

Patricia Harris - Shalom / Irene Word Studies – Developed from reading Wolterstorff

Patricia Harris, Hearing the voices of those who are educating for shalom: what they are saying about institutional vision, missional goals, and educational models

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pp.17-18

The semantic sphere of shalom borders other Hebrew words that carry equal theological weight within the life of Israel such as, righteousness and goodness. While these words posit their own significant meanings, usages are often paired with shalom, especially in a synonymous parallelism relationship as found in the genres of prophetic and poetic speech. Often, the meaning of these word pairs points to a future or eschatological coming glory of Zion/Israel, a promised time of perfect peace and rest.

19 The immediate manifestations of shalom, goodness, and righteousness are glimpses of what is to come as God restores order and renews creation.

Within this semantic field, Wolterstorff highlights the connection between shalom and justice. He labels justice as the “ground floor” (Wolterstorff, 2004, p. 23) of shalom where each person enjoys his or her rights within a just and responsible community and does what is right to enable such a community to flourish. There can be no shalom without justice, for “if persons do not enjoy and possess what is due them, if their rightful claims on others are not acknowledged by those others, then shalom is absent” (p. 23). Wolterstorff (1980c) employs the phrase *justice-in-shalom* to show the interconnectedness of these two concepts. Living out this justice-in-shalom within an educational setting means “to teach justly for justice” (Wolterstorff, 2006, p. 34). Wolterstorff highlights justice both as an adverbial modifier, describing how to teach, and an object of the verb, describing what to teach.

The concept of shalom is woven throughout the biblical story, beginning in Genesis where the Garden of Eden is presented as paradise, or a place of perfect peace and rest, expressed through harmonious relationships between humans, creatures, nature, and God within a context of pleasure and delight. Wolterstorff emphasizes this interconnected portrayal of shalom as the goal or vision of what it is that God wants for humanity, where “man should dwell at peace in all his relationships: with God, with himself, with his fellows, with nature, a peace which is not merely the absence of hostility . . . but a peace which at its highest is *enjoyment*” (Wolterstorff, 1980c, p. 318, italics his). Wolterstorff explains that to dwell in shalom is to enjoy these relationships, to see them flourish: with God, through worship and service; with our neighbors, through delighting in justice and community; with nature, through enjoying our physical surroundings in work and play; and, with ourselves, by acknowledging we are created in God’s image and for his good pleasure.

Today's secular Western culture stands in contrast to this biblical, interconnected, relational culture as it displays a typically Greek orientation to the concept of shalom, which is often interpreted as peace. Shalom or peace is expressed as a condition that persists within the individual; a state of being that is emotionally felt, internally generated, and having no influence of a divine being. In the Hebrew scripture, however, the writers cannot conceive of any human condition as occurring independently of God's controlling will and presence, therefore the concept of shalom is linked to God as he blesses humanity and to the community as they express their purpose and calling.

In the Old Testament, shalom, as well-being, is expressed in a tangible, earthy manner that is indicative of the idea of blessing that is realized through fertility and possession of land. Also implied in this earthly idea of blessing is the truism that God gives such blessings in order to show his presence among the people and bring them joy and delight. Within the Hebrew mindset there is no dualism between sacred and secular, body and mind. In the Old Testament, the people of Israel regarded Yahweh as the sustainer of all reality, both sacred and secular. Shalom, then, encompasses both external and internal sufficiency. "The transition from outer to inner occurs effortlessly: whoever has sufficient for life's needs, etc., also has sufficiency per se, is 'satisfied,' joyous (Jenni & Westermann, 1997). Wolterstorff also affirms this continuity between the sacred and secular as he describes how shalom incorporates delight in all relationships: with God, with others, with nature, and with ourselves. "To dwell in shalom is to find delight in living rightly before God, to find delight in living rightly in one's physical surroundings, to find delight in living rightly with one's fellow human beings, to find delight even in living rightly with oneself" (Wolterstorff, 2004, p. 23)

Shalom is God's expression of fulfillment and presence among his people, particularly within the context of God's chosen representatives through the Aaronic priesthood and the Davidic monarchy. Shalom is seen as a gift of God; God is the source of shalom. Shalom caps the last stich (line) in the final couplet of the Priestly Blessing in Numbers 6: 24-26 (Biblia Hebraica). The two stichs in this last couplet are synonymously parallel, thus showing a relationship between the anthropomorphic gesture of God "making his face shine upon us" and receiving peace or shalom (New International Version). "Making his face shine upon us" demonstrates pleasure, affirmation, favor, and delight. These ideas fit within the concept of shalom. Shalom is wellness, fullness, flourishing, and cannot be realized apart from God's favor.