

FOREWORD BY MADELEINE L'ENGLE

JOHANN CHRISTOPH ARNOLD



SEEKING PEACE

NOTES
AND
CONVERSATIONS
ALONG
THE
WAY

PREFACE BY THICH NHAT HANH

Praise for *Seeking Peace*

Mairead Maguire, Nobel Peace Prize laureate

Seeking Peace inspires each of us to seek peace within our own hearts...It gives hope that we can find wholeness, happiness, and harmony, which is after all the fulfilment of God's plan for humanity.

Former Senator Bill Bradley

Seeking Peace addresses important challenges facing our society. I commend the author for seeking to assist all of us with this life-long journey.

Jonathan Kozol, author, *Amazing Grace*

Seeking Peace is a tough, transcendent envisioning of peace: neither fatuous nor sentimental, but arduous and courageous. Arnold writes in the tradition of the Berrigans, of Simone Weil and Thomas Merton. Activists of all stripes, even those who think themselves agnostics, ought not to ignore this book.

Jesse L. Jackson, The Rainbow/PUSH Coalition

A splendid book drawing on the rich experiences of the author and on relevant observations by legendary activists and writers...A valuable contribution to contemporary thought, and a guide for action as the struggle continues.

Brother David Steindl-Rast, Mount Saviour Monastery

Seeking Peace is a book for people who realize that we are fish out of water. Arnold speaks out of a living tradition of radical response to the challenge of one whose very name is Peace. There is living water here for gasping fish.

Muhammed Gemea'ah, The Islamic Cultural Center of N.Y.

An excellent work... *Seeking Peace* is the very essence of what we are all about.

Tony Campolo, Eastern College

Everybody talks about peace, even as they prepare for war. This is a book that talks about peace in a way that prepares us to make it happen.

John C. Dwyer, St. Bernard's Institute

Seeking Peace is profoundly and universally human. None of the problems of contemporary life are missing, but there is no finger-waving or pietistic jargon... There is a lifetime's material for meditation, and an abundance of life in it. This book deserves to become a classic.

Thomas Howard, St. John's Seminary

Seeking Peace is a gem. The candor, simplicity, and humanity of the whole text, and especially of the anecdotes, should recommend it to an exceedingly wide reading public.

Elizabeth McAlister, Jonah House

An incisive gospel book on a critical issue. May it help Christians regain their lost heritage of justice and peace.

Bernard Häring, author, *Virtues of an Authentic Life*

A thoughtful and attractive vision of a truly dedicated Christian life... and a convincing testimony to a truly ecumenical spirit. Readers will be grateful for the depth and insights of this outstanding author.

Philip Berrigan, Plowshares

Seeking Peace has a lucidity and power completely comprehensible to any person of good will. Peace is the central characteristic of the Gospel, and it is too often avoided or ignored.

Thomas Green, author, *When the Well Runs Dry*

Seeking Peace is solidly rooted in the Christian – and even Jewish and Buddhist – tradition. As Arnold reminds us, Jesus' peace has nothing to do with passivity, nor is it for the spineless or self-absorbed. It demands deeds of love.

Rev. William N. Grosch, M.D., Albany Medical College

Seeking Peace is a delight to read. It is measured and well balanced, and as in Arnold's previous books, the rich human stories make for compelling reading... I will enthusiastically recommend this book to my family, friends, and colleagues. It is another support for me and my work.

Seeking Peace

Notes and Conversations Along the Way

Johann Christoph Arnold

Foreword by Madeleine L'Engle

Preface by Thich Nhat Hanh



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NOW THINK FOR A MOMENT about the meaning of this word “peace.” Does it seem strange to you that the angels should have announced Peace, when ceaselessly the world has been stricken with War and the fear of War? Does it seem to you that the angelic voices were mistaken, and that the promise was a disappointment and a cheat?

Reflect now, how Our Lord Himself spoke of Peace. He said to His disciples, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.” Did He mean peace as we think of it: the kingdom of England at peace with its neighbors, the barons at peace with the King, the householder counting over his peaceful gains, the swept hearth, his best wine for a friend at the table, his wife singing to the children? Those men, His disciples, knew no such things: they went forth to journey afar, to suffer by land and sea, to know torture, imprisonment, disappointment, to suffer death by martyrdom. What then did He mean? If you ask that, remember then that He said also, “Not as the world gives, give I unto you.” So then, He gave to His disciples peace, but not peace as the world gives.

