

Mennonite World Conference Peace Commission Peace Poster, January 2013

Background

In 2011, the MWC Peace Commission conducted a “Peace Audit” of MWC member churches. In its May 2012 meeting, the Peace Commission reviewed the results of this “Audit.” Highlighted below are just a few of the comments recorded in the minutes of that meeting that serve to explain the initiative and the message for the Peace Poster. The minutes indicate that the “Audit” shows:

- 1) There has been resistance to using the word “peace” because of its association with movements that are secular social movements.
- 2) Our understanding of peace is not only different from the secular world, but also different from other churches.
- 3) Examples were given of the difficulty of combining peace and gospel, even in seminary curriculum.
- 4) How is the gospel understood in such a way that separates gospel from peace?

This discussion led the Peace Commission to affirm the need for a resource making the simple point that God desires that the world be reconciled (in every way). Peace (in every way) is the intention of God for the world. Peace is good news.

Key Features of the Peace Poster

1) Key message: “Peace is gospel”

- a) The prophet celebrates peace as good news:
Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace (Nahum 1:15)!
James links peace with righteousness (justice):
And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace (James 3:18).
- b) The word “gospel” means “good news.”

2) Key visual images

- a) A NASA photo of the world from outer space – a very beautiful, even awesome, sight. This symbolizes the biblical affirmation that the created world is indeed “very good.” It is beautiful. It is pristine.
- b) There is, however, a signal of discord. The orange glow emanating from the world can be viewed as a suggestion that the world is “on fire.” Its pristine condition is marred in an ongoing way. It needs to be transformed.
- c) The beautiful dove is both approaching and hovering over the beautiful, yet needy world. The dove is the basic biblical symbol of God’s Spirit present: with Noah, at Jesus’ baptism, on the “wings of a dove” is where rest is found (Psalm 55:6). It is also the promise of the Spirit that Jesus spoke to his to his disciples, included in his greeting: peace be with you. More than a biblical symbol, the dove has come to be the primary symbol of peace, even in the secular world. It is always coming. It is always near, waiting to be invited more fully.
- d) The five colours of the text add texture and beauty, blending into the very black background. The messages are presented in the colours used by MWC as part of its visual identity to represent diversity.

3) The translations

- a) There is no attempt to capture every language in the MWC world. Some languages that are key may have omitted some. This reflects a limitation of space, the complexity of verification, and technical issues of fonts.
- b) The poster includes a very good representation of the major languages used in MWC.
- c) The poster includes both Hebrew and Greek to symbolize that this is a message grounded in scripture (Old and New Testaments), and intended for every culture, language, and tribe in the world.
- d) The issue of translation has always been one of the key obstacles in MWC communication efforts. In the poster, attempts have been made to overcome the translation obstacle in three ways:
 - I. Make the primary message visually accessible.
 - II. Limit the text to just a very few words.
 - III. Put the few words into as many languages as possible.

4) The subtle surprise

There is a subtle surprise for those who look very closely. In tiny, almost invisible print (in English) the names of the languages are included on the extreme left-hand side of the text. This is not easily visible. Perhaps it is like peace itself. Diligence is needed in the search for it.

Peace is good news. This is especially evident for those living in conditions of oppression, poverty, injustice, corruption, abuse, militarization, and violence. They need no convincing that peace, reconciliation, justice, and salvation are all included in the gospel of God.

The dove of peace is accessible. Perhaps if we can understand peace as gospel, the church of the Prince of Peace can commit itself to become an “ambassador of reconciliation” in the way envisioned in scripture (II Corinthians 5:20).

May God bless this humble effort.

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