

TERRORISM of the RIGHTEOUS

Disarming the Violent Heart

November 7, 2004

Peace Sunday Worship

Introduction

What would we call a threat or act of violence used to intimidate or harm people someone hated or despised? Terrorism? Is “terrorism” an appropriate term to use to describe the intended actions of two followers of Jesus, James and John? They threatened to command fire to come down from heaven and kill the civilian inhabitants of a Samaritan village. I wonder what term we would use to describe the proposed acts of James and John if they lived today and made the same violent threats while on a plane flying over a country they considered “foreigners” and an “enemy”? I wonder.

**While you are
proclaiming peace
with your lips, be
careful to have it more
fully in your hearts**

—Francis of Assisi

Since 9/11 terrorism has brought insecurity and fear into the hearts of many people not only in the United States, but all over the world. Terrorism has been effective as a form of threat and intimidation through violent means. Whether effective or not, there are those who would justify terrorism or the use of violence simply because it has a “righteous” cause. The biblical text from Luke’s gospel for this Peace Sunday challenges Christ’s community to question terrorism or any form of violence as a means to some “just” or “righteous” end. Underlying Jesus’ rebuke of his disciples are his convictions

about nonviolence, his compassion for those labeled as “enemies,” and his critique of vengeance.

Terrorism will be part of our national agenda for a long time to come. There is a need for Christians to move beyond an understanding of terrorism as only something that “others” do against “us.” Terrorism, understood as the use of threat, intimidation, or violence against civilians, is not something limited to one particular people, religion, or so-called “righteous cause.” Terrorism has many faces in many cultures. Jesus calls his followers to self-reflection amid cultures of blame. Jesus calls his followers to be peace-makers amid terrorist cultures. Jesus calls his followers to disarm their hearts of violence. Jesus’ way stands as a rebuke to anyone who would justify their own brand of terrorism or violence based upon the “righteousness” of their cause.

Biblical Text

In Luke’s gospel (9:51-56) Jesus has his face set towards Jerusalem, the city of destiny. The city represents the seat of political and religious power. Jesus’ is determined to go to Jerusalem and confront the “principalities and powers in high places” and the fate lying before him. On his way he sends messengers ahead of him to prepare lodging in a Samaritan village. The Samaritans do not welcome him with hospitality because he is headed for Jerusalem. The narrative hints at the tensions that existed between Jews and Samaritans in Jesus’ day.

Samaritans were not considered “good” by the Jews and vice versa. The Jews and Samaritans were at odds with one another and shunned public association. Jesus challenged these social boundaries that separated Samaritans by speaking to a Samaritan woman (John 4), telling a parable in which a Samaritan was the “hero” (Luke 10:39-37), and healing a Samaritan leper (Luke 17:11-19). The Gospel of Luke and Acts places a special emphasis upon the Samaritans.

In Luke 9, the insult from the Samaritans incites the anger of the disciples James and John. For this breach of hospitality these disciples suggest to Jesus that they collaborate in a miracle of vengeance. They want to execute revenge upon the Samaritans by calling fire down from heaven to destroy the village, in the manner of the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 18:20-40). Jesus rebukes the disciples and will have nothing to do with this “theology of vengeance” and this “terrorism of the righteous.” Underlying Jesus’ rebuke is his own theology and practice of nonviolence. James and John, followers of Jesus, have not understood the way of Jesus in their desire that violence be inflicted on a Samaritan village.

Reflections on Terrorism

The word “Terrorism” is an incendiary word. It sparks the flames of fear. It kindles deep emotions. And it ignites frightful images. Collapsing towers. Car bombs with black smoke rising up into the air. Crimson-spattered bodies being carried away. Videotaped beheadings. In the U.S. our eyes have been seared with a barrage of images of terrorism. While some assert that not all Muslims are terrorists, the words that get cemented together in the minds of the dominant Judeo-Christian culture of the U.S. are of “Islamic terrorists.” But, is this the only image we can conjure up that fits the word “terrorism”? The inflammatory term “terrorism” raises many questions that need to be addressed, lest it obscure our vision of the truth.

