

**THE TWENTY-FOURTH JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURE  
1988**

**CREATIVE CONFLICT**

**David Purnell**

## **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 1964.

This lecture was delivered in Adelaide on 6 January 1988 during the Yearly Meeting

James Backhouse was an English Friend who visited Australia from 1832 to 1838. 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. 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.

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.

Bronwen Meredith  
Presiding Clerk  
Australian Yearly Meeting

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Born in Sydney in 1941, David Purnell grew up in Canberra, attending Canberra High School and the Australian National University. He graduated with B.A. (Honours) in 1962, and then worked in the Bureau of Statistics and university administration for some years. He became the full time secretary of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia in 1977 and remained in that position until 1986. Since then he has been working as a Consultant on Conflict Resolution and Peace Education.

David's interest in peace has been fostered through involvement in a variety of organisations - Australian Council of Churches, United Nations Association, Life Line, Australian Frontier, and the Association for Peace, Justice and Development Education. He prepared and ran a course on conflict at a secondary school, and devised a radio program on conflict for a community radio station. He has also conducted many workshops on the subject. He is a member of the Conflict Resolution Network.

Originally a Congregationalist, David joined the Society of Friends in 1970 and is an active member of Canberra Friends' Meeting. He has been involved in developing, on behalf of the Society, a series of seminars for diplomats, officials and non-government groups on Indo-China. The seminars are aimed at increasing understanding of how to achieve peace and conflict resolution in the region.

## **ABOUT THIS LECTURE**

Conflict is a key factor in life. It causes many stresses and crises personally and socially. It absorbs much energy and emotion. It leaves many people feeling disheartened and frustrated.

This lecture puts conflict in the context of trends in understanding human nature and society. It questions the traditional view that force is needed to control and settle conflicts. It explores aspects such as feelings, communication and trust. It gives practical examples of methods and models of solving conflict at all levels.

The essential thesis of the lecture is that we can (and must) enhance our skills for nonviolent conflict resolution. As we work on this we can open new possibilities for using conflict creatively.

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# **CREATIVE CONFLICT**

## **A. Introduction**

This lecture represents an attempt to draw together some of the trends in thinking about conflict, to share my own and others' experience of conflict, to identify ways conflict can be handled constructively and creatively, to offer some practical proposals, and to develop a 'testimony' on conflict. By conflict, I mean the clash of different viewpoints, interests, feelings, or actions. I include those situations where individuals or groups with opposing intentions or wants come up against each other, provoking a crisis. I distinguish between conflict and violence, as conflict can exist without violence, and violence is only one of a range of outcomes of conflict.

In recent years I have been involved in many workshops and programs on conflict. I have found that when I ask people to identify words they associate with conflict, their initial responses focus on negative associations - pain, anger, fear, aggression, tension. When I ask for more positive associations, words like opportunity, challenge, growth, resolution, emerge. It usually turns out that people can identify as many positive as negative associations. This is a reflection of our learning about conflict, as well as our experience. Conflict is not an easy theme to approach, because it triggers off strong feelings and recollections in all of us. I have to ask you to 'sit with' the discomfort as I explore this subject and try to uncover some of the factors involved in conflict.

## **B. The Experience of Conflict**

Over recent months I have asked people attending workshops to put on tape their experience of conflict. From the responses I have received I have summarised the following statements:

- In the past I have avoided conflict until the inevitable blow-up. Now I try to understand where the person is coming from, and to anticipate alarm signals before a conflict escalates. I get stressful physical sensations in conflict.
- I get quiet when I feel myself coming into conflict. I cope passively. I don't mind compromising, as I have my own inner life.

- My mother told me to keep working as a therapy to overcome conflict. But this didn't resolve anything. When I was a teenager, I was an observer to family conflict, and I switched off my feelings. I have had to learn to identify feelings and face conflict.
- My early experience of conflict was being locked in a room, watching a mother who got sick rather than face conflict. I used to run away, and keep things to myself. I became superior, thinking I was not subject to conflict like others. Developing my spiritual side has helped me to live with myself more and to face conflict honestly.
- In a large group I tend to swallow conflict and get a sore throat. At home I wait too long and then blow up and feel guilty at my anger.
- My experience of conflict is that I lose rationality and want to win become closed to another person's ideas.
- I worry that a good relationship will be disturbed by a conflict.
- I don't like conflict. I try to avoid it. I try to look for a middle-way solution.
- I don't think I'm aggressive, but recently I was in an argument and wanted to hit the other person. I became aware of how irrationality takes over.
- I get excited if I think a conflict can be solved.
- If I'm involved in conflict, I revert to childhood ways of fear and anger. I shut people out or shut part of myself out. I want to learn how to bring more adult approaches into my experience.
- Much conflict is a projection of inner conflicts. I feel powerless and am afraid of being wiped out - it's them or me.
- Sometimes if I give things time I can find other options for dealing with conflict.
- I handle conflict differently with different people. I get frightened of the anger inside me.

- I have an ambivalent attitude to conflict. I avoid it, but when I'm in it part of me enjoys the assertiveness aspect. Ultimately I hope to see conflict as something I no longer need (to grow).
- My personality seeks harmony, and I am uncomfortable with conflict experience anger, pain, powerlessness and frustration.
- Conflict churns my stomach and makes me want to flee.
- I believe in peace at any price, which means I pay the price because I can't tell people if things are difficult between us. I blame myself and think things are worse than they are.
- Recently I confronted my father about a family conflict and the outcome was a breakthrough and I felt really good.
- I was in constant conflict with my teenage daughter. I said 'If you're not prepared to act in a sociable way, you're not fit to be in this house, so you can go out until you're prepared to be sociable.' I opened the front door and tried to put her out, but she was stronger and put me out. We both laughed and the conflict dissolved.
- When I get into conflict, my energy level rises and I start to raise my voice. Other people get scared and back away. So I shut down and don't get a resolution.
- Mostly I feel good about conflict, seeing it as a challenge to be open and honest in my relationships.
- I sometimes use manipulative behaviour (e.g. crying) and the other person is then unable to express their feelings. The result is a reversion to old ways of behaving.
- I find myself looking after the other person in a conflict. The result is that I don't resolve things because I focus on their pain.
- If I can accept that other people see things differently, I can cope better with conflict.

From these comments I want to draw out some patterns and reflect on these. In doing this I want to affirm that we all have our own ways of handling conflict, based on our learning and experience, and that we can all share these with others, to mutual benefit. Firstly, then, from what has been said by people about conflict, it is clear that the energy associated with conflict can lead to excitement and fear and can generate physical sensations of stress. This in turn can stimulate a desire to avoid the situation or person and to internalise the feelings. This can compound the problem unless the energy is released or transformed and the conflict face". A delayed explosion is unlikely to assist.

There is an evident anxiety in many of us to protect others from our anger, and to maintain harmony in a relationship. The problem with this is that it can take from others the responsibility for coping with conflict, and can prevent an acknowledgement that there is a problem. There is a definite risk involved in being vulnerable enough to raise a problem, and this involves a degree of self-confidence we may not have.

At the same time, it is evident that people feel good if they can make a breakthrough in a conflict situation. There is a sense of growth and probably a closer bonding with the other person. My impression is that most people are looking for ways of improving their coping skills to achieve such breakthroughs and to overcome the tendency to revert to negative tactics of attack and defensiveness in conflict.

