

INTEGRAL MISSION AND VIOLENT CONFLICT: JOURNEYING TOWARD SHALOM

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Through Christ,
God has claimed us as friends
and granted us peace.
God has given us the ministry
of reconciliation.¹
Amen

Mission does not begin when violence ends. Violent conflict is not the exception but the usual context in which the people of God are called, and always have been called, to bless the earth. The question before us, then, is not, *Can* we do Integral Mission in the midst of violent conflict? But, *How* do we do it? We are to seek the Kingdom, love our neighbours as ourselves and make friends of enemies, in the middle of threat and anxiety, surrounded by enemies, in all the risk, complexity and uncertainty of here and now. If we are not prepared to do Integral Mission in the midst of violent conflict, we are not prepared to do it at all.

I am not going to explain how to do, or how not to do, Integral Mission in contexts of violent conflict. I can't do that. I don't believe anyone can. There are no recipes or best practice templates we can develop and transfer to different contexts.² Integral Mission is always incarnational. It is embodied and organic. Like yeast or a seed, it germinates, grows, tastes and looks different in each place and at each time.

What I will do is reflect on my own experience in contexts where violent conflict is acknowledged, and in contexts where violence masquerades as peace.³ I do this conscious

¹ 2 Corinthians 5.18

² Having said this, Mary Anderson's insightful books are essential reading for anyone involved in development or relief work. Mary Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace - Or War* (London: Rienner, 1999); Mary Anderson and P. Woodrow, *Rising from the Ashes: Development strategies in times of disaster* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1998).

³ Most of my stories are from Afghanistan and Australia because that is where I have lived. Afghanistan and Australia are not 'representative' countries in any way. Nor are my stories intended to represent these countries in any sense.

that some among us, and others remembered by us, have sought peace within depths of violence I hope never to glimpse.

In telling these stories, I assume four things.

1. *Integral Mission inhabits the tension between present realities and the promises of God.* We need to keep our feet firmly planted on the ground so that we see the world as it is and engage the challenges of our day. At the same time, we are not bound by what is, but need to look through and beyond the present to imagine the future we are called to. We practice Integral Mission by living in ways that anticipate and embody that future and join with God in bringing it to life. I think of Integral Mission as Journeying toward *Shalom*.⁴
2. *The shape Integral Mission takes is determined by its context.* Where violent conflict is obvious to everyone, Integral Mission transcends cycles of violence to bring people back into relationships where they can recognise their common humanity, focus on things that unite them, break free from the past, and, together, imagine and work towards a shared future. In these contexts, peace makers are recognised. Where violent conflict is entrenched in and hidden behind cultural, political and economic systems, Integral Mission involves exposing and challenging violence that many people cannot see. In these contexts, peace-makers are called trouble makers.
3. *Scripture can and must inform Integral Mission.* This is not as simple as it sounds. The Bible is not a set of doctrines and instructions. It is a long and complicated story written by real people who struggled to follow God in real-life situations characterised by uncertainty, pain, conflict, and violence. Most of the Bible was written by people who, in one way or another, were persecuted and oppressed, people preoccupied by survival. Once we realise this, we can read ourselves into their stories and read their stories into our lives. We remember *we* were slaves in Egypt. *We* ruled in Pharaoh's court. *We* remember Jerusalem from Babylon. Jesus commands *us* to love *our* enemies and pray for those who persecute *us* while *we* experience *real* persecution and fear *real* enemies.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom* (Philadelphia, United Church Press, 1976) explores the biblical concept of *Shalom* further. The motif 'Journeying to Shalom' was inspired by his words: 'The origin and destiny of God's people is to be on the road of *Shalom* which is to live out of joyous memories and toward greater anticipations' (p16).

Read this way, the Living Word questions us, convicts us, and inspires us to participate with God in changing the world.

4. *While relief, development, evangelism, advocacy and peace-making initiatives can be important steps toward Shalom, they are not our main task.* It is not enough to balance relief, development, advocacy, conflict-resolution and evangelism activities in a holistic contextually responsive integrated way. To stop there is to ‘heal the wound of my people lightly’, to cry ‘Peace, peace!’ when there is no peace, and to risk replacing one form of violence with another. Integral Mission anticipates a world in which relief, development, advocacy, conflict-resolution and evangelism programs are not needed. We are to live our prayer: *They kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.* Amen.

