

COMMON GROUND FOR HOPE

(how Christians and non-Christians alike may find common ground in the phrases of the Millennium Resolution)

The Millennium Resolution was devised on behalf of the Millennium Group of Churches Together in England for use at the 'Millennium Moment'.

This commentary on the phrases of the Resolution was part of a Sabbatical study ,in Spring 1999, of the relationship between Christianity and other world faiths and the need for continuing dialogue.

When I read the 'background briefing' to the Resolution I was intrigued by the declared intention that the text "be used with integrity not only by Christians, but also by members of other faiths and by people with no faith.... If the Churches are to provide a moment for the nation, it has to be something which the whole nation, Christian and non-Christian, can say "

Thus, I set myself the task of trying to discover what people of other faiths, and those without any specific faith commitment, might make of these phrases. I have been at a disadvantage in that there are very few people of other faiths in this rural area of North Yorkshire. However, in visits to Bradford I was helped by the Interfaith Education Centre and the Touchstone Centre, and made use of the library at the College of York and Ripon St. John in York while attending a ten-week course on 'Theological perspectives of inter-faith dialogue'.

I also asked three friends - Gareth, Michelle and Paul who live nearby, and who have no identifiable religious affiliation ~ to comment on the phrases of this Resolution. I have been deeply moved by the seriousness and honesty with which they approached the subject.

Ranald Wylie

Kirkbymoorside 1999

INTRODUCTION

The short phrases of the Millennium Resolution may at first seem bland and inoffensive. On closer inspection they are pithy and pointed; from the opening salvo "Let there be light..." etc., reminiscent of the Divine pronouncements of the Biblical Creation story in Genesis 1; through the stewardship of creation, peace, love, goodness and forgiveness to the challenging call to make a fresh start.

Even possessing a poetic symmetry of their own, 3 - 444444 - 3, the phrases neatly and logically dovetail and merit both serious reflection and practical outworking.

LET THERE BE .. RESPECT FOR THE EARTH

LET THERE BE ... PEACE FOR ITS PEOPLE

LET THERE BE ... LOVE IN OUR LIVES

LET THERE BE ... DELIGHT IN THE GOOD

LET THERE BE ... FORGIVENESS FOR PAST WRONGS

AND FROM NOW ON, A NEW START

LET THERE BE .. RESPECT FOR THE EARTH

There is all over the world a growing concern over the state of the planet earth, with the population now 6 billion and expected to rise to 10 billion in the next 50 years. How will people find food and water, work and space to live healthily and happily, since at the same time we consume the Earth's resources at an alarming rate and callously pollute earth, air and water, damaging our own health and that of generations to come?

Our Stewardship of Creation

"We live in a relationship of interdependence with the earth, its future and ours cannot be separated. For people of faith this relationship may be understood in terms of the stewardship of creation as a gift from the Creator."

(CTE leaflet)

e.g. Genesis 1-2; Psalm 24 v 1, Psalm 8, Acts 14, 15b-17, Rom.-8, 19-21

Islam views the world as a garden for our use, but warns against being prodigal.

"He it is who produced a garden, trellised and untrellised, and the date palm and crops of divers flavour, and the olive and the pomegranate, like and unlike. Eat ye of the fruit thereof when it is fruited and pay thy due thereof upon harvest day, and be not prodigal. Lo! Allah loveth not the prodigal."

(Qur'an sura 5:95-96, 6:42)

This view of creation and our use of God's good gifts are interpreted in modern terms:

"Nature and the world are a field of exploration and the object of enjoyment for the Muslim. But whether he uses them for utility or for sheer enjoyment he must avoid waste and excess. As a responsible agent and a conscientious trustee he must always be mindful of others who share the world with him and who will succeed him in the future."

(Hammadah Abdalati: Islam in Focus 1981)

The earlier Biblical account of creation describes how man was put in the garden "To till it and keep it" (Genesis 2), Farmers in ancient Israel were forbidden to strip their fields or vineyards at harvest, but to leave some for the poor and for the sojourner", and in the 7th year, to observe "a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to the Lord".

"The ground is holy, being as it came from the Creator. Keep it, guard it, care for it, for it keeps men, guards men, cares for men. Destroy it and man is destroyed."

(Alan Paton)

Jewish blessings are said at every turn: over bread and after food, before drinking wine or smelling fragrant woods, on witnessing lightning or hearing thunder, at the sight of the sea, a rainbow, or trees blossoming in Spring. Typical of such blessings is :-

"Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, for the produce of the field;

for the desirable, good and ample land which thou wast pleased to give as an heritage unto our fathers,

that they might eat of its fruits and be satisfied with its goodness."

