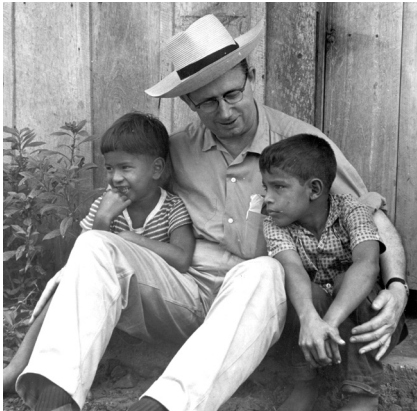


LET'S DEAL WITH BASIC ISSUES

Sermon by Dr. John L. Peters



The beginning of World Neighbors, a grassroots movement that addresses the root causes of poverty, by meeting real needs with real solutions.

WORLD NEIGHBORS - THE BEGINNING

On Sunday, April 22, 1951 at St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Oklahoma City, a guest preacher, Dr. John L. Peters, shook the world. John made a last minute decision to abandon his carefully crafted sermon and spoke sincerely from his heart. He spoke about the need for a more equitable system across the world, about the need for a program to address the root causes of poverty and despair, about a program that would meet



Major John L. Peters

“real needs with real solutions.” He dreamed of an organization that was humbly administered, fully respectful of each individual and aware of the reality that “what men need and want are not always what we think they need and want.”

During his time serving in World War II in the Philippines, he had been deeply troubled by the hopelessness he had seen there and had made a promise to God. Hours after he held a dying soldier from Tennessee in his arms, he made a commitment that altered his life, “If I get out of here alive, I’m going to do something, somehow, somewhere.....”

His promise came to life that Sunday morning.

From the people clustered around him after service that morning, World Neighbors was born. Since 1951, his vision has been lived out through a remarkable history of excellence – reaching over 25 million people, whose lives have been transformed by World Neighbors unassuming, practical, modestly funded program of support.

LET'S DEAL WITH BASIC ISSUES

One of the difficulties in dealing with the basic problem of our day is the lack of agreement as to what that problem really is. Ask the next man you meet, for instance, what he considers the real obstacle to world peace, and he is likely to tell you that it is the Russians, or the Democrats, or the Republicans, or his wife's relatives. The answer will differ with the man and with his mood.



Dr. Peters at St. Luke's United Methodist Church - April 21, 1952

It is said that during World War I, one of the outstanding ministers of America solemnly assured a vast audience that peace would come to the world only when all persons of German extraction were rendered sterile. There was, the eminent gentleman was certain, some carnal content in German blood which constituted the primary threat to the peace of the world. Some years later, in World War II, a member of the British Parliament came forward with a somewhat more provocative suggestion. Said he, "The world will be happy again only when Franco's widow tells Stalin on his death-bed that Hitler has been assassinated at Mussolini's funeral."

The passing of time has demonstrated that the minister was obviously ridiculous and the member of Parliament patently naive. It takes more than genocide or the removal of the current crop of dictators to effect world peace. Such peace can be had only when basic issues are equitably settled.

What are those basic issues?

If our religion gives us any insight into the nature of reality -and this is a primary function of religion -we have the answer indicated in the records of our own faith. Let's assume that God knew what he was doing when he sent Jesus Christ into the world. Let's go further and suppose that there was some actual significance to the song which the angels sang when Jesus was born -"Peace on earth, good will to men." What then was the purpose of this coming? What was the program by which peace was to become more than a fading celestial song? The answer is not difficult. For Jesus presents that program in his keynote message to his neighbors in the synagogue at Nazareth. There, on the threshold of his amazing ministry, he stood and asked for the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. The account is found in Luke 4: 17 -19

"And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor: he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

What was his mission? Why did he come? Let theologians clothe the answer in what terms they choose. Here Jesus simply and explicitly declares that he came to explore and to answer the needs of the disinherited, the exploited, the poverty-stricken of soul and body.

These were the *basic issues* with which the Prince of Peace himself proposed to deal. These are the *basic issues* with which any seeker after peace today must deal. Let's examine them further.

