

Global Peace Services USA

...an idea whose time has come

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The following article is an invitation, even an earnest request, for reader response. We want to have an ongoing exchange of views about the meaning of peace service, and examples of peace service. The questions at the end of the article are provided to stimulate responses from readers. These responses may be as short as a paragraph or as long as the article by Mehdi Aminrazavi in this newsletter. We look forward to hearing from you by email (mejegen@yahoo.com or claradoyle@aol.com) or by post to our mailing address on page 6.

The Editors

What Is Peace Service?

Why Is It Important? What Does It Need?

Seeking an Alternative to War

War is a human invention, a social institution authorized by governments, carried out by a military-industrial complex, and supported or at least tolerated by the people for whom wars are presumably fought. War is based on the assumption that it is a necessary evil needed to eliminate worse evils. Military service has social power because it calls forth great heroism, even to the supreme sacrifice of life.

This paper argues that there can be an alternative to war. This position is based on the assumption that war is not a necessary evil, but an unnecessary one. However, war cannot simply be eliminated, but needs to be replaced by better ways of providing defense and security. These ways must have social credibility and power equivalent to military service, and they will have this power only if they call for heroism even to the supreme sacrifice of laying down one's life on behalf of others.

Just as people have invented and developed military science and the arts of war, together civil society can invent and then systematize a working alternative to war service, which we can call peace service. Peace service must be able to provide political and economic security or it is a useless idea. Further, it must do this by means other than killing, destroying, and impoverishing. And it must have some clearly recognizable contours. Peace service will not simply happen, nor will it appear in fully developed form. In fact, military service and peace service already coexist. Military service is professionalized and has a high degree of social acceptance, while peace service is diffused in society and has no commonly accepted clear definition or description. Each of the two terms *peace*, and *service*, requires a commonly held description or definition if peace service is to become a social reality. I propose that we think of peace as both a *context* and a *way of acting*.

Peace as Context

Think of a happy experience of early childhood, or some blissful experience in adult life in which peace was experienced. We know peace as a context when we have it, and its absence when we do not have it. The experience of peace as context is dependent on the sheer gift of someone wanting us to be happy, and on our capacity to accept the gift and to trust the giver. This is true even if we are alone, experiencing peace in some place of great natural beauty. Even in such a situation our peace depends on others who directly or indirectly enable us to be in that lovely place. The place might have been otherwise; it could have been degraded by pollution or made uninhabitable by war or simply inaccessible to us for political reasons or entrenched prejudice.

From this simple exercise in identifying a personal experience of peace we can draw an important conclusion: peace is always relational. **As a context, peace is that environment in which all parties spontaneously want one another's welfare.**¹ Notice that in describing peace as a context, war has not been mentioned. It is taken for granted that war is excluded from the notion of peace as a context in which all parties want one another's welfare, but peace is more than the absence of war, it is the presence of a dynamism of good will tested by actions on behalf of others.

Peace as Action

This brings us to peace as *action*. Peace is action that is the opposite of violence. Violence, too, is action, but action to injure, to destroy, to break down, to kill. War is a particular kind of violence. War is a socially organized and legitimated lethal form of violence but not the

¹ Michael Nagler. "Redefining Peace," The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists (November 1984). P. 37.

most lethal, measured in terms of victims. Forms of institutionalized violence, such as racism, unjust tax structures, unfair wages, and other entrenched policies and practices result in disease, malnutrition, infant mortality, and other avoidable kinds of suffering, claiming more victims than war.

Peace as action is counter to all kinds of violence. Peace is action to heal, to build, to enliven, to foster life and well-being. This notion is expressed in the saying, "There is no way to peace; peace is the way." Without peace as action as a constant dimension of human life, the human race would have vanished from the planet. Once we see peace as action opposed to violence, we can more readily understand the broad scope of peace service. Peace service embraces all those actions that go counter to violence, that displace violence by an alternative. Peace service also includes those activities that prevent violence before it erupts, and also those actions that address the root causes of violence. Peace service requires the development of specific skills needed in different kinds of peace service, along with imagination, courage, perseverance, and a sense of humor, shown especially in not taking oneself too seriously.