Sikhs worship the Creator god and acknowledge his presence and power over and through all:

"By God's will the Lord has created the creation and watches over all".

(Adi Granth 1036)

"The Lord pervades all created beings. God creates all and assigns all their tasks."

(Adi Granth 434)

Hindus acknowledge their dependence on water and the fertile land. Thus Mother Earth is respected by all for providing their food.

The Isa Upanishad declares that everything, from a blade of grass to the whole cosmos is the home of God. God lives in every corner of existence. Therefore the whole creation is sacred.

(Hinduism and Ecology, Ranchor Prime)

"Thou (Krishna) art the dark blue butterfly, and the green parrot with red eyes. Thou art the thundercloud, the seasons and the oceans."

(Shvetashvatara Upanishad 4:4)

The traditional religions of North America have much wisdom to teach us about respect for the earth and its creatures, for example the words of Chief Seattle:

"We are part of the earth and it is part of us ... The rocky crests, the juices in the meadows, the body heat of the pony, and human beings - all belong to the same family..... The rivers are our brothers - they quench our thirst. The rivers carry our canoes, and feed our children ... The white man treats his mother, the earth and his brother, the sky, as things to be bought, plundered, sold like sheep or bright beads. His appetite will devour the earth and leave behind only a desert ... This we know: all things are connected. Man did not weave their web of life; he is merely a strand of it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself."

Respect for the earth, and its creatures may be inspired by religious motives:

The Muslim is forbidden to hunt during the pilgrimage(Qur'an sura 5:95-96); the Hindu reveres the cow as the sacred mother, the great symbol of life and birth, and allows it to wander freely and to die a natural death. Buddhist concern for animal welfare is legendary :

"I will avoid taking life... I will try to show loving-kindness to all creatures"

(from the Five Precepts).

The Khuddaka Patha recommends all-embracing thoughts for all that lives:

"As a mother with her own life guards the life of her child, have all-embracing thoughts for all that lives"

(Metta Sutta).

Likewise, Jain scripture teaches us to love and serve all sentient beings who experience fear and pain just as we do. Jains brush the streets under their feet to avoid crushing small insects.

The Taoist "Track of the Quiet Way" advises:

"Buy captive animals and give them their freedom ... While walking, be mindful of worms and ants ... "

In the Hadith, Muhammed relates that God pardoned a man his sins because of the kindness he showed to a thirsty dog.

"There will be a reward for anyone who gives water to a being that has a tender heart.

(Hadith of Bukhari)

Respect for the earth may also be for pragmatic and utilitarian reasons

The Book of Deuteronomy gives specific instructions that when a city is besieged

"you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them, for you may eat of them ... Are the trees in the field men that they should be beset by you?"

(Deuteronomy 20: 19)

In the same vein, the Taoist "Track of the Quiet Way" advises:

"Be cautious with fire and do not set mountains, woods or forests ablaze... Do not butcher the ox that plows your field ..."

Celtic spirituality reveals a gentleness and respect for the beasts in our care:

"Encompass each goat, sheep and lamb,

Each cow and horse and store

Surround the flocks and herds

And look after them in a kindly fold."

(Carmina Gadelica)

In line with this attitude is the humanitarianism of Paul and Gareth

"Without a healthy environment we are in danger of damaging our own lives and particularly that of future generations. Our duties stretch far beyond the immediate future..."

(Paul)

"We human beings tread too heavily upon this earth... we do not see ourselves as part of the natural system but as overseers ... that arrogance based on ignorance or an unwillingness to accept a more co-operative role in the world does not bode well for the earth and all those who live upon it..."

He adds

"Alongside 'respect for the earth' there needs to be action, to use less, to recycle more, to use non-damaging products, to work with others on restoring our damaged environment."

(Gareth)

A modern Jewish view is similarly urgent:

"Conservation of the planet and its resources demands global commitment and organisation. We share the planet with each other or else we all perish."

(Norman Solomon : Amman Dialogue 1997)

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LET THERE BE ... PEACE FOR ITS PEOPLE

From 'respect for the earth' the Resolution moves on, naturally and logically, to the yearning for 'peace for its people'. How is peace to be understood and how is it to be achieved?

"Peace, for people of faith, includes concepts of justice, truth, wholeness and reconciliation, expressed in the world faiths as Shalom, Salaam, Shanti, Pax ... Such peace is more than merely absence of war. It implies a commitment to living in harmony with our fellow human beings"

(CTE leaflet).