Outward appearances may be deceptive. A person who appears to be coping well may be a mass of seething frustration, whilst a person who is emotionally volatile may be more resolved within. Alternatively a person with severe inner conflicts may be unpredictable in behaviour and get into outer conflicts easily; a person with a sense of inner peace may be able to cope with external conflict more constructively. A person who suppresses feelings at work may find this the best way to survive in that environment, while being open and aggressive at home. We tend to vary our behaviour according to how vulnerable we feel with different people and occasions.

To inject a personal reflection, I can say that I grew up with a clear message from those around me that feelings were best left unstated (especially by a male). There were conflicts in my family but I kept away from them. I spent hours trying to purge myself of sins like anger, hostility, prejudice, envy, lust, and pride. I transferred the energy of my feelings to outward action - physical exertion, study,

social activities, church. I became quite good at focussing on others' needs and problems and giving my own needs a low priority. What I have learned over many years is to seek a greater balance and to accept more responsibility for working through conflicts.

### **C. Approaches to Conflict**

Aggression has often been seen as innate in humans, and this has been used to underpin theories of conflict. Some researchers, such as Peter Farb, have pointed out that warfare was uncommon among primitive people and became common at the level of chiefdom in which a central authority determined the distribution of wealth.<sup>1</sup> The need to defend life or interests can lead to destructive behaviour. But the creation of a superstructure of power adds a range of aggressive approaches. There is plenty of evidence of kindness and cooperation among humans, to set beside evidence of depravity. The Tasaday people of the Philippines have low aggression. They reward cooperative behaviour from an early age, discourage aggression, and set unaggressive models for their children. The Arapesh people of Papua New Guinea are very cooperative and regard each other as lacking in evil. The Kung of the Kalahari desert in Africa do not use physical punishment and adults do not behave aggressively.

Within the kind of society we have inherited, conflicts have arisen at many levels, and force has frequently been used. Human nature has been blamed for social and inter-group aggression. Theorists such as Hegel and Marx emphasised conflict among groups or classes as inevitable and necessary. Hobbes saw the state as a vehicle for protecting individuals against each other's aggression. Anatol Rapoport, in a 1974 book on conflict,<sup>2</sup> noted the tendency for inter-group and inter-nation conflict to become institutionalised through legal, political, industrial and military structures which perpetuate conflict. He said that many long-standing conflicts between groups and nations continue in spite of human cooperative tendencies. In other words, by giving up their autonomy to structures of power, humans have lost their capacity to resolve conflicts well.

A valuable contribution to our understanding of conflict is an article by John Burton and Dennis Sandole published in 1986.<sup>3</sup> They identify a basic shift in the 20th century in the understanding of human behaviour. This shift recognises the human being as the focus of power, and tries to identify the common needs of humans. The result is that institutions are challenged to adjust to human needs, reversing a process that has gone on for many years. In relation to conflict, this

shift is significant, for it signals a change from the **management** of conflict by outside force to the **resolution** of conflict by the parties themselves.

In my own thinking I see a number of linked strands. In the 20th century the scale of war and destructiveness has increased to the point where it has become urgent to find non-aggressive solutions to conflict. At the same time, education and communication have made us more aware of other people's needs and circumstances - in short, have given others a human face. Studies in psychology, physics, chemistry, physiology and sociology are showing that humans have a much greater capacity than was previously believed for changed behaviour, for caring and sharing, for integrating and cooperating. The need to enforce behaviour is being questioned, and self-determination is emerging strongly in individuals and groups. The 1987 UNICEF Report on the State of the World's Children, for example, said "In the past, child deaths on this scale (a quarter of a million a week) have been regarded as acceptable because they have been perceived as inevitable. In our times, advances in knowledge and social organisation have brought the silent emergency out from the cold of the inevitable and into the domain of the preventable." <sup>4</sup>

Human values have been placed firmly on the world's agenda. Major movements for peace, justice and human survival have challenged our assumptions about what is acceptable. It is an exciting prospect. Conflict can be seen as having the potential for considerable growth. It can be tackled with a renewed vigour, not feared as an inexorable force for negative experiences.

#### **D. Religious Perspectives on Conflict**

All the world's religions have placed emphasis in their teachings on the transcendental importance of the individual. In practice the religions have had a more mixed approach. For example, the Old Testament reliance on God's power and authority led to some bloody conflicts in God's name. The early Christian Church was pacifist; it then became the state religion and was identified with power and war. In the 20th century nonviolence and peacemaking became more evident in Christian circles, but there remain important differences among Christians on these. Quakers have had a fairly consistent approach, believing in 'that of God in everyone' and 'the inner light'. They have adopted a pacifist view with its concomitant features of conscientious objection to war and working to build peaceful relationships and structures.

Hinduism extols nonviolence and also honours warriors. Gandhi drew upon Hindu principles and regarded the warfare described in the **Bhagavad Gita** as spiritual. In Islam the **Koran** stresses that war is allowed only in defence of freedom and in the face of aggression. Buddhism abhors killing and hatred and encourages communion among all people. Confucianism has a pacifist approach, although it sanctions an unequal social order. The practice of all these religions has relied on force and violence at times to achieve a desired end.<sup>5</sup>

The growth of inter-faith dialogue in recent years has indicated the common concern about the use of violence and the dangers of war. The basic principles of all religions are being restated and restudied to identify ways to bring peace to the world. For example, the US Catholic Bishops in 1983 issued a pastoral letter on War and Peace.<sup>6</sup> They said: "We support, in an increasingly interdependent world, political and economic policies designed to protect human dignity and to promote the human rights of everyone. . . We urge all citizens to support training in conflict resolution, nonviolent resistance, and programs devoted to service, to peace and education for peace." The Universal House of Justice of the Baha'i Faith issued a statement<sup>7</sup> in 1985 which included the following: "There is a paralysis of will rooted in the deep-seated conviction of the inevitable quarrelsomeness of mankind, which has led to the reluctance to entertain the possibility of subordinating national self-interest to the requirements of world order." And again: "World order can be founded only on an unshakeable consciousness of the oneness of mankind, a spiritual truth which all the human sciences confirm. Anthropology, physiology, psychology, recognise only one human species, albeit infinitely varied in the secondary aspects of life. Recognition of this truth requires abandonment of prejudice of every kind." Religious movements throughout the world are committed to seeking more effective policies to solve human problems without resort to violence. In this search they are joining many others who are exploring our understanding of life.

## **E. The Study of Conflict**

The study of conflict has hitherto been largely included in studies of war and violence. Andrew Mack, in his analysis of the development of peace research,<sup>8</sup> has reported that the upsurge of such research is partly a reflection of scepticism about traditional approaches to security issues. The traditional approach relies more on historical analysis; the newer emphasis is on social science understanding of conflict. "Peace researchers believed that the scientific study of conflict . . . would succeed where the more traditional approaches of the students

of **realpolitik** had failed. Political science, sociology, social psychology, economics and rational choice theory took precedence in peace research over the older disciplines of diplomatic history, international law and classical strategy."

Kenneth Boulding, a US Quaker economist, has done a good deal of work on peace and conflict.<sup>9</sup> He identifies conflict activities as those "in which we are conscious that an increase in our welfare may diminish the welfare of others, or an increase in the welfare of others may diminish ours". He points out that we, as individuals and nations, have taboos against being violent towards others, but that once the taboo line shifts (e.g. in war or conflict) we can use very destructive behaviour against others. He sees a major goal as being to achieve a situation where nonviolent responses to threats and violence become the norm, and where the costs of violence can be clearly seen as too great.

