

The Peace of Christ

I) Words for peace

II) Three types of peace?

A) Shalom

B) Pax

C) Inner peace

III) The peace of Christ: a single peace?

I) Words for peace

The different words used in various languages give an idea of the various nuances and shades of meaning attached to the concept of peace. The Hebrew and Russian words both give a sense of completeness or wholeness.

Shalom: (Hebrew) wholeness

Shalem v. -to make complete

Mir: (Russian) peace/world

The Greek and Latin words have a more pragmatic and circumscribed meaning, seeming to limit themselves to the notion of absence of violence or war.

Eirene: (Greek) more an absence of war/interlude/truce

Pax: (Latin) an agreement or compact

The Chinese word contains the nuance of peace as dynamic and fluid. What is the relationship between 'ping' and the game 'ping pong'?

Ping: (Chinese) to adjust/balance/harmonize

Both Welsh and Swedish use different words to mean an absence of violence and the notion of an inner peace.

Frid/Fred: (Swedish) peace of heart/absence of war

Tengnefedd/Heddwch: (Welsh) inner peace/absence of violence

Current Western usage of 'peace' seems to move among these notions of 'perfect harmony', 'absence of war' and a 'state of spiritual calm.'

Three types of peace? Shalom, pax, inner peace?

Are there then different types of peace? By looking at the characteristics of these three concepts of peace, we can see that the peace of Christ represents and encompasses all three.

Shalom

Shalom is both eschatological and primordial. It relates to the 'end times' in that this final harmonious peace involving all creation is an end goal. However, this completion is like the completion of a cycle in that it represents a return to the primordial state of blissful harmony of the creation. From a 'natural law' point of view, it can be said that the intention of God for humans is that they be in peace with each other and the whole of creation. The following verses from Isaiah represent this eschatological hope in a return to the primordial harmony:

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox... They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. Is. 11.6-9

This sense of universal hope and longing for this peace, which contains elements of the mystical couple with the pragmatic are neatly stated in the following quote from a lecture by Michael Howard:

Peace is the object of all the yearnings of mankind, religious and secular; a vision and a promise, a concept at once mystical and practical, supernatural and political. The very name of that concept- *Peace, Pax, Shalom*--tolls like a bell throughout Western theology and literature. Even the toughest agnostic is touched unexpectedly by those phrases in the Christian liturgy which play on all our profoundest longings; '*the peace of God which passeth all understanding...*', '*My peace I give you...*' and by the vision, which has so tragically haunted Judaic and Judaic-inspired civilisations, of Salem, Jerusalem, the vision of peace. Concepts like this are not to be pinned down and labelled like entomological specimens by international lawyers or political scientists.

Michael Howard in a lecture at St Antony's College, Oxford, 9 Mar 1988

Pax

The Roman concept of *pax*, an agreement or compact, emphasises the political nature of peace, pointing to peace as an absence of conflict or war. *Pax* is a necessary pre-condition for economic well being in that people must be able to plant crops, conduct business and generally plan their lives with a certain assurance that there will

be sufficient stability for them to realise the gain of their efforts. The achievement of *pax* within and between societies implies some latent coercion and power. Laws and regulations which preserve *pax* are not to everyone's individual liking and a certain amount of coercion/force will be necessary to ensure their effectiveness.

However, a correct balance must be achieved as there is a danger of thinking of peace solely in terms of 'non-conflict' and thus of damping down 'opponent' voices in order to suppress conflict.

This tendency to fragment the notion of peace is also evident in our own prayers. We often hear at morning or evening prayer phrases such as 'We pray for peace with justice' or 'We pray for a just peace'. While praying for peace is arguably a good thing, these prayers of a 'just peace' perhaps demonstrate our failure to recognise that there is no 'peace' without 'justice.' A true concept of peace encompasses the concept of justice as summed up in the quote from John Macquarrie: 'Wherever human life is fractured peace has been destroyed.'*Macquarrie*

The necessity for justice, and not merely an absence of violence, is far from a new concept, as can be seen from this quote from the 8th C. (BCE) prophet Jeremiah. True peace cannot be achieved at the cost of damping down discontented voices and oppressing the weak:

From the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, 'Peace, peace', when there is no peace. Jer. 6.13-14.

The destructiveness of oppression and the effect on all of creation is brought out in these poetic verses from another 8th C. prophet, Hosea:

Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing. Hos. 4. 2-3.

