Mel Gibson to Direct Film About Desmond Doss

Mel Gibson, whose film credits include “The Passion of the Christ” (2004) and “Apocalypto” (2006), will direct his first movie in eight years. “Hacksaw Ridge” will tell the story of Seventh-day Adventist conscientious objector Desmond T. Doss, the first and only World War II pacifist to win the Congressional Medal of Honor. (link)

Bates Versus Byington: Words Versus Actions

Which is more important, actions to change the world or words to herald Jesus’ return? I hope we see this as a false choice, but let’s consider the question in the context of an early Adventist debate. (link)

Flanders Field: Reflections on War by Reinder Bruinsma

It was some twenty years ago that I first realized how terrible the First World War had been. In far away Australia I visited the War Memorial—a museum that pays a lot of attention to the Australian contribution to the Allied cause in the Great War (as WW I is referred to in many countries). During that visit I understood better than ever before that nations from all over the world were involved in this world-wide dispute. (link)
November 11 is known in various parts of the world as Armistice Day, Remembrance Day, or Veterans Day. It marks the anniversary of the end of World War I, ironically tagged as “The War to End Wars.” Sadly, almost 100 years later, we still live in a violent, war-ravaged, and divided world. (link)
Mel Gibson to Direct Film About Desmond Doss

November 26, 2014 · by APF · in Uncategorized.
Mel Gibson, whose film credits include “The Passion of the Christ” (2004) and “Apocalypto” (2006), will direct his first movie in eight years. “Hacksaw Ridge” will tell the story of Seventh-day Adventist conscientious objector Desmond T. Doss, the first and only World War II pacifist to win the Congressional Medal of Honor. The film will star Andrew Garfield (of “The Amazing Spider-Man”) in the role of Doss. The project marks a somewhat surprising turn for the director and actor most famous for his starring roles in violent action films built around themes radically opposed to the values of conscientious objection and nonviolent Christian peace witness that guided Doss and other Adventists of his generation. Yet Gibson, a devout Catholic, has also shown a long-standing interest in telling religious stories. “The project looks a perfect fit for the religiously minded Gibson,” The Guardian newspaper notes (http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/nov/21/mel-gibson-puts-faith-in-christian-war-hero-for-directorial-comeback). “The Oscar-winning director’s 2004 film ‘The Passion of the Christ’ was an enormous box office hit, taking more than $600m worldwide after attracting huge numbers of Christian filmgoers in the US. However, the film also drew accusations of antisemitism, charges that have dogged Gibson ever since.”

The Adventist Peace Fellowship features Doss along with other Adventist peacemakers on the APF website, (http://adventistpeace.org/peacemakers) and during the month of May on its soon-to-be-released 2015 wall calendar. When drafted into the military during World War II, Desmond Doss, like virtually all Seventh-day Adventists in the United States, refused to carry a weapon and entered the service as a noncombatant medic. During basic training he faced harassment and ridicule from his fellow soldiers for his principled stand as a conscientious objector committed to saving rather than taking lives. One of his officers sought to have him discharged on grounds of alleged mental illness. Doss was assigned to the Pacific theatre where he distinguished himself for his remarkable valor. In one incident, he personally carried 75 wounded men, one by one, off of a fire-swept battlefield, exposing himself repeatedly to a barrage of mortar and heavy machine-gun fire without any regard for his own safety. In another battle, he continued to care for the injured even after being wounded by a grenade. Doss became the first conscientious objector to receive America’s highest military award. His Medal of Honor citation reads in part: “Through his outstanding bravery and unflinching determination in the face of desperately dangerous conditions Pfc. Doss saved the lives of many soldiers. His name became a symbol throughout the 77th Infantry Division for outstanding gallantry far above and beyond the call of duty.”
Follow "The APF Blog"

Build a website with WordPress.com
News and Commentary for the Healing of the Nations

Bates Versus Byington: Words Versus Actions

November 20, 2014 · by Jeff Boyd · in Peacemaking & Reconciliation ·

Which is more important, actions to change the world or words to herald Jesus’ return? I hope we see this as a false choice, but let’s consider the question in the context of an early Adventist debate.

