

Does Peace Make a Difference in Our Theology and Mission?

March 2006

Michael Hardin

www.preachingpeace.org

Last month I attended the P.E.A.C.E. Briefing at Saddleback Church. This was a presentation of Rick Warren's vision for global evangelization and it was clear, thorough, and thought provoking. I was also quite taken with the sermon by which Pastor Warren closed out the gathering.

This essay finds its origins in a conundrum: the fact that neither peace nor peacemaking was mentioned. Not one time. It is from the perspective of peace, of the historic peace churches, that I write this essay. In some ways, it is a summary of my theological journey of these past 30 years having come more and more to appreciate the congruity of the peace position with an understanding of the true "Gospel" of Jesus Christ.

This essay's purpose is to clarify the important areas that may profitably be discussed between evangelicals and the historic peace churches, the pitfalls of the evangelical position as I experienced it at the P.E.A.C.E. briefing, and the solutions offered by perceiving the Gospel through a Christological lens. I am not an official spokesperson for the historic peace churches; however, the theology expressed in my articles and on my website www.preachingpeace.org are congruent with the major emphases of the historic peace church position.

I will first summarize some theological convictions and differences between Pastor Warren and myself and then orient the reader to the P.E.A.C.E. Plan. Finally it will explore areas of commonality and divergence in hopes of stimulating further conversation so that we might together engage in sharing the whole gospel for the whole person throughout the whole world.

Finally, I will use evangelical (in the lower case) broadly, knowing that there are Evangelicals who also hold to the Peace position (e.g., Jim Wallis). I hope for the time when the broader evangelical community also embraces Peace as part of their larger social ethic.

I believe Pastor Warren and I have several areas of agreement:

1. God loves the world and has demonstrated that Love preeminently in Jesus Christ, his beloved Son.
2. God has borne witness to Jesus in Holy Scripture.

3. God has poured out the Spirit (*ex patri, dia Christou*) on all flesh so that humankind might be restored to likeness with the True Human, Jesus of Nazareth.
4. God has called, equipped and sent Jesus' disciples into the entire world to proclaim the mighty work done 'in Him' and to teach others how to follow Jesus.
5. God is about the business of continuing the mission begun in Jesus through Christians today.
6. There is a place and a time where God reigns in peace and love that we await and that we pray will come to our earthly habitation.

I want to stress that the critical nature of this essay in no way diminishes the work done by Pastor Warren, the staff and members of Saddleback Church. I appreciated Rick's comment to me that he learns more from honest criticism than he does from commendation. I intend to put into as a clear relief as possible some of the substantive theological issues that I believe we must address as we enter the 21st (and perhaps last) century. Like Pastor Warren, I have a passion for the gospel, but like many, I wonder if enough is being done in this time to get to the root causes of the issues that afflict our churches.

Theological Prolegomena

In my earlier essay, I noted two critical areas for conversation; first the importance of a solid Trinitarian approach to the revelation of God in Christ and second, the value of a 'corporate' approach to Christian anthropology, both discussed in the context of modern Gnosticism. It was noted that the PDL (Purpose Driven Life) offered a 'mixed' gospel. While attempting to stand solid on an orthodox Christianity, PDL failed in that many of its theological emphases were of a Gnostic (Platonic or dualistic) character. This is to be expected, for most of Christianity, following Augustine, has taken its cue, not from the Scripture, but from the dualistic foundation of Hellenistic philosophy. I find this admixture troubling, for it is precisely those Platonic roots that strangle the Gospel, so that what is proclaimed as gospel, is in reality not yet gospel, but a combination of 'myth' and gospel.

I could use many examples from the history of the church. The dualist gospel can be found behind every pogrom, every persecution, every crusade, every holocaust, every social stigmatization. This 'gospel' proclaims a loving Jesus and a righteous wrathful God. This was not the emphasis of the early church before Augustine nor is it that of the Eastern fathers. Western Christendom is beholden to Augustine, and thus enmeshed with dualistic thought. This dualism is a structure of myth.

Now the word myth is used here in a specific way, corresponding to the definition given it in mimetic theory as proposed by Rene Girard. Myth is narrative that covers up traces of original acts of victimage, that justifies violence against a scapegoat(s), that attributes guilt to the victim, and that further sacralizes or makes sacred the victim and grounds human community and culture upon the victims. For those familiar with mimetic theory, history or historical fact is not the opposite of myth. Rather, the Gospel, that is, the uncovering and proclamation of the random victim and God's declaration of the

innocence of the victim is the opposite of myth. Myth depends upon its ability to lie, deceive, cover-up; Gospel is about revelatory capacity, transformative power, and illumination so that we may repent of our sacrificial, violent ways and follow Jesus on the journey of peace.

A 'mythic' reading of Scripture joins the happy chorus of victimage, justifying sacrifice; a 'gospel' hermeneutic, on the other hand, exposes and renders powerless this mythological reading, opening doors for us to follow Jesus in his program of peacemaking.

The 'mythic' reading of Scripture is not difficult to trace throughout the history of the Christian Church. Most peace thinkers would want to place the origin of this reading at the feet of Augustine as he vainly tried to assimilate the new reality of the violent Constantinian state into his theology. We can go back farther though, to the early second century Christian apologists who introduced Hellenic philosophical categories into Christian theology, as did Philo of Alexandria within Judaism (see my essay "The Biblical Testaments as a Marriage of Convenience" on PreachingPeace.org).

