



The Way of Peace

Anzac Centenary Edition 1915-2015

“Much violence is based on the illusion that life is a property to be defended and not to be shared.”

Henri Nouwen

#3 The Blame Game

When groups are threatened with social upheaval, it is human to look for a cause. Rivalry is also part of the human condition. The blame game starts when escalating rivalrous situations lead people to engage in violent conflict. The one blamed for the conflict is usually the one who is the least protected by the group. Everyone is called to be on the same side, the right side. All it takes is for someone in the “in” group to point an accusatory finger and the outsider becomes the one who is made to take the blame by being banished in some way. Expulsion of the scapegoat is the means for restoring a temporary peace. The violence becomes part of the culture but it is not recognised.

This occurs, in all kinds of groups: interpersonal, family, school, work, Church, sporting, civic, political, businesses, international affairs.

Jesus is the one who has enabled us to recognise this “victimage mechanism”. Social philosopher, Renee Girard, believes that *“the Judeo-Christian scriptures represent an unequalled unveiling and trenchant critique of the victimage mechanism, substituting the promotion of an ethic of love and forgiveness that allows humanity to loosen its hold of the seemingly ineluctable necessity of scapegoating.”*

Source: Chris Fleming in *Mimesis, Violence, and the Sacred: An Overview of the Thought of René Girard*.

We are called

The Gospel shines a light on how to discern who and where the scapegoats are.

Understanding how the scapegoat mechanism works helps us to see what happens in the lead up to war. It is often said that the first victim of war is truth. Countries engage in propaganda to garner support for the cause for war. Each side tries to justify its position through impugning the enemy.

Governments understand that we will not fight people unless we see them as “evil”. Hermann Goehring, Nazi propagandist, said after WW2, *“The people can always be brought to the bidding of their leaders. All you have to do is tell them that they are in danger of being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger.”*

The Gospel calls us to recognise the humanity of each and every person, including those blamed as enemies.

As many of you were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Gal.3:27-28

Profile of a Peacemaker



Sr Jan Barnett is the Justice Coordinator for the Sisters of St Joseph. She is passionate in her belief that it is impossible to achieve peace without justice. The anniversary of Gallipoli and the growing threats to world peace have led her to work with many groups to explore the causes of conflict and the deep desire in the hearts of so many people for peace.

In this cause, she has engaged in conversations with other peace-seekers, taken part in peace rallies and workshops, facilitated conferences for Peace groups, such as Pax Christi, and spoken at interfaith gatherings for students and ecumenical groups to promote peace in our world.

She sees this sculpture from Hiroshima of a mother and her children as expressing the hopes for peace of ordinary people and the power of love to endure suffering and overcome grief in the cause of peace. Peace, in this sense, is seen as both fragile and powerful.



“Evil and the violent measures taken to combat evil are essentially the same.”
Rene Girard



“To love one’s enemy is the acid test of who’s Christian and who isn’t. Everything else is an old tape simply replaying itself over and over.”
Ron Rolheiser.

Fact File

On Christmas Eve 1914, “enemy” soldiers fighting on the Western Front in WW1 put down their weapons, came out of their trenches, played football and sang Christmas carols together.

In 2008, the three daughters of Palestinian Dr Izzeldin Abou-Laish were killed by Israeli rockets. He wrote a memoir called *I Shall Not Hate: A Gaza Doctor’s Journey*, where he vowed not to succumb to blame, bitterness and hate.

On July 25th 2014, the German Catholic Bishops made a public statement in which they acknowledged that Europe’s Christian churches had also played their part in “war-mongering” at the outbreak of WW1. www.thecatholicspirit.com

The Columban Mission Institute works at building bridges between those who are being blamed in Australia today. The Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations publishes Bridges and builds community relations between Christians, Muslims and other religions. The Centre for Peace, Ecology and Justice makes connections between issues of peace, ecology and justice with people from different religions, cultures and secular groups.

Discuss:

Think of people you know who are or were in entrenched positions eg George Bush and Sadam Hussein. How was blame used in maintaining their entrenched positions? Discuss what entrenched positions you take.

“All violence is the result of people tricking themselves into believing that their pain derives from other people and that consequently those people deserve to be punished.”
Marshall B Rosenberg

Useful Links

- Australian Girard Seminar:
www.australiangirardseminar.org
- The Raven Foundation:
www.ravenfoundation.org
- Religions for Peace:
www.religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au
- Psychologists for Peace:
www.groups.psychology.org.au