To help keep this broader perspective, let us pause and remember the future. Remember the pictures prophets drew of how God has said the world *will* be but is not yet. Imagine. Imagine a world in which all have enough and none too much, in which all people enjoy the fruit of their own labour, rest beneath their own vines and fig trees, eat the crops they tend and live in the houses they build. The streets resound with the laughter of children. Grandparents live out their days in peace. No one dies prematurely. Depression does not exist. Truth is spoken in the public square and judgements make for peace. Swords are beaten into ploughshares, spears into pruning hooks. No-one learns war any more. Relationships are balanced, difference respected. No-one makes any one else afraid. The fields yield their fruit and the skies their dew in season. Creation is cherished. Well-being is enjoyed by all that is.

Remember. Imagine. Imagine *Shalom*.

Learning to Listen, Learning to See: Stories of Hidden Violence

I began by saying that violent conflict is the usual context in which the people of God are called to bless the earth. The challenge many privileged Christians face is that we can’t see much of the violence and fear that pervade biblical and contemporary worlds. Our experience and cultures blind us to questions of power and privilege, injustice and oppression. When we experience the world as good and safe, we presume the world is good

and safe for everyone. It isn't. If we are not sensitive to violence entrenched in cultural, political and economic systems, we will be complicit in it, and our aid and development projects will be more likely to destroy *Shalom* than to build it.

How can we learn to see violence that surrounds us but doesn't touch us? Attending to the stories of people who feel this violence can help. Listening, however, doesn't just happen. It is something we must choose to do and work at. Vulnerable people are pushed to the margins of life. Their voices are often silenced or ignored. They speak softly, even through silence. Yet, if we have ears to hear, their whispers and their silences are all around us, both in the world and in the Bible.

A Story of Violent Peace

In 1997 I was invited to evaluate a development program in central Afghanistan. I walked for days through remote mountain valleys, asking groups of people to describe their lives, the best times, the worst times, why one time was better or worse than another. I asked them what they dreamt of and what they feared. What would they like life to be like? Over and again, this is what I heard: 'During peace time the government takes half of your grain, the best of your animals, your rugs and yoghurt. They take your sons as labourers and your daughters as maids. They take all you have and give nothing back. They expect you to be grateful. During war time, the government cannot tax you. If you are unlucky, you may be looted, your crops burnt, your sons killed. But perhaps the war won't come your way. You may lose one or two sons as soldiers but, God willing, you will be able to feed and clothe your other children. During peace, the cities grow fat while farming families grow food and starve. In war time, no-one is fat but we starve last. We long for peace, but not any peace....'

Listening to stories like this is not easy. They reveal sides of our own history we prefer not to see.

I like to think of myself as a peace-maker. This story tells me that I have benefited from and perpetuate violence. Not intentionally, not consciously, but through the unquestioned patterns and habits of daily life. Listening is confronting. Stories like this confront me, a Christian development practitioner, because so much Christian aid and development depends on and perpetuates systems and structures which maintain my privilege and do

violence to the poor. They confront me, a privileged person, because they remind me that establishing *Shalom* is primarily the responsibility of well-off powerful people like me.⁵ We expect the poor to change, to adapt again and again to changes imposed on them, while we stay comfortably as we are. The Biblical witness is that the poor are poor not, primarily, because of their own sin, but because of the sin of past and present idolatrous generations who claim that resources belong to those who accumulate them, rather than to those in need.⁶ If I listen long enough, I am compelled to confront the violence hidden within my own nation, my own church and my own heart.

A Story of a Road that Wasn't Made.

