

A study guide to help
individuals and groups
in the churches
to reflect and act in
the Decade to
Overcome Violence

Why Violence? Why Not Peace?

2001.2010



DECADE TO OVERCOME VIOLENCE

Churches seeking reconciliation and peace

Why Violence? Why Not Peace?

*A study guide to help individuals and
groups in the churches to reflect and
act in the Decade to Overcome Violence*

Contents

| | |
|----------------------------------|----|
| How to Use this Study Guide | 4 |
| Is Violence Inevitable? | 6 |
| How Do We Use Power? | 10 |
| How Do We Act Justly? | 14 |
| What Kind of Identity? | 18 |
| What Are You Going to Do? | 22 |
| Resources on Overcoming Violence | 24 |

The opinions expressed in this study guide are those of the writers and do not represent official statements of the World Council of Churches. This material is designed to encourage an active response to the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV).

Written by Diana Mavunduse and Simon Oxley.

ISBN 2-8254-1371-2

Published by the World Council of Churches
 150, route de Ferney
 PO Box 2100
 1211 Geneva 2
 Switzerland
 Tel +41 22 791 6111
 Fax +41 22 791 0361
www.wcc-coe.org

© World Council of Churches 2002

2nd printing, May 2003

Designed by L'IV Com Sàrl, Morges, Switzerland
 Printed in Switzerland

Front cover: Photos supplied by Irene R Lengui

Back cover: these prayers were adapted from the World Council of Churches 1983 Vancouver Assembly

How to Use this Study Guide

Using this study guide will help you reflect on the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) and be active in promoting reconciliation and peace.

You will find in this study guide:

- a basic introduction to the DOV;
- four sections of material for reflection;
- a section on how you can go further into action;
- information about further resources;
- two prayers on the back cover.

Each section for reflection has three parts:

- exercises to help you enter the topic from your own experience;
- material to stimulate conversation around the topic;
- suggestions for Bible study.

In adapting this material for your context, you should take all three parts seriously. Remember to move on from reflection to consider what your next actions will be.

You can use this study guide for personal reflection but we strongly encourage you to join with others in discussion groups. This requires careful preparation. At least one member should be thoroughly familiar with the material in order to guide the group. There should be a welcoming and relaxed atmosphere. Sitting in a circle helps interaction. Begin with your own context and then broaden the conversation. Allow time for people to speak from their experience but be aware that this may be painful for some. Remember that listening is as important as speaking and that violent words can be just as destructive as physical violence. Build prayer into your time together.

Peace to you as you reflect, interact and act.

Invitation to Participate

"Peace is not something you wish for, it's something you make, something you do, something you are, something you give away." (Mother Theresa)

This quotation challenges us to be givers and makers of peace. It also reminds us that peace is within us. However, to achieve peace, we need to work together and that is what the Decade to Overcome Violence, churches seeking reconciliation and peace (DOV) is challenging us to begin today.

Working together will enable us to understand more clearly the interconnectedness of violence in its local and global manifestations and to discover the ways in which we unknowingly contribute to violence. With the help of the global ecumenical family, we can begin to experiment with new models of peacemaking.

Because violence is so pervasive and multi-faceted, each member church must find its own way to be involved in the Decade, be it at a local, national, regional or international level.

One of the most frequently asked questions concerning the DOV is "How do you break the cycle of violence?" This study guide answers part of the question, "The same way you break the cycle of ignorance: educate people."

Why a Decade to Overcome Violence?

While we may have thought that the amazing technological advances of the 20th century may have also led to advances in the basic respect of people for one another, we are saddened to see that ethnic, racial, economic, environmental and gender violence continue to thrive.

If ever there was a moment in history when we have needed to pause and look at the past century, it is now.

The DOV, which was conceived in 1998 at the WCC's Eighth Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, is a response to a call for peace for future generations. It also challenges us to look at the past century in retrospect. A message issued by the WCC Central Committee for

the launch of the DOV in Berlin, 4 February 2001, noted this hope for the new century: "We come together from the four corners of the earth aware of the urgent need to overcome violence that pervades our lives, our communities, our world and the whole created order. We launch this decade in response to a deep yearning among our peoples to build lasting peace grounded in justice."

