

CHRIST

or NOTHING

D*ivide and Conquer* is one of the prevailing influences that relentlessly wars against peaceful co-existence — a calculated plan to break down peaceful and loving relationships. Some fear that the increasingly strident rhetoric of opposing forces in North America may eventually lead to another Civil War. The prophetic lament of Ezekiel echoes in the streets of our cities — *Prepare chains! For the land is full of bloodshed, and the city is full of violence.* — Ezekiel 7:23

Divide and Conquer. Left vs. Right. Republicans vs. Democrats. Muslims vs. Christians. Old vs. Young. Male vs. Female. Race against race.

One of the tactics of *divide and conquer* involves blaming and shaming, name-calling and vilifying the opposition. Those who employ a *divide and conquer* scheme create a seditious, oppressive narrative that fosters mistrust and fear

The gospel is not about overwhelming and defeating one's enemy via violence — it's all about serving others in the name of Jesus.

of “the other side.” *Divide and conquer* is a brutal battle of attrition in which both “sides” blame the other for their problems. Name-calling and blaming escalates until inevitably violence results.

BUILDING OR DESTROYING?

Dividing people leads to a win-at-any-cost mentality and justifies bloodshed in the name of the greater good (sometimes, ironically and pathetically, in the name of God). *Uniting people* involves proclaiming a vision larger than any

human interest and inspiring people to sacrifice and serve others, so that all may be uplifted.

Divide and conquer involves deception and manipulation, dividing people by using the “them” and “us” strategy. *Divide and conquer* feeds anger, fear and ultimately produces violence. Leaders intent on dividing and conquering often build a cult-like following by indoctrinating and brainwashing, giving those who believe in them only one exaggerated side of the story.

Divide and conquer groups, teams, political parties, religions, institutions, companies or nations allow for no middle ground, no compromise, no meeting others halfway — the cause is cast as a war and the followers are exhorted to be all-in warriors, intent on destroying the opposition.

Leaders intent on uniting build bridges rather than blowing them up. Jesus said, “*Blessed are the peacemakers*” (Matthew 5:9). Jesus did not teach his followers to riot, pillage and loot in order to achieve their ends. Jesus gave no directions to his followers about glorifying human leaders who are warriors.

Life in and with Christ is not earned by the rich and powerful elite, nor by powerful empires and their military forces. Life in Christ is a gift of God's grace, not earned or deserved. Life in Christ, the Jesus Way, is in the hands of the poor in spirit, meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful and those who pursue peace (Matthew 5:3-10).

Governments and religions manipulate and control via fear and anger, whereas Jesus invites us to his peace and his rest. Our faith, as Christ-followers, is not based on supporting troops, wiping out terrorists, nor does it consist in placing our ultimate trust and hope in the government or in religion.

Warriors and military leaders who espouse our

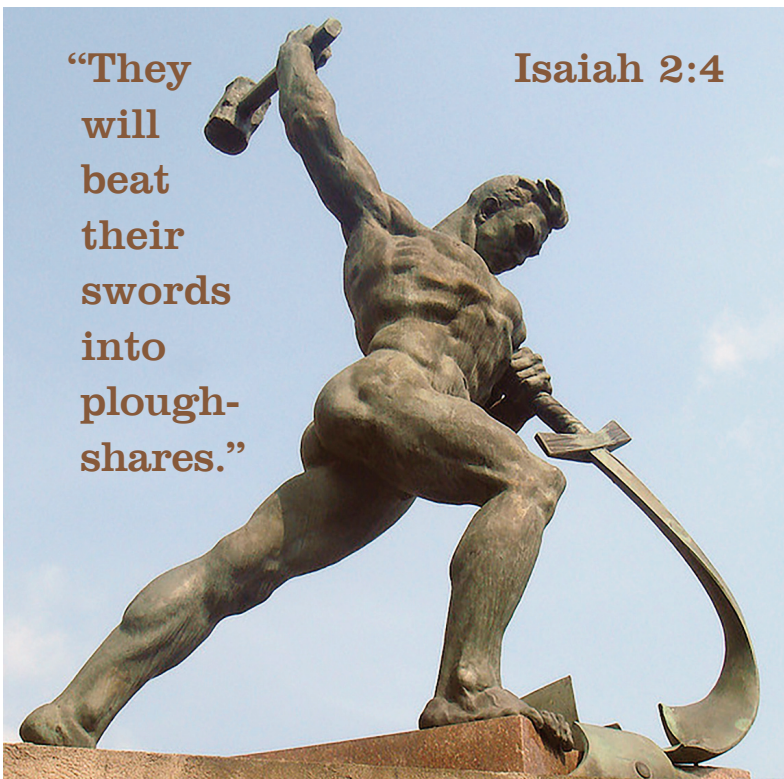
cause and “defend” our country, culture and values are highly esteemed in our world. Men and women of peace are not honored with victory parades — whereas grateful crowds applaud warriors who kill and cripple and maim.

Carl Sandburg, who won three Pulitzer prizes, wrote an epic poem titled “The People, Yes.” He imagined a young girl watching a military parade, and remarking, “Sometime they’ll give a war and nobody will come.” *What if... they gave a war and nobody showed up?*

What if ... rioters and looters broke the window of a shoe, jewelry or drug store ... but no one followed them in to loot that store?

“They will beat their swords into plough-shares.”