The attempt to think Christianity through in dualist philosophical categories in order to show the congruency of the gospel with the great philosophers ended in sublimating the christocentric revelation of Scripture. Apart from a Christ-centered reading of all of Scripture, revelation is obscure (see 2 Corinthians 3). Not only so but, interpretation itself obscures even further. The dualism of much Christian interpretation is sadly assumed as a part of the revelation of God in Christ. Jesus' reading and the apostolic reading of Scripture are in stark contrast to that of contemporary Christianity and dualistic hermeneutics.

The term 'hermeneutics from above' is used to describe the theology written from the perspective of the elite (whether Gnostic or Orthodox) and 'hermeneutics from below' to describe the inner biblical hermeneutic, the view from the vanquished and marginalized, the poor and oppressed, the widow and orphan. This way of reading the biblical tradition does not begin with Jesus, but is part and parcel of the inner dynamic of the Hebrew Bible itself where the Prophetic rendering of the Israelite story challenges the sacrificial (violent) rendering of that story by the powerful and elite. Dietrich Bonhoeffer called it 'the view from below'; liberation theologians called it 'Jesus' preferential option for the poor'; I think Martin Luther would have called it *theologia crucis*, the 'theology of the cross.'

Jesus is heir to the prophetic rendering of the Hebrew Bible; there were many hermeneutic options available to Jesus in his day, of these he focused on the self-critical character of the Bible. Scripture, for Jesus, was self correcting because God was intimately involved in shaping the life of the Israelite people, moving them from a consideration of theology done from the perspective of the winner to that done from the viewpoint of the outcast and extruded (Job is a prime example, as is Joseph, and the Servant of Isaiah).

But all of this inevitably leads to the heart of the issue in our discussion, for evangelicals do not begin with the revelation of God in Christ, but from a static understanding of Scripture itself, enshrined in a doctrine of inspiration. It is the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture that must first be accepted, for according to evangelicals, if we do not accept the entirety of Scripture as dictated by God and then interpreted by themselves, we cannot trust any part of it. This is a conclusion unsupported by Scripture itself or Jesus' reading of it.

There have been those who have sought to demonstrate the inerrancy of Scripture, both exegetically and historically. Personally, I do not find any of the arguments convincing, but neither do I find the liberal approaches to Scripture convincing, where the Scriptures are only testimonies to religious expression. For me as an advocate of peace, there is a third way, an alternative to the chasm created by the Enlightenment between conservatives and liberals. This third way is found primarily in Jesus' use of the Hebrew Scripture, then in the use of the Hebrew Scripture by the apostolic church that is then demonstrated in the character or behavior of the early Christian communities. The ethics or behavior of the early church is the fruit of this hermeneutic approach and cannot be divorced from their theology (for further on this see my essay "Finding our Way Home").

Another way of putting this is to say that the *sola scriptura* principle cannot be separated from the *solus Christus*. This was certainly true for Martin Luther and more so for the Anabaptists of the 16th century. It is only with Calvin that we begin to get a Protestant doctrine of the equality of the Testaments and the real beginnings of a Protestant version of sacrificial theology or a theology from above. The heirs of the Calvinist Reformation took this several steps beyond their master, arguing for an ontology of language where truth of language equals truth of being. We then find the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture 'hardening' into a formal declaration where Scripture has the same characteristics formerly allotted to God alone. Thus Scripture *in toto* becomes the Word of God, rather than Jesus being God's one true Word.

Now along with the early Barth, I would rather have this doctrine of infallibility than one that does away with all revelation of God in the Scriptures. But we are not forced to choose between the two since a christologically focused understanding of Scripture allows us to both heed Scripture and read it critically. It is not an either-or but a both-and scenario. When we look out across the vast theological landscape of the past several hundred years and all of the changes that theology has undergone, it seems that the split between accepting the Scriptures *in toto* as God's dictated Word and the liberal view of Scripture as the mere recording of religious expression seems to be a false dichotomy. There is another way.

Rene Girard has demonstrated that the key to understanding Scripture is the Gospel, the contemporary revelation of violence and the victim (which is the gospel providing its own hermeneutic). This is the key. Inerrancy is all about a secure hermeneutic, but it is itself a form of violence. Inerrancy, in other words, is a 'mythical' hermeneutic because it hides the problem of violence under justification. The Cross does not do this. Rather, the Cross exposes the problem of the justification of violence by justifying forgiveness.

Further, given the radical shifts in Western philosophy, particularly from Wittgenstein to Derrida, and the conclusion that we can no longer associate language with being, I find it impossible to see how one can affirm inerrancy in any of its current manifestations. Furthermore, inerrancy is essential to any just war theory, for it depends on taking passages from the Hebrew Bible, where God is sometimes viewed as violent, to justify its own violence. This is unacceptable from a peace perspective given that Jesus, who spoke the words of his Father and lived out the actions/life of his Father, practiced and taught nonviolence.

