



Blessed are the Peacemakers¹

Ted Ward

Read Matthew 5 and quickly list some responses in the categories that follow:

Characteristics of the Peacemaker

The Need for Peacemakers in the Twenty-First Century

Learning Experiences for the Peacemaker

Brief discussion follows based on responses.

If there is a future for Christian higher education, it will need to be carved out of the reality of a very different century that is about to begin: a century in which we begin with a key problem—a worldwide shortage of peacemakers. The future we tend to envision is one we visualize carved out of ideologies and values we know today. This will not serve the world of the 21st century. “If it ain’t broke don’t fix it,” is not a valid slogan for now or for the future. It’s already broke. We can’t be satisfied simply with maintaining, continuing, and repeating.

We need to take a much harder look at what it will mean to be a ministering people in the 21st century. We can’t simply plan to preserve the 20th century [or the 19th]. We will need to venture out into things we know little about. Our future will be made up of our capacity to deal with the condition of the world around us. For example, how can people of one ethnicity minister with and alongside people of another ethnicity?

Mission organizations such as Operation Impact, Christian higher education institutions, and churches absolutely must address themselves to the problem of mono-culturalism in the immediate environment. However, we have grown up and been guided in North America to ignore these problems. The mishandling of McGavran’s homogenous unit principle is one example: The HUP is a mark of sin—in Scripture and in sociology. The three besetting sins that explain HUP (i.e., we like to be with people like us): Pride, Greed (not wanting to share what’s ours with the stranger), and Fear. The grace of the gospel is the only known antidote to these besetting sins.

We need to ask who are we cutting ourselves off from and why are we doing it. If Christians don’t ask this, we will never develop that characteristic of godliness that allows us to see a relationship of reality and substance with all sorts of people within the family of God. And thus we are depriving ourselves and insulating ourselves at the very moment when the resources of the richest churches in the world are needed by the rest of the world.

¹ Ted Ward. Blessed are the Peacemakers. Excerpts transcribed from keynote address to Operation Impact’s 25th Anniversary, Azuza Pacific College, May 1999

Operation Impact, among other Christian organizations, needs to ways to foster more than a quasi-tourist exposure to other cultures. Build relationships between Christians and non-Christian leaders in these cultures. As a principle, don't send anyone anywhere where there is not already a bridge built between Christian and non-Christian communities to guarantee interaction with non-Christians. In far too many mission centers it is common for missionaries to build cocoons around themselves.

Short term service is justified to expand awareness of the world; but the challenge is how to bring this awareness back to the churches—through more than a report during a Sunday service.

Similarly, the need for peacemakers in the 21st century will demand from those of us in the favored educational sectors of North America that we be more forthcoming in terms of the contributions that we make in the whole world.

Key shortfalls of Christians in Christian higher education:

1. The lack of historical perspective—of the cultures among whom they work or will work. We dare not send people into countries with sloppy historical perspectives.
2. The limited socio-political understandings and skills among Christians is a serious deficit. We are not spending enough time teaching our people the socio-political realities of today's world.

God is at work in the world; we need to be at work in the world. But we need to work in ways that are responsible and sensitive to how governments and societies work—what the political avenues are; what the inappropriate behaviors are that will hinder the progress of the gospel. We need to work in responsible ways in other countries and cultures.

Christians need to volunteer to be helpful in terms of the values of a country. For example, China has permitted Christians to operate there because they are reliable and provide good language instruction. China is an example of the kind of thinking we will have to do to continue to work *effectively* in countries that could be closed in a few years. More and more categories of labor will be refused visa entry if they in any way interfere with the labor of the country—just as the United States does. We can't label these countries as being prejudiced against Christians simply because they are protecting their own labor. The post-colonial era is dead—deal with it!

We are not living in a world where the world is going to cater to Christians just because they have truth on their side. Countries getting on their own feet put their own controls in place as to who is going to hold jobs. We're living in a world where an increasing number of nations are getting on their own feet, which means that they will control who enters their countries and for what purpose. Let's get big enough to respect the decisions of societies and work with them in more creative and responsible ways.

Our future is going to depend on how effective we are in working across cultural lines. Increasingly, the model will be the cultivation of cross-cultural teams—people from North America teamed with counterparts in another nation.

I would propose a minimal set of characteristics needed by peacemakers:

- People who are respectful—people who will work in a respectful way among people with whom they don't thoroughly agree.
- People who have a respectful awareness that other people and their values and their space

need to be protected as well.

- People who effectively communicate in a positive tone; not attack, not hostile—but relational tone.
- People who know that leadership is not showing what I can do, but is a matter of empowering others.
- People who recognize the need for mutual relationships. Every transaction (business, social, and even an apology) must be based on a previously established relationship. Most cultures treat relationship as an essential value. We need Christian peacemakers who can build counterpart relationships—even with non-Christians.

What sort of learning experiences will bring this about?

- Anything that helps people get a bigger view of themselves, of the world, of the perspectives of others, is a worthy goal of education.
- Learning the skills of constructive self-criticism. Until we are engaged in self-criticism we will not hear criticism from outside. We need to build skills of competent self-criticism. How can we do this better?
- We need to deal with our own cultural limitations? How do we get past the rigidities, the judgmental characteristics, the dichotomizing habits, and the habit of being proprietary?

Ministry in the future has a huge agenda. We need a fresh new vision of the demands upon us in the 21st century, toward the end of making us competent peacemakers.