

## A response to a paper on peacebuilding by Ken Casey from World Vision US. November 1999

My Response by email:

Ken,

Thank you for including me in this. I cannot resist joining the discussion. First, an area of agreement:

You say:

<<We need the benefit of a new mental model which sees peacebuilding -- the restoring of relationships -- as part of the warp and woof of all we do as an organization.

At its core, the work of World Vision could be characterized as restoring relationships. The absence of right relationships is both the cause and consequence of the poverty we seek to address.>>

I wonder if even you realise how profoundly true these two statements are.

First, this is a question of values. And since our values spring from faith, it is a theological issue. Our mental model, our theology, must be one that is deeply rooted in an understanding of the peacebuilding nature of the Mission of God in the world. The primary purpose of man(kind) is to love God and enjoy Him forever. The greatest commandment is to love God. We begin here. So it is a spiritual (values) issue. What we **believe** about peacebuilding is the central issue. This implies some connection needs to be made with the Spiritual Enrichment thrust if we are to make a difference.

Second, issuing from a right relationship between us and God, will be a right relationship between the organisation and God, and a right relationship between our purpose and God's purpose. From this will result ministries that result in the restructuring of society as a whole, making society (the way people organise in community) more consistent with God's love and will. To paraphrase your last sentence, the absence of right relationships between the way human society is structured and the way God wants it to be structured, is both the cause and the consequence of the poverty we seek to address. Thus, springing from the experience of lives lived loving God, comes **anthropological** change.

If this seems still unclear, forgive me. I'm wrestling with issues that are quite complex and obscured by the taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs that result from living **within** the very societies which need to come under the judgement of the Gospel. Let me try to keep going...

Third, anthropologically speaking, the Lederach structure takes the structures of human society as given and normative. Jesus did not. The Gospel does not. Lederach's model implies we Christians need to work for change by engaging in the structures of society at all three levels. Jesus did not. Indeed, the Gospel message is that levels 2 and 3 are human inventions, without Divine authority. Render unto Ceasar that which is Ceasar's, but the rhetorical question implied by Jesus is "But what authority does Ceasar have compared with the Son of Man?" Jesus consistently attacks the authority of human leadership structures. The power of the Gospel since has been to continually undermine and weaken the authority of these structures until we find ourselves living in a time where, world-wide, ordinary people have almost no faith in political or religious leadership any more. A thousand years ago, a Pope could persuade Crusaders that his call to war was Divinely authorised. No modern

leader could do this, and those that try have to fall back on weaker myths of nationalism or ethnic superiority. We are seeing how weak these are in forming and unifying societies.

If we interpret the Gospel to say that human authorities have Divine authority (as many do) then the Lederach model works. The problem is not the structure itself, only that the people within the structures need to be more in tune with God's will. For more than 20 years I have observed through our ministry that this simply does not work. The structures themselves are evil. It might reasonably be said that they are the work of the Great Deceiver, the Devil himself, since they so effectively deceive us into believing the illusion that we can make them work.

I look back on the great work in the South Pacific of Moral Re-armament. Almost all the leaders of the late 20th Century in the South Pacific were Christians impacted by MRA. Almost all spent time in places like Coe, Switzerland, or in Bible Colleges in the South Pacific under the mentorship of great Christians like Gil MacArthur (who was our first World Vision South Pacific field director where he continued to mentor and advise Prime Ministers and Presidents of South Pacific nations). If ever there was a chance for real Christian leaders to show the world a new and better way, here it was. Almost to a man, they failed. Nationalistic military coups in Fiji, corruption in Papua, oppression and scapegoating of minorities like the Bougainvilleans, the aggrandisement of one's own tribe -- all perpetrated by deeply committed Christians schooled in the values of Christian leadership. Why? My conclusion is that the world's system of leadership and governance is not God's system. It corrupts even the most faithful. Tom, does it offend if I suggest that the Washington Prayer Breakfast Movement is based on the same false premises?

I see plenty of evidence for this interpretation in the life of Christ. He did not enter the existing political system to reform it from within. He did not try to become the perfect Roman Governor, nor the perfect Chief High Priest. Indeed, he ignored such structures except to (a) attack them, and (b) casually disobey them (what we would call "passive resistance" -- if we overlook a certain Temple table-tossing event).

To rush to a conclusion: The implication of such a theology is that World Vision's primary work **is** at Level 3 (where Jesus worked and related mostly), and that its secondary work is in advocating the wholesale destruction of structures of political oppression. And replace them with what? That is, of course, the tougher question. And I am struggling here, more than elsewhere in this train of thought. Yet, it might be the most important question the human race faces. And the answer might lie back in your opening reflection -- if we discovered the more profound depths of our spiritual nature through learning to love God with our whole mind, body and strength -- what then?

Humbly submitted,  
Philip