

“God shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

ISAIAH 2:4

Learning Peace

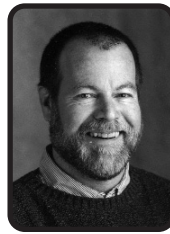
Recently I visited Maluku, in eastern Indonesia, which was engulfed in communal violence after the fall of Suharto in 1998. Up until five years ago, Christians and Muslims in local villages were killing one another and burning down houses, churches and mosques. Today the church is engaged in a peace-building program among these Christian and Muslim villages. Traveling with us was a Muslim friend who grew up in the area and knew everyone. After several days of conversations in both Muslim and Christian villages, and seeing the excitement and hope in the eyes of the mixed Christian and Muslim group of young people who were the “village motivators” in the peace-building program, I expressed amazement that these people could have been so violent toward one another.

My friend explained that what had appeared to the world as a Christian/Muslim conflict had very different local roots. The transition from tribal government to “modern democracy” had been badly mishandled, and opened up a scramble for power in which religion became a convenient mask to hide the interests of the local elite. The Indonesian military then got involved and turned the conflict into a project for military gain.

So there are many cultural and historical reasons why the transition to democracy is so difficult. In eastern Indonesia the churches are involved in what will be a long transition that has to be woven together at the local level. And in the process, the churches will be transformed themselves.

God we pray for a weaving of peace in Indonesia and around the world.

John Campbell-Nelson serves as a Theological Professor at Artha Wacana Christian University in Indonesia, and as a consultant to the Christian Evangelical Church of Timor and the Protestant Church in East Timor.



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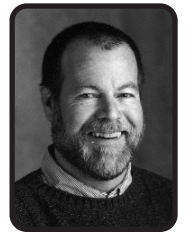
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