

Two Reviews by James Moulder

1. CONCILIATION OR

CONFRONTATION?

C. H. Mike Yarrow *Quaker Experiences in International Conciliation* New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1978. 300 pages plus index, preface, and foreword by Anatol Rapoport. S.A. price R16,80.

C. H. Mike Yarrow was the secretary of the International Division of the American Friends Service Committee from 1963 to 1972. His book is a description and evaluation of three Quaker experiences in international conciliation: between the two Germanies from 1962 to 1973; between India and Pakistan in the War of 1965; and between the Nigerians and the Biafrans in their Civil War of 1967-1970. In each of these three tense situations a small group of Quakers were involved as unofficial "third party" conciliators. From 1962 to 1973 Quaker representatives in Berlin travelled back and forth through the Berlin Wall to support the voices of detente on each side. Their main aim was to interpret one side to the other. In the uneasy cease-fire following the war between India and Pakistan over Kashmir in 1965 a Quaker team helped to strengthen the hands of the moderates on both sides. In the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970 Quaker representatives tried to assess the possibility of a negotiated peace. They visited Nigerian and Biafran headquarters several times and covered the negotiations organised by the Organisation of African Unity in Addis Ababa.

HONESTY

This, of course, is only a description of the book's skeleton. From a more substantial perspective Yarrow's work is a superb blend of three elements: an introduction to Quaker beliefs and the tradition of conciliation which they have developed; an ample description, analysis and evaluation of the three case studies; and a discussion of Quaker contributions to national and International conciliation within the framework of some of the new and fundamental questions which are being asked by those who are engaged in peace research. In addition, Anatol Rapoport has written a hard-headed foreword which approaches Yarrow's questions about conciliation from a more theoretical and secular point of view. All these ingredients are presented with modesty, simplicity and conviction. But the most outstanding feature of the whole enterprise is the honesty with which Yarrow has described both the strengths and the weaknesses of the Quaker involvement in these conciliation experiences. His book therefore contains a great deal which is of ordinary human interest, as well as a substantial amount of material for analysis by those who are engaged either in peace projects or peace research. More specifically, Yarrow has opened a number of important windows on

some of the latent and manifest conflicts which exist within South Africa's political life. I therefore want to recommend his studies by hinting at some of the ways in which he illuminates practical and theoretical problems which have to be faced by anyone who believes that it is still possible to work for conciliation (or reconciliation) rather than confrontation between black and white South Africans.

NEUROSIS

What is conciliation? According to Yarrow, it is "the process of promoting better understanding and agreement between persons or groups in conflict by helping to change their perceptions and images". Those who involve themselves in this process believe that improved communication is the essence of peace. Yarrow's case studies contain many examples which seem to confirm this conviction. But the most useful is his extended discussion of Roland Warren's "social-psychological analysis" of the conflict between the two Germanies. Warren applied the analogy of individual neurosis to society and to various groups within a society. He argued that a whole society, rather like a neurotic person, could have a concept of historical trends and present events that was at variance with reality, and conflicted with the quite different perceptions of the same realities held by the opposing group. Sometimes a society, rather like an individual, is unable to face the realities of a problem. Its members resort to mechanisms such as projection (blaming their failings on the enemy) and phantasy (finding satisfaction in a dream world) to enable them to adapt to a situation. But adaptations of this kind are unrealistic. And so they only make the problem of how to adjust to reality more difficult than it already is. More seriously, reality appears so different from each side that negotiation and compromise are not possible until the two sides to the conflict can expand the area of common perception.

CREDIBILITY

Against this background of how complicated conflict is, it is obvious that conciliation cannot take place until there is a radical alteration of the stereotyped images and language by means of which those who are in conflict approach one another. It is a radical alteration of the stereotyped images and language. Yarrow confesses that Quakers "have an almost mystical faith in the healing powers of communication between

contending groups". This is true. At the same time, however, Quakers are aware that improving communication in political conflicts involves more than simply bringing people together to talk about their problems. Amongst other things, it requires a "third party" individual or team whose credibility as a peacemaker is accepted by both sides. And one or more individuals of this kind have to be present, because to improve communication it is necessary to clear up initial misunderstanding, to make an accurate diagnosis of the causes of the conflict, and to explore alternative means, goals and areas of commonality. Quakers, of course, have a great deal of credibility as conciliators. But if one wants to understand why this is so, then one must attach more weight to Quaker beliefs and history than Yarrow does. And this emphasis has to be provided because their credibility has been achieved only because of a set of sincerely held beliefs and a great deal of hard work. The work has been exemplified in work camps, in peace and international relations seminars, and in relief projects. The beliefs which have established their credibility as conciliators include their renunciation of war and of political power; their tradition of "speaking truth to power"; and their conviction that they are required to work both for individual conversion and social reform.

