

“Pax Christi or Pax Romana?”

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Texts: Jeremiah 8: 8-13 and Matthew 5: 1-16

“Blessed are the peace makers”. I bet you didn’t know that this is the only time the word *peacemakers* is used in the entire Bible. “A peacemaker is literally the “one who reconciles quarrels.” This is opposed to a peace keeper, with whom we are much more familiar, whose role it is to keep the peace, typically with power, authority, and perhaps weaponry. Google peacemakers and you often will see images of people in uniform, usually with the UN insignia, holding an automatic weapon. I’m not here to debate whether or not peacekeeping forces are needed, but I am here to ask you to consider the difference between peace keeping and peace making. They are the entire difference between Pax Christi (the peace of Christ) and Pax Romana (the peace of Rome, or other nations). As Jesus people, we are called to Pax Christi.

In Jesus’ day, one could say that things were very peaceful in the Roman Empire. Of course, that is from one perspective. But for many Roman citizens, there was a great deal of peace, particularly in the center of the empire, Rome. Pax Romana was alive and well – for some. What folks failed to realize is that their relative peace came as the result of a highly trained, incredibly effective military, who ruled with an iron fist in much of the known world. Peace came at the end of a sword quite literally. Peace was

achieved by enslaving many others in the regions that were conquered by Rome.

Things in downtown Rome were pretty good – an era of unparalleled peace, but not so much elsewhere

In conquered regions, like ancient Palestine (from where Jesus came, and where he lived) it was quite another story. Peace would not be the way that Jesus' contemporaries would describe things. Rome's military was in that region of the world protecting Rome's interest, not that of the people who lived there. Meanwhile, taxes were quite high to support the military, and life was anything but peaceful for the people who lived with and around Jesus. Rome declared that there was peace in all the kingdom, but if allowed to speak freely, the people around Jesus would say quite another thing. While Rome triumphantly declared "Peace! Peace!", there was no peace for the people of Ancient Palestine.

In Jesus' day (and perhaps in our own?) many think that peace can be achieved through violence. Not only within the workings of nations, but even in our own homes. We have relative peace, I guess you'd say, but often it is temporary, false peace. Have you ever heard people say, "We will stop killing by killing"? Maybe it hasn't been said that directly, but many nations, including our own have sent forces to other countries to keep the peace through violence or the threat of it. "It is the way we think and it is in opposition to all great religious teachers. (Rohr, *Jesus' Plan for a New World: The Sermon on the Mount, p139*)" Our need for immediate control leads us to disconnect

the clear unity between means and ends. “We even name a missile that is clearly meant for the destruction of humanity a “peacekeeper”. From one perspective, perhaps that’s true. Maybe it is a peace keeper, but it’s no peace maker.

Jeremiah the prophet, from whom we read earlier, would say to our “peacekeeping” wars what he said to the leaders of Israel:

...Peace! Peace!
Whereas there is no peace.
They should be ashamed of their loathsome deeds.
Not they! They feel no shame, they do not even know how to blush
(Jeremiah 8: 11b-12a)

Jeremiah was speaking to his own nation about the crazy methods they were using to keep the peace. He noted that their actions would lead to their downfall. Consider whether or not this may be true today?

Lest you misunderstand, I’m not saying that peacekeeping forces are never appropriate, or that they are evil. Neither is Jesus, and neither is Jeremiah. But we’re still forced to consider the question of what their role is, what peace keeping means, and what our objectives really are. In the words of Richard Rohr, “War is a means of seeking control, not a means of seeking peace. *Pax Romana* is the world’s way of seeking control and calling it peace...[But you see] violence will always create more violence, but it creates violence on the edge, (in the case of Rome) out in the colonies (Rohr, p140).” *Pax Romana* calls what it has at the center peace, yet the violence has

merely been exported to the edges. It is no real peace. Our rich suburbs with security entrances are evidence of the same today. Father Rohr quotes Pope Paul VI saying, “There is no true peace without justice.”

Justice is foundational to peace making. In fact, Jesus defines peace differently than did most in his day (and most in our day, for that matter). “We call it *Pax Christi*, the peace of Christ. “In the remaining Beatitudes Jesus will connect his peace with justice and self-sacrifice. The *Pax Romana* creates a false peace by sacrificing others; the *Pax Christi* waits and works for true peace by sacrificing the false self of power, prestige and possessions (Rohr, p140).” This will never become national policy of any country. It is unlikely to espoused by any political party of any country at any time. Neither will peace making ever be popular. But for the follower of Jesus, peace making is the call and those who truly follow Jesus in this way will always be in the minority.

Peace making, like everything Jesus ever teaches us, is a lot tougher than the ways of the world. It’s hard to make peace – even in our own families, church systems, places of employment, or our neighborhood. It’s much easier to keep peace with rules, regulations, dominance, weapons,...violence. Does it not seem strange that the way most people make peace is through violence. If they/we can neutralize that one person, or that one group, then we’ll have peace. “At the extreme end, if the other can be determined to be wrong, guilty, unworthy, sinful or ‘not innocent’ in any way, it is apparently acceptable to kill them (Rohr, p141).”

That entirely misses the ethical point that Jesus is making: We are *never* the sole arbiters of life or death, because life is created by God and carries the divine image. And yet, we continue to use violence to make peace. Our call is to be less violent. We are called to be peace makers – people who find just solutions to problems wherever possible.

Making peace is never easy, often it is not popular, and it takes more work. However, it is a peace that will endure – a peace that is of God. It's time for us to stop crying "Peace! Peace!" when our peace is surface and illusory, and instead work that deep peace for all people and all of creation.

"Blessed are the peace makers; they shall be recognized as children of God."

Amen.