Malcolm Leary, of the Rudolph Steiner philosophical and educational movement, has identified the downward path of a conflict through various stages - nervousness, neurosis, and suicide.<sup>10</sup> At each stage, behaviour becomes more antagonistic and destructive, until there is absolute commitment to win at all costs. It is possible to intervene at any stage and reverse the process by promoting better communication and trust. The danger is that, as the conflict develops, those involved will become locked into a deteriorating process and find it increasingly difficult to pull back from disaster.

Edward de Bono, in some recent writing on conflict,<sup>11</sup> says that argument, a well-entrenched feature of our society, reinforces conflict. In conflict situations each side gets more rigid and tries to defeat the other. People get into conflict because they see things differently and want different things, and cultural and language patterns encourage the view that differences cannot easily be reconciled. He sees the need for more effort to be put into improving ideas by cooperative effort. In this way the energy and creativity of each side can be used fully.

Negotiation is an important element in dealing with conflict. Roger Fisher of the Harvard Negotiation Project is the most well-known exponent of negotiation thinking.<sup>12</sup> "More and more occasions require negotiation; conflict is a growth industry. Everyone wants to participate in decisions that affect them; fewer and fewer people will accept decisions dictated by someone else. People differ, and they use negotiation to handle their differences." Roger Fisher believes that 'soft' negotiation results in a feeling of being exploited, 'hard' negotiation involves a win/lose outcome which damages the relationship of the parties. The concept of 'principled negotiation' is used to describe a way of

deciding issues on their merits and being fair to all concerned. Herb Cohen, another scholar of negotiation, believes that the careful use of power will enable anyone to obtain what they want and be fair to others.<sup>13</sup> This is done by exploring the needs of both parties and reaching a win/win result. "Winning means finding out what the other side wants and showing them a way to get it while **you** get what **you** want."

A different angle on conflict is offered by Elise Boulding, a US Quaker sociologist.<sup>14</sup> Emphasising the spiritual dimension of human unity, she works to identify points of contact across cultures and religions. This involves mutual listening and appreciation, trust, and working together nonviolently. Elise Boulding focusses on the concept of 'enemy' as the source of much conflict with people who are different. "If we abolish enemies and dialogue with strangers then we may be in a position to speak a new word to old quarrels." She affirms the value of us all developing conflict resolution skills.

Global conflict is a reflection of domestic conflict in the countries involved, according to John Burton, an Australian scholar now working in the USA.<sup>15</sup> Until communities cope with their own internal conflicts and insecurities, they will continue to project their conflicts onto other countries. The concept of projection has been studied by a number of people in the field of conflict. Henri Tajfel, a social psychologist from the UK, has examined group behaviour and shown how frustration and aggression in an individual can be displaced onto other individuals and groups.<sup>16</sup> He has pointed out the readiness of groups to characterise other groups by crude traits (skin colour, temperament, etc.) as a way of building their own group's identity.

Racism can be seen as a classic example of projection. Jan Pettman of the ANU Peace Research Centre has analysed the factors which underlie racist attitudes and has shown how stereotyped attitudes become oppressive to minority groups.<sup>17</sup> In the Australian context she points out how most Anglo-Australians see themselves as individuals who are tolerant and rational, while seeing others - Aborigines, Asian and European immigrants as irrational and poor. She maintains that freedom, justice and equality are all essential for overcoming social conflict. This involves a guarantee of certain basic rights for all citizens, and institutionalising agreed principles.

This leads to another facet of conflict, namely the existence of oppressive structures in our world. Those who are in a position of underdog naturally see conflict as due to the dominance of a particular group or cultural tradition. An

example which affects us all is the position of women in our world. For many women, conflict arises from the impact of traditional male dominance with its characteristics of competitiveness, aggression and power. Challenging patriarchal values is therefore essential if the world is to be kept from more violence. Affirming values of sharing, nurturing and cooperating are thus fundamental to resolving conflict.

A further dimension of the oppressor/oppressed analysis is world development. Those who 'have' are in conflict with those who 'have not'. Until a more just society is achieved, such conflict will continue. A limited improvement in the condition of slaves hardly guarantees a reduction in conflict, as it fails to change the conflict-producing structures. The study of conflict has so far given only limited attention to this aspect of structural change.

From the foregoing it can be said that the study of conflict is an emerging area, still far from well developed. Conflict itself exists at all levels of our experience - individual, group, community, national, international. We are all involved in it, and carry our skills or mistakes from one level to another. We cannot avoid allowing our inner conflicts to spill over into our relations with other individuals and groups, and then on into relationships with other communities of people. We cannot be satisfied with focussing on only one area of conflict - we need to bring all our resources to bear on all layers.

## **F. Feelings and Conflict**

Feelings are a potent part of conflict. Unless they are identified and expressed, they will prevent attempts to solve conflict. Anger is the strongest feeling in conflict situations. It is full of energy and can feed on itself or on other people's anger in response. The result can be a spiral of anger, causing the conflict to escalate and get out of perspective. Things said in anger come back to haunt us later, especially in close relationships. Anger can be exacerbated by negative feelings inherited from previous occasions when our feelings were not dealt with fully (e.g. in childhood). So when a conflict occurs now, some of our response may be feelings from the past as well as feelings aroused from the present problem or crisis.

It is important, then, to learn ways of dealing with the strong feelings caused in conflict. I suggest three steps - identify the feeling, tell the other person that the feeling exists, then go away and work through the feeling. The first step

can be hard for it involves being conscious of physical symptoms and recognising them as signs of particular feelings (unease, frustration, anger, sadness). Also, this step requires a decision that a conflict exists and that it needs to be addressed. The second step is important since the person who triggered the feeling needs to know what is going on, and not be left in the dark. It is tempting to blame that person, but the best response is to state that the feeling exists and needs to be handled before anything can be done about the conflict. The third step involves removing oneself from the other person and facing up to the feeling.

Listening to many people share conflict experiences, I have become aware of a wonderful variety of ways of working out feelings. There are the very active ways - physical exertion (chopping wood, dancing, running), learning martial arts, screaming or shouting, hitting inanimate objects ('beating the bed'). There are the more gentle ways - meditation, prayer, reading, music, painting, writing, even eating, and 'sleeping on it'. Some people use a combination of these ways. Others find a third person (neutral) or a group so they can vent their feelings safely. Psychodrama can be effective in dealing with feelings connected with the past. Some people (especially children) need a space to withdraw (a cooling-off room).

The point to be made here is that feelings are important and legitimate. They are part of our makeup and they are signs which need to be heeded if we are to make progress in relating to others and in reaching greater self-esteem and inner peace. Venting them on others is unlikely, however, to be the most appropriate way of dealing with them, except perhaps on a rare occasion when 'shock value' is needed to alert another person to the existence of a problem. A person who consistently vents their negative feelings on others is likely to lose friends and to make it more difficult for others to share their feelings.

One creative approach to feelings is to use imagination and fantasy. The idea is to think of the most extreme things one could do to the person involved in the conflict, or to imagine the worst possible outcome for oneself. It is then possible to examine the implications of such outcomes and move to a more constructive response to the conflict. This approach has two advantages - it brings the imagination into play, thereby allowing the possibility of a creative idea occurring. Secondly, it enables one to see that even a bad outcome would not be the end of the world and could be handled.