To the faithful it also implies peace with God, and being at peace with oneself. Biblical references inseparably link spiritual peace and social harmony: Isaiah 21 v 1-5; 11 v 1-9; 32 v 14-20. John 14 v 27; Ephesians 2 v 14-18 and Hebrews 12 v 14.

Blessed are the Peacemakers,

for they shall be called sons of God. (Matthew 5 v 9).

This Beatitude is echoed in the story of how Elijah appeared to Rabbi Barucha of Huza in the market place at Lapet, drawing his attention to two particular men. "These two men will have a share in the world to come." The Rabbi asked the newcomers their occupation. "We are clowns", they replied. "When we see someone who is sad we cheer him up. When we see two people quarrelling, we try to make peace between them". (Taanit 22A)

Hindu prayers emphasise this longing for peace:

"0 Lord God, give us understanding to get together as one family. Give us humility to learn from one another; give us strength to create wealth; give us generosity to share your gifts; 0 Lord, the giver of peace, grant us peace, grant us peace, grant us peace.

(Peace prayer- AUM Sahana Vavatu)

Prayer for peace to the God of peace is the Muslim's daily petition. It is a du'a (supplication) said after namaz (formal daily prayer):

"0 Allah you are the source of peace and from you comes peace, exalted you are, 0 Lord of majesty and honour."

(from "Prayers of 4 Faiths" Interfaith Education Centre).

Force is only permitted in self-defence and with restraint

(cf 'the just war')

The Qur'an enjoins Muslims to 'fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits ... if they cease, let there be- no hostility except to those who practice oppression."

(Sura 2: 190,193)

The first Sikh community, founded by Guru Nanak, was committed to pacifism. Later Gurus taught that they should defend themselves. Kirpan is intended for use in self-defence, a symbol of dignity and self respect, and a reminder of the need to protect the individual's religious freedom.

"The Khalsa - the pure ones ~ shall rule, no hostile powers shall exist ... Those who enter the Khalsa for shelter will be protected. Without power, justice does not flourish; without justice, everything is crushed and ruined"

(Dasam Granth)

In the Hindu tradition it is acknowledged that in certain circumstances force is not only necessary but obligatory:

"If you do not fight in the just war, you will neglect your duty, harm your reputation and commit the sin of omission..."

(Bhagavad Gita 2 : 31,33)

Buddhists repudiate all forms of violence:

"All wars stem from our lack of human understanding, of mutual trust, of mutual respect, based on kindness and love for all beings."

(the Dalai Lama)

"...May all live in equanimity, without too much attachment and too much aversion (hatred), and live believing in the equality of all that lives."

(Tibetan Buddhist prayer)

The folly of violence is widely recognised :

"Those who live by the sword, will die by the sword".

(Matthew 26v52 - cf Genesis 9 v 6)

"Ashes fly back in the face of him who throws them".

(Yoruba - African trad.)

"Those who wrongfully kill men are only putting their weapons into the hands of others who will in turn kill them"

(Taoism:Treatise on Response and retribution 5)

Michelle sums up the practical implications for the longing for peace : "We in this country are very lucky that there is no war and very few of us feel threatened or frightened. But peace is also getting on with neighbours ... we are here for only a small space of time and we should enjoy as much of it as possible. if we respect each other's space and characters, see and accept people for who and what they are, I think life could be more peaceful.

"Shalom"

contains within it a variety of meanings including that of well-being, harmony, happiness and wholeness: in a corporate sense of what would be the ideal state of life in Israel (Is 2: 2-4; Il: 6+), and the personal state of well-being of every member of that community. (Ps 4:8, 37:37)

One of the benedictions that follow the Shema in the Jewish evening liturgy reads:

"Cause us, O Lord, our God, to lie down in peace, and raise us up, O our King, unto life. Spread over us the tabernacle of thy peace ... and guard our going out and our coming in unto life and unto peace, from this time forth and forever more. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who guardest thy people Israel for ever."

According to the Sikh tradition "the Lord is Peace" and bestows peace to the troubled and in distress.

"Should anyone be a victim of great anxiety, his body racked with maladies, beset with problems of home and family, with pleasure and pain alternating, wandering in all four directions without peace or rest, should then contemplate the Supreme Being, peaceful shall his mind and body become."

In Hinduism, peace and freedom are found

"if you detach yourself from identification with the body and remain relaxed in and as Consciousness, you will, this very moment be happy, at peace, free from bondage."