Isaiah 2:4



A FORGIVING LIFE

Jesus’ call to non-violence is neither passive nor is it weak ... it is the power of the love of God, in action. It is returning good for evil. It is standing up to abuse and oppression, not with violence, but with love. Loving one’s neighbor and indeed one’s enemy is the core of being a new man and new woman in Christ — the very center of a Christ-centered revolution.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not about winning and defeating one’s enemy via violence — rather in a cruciform, Christ-centered way it is about a

willingness to lose one’s own interests in the greater good of serving another. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not all about winning and crushing and overwhelming — it’s concerned with yielding, giving, self-sacrificing and serving others in the name of Jesus.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is loving people who don’t look like, talk like, think like, believe like, vote like or live like we do. The gospel of Jesus Christ is all about forgiveness rather than revenge — reconciliation rather than retribution.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is about a real God who in the midst of the reality of people’s lives loves them and is with them, during the storms and upheavals and losses and tragedies they face. Being a Christ-follower means that many disciples of Jesus do not have nor will they have, in this life, what some in Christendom would call *their best life now*.

Life is not what you and I want it to be — life is life — life is what it is. History is a record of facts — history may not have happened the way you and I wish it had happened, but the facts are facts. *We are not free, as some seem to think they are, to rewrite history so that it comports with what we believe should have happened.*

George Orwell (1984) said that those who control the present control the past and that control of the past helps shape and control the future. Control is always a key element within politics and religion, but coercion is missing in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Today, in the interests of control and enforcing their perspective (*their truth, if you like*) many engage in massive efforts to discredit the past, rewrite and redact it, and tear down statues and monuments ... as if doing so will reform the world according to the image of those engaged in the undertaking.

Life is life. Truth is truth. It is what it is. Following Jesus is not Hollywood — it’s not a nursery rhyme or a Mother Goose story. Circumstances and experiences that happen in life are real — they are true or false, right or wrong. Love it or not, life is what it is. Accept it and deal with life, with Jesus by your side and living his risen life in you, or reject reality and live in the denial of some false religious or political la-la land.

But here’s what we don’t get to do — and this is

something that is lost on vast swaths of Christendom today — we cannot remake Jesus into our own image. The gospel of Jesus Christ is what it is. Love it or hate it. Accept it or reject it. But *God does not empower us to edit and rearrange the past or the present so that it is more to our liking.*

CHRIST OR NOTHING

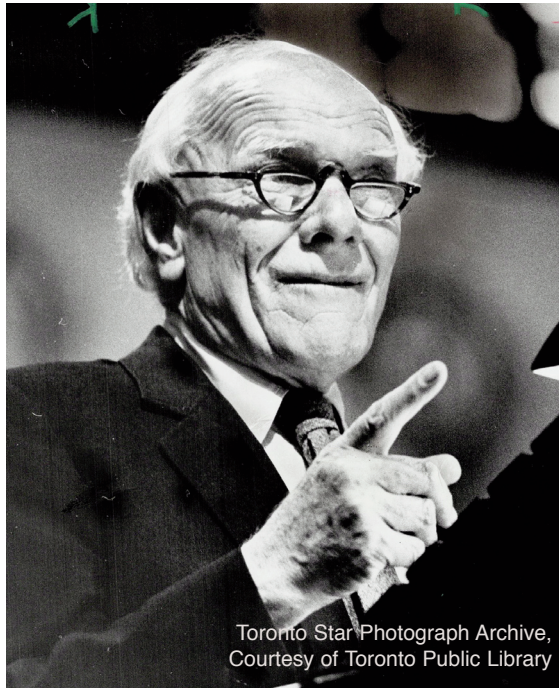
All who follow Jesus will experience hardship and suffering — suffering and hardship are part of following him — as Christ-followers, the emphasis in our life is on Jesus and on serving others in his name. We follow Jesus. *All Jesus, All the Time.*

For us, it is *Christ or nothing.* We should not expect that our lives following Jesus will be a day at the beach or a walk in the park — if a religious professional tells you that, they are incorrect and they should either learn what following Christ is all about or they should find a new way to put bread on their table and pay their rent.

We should not expect that our efforts on this earth, in support of a political perspective or party, will turn the world into a utopia. We are not capable of such a thing.

Above all, Christ followers live a Christ-centered life. All else is peripheral. All else is trivial by comparison to the privilege of following Jesus and serving others in his name.

One of the most incredible moments in the 20th century world of higher education took place in January 1968. Malcolm Muggeridge resigned as the



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—Malcolm Muggeridge

Rector of the University of Edinburgh because he would not accept relaxing rules on campus so that students could buy and sell marijuana. He faced the student body in this speech, and courageously, in the face of the heckling, shouting and booing of young people, Muggeridge told them the truth.

Where are the educators and pastors and priests today who will tell our young people the truth, instead of what they want to hear? Where are the politicians and leaders who will tell their constituencies the truth, rather than manipulating them with fear and hatred?

Here’s a short excerpt from the 1968 resignation speech of Malcolm Muggeridge, which some later titled “Christ or Nothing.”

The students of this university are the beneficiaries of centuries of selfless scholarship. You are supposed to spearhead progress and carry the torch of humanity. Speaking for myself there is

practically nothing you could do in rebellion against our impoverished way of life for which I should not feel some sympathy.

But how infinitely sad, how macabre that the form of your rebellion should be a demand for drugs, for the most tenth-rate sort of self-life.

We await great works of art, the spirit of adventure and courage, and what do we get from you? Self-centered folly. You are on a crazy slope. For myself, I always come back to the King, to Jesus, to the Christian notion that all our efforts to make ourselves happy will fail, but that sacrifice for others will never fail.

A man must become a new man, or he is no man. Or so at least, I have concluded, having failed to find in past experience and present dilemmas any alternative proposition. As far as I am concerned, it is Christ or nothing. Goodbye and God bless you. □

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