'There is much energy generated in conflict, and this energy can be transferred to useful purposes. For example, Einstein used unbelievable obstinacy to pursue his mathematical problems. Florence Nightingale, when asked why she

worked in hospitals, said "Rage!" Emerson said: "Good indignation brings out all one's power." I am sure many people can attest (as I can) that the strong emotions aroused in conflict and crisis situations can be turned to valuable projects in our lives. Of course, these feelings can also be used for negative purposes, such as violence and war. This can be because people see no other way of responding to strong emotions (especially anger). Men are especially prone to this. My experience in men's support groups indicates that many men are keenly aware of the potential they have for violence and are seeking alternative ways to express their feelings safely.

A vital aspect of handling feelings is having the self-confidence to identify and articulate them. We all need help in this. We can support each other in sharing feelings without doing damage to anyone. On the community level, the use of 'cooling off' periods in industrial disputes is a valuable process. Sport, notably in cooperative games, has a part to play also. Adventure opportunities (treks, voyages) may also be important for some people. National leaders need to be encouraged to be more open about their feelings, as an example to others.

If negative feelings have great power, so do positive ones. Conflict can provide opportunities for positive feelings to be noticed and expressed to those involved. This may give an opening to others to respond similarly. Since it seems we all need more praise than blame in order to feel able to change and grow, positive feelings are a most valuable part of the process of dealing with conflict.

## **G. Communication**

Communication is often the first casualty in conflict. Communication is not easy at the best of times, but it is made very hard when engulfed in emotion and tension. Misunderstandings arising from poor communication not only create conflict but delay its resolution. In a conflict situation, communication is characterised by - a higher tone of voice, the use of cutting words (e.g. 'rubbish!'), name-calling, aggressive body language, interrupting, repeating points for emphasis, and dismissing others' comments as irrelevant or wrong. The danger is that things will be said in heat which are regretted later and which undermine the relationship.

It is almost impossible for us to be neutral in communicating. We have a set of filters based on our background and experience and through these filters we hear what we want to hear and evaluate others' behaviour. The film **Being There**

shows this very effectively, as the humble and ignorant gardener is perceived to be a man of great wisdom. Carl Rogers, the well-known psychotherapist, has said that the major barrier to communication is our tendency to judge, evaluate, approve or disapprove, statements of others. We are thus not open to others but are looking to them to confirm or deny a preconceived attitude or behaviour.<sup>18</sup>

There are other barriers to communicating. Robert Bolton, in a book on communication,<sup>19</sup> elaborates these as follows - criticising, name-calling, diagnosing, praising evaluatively, ordering, threatening, moralising, excessive questioning, and advising. I expect we can all recall occasions when we have tried to get responses from others by these means. The likely outcome is defensiveness and a cutting off of communication, because the other person feels unaccepted.

The use of 'I' language and reflective listening can help communication. 'I' language represents the speaker's own perception and does not assume the receiver sees things the same. It enables me to say what is happening to me and to invite a response in similar language. I accept responsibility for myself and am open to receive from others. I put aside (or tone down) my filters, concentrate on listening, and reflect back to the other person what I receive. This enables them to confirm that I have received their message correctly.

The implication of all this is that to communicate effectively I need time to 'be present' with the other person. It is not easy to achieve this in our busy lives. It requires taking the relationship seriously enough to want to achieve effective communication. It means giving immediate feedback to others so they understand they have been heard, even if I need time to reflect on what they have said before giving a fuller response. Conflict is less likely to arise if this approach is followed, and existing conflict is likely to be settled more readily once communication channels are functioning well.

Assertiveness is an inescapable part of effective communication. Robert Bolton describes a continuum of behaviours - submissive, assertive, aggressive. He points out that submissive behaviour avoids conflict and responsibility, aggressive behaviour alienates others and breeds resistance, while assertive behaviour affirms everyone's dignity. He proposes three parts to assertiveness - (a) a description of the behaviour to be changed, (b) disclosure of the asserter's feelings, and (c) clarification of the effect of the behaviour on the asserter. For example, "When you call me at work and talk at length, I feel tense, because I don't get my work done."

This sounds straightforward enough, but I am sure many of you will identify with some of the comments included early in this lecture by people who find assertion very hard to practice. My own tendency has been to be inclined to play down a problem and take the burden of 'suffering' on myself (i.e. to be submissive). This does not solve anything usually. I now try to make a more deliberate assessment of the situation and consider how best I can express my own needs and feelings. This then allows the other person to know what is going on with me and to share their own response. I find that this **works**.

Although the emphasis of this section has been on personal communication, much of it is relevant also to social structures. In educational, industrial, governmental, media, and community agencies, there is plenty of evidence of communication styles which are inadequate. Worse still, division and prejudice are often encouraged by one-way communication (top-down) and by manipulative processes of decision-making which preach consultation while practising authoritarianism. Fortunately there are more people ready to challenge these obstacles to communication. They need to support each other in assertively proposing modifications to structures to reduce conflict and enhance cooperation.

## **H. Trust**

Trust is basic to many parts of life. We all need to be able to trust others to provide for our safety, comfort, and needs. One of the features of conflict is a breakdown in trust, putting each side on its guard against the other. In many respects the international situation exemplifies this best. Arms races, power blocs, alliances, preoccupation with security - these are classic signs of mistrust and conflict. As trust declines, the inhibitions on behaviour are lifted and it becomes acceptable to attack and destroy the other side.

Those in conflict project onto each other their own vices and weaknesses. They become the creation of each other, possessing all kinds of evil qualities and motives. The breakdown of trust removes any incentive to solve the conflict, since every attempt can be seen as a ploy and a fraud. Memories of past history can feed this mistrust, as old feuds are dragged out and are re-fought. Phrases like "You always do that", "you let me down before, so why should I trust you" are bandied about, adding fuel to the fire. At intergroup and international levels, the sins of the forebears are 'visited upon' the present generation.

Building trust is an essential prerequisite for solving conflict. Forgiveness is an important part of this. If we can forgive others for what we perceive them to have done wrong, we can then move to make an opening for renewed relationship. A signal from one side may be enough to set the stage for resolution. A touch of humour, a gesture, an offer. It may be the result of mutual recognition that the situation has got out of hand. It may involve a 'third party' who is willing to help set up rules for the two sides to meet. In international negotiations, sometimes the shape of the table has been the significant point on which trust can be re-established.

In today's world, it may be important for the two sides to use private contacts to solve their dispute. Open canvassing of views in the media may prove counterproductive if it reinforces preconceived ideas. At the same time, the media may be able to help set the scene for community acceptance of a resolution. The renewal of trust may involve some reassurance to each side that they will not abuse that trust, at least for a defined period of time. Another aspect of trust is that the people who are representing each side have the full confidence of their own group and are able to work towards a settlement without hindrance.

Our capacity to deal with specific conflicts would be increased if the overall level of trust in the world were raised. We can all be part of this. We can strengthen links among people, seek common rather than divergent interests, encourage a pluralistic approach, and support tolerance of difference. We can share positive visions of a peaceful world. We can seek to reconcile the opposing elements in our own nature by accepting them as part of a whole person. We can look for opportunities for dialogue with those of different backgrounds and experience.

## **I. Resolving Conflict: Methods**

I have so far mentioned several aspects of conflict - feelings, communication, and trust. I now turn to ways of resolving conflict. I shall distinguish between methods and models. In this section I am concerned with methods and approaches which could apply to most conflicts. In the next section I shall examine specific models and structures which can help solve conflicts. For the purposes of this section I shall refer to a number of writers on conflict.