(Ashtavakra Gita 2 - 29)

Again, peace comes through knowledge of the Truth:

"The ignorant say "what I believe is true; others are wrong" It is this attitude that causes disputes among men. But all doubts vanish when one masters self and finds peace by realising the heart of Truth. Thereupon dispute, too, is at an end."

(Srimad Bhagavatam 11:15)

Buddhism advocates the Middle Way of the eightfold path to avoid suffering

caused by the desire for a life devoted either to sensual pleasure or mortifications of the flesh:

"Which, O Bhikkus (my monks) is this Middle Path? It is the holy eightfold Path ... which leads to wisdom, which conduces to calm, to knowledge, to Nirvana."

(Mahavagga 1: 6)

Similarly, Islamic teaching espouses virtue (the selfless act) as the way to contentment and peace:

"Question your heart ... Virtue is that by which the soul enjoys repose and the heart tranquillity. Sin is what introduces trouble into the soul and tumult into man's bosom..."

(40 Hadith of An-Nawawi : 27)

Taoism teaches a sharing in the general harmony of nature.

"Men should cease to bicker and quarrel and fight over material possessions. They should rather take as an example the qualities of water. Water is gentle, acts quietly, overcomes all things and benefits all men. Yet it always seeks the lowest place. So man should design his life: orderly and unhurried, humble and controlled, ambitious only to benefit mankind ... To the man of Tao the only way to settle disputes is by discussion. Human warfare is unnatural; the man of Tao hates all weapons. He respects all life, human animal, and insect ... He returns good for evil."

(FC Herod: World Religions)

"Hatred and enmity can be so overpowering that there leaves little room for anything else - it can suck goodness out of you, poisoning your system and those who come in contact with you. Peace has the opposite effect, building up individuals, families, neighbourhoods and communities - we should all resolve to welcome peace more often into our lives."

(Gareth)

"Great is peace, because peace is to the earth what yeast is to the dough. If the Holy One, blessed be He, had not given peace to the earth, the sword and wild beasts would desolate the world."

(Judaism: the Talmud Beraita de Perek ha-Shalom)

LET THERE BE ... LOVE IN OUR LIVES

At the centre of the wording of this Millennium Resolution is the acknowledgement that **there is a universal need for love: to love and to be loved.**

My three local friends describe well this common need of love:

"We all need love in our lives, for comfort and support. Everyone needs to feel wanted: sometimes physically (a cuddle or just holding hands), sometimes spending time for a chat." (Michelle)

"Nothing improves the quality of life more than love." (Paul)

"Love tells me I am not alone, that my life is shared with people I love and who love me." (Careth)

Historian Arnold Toynbee wrote :

"Love is the only spiritual power that can overcome the self-centredness that is inherent in being alive. Love is the thing that makes life possible or, indeed, tolerable."

People of faith acknowledge the centrality and sacredness of love

"Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God ... In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him, that he who loves God should love his brother also."

(1 John 4)

In serving others from love, divine love is encountered.

"Whether you love the One or another human being, if you love enough, in the end you will come into the presence of love itself.

(Islam... Sufi Master Rumi)

cf. the parable of the Sheep and the Goats. (Matthew 25, 31-46)

"When the Holy One loves a man, He sends him a present in the shape of a poor man, so that he should perform some good deed to him, through the merit of which he may draw to himself a cord of grace".

(Judaism ... Zohar, Genesis 104A)

When asked the greatest commandment, Jesus quoted the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:5) and declared total love for God inseparable from total love for our neighbour.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind ... Love others as much as you love yourself." (Matthew 22: 37.39)

The Golden Rule

in Jesus ' Sermon on the Mount, that "whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them" has remarkably close parallels in other faiths in what may be described as a 'universal ethic of empathy' as the following examples show from: Judaism, Islam, Confucianism, Jainism, Hinduism, Buddhism and the Bahai faith.

"What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour; that is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary; go and learn."

(Talmud, Shabbat 3IA)

"Not one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself."

(40 Nawawi 13)

"Try your best to treat others as you wish to be treated yourself, and you will find this is the shortest way to goodness."

(Mencius VIII.A)

"A man should wander about treating all creatures as he himself would be treated."

(Sutrakritanga 1.11.33)

"One should not behave towards others in a way which is disagreeable to oneself. This is the essence of morality. All other activities are due to selfish desire."