It is less a question of the authority of Scripture and more a question of the authority of a hermeneutic. We may have a high or a low view of Scripture but if we are not interpreting Scripture in light of its own internally given hermeneutic, we are misreading the text. Our view of inspiration is a hermeneutic and there are approaches to 'the inspiration and authority' of Scripture that are simply wrong because they are not Christ-centered.

Christian believers on the right consistently talk as though believers on the left are not Christians, that indeed liberal Christianity is a 'fall of the church' into some kind of apostasy. Yet, can it not be said that the so-called Christian Right has engaged in behavior which is as far from Jesus as one can get; intolerance, exclusivity, scapegoating, etc? The fact is, (as Philip Lee has demonstrated conclusively in Against the Protestant Gnostics), both conservative and liberal American Christianity share the very same Gnostic presuppositions and both are to be chided for their inability to see that revelation is not a concept but a person, Jesus Christ.

Jesus alone is the true Word of God, whom we are called to obey in life and in death (to paraphrase the Barmen Declaration). It is in and through Jesus that we know God and ourselves. He alone is the 'image of the invisible God' (Col 1:15), 'the Son of the Father' (John 14:6). The New Testament writers were quite careful in not equating Jesus with their Hebrew Bible, nor equating the quality and substance of the revelation of God in Christ with the texts of the Hebrew Bible. Jesus was differentiated from the biblical text in that in him alone 'the fullness of the Godhead dwelt' and in him alone is manifest the glory of God (John 1:1-18), Jesus alone 'exegetes' the Father. All revelation before him was incomplete, mixed, looking in a fogged mirror, in Him alone is to be found the identification of the Human with Deity, in Him alone is to be found the character of God, He alone (and not Holy Scripture) is *homoousias* (of one substance) with the Father (as suggested by the Nicene creed).

As such, Jesus' character can alone be the benchmark by which we determine God's character. Any other benchmark, whether it be the Hebrew Bible or ecclesial tradition or private revelation falls short. This Christological emphasis on revelation is also necessary for an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity and this leads us to a consideration of one of the major problems that faces Evangelicalism which stems from Calvinism and has its roots in Augustinianism: the relation between the Father and the Son.

When the God announced and believed in by Jesus is equated with every text that speaks of God in the Hebrew Bible, that which is truly distinctive in Jesus' life and ministry is hidden or mythologized. Now we can get ourselves into a tizzy here, worrying that perhaps shades of Marcion lurk in the shadows, but this need not be the case. Marcion believed in two gods; he was a dualist. We do not confess such; we acknowledge that God is One. Saying this means that there must then be an internal consistency in what we say about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Everything we predicate about any one member of the Triune God must be able to be predicated of the other; this is the notion of the divine perichoresis, the mutual indwelling, the 'dance of the Trinity.' This essential Father-Son relationship expressed as revelation is what Athanasius argued when he pointed out the error of Arius in the 4th Century in his treatise 'On the Incarnation of the Word.' Whatever is said about the Father is true of the Son, and whatever is said about the Son is also true for the Father, save the names 'Father' and 'Son.' One God, one character, one revelation in fullness.

The main problem here is that the Western Christian doctrine of God has usually, right at this point, differentiated God from Jesus, taking its understanding of Jesus from the Gospels, but its understanding of God from the Hebrew Bible and the two are not the same. This does not mean there is a complete disjunction between the revelation of God in the Hebrew Bible and Jesus; it does mean that one or the other is going to be the foundation for interpreting the other and the New Testament writers were clear as to which side of this equation they came down on: Jesus, and Jesus alone, reveals and interprets the character of God. Hebrews says,

“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”

Ignatius of Antioch clarifies the Christological approach. Kugel and Greer in their Early Biblical Interpretation adequately summarize this important hermeneutical perspective.

“Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, was under arrest and on his way to Rome and his eventual martyrdom, when he met with several representatives of several of the churches in Asia Minor (ca. 107 C.E.). His opponents refused to accept any teaching in the 'Gospel' unless they could find it in 'the charters.' Their view was almost certainly that the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures ('the charters') determines the meaning of the Christian preaching (the 'Gospel'). Ignatius, of course, accepted the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Christian must 'give heed to the prophets' (Ep. To the Smyrneans 7:2). But he insisted that the Christian preaching has prior authority and must determine the meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures. 'But to me the charters are Jesus Christ, the inviolable character of his cross, and death, and resurrection, and the faith which is through him' (Ep. To the Philadelphians 8:2). What he must mean is that the Hebrew Scriptures have authority only when read in the light of the Christian faith. The

book is less important than the message that gives it its proper meaning. If we may take Ignatius' view as the one that prevails in the early church, we may conclude that while the Hebrew Scriptures were the Bible of the early church, their authority was secondary to that of the Christian preaching."

The early church seemed to be well aware that while the Hebrew Bible was an essential document for the Christian faith, nevertheless God was not 'revealed' in the biblical text as clearly and forthrightly as in Jesus Christ. The role of the Hebrew Bible in early Christian preaching was subject to the authority of the revelation of God in Christ. Jesus, not Moses or David, had revealed God in God's fullness.