During a series of village meetings facilitated by our community development team, villagers unanimously decided that a road was the most pressing priority for their village. An action plan was devised with the village supplying labour and locally available materials and the project contracting technical expertise and providing resources beyond the village's reach. When the time came to begin work, villagers who had eagerly voted for a road were nowhere to be found. Why? We asked village men, one or two at a time, working in their fields, collecting water, riding their donkeys or walking to town. We asked women, younger women in their houses, older women guarding watermelon fields. We heard the same story again and again. 'What is a road to us? What use are trucks or tractors to us? Road or no road, we travel by foot or by donkey. A road will only make our donkeys' feet sore. But if a road is built, who will maintain it? Will a tractor-owner or land-lord lift a spade? They will say, 'This is your road, the people's road.' And our children will go hungry while we repair 'our road', a road we never wanted. Why didn't we speak in the village meetings? Who do you think we work for? Truck-owners, land-lords... people who want the road!'

⁵ Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision*, 21: 'Shalom in a special way is the task and burden of the well-off and powerful. They are held accountable for *Shalom*. The prophets persistently criticized and polemicized against those well-off and powerful ones who legitimized their selfish prosperity and deceived themselves into thinking it was permanent.'

⁶ Contrasting forgiveness of sin with deliverance from political oppression divides religious and political spheres in an impossible way. Sinfulness is simultaneously political, social, religious, and so forth. Non-poor people need deliverance from sin as much as the poor, not just from personal individual sin, but from sinful social, economic, cultural and political structures that bind and constrain with chains we can't feel.

I often remember this story and often retell it. Not everyone recognises the violence. There are no guns, no beatings, and no imprisonment involved. To most of us, roads are self evidently good. Few of us empathise naturally with daily labourers for whom death shadows every day worked without pay.

It still bothers me how close we came to building that road. If we hadn't lived in the village and only visited occasionally... If we hadn't asked people individually or if the people we asked hadn't known and trusted us... If we had worked mainly through village elders... If we hadn't had time to put the pieces together... If our donors had been anxious for results... If our team had wanted to achieve something tangible... If our own desire for a road had led us to convince people that they were wrong, that they really did need the road they thought they didn't want...

A Story of the Price of Wheat

I travel from the village to spend a day in town with another aid and development organization. Conversation extends over an elaborate meal: bread, meats, salad, yoghurt, sweets, and strong black tea. I listen as my colleagues bemoan the price of bread and describe how they lobbied the government to legislate a lower price and how they hope to import free flour. I return to the village that night and sit beside exhausted neighbors, men who trudged 30 hot dusty kilometres to the bazaar and 30 hotter dustier kilometres back, their donkeys staggering under loads of wheat, 70 kg, unsold. We share bread, tea and silence. What can they say when the price of wheat is lower than production costs and they have nothing else to sell, nothing except their children. What can I say? What will I tell my friends in town? They are not bad people and I am their guest. I say nothing. What will I tell my agency, my church, my other friends in countries that donate wheat? They are not bad people and they mean well. I say nothing.

Living with a poor agrarian community while maintaining friendships with middle class urban Afghans allowed me to observe how charity (doing things *for* the poor or marginalised rather than *with* them) protected middle class people while perpetuating the exclusion of the poor. I learnt that apparently impartial systems and laws don't treat everyone the same. Unfortunately, I didn't use my friendships well. I told stories people wanted to hear, stories they asked for, mostly stories of Australia. My stories made rich

Afghans feel discontented and poor. They did nothing to help my middle class friends understand what it *felt* like to be poor. By keeping silent, I denied them the chance to change.

Neither did I tell the right kind of stories to city-based expatriate workers in Afghanistan or to friends and family in Australia. In Afghanistan, my tales of village life rarely drew connections with Afghanistan beyond the village. In Australia, my Afghan stories drew few connections between Afghanistan and the wider world.

Why did I do this? Was I afraid of being too confrontational? Was it because I didn't know how to tell the truth without condemning people? Was I afraid to move beyond helping the poor to ask, Why are the poor so poor? Was I afraid of questions that might challenge my comfort and security? Or was it that I didn't really believe in the possibility of change? Did I have too little faith?

I wonder. How might we share stories that confront yet do not condemn, that expose violence in ways that open the possibility of transcending it?

What Bible stories do we tell and how do we tell them? Christian communities who have all their physical needs met and have little immediate experience of violence tend to read the pain and injustice out of the Bible and focus on things that are positive or personal or spiritual. Reading the Bible selectively lets them assume that God promises things few people experience. What would happen, I wonder, if our nativity plays included the wails of Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted? What would happen if our churches sat with the grief of Hebrew slave-mothers and with Egyptian families mourning their first-born? How would the world change if our congregations attended more to the pain of God, so vividly portrayed by the prophets, God's heart torn apart by a people who claim to worship God yet ignore the most vulnerable of God's children?