T. S. Eliot
Murder in the Cathedral

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Foreword

by Madeleine L'Engle

Shalom. Peace. A peace that is not passive, but active. A peace that is not just the cessation of violence, but is through and beyond violence. Real peace.

In an era that has been notable for its lack of peace, it is good to have Johann Christoph Arnold's fine book, *Seeking Peace*. He quotes his grandfather's definition of peace: "the inner peace of the soul with God; the fulfillment of nonviolence, through peaceful relationships with others; and the establishment of a just and peaceful social order." As I listen to the news each morning, we seem to be slipping further and further away from this threefold peace. We need this book which guides us to Shalom.

A decade or so ago one evening during Lent, at Manhattan's Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, I listened to the Reverend Canon Edward West talk about the peace we seek, and use the rather unexpected metaphor of a subway.

Most of us in the audience that night rode the subway, to the Cathedral, to and from work. He pointed out to us that if we looked at the people riding in the same car with us, most of them would look as though nobody loved them. And that, alas, was largely true. Then he told us that if we would concentrate inconspicuously on one person, affirming silently that this person was a beloved child of God, and, no matter what the circumstances, could lie in God's peace, we might see a difference. Peace is not always something you "do;" it is a gift you can give.

The next time I rode the subway I glanced at a woman in the corner, hunched over, hands clenched, an expression of resigned endurance on her face. So, without looking at her,

I began to try to send God's loving peace to her. I didn't move. I didn't stare at her. I simply followed Canon West's suggestion, and to my wonder she began to relax. Her hands unclenched; her body relaxed; the lines of anxiety left her face. It was a moment for me of great gratitude, and a peace that spread out and filled me too.

It is something I try to remember as I ride a subway or bus, or walk down the crowded streets, or stand in slow-moving lines at the supermarket. If God's peace is in our hearts, we carry it with us, and it can be given to those around us, not by our own will or virtue, but by the Holy Spirit working through us. We cannot give what we do not have, but if the spirit blows through the dark clouds, and enters our hearts, we can be used as vehicles of peace, and our own peace will be thereby deepened. The more peace we give away, the more we have.

In *Seeking Peace*, Arnold tells of many such incidents, illustrating as well as explaining the kind of peace he calls us to seek. This is an important as well as a beautiful book, and a much needed one to help us take God's peace with us into the future.

*Goshen, Connecticut
Summer 1998*

Preface

by Thich Nhat Hanh

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.” To work for peace, you must have a peaceful heart. When you do, you are a child of God. But many who work for peace are not at peace. They still have anger and frustration, and their work is not really peaceful. We cannot say that they are touching the kingdom of God. To preserve peace, our hearts must be at peace with the world, with our brothers and our sisters. This truth is at the heart of Johann Christoph Arnold’s welcome new book, *Seeking Peace*.

We often think of peace as the absence of war; that if the powerful countries would reduce their arsenals, we could have peace. But if we look deeply into the weapons, we see our own minds—our prejudices, fears, and ignorance. Even if we transported all the bombs to the moon, the roots of war and the reasons for bombs would still be here, in our hearts and minds, and sooner or later we would make new bombs.

Jesus said, “It is written, ‘Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of judgment.’ But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be in danger of the judgment. . . Whosoever shall say, ‘Thou fool,’ shall be in danger of hell fire.” So working for peace must mean more than getting rid of weapons. It must start with uprooting war from ourselves and from the hearts of all men and women.

How can we end the cycle of violence? Arnold tells us that before we can make peace with others and with the world, we must make peace with ourselves. How true this is! If we are at war with our parents, our family, our society,

or our church, there is probably a war going on inside us also. Therefore the most basic work for peace is to return to ourselves and create harmony among the elements within us—our feelings, our perceptions, our mental states.