Joseph Bates was active in the U.S. anti-slavery movement before he believed in Jesus’ soon return. Although after his conversion he continued to oppose slavery, his new theology or eschatology significantly changed his approach to abolitionism. He wrote:

Some of my good friends that were engaged in the temperance and abolition cause, came to know why I could not attend their stated meetings as formerly, and argued that my belief in the coming of the Saviour should make me more ardent in endeavoring to suppress these growing evils. My reply was, that in embracing the doctrine of the second coming of the Saviour, I found enough to engage my whole time in getting ready for such an event, and aiding others to do the same, and that all who embraced this doctrine would and must necessarily be advocates of temperance and the abolition of slavery; and those who opposed the doctrine of the second advent could not be very effective laborers in moral reform. And further, I could not see duty in leaving such a great work to labor single-handed as we had done, when so much more could be accomplished in working at the fountain-head, making us every way right as we should be for the coming of the Lord.[1]

Bates believed he was moving from working with one hand to working with two and moving from peripheral branches to the root or fountain-head. Rather than merely get right about slavery and alcohol, Bates wanted to be “every way right.” Adventist historian Douglas Morgan states that Bates believed issue-oriented activism “would never be widespread enough to transform human society before Christ’s return” (Adventism and the American Republic, p. 27). That is, Bates felt that even his best efforts toward abolition would inevitably fail to end slavery, whereas if he labored for Jesus’ return, he could (a) turn more people against slavery as they converted to true Christianity and (b) actually speed the release of slaves (which would only happen at the second coming).

Bates and others believed from their study of Revelation that there would be people in bondage and slavery right down to the end of time (Rev. 6:15; 13:16). Jesus’ return was the only cure; slavery in the U.S. could not be stopped short of this apocalyptic event.

I can sympathize with this viewpoint. When studying peace and social justice in graduate school, it
seemed I prayed more fervently for Jesus’ return with each new issue covered—war, hunger and malnutrition, genocide, human trafficking, violence against women, insufficient healthcare, environmental deterioration, etc. Each topic felt too big, too impossible to solve or even minimize. “God you have to come end this because we can’t. It’s too big. Each individual problem is too big.” If I were Bates, I would probably have also thought slavery in the U.S. could never be abolished.

Not every Adventist shared Bates’ viewpoint. Morgan highlights the counter-voice of Anson Byington, brother of the first Adventist president, John Byington.

Anson Byington grew disenchanted with the Review by 1859 because of its passivity on the issue of slavery and wrote announcing that he would not be renewing his subscription. He declared, “I dare not tell the slave that he can afford to be contented in his bondage until the Savior comes however near we may believe his coming. Surely the editor of the Review could not afford to go without his breakfast till then. If it was our duty to remember those in bonds as bound with them eighteen hundred years ago, it must be our duty still” (Morgan, p. 28).

Byington held both convictions—for social action and for evangelism pointing to Jesus’ return. “Expectation of Jesus’ soon return combined with accountability to his way taught in the gospels, and for Byington the love of neighbor there enjoined implied public responsibility” (Morgan. p. 28).

The results of the Civil War would prove Bates’ view to be too limited. Change was in fact possible. Slavery in the U.S. was abolished in his lifetime. Bates was wrong; Byington was right.

But here we are today, one hundred fifty years later, and slavery is greater today around the world than it was at the height of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.[2] Bates was wrong about the inability to stop legal slavery in the U.S., but he was actually right on a larger scale. The demon of slavery has grown bolder and stronger, despite the efforts of governments[3] and organizations like International Justice Mission or Tiny Hands International (the Christian nonprofit I work for).

Bates and Byington each have something to say to Adventists today. On the one hand, Byington tells us that change is possible, that Christians can make a difference to reduce the suffering of God’s children, that we should combine social action with Christian preaching. On the other hand, Bates tells us that our compassionate actions will not lead to the ultimate good we wish for the world, for God’s pure and complete will to be done on Earth as in Heaven. We can facilitate change—the gates of hell will not prevail—but the change will be limited in scope. This ultimate desire for righteousness/justice will only be realized after Jesus returns and demolishes this world’s empires (Dan. 2).

Bates’ point is important because it reminds us that we’re in for the long haul. That is, we shouldn’t get discouraged when our efforts lead to much smaller changes than we hope for. Instead, we should act as we’re able, knowing that God can bless our loaves and fishes but that perfecting the world is not in our grasp, that rescuing the world is on Jesus’ shoulders, not ours. This shouldn’t discourage us from doing what we can; rather it should let us know we need to play the long-game and not give up when things fail to improve as substantially or as quickly as we wish.

In his book The World Is Not Ours To Save, Tyler Wigg-Stevenson paints a daunting picture of the world today, lamenting the inadequacy of our remedies. He writes:

In response to the litany of human woes filling the pages above, some may be saying, “Okay, okay, I get it—the world is terrible! So, what’s the secret? What’s the plan? What’s the solution?
There is no secret. No plan. No solution—until the kingdom of God comes—to the dilemma of living in a fallen world. That’s the point. The answer is not a course of action, a recipe, a hidden formula. But the absence of evident solutions does not absolve us from the pain of loving the world as Christ loves it.