However, the Decade is not organized around set programmes, but rather is an invitation for all Christian bodies to offer their own gifts for peacemaking according to their own particular calling, to learn from one another and to act together. It is more than a matter of changing individual behaviour. It is about seeking the root causes behind personal violence. It is about overcoming the systemic inequalities that lead to violence in the first place.

Most importantly, it is a time for churches and individuals to re-examine our own biblical understanding of God's call to reconciliation and justice.

By understanding why violence has been created, we will then know what to do and what not to do in order to decrease the level of violence in ourselves and in the world, to create and foster understanding, reconciliation and forgiveness.

In an attempt to stimulate reflection and action around the DOV, the WCC has identified four major themes as root causes of violence. These have been identified from responses to a 2000–2001 survey among churches.

The four themes are:

- the spirit and logic of violence;
- the use, abuse and misuse of power;
- issues of justice;
- religious identity and plurality.

The topics have been set not just for academic study, but as the lens through which churches can become more aware of the challenges ahead in overcoming violence and, thus, to assist them to find sustainable solutions.

It is clear, however, that the features, dynamics and interplay of these four phenomena will vary according to a particular church's context. The themes therefore need to be explored further in each church's specific environment.

Is Violence Inevitable?

To Begin

Look at your local newspaper. How many stories contain reports of violence? What kinds of violence are reported? Do you think that the newspaper gives an accurate picture of violence in your local community?

You can go on to talk about violence you have witnessed or experienced in your community. Be sensitive to those who may be victims of violence and may not want to discuss it.

Watch the world news on television or listen to it on the radio. Which stories are about violence? What kinds of violence are reported? Why do you think that these particular stories made the news?

What films are being shown at the cinema or on television? What computer games do your young people play? How much violence is there in your entertainment?

To Help You Reflect on Violence

Violence repels us, but violence also attracts us.

Violence alarms us, but violence also entertains us.

Violence destroys us, but violence also protects us.

As human beings we seem to be in two minds about violence. Yet many of us feel that violence is inevitable. When we look at the world, our local communities and ourselves, it is not surprising that we come to that conclusion. It is easy to be pessimistic about human nature when we see what we are capable of doing to one another.

Faith tells us that there is another way of looking at human nature. In considering the place of humanity in the creation, the Psalmist declares us to be the highest product of God's creativity (Ps 8). If human beings are made in God's image (Gen 1.27), we are entitled to look for expressions of the divine in our make up. To surrender

completely to a negative view of humanity is to worship a god who is mean, vindictive and glorifies in violence, and not the God who was in Christ.

This does not mean that we should try to live in a fantasy world where all is goodness and joy. We should use our vision of what humanity can be so that our culture of violence may be transformed into a culture of peace. In order to do that, we have to be totally realistic and totally hopeful.

Perhaps we need to begin by accepting our complicity in violence and to take responsibility. It is always tempting to blame other people for what is wrong in the world. It's the rest of the family. It's the church. It's the government. It's global capitalism. Or we may blame our genes or our environment. That is not to say that we do not need a clear analysis of the effects all of these have in creating a violent world. But they are not an excuse for us not accepting responsibility for ourselves. There are two problems with feeling that we are victims. One is that we feel powerless to change things and that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The other is that there seems to be something in human psychology that turns victims into perpetrators – thus an abused child often becomes an abusing parent, a previously oppressed group becomes oppressors.

In order to encourage you to think of alternative ways of thinking and acting, let's think about some of the reasons we use violence:

To make other people serve our interests

Slavery may be the most obvious example of this and for many people slavery has not been abolished. We do not have to ship people from one continent to another to produce the kind of relationship where one person exists only to serve the needs of another.

What is our alternative vision of inter-dependence?