Seeds of Peace – Integral Mission and Overt Violence

Overt violence always superimposes underlying injustices and always interacts with dynamics of power and privilege, domination and subordination, inclusion and exclusion.

If we engage only the surface of things, the violence we see, our efforts to build peace may only produce more sophisticated forms of violence.

I remember heated debates among humanitarian workers in Afghanistan, Does relief do more harm than good? Do humanitarian interventions only prolong violent conflict and result in more suffering? Do we make it easier for local leaders to go to war and stay at war by relieving them of civic duties and alleviating the suffering they cause? Does our presence camouflage the way external economic and political interests drive the war? Should we accept relief funds from groups who support, however indirectly, the warring parties? Should a charity working with disabled people accept money from groups who manufacture landmines? When fighting escalates, should we continue working, exposing our teams to immediate danger, or, should we wait for the situation to improve? What will suspending projects cost participating communities? What might it cost our Afghan colleagues, many of whom fear unemployment more than the immediate dangers of war?

In Afghanistan, as in the Bible, Spring is the time that kings go out to war

One Spring I walk with five Basic Veterinary Workers to a bazaar several hours away to buy animal medicines. Sahmatali insists we wait at every village while he drinks tea with men of other ethnicities. I grow impatient: Will we reach the bazaar before it closes? Sahmat explains: Enemies make themselves. You have to work to make friends.

A few months later, I visit the veterinary office of an international agency in town. Things have changed and I only recognise one face, Mohammed Daood.⁷ Briefly alone with Daood, I ask, 'Why so many Pashtun's in a non-Pashtun area? Your office used to have every ethnicity, now you are the only non-Pashtun left.' Daood Whispers, 'Staff are appointed in Pakistan. The Director is Pashtun.' 'But what about the expatriate Director?' 'What would he know? He signs off on a list of names: Mohammed this, Ali that, Hafiz something else... Even if he visits, we all look the same to him...' 'But this is wrong! There must be something we can do!' 'No, no... Please don't do anything. I'm not afraid exactly, but...'

A year later in the village, Sahmat's oldest brother is called out of the graduation ceremony for his adult literacy course. He returns moments later, ashen faced. 'Taliban

⁷ Not his real name..

has taken Mazar. We are dead men.’ The following days are tense: fields empty, streets deserted. No children play. Even the animals are silent. People huddle in fear-filled rooms. I listen. Nobody leaves the room, nobody enters, yet news arrives that Taliban are looting, raping, plundering nearby villages – we are all going to die. We wait. And wait. Nothing happens.

My neighbour’s son and 20 other village boys are on military duty in town. Their mothers and grandmothers weep: No body to wash. No burial prayers. No grave. ‘How do you know your sons are dead?’ ‘Who could survive Taliban?’ Days pass and slowly, one by one, night by night, the lads return: thin, hungry, footsore, alive. My neighbour’s son sought cover the moment Taliban entered town. He didn’t move for days—Talibs were everywhere—then he sneezed. Instead of killing him, the Talibs gave him food and water and told him when it was safe to leave. He tells the village, ‘We don’t need to fear Taliban, not all of Taliban. The soldiers I met were village lads. They know how to plough, they have donkeys, they grow wheat. They are just like me, like us. They don’t want to fight. They just want to go home.’ Every returned soldier tells the same story. But Taliban is the enemy and the enemy is always evil. No-one listens.

A week passes. Two weeks pass. I spend hours lying on the floor. I read Primo Levi, slowly, one word at a time, rationing the pages. Mostly I do nothing. I don’t think. I don’t pray. I don’t eat. Each day one of my Afghan colleagues delivers the same message: ‘The agency brought our families here. The agency must get us out. Tell them to send a helicopter’. Every day I give the same answer: ‘I will radio the agency and tell them what you said. They are as concerned for you and your families as they are for me. We have a car that can carry both your families any time you decide to leave.’ ‘And our belongings?’ ‘We are ten people and one car. ‘When I radio the agency, they remind me to evacuate with the agency’s belongings, the radio and solar system. They ask if I want the Red Cross to evacuate me from Mazar. A choice no Afghans have.