(Mahabharata, Anusasana Parba 113.8)

" ... strive constantly to serve the welfare of the world; by devotion to selfless service one attains the supreme goal of life. Do your work with the welfare of others always in mind."

(Bhagavad Gita, Ch 3-4)

" ... comparing oneself to others in such terms as 'Just as I am so are they, just as they are so am I', one should neither kill nor cause others to kill.

(Sutta Nipata 705)

"Religious fanaticism and hatred are a world-devouring fire ... Only the hand of divine power can deliver man from this desolating affliction..."

Deal with one another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship."

(Epistle to the Son of the Wolf)

Let there be love in our lives.

Love is something expressed in loving service, in both family and community.

The caring, selfless love of a mother for her family is like the pure love of a Buddha.

"My mother's kindness is responsible for all the opportunities I have... my mother always took care of me, feeding me properly, protecting me from dangers, directing my life ... from the time of my conception she

has been worried and concerned about me."

(Lama Zopa Rinpoche)

"All men are responsible for one another."

(Sanhedrin 27 b)

"Even a poor man who himself subsists on charity should give to charity."

(Gittin 7B)

"Deeds of kindness are equal in weight to all the commandments."

(Y Peah 1 : 1)

"Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those in prison, as though in prison with them; and those who are ill-treated, since you also are in the body ... Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."

(Hebrews 13: 1-3, 16)

Muslims who have savings should pay zakat (one of the five pillars of wisdom) to those in need: the poor, the disabled and the elderly.

"They feed with food the needy wretch, the orphan, and the prisoner for love of Him, saying, 'we wish for no reward nor thanks from you.' (Qur'an 76: 8-9)

Charity is also one of the fundamental concepts of Sikh life and conduct:

"The householder who gives all he can.-afford to charity is as pure as the water of the Ganges."

(Adi Granth 952)

Selfless Love is unifying, essential and enduring. It is simply the greatest!

Krishna teaches his disciple, Arjuna, the power of selfless service. This is the promise of the Creator:

Through selfless service you will always be fruitful and find the fulfilment of your desires ... All life turns on this law, O Arjuna. Whoever violates it, indulging his senses for his own pleasure and ignoring the needs of others, has wasted his life."

(Bhagavad Gita ch 3 - 4)

"Even three times a day to offer 300 cooking pots of food does not match a portion of the merit acquired in an instant of love."

Bu (Nagarjuna, Precious Garland 285)

"There is no need for us to agree philosophically, no need to share a temple or a belief. If we are full of goodwill, our own mind, our own heart, is the temple. Kindness alone is enough. This is my religion."

The Dalai Lama: (Voices of survival in the nuclear age)

"Love is the firstborn, loftier than the gods, the fathers and men. You, O Love, are the eldest of all, altogether mighty. To you we pay homage. Greater than the breadth of earth and heaven, or of waters and fire... In many forms of goodness, O Love, you show your face. Grant that these forms may penetrate within our hearts."

(Atharva Veda 9.2.19-25)

"Love is patient, love is kind ... it always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ... Love never fails... And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

(1 Corinthians 13)

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LET THERE BE ... DELIGHT IN THE GOOD

This phrase of the Resolution was included at the specific request of the Jewish participants, reflecting the Genesis narrative of creation that "God saw all that he had made, and it was good". Thus, God's providential gifts of food and drink, good health and long life, work and rest, marriage and family are, in the Jewish tradition, to be enjoyed and appreciated - in contrast to the world-denying, austere asceticism of the Nazarites. On the Day of Judgement, according to the Talmud, we must explain the things we were allowed to do, but didn't.

This accords with the story of Jesus and his disciples in the cornfields on the Sabbath happily eating the grains.

"The Sabbath was made for the good of man, not man for the Sabbath".

(Mark 2 v 23-28)

A Jewish prayer for 'length of days' summarises God's good gifts and the many blessings of life:-

"May it be thy will, O Lord our God, to grant us long life, a life of peace, of sustenance, a there is fear of a life of riches with the love of which thou shalt a life of good, a life of blessing, a life of bodily vigour, a life in which sin, a life free from shame and confusion, and honour, a life in which we may be filled thy Law and the fear of heaven, a life in fulfil all the desires of our hearts for

good."

(Berakoth 99)

WHAT IS THE GOOD IN WHICH WE SHOULD DELIGHT?

It is the good within us.

Taoism refers to "natural goodness" ...

" which is like a deep well inside of you. If you have been drawing from this well, then nothing is impossible ... Be like a mother, and the effects of what you will do will last."