To make other people resemble us

Whether it is to "save their souls" or to share the "benefits" of our social and economic system, humans have used violence of various kinds to make others conform to our way of believing, behaving and acting.

What is our alternative vision of diversity?

To take something from other people

Few people using this booklet will be bank robbers, but we are all caught up in global economic relationships that violate the many so that the few may gain. Many contemporary wars and conflicts are related to the exploitation of diamonds and oil.

What is our alternative vision of the stewardship of creation?

To punish wrongdoers

Of the two reasons often given for the punishment of those who offend against society, retribution and reform, the first is usually given priority. It is as though we feel better because they are being made to suffer. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind".

What is our alternative vision of justice which transforms the victim and the perpetrator?

To protect ourselves and the defenceless

This is the issue that supporters of the inevitability of violence use as their proof. Whatever an individual or a community may or may not do in a particular context, the use of violence is self-defeating in the long term.

What is our alternative vision of personal and communal security?

You may think of other reasons why we use violence, and you will be able to give other examples from your own experience or that of your community. We will be looking again at some of these issues in a later section.

Using violence seems to be the natural order of things only because we have not taken alternatives seriously enough, using the resources of faith to encourage, inspire and support us.

What are the resources of our faith – in the Bible, tradition, worship, spirituality, experience, action and relationships – that give us an alternative vision?

Bible Study

The prophet Jeremiah wrote a surprising letter to the people of Jerusalem who had been taken off into exile in Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar.

Read Jeremiah 29.4–7

Jeremiah did not tell them just to live for the day their exile would be ended. Instead, he told them to make themselves at home in exile – building houses, planting gardens and continuing family life. If that surprised them, they might have been shocked by the words that followed. In verse 7, they were told to pray and work for the welfare, peace or even salvation (different translations use these words) of their city of exile. Good could come for them only if good came to that place.

Think about their situation – they bitterly resented the political situation in which they found themselves; they were forced to live among the enemy whose religion they despised. An understandable reaction would have been to make opportunities to offer resistance and to take revenge. Yet they were told to work for the welfare of the enemy for their own good.

Read Romans 12.9–20

Paul was writing to Christians who knew what persecution meant. It is easy to quote Jesus' words about turning the other cheek (Matt 5.39), more difficult to do it and even more difficult to follow Jesus' instruction to love our enemies (Matt 5.44). Paul was clear that retaliation is not our business; instead, we are to use good to conquer evil. This is the divine logic of reconciliation as opposed to the logic of violence.

Why, when our instincts may tell us to retaliate against those who threaten or harm us, does faith call us actively to love our enemies?

How do we find our welfare or peace in seeking the welfare or peace of those whom we fear, despise or hate?

How Do We Use Power?

To Begin

Think about electricity. What does electricity enable you to do? What are the risks of using electricity? (If you are working in a group, you could divide with each half looking at one question and then sharing your answers.) What other things in life are useful yet dangerous?

Who decides what happens in your family, church, local community and nation? It could be an individual or collective decision. Who gave them the authority to decide? How do you judge whether decisions are good or bad?

To Help You Reflect on Power

Power is simply the ability to control and to make things happen. In order to know whether power is good or bad, we need to know where it comes from, the intention with which it is used and the outcomes of its use. In your opening discussion on electricity you may have noted factors such as whether it was generated using renewable resources or by polluting power stations, the possibility of an exploitative energy market, the dangers of shock and fire and the benefits of light, heat and domestic and commercial machinery. Electricity is a good example of any form of power – useful, dangerous and raising some complex issues.

We can see violence as a misuse or abuse of power. That should not make us deny power or refuse to use it. This is where power and violence differ. We may be able to look forward to a world without violence, but we cannot do without power. Even if we feel weak and insignificant, every one of us, individually and together, has the power to do certain things. We need the power to right wrongs and to bring healing and reconciliation. Without the use of power, nothing good happens. There is a saying that evil triumphs when good people do nothing.

