

A Personal Word for You

Mack McCarter

In last month's issue of *Renewal News*, I recalled William James' declaration that what we need is the "moral equivalent of war," if we are to win the battle for our cities. It is interesting to note that America's peerless essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson, anticipated James' thought by almost a century when he wrote in 1838, "The peace principle is not to be carried into effect by fear. It can never be defended; it can never be executed by cowards. Everything great must be done in the spirit of greatness. The manhood that has been mobilized in war must be transferred to the cause of peace, before war can lose its charm and peace can become venerable to men."

We are engaged in a real war for the heart and soul of humanity. The forces of a new barbarism are already devouring the edges of all history has held dear. They are eating their way inexorably toward the center. We must join this battle with real men and women who have the faith to fight and to win it. ***And we must ever be reminded that the supreme passion of true faith is not the self-centered desire to win heaven, but the other-centered desire and devotion to win the earth for God!***

This is ever and always the ultimate desire, the ultimate passion of the men and women of faith. It is a passion for the establishment of the Divine order, or in figurative language, for the building of the city of God. It is "The City" which has foundations whose Builder and Maker is God.

To this end, the whole Bible bears witness. You open it, read through it, and journey in spirit along the way of the wilderness over which there is a highway: a way of battle, turmoil, and strife. You come to the closing book; there you find the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem; not heaven, but a city descending out of heaven; and while you look, you hear the all-inclusive angelic anthem, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God."

We are called to fight against the forces that seek to destroy the divine spirit within humanity. Because it is the "divine within" which makes us uniquely human. It is critical that we answer this call by mobilizing in an all-out moral equivalent of war itself. As I wrote last month, to achieve victory we must understand and fulfill the principles necessary to win in any protracted struggle.

Here is the first principle essential to success in warfare: a ***clear understanding of what "victory" really means***. It was Benjamin Franklin who said, "He who has one end in mind, makes all things serve." The clarity of goals and objectives helps us to marshal our forces for effective striking power.

In this moral equivalent of war, *our goal is to rebuild the system of caring human relationships necessary for a redemptive human society to exist, thus restoring "community."* This means that we must deliberately re-establish the only human social collective which has never collapsed. We must rebuild the geographical and relational caring infrastructure called "the village." We must re-village-ize within our urban areas or we shall simply disintegrate.

Lewis Mumford's thought helps us here. Before the city came into existence, he wrote in 1961, "the village had brought forth the neighbor: he who lives near at hand, within calling distance, sharing the crises of life, watching over the dying, weeping sympathetically for the dead, rejoicing at a marriage feast

of childbirth.” There must be a *caring connectedness* among people in order for there to be this vital center of harmony. Hesiod, the Greek poet of the eighth century BC, reminds us of that reality, “Neighbors hurry to your aid while even kinsmen dawdle over their gear.” So this is our goal. Now let me linger just a bit more on this point before moving to the next principle for winning a war, because it is absolutely essential for us to understand the target at which we aim.

I believe that there are four foundations upon which the historical village stood. (And I am also old enough to remember that the remnants of this village life used to exist within each neighborhood of our city!) First came **a strong inter-family support system**. Then the village maintained **a strong system of ethics which both prohibited certain behavior and demanded certain performance**. No one could escape accountability in the village. There was also a strong sense of living tradition as a foundation stone. Tradition brings stability, and stability is a fundamental ingredient of that one human necessity—hope! And finally, the fourth cornerstone of the village was a strong sense of transcendent value. Each person was aware that there more to life than “me, myself, and I.” They were taught almost intuitively the truth of that great human paradox: the completion of self must be found outside of self. This is why the “other-centered” life must become the means by which we reach our goal of self-fulfillment.

The second principle for winning any war is this: *we must have a simple strategy to achieve victory*. Our strategy to rebuild caring relationships, thus restoring “community,” is three-fold. First, we are forming a grassroots movement of ordinary people like you and me who are committed to the intentional life of caring for others. People must see that this ship has no life boats and that we are all inextricably bound together by the common cord of our own humanity. We call this movement our Mission Support Team. Each person must consciously choose to commit to this “fight,” the ferocious “battle” for gentleness and goodness and kindness, in order to win.

Then we have a block-by-block strategy to re-establish the neighborhood through bonds of caring. This is called our Haven House Plan. We enlist and train willing people to become the catalysts for caring on the street in which they lie. Our slogan is, “We are remaking our city by making friends on our street.”

The third thrust of our strategy is called “The Internal Care Unit Plan” (ICU). This involves rebuilding whole neighborhoods from the inside out by actually moving persons into a designated ten block area to live, and to rebuild the lives of children, youth, and adults through relational programming and educational equipping. It is the strategy of bringing special help to areas of greatest need.

Well, I have reached the end of the page all too quickly. I shall elaborate on the remaining five principles necessary to win a war and our “moral equivalent” translation of those principles in next month’s *NEWS*. Have a blessed Christmas and a hope-filled New Year! And when the call comes to join us in taking this city back...say, “YES!”