I presume that each of you who could be was at a radio Thursday and heard General MacArthur's moving address to the joint Houses of Congress. The general's defense of certain of his policies has, of course, gained the spotlight of attention and is now the center of wide and furious debate. I wonder, however, if in the midst of all this strife and confusion we have not tended to ignore some areas of his message which are more deeply significant. Do we remember, for instance, his opening remarks in which he described the underlying reason for Asian unrest, the surging tide of which the present conflict is but the bitter froth? Here, according to MacArthur, are facts which must be taken into consideration before any realistic policy can be enunciated or before any permanent solution can be had:

“Long exploited by the so-called colonial powers, with little opportunity to achieve any degree of social justice, individual dignity or a higher standard of life..., the people of Asia found their opportunity in the war just past to throw off the shackles of colonialism and now see the dawn of new opportunity, a heretofore unfelt dignity, and the self-respect of political freedom.

“Mustering half the earth's population, and sixty percent of its natural resources, these people are rapidly consolidating a new force, both moral and material, with which to raise the living standard and erect adaptation of the design of modern progress to their own distinct cultural environments.

“Whether one adheres to the concept of colonialism or not, this is the direction of Asian progress and it may not be stopped.

“What they seek now is friendly guidance, understanding

and support, not imperious direction; the dignity of equality and not the shame of subjugation. “Their pre-war standard of life, pitifully low, is infinitely lower now in the devastation left in war's wake. World ideologies play little part in Asian thinking and are little understood.

“What the people strive for is the opportunity for a little more food in their stomachs, a little better clothing on their backs, and a little firmer roof over their heads, and the realization of the normal nationalities' urge for political freedom.”

There has been none to challenge these assertions, for the facts overwhelmingly support them.

Are we fully aware, for instance, that while here in America the per capita annual income is around \$1,450; in Indonesia it is around \$25; in Thailand and Burma, \$35; in China, \$27? True enough, most of these people do not live under a cash economy like ours. But around the world there are many things- necessary things -which cannot be had except as they are bought, bought with that which they simply do not have.

Occasionally it is argued that, despite this fact, these people are probably happy and any attempt to assist them is simply a foolish meddling with an already satisfactory situation. Those who subscribe to such an idea must take seriously romantic novels, Hollywood extravaganzas, and the seductive brochures of travel agencies. But engineers, economists, health authorities, and soldiers have had an opportunity to observe the unrelieved misery that is characteristic of most areas of the world-including many of those lands which we still hope to preserve as a bulwark against encroaching communism.

These people, it is true, usually make the most of what little they have. And they neither want nor could use that multiplicity of things which we consider necessary to our standard of living. But that they are *happy* amid their hunger and disease and illiteracy is a ludicrous assumption. I never shall be able to forget the mothers who brought their emaciated and fever-ridden babies to our aid stations, *begging* for medicine to check their suffering. And who that saw them could forget the long lines that waited patiently under the blazing sun or in the driving rain -for what? For the privilege of dipping into our garbage cans and relieving their constant, gnawing hunger. The trouble with most of us is that we have *never* known the hunger which is the constant corrosive companion of millions of these people.

I thank my God now, as I did not then, that I have known what it is to be *really* hungry. In hot pursuit of an education, I came to a period when I was forced for a week or so to live on fifteen cents a day. Each day I would buy one Coca-Cola and two packages of "Nibs." It wasn't enough. And during that time, as I watched others eat steaks, salads, and pork chops I came to dislike them intensely. They had done nothing to me. Most of them did not know that I existed -but I just didn't like them. Hunger has its own peculiar logic.

The masses of the world are hungry. And when, through our magazines and movies, we tell them of our over-abundance, they do not respond with respect and love -they only pull their belts a little tighter and hate us a little more.

It is assumed by some that any attempts to improve these conditions will only aggravate the problem of over-population which prevails in some of these areas. And that is a very real problem. But is the answer to be found in deepening malnutrition? In virulent disease? In weapons of mass

destruction? This will, of course, *have* to be the answer unless some sufficient alternative is forthcoming?