Taliban comes. Six years pass. Sahmatali, the peace-maker, is one of the two village men killed in those six years.

These stories raise many issues: the quiet commitment of local people to relationships that make for peace; the potential for development programs to exacerbate divisions; the

power of fear; the way enemies are constructed; the potential for empathy and kindness to bridge enemy lines; the implicit messages development agencies send about who and what they value; the cost of making peace.

Have you noticed the contrast between the way Jesus sent his disciples out and the way Christian relief and development workers often operate? Jesus' disciples' approach was one of radical vulnerability, utterly dependent on the hospitality of those who received them. They traversed a harsh violent landscape with nothing but the clothes they wore, the staffs they carried, the sandals on their feet. They went as sheep among wolves, expecting to be betrayed, hated, and persecuted. Death was a real possibility and they were not to fear it.

Why is it, then, that if a Christian relief or development worker is injured or killed, we ask: Who slipped up? Who was negligent? What security protocols and policies need changing? When I worked in Afghanistan, Australian Christians asked me, 'How can you go to Afghanistan? Isn't it much too dangerous?' The question is, Too dangerous for whom? Are our lives more valuable than theirs? How can we do Integral Mission isolated from local people and insulated from the realities of their lives? Does the way Christian NGOs work foster respect, trust and solidarity, or does it reinforce violence and legitimate the use of force to protect us (but not them) and to achieve our goals (not theirs). What do our cars, our equipment, our evacuation and insurance policies convey about where *we* find security and in what or whom *we* trust? Do we claim to work for peace yet work in ways that undermine the foundations of peace? What do we convey if we, who have the ministry of reconciliation, fly out of trouble spots whenever things get really nasty? How do we embody the Good News in violent contexts if we always leave them? What price are we prepared to pay to live toward the kingdom—or to die for it?

At the same time, before we enter or remain in danger, we need to ask what our presence is likely to achieve. In situations of open warfare, it is rarely possible to do much work. Is just being there the point? Is our role to share the vulnerability and the pain, to witness the other side of the story, to tell the story? Local people may risk their own lives to protect a 'guest' or may be suspected for associating with outsiders, particularly if the outsider is Western.

Integral Mission and the Image of God: Constructing Enemies or Making Peace

Taliban retreats south in Spring 1997. In their wake, a different warlord rules each corner. Everyone with a gun does what is right in his own eyes. As I walk to the office, young men who once lowered their eyes respectfully, and old men who once raised hands in welcome and peace, spit and glare open hatred. Some pass a finger across their throats, an eloquent pantomime of slaughter. Even the gentle bread seller mutters, 'Now you've lost your big white cars you know what it's like to go on foot like the rest of us.' I protest, 'I have always walked... Every time I buy bread from you, you see me walk ...' And then I realise, I am no longer the neighbour who buys bread. I am the face of evil, the enemy. I am America, the people behind Taliban. Or so everyone thinks. I feel hurt. I am very frightened. At the same time, I understand the resentment and hatred. I work for an NGO: cars help us work efficiently, safely and comfortably. I also walk through the dust and mud and listen enough to know that cars symbolise power and conspicuous wealth, and that travelling in white cars conveys messages of separation, superiority, mastery and immunity. How you interpret cars all depends on whether you ride in them or splutter in the dust, fumes and heat they leave behind.

Two years later, the guns are all gone. Taliban rules Mazar. I take a taxi to the airport. People crowd in the shade outside the gate, men closer to the road, chaddari-clad women further away. I ask the closest man, 'Uncle, Would you tell me which way to go?' He ducks his head and flicks his eyes to the white turbaned guard at the gate. Of course, Taliban. I turn to the women but they flinch away, veils rustling. I approach the Talib, head lowered respectfully, and ask, from a respectful distance, 'Brother, Which way should I go?' He doesn't answer. He must have heard me. I raise my eyes. The Talib is looking straight through me. He does not see me. He cannot see me. I do not exist. For a moment I am stunned: So this is what it feels like to be invisible. This is what it feels like to be nothing. Then rage sweeps through me: How dare he! I lift my head and glare straight in his eyes. The silence is intense. The waiting-watching people don't breathe, don't move. The Talib looks straight ahead. My rage wanes slightly: What am I doing? What am I trying to prove? Whom am I going to hurt? I lower my eyes and step back. The watching-not-watching crowd breathes again. I am as shaken as I was angry: So that's what hatred tastes like. Where did it come from? Was it within me all along? But I