As you read this book, seek to recognize the conflicting elements within you and their underlying causes. Seek to become more aware of what causes anger and separation, and what overcomes them. Root out the violence in your life, and learn to live compassionately and mindfully. Seek peace. When you have peace within, real peace with others will be possible.

*Village des Pruniers, France
Spring 1998*

Introduction

It has been years since the first edition of this book appeared, and the rising tide of violence I wrote about then has since become a wave that threatens to engulf everything in its path. Not a day goes by, it seems, without murder or mayhem of some sort. Violence is everywhere, whereas peace is almost nowhere to be found. Rather than discourage us, though, this ought to jolt us out of our complacency and spur us to action.

Peace activist Dorothy Day, whom I first met some forty years ago, once wrote, “No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless. There is too much work to do.” Writing this book has put me in touch with countless readers who share her determination. It has resulted in letters from the Vatican and the White House, and hundreds from more ordinary addresses as well. It even brought a response from a convicted murderer, in the bowels of death row in Texas, who wrote:

Have you ever seen the movie *The Mission*? In it a slaver who has killed his brother in a duel does penance by hauling his armor up the rocky side of a waterfall over and over, until he is satisfied that it is enough. In the end he finds his peace. I’m still seeking mine.

I’m not sure why I’m writing to you...it’s so hard to find someone to write to who is capable of understanding my struggle...But I just finished reading *Seeking Peace*, and I want you to know that this has been one of the most meaningful books I’ve ever read. It really put some fire in these tired bones.

Another letter that touched me was this one, from a woman in Kentucky:

Reading *Seeking Peace* has become a spiritual practice for me. I feel like the men and women quoted in it are talking to me personally....

I grieve for the hatred and violence in the world, and for the poverty around me, which is often a poverty of spirit as much as a lack of material goods. What can any of us really do in the face of the needs of this world? I think we must pray; we must live as consciously as we can, and take steps to overcome our own weaknesses. We must also give to others whenever we have the opportunity, and not hoard our wealth, whatever form it is in. And all the while we must, as Mother Teresa said, be faithful in the small things.

Most gratifying of all, I have heard from dozens of younger readers whose lives have been touched by the stories in this book. In Littleton, Colorado, for example, a youth group had been using *Seeking Peace* for a weekly book discussion that continued for several months. When I spoke at their church some time later, several of the participants told me how deeply it had affected them. Then, in the last week of April 1999, as news of the Littleton high school massacre was making headlines across the country, I learned that one of the victims, Cassie Bernall, had been part of this youth group, and that she was planning to attend a final discussion of the book on the day she was killed. Immediately my mind leapt to a line from the Gospel of John—a verse that for me captures one of the most vital truths there is about finding peace: “Unless the seed dies and is buried, it will only remain a seed. But when it dies, it produces many seeds.” Already, stories of Cassie’s faith (she affirmed her belief in God at gunpoint) were spreading beyond her hometown, and she has since become a symbol of conviction for millions of people around the world.

Several of those who shared their stories with me for this book have now passed on. In each case, it has struck me that because they had truly found peace, nothing could take it away—neither pain, uncertainty, nor fear of the future. Peace was the greatest gift they possessed.

Dale Aukerman went on planting trees at his Maryland farm until cancer confined him to his bed, and after that he spent his time writing and dictating letters. George Burleson, who also succumbed to cancer, visited prison inmates for as long as he could and insisted, during the final stages of his illness, on being driven to a rally against capital punishment. Both men must have feared death on some level, but because they had found peace, they were able to lay aside their self-concern and reach out to others until the end. Both went peacefully, and with confidence.

The words of another person in this book, Freda Dyroff, who has died since its initial publication, gained special significance in light of the Littleton massacre. A few weeks after the shooting I was speaking in Denver and was shown Cassie Bernall's personal copy of *Seeking Peace*. Among other passages that she had highlighted was this one from Freda:

Seek until you find, and don't give up. Pray, too, even if you think you don't believe, because God hears even the "unbeliever" as she groans. God will help you through. Don't give up, and above all, avoid the temptations that distract you from what you know you really long for. If you do fall, pick yourself up again and get back on track.