A U.S. Army manual defines terrorism as “the calculated use of violence or threat of violence against civilians in order to attain goals that are political, religious, or ideological in nature... through intimidation, coercion, or instilling fear.” If that is a correct definition of terrorism, then what do we call the Christian Inquisition, the Crusades, and the Jewish pogroms (i.e. assaults on Jewish communities by Christians throughout history)? Could they be called “terrorism”? Or what about what Catholics and Protestants did to sixteenth century Anabaptists? Can we talk of the conquest of America and Euro-American treatment of Native Americans as a form of “terrorism”? What about the witch hunts in the early colonies? Was that a form of terrorism against women? Or the Jewish Holocaust? Slavery and Southern apartheid in the U.S.? Is “terrorism” a term that only applies to our contemporary world? If that is the case, then does the term fit the racist activities of the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist groups against African-Americans and Jews? Was Timothy McVeigh an “Oklahoma City bomber” or a “U.S. terrorist”? How about “Christian” extremists who threaten or kill

abortion doctors or those who verbally threaten or physically attack gays? Are they terrorists? Have you ever noticed that we never hear of “white” or “Christian” terrorists in the media?

Is terrorism a “weapon of the weak,” as some have described it?. Or can it be used by powerful states? It is never used to describe the military tactics of Israeli forces against Palestinians. What do we call U.S. acts of aggression and violence against innocent civilians? Some would call it “collateral damage” or “low intensity warfare.” But, what about when civilians are the direct targets of threat, intimidation, and violence? Does the U.S. use of nuclear threat against nations and their civilian populations or its actual use upon Hiroshima and Nagasaki fit the definition of terrorism? What about when the U.S. “rained down fire from heaven” on villages in Vietnam or backed paramilitary groups who terrorized and slaughtered civilians in Central America? Is that “terrorism” or simply “war”? Who makes that distinction?

And when is an act of counter-aggression considered “resistance” instead of “terrorism”? If a dominant power forces its political and economic agenda upon a people and they fight back, is counter-violence considered “terrorism” or “resistance”? It probably depends on who is using the terms and whose political or religious ideology the terms are used to support.

For instance, Nelson Mandela’s African

Nationalist Congress was

once labeled as one of the world’s worst terrorist groups. Were the acts of the ANC “terrorism” or was the apartheid system in South Africa itself a form of terrorism? How we answer all these questions will determine the parameters of our definition of terrorism.

I would not defend violence in any form for whatever political, religious, or ideological reason. But, as you can see, the use of the term “terrorism” can be selective and itself be used as a rhetorical weapon in an ideological war. To project the image of “terrorism” upon those we label as “enemies,” while absolving those who share our politics, ideology, or religion of any connotations of “terrorism” is to selectively use the term as an ideological weapon. This is a rhetorical attempt to rid ourselves of the evil connotations associated with the term. They are “terrorists.” We are “freedom fighters.” They are using “tactics of terrorism.” We are “waging legitimate war.” The problem is that if *we*, whoever that is, do not control the use and definition of the term “terrorism,” it can be turned around and used as a weapon against *us*. A “war on terrorism,” that is not fenced in by an ideological dividing wall, may point a finger back at the world’s power brokers.

**O Lord, you will hear
the desire of the meek;
you will strengthen
their heart, and you
will incline your ear to
do justice for the
orphan and the
oppressed, so that
those from earth may
strike terror no more.**

—Psalm 10:17-18

The evil, horror, and pain of terrorism is real and not simply rhetorical. For that reason, we must be truthful about violence, regardless of who uses it and for whatever political, religious, or ideological purpose. To try to absolve ourselves of the term, while we commit acts that fit the definition is a futile attempt to wash our hands of our own violence. Truth and honesty calls us to take a second look at what we define as “terrorism.” We need to look our own histories and place in the world to form a clearer and truthful perspective about what acts of violence should be considered “terrorism.” And for starters, we can check our own eyes for political, ideological, and religious logs that might obscure our vision. It seems like I once read that kind of advice from a wise philosopher.