For most evangelicals today, God is nothing like Jesus, until and unless one has decided to 'be born again', to 'accept Christ as savior.' Prior to our decision to acknowledge Jesus, God is wrathful, full of righteous fury, ready to plunge us into unspeakable hell all for the sake of God's own majesty and glory. But, of course, after we become Christians, we can count on God being on our side. This is especially reflected in the penal satisfaction theory of the atonement, which from a peace church perspective is nothing more than human projection of violence upon deity.

The spiteful, wrathful God reflects the importation of dualism, the influence of Plato and does not come close to approximating the Abba (the 'Daddy') that Jesus announced who makes 'his sun to shine on BOTH the evil and the good, and his rain to fall on BOTH the just and the unjust', a Father in whom there is 'no darkness at all', in whom 'there is no shadow of turning.' This 'dark side of God' found in the Hebrew Bible and in fact, in all other major religions, cannot be found in Jesus' teaching.

At this point some might say that Jesus talked about judgment, hell and apocalypse. This is true, but he did it in a way that is totally dissimilar to his contemporaries, evidencing a well thought out hermeneutic. The Christian tradition has tended to flatten out this revelation by reflecting more of Jesus' contemporaries in their theology than Jesus himself. Strange as it may seem, the church from the second century on has all too often missed the mark and it snowballs after Constantine ascends the throne. Raymund Schwager in Must There Be Scapegoats? and his Jesus in the Drama of Salvation has dealt inspirationally with these difficult questions.

If God is violent in the atonement, if God pours out his wrath on Jesus, then Jesus is not like God, for Jesus does not pour out wrath upon sinners during his ministry. Nor is there any single verse in the New Testament where it says that God was pouring his wrath out on Jesus, it can only be argued by means of an imposed hermeneutic, where other interpretations make much more sense. In fact Scripture says God was 'reconciling the world to himself in Christ' (2 Cor 5:16-21) and it is this ministry of reconciliation we as Church are given.

As he is dying on the Cross, what does Jesus do? He forgives his persecutors, 'Father, forgive them, they are unaware of what they do.' Paul reflects this in the passage just cited when he says that God does not count our sins against us, God forgives us. James

says, 'love covers a multitude of sins.' As far as east is from west, so far does God remove our sin from us (Psalm 103). In short, Jesus reveals that God, maker of heaven and earth is a peacemaker. Jesus is the Prince of Peace, of Reconciliation, of Forgiveness. We, the Church, announce the Gospel of Peace, of Reconciliation and Forgiveness.

Here again, one might object that I have minimized the holiness of God. I can understand how I might be read this way. Jesus' contemporaries regarded God's holiness in highest esteem; Phineas was the prototypical ancestral model exhibiting real zeal for holiness. Yet, nowhere in the New Testament is Phineas brought into the picture as an archetype of Jesus. Rather, Jesus subverted the so-called holiness code of his day, 'Be Holy as I am Holy' with his own mercy code 'Be Merciful as your Heavenly Father is Merciful.' This is an intentional hermeneutic alternative, a counterpoint to those who had made God into their own image. For more on this you can see my essay "Sacrificial Language in Hebrews" (Violence Renounced, ed. by Willard Swartley).

These differences are significant and one can understand how a person who takes a peace position might feel uncomfortable with the God of Calvin and Augustine. This is not to say there is no great benefit to be derived from these writers and their heirs, but only that the Anabaptists of the 16th century and their heirs (not to mention Maximus Confessor, St Francis, and Erasmus among others) feel compelled to say to the modern church that the admixture of gospel and myth, gospel and law, retribution and forgiveness, heaven and hell, reflect more on Hellenic philosophy embalmed with a pseudo-Christianity than they reflect the teachings of Jesus.

Contemporary 'peace' Christians must take Jesus as their example in all they do, and that includes how Jesus read His Bible, interpreted His Bible and reflected upon His God. To derive our biblical hermeneutic from anywhere else other than Jesus is to do others and ourselves an enormous disservice.

Now, in a way, all of this is prelude to some observations I would like to make about the P.E.A.C.E. plan.

The P.E.A.C.E. Plan

At Saddleback Church this past week about 120 pastors and lay leaders were given an overview of the global vision for mission titled the P.E.A.C.E. plan. We found that Rick Warren is fond of acrostics and the P.E.A.C.E. plan is an acrostic that is a 'holistic vision of Christian mission.' It has five key components that are spelled out:

- P Plant Churches
- E Equip Leaders
- A Assist the Poor
- C Care for the Sick
- E Educate the Illiterate

Each of these five emphases corresponds to a 'global Goliath' often called a global giant, a problem virtually insurmountable, unable to be adequately addressed by either politics or business and thus wholly needing to be addressed by the Church of Jesus Christ.

These five giants are:

Spiritual Emptiness/Lostness (terms used interchangeably)

Egocentric Leadership

Extreme Poverty

Pandemic Disease (emphasis on HIV/AIDS)

Illiteracy

In the address from Rick (by video) there is biblical warrant for each of the five points of the P.E.A.C.E. plan (all texts from the gospels). Rick said, "The model of Jesus is the antidote to the five global giants. What Jesus did in his physical body, he expects us, his spiritual body, the church, to keep doing."

In both the video address shown on Tuesday morning as well as the closing address of Wednesday afternoon, Rick referred to starting the second Reformation of the Church, leaving little doubt that he sees himself as an heir to Calvin (Rick is not a Lutheran, he is a Calvinist). He said that if the first Reformation was about creeds, the second would be about deeds; if the first was about beliefs, the second will be about behaviors.