am a Christian --I love my enemies, I pray for those who persecute me! How could I hate someone so quickly? How could rage consume me so completely? What, but for the grace of God, might I have done? What, but for the grace of God, might I have caused?

In *The Journey Toward Reconciliation*, Jean Paul Lederach explains that we ‘construct enemies’ in several stages. At first, all that happens is that I look at the other person and focus on our differences rather than on what we share. Second, I view their difference in a negative way. I decide that they are a threat to me, that they are wrong. Third, I begin to see myself as intrinsically better and more worthy than the other person. Fourth, I dehumanise the other person and erase, or refuse to see, the image of God in them. I no longer acknowledge that they, like I, am made in the image of God. Having done this, I need no longer accord my enemy the dignity, consideration or respect that I naturally accord other people. They deserve no kindness. They have no rights. I feel no compassion when they suffer. I can commit atrocities against them and feel no guilt.

Reconciliation reverses that process. It begins by recognizing our common humanity, our sinfulness and our grace. It depends on recognizing the good in the other person: *We don't need to fear Taliban, not all of Taliban. They are just like me, like us. They don't want to fight. They just want to go home.* It depends on recognizing our own potential for evil: *What, but for the grace of God, might I have done?* Miroslav Volf calls this solidarity in sin.

Integral Mission calls us to recognise the image of God, not only in the poor, but also in those we fear most, the very people who have killed, maimed and tortured. This is not easy. At times I have seen a man (or a child) with a gun as the epitome of evil. I have looked into their eyes and seen blankness - a vacuum, emptiness. In other eyes I've seen fire - burning rage, burning hatred. I wonder what they saw in my eyes. The love and acceptance and grief of Christ? Or, the hard condemning stare of a Pharisee?

A Story of a Man who Forgave and a Story of Fathers Who Have No Choice

Wendy Strachan worked in Africa with Scripture Union. She describes how, during the prolonged war in Sierra Leone, rebels would storm into a village and ask, 'Do you want short sleeve or long sleeve?' Your answer determined whether the machete severed your arm at the wrist or the elbow. The people who did this were often children, children

abducted from their villages, trained, drugged, and sent back to kill and maim in their own villages. Wendy tells the story of Bambe, a man who forgave. Bambe was 15 years old when the rebels came into his village. They demanded money. There was no money. These were subsistence farmers - there was never any money. So they beheaded his father. Then they accused the villagers of protecting the soldiers from the government. And they beheaded his uncle. And then they turned to him. And they told him to put out his arms and he knew what was coming. By a miracle he got to a hospital where there were no bandages or medicine. By another miracle he was taken to another hospital. By a third miracle he survived. But the real miracle is this. Bambe told Wendy, 'I saw the person who killed my uncle and my father here in Freetown. Some friends found him in the streets and dragged him to me. I knew it was him. I knew my friends would kill him if I asked them to. But I thought, 'That could have been me. I could have done those things. I'm just like him.' Bambe wept as he spoke.

This miracle of forgiveness is born in acknowledging solidarity in sin: *That could have been me. I could have done those things. He is just like me.* Forgiveness transcends the cycle of violence and frees us to live toward a future not defined by the past.

Reconciliation is not just a question of bringing enemies together and repatriating soldiers back into society. It requires personal and social healing that respects the personhood and brokenness of combatants, their families, and their communities. It means recognizing that violence damages perpetrators as well as victims and that the sinners are often sinned against. Distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants is sometimes just another way of blaming the poor for being poor. Soldiers often come from the poorest sectors of their society. Not because poor people like fighting more than other folk but because they have fewer options, sometimes no option.