Confronted with this tension, the only response is resolute commitment. We can realize that there is no solution and simultaneously refuse to be defeated or paralyzed by that fact. (p. 60)

Wigg-Stevenson’s purpose in describing this reality as he sees it relates to the two lessons we can learn from Bates and Byington—we need to do what we can, but we shouldn’t be discouraged by a world beyond complete repair. He warns, “A generation of Christians that thinks it is called to save the world is a generation firing on the fuel of false hopes. It is signing up for exhaustion and disillusioned burnout. I can already see its signs in the audiences I speak to and the people I meet. It is imminent. And, for the love of God, we can’t afford to let it happen” (p. 60).

I hope the Adventist community can increasingly embrace these lessons so activists will also be concerned about Jesus’ return and evangelists will also care about social issues affecting people today. To be only an activist or only an evangelist is to miss the importance of the other element, like trying to make chocolate milk with only milk or only chocolate. While Jesus’ healing and preaching can be studied separately, the intertwining of these actions reveals the synergy that can result from approaching them in a more unified way—social action that speaks to God’s good future, and preaching that calls for us to embody God’s traits of compassion, justice and love.

“The Lord says, ‘Preserve justice and do righteousness, For My salvation is about to come And my righteousness to be revealed.’” Isaiah 56:1

“True sympathy between man and his fellow man is to be the true sign distinguishing those who love and fear God from those who are unmindful of His law.” Ellen White (Welfare Ministry, p. 36)

“It is only by an unselfish interest in those in need of help that we can give a practical demonstration of the truths of the gospel…. Much more than mere sermonizing is included in preaching the gospel…. The union of Christlike work for the body and Christlike work for the soul is the true interpretation of the gospel.” Ellen White (Welfare Ministry, p. 32-33)

---


**Featured Image Credit:** “Chain (PSF)” by Pearson Scott Foresman – Pearson Scott Foresman, donated to the Wikimedia Foundation. Licensed under Public domain via Wikimedia Commons – https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chain_(PSF) (https://commons.wikimedia.org)
The APF Blog

News and Commentary for the Healing of the Nations

Flanders Field: Reflections on War by Reinder Bruinsma

November 13, 2014 · by APF · in Peacemaking & Reconciliation.

Reinder Bruinsma originally posted this essay on his blog (30 October 2014, link). Dr. Bruinsma was one of the presenters at the WWI symposium APF reported about this summer (link), and he is contributing two chapters to a book on Adventist mission and social ethics that will be published by the Andrews University Press in 2015. See his full (translated) bio below.

Flanders Field

It was some twenty years ago that I first realized how terrible the First World War had been. In far away Australia I visited the War Memorial—a museum that pays a lot of attention to the Australian contribution to the Allied cause in the Great War (as WWI is referred to in many countries). During that visit I understood better than ever before that nations from all over the world were involved in this world-wide dispute. A few years ago I was, quite unexpectedly, also confronted with this same fact, as I was travelling with a group in Turkey. Our guide told us that near the Dardanelles more than one million soldiers lost their lives in Word War I.

There are, however, few places that are so moving, as far as the Great War is concerned, as Ieper in Belgium. In a part of southwestern Belgium and the North-West of France one finds dozens of war cemeteries, where hundreds of thousands of men and women from dozens of different nations have found their last resting place. The remains of the trenches in which the opposing armies were involved in an inhuman process of cruelty and senseless violence, still tell their macabre story. But it is, in particular, the Flanders Field Museum in Ieper that is unforgettable in its sadness. It is truly a fitting monument for the millions who lost their lives between 1914 and 1918. And, why and for what, in fact, did they die? Its subject matter would make the visitor even more downhearted, were it not for the magnificent medieval building, the famous Lakenhal, in which this museum is housed.

I have always loathed everything that has to do with war. As a boy I never liked books about war and I did not go to war movies. I was fortunate enough that I could escape the obligatory military service, since I studied theology—which at the time in the Netherlands provided a possibility to stay out of the army. But, had I been conscripted, I would have refused to bear arms. It always made me proud to
belong to a church that was opposed to war and that advocated a non-combatant position.

To my deep regret, in many countries this Adventist tradition of non-violence has been watered down, or even changed into the opposite. This is especially true for Adventists in the United States, where so-called patriotic feelings have ‘inspired’ ever more men and women to serve their country by opting for a career in the military. A visit to Flanders Fields should be required for all fellow-believers who consider joining the army!

Yes, I know there are weighty arguments against radical pacifism. I must admit that I am happy that people are currently fighting the IS, and I would not want to live in a place where there is no police. But there are at least as solid arguments for resurrecting the Adventist tradition of non-violence. After all, in our world there are plenty of men and women who are prepared to take up arms. But there are always too few people who want to do everything to promote and model peace. Remember: Blessed are the peace makers. Real happiness is for those who pursue reconciliation and peace. They will be called children of God (Matthew 5:9). My visit to the Flanders Field Museum reinforced in me that long-held conviction.