The Saddleback Church pastoral team and leaders have developed a comprehensive strategy for global missions to bring sustainable and reproducible results to the mission field. The P.E.A.C.E. plan seeks to build churches that are strong, healthy and balanced through implementation of four pillars: fellowship, discipleship, ministry and mission all of which culminate in worship.

The focus is not, as one might suspect, on the big church, the mega-ministry, but on the small group, its assets and functions within the larger body. Biblical community is lived out in small groups. Why small groups? Because they are reproducible.

It is a grand plan:

P Purpose Driven

L Led by small groups

A Addresses all five giants

N Networks church to church

S Sends to the whole world

Finally, according to Pastor Warren's closing statements, "The P.E.A.C.E. plan is from God" and "the Kingdom of God is where Jesus is King and Jesus is King in the P.E.A.C.E. plan."

Convergence, Difference and Conversation

Well, these are pretty bold statements. And they are worth affirming, for indeed we dream big dreams for Jesus said ‘greater things than those that I do, you shall do.’ But this begs the question: is the theological model underlying the P.E.A.C.E. plan the gospel of the New Testament?

The theology underlying the P.E.A.C.E. plan is that of Bill Bright and Billy Graham. It is really nothing more than the TULIP of Calvinism:

T Total Depravity
U Unconditional Election
L Limited Atonement
I Irresistible Grace
P Perseverance of the Saints

I came to this conclusion inasmuch as the T and LIP of TULIP were all mentioned in Rick’s final address to us. Now, I for one, am fond of the theology of John Calvin, but am aware that there is a great difference between Calvin and the later Calvinists. Some of these differences are a matter of degree but foundationally, the model of TULIP is a deviation from Calvin’s theology, particularly since Calvin did not teach a Limited Atonement. This makes all the difference in the world. Christ died for all according to Calvin, although the consequence of his salvation might not be effectual for all (on this see R.T. Kendall Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649).

Why is this important? Because not everyone is a Calvinist. The Orthodox churches are not Calvinist, nor are the Roman Catholics, nor the Lutherans, nor even the Anglicans (although the African Anglican communion is leaving its heritage and moving in this direction). The Historic Peace Churches (the Mennonites, the Amish, the Church of the Brethren and the Brethren in Christ) are certainly not Calvinist. Therefore, the model of the P.E.A.C.E. plan will only really work for those within the Calvinist tradition. Furthermore, there are distinctions within Calvinism and the P.E.A.C.E. plan would not even work for all of Calvin’s heirs.

Since the five points of the P.E.A.C.E. plan are all grounded in the ministry of Jesus, we might conclude that a provisional christology is implicit in the plan itself. Each of the five points is worth considering.

Did Jesus plant churches? Hardly. Did he have a group of followers? Yes. Were they institutionalized? No. It is a question then, of how we define church. Warren is clear that a church is not a building but a small group of believers dedicated to sharing together and then sharing with the world the graciousness of Jesus. I concur, so perhaps we might provisionally say Jesus ‘planted churches.’

Did Jesus equip leaders? Yes. He taught them and modeled for them what true and beneficial servant leadership is about.

Did Jesus assist the poor? Undoubtedly.

Did Jesus care for the sick? Absolutely.

Did Jesus educate the masses? Yes. Did he teach them how to read? No. The literacy rate in Jesus time was far worse than in our time but evidently he didn't feel the need to teach anyone how to 'read God's word.'

The question remains though, are there significant areas of Jesus' mission and ministry that have been omitted and the answer is unquestionably 'Yes!' This suggests that the P.E.A.C.E. plan is just part of the whole and not the whole itself and thus we might be careful in identifying it with the Kingdom of God, as though they are one and the same.

In order to illumine the difference peace hermeneutic brings I offer the following:

The five Giants in our world today are:

F Fear
E Exclusion
V Violence
E Ecological Plunder
R Rigid Holiness

The world is sick, it has a FEVER that is causing it to lose vitality. There are indeed Giants in the land but are they the Giants proposed in the P.E.A.C.E. plan? Let's look again at them.

In the P.E.A.C.E. plan Spiritual Lostness is the first Giant but is Spiritual Lostness a Giant in the world today? People might be 'lost' according to some but these same folks no longer care if they are 'lost.' They've given up on a church that condemns them and perhaps rightly so. The Gospel, the *good* news is not so much about who is lost but about the Father of Jesus who finds us, and brings us home. I sense that only a paradigm of Limited Atonement would focus on Spiritual Lostness.

Egocentric Leadership? Let's see, we live in a country where 'greed is good', where leaders receive 'Christian' approbation like Cheney and Bush who are friends of people like Lay and Skilling and other unnamed corporate executives in the oil, pharmaceutical and defense industries. Then there are Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell and James Dobson. Yes, egocentric leadership is a problem, but what's worse is that it seems to be a BIG problem of the Christian Right (and who is addressing this?)

Not everyone is sick and not everyone is poor, not everyone is illiterate. Although I do agree that these are major problems, are they causes or rather effects of our greed, violence and selfish consumption of resources?

F.E.V.E.R.