Though hardly dramatic, this coincidence reminds me that more often than not, peace grows quietly and invisibly, like a seed in the heart. Freda is now gone, and Cassie, too, but—like every kernel that disintegrates and dies—the seeds of their peace have sent up new shoots. And as we look to the future, rather than bemoaning the sorry state of our world, we can water and nourish those seeds.

Johann Christoph Arnold
Rifton, New York

PART

I

Seeking Peace

“Hope is the thing left to us in a bad time.”

Irish Proverb

Seeking Peace

We live in an unpeaceful world, and despite constant talk about peace, there is very little. So little, in fact, that when I told a close friend about this book, he suggested it was not only naïve to write on the topic, but even somewhat perverse.

No one will deny that violence affects public life everywhere around our globe, from current hot spots overseas to the streets of our own decaying cities. In personal life too, even in the most “peaceful” suburbs, unpeace is often the order of the day – in domestic violence, in unhealthy addictions, and in the destructive tensions that divide businesses, schools, and churches.

Violence hides behind the most respectable façades of our supposedly enlightened society. It is there in the turbines of greed, deceit, and injustice that drive our greatest financial and cultural institutions. It is there in the unfaithfulness that can erode even the best “Christian” marriages. It is there in the hypocrisy that deadens spiritual life and robs the most devout expressions of religion of their credibility.

The need for peace cries to heaven. It is one of the deepest longings of the heart. Call it what you will: harmony, serenity, wholeness, soundness of mind – the yearning for it exists somewhere in every human being. No one likes problems, headaches, heartaches. Everyone wants peace – freedom from anxiety and doubt, violence and division. Everyone wants stability and security.

Some people and organizations (the International Fellowship of Reconciliation comes to mind) focus on striving for global peace. Their goal is the attainment of political

cooperation on an international scale. Others (like Greenpeace) seek to promote harmony between human beings and other living things, and a consciousness of our inter-relatedness with the environment.

Others look for peace by modifying their lifestyles: by changing careers, moving from the city to the suburbs (or from the suburbs to the country), cutting back, simplifying, or otherwise improving their quality of life. Then there is the young man who recently returned home to my community from abroad: after a “wild ride” of fast money and promiscuous relationships, he yearns to be able “to wake up in the morning and be at peace with myself and with God.” Still others seem to be at ease with the lives they lead; happy and fulfilled, they claim they are not searching for anything. Yet I suspect that below the surface, even these people do not possess perfect peace.

While working on this book I came across an ad with a picture of a woman on a dock. Curled up in a lawn chair, she is gazing out over a lake toward a brilliant sunset. The ad reads: “A dream job. Beautiful kids. The best marriage. And a gnawing feeling of absolute emptiness.” How many millions share her unspoken fear?

At a certain level, we are all in search of life as the Creator intended it: a life where harmony, joy, justice, and peace rule. Each of us has dreamed of the life where sorrow and pain do not exist, of the lost Eden for which (the Bible says) all creation groans.

The longing for such a time and place is as ancient as it is universal. Thousands of years ago, the Hebrew prophet Isaiah dreamed of a peaceable kingdom where the lion would dwell with the lamb. And down through the centuries, no matter how dark the horizon or bloody the battlefield, men and women have found hope in his vision.

When anti-war activist Philip Berrigan was tried and sentenced for committing civil disobedience at a naval shipyard in Maine in 1997, many people dismissed his actions. Phil admitted that by most standards they “constituted a theater of the absurd.” But he added that he would rather spend the rest of his life in prison for his convictions, than die “on some beach.” How many of us can say the same? Although in his seventies, Phil continued his tireless campaign against the nuclear weapons industry with such vigor that one all but forgot his age.

My own community, the Bruderhof, has often been similarly accused of being out of touch with reality. Yes, we have abandoned the accepted path to middle-class happiness – the route of private homes and property, careers, bank accounts, mutual funds, and comfortable retirement – in order to try to live together in the manner of the first Christians. We struggle to live a life of sacrifice and discipline and mutual service. It is not a life of peace as the world gives.