This year in Afghanistan I asked groups of rural people, 'Tell me about the last ten years? What happened? How has life changed? How do you feel about it?' They discussed the seasons, when it rained and when it didn't, when locusts came and when they didn't, a flood that swept crops away. Then they talked about conscription. 'People who can afford it, town people, send their sons to Pakistan or Iran so they don't get taken as soldiers. Some even send boys to America or Australia. But we need our sons to work

the fields so we can eat. The Northern Alliance took everything. If a commander saw a sheep he'd eat it. If he saw a healthy man, he'd take him. So we hid in the mountains, stayed out of the village, worked our fields at night, kept our heads low. Taliban were different. They took one sheep in ten and one man for 10 or 20 houses. They called the elders and told us to choose. So we raised money, all the money we could, and offered it to whoever would take it. The men who went were desperate, the poorest of men. They took the money, bought rice, oil, flour, gave it to their wives, kissed their children, and left. They knew they wouldn't come back. We see their widows and orphans and know they could have been our widows and our orphans. You say there is no conscription in your country? Who would fight if they had a choice?' I met a woman whose husband had gone with Taliban. She asked if I'd seen him among the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay. How many Afghan fathers, I wonder, gave their lives to feed their children and ended up in Guantanamo Bay?

Imagining the Future and Breaking from the Past

It is not always helpful to focus on the root causes of conflict because the things that keep conflicts going often have little to do with why they started, and because foot soldiers often find themselves trapped in conflicts they have no interest in and do not understand. Both Christians and Muslims in Sulawesi said, *'It feels as if someone else is pulling the strings... we are involved in fighting we never wanted and don't seem able to stop... It is being pushed from somewhere else or someone else outside of here and we don't know who they are or how they work.'*

Once fighting starts it is difficult to stop. Even war can become familiar and grief is involved in letting go of the world we know to embrace possibilities that seem terrifying and precarious.⁸ When rural communities in Afghanistan were asked to surrender their guns, their initial response was, 'But how can we do this? We have never lived without guns. Our weapons are dearer to us than our wives.' But they did surrender their guns, or buried them, and discovered new possibilities for freedom and society. One village elder told me, *'From my youth, my weapon never left my shoulder. It was part of me. You see*

⁸ Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision*, 46: 'Pain goes with giving up swords and spears and living with pruning hoods and ploughs.'

this man beside me. He is closer than a brother to me. Yet, with a gun in my hand and a gun in his, we were one against the other, forever trying to get each other in our sights. I would have killed him if I could and he would have killed me. People say many things about Taliban, but I will say this. When Taliban disarmed us, my neighbor became my brother again. We are no longer one against the other. Without guns, we live together, side by side.'

Combatants fear peace for diverse complex reasons. Men who grow up fighting lack other vocational skills: gun in hand, they command respect; without a gun, they fear being superfluous or indigent. Some combatants fear reprisal and punishment. Some continue killing to avoid facing up to what they've done. I am told that the face of the first person they kill stays with them forever. As they continue to kill, the memory of that face blurs behind the faces that follow. So, they keep killing to escape that first face.

Combatants struggle to imagine living beside neighbours they brutalised or betrayed. They fear being rejected, ostracised and despised. They can't imagine watching their own children grow knowing what dreadful things they've done. They fear that they might 'snap' and brutalise their or other people's children. For their part, communities also fear combatants. Yet, only by welcoming combatants is future peace possible.

Communities and combatants need safe social spaces where they know they are accepted and can find the courage to learn to dream and hope again. The shared hope for future generations can provide a space within which past enemies can relate and work together in the present. To build peace, both sides need to include their enemies in the process of imagining a way forward. They need to make space for their enemies in the futures they imagine. We need to remember that, '[T]he biblical vision of *Shalom* stands against all private arrangements, all separate peaces, all ghettos that pretend that others are not there....'⁹

Journeying Toward Shalom: Gift and Commitment

Brazil has the dubious distinction of being among the most unequal countries in the world. When a group of North Americans visited, Dom Helder Camara told them, 'If you

⁹ Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision*, 21.