Where does power come from? One answer is that it comes from God. That could be a recognition that God is the originator of everything or that power comes as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Some would want to relate power to the nature of God. It is possible to select biblical texts which appear to justify a violent use of power because that is the way God wants it. It is equally possible to project back on God our own misuse of power so as to justify it. In choosing such a possibility, we turn faith upside down and make God in our own violent image. Yet the power of the resurrection is nothing like the power of a fist, a missile or an economic system.

There is power that is in each of us – perhaps this is one of the ways in which we are made in the image of God. There is greater power when we are together. We have the strong images in the Hebrew Scriptures of the people of God and in the New Testament of the church and of the kingdom of God. Sometimes we talk of empowering people as though power is something we possess that we can kindly give to others. We should rather talk of accompanying people in learning to exercise their own power.

For all of us, power implies taking responsibility for the way in which we use it. It also implies accountability both to the source of power and to those who are affected by it.

Remembering that we suggested earlier that the test of power is the intention with which it is used and its outcomes, let's look at five inter-connected types of power.

Physical force

We can make things happen or prevent them from happening by the threat and the use of physical violence. Both the armed robber and the armed police officer work on the same principle – if you have a gun pointed at your head, you are less inclined to resist. The bully in the school playground and the international superpower adopt the same approach – I'm bigger than you, so do things my way. This makes for uncomfortable reading for some of us, and there may be other things to be said. Why, when we can't get our own way (good or bad), do we resort to physical violence? What is the alternative?

Resource power

If I own or control something that you need, I have power over you. I can use my resource power to make you behave in particular ways. Parents sometime do this with their children to produce good behaviour, offering rewards or threatening to deprive them of enjoyable activities. Global economic institutions do the same with nations, requiring them to adopt certain policies through the promise of financial reward or threat of withdrawal of assistance. Resources also include natural resources. Resource power works only when the few control the resources that many need. What alternative should we offer?

Knowledge power

This is closely related to resource power. It is possible to keep what we know to ourselves for our own benefit. Knowledge is becoming a commodity with the same kind of international legal protections, so it may be bought and sold – even if it is someone else’s traditional knowledge. Another kind of power is that of the media to share or distort knowledge as it suits their purposes.

Position power

Some people have power because of the position they hold – for example, president and prime minister; bishop and priest; director and manager; husband and parent. In the end, position power can operate only with the consent of those who are ‘governed’. In some cultures, elders have position power from the respect given to them. How do we make sure that those who are given privileged positions are accountable for their decisions and act with consent?

We should also note that sometimes churches have position power because of their constitutional or accepted role in society. The same question regarding privilege may still be asked.

Moral power

This is exercised by those who, by the sheer force of their personality, demand our attention. Their influence can be to the good but equally it may be evil.

How do we judge the use of power as we experience and observe it?

Bible Study

King David is remembered in popular imagination for two things – an act of heroism and a monstrous abuse of power. The story of Bathsheba, David and Uriah is not particularly about sexual promiscuity. After all, David had many relationships in ways that were culturally acceptable to his contemporaries. When David caught sight of Bathsheba and had her brought to his room, he entered on a disastrous course of action. Bathsheba became pregnant. In an attempt to cover this up, David tried to persuade Uriah, her husband who had been away at war, to return home so that the child to be born could be thought to be his. Out of a sense of responsibility to his comrades, Uriah refused. So David gave a cynical order to have Uriah placed on the front line of the next battle. Uriah was duly killed in action, and David took Bathsheba as one of his wives.

Read 2 Samuel 12.1–7a

In what ways do you see David abusing his power?

Why do you think that David seemed genuinely to want to use his power to right the wrong in Nathan's story and yet seemed unable to see or control his own abuse of power?

Read Philippians 2. 5–11

This is a beautiful passage where Paul is probably quoting a very early hymn of praise. It says many things about Christ, any of which is worth meditating on. Instead, concentrate on what this says about power.

What does this passage tell us about the use of power?

Why is the way of self-emptying, identification and death so powerful?