Are we so spiritually and intellectually bankrupt that we can offer none!

There *is* another alternative. And men like Frank Laubach have dedicated themselves to it. For these miserable masses are not merely animals. They, too, aspire and dream and love and hope. They are God's children and potentially his sons in as full a measure as any of us are or ever could be. But they are illiterate, ignorant -lacking that basic prerequisite to self- help, the ability to read. Three out of every five persons on this globe, a billion two hundred million people, spend their lives in poverty, hunger, and superstition, primarily because they are illiterate. The knowledge of how to care for themselves, how to plan for and to rear their children, how to improve personal and community sanitation, how to cultivate their soil and to develop their natural resources -all this is to them a closed book because simple manuals of instruction are as indecipherable to them as Egyptian hieroglyphics are to most of us. The saving alternative begins with the impartation of the precious gift of literacy. As yet, the world's masses are without it -and dwell in consequent misery.

What makes their deep tragedy our dire threat is that now they are aware of their plight. We have sent movies, and tourists, and GIs and missionaries into these areas. And while once these people knew merely that they were miserable, now they know too that they need not remain so. To make sure they do, the *agents provocateurs* of communism are fiercely at work among them, fanning the coals of their tortured resentment into the flames of open rebellion - and Africa, India, Asia and the Philippines are awork with this ferment of peril and

protest. A vast, dumb, suffering multitude is determined to rise - a movement which General MacArthur has said “may not be stopped.” We have the choice of giving it guidance or being destroyed by it.

We are, of course, living in that day when the prophetic words of Edwin Markham are being fulfilled. You remember his “Man With the Hoe,” that brutish symbol of “humanity betrayed, plundered, profaned and disinherited.” And you will recall Markham’s piercing question:

“O Masters, lords and rulers in all lands,
How will the future reckon with this Man
How answer his brute question in that hour
When whirlwinds of rebellion shake all shores?
How will it be with kingdoms and with kings-
With those who shaped him to the thing he is-
When this dumb Terror shall rise to judge the world,
After the silence of the centuries?”

Around the world, multitudes once dumb are rising to ask questions -questions which once we asked: “Is colonial status right? Is exploitation just? Is deprivation necessary?”

They ask, too, “Who will help us?” And far too often the only voice they hear and the only hand they see is the voice and hand of communism. From our high vantage point it seems obvious that they should *know* that the communist’s offer of help is but an invitation to deeper enslavement. But from their depth of need -and hearing no other voice - these masses seize this offer as a way of life itself. Unless we have shared their wretchedness, we simply cannot understand the impact which the *Internationale* makes upon them as it thunders:

“Arise ye prisoners of starvation,
Arise ye wretches of the earth,
For justice thunders condemnation,
A better world’s in birth.”

And to the submerged millions, these words are far more meaningful than all our political ideologies.

It is true that a militant and ruthless Russian imperialism is using international communism as a front behind which to conceal its real designs and as a tool through which to effect its real purposes. This must be clearly recognized and intelligently dealt with. But it is also true as Stringfellow Barr, erstwhile President of St. John’s College, has recently reminded us:

“...that if all the Russians in the world obligingly died this evening, and that if all the communists of whatever race were so kind as to commit suicide tomorrow at noon sharp, the world revolution for equality would not stop. ...the ‘backward’ peoples. ...are in motion ...Neither ‘containment’ nor ‘appeasement’ will bring us peace. Our only chance is to do something about the real problem.”

But “the real problem” may be even deeper than already has been indicated. For it is as true today as it was when Jesus declared it, that “Man shall not live by bread alone.”

If we ignore man’s physical needs while we hand him pious platitudes, we justify the communist’s contemptuous characterization of religion as “the opiate of the people,” promising little but “pie in the sky bye and bye.” But if we conclude that the problem is simply and only economic, then we *join* the communists in their crass dialectical materialism. An attempt at a global program of ‘bread and circuses’ is not

likely to serve us any better than it served imperial Rome - and she lies today in the dust. History is full of the truth that mere material prosperity has brought neither real happiness nor continuing peace to individuals or to nations. Today's juvenile delinquent is recruited mainly from families whose economic resources are more than ample. It must be recognized that man is a unit, whose physical and spiritual needs are concomitant and inter-related. Neither can be adequately dealt with if the other is casually ignored.

