

The armed life

Violence is a part of our world, and for many a part of daily life. If we have not been on the receiving end of physical violence we have all had experience of social structures of one kind or another, that may be described as violent.

In this context the community of faith asks with Bonhoeffer, "who is Jesus Christ for us today?" Perhaps we can understand the prophet from Nazareth as one whose hands are open, one who refuses to live at the expense of others, one whose strength is in the power of suffering love.

Could the answer to the question about Jesus' identity be that he is the "person without weapons?" When Peter sought to defend Jesus at the time of his arrest, the fourth gospel reports that "Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back in to its sheath.'" (John 18:11)

All of us experience times of insecurity and fear. We can be uncertain of our identity. We can waver in our allegiance. We can begin to see others as a threat. It is easy at these times to believe that we need to defend ourselves.

We can begin to protect ourselves by building weapons, constructing fortresses, clothing ourselves in armour. But the weapons foster distrust, the fortresses produce more barriers and the armour we wear prevents intimacy in personal relationships. A deadly cycle is created that leads to hostility and aggression.

Person without weapons

The Good news is that Jesus Christ has broken this vicious cycle. He has located his security outside the cycle of violence. Jesus has found his security in the love of God. This discovery profoundly reoriented and transformed Jesus' life. He was freed from the burden of creating his own security.

This liberation meant that Jesus had no need of acquiring and accumulating weapons. He had no need to construct his own fortress. Armour had no place in his life. People found that they could get close to him. A new person emerges free from slavery to idols of defence.

Jesus Christ is for us in our world of violence the 'person without weapons.' He is the liberated one, free to live creatively. Jesus is what humanity would look like if we did not pick up weapons and place our faith in their power. If Jesus is the 'person without weapons' he is the one in whom we see no destructiveness.

Parts of scripture depict God as warrior. God can be seen as not only powerful, but also ready to deploy armies of one kind or another to achieve the divine purpose. The God encountered in Jesus subverts the image of God as warrior. If we see the divine nature in action in Jesus, we see a God who gives freedom to creation, and a God who rejects the way of control. Jesus, the 'person without weapons' discloses a God who is non-violent.

The disarmed life

The God we meet in Jesus' cross is one who refuses to employ power in violent ways. The God revealed in the cross is one who will not inflict wounds, but intervenes in the cycle of violence by receiving wounds.

As followers of this 'person without weapons', we are called to find our trust and security in God. Baptism gives us a new allegiance. We are called to grow in freedom to risk living the disarmed life. Nothing is inevitable for a people gripped by the vision of God's New Creation: communities of joyful resistance can become signs of a new way of being and acting.

The spirituality of the disarmed life will free us to envision new and more human forms of community. Released from fear, it will enable us to translate compassion into political action and love into the pursuit of justice for our sisters and brothers.

If Jesus is the one who has broken the cycle of violence refusing to retaliate because he is the 'person without weapons', then there will be implications for the church. As disciples today we are called to be the 'community without weapons.' This means that we have a part to play in breaking the cycles of violence that remain in our nation and neighbourhoods. Because we are being freed, and have a new security in the love of God, it should be said 'there is no destructiveness among them'.

Vision of shalom

The biblical vision of peace is not about the absence of conflict, but of the presence of the things that make for peace. These may be taken to be the rejection of false gods and the renunciation of hardness of heart. Shalom takes root in communities when the silent are empowered to speak, and when those with resources are willing to listen.

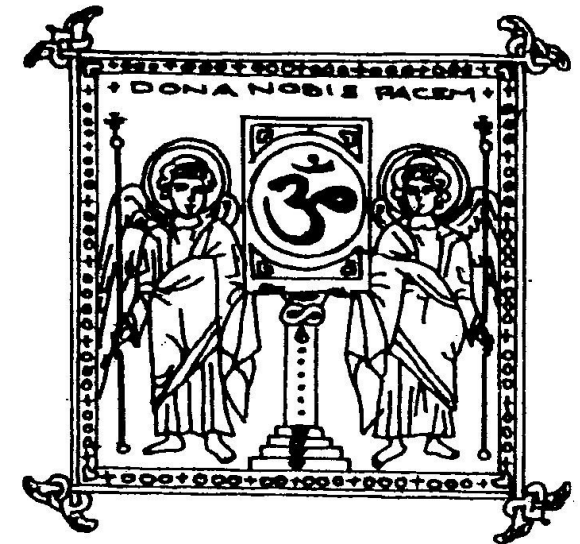
Shalom begins to flower when weapons are discarded, fortresses are dismantled and armour abandoned. In the free space created a new security can be found even in the context of vulnerability.

The biblical vision of peace is unattainable without the realisation of just relationships. "The fruit of justice will be shalom." (Isaiah 32:17) Only those who are committed to the disarmed Way can work effectively for a disarmed world. Our hearts, our inner lives can be prepared by the Spirit of God to participate in this revolution.

It was Martin Luther King who said, "Today the choice is non longer between violence and non-violence. It is either non-violence or non-existence." The 'person without weapons' representing the non-violent God, calls disciples to adopt the disarmed life. Only the disarmed Way will enable us to be makers of shalom, witnessing to the future as promise. In the eucharist the 'community without weapons' celebrates the disarmed Way.

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Te Hahi Weteriana o Aotearoa

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"Blessed are the peacemakers. for they will be called children of God."

Matthew 5:9