Barbara Hicks, of the Institute for Social Development (based in Sydney), has suggested several steps in resolving conflict:

1. Be clear about the issue. Who has the problem? What has been done so far to deal with it?
2. Recognise your own feelings, and acknowledge and understand the feelings of others involved.
3. Negotiate a mutually convenient time to discuss the matter.
4. State the matter clearly and brainstorm for solutions. No judgments.
5. Through discussion and debate, agree on a solution. Try it out with the intention of reviewing it after a period of time.

Robert Bolton proposes what he calls 'collaborative problem solving' which has six steps:

1. Define the problem in terms of needs, not solutions.
2. Brainstorm possible solutions.
3. Select the solution that will best meet both parties' needs, and check possible consequences.
4. Plan who will do what, where, and by when.
5. Implement the plan.
6. Evaluate the process, and later, how well the plan worked.

Most of us use these kinds of steps, albeit unconsciously at times. The process may not be so smooth as outlined above; it may be necessary to retrace our steps. The review step is very important, as it is unlikely the first solution agreed upon will be perfect. In some cases, a temporary settlement may be the best that can be achieved, and a fuller resolution may have to wait.

There are several different kinds of outcome to conflict. Firstly, it is possible to have **capitulation** - a gift by one side to the other. This is viable so long as it does not become habitually one way. Secondly, a conflict can lead to a

**compromise** with each side giving some ground and meeting the other half-way. Thirdly, if differences persist, it is possible to agree to differ - **coexistence**. In this, the parties agree to avoid fighting each other. Fourthly, it may be feasible to devise a **consensus** outcome which differs from what either side wanted but satisfies each. All these outcomes may occur as a result of the parties' own efforts or with the help of a third party.

A valuable contribution to understanding about negotiation as a method of resolving conflict has been made by Roger Fisher and William Ury in their book, **Getting to Yes**. They make many practical suggestions, and I shall summarise these:

1. **Don't bargain over positions** - it is likely to lead to a stand-off with each side hardening its attitude and defending its position.
2. **Separate the people from the problem** - allow for feelings to be expressed, speak about yourself and not the others, don't blame them, don't deduce their intentions from your fears, build a working relationship.
3. **Focus on interests, not positions** - look for the shared interests by asking 'Why?' and 'Why not?' in relation to each side's approach.
4. **Invent options for mutual gain** - there are four obstacles to this, (a) premature judgment, (b) searching for the single answer, (c) the assumption of a fixed pie, (d) thinking that solving their problem is their problem. Brainstorming can be helpful in multiplying options.
5. **Objective criteria** - it is possible to appeal to outside authorities to determine standards to be applied in solving the conflict.
6. **What if they are more powerful!** Work out your best alternative to a negotiated agreement, identify the power available to you, and don't give in to pressure.
7. **What if they won't play?** Do not react to attack, sidestep it. Stick to principled ends and means.
8. **What if they use dirty tricks!** Recognise the tactic and raise it as an issue. Resist threats.

Apart from the practical value of these ideas, there is an underlying commitment to a 'win/win' outcome satisfactory to all sides. There is an emphasis on narrowing the distance between the parties in conflict. There is also an acknowledgement that principled methods will be the most effective in achieving a result that maintains the relationship. A useful insight Fisher and Ury have offered is that everyone has more power than they often think. In negotiating, this power needs to be used carefully and openly to ensure a fair resolution.

Edward de Bono, in his writing about conflict, distinguishes among several conflict modes - fight, negotiate, problem-solve, or design. The fight idiom involves all the battle jargon and is a common approach. Negotiation is superior but involves working within existing boundaries. Problem-solving is attractive but inadequate as it tends to focus on a particular cause of conflict and ignore the complexities. Design is open-ended, aimed at creating something new. De Bono favours the design approach, in which existing ideas are not attacked, the parties explore new possibilities, there is no apportioning of fault, and there is joint responsibility for the outcome. "A child playing with a set of Lego construction blocks will dismantle all pre-formed pieces in order to build up again from the most basic elements. So in a conflict situation we survey the ingredients, values, objectives, positions, channels, mechanisms, personalities, etc. An attempt is then made to construct the needed design." A third party can help this by setting the agenda and preventing the conflict mode from reasserting itself during the design process.

Elise Boulding reminds us of the need to maintain and develop our skills of dialogue with people who are different. She also draws attention to our human capacity to see things in holistic terms - in global and local settings at the same time. She alerts us to the danger of being caught up in actions unworthy of our insights. "One of the hardest challenges of any of us is to carry our best understanding and our highest insights into each situation we enter and not let some of our wisdom be squeezed out because we are in a setting where power responses seem more appropriate and are being reinforced by those around us." Clearly conflict situations put us to this challenge, especially when we are tempted to revert to old patterns of behaviour.

Conflict gives us the opportunity to learn more about ourselves and to express our faith and personality. If we approach it with a series of techniques to be applied in each situation, We shall probably end up in a worse situation. If we develop our awareness and skills, then deal with each occasion according to our light and consistent with our integrity as an individual, we are more likely to

create an environment in which positive resolution will occur. The methods mentioned above reflect a range of perceptions about conflict and about human behaviour, and can help us in our quest for better responses to conflict. In the end, however, we have to make our own pilgrimage through life and conflict as part of life.

## **J. Resolving Conflict: Models and Structures**

In this section I want to describe some of the channels being used to assist in resolving conflict. I shall begin with those relevant to personal and interpersonal conflict, then consider social and international conflict. Some general definitions may be worth making first. Arbitration means a binding decision by a third party. Conciliation involves activities to promote agreement (checking facts, carrying messages). Mediation means the use of a third party to help the parties to work out a solution.

1. **Clearness Meetings** This is a mode created by early Friends. An individual in conflict about a decision or a choice may find it helpful to meet with a group of sympathetic friends to share the problem and work through the options and feelings. Such a meeting needs to be held on a trusting basis, with people chosen by the person in crisis. The final decision on what action or decision to take remains with that person.

2. **Co-Counselling** This is a process whereby two people are available to each other in a listening role. Each person can explore their own issues and listen to the other's search. Self-awareness, feedback and confidence-building can occur within this kind of structure.

3. **Encounter and Support Groups** There are many examples of groups which provide an atmosphere in which individuals can explore their needs and problems. In some cases, special groups (e.g. Self-Transformation, Psychodrama, Despair and Empowerment) offer courses or workshops to enable participants to examine relationships and influences which have shaped their attitudes and behaviour, and to make desired changes. In other cases, support groups (e.g. men's and women's groups) provide challenge and support about issues of communication and conflict.

4. **Family Conflict Resolution** In some cultures the elders or respected leaders intervene to solve disputes. In Hawaii, for example, the following stages

are used in family conflicts: prayer for guidance, identification of problem, working with each aspect in turn, confession of wrongdoing, forgiveness, resolution, prayer of thanks, shared meal. Senior members of religious groups sometimes have a similar role, although it seems less evident today.

5. **Counselling** Those with professional skill in assisting individuals to solve problems are frequently placed in the role of dealing with conflict, inner or outer. As a result, many of them have enlarged their understanding to help clients identify causes and solutions of conflict. Role playing can often be of value here.

6. **Family Conciliation Centres** Family Court counsellors and registrars offer some conflict resolution services. Recently two special pilot schemes (one in Victoria, one in NSW) were established by the Attorney-General's Department to develop conflict resolution skills. These centres use the following process: setting rules, presentation by each party of their version of the issues, compilation of a list of issues for negotiation, negotiation of each issue in turn, writing an agreement. The solution is not imposed on the parties but is worked out by them with the help of a third party.