Nevertheless, there is widespread agreement that today's real problem is theological. Men need not only food, they need God. Their hearts as well as their stomachs cry out for satisfaction. And many an ex-GI is serving his Lord today in the Philippines, Japan, and Asia because he glimpsed the vast hunger for God when he served in those areas. I could tell you of the deep appreciation for Testaments and Bibles -and the plea for more of them -on the part of these peoples of the East.

It is reported that before World War II, Toyohiko, Kagawa, observing the rising power and spreading ambition of the Japanese military, wrote to American Christians saying, "Send us thousands of your sons as missionaries now or you will send tens of thousands of them as soldiers later." We would not do the first. We were forced to do the second. MacArthur, shortly after assuming his responsibilities in Japan, invited the churches to send a thousand missionaries to that country. There was an immense spiritual vacuum in Japan with the collapse of Shinto. It was an open door and a golden opportunity. After five years had passed, that quota requested from the churches by the military remained about as follows: The Roman Catholic Church, to its credit, has fulfilled its portion: the quota of the Protestant Churches was substantially unfulfilled. By way of comparison, it is instructive to note that Russia, upon the

conclusion of her treaty with Red China, is said to have sent 45,000 "specialists" into that country. Large numbers of these went, of course, to the armed forces, but thousands were assigned to posts of educational, agricultural, and technical assistance -"missionaries" in the full sense of the word.

The irony of it is that while the' followers of Christ are preaching the precepts of the Master, and while the Voice of America is proclaiming to the nations our good intentions, the communists move in among the masses who never saw a missionary nor heard a radio, and appear to be practicing what we preach. "Practice" always has been more eloquent than "preaching." Actually, America is far more able and better prepared to do, and do honestly, what the communists do on a limited scale and for a limited time. But we have been short-sighted and reluctant. "It is time," as Frank Laubach has said, "for us to take the initiative and call the plays!"

It is *not* too late to win the battle for men's minds and for the peace of the world. I trust, as all of us do, that we shall win any war into which we might blunder or be plunged. But our goal is not merely to win the war. It is to win the world for all that is ultimately right and good. And this second goal will not be accomplished by the weapons of the first. For war solves no basic problems.

On this there is unanimity among our thoughtful military leaders. General Bradley recently has decried the fact that we know more about killing than about living, more about waging war than about making peace. In 1946, at the reception of an honorary degree from Boston University, General Eisenhower said to his assembled auditors, "I have been classed as a rather risky chance-taking person, and I venture to make a suggestion. Why doesn't Dr. Marsh, and the president of every great

university in the world, teach his people to put people in my profession permanently out of a job?” More recently General MacArthur has asserted, “I know war as few other men now living do and to me nothing is more revolting. I have long advocated its complete abolition, as its very destructiveness on both friend and foe has rendered it useless as a means of settling international disputes. ...If we will not devise some greater and more equitable system, our Armageddon will be at our door.”

Can we devise this “greater and more equitable system?” We can. But it will not be easy. It will call for considerably more than the pushing of a button or the dropping of a bomb. It will be long and costly- but not as long nor as costly as the unprofitable road which heretofore we have trod. It will be beset with false starts and disappointments. But if we undertake it, we shall win out for we shall be moving in the right direction and we shall be doing what God through Christ has told us we must.

What kind of a program shall it be? I hesitate to suggest its outline. And if there be a man among you who has a better plan or can improve upon this one, I adjure him, in humanity’s name, to stand and declare it. Until then, let me suggest these characteristics:

First of all, it must meet real needs with real solutions.