The connection between economic injustice and war, lending weight to what may seem mere metaphorical and hyperbolic prophetic writings, is brought out in the writings of +Peter Selby, Bishop of Worcester:

'At the top of any list of the disastrous ways in which the debt trap eventually comes home we must ...place the connections between debt and war. For while it is well known...that war leads to debt, Dan Smith, in his careful and detailed research demonstrates that the explosion of indebtedness itself also leads to the outbreak of war, and in the process it not only gives the cycle a new twist, for wars do in fact lead to further indebtedness for all participants whether they 'win' or 'lose' the war, but imposes its burdens of violence, injury and death on the creditor economies too.' Bishop Peter Selby, *Grace and Mortgage*, p.90.

The achievement of justice, and of the equal sharing out of power within a society, will necessarily involve change and at times conflict (although not necessarily violence). This balancing and adjusting seems similar to the Chinese *ping*. The following quote from Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy supports this idea of peace as dynamic change:

'Peace is the experience of change at the right time. The best change is a peaceful change. Peace is not a situation that obstructs change or history or reform. Peace presupposes change and time processes.'

The idea of wholeness and unity alongside the need for change/transformation is present in these verses from the Pauline letter to the Ephesians:

'...in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.' Eph. 2:14

These verses also bring out the idea of the costliness of peace and the difficulty of transformation. True peace, the making of different groups into one, has required atonement, the blood of Jesus Christ. It is an atonement made necessary by our hostility and resistance to the transformation required to bring about peace. The Christian idea of Christ's sacrifice also points to shalom/peace as a gift from God.

Inner peace

In an increasingly fragmented and frantic world, the quest for inner peace seems ever more urgent. The rise in the interest in 'spirituality', particularly of eastern spiritualities attests to this desire for inner calm and harmony. It has also been said that this quest is a luxury of the bourgeois middle classes.

However, inner peace is not a mere add on to a political peace. From a Christian perspective, inner peace is part of the 'life in Christ.' This peace is a product of our eschatological hope, of the ultimate *shalom* as stated in the quote from +Richard Harries:

[Christian faith] offers an inner peace that is a personal participation in Shalom; a fragmentary anticipation, by a particular individual, of that divine peace which one day will embrace the whole of existence.... This peace is an essence, a fruit of the union of the human will with the divine will. For the Christian this union has been achieved, for all people of all times, by Jesus Christ. Our peace is a sharing in that unbreakable union he has eternally with the Father.

Bishop Richard Harries, *Questioning Belief*.

This participation is achieved through the body of Christ, the church, in its worship, prayer, and sacramental life. Baptism joins the Christian to the whole body and is a commitment to discipleship in all its implications. Eucharist can be seen as a foretaste

of the final 'heavenly banquet', the final complete union with the divine, and is a recommitment to the aligning of the human will to the divine will.

The Peace of Christ: a single peace?

From the perspective of Christian ethics, the peace of Christ encompasses all aspects of peace. The work of Christ in his life, death and resurrection (the atonement) points to *shalom*: a final and complete reconciliation of the whole created order with God. It subsumes *pax* and warns against a superficial peace achieved at the cost of justice and oppression. The peace of Christ provides a dynamic of transformation of the individual and thus of the collective through the acceptance of discipleship and the commitment to a life 'lived in Christ.' The hope and commitment inherent in life within the body of Christ then is the source of *inner peace* for Christians. This inner peace in itself becomes part of the continuing transformation of the individual and transforming power of the peace of Christ.

This ancient prayer captures some of this concept of a unified peace in Christ:
O God, who wouldst enfold both heaven and earth in a single peace; let the design of thy great love lighten upon the waste of our wraths and sorrows; and give peace to thy church, peace among nations, peace in our dwellings and peace in our heart; through thy Son our saviour Jesus Christ.

Appendix: some other scriptural references to peace

He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall sit under their own vines and under their fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.
(Mic. 4.3-4; also Isa. 2.4)

Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. (Zech. 8.4-5)

Because, in truth, because they have misled my people, saying, 'Peace,' when there is no peace; and because, when the people build a wall, these prophets smear whitewash on it. Say to those who smear whitewash on it that it shall fall. (Ezek. 13.10-11)

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those whom he favours. (Lk 2.14)

Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be on this house!' And if anyone is there who shares this peace, your peace shall rest on that person; but if not, it shall return to you. (Lk 10.5-6; Mt. 10.12-13)

Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. (Mt. 10.34)

And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.' (Lk. 19.41-42)

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5.1)

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways (2 Thess. 3.16)?

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. (John 14.27)

Word count: 1820

Bibliography

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Ethics

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Presentation section: War and the Peace of Christ