(Tao te Ching 59)

Gareth comments: "When there is so much sad and dispiriting news around it is easier to wallow in that than to celebrate that in life which is good ... Working within the voluntary sector, we regularly celebrate success and good work ... the motivational power of recognising and celebrating what is good within us and our organisation drives us forward."

It is doing what God wants -of us .

The prophet Micah answers the question in memorable phrases:

"He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

(Micah 6 : 8)

Close to the meaning of this prophecy are the words of the Qur'an:

"Say, Come, I will recite what God has made a sacred duty for you: Ascribe nothing as equal with Him. Be good to your parents... Approach not lewd behaviour whether open or in secret ... Take not life, which God has made sacred, except by way of justice and law. This he commands you, that you may learn wisdom ... And approach not the property of the orphan, except to improve it; until he attains the age of maturity ... And if you give your word, do it justice even if a near relative is concerned, and fulfil your obligations to God.

(6 151+)

It is loving service, done out of sincerity and the desire to please:-

"Those who serve God from love will be like servants who lay out gardens and delights with which to please their absent Lord when he returns."

Judaism (Tana d'be Eliyahy, 560)

"Be mindful of your duty and do good works ... be mindful of your duty, and believe. Be mindful of your duty and do right."

(Qur'an 5: 93)

There is satisfaction in honest labour and happiness in sharing the fruits of our labours with others.

"Only he who earns a living by the sweat of his brow and shares his earnings with others has discovered the path of righteousness."

Sikhism (Adi Granth 1245)

It is generosity, compassion and hospitality.

"But when you give a party, ask the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. That is the way to find happiness, because they have no means of repaying you. You will be repaid when the righteous rise from the dead."

(Luke 14 v 13-14)

"He is not a believer who eats his fill while his neighbour remains hungry by his side."Islam (Hadith)

Abraham and his wife are quick to welcome and provide for the three strangers. (Genesis 18) Such kindness can have unexpected consequences:

"Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

(Hebrews 13 v 2)

So, to be magnanimous and altruistic is goodness in action, as Paul points out (with echoes of St. Paul's hymn of love).

"Delight in the good and in the fortune of others, without jealousy. Enjoy things because they bring pleasure to others?".

"Happiness lies more in giving than in receiving."

(Acts 20 v 20v35)

It is all the joys of home and family life

Parents will take great pleasure and satisfaction in a son who is wise and good:

"My son, if you are wise at heart, my heart will in turn be glad. I shall rejoice with all my soul when your lips utter what is right."

"Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old ..."

"A good man's father will rejoice and he who has a wise son will delight in him. Give your father and mother cause for delight; may she who bore you rejoice."

(Proverbs 23: 15,22,24-25)

Our sexuality is to be celebrated and fidelity in marriage cherished:

"And among his signs is this: that he created for you mates among yourselves, that you should dwell in tranquillity with them; and he has put love and mercy between your hearts."

(Qur'an 30:21)

In a Hindu wedding, the couple take seven steps towards a sacred fire, each step having a special significance:

- | | | |
|-------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| 1) food | 3) increasing wealth | 5) children |
| 2) strength | 4) good fortune | 6) the seasons |
| | | 7) everlasting friendship |

"The best treasure is a good wife. She is pleasing to her husband's eyes, obedient to his word, and watchful over his possessions in his absence; and the best of you are those who treat their wives best."

Islam (Hadith)

It is the joys of Shabbat observance

The Sabbath is a day of tremendous joy, according to these observant Jews:-

"It's the day that keeps me going for the rest of the week. Without the Shabbat, I feel the week would have no shape ... On the Shabbat every Jew receives an added dimension to his soul ... On the Shabbat I feel a different person. I feel more alive, more bright, more cheerful ... In fact when one keeps the law according to the Shabbat, it is like being in a different world ... On Shabbat we sing, on Shabbat we dance, on Shabbat we have time to study without interruption. We have time to pray."

One who came from Poland before the First World War, recalls the happy family atmosphere generated by Shabbat observance in his childhood days:

"Shabbat is a very beautiful day. In my younger days ... they used to get very famous Rabbis coming there, and it was very jolly-very jolly ... And I used to enjoy the singing, and the dancing, and the clapping ... I used to enjoy it; and I loved the Shabbat, because they didn't have that during the week."

(John Bowker: Worlds of Faith p147-148)

It is choosing goodness and rejecting evil

"Nor can goodness and evil be equal. Repel evil with what is better"

. (Qur'an 41:34) cf (Psalm 34 v 14)

"Let us fill our hearts with compassion - towards ourselves and towards all living beings. Let us pray that we ourselves cease to be the cause of suffering to each other.