What do these two passages say to you about the way you exercise power in your relationships?

How Do We Act Justly?

To Begin

Think of an occasion when you said “That’s not fair” or “That’s not right”. It may have been something that happened to you or something you saw happening to someone else. What was it that made you say that something was not fair or right? How did you come to that opinion? How did you and anyone else involved feel about the situation?

What news stories are people talking about in your local community, nationally or internationally? Which of them involve feelings of injustice? Why are we more sensitive to some forms of injustice than another?

To Help You Reflect on Justice

When we talk about justice, we may think of courts of law with their array of judges, magistrates, lawyers, witnesses and defendants. It is vital that justice is done in court, but there is more than that to say about justice. Justice is moral or ethical and not simply legal. Justice is about right action to restore right relationships. What ‘right’ means is open to discussion, but we should think beyond the establishment of guilt and passing sentence.

We can find two different images of God running through the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament. One pictures God as being like a human judge in court passing sentence. The other presents God as the one who does justice or who makes justice happen. The first preserves God’s role as the final decision-maker as to what is good and right. God is not a neutral observer of the world’s life but holds us accountable for how we treat one another. The second shows us God who does not wait until some end-time to see right relationships prevail but stirs up people to act now. This is why justice and mercy are seen as belonging together. The aim is not simply to punish offenders in order to prevent wrong doing in the future. It is to establish a new or a renewed set of relationships.

One of the books of the Hebrew scriptures is called 'Judges' in English. It contains the stories of men and women who were appointed by God to put right what had gone wrong. Their role was to do justice, even though, from our viewpoint, we might have questions about their intentions and actions. The Hebrew prophets demanded justice. In every generation, people have responded to God's call to work for justice. It is a call given to us as well.

Injustice is a form of violence. It also produces violence where people are driven to use force to begin to right wrongs. Injustice often encourages the growth of political, ethnic and racial violence. In spite of our horror at atrocities committed by those who seek their rightful place in the world, we can still recognise any injustice that triggers this. However, right relationships can never finally be established by unjust means.

In considering the relationship between justice and peace, it is helpful to think about the different ways in which we use the word 'peace'. The ending of physical violence in a particular situation brings a form of peace. However, complete peace will not be achieved until the other forms of violence, the injustices, are resolved and reconciliation is a reality. We must recognise, too, that the pursuit of certain forms of justice, e.g. the bringing of those responsible for crimes against humanity before a court, can produce violent responses.

Is justice a matter of right or wrong according to a set of laws, God's or human, or is it about creating or restoring right relationships? What difference does our answer make to the way we should act?

We can go on to think about four of the many forms of injustice that are both a violation of people and the breeding grounds of violence.

Economic injustice

Within nations and across nations there is an unequal distribution of wealth. A nation or region may be rich in natural resources but the majority of its population may be in poverty. Peoples' natural ability may be exploited so they have no way in which to support themselves. Throughout history we have seen the development of wealthy classes within societies at the expense of the majority. Economic globalization compounds this injustice to a global level.

Political and social injustice

Many of us have placed great faith in a particular form of representative democracy and in the ability of nation states to provide the right environment in which people can live. Yet even the strongest nations find that they can no longer control their own destinies, however much force they use. Within nations, we find the active denial of political and social rights, often with the excuse of promoting national security. In some places, we see citizens failing to participate responsibly in elections because they feel that local and national decision-making bodies are neither representative or responsive. The processes of criminal and civil justice are heavily weighted on the side of those who have the resources to pursue actions or to defend themselves. Even in countries with a long tradition of respect for the law, influence can be bought and political expediency may allow the powerful to escape the consequences of their activities.

Cultural injustice

The threat of imperialism and colonization to people's religious and cultural identities is continued by force and by the more subtle influence of the media. What is liberating, life-affirming, communal and contextual in local cultures is being destroyed, only to be replaced by a commercially oriented global culture. The way of life being promoted is one which emphasises individual self-fulfilment, economic success and the glorification of violence.