Sermon Starters

The biblical text (Luke 9:51-56) can be approached from a number of possible angles and still be related to a peace and justice theme:

- **Terrorism of the Righteous**—Though they were followers of Jesus, James and John expressed vengeful attitudes toward their enemies that might be described as a form of “terrorism.” Explore how Christians and people who claim their cause to be “just” and “right” can still express violent actions and desires. Proclaim the way of Jesus’ nonviolence as an alternative.
- **Disarming the Violent Heart**—James and John reacted to insult with vengeance. Violence begins within the human heart. Preach on a spirituality of peace that gets to the “heart of the matter” of violence within. Disarm the heart of anger, rage, insult, and judgmentalism with spiritual fruits of patience, forgiveness, love, and hope.
- **Who Are Our “Enemies”?** The Samaritans were “enemies” of the Jews. Who are our enemies today? Preach on Jesus’ way of dealing with enemies as revealed in the Luke text and other parts of the New Testament.
- **Responding to Inhospitable People**—There are some people we meet who give us the cold shoulder or treats us with disrespect. Explore practical responses Christians can make, based upon Jesus’ model, to those who insult us or treat us badly.
- **Welcoming the Stranger: Hospitality as Peacemaking**—Hospitality was an important practice in the Ancient Near East and is still today. Issues of hospitality are key to the Luke text. Consider how hospitality can be a way of welcoming the stranger and creating peace in the world.
- **Terrorism or Peace Agenda?** Begin with the problem of terrorism in the world today and how it dominates our political agenda. Proclaim how Jesus’ way of peace is the dominant agenda for Christians.

Sample Service

This sample service provides various litanies, prayers, and hymn options. The service may be utilized as it is or elements can be rearranged or used to create your own service.

Praise

Gathering

Call to Worship—based on Psalm 146:1-7

Praise God!

Praise God, O my soul!

I will praise God as long as I live.

I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Do not put your trust in princes (and presidents),
in mortals, in whom there is no help.

When their breath departs,

they return to the earth;

on that very day their plans perish.

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, (Leah, and Rachel),

whose hope is in the Most High their God

who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them;

who keeps faith forever;

who executes justice for the oppressed;

who gives food to the hungry;

who sets the prisoners free.

Invocation

Sovereign God, Ruler of all nations, we trust in you alone. You are our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. We will not fear even though rulers change and empires totter, though bombs explode in the streets and terror wreaks its havoc. You are in our midst. God is our refuge and strength. We shall not be moved. For you, O Most High, bring peace to the earth. In stillness and song, word and witness, we will listen for your voice and know you are our God, our refuge and strength. Amen.

Praise Hymns (options)

- “God of grace and God of glory,” No. 366, *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Brethren, Faith and Life, Mennonite Pub. House, 1992).
- “O God, our help in ages past,” No. 328, *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.
- “God our help and constant refuge,” No. 192, *Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs* (Westminster John Knox, 1990).
- “Jesus A, Nahetotaetanome,” No. 9, *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.

Confession

Call to Confession—In our scripture text today James and John, followers of Jesus, are put in a situation that reveals the violence that crouches in the human heart waiting to spring forth. We must

confess our own prejudices, hatred, desire for revenge, and the use of our tongue as a weapon. Disarming the violent heart is essential to following Christ's way of peace. Let us pray in the peaceful spirit of Catholic Worker founder Dorothy Day: "Dear God, please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy as well as our friend."

Corporate Confession—God of mercy and grace, we mourn the lives of those who are daily impacted by terrorism and violence around the world. We acknowledge that violence is a web in which we are all caught. We confess our own complicity in the terrorism and violence that is perpetrated by the state to protect our interests and lifestyles. Forgive us, loving God, of our thoughts and acts that dehumanize those we consider enemies. We look into our own hearts and confess our own desires for vengeance and retaliation against those who have harmed us. Forgive us our violence as we forgive those who commit violence against us. Disarm our hearts as well as our hands through the transforming power of the Spirit of Jesus. Amen.

