

THE FAVORITE TEXT OF FAMOUS PEOPLE - Ralph Bunche

**“World Peace! Is It Possible?”**

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Isa. 2:4

A ten-year-old boy was asked by a sidewalk interviewer on television, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Such unhappy prospects as nuclear bomb explosions, guided missile attacks, radioactive fallout and similar terrors had apparently made an impression on the boy. Simply, earnestly, wistfully he answered, “Alive!”

All of us join him in his wish. The love of life runs deep in the human soul. Some of us would want to add that of equal, if not greater importance to us than just being alive, is the kind of world we will be alive in. Having said that, however, we would heartily concur with the boy in his eagerness to stick around and see what the future holds.

That this ten-year-old might have his wish, and that lads and lassies everywhere may be spared the calamity of a third World War, men of many tribes and nations have dedicated themselves to the pursuit of peace. One such stalwart servant of mankind’s fondest dream is America’s Under Secretary to the United Nations, Dr. Ralph J. Bunche.

Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and numerous other awards, for his work at easing world tensions, this grandson of an American slave has been guided in his high endeavor by a verse of scripture which laid hold of him as a lad in Sunday school. He tells about it in the following letter.

Dear Dr. Lavender,

I acknowledge receipt and thank you for your letter of December 7. Your kind sentiments are appreciated.

In response to your request I refer to the following passage from Isaiah:

“. . . and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither

shall they learn war any more.”

This impressed me deeply when I first read it in Sunday school. Later I used it in a High school oration. It is, of course, very pertinent to the aims of the United Nations. With Season’s Greetings, Sincerely yours,  
Ralph J. Bunche.”

Shortly after the cessation of World War II Americans answered a nationwide poll in which they indicated the one thing they wanted most. Leading all other longings by a country mile was the hunger for peace. Editorial comment upon this finding, in newspapers around the world, revealed that Americans were joined in their desire by people everywhere. Like the love of life, the love of peace runs deep in the human heart.

Admittedly, this dream of a world at peace is precisely that, a dream. But, as the poet observed,

“Men do not reach the stars  
By digging in the mud that murks the stream.  
Stars are reached by those who sing,  
Climb the ladder of a dream.”

Man is at his best when he wishes wisely and dreams well. It is in reaching for that dream that discovery, invention and progress are made.

This capacity to stretch one’s sight to encompass new horizons was implanted by God. He wants us to be dreamers in action. Through his son he has said, “Ask, seek, knock -- and you shall find.” So there’s nothing wrong with dreaming, least of all, dreaming of peace.

But some disciples of Jesus seem to feel that any effort expended in this noble cause is at cross-purposes with the plan of God.

“Don’t you realize,” Jesus said, “there shall be wars and rumors of wars?”  
they cry. “A Christian should not meddle in world affairs. To do so only brings aid to the anti-Christ. Peace cannot come through world government.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Our hope is in his coming. To attempt any alleviation of the threat of war merely delays his return. Things must get worse before they can get better. Leave well enough alone!”

So they look at that which is coming to pass upon the earth as if they really believe evil is good.

“The world is getting worse and worse,” they say, “praise the Lord!”

*What they apparently forget is that God did not intend it to be so! His purpose for mankind is peace. Whatever dream we have of a world without war was inspired by God himself.*

When Isaiah picked up scroll and stylus to write the cheering words of our text, he was motivated by God, not by Satan. This compelling dream of a world in which the tools of hate are turned into implements of help to mankind, found its genesis in heaven, not in hell.

Justice, equality, integrity, common decency, and those other qualities which make for peace, come from the heart of God. That they strike a responsive chord in the human soul is because he willed it so! God planted the hope for peace within us. It is heaven-inspired, not hell-begun, and that people should work for peace is not bad, it is good!

If the shadowy figures on our television screens do not deceive us, there was a time in America’s history when her citizens settled their disputes with six-shooters. In recent years, we have outgrown that. Now, when difficulties arise, instead of reaching for our holsters, we reach for our telephones and invite our neighbors into our home. Over a cup of coffee, perhaps, we seek to settle our disagreements in a civilized way. If that fails, and if the issue is of sufficient import, there is a court of law to which we may turn.