What is peace, and what is reality? What are we living for, and what do we want to pass on to our children and grandchildren? Even if we are happy, what will we have left after the marriage and the kids, after the car and the job? Must our legacy really be the “reality” of a world bristling with weapons, a world of class hatreds and family grievances, a world of lovelessness and backbiting, selfish ambition and spite? Or is there a greater reality, where all these are overcome by the power of the Prince of Peace?

In the following pages I have tried to resist formulating neat theses or presenting loophole-proof arguments. Spiritual “how-to” guides can be found in any bookstore, though in my experience life is never so tidy. Often it is very messy. In any case, each reader will be at a different place

in his or her search. I have also tried to avoid dwelling on the roots of unpeace. One could focus a whole book on that subject, but it would be too depressing to wade through. My aim, very simply, is to offer you stepping stones along the way – and enough hope to keep you seeking peace.

PART

II

Meanings

“Only when you have made peace
within yourself will you be able
to make peace in the world.”

Rabbi Simcha Bunim

Meanings

From greeting cards to bookmarks, from billboards to embroidered dish towels, our culture is awash in the language of peace. Phrases such as “peace and good will” appear so widely that they have been reduced to slogans and clichés. In correspondence, many of us close personal letters with “Peace.” On another level, governments and the mass media speak of heavily armed “peace-keeping” battalions stationed in war-torn regions around the world. In churches, priests and ministers close their services with “Go in peace,” and though the words are intended as a blessing, they often seem to be little more than a dismissal until the following Sunday.

Muhammad Salem Agwa, a leading *Imam* (Islamic teacher) in New York, notes that observant Muslims acknowledge each other when they meet with the words *Salaam alaikum*. Yet he says that among them, too, the greeting of peace has all too often become a habit, passed on with little regard for the mutual responsibilities it implies:

I use *Salaam alaikum* as a daily greeting, but it does not just mean “Good morning” or “Good afternoon.” It means more: “The peace and blessings of God be upon you.” When I say this, I feel that you are at peace with me, and I with you. I am extending a helping hand to you. I am coming to you to give you peace. And in the meantime, until we meet again, it means that I pray to God to bless you and have mercy upon you, and to strengthen my relationship to you as a brother.

How different the world would be if we were really at peace with everyone we greet during the course of the day, if our words were more than politeness and came from our hearts! In reality, as atheists never tire of pointing out, few conflicts have caused so much bloodshed in the course of

human history as our ceaseless bickering over religious differences. No wonder the old prophets sighed, “They lead my people astray saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.”

Peace as the Absence of War

To many people, peace means national security, stability, law and order. It is associated with education, culture, and civic duty, prosperity and health, comfort and quiet. It is the good life. But can a peace based on these things be shared by all? If the good life means limitless choices and excessive consumption for a privileged few, it follows that it must mean hard labor and grinding poverty for millions of others. Can this be peace?

Writing on the eve of World War II, my grandfather, Eberhard Arnold, wrote:

Does pacifism suffice? I don't think it is enough.

When over a thousand people have been killed unjustly, without trial, under Hitler's new government, isn't that already war?

When hundreds of thousands of people in concentration camps are robbed of their freedom and stripped of all human dignity, isn't that war?

When in Asia millions of people starve to death while in North America and elsewhere millions of tons of wheat are stockpiled, isn't that war?

When thousands of women prostitute their bodies and ruin their lives for the sake of money; when millions of babies are aborted each year, isn't that war?

When people are forced to work like slaves because they can hardly provide the milk and bread for their children, isn't that war?

When the wealthy live in villas surrounded by parks, while in other districts some families have only one room to share, isn't that war?

When one person builds up a huge bank account while another earns scarcely enough for basic necessities, isn't that war?

When reckless drivers cause thousands of traffic deaths every year, isn't that war?

I cannot represent a pacifism that maintains there will be no more war. This claim is not valid; there is war right up to the present day...I cannot agree with a pacifism whose representatives hold onto the root causes of war: property and capitalism. I have no faith in the pacifism of businessmen who beat down their competitors, or husbands who cannot even live in peace and love with their own wives...

I would rather not use the word "pacifism" at all. But I am an advocate of peace. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers!" If I really want peace, I must represent it in all areas of life.

