

Adieu, 2023

This offering comes to you as we remember Lewiston on October 26, and do what we can to help it heal. By late November, the United States as a whole had notched 600 mass shootings for the year, a new record. The violence which Robert Carr exemplified in Maine has analogs which cover the continent and planet with innocent blood. There are six thousand gun dealers in Texas who don't mind selling weapons to the drug cartels in Mexico who then sell fentanyl in our country. Mexico's strict gun laws are powerless to stop the trade.

As this column goes to press, the United States accounts for both 39 percent of world military spending and 39 percent of arms sales abroad; 103 countries buy the weapons we export, the top customers being Benjamin Netanyahu and Muhammad bin Salman. According to Josh Paul, who used to manage arms sales abroad for the State Department and resigned in protest over events in Gaza, among the weapons for sale are Aegis destroyers, which can carry nuclear missiles and are manufactured at the Bath Ironworks here in Maine.

As Mr. Paul has observed, Israel itself is one of the world's top ten exporters of military weaponry. In effect, our military aid to that country subsidizes a weapons industry which competes with our own. Along with Israel, Saudi Arabia is one of the world's top ten military powers, and around the world, military rivalries abound. While we're on the subject, if Israel can afford to arm itself and sell weapons abroad on the scale it does, why does it need military aid from the United States?

Col. Ann Wright, who has extensive experience in matters of war and peace, and also once worked in the State Department, has stated quite plainly that the Netanyahu government's objective in its fight with Hamas in particular and Palestinians in general is ethnic cleansing in Gaza and the West Bank.

Craig Mokhiber, who resigned in November from his job with the United Nations Human Rights office in New York after three decades' experience in the field of human rights, has gone even further, calling the Netanyahu government's bombardment and invasion of Gaza "a textbook case of genocide." Welcome as it was, the brief cease-fire and hostage for prisoner exchange just after Thanksgiving was simply a brief intermission in the catastrophe. In his resignation letter, Mokhiber insisted on equal protection for the rights of Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike, and peace for everyone living in the Holy Land.

All told, it's hard to imagine peace on earth as we approach the end of this hideous year. Along with the exchange of atrocities and asymmetries of power between Hamas and Israel, which threw into sharp relief a dismal October and November, we've had Haiti, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Myanmar, the Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Ukraine. On November 22, the World Food Program reported that because it was running out of anything to feed them, it would have to cut food aid for the 1.4 million refugees in Chad who have fled this year's carnage in Darfur. So once again, we are witnessing what human beings become when they trade eyes for eyes and teeth for teeth. In a rerun of King Herod's performance two thousand years ago, heads of state, ours included, match and exceed Hamas'

own butchery. It becomes harder and harder to tell the difference. Among those who read these words, some may see no difference at all. And if Christ and his family were alive today, they would have been among those marked for slaughter and forced to flee south to Egypt, just as they were back then. Along with all that, neglect, delay, and rationalization in the face of climate change and its corporate and military enablers have spread disaster across the planet, and it's still getting worse. Right now, the chances of reconciliation among ourselves and with the planet look mighty slim.

It's altogether fitting and proper that young and indigenous people have grown tired of such cruel transactions. If we haven't done it already, it would be a good idea for older people to join them. That goes especially for people in their Medicare years who are looking for something of value to leave behind when they're gone. Precisely because things are as bad as they are, we must insist on peace on earth. We must keep doing it, again and again. As Thomas Merton once said, do not depend on the hope of success. Grab hold of necessity and compassion instead, and set course that way. It's exactly what the voyage of *The Golden Rule* did over the summer. As an example to the rest of us, those who sailed the ship cast aside any fear of long odds.

Even now, we can still choose.

During this holiday season, may the company of friends and loved ones console us and lay a foundation for hope in 2024.