Brazilian Archbishop of Recife and Olinda, Dom Helder Camara, on the title page of this lecture. As the Australian writer, Morris West, put it: "The battle between good and evil is already joined; but the good man (sic) looks like a fool while evil wears a wise man's face and justifies murder by impeccable statistics." <sup>20</sup> The Apostle Paul put it more succinctly when he invited us to be fools for Christ.

Speaking of the difficulties we shall face within our own ranks in organising for change, Godfrey Guntilleke from Sri Lanka put it like this in his essay on "The Religious Radical":

He (sic) remains profoundly conscious of the tragic dimensions in human action. He remains sensitive to the corruption of power in all forms of human organisation. He sees the contradiction in life which can overnight transform the oppressed to the oppressor. In his realistic struggles against prevailing forms of oppression, he is not deluded by dreams of human perfection. His own understanding of man and the human condition has made him aware that suffering and evil can find expression in all social and economic forms. The 'revolution' for him therefore must remain 'a permanent revolution' of man himself and of his values."

Gabriele Dietrich added the comment that we need to keep in mind that fruits only ripen where the seed has died in the earth. Another point to remember is that any meaningful change we undertake to transform our society will involve sacrifice. That is not a very popular idea to advocate, either to the well off who don't want to renounce their easy life, or to the poor who have suffered enough. Most people go to church to hear nice things said about them, and a preacher can only risk the occasional angry sermon or talk of sacrifice. Many of us are fully committed already with our work, our families and time for leisure which we need. Nevertheless I believe there are several ways in which we can explore ways to simplify our lifestyles and reduce our consumption, although it will vary for different people at different times in their life.

People who live close to each other in a low-cost housing area are immediately able to share material possessions and services like childcare, which means that they do not need so much money. We have never taken recycling seriously as a way of conserving resources, all part of the Creation. Cooperatives and Credit Unions are beginning to come back, but we have to keep them on a neighbourhood scale if we are to learn from past mistakes. Less obsession with money and profit will enable us to reestablish our true priorities.

In these ways with a reduced or shared income we shall have more time for social change involvement and community. Men must be ready to take on more work in the home and with children to allow women the fulfillment men have traditionally enjoyed through a balance of paid labour and leisure time with family and friends. I know that moving house or sharing things is not always easy, but I have already stated that no meaningful change can be achieved without sacrifice. Something like this is pretty mild compared to the sacrifices others have been called to make at other times in our history, or elsewhere in the world.

*"They turned the world upside down."*<sup>21</sup>

New models of work and new attitudes to work are inevitable, and a reduction in consumption is necessary if we are to pay a fair price for those things we import, as well as goods we make here. When you have more time to get involved in social change and community, I don't know what you will turn to and I am not here to present a blueprint. We have to ask ourselves as teachers and artists, as lawyers and social workers, as farmers and civil servants, as factory workers and bartenders, as car mechanics and homemakers, what sort of society and workplace we want to be part of, and how do we get there?

Only in community can we begin to find an answer and that is where of course there will be difficulties and disillusionment. We need to be well equipped spiritually as well as having a sound understanding of what we are up against, and a good sense of history. If power is transferred to the powerless no-one knows what will happen. If we take stewardship seriously how will this affect uranium mining, building dams, logging the forests, building freeways or developing luxury tourist resorts? It is a step in faith. I wonder what might emerge from Summits for Survival or UNCTAD conferences if the organisers listened to the

poor and powerless, and acted on what they needed - or even handed over power to them?

Real community will build a happier Australia when we have more time for each other and less for the mad race to consume and be entertained in a superstar society. I don't know where your political and economic understanding will lead you or what your community will look like. That is your decision through prayer and discussion with your support groups.

Like John of Revelation I believe that harsh times lie ahead. Faced with a declining standard of living, most people would opt for increasing repression and militarisation, and less democracy if it would guarantee their future prosperity. When the frustration boils over amongst those on the losing side, we shall be forced to take sides. We cannot always be nice to everyone.

I believe like the Council of Churches that Australia has the possibility of establishing an equality of relationships with neighbouring countries which could provide a model for other regions, especially given the part of the world we live in. We can certainly start by relating more closely to Asia and the Pacific rather than constantly seeing ourselves as a distant appendage of Europe and North America.



*"Where there is no vision, the people perish."*

The vision of what the Australian Council of Churches called a "Just Participatory and Sustainable Society" is one worth committing ourselves to, because even if we shall not achieve this ideal in our lifetime, we still need a vision that is worth working towards.

I believe that a vision is essential for those of us dedicated to work for justice and peace. It should be backed by the conviction that not only is God

working through history, but that there are many others working for change and against oppression around the world, as many others have done before us. I have tried to tell you about some of these people in our region; people whom Helder Camara calls the Abrahamic Minorities. If they do not despair then we in Australia can have no grounds for despair, though of course there will be times when we feel down and depressed.

I said I wasn't going to offer a blueprint for change because I don't think that is the correct way forward. We can start living out the values of the Kingdom here and now. I have tried to outline some of the conditions that will illuminate our way, and remind you of the witness of others working with us.

Perhaps more than anything else in human terms I need to stress the perspective of time, because we seem to give up so easily. When I feel that we seem to be getting nowhere I remember the Mozambique poet and freedom fighter I met in 1974 at the Liberation Centre in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. He told me that he didn't think his country would achieve independence in his lifetime, but he was prepared to commit the rest of his life to that goal for the sake of his children and grandchildren. If we can think like that it will help sustain our fragile witness when we see others fall by the wayside. It will also thwart those in high places who coldly calculate that our protests against the renewed Arms Race will peter out after three years or so because we lack the staying power for a prolonged campaign.

This presentation has been a call to a renewal that every church or movement needs periodically, and because I believe that to some extent we have lost our sense of direction. I only feel competent to share these thoughts with you because of fresh insights given me through the time I have spent with friends in Asia and the Pacific.

In the spirit of those who have given me that inspiration, both here in Australia and around the world, let us also resist injustice and celebrate life in a spirit of faith and hope!



Drawing by R. Corbin, *The Catholic Worker*.

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