(Buddhist - The Venerable Thich Nhat Hahn)

According to Anas ibn Malik, the Prophet said:

'Help your brother whether he is oppressor or oppressed'. Anas replied to him, 'O Messenger of God, a man who is oppressed I am ready to help, but how does one help an oppressor?' 'By hindering him doing wrong', he said.

(Hadith of Bukhari) (Islam)

"Whatever is true ... whatever is pure ... think about these things".

(Philippians 4 v 8)

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LET THERE BE ... FORGIVENESS FOR PAST WRONGS

Our century and closing Millennium, littered with the debris of innumerable brutal atrocities, show the frailty of human nature and the power of sin. Forgiveness at every level, however costly, is undoubtedly essential if true reconciliation is to be achieved.

All religions urge acknowledgement and repentance of sin and shortcomings, both corporate and individual, as a first step to transforming and overcoming them.

The Day of Atonement, YOM KIPPUR

On the holiest day in the Jewish calendar the people are called to prayer, fasting and public confession of sin. Traditionally it was the day when the high priest offered sacrifices for the sins of the whole people of Israel, in the Temple holy of holies. (as described in Leviticus and Numbers, and in Isaiah 57-58, and Micah 7:18-20)

Judaism, ever practical, stresses that it is not enough for a man to feel sorry for his sins - he must do something about them.

"For transgressions against God, the Day of Atonement atones; but for transgressions against a fellow man the Day of Atonement does not atone so long as the sinner has not redressed the wrongdoing and conciliated the man he has sinned against."

(Rabbie Eleazar ben Azariaiah AD70-135)

(cf. Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:12. Matthew 18: 21-22)

Everyone stands in need of forgiveness

"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God"

(Romans 3:23; Ps.14)

"Let every person ask pardon of the Great Light ASIS, the Moulder of us all"

(Kipsigis saying - Kenya)

"And whoever does evil or acts unjustly to his soul, then asks forgiveness of Allah, he shall find Allah forgiving, merciful"

(Qur'an 4: 110)

(cf. 1st letter of John 1: 8-9)

"If one has indeed done deeds of wickedness but afterwards alters his way and repents, resolved not to do anything wicked, but to practice reverently all that is good, he is sure in the long run to obtain good fortune- this is called changing calamity into blessing."

(Tao Treatise on response and retribution 5)

Therefore do not judge others

Matthew 7: 1-5. John 8: 2-11.

"The vile are ever prone to detect the faults of others, though they be as small as mustard seeds, and persistently shut their eyes against their own, though they be as large as vilva fruit."

Hinduism (Garuda Purana 112)

"Dwelling on your brother's faults multiplies your own. You are far from the end of your journey."

Buddhism. (Dhammapada 18)

"Do not judge your comrade until you have stood in his place."

Judaism. (Abot 2: 5)

"Do not judge another until you have walked some miles in his mocassins."

(N.American Indian)

Forgiveness is best

"Who is the bravest hero? He who turns his enemy into a friend."

Judaism (The Talmud)

"The good deed and the evil deed are not alike. Repel the evil deed with one which is better, then someone with whom you were divided by enmity will become like a bosom friend."

(Qur'an 4: 110)

"Moses, son of Imran, said, "My lord, who is the greatest of your servants in your estimation?" and received the reply: "The one who forgives when he is in a position of power."

Islam (Hadith of Baihaqi)

Reconciliation should be sought without delay,

as in Jesus' teaching:

"So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember your brother has something against you, leave your gift there at the altar and go! First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Make friends quickly with your accuser."

(Matthew 5: 23-25a)

"Do not let the sun go down on your anger."

St. Paul (Ephesians 4:26)

Michelle comments:

"I'm the sort of person to sort out any wrongs at the time, once it's sorted, it's sorted."

On the other hand, revenge is easy and may even seem just:

but it is deadly.

"The recompense (reward) for an injury is an injury equal thereto; but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah."

(Qur'an)

"The smallest revenge will poison the soul."

(Jewish proverb)

"The methods (of punishment) used only create more problems, more suffering, more distrust, more resentment, more division. The result is not good for anyone."

(The Dalai Lama)

"... a superior being does not render evil for evil ... one should never harm the wicked or the good or even criminals meriting death. A noble soul will exercise compassion even towards those who enjoy injuring others or those of cruel deeds when they are actually committing them - for who is without fault?"