7. **Community Mediation** This is relatively new in Australia, but has existed elsewhere for many years. For example, in China there are thousands of neighbourhood mediation committees. In Australia there are community justice centres in NSW, neighbourhood mediation centres in Victoria, and local mediation services in other States. The basic service is to provide disputants with a channel for resolving conflicts outside the legal system. Anyone in a dispute can seek the help of a centre in conciliation or mediation. Trained volunteers are available for mediation sessions which include expression of feelings, mapping the conflict, and considering solutions. Written agreements are prepared. The process does not remove legal rights, but in practice it prevents many conflicts from coming to court. Magistrates, police, local government officials often refer people to such centres, so they are clearly being seen as having an important role in community harmony.

8. **Small Claims Courts** Disputes involving amounts below \$2000 often are dealt with by these courts. Before a judicial decision is made, court officials enquire into the circumstances using a conciliation process. Settlement is then embodied in an order of the court.

9. **Court-based Arbitration** A court can order the appointment of an arbitrator to determine the outcome of a conflict. This is a formal process and the

decision of the arbitrator has the binding force of a court judgment. The arbitrator has to apply standards of equity and merit within the existing law.

10. **Commercial Dispute Agencies** There are now two agencies set up to respond to commercial conflict - the Australian Centre for International Commercial Arbitration (ACICA), and the Australian Commercial Disputes Centre (ACDC). Conciliation and mediation, as well as arbitration, are offered on a voluntary basis to business firms.

11. **Industrial Machinery** Within the framework of industrial legislation, there is scope for arbitration between employers and employees. In recent years this has been supplemented by informal procedures of investigation, consultation and mediation.

12. **Judicial Processes** In the realm of civil law, informal procedures are being increasingly used prior to actual court sessions, to see whether settlements can be reached. In criminal law there are fewer such initiatives, although the need to prevent criminal situations from arising has led to more attention being given to social factors.

13. **Community Tribunals** There are now many agencies which seek to resolve conflict among different groups and individuals. Examples are the Human Rights Commission, Equal Opportunity Tribunals, Anti-Discrimination Boards. Although they have legislative backing to prosecute, they endeavour to solve disputes through conciliation and mediation. The legal power which they have is important in equalising the parties in a dispute (e.g. between an Aboriginal person and a hotelier) in which one party is, by virtue of the situation, less powerful.

14. **Search/Community Conferences** These are gatherings designed to help groups and organisations assess where they have come from, where they are, and where they are going. Such events involve an open-ended searching of possibilities for a better future. They can help bring unity of purpose and action, as well as highlighting problems and conflicts.

15. **Environmental Mediation** The impact of forestry and mining on the environment is a contentious issue in many parts of the world. In the USA, processes of mediation have been used to enable different interests to meet and discuss options. For example, when the San Juan National Forest in Colorado was being envisaged as a timber harvesting area, mediators held a series of sessions with people from all affected groups. The outcome was an agreed plan whereby

timber sales could occur without harming the scenic views, recreational amenities and tourism.

16. **Organisational Mediation** I want to recount a particular experience in which I was involved. A community group was in crisis, with staff resigning, much tension and falling morale. I was invited (with another) to help sort out the situation. We attempted this firstly by meeting each person in turn, allowing them to 'let off steam' and give their views. We then made our assessment of the issues and options for change. We then held two workshops (three months apart) with all the members of the organisation. In these meetings we asked people to say why they were involved in the organisation; we presented our findings; and there was much discussion. The differences which emerged centred on personalities, values, decision-making, and communication channels. By exploring these with us, the staff were able to find some common ground. A plan emerged in due course for changes in policy and procedure. Lines of responsibility were clarified, and positive feelings shared. The outcome was a more satisfactory environment for people to work together, and better structures for dealing with conflict.

17. **The Media and Conflict** It is rather hard to find evidence of the media contributing to the resolution of conflict. More often than not the media are excellent at describing and highlighting conflict situations, but show little interest in putting forward solutions. Some analytical journalism does attempt to show ways things could be solved, and this is to be encouraged. If less attention could be paid to the *ad versa rial* approach (e.g. having someone from each 'side' in a debate on TV, leading to an argument), there would be a more substantial role for the media. If, for example, talk-back radio invited calls from people offering solutions rather than just opinions, we could get some creative ideas. We all - as listeners and readers, as journalists and presenters, as public speakers and leaders have a responsibility to use the media in a way which promotes unity rather than division, positive rather than negative images, and practical improvements rather than stalemates.

18. **Public Enquiries** These have been around in one form or another for a long time. Whether they be parliamentary enquiries, judicial enquiries, or non-government enquiries, they can provide valuable outlets for public feelings and ideas. A good recent example was the International Year of Peace Peace and Justice Enquiry sponsored by the churches. Parliamentary enquiries have the advantage of encouraging members of Parliament to work jointly on a task, rather than competing with each other. It is a pity that this kind of activity by politicians receives little attention.

19. **Worker Cooperatives** These organisations allow those working in an enterprise to own it and to help run it cooperatively. Cooperatives exist in many industries around the world, most notably in the Basque country in northern Spain. In the UK there are reported to be over 10,000 cooperatives. In Australia they have had some success in rural and retail areas. Part of the key to their success is their small scale nature which enhances communication and a sense of belonging and shared responsibility. This reduces the likelihood of conflict getting out of hand.

20. **Consensus and Participation** It is increasingly common for groups in our society to use decision-making procedures which allow their members a full say. It is my experience that newly-forming groups adopt as a matter of course a consensus method and a sharing of tasks among members. This of course is gratifying to me as a Friend, as it comes closer to the Quaker concept of 'sense of the meeting' and equality of responsibility and status in a group. There is however a danger. Sometimes an organisation uses the rhetoric of consensus, consultation and participation whilst actually practising autocratic decision-making. This is a recipe for more conflict as people become frustrated and disillusioned. There needs to be a clear acceptance of and understanding of the nature of consensus and consultation to ensure their success.

21. **Peace Brigades** These are teams of unarmed civilians skilled in peacemaking through nonviolent means. They intervene as third parties in local, national and international conflicts. They arose from Mahatma Gandhi's approach to communal riots in India. Vinoba Bhave developed a peace army in the 1950s which sent people into conflict situations throughout India. The Shanti Sena (Peace Brigade) helped to negotiate a ceasefire in Nagaland in the 1960s and Peace Observer Teams functioned there for six and a half years as a follow-on. Peace Brigades stand physically between opposing groups, at the same time encouraging the different groups to work out peaceful ways of settling their grievances. Friends in the Philadelphia area of the United States have also used this approach in neighbourhood crises.

A World Peace Brigade was set up in 1962 in Beirut. The WPB was involved in preparations for the Africa Freedom Action proposed international march into what was then Northern Rhodesia, but as the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland broke up and elections were held in what was to become Zambia, the march did not go ahead, though 10,000 people attended a rally near the Tanganyikan border with Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). In 1962 some of those

involved with the WPB prepared to walk from Delhi to Peking on a Friendship March at the time of the Sino-Indian border war, but they were not allowed over the frontier into China.

