



Peace Race

by James Henderson

Mutually Assured Destruction.

MAD. It sounds scary, doesn't it? Are you in a relationship like it? What about the friends you hang out with? Do you build up or destroy each other?

MAD, however, is not about any of those things. It's a political term. And it's not about the endgame of Brexit and Europe. Have you heard of it? The doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction held that—for two sides with large nuclear stockpiles—if one side launched a first strike on the other, the other side would retaliate. The resulting nuclear war would totally annihilate both sides. Knowing this, both sides would be deterred from launching a first nuclear strike.

For a while this madness was seen as a deterrent to war. It describes a lose-lose situation, and therefore why not have an arms race to equip yourself above anyone else? No one is likely to win, anyway. Two men thought this was utter nonsense and decided to do something about it. They were two Presidents, one of the USSR and the other of the USA. They seemed like giants on the world scene. Gorbachev and Reagan were the Putin and Trump of their time. Eventually, after a few false starts, in 1987, Gorbachev and Reagan agreed to halt the arms race by eliminating all land-based

missiles in their respective countries. It was called the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty, for short), but now, in 2019 both the US and Russian presidents have said that their nations will honour the INF treaty no longer, President Trump suspending it on the 1st February and President Putin on the 2nd. Each claims different reasons for doing so, and there's been an accompanying war of words.

Where does that leave us? Will there be an arms race once again? A return to the madness of MAD?

Personally, I remember the Cold War tensions that existed before the Reagan-Gorbachev discussions began. I was for nuclear disarmament and was among the many teenagers and twenty-somethings who began to learn the Russian language just in case. For all that he achieved in helping end the Cold War, Gorbachev was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and, in his 1991 acceptance speech, he said that in 'preparing for my address I found in an old Russian encyclopaedia a definition of "peace" as a "commune"—the traditional cell of Russian peasant life. I saw in that definition the people's profound understanding of peace as harmony, concord, mutual help, and cooperation. This understanding is embodied in the canons of world religions and in the works of philosophers from antiquity to our time'.¹

I like his thought that peace is related to community. We might battle with

ourselves inwardly over something, but real war and real fighting breaks out in community. Without people there'd be no war, and without people there'd be no peace either. How we exist in community is the starting point. Gorbachev made me think of my own belief system when he said that the idea of communal peace was embodied in the canons in world religions. Embodied means 'is fleshed out in', 'finds expression in'.

What about Christianity? One of its proponents, a first-century writer called Paul, said this to those who would follow Christ: 'If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone'.² He's right, isn't he? We can live peaceably, and so much depends on us.

Maybe we need a new race. This time a race to peace more than a new arms race. How can it begin? Of course, we hope and pray, and sometimes doubt, that it'll happen in the community of politicians and world leaders. But is there something we do at the local level where we live, in our families, and in our work places? Of course, there is.

Please join me. Let's race to peace together.

NOTES

¹ www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1990/summary/

² Romans 12:18, New International Version.

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