Surely no one would suggest that in striving for some such peaceful solution we are being sinful. That instead, we should buckle on our Colt 45 and attempt to outdraw our neighbor. No. Sensible men would say that in behaving peaceably we have sought, and found, the mind of God. If such logic holds for the individual, why not for nations? Why should earnest workers for peace

be caricatured, and made to seem sub-Christian, because they insist that when a dispute arises between nations, we should not slaughter human lives, squander natural resources, and smash society to bits, but should find some way of seeking an honorable and peaceful solution?

Basically, that is what the United Nations has been formed to do. It provides a place where opposing views can meet. A table around which adversaries can negotiate. The progress we should like to see is not always forthcoming. Sometimes the issues are so inflammatory, and the points of view so diverse, agreement seems well-nigh impossible. But at least while we are talking, and not shooting! In the process we are buying time. Time which is always on the side of peace.

Time to re-arm morally and spiritually.

Time to regain a sense of national and world purpose.

Time to gird our loins for a titanic economic contest with another governmental system.

Time to compete with ideas for the minds and loyalties of people.

Time to apply the enormous resources and creative capacity of America in aiding the underdeveloped nations of the earth in their struggle for a place in the sun.

Time to use our great agricultural potentials to feed the starving millions.

Time to show the so-called “little people” of the world that we care about them as persons.

Time to love others, as God through Christ Jesus has loved us.

Surely such an endeavor is not sinful! Surely God must find far less pain in the sound of verbal clashes around the conference table, than he would in the sight of a mass of mushroom clouds reaching up into the sky. Man’s dream of peace is *not* the product of the pit! It is *God*-inspired. It is *he* who gave Isaiah the vision of a world in which,

“Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.”

It is *he*, not the high priest of hell, who encourages those who earnestly and honestly work for that aim.

There is a second note which needs to be sounded, however, a note of realism. For the same God who inspired the dream of peace declares that this dream is almost certain to be thwarted.

Jesus said,

“. . . ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars . . . for such things must needs be . . . nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be earthquakes in diverse places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows.”

What a dreadful prophecy. How we wish it had not been uttered. Particularly by so dependable a Source. But Christianity is not a “head in the sand” religion. It does not gloss over man’s failings.

The Bible is a very practical book. It reveals human nature as it is, as well as how God intended it to be. The unfortunate fact of history is that though the dream of peace is God-inspired, man has failed to achieve it by stubbornly refusing to run God’s world in God’s way.

Our leaders have conjured up innumerable programs for peace, and have struggled valiantly to strike a tenuous balance between the volatile, and sometimes vitriolic, forces rampant in the world. But more often than not, they have been thwarted in their endeavors because they gloss over the hard-core of our problem, which is nothing more or less than our own wicked and sin-weakened nature.

The folly of this is illustrated in the mad tea party scene in “Alice In Wonderland.” The March Hare is concerned with his watch, which has stopped. He shakes it, opens it, finally dashes it in butter. Still it won’t go.

“I told you that butter wouldn’t help,” declares the Mad Hatter.

“But,” argues the March Hare wistfully, “it was the best grade of butter.”

Our endeavors are often like that, and they fail, not because our cause is wrong, but because our marrings are beyond any surface solution.

We heartily endorse all efforts by people of good will toward the easing of world tensions. We applaud their dedication, and welcome what success they secure. But even the best grade of diplomatic butter cannot repair the broken main-spring of mankind's spirit. The problem is too deep for that, and to place our hope on solving it in some creation of man's ingenuity, is to doom ourselves to disillusionment.

Two Indians watched a white man build a lighthouse near their reservation. After it was completed they stopped by one night to see it work. As the sun sank out of sight, a thick fog rolled in. The Indians watched for a while and then one said to the other,

“Ugh. Light shine. Bell ring. Horn blow. But fog come in just the same.”