Prayer

Prayer for Peace—God of perfect peace, violence and cruelty can have no part with you. May those who are at peace with one another hold fast to the goodwill that unites them; may those who are enemies forget their hatred and be healed. Give us all the gift of your peace; makes us into a people of nonviolence, Make us instruments of your peace, channels of your nonviolent love. Transform our hearts and transform our world, so that together, we may enter into your reign of nonviolence and see you face-to-face. (*from John Dear, Disarming the Heart*)

Community Prayer—In preparation for the time of community prayer ask a number of people to scan the newspaper during the week previous to the service to find stories of terrorism and violence. Have them share the basic information during the prayer time and to pray for the victims, perpetrators, families, and friends. Include in the pastoral prayer leaders of our and other nations, for soldiers and civilians. for politicians and peacemakers.

Vow of Nonviolence

This vow might be given to the people beforehand to consider before the Sunday it is used. Options for using the vow can be found in John Dear's book *Disarming the Heart*.

Recognizing the violence in my own heart, yet trusting in the goodness and mercy of God, I vow to practice the nonviolence of Jesus who taught us in the Sermon on the Mount—

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called (sons and daughters) of God. . . You have heard it was said, : "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemies." But I say to you, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be (sons and daughters) of (God) in heaven" (Matt. 5:9, 43-44).

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Children's Time and Activities

For Young Children

1. Find a recording of Louis Armstrong singing "What a Wonderful World," and if you can, find a copy of the book *What a Wonderful World* by George David Weiss and Bob Thiele, illustrated by Ashley Bryan, Atheneum, 1995. Show the pictures as the song is sung. Or have someone from your congregation sing the song and make your own illustrations or find other pictures to make into a Power Point presentation with the music. Lead the children in a prayer of thanks for the wonderful world full of all kinds of people which God has created for us to live in. Then sing together the revised version of "Jesus Loves the Little Children:"

*Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the world.
Any color, Any place,
Every country, Every race,
Jesus loves the little children of the world.*

(Song is in the Jubilee Songbook. Faith and Life Press. The recording of songs from that book are available on CD or tape.)

If you have an activity time, the children could choose parts of either of these two songs to illustrate. The theme for young children would emphasize the positives of our differences.

2. Read *The Tall Man* by Dorothy Brandt Davis and Carl Brandt Davis, Brethren Press, 1963. Talk about how the John Naas stood firm in his beliefs, even though he was treated unkindly. Available at brethrenpress.com/store. This story is one of three on the Littlemiddleletall Video by David Sollenberger's video narrated by Ed Asner, also available at the above website.
3. Read *Miss Penny and Mr. Grubbs* by Lisa Campbell Ernst, Bradbury Press, 1991. The staunch Miss Penny never gives up trying to overcome the wicked naughtiness of her neighbor, and in the end her goodness triumphs. Give each of the children a bunny sticker to help them remember the story. Or give them a simple outline of a bunny to color.
4. Gather seven candles and candleholders and *The Quarreling Book* by Charlotte Zolotow, illustrated by Arnold Lobel, Harper Collins, 1991. Light all the candles. Then read the story, and blow out a candle each time a story character passes along unkind grumpiness. Then, as the dog breaks the cycle, relight each of the six extinguished candles as kindness is passed back among the characters. Another book that shows the chain reaction of a small kindness is *I like Your Buttons!* by Sarah Marwill, illustrated by Nancy Cote, Whitman, 1999. And a book that shows how one child handles her anger is *When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really Angry!* by Molly Bang, Scholastic, 1999.

For Older Children

1. Read *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles, illustrated by George Ford, Scholastic, 1995. Purchase it for your church library if you do not have it already. This true story of the Civil Rights era shows how Ruby returned unkindness by praying for her tormenters. Teach the children a verse of “We Shall Overcome” if they do not know the song. Talk about overcoming evil with good. Let the children share other examples they know about or personal experiences they have had in seeing this principle work.
2. Read *The Cornhusk Doll* by Evelyn Minshull, illustrated by Edwin B. Wallace, Herald Press, 1987. Fashion a doll to use as you tell the story, or buy one already made. Cornhusks are available at your local farmers’ market, the produce section of a large supermarket, or in your garden! If you have activity time, you might have the children make dolls to give to a younger sibling or friend. The story shows how actions can sometimes speak louder than words in creating peace.
3. Read the Luke 9:51-58 passage as is, or create a mini readers’ theater; co-opt some adults or use the children.