Still committed to the idea, some of those originally involved with the WPB then set up the Cyprus Resettlement Project in 1972-74 to bring Greek and Turkish Cypriots back together in their mixed villages on the island, but the war of July 1974 when Turkey invaded Cyprus put an abrupt end to the project. A new body, Peace Brigades International, emerged in Canada and the United States in 1981, committed to mediation, observation and investigation, reconciliation work and forming human buffers between attackers. Initial work has been in Central America while PBI has now expanded to Europe and Asia in terms of interest and support. Other situations PBI has considered becoming involved in have included Sri Lanka, South Africa, and Big Mountain in the United States.

22. **UN Good Offices and Peacekeeping Forces** It is appropriate to draw attention to the many unheralded efforts of the United Nations to keep the peace and to defuse conflict situations. By means of sending observer teams, unarmed (and sometimes armed) forces, and diplomatic conciliation, the UN has been able to prevent some conflicts from becoming war. The Secretary-General can play a crucial role in such efforts, especially by the use of special representatives who have the skill and prestige to influence parties to a dispute.

23. **Quaker Conciliation** Adam Curle, a Friend and first Professor of Peace Studies at Bradford University, has described conciliation as "activity aimed at bringing about an alteration of perception that will lead to an alteration of attitude and eventually to an alteration of behaviour"<sup>20</sup> Friends have engaged in conciliation efforts in numerous critical situations around the world. Acting on the conviction that inner and outer peace are inseparable, Friends have made approaches to despotic rulers, treated despised groups fairly, sent missions to governments, carried messages between opposing sides, and given aid to people afflicted on all sides in war. Full details of these experiences are given in Mike Yarrow's book, **Quaker Experiences in International Conciliation**.<sup>21</sup>

24. **Diplomats Conferences** For about forty years Quakers have brought together diplomats from different nations to share understanding and information about international problems. Some of this work has been based at Quaker centres in New York and Geneva (UN offices), and some has been evident in London, Vienna, Singapore and Canberra. The distinctive feature of these gatherings is the

atmosphere of trust and openness that is created. Many diplomats have found this conducive to exploring new ideas and friendships. A recent example has been the Indo-China Seminars held in Canberra in 1985 and 1986, well received by the diplomats who participated.

25. **Controlled Communication** This is a process, pioneered by John Burton (an Australian peace scholar), whereby representatives of nations or groups in conflict meet in the presence of a 'third' party comprising facilitators with experience in human relations, history, sociology, law, and international politics. Each side states its position and responds to questions from the panel, to identify the different interests. The factors behind the present conflict are revealed gradually, and then options for resolution are explored, with the panel offering insights from their scholarship. When agreement is reached, special care is taken to prepare the participants for re-entry to their own national situation, so that the benefits of the meeting will not be lost. The process has so far been used in the Middle East, Northern Ireland and the Falklands/Malvinas conflict between the UK and Argentina. It is interesting to speculate on whether US/USSR talks would benefit from such assistance.

26. **Supranational Independent Thinking Organisation** A novel idea by Edward de Bono is that there should be a SITO comprising specialists in lateral thinking and creative conflict resolution. The organisation would be available to countries in dispute and would offer them opportunities to meet and design a positive outcome to their conflict. Adam Curle has encouraged the idea of a bureau of trained mediators available to be called into any international trouble spot.

27. **One-text Mediation** This is a method devised by the Harvard Negotiation Project (Roger Fisher in particular). It involves a third party listening to the views of the conflicting sides and then preparing a draft agreement as a basis for discussion. This approach, used effectively in the Camp David talks between Israel and Egypt in 1978 (with the US as third party), obviates the problems caused by each side drafting its own agreement and then having to reconcile it with the other's draft. "As a mechanical technique for limiting the number of decisions, reducing the uncertainty of each decision, and preventing the parties from getting increasingly locked into their positions, it worked remarkably well." This method has considerable potential for international and inter-group conflicts.

28. **Exchange Programs** Students, officials, workers, and others have been involved in programs of living in each other's countries. There is considerable value in such programs as they enable people to see 'foreigners' and 'enemies' in a different light. Ideally, such programs should focus on those countries which have the greatest levels of hostility. Along with such programs go initiatives like learning other languages, joining the worldwide Esperanto movement, and linking with hospitality groups such as Servas. International conferences, study tours, and correspondence networks are also part of the process of reducing the potential for conflict to become war. As networks develop, it is possible to ensure that problems in one region become the concern of a wider range of people, and this can help prevent abuses of human rights (e.g. Amnesty International).

29. **Visioning** Elise Boulding and others have been offering workshops which allow people to think creatively about the future. A world without weapons is envisioned, and the steps to it are then described. This approach supports us in our attempts to devise constructive ways to solve conflicts without violence.

30. **Peace Research** There is increasing emphasis in peace research on questions of conflict resolution. The ANU Peace Research Centre, for example, has offered a post to someone working in conflict resolution. Research is a vital contribution to our understanding of conflict, and more work is needed to back up the action being taken 'in the field'. Research has the effect of evaluating what is being tried, and of giving greater credibility to alternative approaches. This is important, as there is still a widespread belief that conflict is inevitably bound to lead to violence and war. By giving us more information about human nature, communication, conflict, international relations, and social structures, peace research can reinforce our efforts for peace.

## **K. Conflict, Power and Nonviolence**

Conflict always involves power. In some cases, the power is reasonably well balanced between the parties. Conflict resolution methods and processes work best in these situations. Where power is less equal, problems can arise in reaching an outcome which meets the needs of all involved. In this section I want to focus on this question of power, and the role of nonviolence in equalising power.

A critique of the conciliation and mediation approaches to conflict has been made by Jocelyne Scutt of the Law Reform Commission of Victoria. In a paper

delivered at the Australian Institute of Criminology in July 1986<sup>22</sup> she drew attention to circumstances in which counselling based on talking matters out would not be appropriate, for example domestic violence, child abuse, incest. It is even possible that counselling would give the stronger party (in this case the husband/father) a forum to reinforce their views and attitudes and to avoid responsibility for changing their behaviour.

Jocelyne Scutt points out that conciliation procedures (e.g. under equal opportunity legislation) can lead a 'weaker' party to settle without pressing their case far enough, because of insufficient resources and pressure from tribunals to sort the matter out amicably and quietly. The use of the public court system can have the valuable asset of bringing to public notice acts of discrimination and unfairness and of applying clearly-defined rights. "The implication that disputes can be resolved by mediation, conciliation and counselling ignores power differentials and inequality. The idea that the problems of the adversary system and traditional justice can be resolved by the establishment of alternative systems hides from view the fact that despite valid criticisms of the adversarial process, positive aspects exist which should not be removed from disadvantaged groups in particular."

Similar controversy has occurred over the years in relation to Quaker international peacemaking efforts. Mike Yarrow has reported that Friends have disagreed on the extent to which they could remain neutral in conflict situations (e.g. Vietnam, South Africa). In 1967, Roland Warren said "The role of the peaceable mediator, seeking out areas of agreement, seeking to ease tensions, seeking for possible steps forward is a comfortable one for Quakers." He went on to point to structural violence as the cause of unequal distribution of wealth, racial and religious discrimination, and war. He stated that "if the individual is to be able to change we must concern ourselves with changing the social institutions which form and limit (the individual)".

These criticisms of conflict resolution approaches remind us that we still have a long way to go in our understanding of conflict and our application of solutions. In many situations, it will be necessary to make a judgment about which kind of approach or model is most suitable. Often there will be elements of conciliation and elements of confrontation. As Adam Curle has said, if there is a substantial imbalance of power, there is no room for conciliation until, through education, awareness and confrontation, the underdogs are in a more equal position.