In political terms, peace may take the form of trade agreements, compromises, and peace treaties. Such treaties are usually little more than fragile balances of power negotiated in tense settings, and often they plant seeds of new conflicts worse than the ones they were designed to resolve. There are many examples, from the Treaty of Versailles, which ended World War I but stoked the nationalism that started World War II, to the Yalta Conference, which ended World War II but fueled tensions that led to the Cold War. Ceasefires provide no guarantee of an end to hatred.

Everyone agrees that peace is the answer to war, but what kind of peace? Rabbi Kenneth L. Cohen writes:

Darkness is the absence of light, but peace is not just the cessation of hostilities. Treaties may be signed, ambassadors exchanged, and armies sent home, yet there still may not be peace. Peace is metaphysical and cosmic in its implications. It is more than the absence of war. Peace, in fact, is not the absence of anything, but rather the ultimate affirmation of what can be.

Peace in the Bible

One way to examine the deeper meanings of peace is to see what the Bible says about it. In the Old Testament there is perhaps no concept richer than the Hebrew word for peace: *shalom*. Shalom is difficult to translate because of the depth and breadth of its connotations. It possesses no single meaning, though one might translate it as completeness, soundness, or wholeness. It extends far beyond “peace” as we commonly think of it in the English language.

Shalom means the end of war and conflict, but it also means friendship, contentment, security, and health; prosperity, abundance, tranquility, harmony with nature, and even salvation. And it means these things for everyone, not only a select few. Shalom is ultimately a blessing, a gift from God. It is not a human endeavor. It applies to the state of the individual, but also to relationships – among people and nations, and between God and man. Beyond this, shalom is intimately tied to justice, because it is the enjoyment or celebration of human relationships which have been made right.

In his book *He Is Our Peace*, Howard Goeringer illustrates an even more radical meaning of shalom: love of one’s enemies.

In 600 BC the Babylonian army invaded Judea and took hostages from Jerusalem into exile. It was in such difficult circumstances that Jeremiah wrote these remarkable words to refugees in hated Babylon: “Seek the shalom of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its shalom you will find your shalom.” The refugees were forced to live as exiles while they watched their Jewish culture collapse. Despising their captors, yearning to return to their homeland, and resenting God’s failure to save

them, they couldn't believe what Jeremiah was saying. This crazy man of God was telling them to love their captors, to do good to their enemies, to ask the Lord to bless their persecutors with shalom.

As we might expect, Jeremiah's letter was not popular, not a bestseller. The suffering hostages could not see how their well-being and the well-being of their captors were inseparably bound together. To think of serving their captors in a spirit of kindness, nursing their sick, teaching their children Jewish games, working an extra hour for them! – this was utter foolishness.

Goeringer is right: often the peace of God appears utterly irrational, not only in the eyes of the worldly-wise, but in the eyes of the most religious people.

Peace is a central theme in the New Testament too, where the word *eirene* is used most frequently. In its biblical context, *eirene* extends far beyond its classical Greek meaning, “rest,” and includes many of the various connotations of shalom. In the New Testament, Jesus the Messiah is the bearer, sign, and instrument of God's peace. In fact, Paul says Christ is our peace. In him all things are reconciled. That is why his message is called the gospel of peace. It is the good news of God's coming reign, where all is made right.

Peace as a Social Cause

The world is full of activists fighting for worthy causes: there are advocates for the environment and for the homeless, anti-war activists and promoters of social justice, fighters on behalf of battered women and oppressed minorities, and on and on. In the sixties many of us in the religious community marched with Martin Luther King. In the nineties, many took up the fight for the abolition of the death penalty. This cause is, in a broader sense, a struggle against the injustices in the American judicial system. The horrors I have come across, both locally and internationally, make it clear that the politics of law and order have more to do with violence and fear than with peace.

Some of the men and women I have come to know in this work are among the most dedicated people I have ever met, and I would not belittle their achievements for a minute. Yet the fragmentation that marks the lives of others, and the divisiveness that often results in their fighting one another, is painfully apparent too.