Narrator: The days drew near for Jesus to be taken up to heaven.

Jesus: I must go to Jerusalem. I will send messengers ahead.

Narrator: On their way the messengers entered a village of the Samaritans.

Messenger(s): Jesus is coming this way. We need to prepare a place for him.

Samaritan(s): Jesus’ face is set toward Jerusalem. We will not receive him here.

James and John: Jesus, did you hear that? Do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and burn these people up since they will not welcome you?

Jesus: No, indeed. What are you thinking? That is not how I treat people who reject me. Let’s just go on to another village.

Talk about times the children may have felt rejected or opposed. What emotions did they feel? Did they feel like striking back? How can those feelings be handled? You might role play a contemporary situation children face, such as not supporting the war in Iraq, not being invited to a party or sleep-over, or other situations you or they may think of.

4. **Read** this story of John Schrag. When the United States entered World War I in 1917 many people’s anger turned against Germany. The entire country was supposed to hate the Germans. John Schrag did not hate the Germans. John Schrag hated no one. Members of John’s home community in Kansas did hate the Germans, though. They wanted everyone to buy war bonds to help pay for the war against Germany. John Schrag refused. He didn’t hate the Germans, and he didn’t want to pay anyone to kill them on his behalf.

In response, John’s neighbors sought him out and with great anger tried to make John buy war bonds. After repeated attempts, John still refused.

Even though the war was over by November 1918, on November 11, five carloads of men drove to John’s farm to pick him up. They were going to force him to participate in a patriotic gathering in the nearby town of Burton. When they arrived at the farm, they began to overturn and destroy John’s property. After forcing their way into his house they found John and pushed him into one of the cars. John did not fight back in any way.

When they arrived at the Armistice Day festival in Burton, the men took John out of the car and yelled at him, “Buy war bonds or face the consequences!” In front of the growing crowd, John replied, “No, I will not buy war bonds, because that is against my conscience. But I will contribute \$200 to the Red Cross and the Salvation Army.”

This did not satisfy the crowd. Someone jammed an American flag into John’s hand and told him to salute it. John replied, “No, my highest loyalty belongs to God.” As the crowd pushed and shoved around him, the flag fell out of John’s hand. When someone yelled, “He stepped on the flag,” the people began to curse at him, hit him, and kick him. John did not say anything as they beat him, but looked to the sky as if asking God to give him strength.

Next, a man brought a bucket of yellow paint and poured it over John. Even as the paint dripped off his body, someone else slipped a rope over John’s neck and began to push him toward a tree where they could hang him.

Before they got to the tree, however, the deputy sheriff interrupted the mob and took John to the jail, where he put him in a cell for his protection. While he stayed there, they put him on a raised platform so that everyone could look at him in jail.

John was eventually released from his cell and was able to go home. Later, a member of the mob felt bad for what he had done to John. He remembered with crystal clarity how John had looked as they beat him. “Some kind of glow came over his face. They’d slug him on the one side of the face, and he’d turn his cheeks so they could slug him on the other. He exemplified the life of Christ more than any man I ever saw in my life.” -adapted from the story “To Pay or Not to Pay” in *Peace Be with You* by Cornelia Lehn, Newton, Faith and Life Press, 1980, p. 83. Found in the “Anabaptist History” unit.

of Journeys With God, Mennonite Schools Curriculum.

Discuss the story itself, or read the passage from Luke 9:51-57 and compare the two events. Are there stories like this still happening today when folks stand up for peace?

Sing “Obey My Voice” # 163 from *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.

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Before God the creator and the sanctifying Spirit, I vow to carry out in my life the love and example of Jesus

- by striving for peace within myself and seeking to be a peace-maker in my daily life;
- by accepting suffering in the struggle for justice rather than inflicting it;
- by refusing to retaliate in the face of provocation and violence;
- by persevering in nonviolence of tongue and heart;
- by living conscientiously and simply so that I do not deprive others of the means to live;
- by actively resisting evil and working nonviolently to abolish war and the causes of war from my own heart and from the face of the earth.