HOLLOW RING

In other words, and with special reference to South Africa, anyone who believes that he, or his religious tradition, can bring peace between men and women who are in conflict, may need to invest at least as much time in the scrutiny of his beliefs, his style of life, and his religious tradition as he does in the construction of programmes which bring people together. For example, statements about the horrors of violence and war have a hollow ring when they come from Christians who provide either or both sides of the irregular war in which we are involved with military chaplains. And statements about the abuse of privilege and power have a hollow ring when they come from Christians who ask for special laws to govern what people do on Sundays, or for exemption from paying rates and taxes on church property. Similarly, denominations who use the vast amounts of money which they do use to employ clergy simply do not have the resources to run the kind of relief and similar programmes which have enabled Quakers to establish their credibility as peacemakers.

And so one could continue until one begins to despair about the ability of Christians to contribute anything tangible to conciliation between black and white South Africans. But there is no need for this kind of despair. More specifically, one of the things that one can gain from reading and reflecting on Yarrow's discussion of how Quakers acquired and have maintained their credibility as conciliators is a better understanding of what a genuine renewal of the churches would involve. At the same time, this book contains many examples of how individuals and groups of people can become credible peacemakers.

HARM OR HELP?

Yarrow's careful analysis of his three case studies sheds a great deal of light on what conciliation involves and how conciliation is possible. But with characteristic Quaker honesty he ends his book with a detailed discussion of a question which both official and unofficial peacemakers in South Africa dare not ignore: Are efforts to build bridges between peoples of opposing political ideologies sometimes

harmful rather than helpful? This question arises because there is a danger that conciliation may lend itself to oppression. More specifically, it is not at all obvious that conciliation is helpful in those conflicts in which there is a glaring political and economic inequality between the two parties.

Yarrow does not even try to provide us with a definite answer to this problem. This is a good thing because it enables him to do something which is much more useful: namely, to increase our understanding of why this question is being asked both inside and outside the Quaker tradition. And the hub of the matter is straightforward enough: "many conflicts are a matter of objective structure rather than attitudes or behaviour and hence are not resolved by changing attitudes". Nevertheless, the spokes in this hub are far from straightforward ones. And so Yarrow's book ends on a more positive note which attempts to blend the legitimate demands of confrontation and conciliation and of "justice research" and peace research.

But when all this has been acknowledged there are questions which remain. I am certain that Yarrow will admit this and will want to insist that these questions ought not to be avoided. For example, and in a South African context, there are questions about the extent to which both black and white South Africans have to discover that the articulation of our conflict in racial (or ethnic) terms rather than in economic ones distorts our perception of reality and therefore makes it more difficult to develop more just alternatives to the present economic, political and social structures.

There are questions about how to develop educational and relief programmes that are a necessary condition of future attempts to bring about conciliation and reconciliation. There are questions about why there is such an alarming absence of individuals and agencies which have the necessary credibility to be genuine "third party" conciliators in the South African context. There are questions about how black South Africans can confront white South Africans with the challenge to translate our desire for conciliation into a desire for the kind of justice without which reconciliation cannot take place. The last set of questions are perhaps the most important of all because for far too long white South Africans have taken it for granted that they are able to write unilateral agendas for peace. This is "the black man's burden" — to bring humane civilization (*humanitas*) to the unjust masters of the bureau-crat and technocratic jungles of Southern Africa. This, of course, is easier said than done. But perhaps one way in which black South Africans can continue to grow in dignity and in selfconscious awareness of their humanity is to take the initiative in the writing of agendas for peace projects of the kind which Yarrow has described.

I have only scratched some of the surfaces of Yarrow's attempt to share his understanding of Quaker experiences in international conciliation. But I hope I have said enough to demonstrate that his reflections deserve the thoughtful attention of anyone who believes that conciliation is better than confrontation. And so I hope that this book will find its way onto the shelves and into the minds of those who are involved in the work of justice, reconciliation and peace; of those who wish to translate vague talk about reconciliation and about Christians being "an alternative community" into operational projects and programmes; and of those who are searching for ways in which both justice and peace can become the inseparable realities that they need to be in South Africa's economic, political, and social life. □