It is here that nonviolent action is relevant. If injustice and oppression are at the root of a conflict, nonviolent methods can highlight the issues and bring things to the point where conflict resolution can be effective. Gandhi was the best-known exponent of this approach in this century, and he identified four elements: (a) Satyagraha - truth force, which precludes violence; (b) Ahimsa - non-injury to a sentient being, forgiveness, love, courage; (c) Tapasya - self-sacrifice; and (d) Common welfare. From these principles Gandhi developed actions which challenged injustice and offered opponents constructive options for solving the conflict. Martin Luther King, in the US civil rights movement, built upon these approaches and emphasised that nonviolence rests on the conviction that the universe is on the side of justice.

A helpful insight into the use of nonviolent resistance has been given by Walter Wink, a New York theologian.<sup>23</sup> He reflects on three of the sayings of Jesus: turn the other cheek, resist not evil, and go the second mile. He concludes that in the culture of those days, each of these is an affirmation of assertiveness by someone in a weaker position faced with a more powerful person. For example, a person struck on the right cheek by the back of the right hand has been insulted (i.e. treated as inferior). To turn the other cheek says to the oppressor, "try again - your first blow failed to achieve its intended effect. I deny you the power to humiliate me". This would perplex the striker - if the striker responded by hitting with a fist, the two would then be seen to be equals.

Nonviolent action may take many forms - from petitions to non-cooperation. It has the potential to enhance the power of those using it and to put pressure on those in a stronger position to respond and to resolve differences justly. It is therefore a valuable aid to conflict resolution, for it affirms the importance of solving disputes without recourse to destroying people. It acknowledges the humanity of all involved and sets the scene for effective communication, trust and resolution of differences.

## **L. Conflict: Towards a Testimony**

To conclude this lecture I wish to draw together my understanding of conflict and its resolution. I propose to do this in a series of statements which might form the basis of a testimony on conflict. Testimonies were used in the early days of Friends to affirm truths which Friends saw as arising from their awareness of the presence of God.

- \* Conflict represents a vital part of life. It occasions energy, opportunity, learning, and change. The absence of conflict may indicate lack of life, or a sense of hopelessness.
- \* Conflict may be approached in different ways. For some people it is a means of self-discovery in relationships; for others it is a challenge to accepted ways. Everyone has their own approach, based on experience and understanding. It is possible to add to those approaches by sharing with others.
- \* Feelings that arise in conflict situations are natural and important. They need to be dealt with before the conflict can be solved. There are many ways of doing this - some active and some passive - without hurting others. It is desirable to let others know that feelings have been aroused, and to seek time out to work on them.
- \* The capacity to communicate effectively our needs and wants is an essential component of solving conflicts. Using language and expression that assert our perceptions gives others the opportunity to respond openly and honestly.
- \* An atmosphere of trust is conducive to coping with conflict. Risks may have to be taken by one party to promote trust. The act of being vulnerable can, at the same time, trigger a breakthrough towards a satisfactory and creative outcome.
- \* Attitudes can be pivotal in any relationship which is going through conflict. If our attitude is one which affirms the person while differing on a problem, the stage is set for a constructive interaction. If we can 'put light around' someone with whom we are in conflict, we are acknowledging the spiritual dimension of the relationship.
- \* Humour can play a useful role in conflict. Seeing the absurdity in a situation can defuse tension and provide a shared experience. This can be the way forward.
- \* Conflict often has both personal and structural elements which need to be addressed. Attempting to deal with one aspect alone is unlikely to produce a good outcome.

- \* The process of resolving conflict is as important as the outcome. Steps which acknowledge the conflict, deal with feelings, map the conflict and work on outcomes, then decide a plan and review it later, constitute a positive process. No solution has to be seen as final.
- \* Many methods of resolving conflict are enhanced by involving a 'third party' who is neutral. This can expand the options for resolution and take some of the burden of the conflict from those involved.
- \* In the social and international context, there are many models of conflict resolution now being used. This is a reflection of the growing belief that conflict does not have to be settled by force. It is also an acknowledgement of the real dangers of violence in today's world.
- \* Where there is unequal power based on injustice, conflicts cannot readily be resolved. Nonviolent action may provide a way of equalising power so that negotiation can take place fairly. Legislation may also help in this process, by setting standards of conduct and justice.
- \* There may be some situations in which it is not possible to find a solution, at least for the time being. In these cases it is appropriate to remove the parties from each other or to work out some form of co-existence which will enable life to continue without undue stress. Time may provide some healing or give a new opportunity for resolution.
- \* Sometimes it is possible to 're-frame' a conflict in one's mind so that it no longer assumes the proportions it once did. This may solve a conflict or reduce its power to disrupt one's life. Such 're-framing' may be accompanied by a choice to forgive others for the hurts they are perceived to have done to us.
- \* We can all enhance our skills of articulating feelings, reflective listening, assertiveness, risk-taking, and creative problem-solving. In the wider community we can be more open to truth from many quarters, and refrain from judging others because they are different. We can, in fact, celebrate each other's uniqueness, 'that of God in everyone'.
- \* Creative conflict resolution involves imagination, inspiration and perspiration. It assumes a capacity in human nature to make changes, to

work with others in a common cause, and to look for positive outcomes, acceptable to all parties to a conflict.

- \* We can integrate conflict into our lives, so that it ceases to be a threat and becomes a resource. If we do this, our approach to conflict will be confident, drawing upon our awareness and experience. We will be true to ourselves and be open to new light.

## **M. Conclusion**

I want to end on a spiritual note. The human spirit is the key to progress in our dealing with conflict. Let me quote from **The Hundredth Monkey** by Ken Keyes:<sup>24</sup>

"If we want humankind to survive into the next century we can no longer afford to transmit the deadly viruses of hatred, non-caring and forcefully getting one's way that lead to murder, assassination, and ultimately to nuclear destruction.

In the millions of years in which our ancestors were surviving in the jungles, it was important for their minds to create an instant 'self vs. other' perception.

For animals eat other animals and no species can survive if all of its members are eaten up.

This instant perception of 'otherness' is basic to survival for animals in the jungle.

We can learn a more effective way to make our lives work.

We are still creating a 'jungle' of our civilised lives by continuing the operation of our 'us vs. them' mental habits.

We're all in this together!"

We are faced with a challenge to change our perception and affirm the unity of humanity and its potential to cooperate and create new opportunities for growth in awareness. George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, spoke of a vision in which "I saw there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. And in that also I saw the infinite love of God." Resolving conflict can be seen as a process of moving from darkness to light. As we experience the light we begin to see different ways of relating, of loving, of communicating, of trusting. Hope is rekindled as we sense that a conflict can lead to something good for us and others involved.

In the opera **Fidelio**, Beethoven gives a graphic illustration of this in the Prisoners Chorus. As a result of a gesture by the heroine of the opera, the prisoners of the Spanish gaol are allowed briefly out of their cell. They react with the following words:

"O what joy in the open air, to breathe with ease!  
Only here, only here is life, the prison a tomb.  
With trust we will build on God's help.  
Hope whispers gently to me: We shall be free, we shall find rest."

As with the prisoners, we may experience the light only briefly at first as we seek to understand better how to cope with conflict. But as we encourage each other and seek divine assistance, we can look forward to longer periods of light. We can welcome conflict as a source of energy and creativity.



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#### **FURTHER INFORMATION CAN BE OBTAINED FROM:**

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United Nations Information Centre, 44 Market St., Sydney, NSW 2000

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