Looking back on the sixties, a time when so-called peaceniks abounded, several thoughts come to mind. The longing of Beatles fans who chanted “Give peace a chance” over and over cannot be discounted; I feel it was genuinely spiritual. Unlike the overwhelming majority of today’s young men and women, many youth in the sixties and seventies attempted to translate their hopes and dreams into deeds. They led marches and held events, formed communes and committed acts of civil disobedience; they organized sit-ins, protests, and community service projects. No one could accuse them of being apathetic. Yet it is hard to forget the anger that twisted the faces of some who shouted

loudest for peace in those years, and the anarchy and cynicism that later swallowed the whole era.

What happens when idealism runs out, when the rally is finished, when the Summer of Love is over? What happens when peaceful communes and loving relationships fall apart? Does peace become just another cultural commodity, a symbol to be ironed on T-shirts or printed on bumper stickers? In *The Long Loneliness*, Dorothy Day, the legendary radical who founded the Catholic Worker, comments that youth's longing for a better world sometimes has as much to do with nihilism and selfishness as with anything else. Young people idealize change, she says, but they are rarely ready to start with themselves. To quote Rabbi Cohen again:

An individual can march for peace or vote for peace and can have, perhaps, some small influence on global concerns. But the same small individual is a giant in the eyes of a child at home. If peace is to be built, it must start with the individual. It is built brick by brick.

Peace in Personal Life

Sylvia Beels came to our community from London as a young woman, just before the outbreak of the Second World War. She told me that a prevalent attitude in the peace movement of her youth – an opposition to killing, but not to social injustice – dissatisfied her and made her want to seek something more:

A war film I saw when I was nine horrified me, and from then on I knew I could never see war as anything good, however good the cause might be.

After I married, my husband Raymond and I joined the Left Book Club and read all their books. We met regularly with a group of friends discussing the ideas in these books. We searched and searched to find a way through the labyrinth of human ideas – war, peace, politics, conventional morals versus free love, etc. – but came no nearer to finding a peaceful or just society.

Later, during the long, difficult birth of her first child, Sylvia realized that her personal life was marked by the very same troubles she was fighting in society. Despite a promising career in music, her marriage was in shambles and her mind in turmoil. Then and there she decided that before she could contribute anything to world peace, she needed to find peace within herself and with others. (Sylvia's husband died of heart disease shortly after this, but they were able to reconcile at his deathbed.)

Maureen Burn, another community member, came to the same conclusion after years of anti-war activism, first in Edinburgh and then in Birmingham, where money, social connections, and a vibrant personality made her a well-known and effective pacifist:

I was always an idealist and a rebel. The First World War worried me, though I was but a child. We were told that the German Kaiser had caused the war, and when I was ten I wrote to him asking him please to stop the war. I was always against war.

My husband, Matthew, a prominent public-health officer, was also a pacifist. After experiencing the trenches of World War I, he had become an ardent anti-militarist and champion of social justice. Our common interest in the Russian Revolution of 1918, the works of Tolstoy, and the crusades of Gandhi had created a bond between us and led to marriage.

Many young people were going to Moscow in those years, and because we were attracted to the communist ideal, “from each according to his strength, to each according to his need,” I suggested that we move to Russia, too, with our little boys... Only when Matthew said, “A bomb thrown by a communist is no better than a bomb thrown by a capitalist” did I change my mind.

Matthew always disappeared on Armistice Day. I don't know where he went. He thought it an insult to the dead to have a big military parade at the Cenotaph, where the unknown soldier was buried; and he never wore his medals. After the war Matthew's mother told me that he had once declared he would never again do a thing for a society so rotten that even the clergy preached killing to the young...

In the Second World War, during the bombing of Britain, many English cities began to evacuate children, and the Burns had to find a place to take their four sons, the youngest not yet one year old. Matthew's job required that he stay in the city, and Maureen had no idea where to go. Just in those same days Maureen discovered she was pregnant with a fifth child. Under these uncertain circumstances, she and Matthew decided for an abortion.

When I returned home afterward, my husband suggested I go to my sister Kathleen for a few days' rest. Kathleen lived at an intentional community. I wrote asking if I could come for a short time, and she answered yes.