Essential Characteristics of Peace Service

From a consideration of peace as context and peace as action we can derive essential characteristics of peace service. Peace is a quality of relationships, a quality that depends on a gift of mutual good will. Where peace is lacking, its restoration depends on at least one side taking an initiative to make peace. Often this work will take the form of forgiveness, that is, a willingness to let go of past injuries in order to create a new and better relationship. This, of course, is not easy and

depends on recognizing that forgiveness is a decision. In forgiving, a person decides not to let an injury determine one's response to that injury. Forgiveness is not an immediate release from the feelings of hurt from an injury, hurt that can be very intense which it comes from betrayal or violent action against oneself or those one loves deeply. Refusal to forgive leads to cycles of revenge and retaliation, bitterness, sadness, and depression. Refusal to forgive locks a person in the past, and keeps one from finding joy in the present and hope for a better future. A person who forgives is liberated from chains that bind and cripple.

Forgiveness makes peace possible, but it is only the beginning. Peace as a context or an environment requires a disposition of the heart, a quality of caring, a heartfelt feeling for solidarity, at least as an ideal worth one's best efforts. Above all, it requires a commitment to promote the common good, that environment in which there is a practical concern that all members of the group have their basic needs met, and the possibility of continuing human development of all persons as members of a larger whole. Peace service requires that this sensitivity to the larger whole include the earth of which we are a particularly responsible part. Peace as context is a work in progress, never to be completed, but at the same time peace is that on which the good life, personal and social, is fundamentally dependent. There is nothing that is more worthy of human endeavor.

An understanding of peace as context depends on a habit of reflection. Only then can we keep in focus the truth of peace as a work in progress, and thus avoid discouragement, and also avoid grabbing on to any and every activity that seems worthy, without any standards or criteria for judging whether a particular activity is the best way to work for peace. A habit of reflection about peace helps us keep in mind that peace is a transcendent good, beyond those things that satisfy our immediate material needs and our

cravings. Peace is fundamentally a gift. The first requirement is to open ourselves to it each morning and recall it throughout the day.² Experience of the gift of peace brings insight into ways of finding the path of peace by walking it. A habit of reflection on one's actions in relationship to overall goals and immediate objectives is an important factor in preventing debilitating discouragement or burnout, a hazard for anyone whose work is fired by noble ideals and who will often be in the position of opposition to the status quo.

Peace service is much broader than nonviolent engagement in situations of open conflict or violence. Peace service can cover a broad range of activities if they fulfill the following three requirements: first, they are activities actively contributing to the common good, and often in opposition to prevailing conditions which militate against it. Second, peace service holds to active nonviolence as a fundamental principle and practice. Nonviolence is here understood as the power of love and truth to change persons and situations in the direction of the common good. Third, peace service requires an habitual rhythm of reflection/action/reflection to help insure that it is meeting genuine social needs in good working relationships with others, as far as this is possible.

Education and Training for Peace Service

Clearly, peace service requires education and training. This training needs to take into account many factors: educational level, competencies in other fields, the particular kind of service goals a person has, and the opportunities for service available or to be created. The education and training itself will depend on a philosophy of

² Saint Francis de Sales

active nonviolence, and this itself will have an important part in the curriculum, including both a theoretical understanding and practice in actual situations. At a time when peace service has no clear profile in society, the development of proposals and experiments in education for peace service is itself a particular kind of peace service.

Peace Service and a Culture of Peace

A movement to promote peace service can be greatly strengthened by aligning peace service efforts with the movement to build a culture of peace.³ *Culture* here stands for all customary beliefs, social practices and material traits of a group, and depends on a people's ability to learn and transmit its culture to succeeding generations, all the while the culture is changing in relationship to new situations and experiences. The human quest for a "peace culture" is expressed informally in many ways, and is now promoted internationally by a resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations, which passed a resolution calling for a Decade for a Culture of Nonviolence and Peace for the Children of the World, 2001-2010. Placing peace service within the context of peace culture opens up vast possibilities for people of all ages, from small children to elders. It is not too soon to project ways of peace service training for those who will find their life's work in peace service which has as much social standing as many other kinds of professional service, each with its own specific standards and professional associations.

Mary Evelyn Jegen, SND

An Invitation for

³ Elise Boulding, *Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side of History*. Syracuse, NY, Syracuse University Press, 2000.

Reader Response

- On the basis of the essay's descriptions/ definitions of *peace as context* and *peace as action*, what kinds of actions qualify as peace service?
- Describe a peace service in which you or someone else has been engaged.
- What do you see as elements already in place in culture and society as foundations for peace service?

Email your answers to mejegen@yahoo.com or claradoyle@aol.com or mail to our address on page 6.