What is a Giant? The New Testament refers to the spiritual giants in our world as 'principalities and powers.' These powers are both noumenal and phenomenological; they are interior to us in memory, ideology and perspective. They are exterior to us in culture, economics, politics, religion. These 'powers and principalities' wreak havoc in the lives of every human being every single day. A biblical view of the Giants notes the important many faceted ways we are under their attack and sway.

Fear is a deadly spiritual Giant. It can be said that we all live with a certain amount of fear: fear of death, fear of accidents, fear of natural disaster, fear of our loved one's getting hurt or dying, etc. No one on the planet is immune to fear. Thankfully we know that 'perfect love casts out fear.'

Exclusion is also a spiritual Giant. Just ask people of color, or women or the GLBT community. Groups gain their self-identity not by who they are but by who they are not and by whom they are against. Exclusion is a cultural principle, without exclusion the world (in the Johannine sense of the term) would not go round. It is as pervasive as air. Thankfully we know that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Pagan, slave nor free, male or female, but all are one in Him.

Violence. Imagine a world without violence. Impossible. Violence is THE structuring principle that governs us. Violence of word, violence of thought, violence of deed, hidden violence, public violence, justified violence, unjust violence. Violence is ubiquitous. Violence is THE Giant. Thankfully we know the Prince of Peace who blessed the peacemakers.

Ecological Plunder is the relative newcomer on the block in terms of our awareness but once again, America and American Christianity lead the way here. Calvinist capitalism and market driven economies have spawned consumers like rabbits and Earth's bountiful resources are drying up and human consumption has radically altered the ecology (Bill McKibben The End of Nature). If we don't change our ways we will surely bring the Apocalypse down upon our own heads. I was glad to see Pastor Warren's signature along with other prominent evangelical church leaders warning us about global warming in February 2006. Thankfully we praise Jesus, the Word by whom and in whom all things were and are and will be created and that we are grateful that we may also care for the work of God's hands.

Rigid Holiness. This is a corollary of Exclusion. It is the real manifestation of Egocentric Leadership. It is the 'I am always right because God told me so' thinking of far too many religious people, whether they are Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or Pagan. It is the standard we hold before others but do not live up to ourselves. It is political

leadership saying they wished other religious traditions would give up their violence but never once asking how they as “Christians” might give up theirs. It is the inflexibility of those who exclude and scapegoat others who do not toe the party line. It has always been the hidden justification for war. Thankfully we are held to a different standard: asking God to show us the same amount and type of forgiveness that we show to others.

These are the Spiritual Giants in the land today. Disease and poverty are the result, not the cause of violence and war. If we took the money we spend on war, armaments and planning for war, we could feed the entirety of the world’s hungry, we could eliminate HIV/AIDS in a heartbeat and we could teach billions how to read. But we don’t. War (National Violence) leaves in its path disease and poverty and perpetuates an endless cycle of retribution. And Calvinists are loathe to address the problem of war (because war is not a problem but a solution granted by God as they see it).

What is an alternative solution that more closely approximates the message and mission of Jesus? I also came up with an acrostic, knowing that it would contain an implicit christology. I don’t have a P.E.A.C.E. plan, but I do have a J.E.S.U.S. plan. I will highlight the first two points and summarize the last three in the interest of time.

J Jubilee of Joy and Justice
E Example
S Sharing
U Understanding Love
S Socialization

Jesus Brings the *Jubilee of Joy and Justice*

Like Pastor Warren, I too would turn to Luke 4 and Jesus’ inaugural sermon at Nazareth. Here it is clear that the use of Isaiah 61 is intended to announce Jesus’ jubilee (Robert Sloan, [The Favorable Year of the Lord](#)). It is the announcement of hope to the hopeless, of freedom to the imprisoned, of acceptance to the excluded. As such it fittingly captures Jesus’ hermeneutic. But as I have suggested it goes further than that. When I interpreted this text for preachingpeace.org I noted, “the message is about God’s character. In Jesus’ citation of Isaiah, the passage about the vengeance of God is omitted. Later in Luke 7 there is the conflation of three Isaianic passages, all of which omit reference to God’s retribution. This is very significant, for it asserts the real distinction of God from all other gods; that God, in relation to humanity, is loving and forgiving, non-retaliatory, and this is demonstrated over and over again in the Gospels when Jesus, in the power of God’s Spirit, forgives sin.

Implicitly this forgiveness also extends to the enemies of God’s people. By omitting the vengeance aspects of the Isaiah text, Jesus is clearly extending the blessing of the gift of the Spirit in his person to everyone, but especially those violated and victimized by society and authorities and economies. Jesus not only goes to those we have deemed at the bottom of our social list, he also goes to our enemy. Friends, this is a courageous interpretation of this passage. And to do it in his hometown synagogue!” No wonder the

people were so amazed then enraged by his words of grace. They wanted to keep God's graciousness for themselves only.

In this text Jesus deals with fear, violence, exclusion and implicitly critiques the rigid holiness that undergirds the typical stance of his synagogue listeners.

Jesus is our *Example*

How shall we then live, that is, how shall we relate to others? And to what extent shall we take Jesus as our Example, Pattern, Paradigm, or Model?