I had no idea what a shock awaited me there. I was reading some of their literature, I can't remember the title of the book. Whatever it was, it plainly stated that abortion was murder: to kill new life in the womb was no more justifiable in the eyes of God than the killing that takes place in war. Up till then I had been a rationalist and didn't see anything terrible about abortion. Now, however, I was thrown into great turmoil and felt the horror of my action for the first time.

I do not cry easily, but at that point I could do nothing but weep and weep. I deeply regretted what I had done, and longed that it could be undone. I was only a visitor to the community, but my sister took me to one of the ministers, and I told him all. He invited me to a members' meeting, where a prayer was said for me. Immediately I knew I was forgiven. It was a miracle, a gift; I was full of joy and peace, and able to make a new start in life.

Nothing is so vital – or painful – as recognizing the unpeace in our own lives and hearts. For some of us it may be hatred or resentment; with others, deceit, dividedness, or confusion; still others, mere emptiness or depression. In the deepest sense it is all violence and must therefore be faced and overcome. Thomas Merton writes:

There is a very pervasive form of contemporary violence to which the idealist fighting for peace by nonviolent methods most easily succumbs: activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is to succumb

to violence. More than that, it is cooperation in violence. The frenzy of the activist neutralizes his work for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of his own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.

Many people feel called to take up the cause of peace, but most of them turn back once they realize that they cannot bring it to others unless they experience it themselves. Unable to find harmony in their own lives, they soon come to the end of their rope.

In the most tragic instances, a person may suffer such disillusionment that he takes his own life. Folk singer Phil Ochs, a well-known peace activist in the sixties, comes to mind; so does Mitch Snyder, founder of the Center for Creative Nonviolence and a respected advocate for the homeless in Washington, D.C.

The Peace of God

True peace is not merely a lofty cause that can be taken up and pursued with good intentions. Nor is it something to be simply had or bought. Peace demands struggle. It is found by taking up the fundamental battles of life: life versus death, good versus evil, truth versus falsehood. Yes, it is a gift, but it is also the result of the most intense striving. In fact, several verses in the Psalms imply that it is in the process of striving for peace that peace is found. Such peace is a consequence of confronting and overcoming conflict, not avoiding it. And rooted as it is in righteousness, genuine peace – the peace of God – disrupts false relationships, disturbs wrongful systems, and debunks the lies that promise a false peace. It uproots the seeds of unpeace.

God's peace does not automatically include inner tranquility, the absence of conflict, or other, worldly estimations of peace. As we can see from the life of Christ, it was precisely by his rejection of the world and its peace that his perfect peace was established. And this peace was rooted in his acceptance of the most harrowing self-sacrifice imaginable: death on a cross.

Many of us who call ourselves Christians today have forgotten this, if not willfully blinded ourselves to it. We want peace, but we want it on our own terms. We want an easy peace. Yet peace cannot come quickly or easily if it is to have any genuine staying power. It cannot merely mean psychological well-being or equilibrium, a pleasant feeling that is here today and gone tomorrow. The peace of God is more than a state of consciousness. Dorothy Sayers writes:

I believe it to be a great mistake to present Christianity as something charming and popular with no offense in it... We cannot blink at the fact that gentle Jesus meek and mild

was so stiff in his opinions and so inflammatory in his language that he was thrown out of church, stoned, hunted from place to place, and finally gibbeted as a firebrand and a public danger. Whatever his peace was, it was not the peace of an amiable indifference.

Here I should point out that despite my own faith in Christ, and despite the vocabulary of this book (which some may find “churchy”) I do not believe that one must necessarily be a Christian to find the peace of Jesus. True, we cannot ignore Jesus’ statements: “He who does not gather with me, scatters” and “He who is not for me is against me.” Yet what does it mean to be “for” Jesus? Doesn’t he make it clear that it is not religious words or other expressions of piety that matter? He looks for deeds of compassion and mercy – for love. And he says that even giving a cup of water to a thirsty person will be rewarded “in the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus is a person, not a concept or an article of theology, and his truth embraces far more than our limited minds can comprehend. In any case, millions of Buddhists, Muslims, Jews – and agnostics and atheists – practice the love Jesus commands us to live out with more conviction than many so-called Christians. And it is hardly our place to say whether or not they possess his peace.