*are appalled by what you see here, please don't try to start a revolution for us – a revolution from which you can flee when real bullets start flying. If you really want to help us, go back to your own country and work to change the policies of your government that exploit us and keep our people so poor.'*¹⁰

How does Helder Camara's advice apply to us? Our presence at this Consultation demonstrates that few of us are poor and few of us oppressed.¹¹ Might some of us contribute more by staying where we are and working for change among our own people? What influence might we exert where and how? Might company directors put aside questions of personal ambition and shareholder profit to think about how their corporations affect the world? Might theologians and ethicists focus less on abstract problems (such as the problem of evil or justification by faith) or quandary ethics (such as the moral rights and wrongs of stem cell research or torture) and examine the rarely questioned habits, systems and practices of societies that, cumulatively, shape the world? Might economists devise systems and structures that enhance life without relying on ever-increasing levels of consumption? Might parents think less about, 'What is in the best interests of my child?' and more about, 'How will the way my family lives shape that world?'

There are many paths to *Shalom* and many ways to travel them. God's Spirit gifts us with the ability to see the world as it is and to dream of the world made whole. Yet, we do not see perfectly, but through a glass darkly. Being committed to Integral Mission doesn't mean that we understand it all or can do it all. We are not experts who bring answers and solutions. We are disciples searching together to find and take the next step on the journey to *Shalom*. We are peace-makers, not the Prince of Peace.

¹⁰ Robert McAfee Brown, *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984) 44.

¹¹ Few of us think of ourselves as powerful people. Most of us inhabit privilege so naturally that we don't notice it is there. Yet, on global terms, if we are literate, if we are able to travel, if we regularly access running water, electricity, television or the internet, we are powerful. The question is, How do we relate to networks of power? How do we use the influence we have?

The Stories We Choose to Live By: The Story God Calls Us to Live

Our commitment affects the stories we ask for as well as those we tell. Asking people to tell and re-tell stories of personally experienced or personally perpetrated violence can make violence the defining reality when it needn't be. Save the Children psychologists working in Kabul expected children to be traumatized by and fear violence. They discovered that the children framed their lives, their hopes and fears, in terms of family relationships and the daily rhythms of life. They feared mad dogs and traffic police most, not bombs and rockets.

Re-telling violent stories keeps the wounds fresh and can delay healing. It can solidify trauma in personal and social memory so that experiences of violence shape and form individual and collective identities and become the framework for interpreting future experiences and engaging future realities. This perpetuates violence. Instead of defining ourselves by stories that divide, we can choose to live by a story we share.

The Bible's stories of violence and vulnerability, woundedness and healing, anger and grace, danger and salvation, despair and hope, articulate pain and make space for grief. But the Bible doesn't stop there. God's story transcends the cycle of violence through the miracle of forgiveness and resurrection love.

Susan Kiguli, a Ugandan poet, expresses this well.

Because I love this Land
I hold a thousand tears
in the cup of my skinny hand.

I carry ten thousand wails
in the deep hollows of my ears.

I host a million bloated babies
in the deep brown of my eyes.

I house ten million graves
in the curls of my thinning hair.

I have stored pouches upon pouches of pus
in the blisters of my heart.

So we do not talk about them; We do not sing about them.

How can we sing of things we do not know?

How will we sing about old men's guts eaten out by hunger,
old men's eyes closed for fear of watching axes tear the heads off their grandchildren?

How can we explain missing ears, lips, noses,
lone limbs traversing the land without their owners?

How can we ever talk about these things

without tumours of bitterness teeming in our hearts?
 No wonder we are silent.
 I will not talk about them
 I will talk of other things
 Of the man who hung naked on the tree and sweated sorrow for us.
 I will sing only of water and blood flowing out of a side and a voice that whispered
 'It is finished'.
 I can speak about glory
 wrapping darkness in a shroud
 and storing it in an eternal grave.
 I will dwell on love of a heavenly prince
 clothed in earthly tatters
 fighting swindlers in the temple of God.
 I will tell of a little child talking to bearded men about his Father's Love.
 I will sing about a risen Son and transcending peace.
 I will dance of the victory of love embracing love
 This is the only way I can ever walk upright.

The only way I can ever walk upright. The only story I can bear to tell. The story God calls us to live—a story in which violence does not have the final word.

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