When exegeting this text on PreachingPeace.org I pointed out, "There is however, an important conversation in the research on discipleship that has implications for mimetic theory. Some have argued that discipleship should be conceived along rabbinic lines. Martin Hengel quotes Hans Dieter Betz: "The idea of following Jesus is rooted in the Palestinian Jewish relationship of the teacher of the Torah to his pupil." Hengel notes that this view "is taken over as an unexamined axiom." (The Charismatic Leader and His Followers)

What if, instead of conceiving discipleship in master/pupil terms, we had another metaphor? T.W. Manson made an important linguistic contribution that has powerful implications for a positive view of mimesis. He points out that certain sayings in the gospel tradition can have their variants explained as either a mistranslation or interpretive choice from Aramaic to Greek. In this regard he observes that the saying found in Matthew 10:37 and Luke 14:26 has an underlying Aramaic term used for 'disciple' (*maqhtes*). He says: the suspicion arises that Jesus did not use the common word *talmid* to describe his intimate followers, but the unusual word *shaliah*." (The Teaching of Jesus).

Manson goes on to point out that the term Jesus chose is better translated as 'apprentice.' He further observes, "It is tempting to see in the choice of the word a definite opposition to the whole scribal system. The *talmid* of the Rabbinical schools is primarily a student. His chief business was to master the contents of the written Law and the oral Tradition. The finished products of the Rabbinical schools were learned biblical scholars and sound and competent lawyers. The life of a *talmid* as *talmid* was made up of study of the sacred writings, attendance on lectures, and discussion of difficult passages or cases. Discipleship as Jesus conceived it was not a theoretical discipline of this sort, but a practical task to which men were called to give themselves and all their energies. Their work was not study but practice. Fishermen were to become fishers of men, peasants were to be laborers in God's vineyard or God's harvest field. And Jesus was their master not so much as a teacher of right doctrine, but rather as the master-craftsman whom they were to follow and imitate. Discipleship was not matriculation in a Rabbinical College but apprenticeship to the work of the Kingdom."

This term is a deliberate contrast to the rabbinic relationship. It has explanatory power; those who followed Jesus also participated in his mission of mercy and experienced the

healing power of Jesus' abba. They followed Him. Like *shaliah*, "to follow" (akoloukein), is a technical term used of discipleship in the gospels. These texts, these stories and this life originate from those who lived with, traveled with and imitated Jesus. Like the young ox in the yoke with the lead ox, keeping pace turn for turn, step for step so followers of Jesus take upon themselves the 'yoke of the Kingdom' (in contrast to the rabbinic 'yoke of the Torah').

The Gospels are shot through with sayings of Jesus that admonish his followers to do as he did. Why is Example important? Because we all learn by imitation, you are who you imitate. The question I would put to evangelicals is this: how far do you imitate Jesus? I suspect that most evangelicals would like to think they are imitators of Jesus' moral life. But it goes much further than that. Discipleship as imitation extends to spirituality, ethics, relationships, hermeneutics, economics, and more. We are all imitating all the time, the question is whether we realize how bound we are to the non-conscious imitation of those around us or whether we continue to suppress this knowledge in the mistaken belief that we are autonomous egos.

Here a critical question from a peace perspective arises: How can followers of Jesus not engage Jesus' teaching on non-retaliation? How can they ignore his striking emphasis on peacemaking and reconciliation, not just for personal ethics but also for social ethics? At this point the Anabaptist interpreter of Christianity sees FAILURE writ large on both the contemporary ecclesial canvas as well as the canvas of Christian history. I raised this issue already in my previous essay when I asked how Warren could suggest that 'making weapons' and 'being a soldier' were 'gifts or talents that God uses.' The virtual evacuation of Jesus' teaching on peace and the subsequent justification of force is one of the greatest sins of Calvinism.

Jesus Bids us to *Share* All That We Are Given

This is the ethic explicitly enjoined in the Sermon on the Mount. It has to do with meeting the concrete needs of others. Perhaps it smacks a bit of 'welfare' but then again so does the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25). A hand out can also be a hand up. Freely we have received; freely we are asked to give. This sharing has profound economic consequences as is evidenced by the 'distribution of wealth' in the early church, seen especially in the early chapters of Acts and Paul's letters. Jesus was certainly no Marxist where wealth is redistributed by force; yet his teaching certainly invites us to be set free from economic slavery, slavery to upward mobility, slavery to consumerism (in this last I agree with you).

Jesus is the *Understanding Love* of God Incarnate

This is the principle *par excellence* of Incarnation. There is a severe lack of Understanding in the World. "Christians" are winning most of the gold medals at the Intolerance Games. The true Christian community is one that is inclusive of others, where dogmas and laws, which previously kept peoples apart, are now no longer valid (Ephesians 2:11ff), where compassion, mercy, forgiveness and tolerance are indicators of

a healthy spirituality. Understanding is the principle of Incarnation: ‘the One who knew no sin, became sin for us’ and ‘he became like us in every way so that he might be a faithful mediator between humans and God.’ Jesus, God dwelling with us, Emmanuel, is our lifeline to eternity.

