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In a dark time the eye begins to see.
- Theodore Roethke



FROM CHRISTMAS CARDS FOR PEACE

PACEM IN TERRIS

Peace on Earth.

Everybody wants it, though it is more a seasonal idea traditional with Christmas bonhomme, not necessarily having much to do with the real world.

The real world beats itself up every day, including Christmas.

Christmas is among the very violent days of the year. Murders. Suicides. Drunken assaults upon family, friends and strangers. Strangling a spouse with this year's lousy tie or latest zirconium necklace. Carving up the turkey sitting at the table next to the platter. Caroling groups mowed down by uzi-carrying psychopaths. Little girls and boys assaulted by merry old cherubs. Mommies baking poisoned pies and cookies. Daddies impaled on spiky plastic Christmas trees. Relatives gift wrapping cluster bombs for the kiddies. Halloween nightmares crashing down midnight chimneys.

Laughter, good cheer and full bellies exude a gaseous odor of complacency that is unable to disguise despair, hunger and murder shrieking from outside the frames of Grandma Moses' odes to family Christmas joy.

Peace loving peoples commit genocide upon neighbors. Large parts of the world act as laundries for ethnic cleansing. Countries or persons who publicly (reflexively) declare themselves as peace loving are often as vicious as attack dogs. Peace is not on the earth but a few feet under it for millions. Life for so many of our human brethren is the hell the pious claim the province of sinners after life. The pious are often responsible for the living hell so many endure on earth. (Gehlin Palmer remembers an old Sunday school song: "Red, yellow, black and white/He's got you in the crosshairs of His sights.") Nazi wannabes deny the Holocaust yet intend the same.

The more dangerous bigots are those who think they are not prejudiced; the everyday folk who resent changes made by newcomers into their communities, which of course in this part of the country were only recently established by displacing earlier communities. These good decent ordinary folk disclaim any prejudice against whomever threatens, in their opinions, to change for the worse the old habits and neighborhoods, and consider their concerns reasonable, justified and unprejudiced. Yet their complaints about differences of color or culture of their new neighbors are the same as bigots have used to enflame hatred for thousands of years.

The prejudice against gays and lesbians is the same root fear of change as the cultural imposition of Latinos into the

small Haole enclaves on the north Oregon coast, a dread and hatred of change in daily life. The Oregon Citizens Alliance (smart to use that word 'citizens', as if fools, bigots and goons were the only worthy citizenry) and the so-called Christian Right invoke a cultural/religious return to a Norman Rockwell past that never existed except in the mind of Ronald Reagan.

The religious right claims a desire to return to traditional values. What are these values? Squatting nakedly around yule fires sacrificing animals or maidens to malevolent gods? The OCA demands a blood sacrifice of gays and lesbians as a talisman of its grim vision of power and pentacost.

Ethnic cleansing is not a stranger to America.

Ever see the old Humphrey Bogart movie, *The Black Legion*? If you have seen it you might recognize the inflammatory rhetoric of 100% Americanism focused against "alien undesirables" which is rather familiar of late. "What this country needs," the Black Legion boss tells his black-hooded worthies, "is bigger and better patriots."

The cynical shibboleth: White and All Right!

This year, 1993, marks the 2,500th anniversary of the birth of democracy. In 508 B.C., the people of Athens overthrew a tyrant and set up a government of the people. Democracy is a Greek word meaning 'rule of the people.'

Mark Clifton: "The first rule of a government of the people, by the people, for the people: Don't tell the people."

Don't tell them anything intelligible. They might want to be democratic. Feed them lies, sex and violence instead.

Especially violence. Sex is banned at prime time but mayhem is okay. Shows the kids the real world, which they will perpetuate.

They aren't waiting until they grow up. Or even until the pimple pushing-peers-around stage. Big war stuff trickles down from extinct cold war arsenals into the grubby little hands of schoolchildren who arm themselves like gunfighters or gangsters. (How many uzis or AKs on Santa's list?)

Just say No. And the kid will blast you.

So Merry Christmas. Peace on Earth. Goodwill toward all everywhere.

Perhaps the camaraderie of the season will shut out for a moment the unholy howling of hellhounds.

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