God, I trust in your sustaining love and believe that just as you gave me the grace and desire to offer this, so you will also bestow abundant grace to fulfill it.

—Pax Christi USA (from John Dear, *Disarming the Heart*.)

Word

The Ancient Word

- 1 Kings 18:20-40 (Story of Elijah)
- Luke 9:51-56

For the gospel reading:

- have someone, possibly a youth, write a modern paraphrase of the text and read it.
- have three persons pantomime the text while it is read by a narrator.

Theme Hymns (options)

- “For the healing of the nations,” No. 367, *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.
- “O God of love, O Power of peace,” No. 368, *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.
- “Lord make us servants of your peace,” No. 374 *Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs*.
- “He is our peace,” No. 102, *Maranatha Music Praise Chorus Book*, expanded 3rd ed. (Word, 1993).

The Contemporary Word—Sermon

Offering

Please consider receiving an offering or a portion of the offering to support the work of Peace and Justice Support Network. More information can be found under “funding” on the PJSN web site: www.mennoniteusa.org/peace. Offerings may be sent to: Peace and

Justice Support Network, Contributions, c/o Scott Franz, Mennonite Mission Network, P.O. Box 300, Elkhart, IN, 46515-0300.

Prayer of Blessing

God, we recognize that worldly peace and prosperity are not always your blessing. Sometimes they come with strings tied to weapons and unjust economics. We pray for peace grounded in nonviolence and justice for all your people. We pray for hearts disarmed of vengeance, hostility, and hatred. In our prayers and practice we will seek your perfect peace for all your children. Through our gifts of time, talents, and energies, we will support the movement of the Spirit toward compassion, transformation, wholeness, and healing of the earth and all its peoples. Bless these gifts, Gracious Giver, that they may serve the vision of your reign. Amen.

Offering Hymns (options)

- “Heart and mind, possessions, Lord,” No. 392, *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.
- “O God, you hear our every prayer,” No. 53 Jane Parker Huber, *A Singing Faith* (Westminster, 1987).
- “O God, to whom we sing,” No. 60, *A Singing Faith*.

Sending

You are God’s people.

We are a people of justice!

You are Christ’s followers.

We are a people of peace!

You are empowered by the Spirit

We go forth with hope!

Benediction Hymns

- “O healing river,” No. 372, *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.
- “Canto de esperanza” No. 432, *Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs*.
- “God, Teach us Peacemaking,” No. 64, *A Singing Faith*.

Action Ideas

- **Start a “Spirituality of Peace” or “Disarming the Heart” small group.** Gather together people from church and community who want to explore the interconnections between spirituality and peacemaking. Create action plans for integrating prayer, peace, and politics. Use John Dear’s book *Disarming the Heart* as a guide and encourage others to take the vow of nonviolence.
- **View MCC video “The Dividing Wall.”** This video explores the humanitarian, social and political impact of the Israeli-built “security fence.” The barrier, which will run about 700 kilometers (430 miles), is a series of walls and electrified and razor-wire fences meandering through the occupied territories as an

effort to deter acts of terrorism. It separates Palestinians from their land, water, jobs, families and friends. Increasing numbers of Israelis are questioning if this "separation wall" will actually bring lasting security to Israel. Use the video as a small or large group discussion around the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and its relation to terrorism. Offer the opportunity to write to U.S. representatives about the wall. For MCC "Bridges Not Walls" project: www.mcc.org/washington/bridges/index.html.

- **Use the "Guide for Civic Engagement."** Put this guide in the bulletin before the presidential election or as a general guide for Christian engagement in the public arena.

Guide for Civic Engagement

With our thoughts on the presidential election Christians we recognize that terrorism and homeland security will continue to be a high priority of the political administration. As Christians we cannot rely upon partisan politics to define how we will form our understanding and response to these issues. Nor is the political arena the only place where we respond to terrorism, security, and other social issues. For Christians who hold to Christ's teachings concerning nonviolence involvement in the civic arena will be an act of critical engagement.