But Jesus is our lifeline only as He is the lifeline for all. He either is for us all, including you and me, or He is for none, including you and me. The mention of Incarnation of course brings me to atonement, what Christ does He does for all (Romans 5), His work is not limited to just the elect or just the believing or just the good or the holy or the righteous or those who go to Church on Sunday or just “Christians” for that matter. No. The work of Christ is for the entire ‘kosmos’ (I John 2:2), a world God so loved that God gave his son to redeem it. If we lack understanding, if we are not willing to get in there and get our hands dirty like Jesus did, can we say we are following Him? Can we call ourselves servant-leaders?

Jesus Brings God’s Gift of *Socialization* to the Outcast

When Jesus healed it was more than simply a display of supernatural power. The one healed was given a new opportunity to rejoin society, a society that had rejected them as a burden or as one cursed by God with affliction. Jesus rejected the notion that God afflicts us and in healing others He rejected *that* correlation between affliction and sin. A leper now healed could reenter society; a bleeding woman now healed was no longer unclean; a blind man now healed could move about freely. I think that the P.E.A.C.E. plan is moving in this direction in its concern for HIV/AIDS victims but I wonder about the homophobic intolerance I heard from staff and attendees of the Conference. Is it just enough to get medicine to the afflicted, or might the Church also learn how to embrace folks whose sexual orientation is different than the ‘mainstream.’ We have done it for women, people of color, etc. Can we do this too?

Conclusion

I wonder if it is possible to get beyond the limitations of the TULIP pattern (and it’s stepchild Fundamentalism) so that the P.E.A.C.E. plan might actually also reference GOD’S PEACE. Again, more than anything else, this was the greatest anomaly for me this past week, viz., that neither peace nor peacemaking was never mentioned. Not once.

I would like to suggest a place of dialogue. Both evangelicals and the historic peace churches would find common ground in Karl Barth’s view of the church and Christian mission. What Warren is doing at Saddleback Church in the P.E.A.C.E. plan is, in my eyes, light years ahead of the way the Protestant churches have engaged mission previously. The P.E.A.C.E. plan does not simply offer salvation to the soul but also seeks to address real, common needs of real suffering people.

Elizabeth Barnes points out the usefulness of Barth for re-envisioning the church-at-mission. She notes the Southern Baptists awareness of “the need for a new theology of the church and a new theological base for social action that affirms its integrality to the

church's nature and mission. Presupposing God's own initial activity and the ecclesia's correlative action, an ecclesiology is needed, these see, which reshapes Baptist individualism, correcting Enlightenment excesses and permitting a corporate solidarity which protects the personal nature of faith but does not militate against a 'nobler church-consciousness.'" (An Affront to the Gospel: The Radical Barth and the Southern Baptist Convention)

Evangelicals can learn from Barth the strategic importance of having a Jesus centered revelation, one grounded in the 'humanity of God' and thus a theology that interprets incarnation and atonement together. They would also learn the value of a truly ecumenical paradigm; Barth, a Reformed theologian, truly does break through Augustine and the dualistic dilemmas that have plagued Western theology, in his use of the Greek Fathers.

Historic Peace Churches have a lot to learn from Barth, not the least of which is that life and theology are one, two sides of the same witness. The historic peace churches have not typically been strong in theology preferring the piety of a lived life rather than 'lofty and largely unusable' theological debates. Many have yet to learn the 'joy of doing theology.' Peace Christians can learn from Barth just how to celebrate Jesus when framing an orthodox theology, an apostolic theology.

I am one with Pastor Warren in praying for a second Reformation. It is my hope that this Reformation will actually be a Transformation of the Church into the image of her Lord. Like Warren, I too feel the winds of the Spirit blowing across the churches. We know that Jesus calls and empowers each one of us, his little ones, to be his witnesses in the world. In all we do we are but 'self-giving offerings' (Romans 12:1-2).

Walter Wink in his important and influential book Engaging the Powers speaks also of the changes coming about in Christianity. He says, "In the spiritual renaissance that I believe is coming to birth, it will not be the message of Paul that this time galvanizes hearts, as in the Reformation and the Wesleyan revival, but the human figure of Jesus. And in the teaching of Jesus, the sayings on nonviolence and love of enemies will hold a central place. Not because they are more true than any others, but because they are the only means known for overcoming domination without creating new dominations.

I submit that the ultimate religious question today should no longer be the Reformation's question, "How can I find a gracious God" but rather, "How can we find God in our enemies?" What *guilt* was for Luther, the *enemy* has become for us: the goad that can drive us to God. What has often been a purely private affair – justification by faith through grace – has now, in our age, grown to embrace the world. As John Stoner comments we can no more save ourselves from our enemies than we can save ourselves from sin, but God's amazing grace offers to save us from both."

I wish Pastor Warren well and will pray for him in your mission. I will also pray that the Lord of the Harvest not limit the second Reformation to the Calvinists but also grant that all Christian traditions might shape the vision for that Reformation. If it is not bigger

than one tradition, it will fail and cause schism. If the second Reformation for which we both yearn is larger than just the P.E.A.C.E. plan or if the P.E.A.C.E. plan is large enough to include all, even our enemies, then there is hope that Christians worldwide might wake up and begin to once again look to Jesus 'the author and perfecter of our faith.' Then we may trust that Jesus' example of bringing jubilee, understanding, love, joy, peacemaking and faith will transform the Church worldwide. Now THAT would be a miracle!