Racial injustice

This dehumanises people on the basis of physical appearance and racial stereotyping. Down the years, people of colour have been treated as inferior and subjected to violent humiliation by their oppressors.

As we have said, each of these is a violation of people and produces violence from those who feel that it is the only effective response. How do we work to transform injustices into right relationships? How do we do justice?

Bible Study

Exploiting other people seems to be a consistent human characteristic throughout history. The people of Israel knew how they ought to relate to one another under God. Yet they had to be constantly reminded by the Hebrew prophets about God's insistence on acting justly.

Read Amos 8.4–7

Rigging the market in favour of the seller is the same whether you are trading in corn or on the stock exchange. The result is that the poor lose out. Selling inferior products as though they were the real thing is wrong whether you are passing off the husks as wheat or marketing soft drinks. This is made worse by the hypocrisy of religious people who sit in worship looking forward to that moment when they can get on with pursuing unjust business practices again.

What is the relationship between justice and our worship of God?

Around 800 years later, Jesus stood up in the synagogue in Nazareth and claimed some words of Isaiah as a foundation for his own ministry.

Read Luke 4.17–21

Luke places this account in the time following the temptation of Jesus in the desert. Jesus had resisted the temptation to a self-serving and superficial ministry. Instead of simply condemning or even calling retribution on those who had caused the poverty, captivity, blindness and oppression, he uses these words to speak of righting wrongs. Jesus affirms a justice which restores.

Would an observer use these words to describe the ministry of your church?

What do these two passages say to us about how we should do justice?

What Kind of Identity?

To Begin

Collect together symbols which say something about who you are. Your birth certificate, passport or driving licence will say something about you. What symbolises all the things that make you yourself – relationships, beliefs, activities, interests, personality?

(Only for groups) Everyone writes a list of ten words which describe themselves. Collect the lists and distribute them at random. Each person has to work out, with the help of the rest of the group if necessary, who the list they have been given describes.

To Help You Reflect on Identity

We may be surprised to discover that other people do not see us in the way in which we see ourselves. There are two reasons why we ought to recognise this. The first is that relationships often run into difficulty when we do not recognise that others' view of us is not the same as the way we view of ourselves. The second is that we sometimes fail to distinguish between the ideal of what we should be and the reality of what we are. To take a very simple example, a church may proclaim its identity as a warm, welcoming community, and it may believe itself to be so. For the visitors who find that no one speaks to them, the identity will seem exactly the opposite.

To promote good relationships, we as churches need to look at ourselves and how we are perceived by others. We should be honest enough to admit our failings. We need to ensure that our identity is not compromised by too intimate a relationship with repressive regimes or the forces of oppression. The church represents the promise of the kingdom of God. It will lose its identity if the kingdom is not reflected in its being. This gives our worship a cosmic dimension as well as rooting it in daily life.

Religious identity is a factor in much of the violence which happens within communities and between nations; that is, both the religious identity people give to themselves and that which is given by

others. It may be better to say that it is a factor rather than a cause because of the complexity of both violence and religious identity. Thus, in inter-communal violence there may be a mixture of issues relating to jobs, housing, welfare provision, provision of services, education, policing, racism and so on. Even though they are only one factor, religious differences have the capacity to be used to separate the identities of the warring groups.

In one way, it might not make any difference to the conflict if the two sides were called 'apples' and 'oranges' because the issues of dispute would be the same. The fact is, though, that it is religion which is used to define the identity. Conflicts are seen to be between Christians and Muslims, Christian and Jews, Muslims and Jews, Hindus and Sikhs and many more combinations. Those of us who may think that a particular conflict is not a 'Christian' issue as such find ourselves in conflict with those who believe it is of the essence of their Christian-ness.

We may want to ask whether there is such a thing as a purely religious identity. Religious identity is related to what we believe but not limited to it. Christians may agree on some common ground of what we believe – the Nicene Creed, for example. That does not give all the churches and everyone who belongs to them a common identity. Far from it.