---

**Reinder Bruinsma Bio** (partially translated by Google Translate; original (http://reinderbruinsma.com/nl/about/)): “I live with my wife Aafje in Zeewolde (Flevopolder, Netherlands). I have over forty years of experience working within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in various capacities and in various countries. I have written twenty books and hundreds of articles in both Dutch and English. Writing is now one of my main activities. Since September 2011, I also temporarily held the position of president of the denomination in Belgium and Luxembourg. Fortunately, there still remains some time for travel and other fun things.

**Featured Image Credit–Flanders Field:** By King, W. L. (William Lester) (http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007663169/) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.

About these ads (http://wordpress.com/about-these-ads/)

---

Tags: Noncombatancy, nonviolence, war, WWI
Making Peace (Brown, Adventist World)

November 11, 2014 · by APF · in Peacemaking & Reconciliation.

Nathan Brown originally wrote this essay for Adventist World (8 November 2014, link (http://www.adventistworld.org/2014/november/making-peace.html)).

Making Peace

November 11 is known in various parts of the world as Armistice Day, Remembrance Day, or Veterans Day. It marks the anniversary of the end of World War I, ironically tagged as “The War to End Wars.”

Sadly, almost 100 years later, we still live in a violent, war-ravaged, and divided world. Violent conflict is a significant cause of injustice, poverty, and suffering. Included in the costs of war are the direct victims and shattered lives, the attention and resources devoted to military machinery that would be better diverted to alleviating other human needs, and the continuing suffering of war survivors and veterans, even among the “victors.”

There is something about making war that messes with our humanity. The ongoing struggles experienced by veterans of the Vietnam War are perhaps the most notorious example of this. Australians were involved in the Vietnam War between 1962 and 1973, during which time 521 Australian personnel died in active service. In the three following decades, 421 “surviving” veterans are known to have committed suicide, with the suicide rate increasing decade by decade.

The figures are even more disturbing when we look at the much larger veteran population in the United States. Reports vary across the many studies that have been conducted, but as early as 1979 a report from the University of Denver’s School of Professional Psychology concluded that “more Vietnam veterans have died since the war by their own hand than were actually killed in Vietnam.”

And the suicide statistics are simply the most extreme count of larger problems, often grouped under the generic designation of post-traumatic stress disorder. Suicide is an expression of the mental, emotional, and spiritual scarring that also contributes to mental illness, homelessness, alcoholism and other drug dependencies, family breakdown, and continuing physical ill-health.

Both in practice and in aftermath, there is a stark difference between being prepared to die for one’s beliefs, family, or nation—“Greater love hath no man than this . . .” (see John 15:13)—and killing for one’s beliefs, family, or nation. That is why the people of God are called to a different way of living,
even amid the violence, warmongering, and other conflicts of our world. The kingdom of God, as inaugurated by Jesus, is never advanced by violence.

At the heart of the gospel of Jesus is God’s gracious and grand act of peacemaking, reconciling sinful human beings with their Creator. This is another way of understanding the plan of salvation, and one that we can readily appreciate from our experiences of human relationships. And the reconciliation we receive becomes the pattern for us to be “ambassadors” for this reconciliation (see 2 Cor. 5:18–21).

Even in the Old Testament, the concept of peace is closely linked with salvation and the gospel: “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news of peace and salvation” (Isa. 52:7, NLT*).

This gospel of peace also becomes the motivation, pattern, and resource for working for peace in our violent world: “The heart that is in harmony with God is a partaker of the peace of heaven and will diffuse its blessed influence on all around. The spirit of peace will rest like dew upon hearts weary and troubled with worldly strife” (Ellen White, Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 28).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God” (Matt. 5:9, NLT). Taking this further, not only did He affirm the commandment against killing, precluding Christian support of war, He said we should not be angry or hold a grudge (see Matt. 5:21-26), and that we should love our enemies and pray for those who persecute (see Matt. 5:43-48), meaning that we should take active steps to seek their good.

There are many inspiring stories of people who have devoted their lives to peacemaking in world trouble spots, bringing glimpses of reconciliation and healing, and often alleviating much of the injustice and suffering these conflicts have brought. Whether working for peace between nations or between two bitter family members, Jesus said that those who do such work will be rightly described as “children of God.”

*Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

**Featured Image Description & Credit:** “Box with graves of deceased internees of several conflicts at the Bremgarten cemetery in Berne; Berne, Switzerland. In the foreground polish in the background french and belgium soldiers (1914–18, 1939–45), in centre the stele for the deceased internees of the armée de l'est (1871), WWI and WWII.” © Chriusha (Xpoua) (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/User:Chriusha) / CC-BY-SA-3.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0) / (optional) Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page).

Tags: war, WWI
Follow “The APF Blog”

Build a website with WordPress.com