

Have you read the gospel?

Adapted by Bob Young

It is told that when Tolstoy was an army officer, he saw during a march that one of his fellow officers was beating a man who was marching out of step and out of line. Tolstoy said to the other officer, "Have you not read the gospel?" to which the other officer replied, "Have you not read the military regulations?"

Despite the fact that violence leads to a spiral with destructive force, this story illustrates the way in which church people today often ignore the gospel and read the Bible as a set of military regulations.

What makes people human beings is their ability to relate to other people and to communicate with words. Violence is always a denial of the power of communication, both of human words and of divine words. Violence, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual, is a mistake. Every teaching that justifies maltreatment of others is also a mistake. When violence is victorious, a way of understanding and living is imposed which denies the image of God within human beings.

The gospel proposes to break the cycle of violence and to reestablish communication. To learn to listen to another, to understand the motivations and expectations of others, is essential. To replace force with words and the gospel opens dialogue and makes possible an agreement that leads God's people to peace. How do you read the Bible? Do you see the gospel (good news) or do you see regulations?