Hinduism (Ramayana, Yudda Kanda, 115)

"Who takes vengeance or bears a grudge acts like someone who, having cut one hand while handling a knife, avenges himself by stabbing the other hand."

(Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim 9.4)

But forgiveness is hard, perhaps at times impossible?

C.S. Lewis makes the point: "Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive."

This is acknowledged by Michelle: "I have neither the time nor the inclination to carry on bad feelings towards others - but maybe I'm lucky and no one has done anything bad enough for me not to forgive them..."

Paul has difficulty with the idea of forgiving heinous crimes:

"I can overlook certain wrongs. Indeed it is better to look ahead rather than to the past. However, I think some things cannot be forgiven. To do so might imply that they are not wrong. e.g. How can atrocities carried out in Kosovo in the name of 'ethnic cleansing' be forgiven? It can never be right".

Gareth advises caution before imputing blame:

"If I do resolve to forgive others for past wrongs, I also resolve to make sure as sure can be that I am not falsely accusing in the first place. 'Life moves on' it is said, but holding people for past wrongs puts life on hold, conflicts last generations when they should be over in weeks..."

To forgive is beautiful (Greek proverb)

"The best deed of a great man is to forgive and forget."

Islam (Nanjul Balgha 201)

"After an attempt at reconciliation, if bitterness still remains - what then? Meet bitterness with kindness."

(Tao Teching 70)

"They who are reviled but revile not others, they who hear themselves reproached but make no reply, they whose every act is one of love and who cheerfully bear their afflictions - these are the ones of whom Scripture says 'Those who love him are like the sun rising in strength.'"

Judaism. (Yoma 23a; Shabbat 88b; Gittin 36b)

"Those who beat you with fists, do not pay them in the same coin, but go to their house and kiss their feet."

(Adi Granth, Shalok, Farid) Sikhism

"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

(Ephesians 4: 31-32)

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AND FROM NOW ON, A NEW START

Each new day offers opportunities to each of us to be better, to live in better relationship with one another, and to contribute to a better world.

"New mercies each returning day hover around us while we pray:

New perils past, new sins forgiven, new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven."

(John Keble: 1792-1866)

So the start of a new century, indeed a new Millennium, presents Christians and all people of goodwill and a concern for justice to work for radical reform, for example, following the Jubilee 2000 Campaign aim of "a debt-free start for a billion people." The inspiration behind this Campaign comes from the Jubilee principle in the Book of Leviticus, as Desmond Tutu explains:

"The leaders of rich nations should look to the Bible for inspiration. Every 50 years you make a new beginning. You cancel any debts owed. If there are slaves, you set them free. It's a chance for renewal for everybody."

So -

Is there, then, common ground for hope for the future?

The hope is that as the words of the Millennium Resolution are read and reflected on by Christians and non-Christians alike, they may be said with sincerity and lived out with conviction. For we have much in common.

Let dialogue continue

"Questions of peace and justice, of development and education, of dialogue and education, of truth and love, and the almost desperate search for a quality of life that can sustain personal values in an age of technology - these are matters that bring together various peoples as they share a troubled past and look to a common future..."

(Stanley Samartha: 'Courage to Dialogue' on the World Council of Churches debate at Nairobi in 1975)

Looking ahead into the future

"We have glimpses of the deepest perceptions of faith, but we know that this perception of faith cannot be carried out alone. There are many others in the wilderness, people of other living faiths, people of other ideologies or of none; we cannot pass them by. The dialogue which is called for is a face to face existence of living together and struggling together as we seek community. Above all, in the wilderness, we have discovered that we are indeed a fellowship of the pilgrim people of God."

(Final Address to the 5th Assembly W.C.C., by Philip Potter)

Hope lights a candle

(for the following you will need an unlit candle)

Hope looks for the good in people, instead of harping on the worst.

Hope discovers what can be done, instead of grumbling about what cannot.

Hope pushes ahead, when it might be easy to give up.

Hope opens doors, where despair closes them.

Hope lights candles instead of cursing the darkness.

(Sri Lanka. Author unknown Christian Aid)

(Light the candle now)

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Acknowledgments

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I am indebted to my wife Anne, who patiently and painstakingly typed the script from my rough drafts; and to t'other Anne (as they say up here) who kindly photocopied and assembled the paper.

Note: If I have misquoted, misunderstood or misinterpreted the sayings and sacred scriptures of other faiths, I apologise profusely. No offence was intended.

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Converted to pdf October 2008