Some of our sporadic efforts along this line have smacked much of these radio quiz shows which have a habit of showering fantastic and utterly useless prizes on the luckless winner. Some mild and humble soul answers his phone and foolhardily comes up with the right answer. He is thereupon flung into the ruthless machinery of publicity, given two weeks in the bridal suite at the Waldorf Astoria with paid admissions to all the

bright night spots - when all the poor man wanted and needed was a new pair of pants and some repairs to his upper plate. This program we envisage, therefore, must be international in its support and administration. America, while undoubtedly she must take the initiative, cannot and must not assume the role of the world’s Santa Claus - and the cloak of economic dictatorship which inevitably would follow. Powerful and well intentioned though we may be, we have neither the resources nor the insight to administer this program alone. We must appeal to and gladly accept the assistance and instruction of men of good will everywhere.

Only so can we devise a program which will allow men to keep their dignity and self-respect. For this can be no universal dole, no global boondoggle. This program must be designed to help men help themselves; to become men in the only way such a process is possible, by their own participating efforts, guided and assisted wherever that is necessary and possible-

Secondly, it must be extensive and aggressive enough to constitute a real counter-offensive to the communist program.

Unless we embark upon it in this measure, we shall sink like a row-boat in a heavy sea. But a vigorous program is certain of success. In France today, the Roman Catholic Church is having a revival primarily because its younger priests are acting upon the conviction that the only way to defeat communism is to out-live, out-love, out-serve and out-die it. So far our efforts have been marked and marred by timidity. We have set up a Point Four Program and Dr. Henry G. Bennett, President of Oklahoma A.& M. College, has been placed at its head -a program nobly conceived and ably headed. The Congress, with some reluctance, voted an appropriation of thirty-eight million dollars to put it

effect. Immediately the plan was condemned as contributing dangerously to inflation.

What is it that *really* brings about inflation? I have here a chart prepared by the National Bank of Commerce of Chicago. It is their 1950 chart of Business Booms and Depressions since the beginning of our national history. One fact is made unquestionably clear. The cheapening of the dollar- which is, of course, inflation - has come in connection with and as a direct result of war, in particular World Wars I and II. Starting its subnormal trend in mid-1917, the dollar had plunged to 69c by 1920. After regaining its strength through the thirties, the downgrade began again in 1941 and by 1949 had a comparative value of 59c. It is our expenditures for *war* that is bleeding us economically white. Yet this year our appropriations for defense have risen at the last report I noted, to the sum of seventy-one billions of dollars. That's a little over a million dollars every 7½ minutes, day and night, for one year. That means that in one hour we spend more for arms than the entire world spends in a whole year for meeting the problems of hunger through the Food and Agriculture Organization, or in combating disease through the World Health Organization. Yet these are the only world-wide organizations set up to cope with the issues which are the breeders of war and the spawning ground of communism.

In the light of all this, to denounce expenditures for Point Four as unwarranted and foolish is much as though we planned a malarial control program with the slogan. "Billions for swatting mosquitoes, but not one cent for draining swamps." Yet it is the swamps that breed the mosquitoes. And Point Four, not yet adequate, is nevertheless a step in the right direction and deserving of our earnest prayers and substantial support. We need a technical assistance program aggressive and vigorous

enough to make a real impact on today's need.

In the third place, and of central importance, this program must be shot through with the spirit of Christ.

We can send the wrong people to do the right job -and fail completely. That is why I should like to see this program taken in hand, sponsored and underwritten in a large part by the churches. The Church is an international institution, wedded to no one culture and subservient only to the high demands of Almighty God. Where the Church is vital she exercises a bond of unity which transcends all other lives. She has the commission to undertake this task and the organization to effect it. And she can, if she will, do it better than any or all governments. The question is: does she have the passion and the will to do it?

If she does attempt it, she will need vastly to expand her missionary program and to give a new definition to the term "missionary." The Christian evangel would have to be carried by teachers, engineers, mechanics, nurses, writers and technicians. The saving "good news" would be presented by teaching men to read, helping them build dams, showing them how better to cultivate their soil, care for their health -in short, how to rise out of their ignorance, disease and misery. It would be the imposition of no particular culture. It would be the unfolding of a way of life, as Laubach has said, it a spirit of Christian love and democratic friendliness -and it would stop communism cold.