The following are some biblical/theological principles Christians can use to guide them in their engagement in civic responsibility. These guiding principles may not make political engagement easier, in that often public and political issues may bring several of these principles into conflict. But, they can serve as a tool for Christians to reflect on the principles that do guide their participation in the public arena. It should be acknowledged that any such list of guiding principles, even when based on biblical/theological foundations, are biased by the political, ideological, and theological perspectives of the person or persons who construct them.

Ten Principles for Guiding Christian Civic Engagement

1. **The earth is God's good creation (Genesis 1).** We are stewards of creation. Protection our air, water, land and responsible use of natural resources, as gifts of God, is a Christian responsibility.
2. **God has created humanity in the divine image (Genesis 1:27).** We are to foster the dignity and rights of all peoples and the sanctity of life. Human rights and equity, racial and economic justice, and respect for human life are grounded in God, who is reflected in all humanity.
3. **The state was created to serve human welfare (Romans 13:4).** We are to call upon the state to serve its more noble purposes. The church has a role in calling the state to promote the welfare of all of its citizens.
4. **In Jesus Christ God has revealed a way of peace, nonviolence, justice, and reconciliation (Matthew 5).** We are to live in the way of peace and justice. Seeking peace with justice is an essential Christian stance in the public arena.
5. **All human reality has "fallen" from God's purpose (Romans 8:22-23).** We are to live in that creative tension of being "in" the world, but not "of" the world. Because no human institution lives up to God's purpose, Christians should practice humility and critical discernment in their engagement in the political arena.
6. **The church, as a signpost of God's reign, is the primary arena for Christian "politics" (1 Peter 2:9).** We are to be the church, an alternative community or polis. The church is to the primary community where Christians seek to form an alternative way of life distinct from the nation and culture in which it finds itself.
7. **God's mission is for and within the world (John 3:16).** We are to engage the world reflecting God's compassion. Christians will approach civic engagement with compassion towards all persons and communities impacted by social and political policies.
8. **God has compassion for the most vulnerable in the world (Proverbs 31:8-9).** We are to welcome the stranger, seek economic justice for the poor and the marginalized in society. How politicians and policies address the well being of the poor, homeless, people of color, persons with disabilities, refugees, and immigrants are significant issues for Christians.
9. **Security is in God (Psalm 146:1-6).** We are to place our ultimate trust in God. Christians should avoid making "national security" into such an idol that it leads us to uncritically sacrifice our children, our money, our energies, and our national agenda upon its altar.
10. **God's reign transcends peoples and nations (Revelation 7:9).** We are first and foremost citizen's of God's rule. As Christians we pledge our primary allegiance to the God beyond our particular gender, race, culture, and nation, which makes all of these things secondary.

For similar Christian guides for civic engagement:

- National Council of Churches: www.nccusa.org/electionyearprinciplesguide.html
- National Association of Evangelicals: www.nae.net/images/civic_responsibility.pdf

Resources

Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (Crossroad, 1995).

Jon L. Berquist, ed., *Strike Terror No More: Theology, Ethics, and the New War* (Chalice, 2002).

John Dear, *Disarming the Heart: Toward a Vow of Nonviolence* (Herald, 1993).

Victoria Lee Erickson and Michelle Lim Jones, eds., *Surviving Terror: Hope and Justice in a World of Violence* (Brazos, 2002).

Lee Griffith, *The War on Terror and the Terror of God* (Eerdmans, 2002).

Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God* (University of California, 2000).

William Klassen, *The Love of Enemies: The Way to Peace* (Fortress, 1984).

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Peace and Justice
Support Network

Peace Sunday material was written by Leo Hartshorn, minister of peace and justice, Mennonite Mission Network and designed by Cynthia Friesen Coyle, Peace and Justice Support Network volunteer. Children's time material was written by Beth Berry. For peace and justice resources and to join the network go to: www.mennoniteusa.org/peace. For more information about PJSN or to offer your responses to the Peace Sunday materials contact: Leo Hartshorn, Mennonite Mission Network, 202 South Ann Street, Lancaster, PA 17602, 717-399-8353, LeoH@MennoniteMission.net. **Your financial gifts are crucial for continuing to strengthen the vision of peace and justice in Mennonite Church USA. Thanks for your support.**