In fact, churches would debate the degree to which identity is a given that is expressed within a given context, or whether identity has a history of development so that it is shaped by its context. If we say that our religious identity can be separated from our national, ethnic and political identities or from the identity given by our relationships and our activities, we run the danger of expressing a faith that does not involve the whole of our living.

Identity building takes place within a community because, as we have seen, part of our identity comes from our relationships with others and, if we are speaking of religious identity, our relationship with God. We have suggested in the earlier sections of this study guide that there is a close relationship between how we understand violence, power and justice and how we understand God. Instead of building our identity in relation to God in Christ, we may find ourselves building an identity for God from our self-interested actions.

For identity building, there needs to be space for us to explore who we are and how we relate. There has been discussion in the WCC around the idea of ecumenical space – space where those with differences can feel safe to be themselves. This means being respected without the threat of exploitation.

Entering relationships of mutual acceptance within and between religions would be a step too far for some. Not accepting those who do not share your belief may be an important part of identity. Sectarianism and fundamentalism are often responses to threats to identity where the defining lines of difference are hardened – a distortion of identity.

Taking a positive view of others has implications for our theology of mission. Aggressive missionary activity can be seen as a violation of those who are its objective. Christian missionaries have not always been sensitive to indigenous cultures, preferring to impose a westernised Christian identity. Repentance for this can help us all move towards positive relationships between Christians from different parts of the world.

Is there a difference between accepting people at the level of good human relationships and accepting what they believe? How do we reconcile deep commitment with an openness to the other? How do we see those who believe differently as embodying a potential for enriching our own faith and not as a threat to our identity?

Bible Study

Being God's chosen people carried both a privilege and responsibility. Moses spelt this out to a gathering of the people of Israel.

Read Deuteronomy 10.12–22

There are two problems with privilege – we may come to enjoy privilege so much that we forget the responsibility and we may keep our privilege within a closed circle. There seem almost too many examples of these problems in the Hebrew scriptures and in the history of the Christian church. Perhaps that is why Moses is recorded as constantly emphasising privilege and responsibility, themes taken up later by the prophets. There is a dynamic relationship between the two rather than a simple teaching to 'keep God's rules' so you 'get the reward of God's favour'.

However, included within the circle of privilege and responsibility of Israel were the strangers who lived among them – those who came from elsewhere, those who did not fully belong, those whose culture was different. God cared for them and for those who are weak or who have no position in society.

Do our circles of privilege and responsibility in the churches include or exclude the strangers who live in our communities? What does it mean for God to care for them as much as God cares for those of us who believe?

Read Ephesians 2.13–18

The claim here is not simply that Christ breaks down barriers, even the barrier between Christians and Jews. That would be good news in itself. Ephesians goes further to say that Christ makes a radical change by creating a new humanity.

How can we find our identity in the new humanity in Christ rather than behind the barriers of enmity which divide the church and our societies?

What Are You Going to Do?

Reflecting on the issues raised in this study guide is the first step of a longer journey. We hope that all the things you have talked about have given you some insights and some further questions, a determination not to be satisfied with the way things are and a recognition that in Christian faith we have immense resources. Can we work for change in ourselves, in our churches and in society?

Focusing and Looking Deeper

In a small booklet like this, we have not been able to mention all the issues around overcoming violence and seeking reconciliation and peace. In order for our actions to be effective, we need to be focused. Try to identify one or two particular issues that you have seen as important. These may be local problems or large global issues. For example, some congregations have taken up the issue of violence on the streets of their local community; others have involved themselves in campaigns to write off the international debts of the economically poorest nations. Whatever you choose, you need to look deeper into the issue, consider the underlying problems and learn from the way other people have responded elsewhere.