It would call for a greatly increased support of the missionary program. If we send 100,000 such workers into these fields, it probably will cost the average church member around \$50 annually- as compared to the \$1.25 he now pays. Let us not forget, however, that we will each spend this year between \$450 and \$500 for arms. Perhaps it will be argued that this is all the

more reason why we cannot be expected to make an increased outlay in any other direction. But the point is that somewhere, somehow, we must break through this vicious circle of recurrent wars. Somehow we must interrupt the process that requires us to send our sons and our sons' sons to stain the world's battlefields with their blood. Suppose, for such a purpose, we do have to pay more. Surely sacrifice and heroism is not to be required merely of the young. Actually, if we choose to put a dime for constructive ends along side every dollar we spend for destructive ends, the day will come when the dollars now spent for death will buy more abundant living for us all. But we've got to begin. We've got to sacrifice. We've got to match heroism with heroism.

There are men of means and intelligence listening to me this morning. They have proved what they can do for themselves, for their families, and for their communities. This is the hour when, under God, they need to rise and show what they can do for their world. And there are able and talented young people hearing me who ought now to dedicate their talents to this high, holy, and absolutely necessary task. It is a sad and sobering fact that, in the last thirty years since communism began its militant march, the missionary enterprise has dwindled and retreated. In more than one major denomination of Protestantism there actually are fewer full-time missionaries today than there were thirty years ago. Shall we not pick up that faltering banner and justify our very own reason for existence?

Perhaps you wonder why I feel this so deeply. Let me tell you one of the reasons. A group of us were moving up a hill in the Philippines one day through the driving rain. Suddenly a mortar shell burst squarely on top of us. The lad directly behind me

was mortally wounded with a piece of shrapnel directly through his heart. As I held him in my arms and tried unsuccessfully to staunch the spurting blood, the whole cruel waste of it all swept over me. Here was this lad, a farm boy from Tennessee. He had joined our outfit only two weeks earlier and the night before we went into this sector his mail had caught up with him.

Amid all the wonderful words from his loved ones was a letter from his draft board. He showed it to me ruefully. It informed him that, after due deliberation, the board had decided to classify him as 4F. He was the only able-bodied man on the farm of his parents and so he was exempt. But the boy had tired of waiting and, stung by the taunts of some of his neighbors, had enlisted. After basic training, he had been sent out to us as an Infantry Replacement. And now he lay dying in my arms. That night, as I lay in my muddy fox-hole, I asked God why that boy had been taken and I had been spared. Perhaps it was a foolish question. But split seconds before he was hit, I stood exactly where he had stood. Why was I spared? I don't know. But I was, and I vowed I would do all I could to keep this thing from happening again. Perhaps I've failed. Surely somebody has. As I go my way in safety and comfort, I feel now and then the lash of this adaptation of Eleanor Breed's bitter poem:

“The young men die in battle,
The old men sleep in bed.
The tortured earth of Asia
Is furrowed deep with red.

The old men sat conferring
With smile and scheme and lie.
The old men made the blunders,
Today the young men die.”

Must this go on? I have a kid brother and a fine nephew in the Air Corps. Another nephew is entering the Marines. My son is approaching draft age. And many of your sons and nephews and husbands are even now in Korea and on the high seas. Is this all and always the answer? Has Jesus failed in that high mission he undertook? Is it not, in fact, we who have failed and are failing?

Suppose the road out should prove costly. Is there any price higher than He paid? Is there any price higher than our sons are paying today?

Let us go to our knees to find our answers and rise to our feet determined by God's grace to make them effective.

* * *

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WORLD NEIGHBORS

Inspiring People • Strengthening Communities

World Neighbors is an international development organization striving to eliminate hunger, poverty and disease in the most deprived rural villages in Asia, Africa and Latin America. World Neighbors invests in people and their communities by training and inspiring them to create their own life-changing solutions through programs that combine agriculture, literacy, water, health and environmental protection. Since 1951, more than 25 million people in 45 countries have transformed their lives with the support of World Neighbors.

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