In the June Issue

The June issue of the newsletter will report on the GPS programs planned for 2003-04. These will include a conference on the relationship of Jewish, Islamic and Christian traditions to peace service, and a consultation on the development of a curriculum for education and training in peace service in colleges and universities.

Assalam Alykum

Peace Be with You

Writing about peace at the dawn of war is an irony, but then irony is so characteristic of the times we live in. As the age old debate concerning whether there can be “a morally justifiable war” looms, one is reminded of the debate between Arjuna, the brave warrior of Hindu mythology and Krishna, the deity who engages Arjuna in a long discussion concerning whether there can be a justifiable case for war and necessary evil.

Amidst a madness about to be unleashed in the Middle East, there are the voices of consciousness whose only desire is to promote the art of peaceful coexistence and to proclaim that the time has come to end intolerance, war and the desire to control others. These voices of consciousness are concerned citizens who neither control armies nor are “power brokers” but wish not to be among the silent multitudes, the observers of life and death possessed and drowned in the every dayness of life. The unfolding saga of human suffering leaves few choices for us, the question is not just “to be or not to be” but to be a participant or an observer. The choice before us therefore is how to be an activist and how to contribute in a manner that is both consistent with our chosen spiritual traditions and our given realities.

At a time when the gladiators are awaiting Caesar’s sign to kill or not to kill, those who are deeply pained by the circumstances find themselves with few choices. First, there is apathy, escaping into the maze of the hustle-bustle of life and make living a project unto itself. Second, there is a “touchy-feely” approach, an outcry for peace, love and while you are at it, cosmic consciousness. This battle seems to be seasonal, situation based and temporal in nature; today it is the Vietnam war and tomorrow the crisis in the Middle East, and while it is noble to be concerned, the temporality of such movements has been their biggest enemy. Although

I have been a participant in some of these peace marches and movements, knowing there is an “expiration date” for them has always been a source of anxiety and dissonance.

There is a third alternative, one which GPS has embraced, and perhaps above all it is this vision which attracted me to its mission, that is a systematic and methodical approach to establishing a *Discipline* which outlasts those who are concerned with it. The *Discipline* of peacemaking, conflict resolution and peaceful methods of negotiation as opposed to a discourse of power is a much neglected area of academic work and scholarship.

The “peace specialists” of the future may function in a variety of situations and circumstances. I see them as mediators, an alternative to lengthy legal battles, as marriage counselors and therapists, as social workers. I see them at the UN, the State Department and the Peace Corps. If the US is to recover from the harsh picture it has painted of itself in the post-Cold War era, it would have to be by presenting the other face of this great nation, one that projects its power of peace making, what Confucianism calls *Wen* (The Art of Peace Making) and the peace specialists of the future will be in a position to portray this much needed picture adequately.

The *Discipline* of peace making and conflict resolution, though in its infancy, promises great potential but the road between now and establishing such a *Discipline* and gaining recognition for it will be a long one. Friends, let us brace ourselves for a long journey ahead.

Mehdi Aminrazavi

GPS Board Welcomes New Members

The GPS Board welcomed three new members at the annual Board Retreat in Washington, DC, February 28 – March 2. Mehdi Aminrazavi of Manassas, VA, is an Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religion and the Co-Director of the Leidecker Center for Asian Studies at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, VA. Cecil Monroe of Youngstown, Ohio, is employed at a state facility for the developmentally handicapped and the President of the Board of Deacons at the First Presbyterian Church in his community. He started a program for inner city children called SONG (Supporting Our Next Generation). Irfan

Omar of Milwaukee, WI, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Theology at Marquette University. He has taught at several colleges and universities and his articles and book reviews have appeared in various scholarly journals. The GPS Board is greatly enriched by the presence of these new members.

The GPS Board wishes to acknowledge our gratitude to the three retiring board members, John Halpin of Cincinnati, OH, Mindy Reiser of Washington, DC, and Tricia Sullivan, of Poulsbo, WA, for their valuable contributions to GPS during their service as board members.

Global Peace Services USA

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The newsletter of Global Peace Services USA is published quarterly. GPSUSA is incorporated in the District of Columbia and is tax-exempt. Current Board members are: Mehdi Aminrazavi, Clara Doyle, John Eriksson, Mary Evelyn Jegen, Jean Martensen, Aura Martinez, Cecil Monroe, Irfan Omar, and Harry Yeide. We welcome contributions and comments. To contact us:

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