Know What You Want to Do

We want to overcome violence. Telling people, for example, to stop abusing children or to end an ethnic conflict is not enough. Violence in most cases is a way of dealing with underlying problems. We have to think through how we can respond to particular problems in non-violent ways and how we can develop just solutions to remove or reduce the causes of violence. We need to be able to suggest positive alternatives to violence and engage both sides in new ways of relating. The amount of violence in the world can overwhelm us and make us believe that there is nothing we can do. By choosing something, however small, where we feel we can make a difference effectively, we start a process of change. Don't worry about all the things you can't do to overcome violence. Start with something you can achieve!

Involve More People

Who else could you involve in your congregation? Many congregations have groups for women and for youth that have energy and imagination. Is there a bible study group that could look more deeply into reconciliation? How does the pastoral care in your congregation support victims of violence? Is there safe space for them to talk about their suffering and those who inflict it? Could you involve other congregations locally and those from other denominations as well as your own? What campaigns, groups and organizations around issues of violence already exist in your locality and nation? How can you link up with them?

Prayer

Prayer is dangerous! If we expect God to change things without changing us, we will be disappointed. As we have found in the earlier pages of this study guide, we are part of the problem of violence and not just spectators. In praying, we open ourselves up, as individuals and churches, to God. The spiritual discipline of prayer will enable us to live lives as individuals and congregations that promote reconciliation and peace. This will also involve changing our ways of relating to others – forgiving and being forgiven. Prayer is a powerful means of being in solidarity with the victims of violence.

Don't Keep Your Ideas and Plans to Yourself

Let other people know what you have learnt and what you intend to do. The Decade to Overcome Violence is an initiative of the churches, so we need to encourage one another by sharing our visions and our activities. Let your national church and your council of churches know how you are getting involved in the Decade. Contact the World Council of Churches, too.

"It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it." (Eleanor Roosevelt)

Resources on Overcoming Violence

-  *He Came Singing Peace: Songs to Overcome Violence*
Compiled and published by the New Zealand Hymnbook Trust, April 2002. Available in English.
Order from: jmsem@paradise.net.nz, or Tel: +46 644 902 8855.

-  *Overcoming Violence: Teachers' Manuals for Nursery/Kindergarten 3–6, Middle Elementary 9–10, Older Elementary 10–12*
Published by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, 2002. Available in English.
Order from: nccp@phil.gn.apc.org, or Tel: +63 2 928 8636.

-  *Learning Peace*
Published by Swiss Ecumenical Peace Programme, 2001.
Available in German and French.
Order from: rgeiser@access.ch, or Tel: +41 62 844 3907.

-  *Youth Peace Training Manual*
Published by the All Africa Conference of Churches, 1999.
Available in English.
Order from: infodesk@aacc-ceta.org, or Tel: +254 2 444 1338.

-  *Overcoming Violence: The Challenges to the Churches in All Places*
by Margot Kässmann, 2nd revised printing 2000.
Available in English and German.
Order from: publications@wcc-coe.org, or Tel: +41 22 791 6111.

Visit the DOV website: www.wcc-coe.org/dov

You will find stories and photos about people and groups around the world on what they are doing to overcome violence. You will find links to a growing list of DOV-related websites of other local, national and international peace movements. And there is a calendar of DOV-related events.

If you have any events, stories, courses and books related to DOV you would like to share with others, please send us an e-mail:
dov@wcc-coe.org

Prayers

In the midst of hunger and war,
we celebrate the promise of plenty and peace.
In the midst of oppression and tyranny,
we celebrate the promise of service and freedom.
In the midst of doubt and despair,
we celebrate the promise of faith and hope.
In the midst of fear and betrayal,
we celebrate the promise of joy and loyalty.
In the midst of hatred and death,
we celebrate the promise of love and life.
In the midst of sin and decay,
we celebrate the promise of salvation and renewal.
In the midst of death on every side,
we celebrate the promise of the living Christ.

For peace in your country
For the victims of violence everywhere
For those struggling for peace and justice
For churches in conflict situations
For a world without war and violence

Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth,
Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust,
Lead me from hate to love, from war to peace,
Let peace fill our beings, our world and our universe.

Amen

World Council of Churches



2-8254-1371-2



9 782825 413715