Well, of course. The Indians missed the point! It was not the purpose of the lighthouse to stem the flow of this phenomenon of nature. It was not there to make fog *impossible*, but to give aid and comfort to those who were afflicted by the fog.

As long as we keep our striving for peace in proper context, and remember the United Nations was not raised to change man's nature, but to send a shaft of light against the darkness of his degradation, our frustration will not be so great.

We will know what Jesus knew, people being what they are, the chance of having world peace is mighty slim. This not because Jesus wants it that way. It is because our fallen nature makes it most likely that we will behave in a peaceful way. All of which led someone to say,

“We cannot have Utopia now,  
It's a waste of time to plan it:  
For if we had Utopia now,  
Where would we find the men to man it?  
You cannot work the Utopian plan  
Unless you have the Utopian man.”

In other words, we cannot successfully rebuild society without first going through the painful

process of being rebuilt ourselves. Our human nature must be changed. Before we can move into the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of God must move into us!

As Christians we are naturally committed to the propagation of peace. But in our pursuit of this goal, we must be careful not to impose Christian ideas and ideals upon people without also making an earnest effort to win them to a personal commitment to Christ *himself*. To do so, is to build on quicksand.

Society has been, and will continue to be, molded by the influence of Christians wherever and whenever they take their Lord seriously. But society will never be finally redeemed until each individual in it has been redeemed.

To have a new generation tomorrow, we must have a regeneration today. That better world for which we are seeking, can come about only when there are better people in it. People whose human nature has been changed, by the grace of God, through Jesus Christ.

Lyman Abbott, the early prophet of social reform, finally came to that awareness. In one of his last letters to his congregation he wrote:

“What I had once hoped might be done for my fellows through schemes of social reform and philanthropy, can be done only by the influence of Jesus Christ. There is no dynamo in reform, *save the cross of Calvary*” (Italics mine).

At the moment, Americans seem more concerned about *outer* space than they are about *inner* space. They seem more interested in *being* a savior, than in finding One. Insofar as we do find *the* Savior -- or more accurately are found *by* him, because Christ is not lost, *we* are! -- and are transformed, the heralds of peace will have another ally. And we will move one step closer to the time when, “Jesus shall reign where’re the sun does his successive journeys run . . .”

This leaves the matter squarely up to us. Peace must begin here, or nowhere. It must start with,

and spread from, individuals. It must find its roots in my heart, and your heart, before it can flower elsewhere. Thus it has been, and always shall be.

Big things have their roots in little things. Jesus knew that. Therefore, he found a handle on the major issues of his time in the minor actors on the stage about him. He did not waste his energy attempting to legislate righteousness in a large way. He changed the lives of the everyday people around him, and through them, the world.

As we face the staggering problems of our time, we would do well to heed his example. We must set about changing history by changing lives. We must tackle the problem at its base, by making sure of our own relationship with God. Then, assured of *that*, we must begin to share what we have in him, with others. In this simple, but effective way, the first century Christians turned the world upside down.

There is a story about Napoleon Bonaparte which records how, following a crucial battle, he distributed medals to all his men. On one side of the disk were engraved the date and place of the battle. On the reverse side were written the words, “I was there.” It seems to me those words can have special meaning for us. We live in a time of infinite danger, but it is also a time of infinite possibility. A time that demands our noblest and best. God grant that we shall live for it, and give to it. That we shall set about changing history, by changing lives. That we shall be peacemakers, by introducing men to Jesus, who is the Prince of Peace.

Should history show *this* to have been the time when the tide finally turned, and mankind generally made a move toward peace by individually and collectively making a move toward God, we will be able to say with gladness of heart, “I was there.” The vain babbling of a visionary? Perhaps. But Browning, blessed all such dreamers when he said,

“A man’s reach should exceed his grasp, or what’s a heaven for?”

And St. Paul, *God’s* dreamer in action, gave each of us heart when he wrote,

“We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.