



Bienenberg Peace Consultation

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Peace Churches Discuss Theology

By Judy Zimmerman Herr and Robert Herr

Seventy people from fifteen countries spent a week together at Bienenberg Theological Seminary near Basel, Switzerland, in June 2001. They came from the Historic Peace Churches and spent their time in intense rounds of hearing and discussing papers, reflecting on Christian peace theology.

Who were these people, and why were they doing this?

The Historic Peace Churches (Mennonites, Quakers, and Church of the Brethren) have a long history of interaction, beginning formally in the 1930s. Much of this conversation revolved around responding to the injustice of war and occasionally included making provision for conscientious objection to war. The central theme in these processes, however, has been the theological underpinnings for a Christian peace stance. Most notable in this regard were the series of Puidoux Conferences which took place in Europe in the 1950s and 1960s. In more recent years there have been few formal gatherings of these traditions for theological discussion.

The immediate trigger for picking up the conversation again at Bienenberg was the invitation from the World Council of Churches that Christian churches around the world spend the 2001–2010 decade considering peace and working against violence. This Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace is a commitment from the world body to focus on peace as a Christian calling. In its call to churches beginning this Decade, the World Council named the Historic Peace Churches and their consistent testimony as a source from which other Christians could learn.

The Bienenberg Consultation, then, was a beginning attempt to come together as Historic Peace Churches (HPCs) in response to the Decade, and to think together about what we might offer from our traditions of thinking about peace. The planners sought to discover where HPCs had grown in their peace theology, whether they had enough in common to speak with one voice, and whether there were theological insights they could offer to the larger church.

While the focus of the gathering was discussion among the three HPC streams, the meeting also included interaction with some World Council of Churches (WCC) staff. Konrad Raiser, WCC general secretary, met with the group on its first day, and most participants traveled to the Geneva WCC offices on the final day of the meeting for a time of interaction with staff of the Faith and Order and the Decade to Overcome Violence offices.

One of the changes that has taken place since the earlier peace theology discussions among peace churches is the growth and strengthening of the global church. Thus, the planners recognized that, unlike earlier discussions, this one needed to include voices and participation from around the world, and not only from Europe and North America. In the end, although those from the North Atlantic areas greatly outnumbered those from elsewhere, there were participants from Paraguay, Colombia, Burkina Faso, India, and Korea whose voices added important contextual understandings to the gathering.

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If one looks, it is not difficult to find signs of eroding commitment to non-violence among the historic peace churches. Thus I approached the Historic Peace Church consultation at Bienenberg with some trepidation. I entertained the possibility that the consultation might turn out to be the death rattle of the peace churches. [But] it became clear that there was a real commitment to nonviolence among those present. And I left the consultation with renewed faith and hope that the historic peace churches will continue as a Christian witness to peace in the world.

—J. Denny Weaver, a Mennonite participant in the Bienenberg Consultation and Professor of Religion, Bluffton (Ohio) College

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Significant Themes

Summarizing countless conversations, both in formal sessions and in informal interaction over a five-day period, is an impossible task. Our attempt here is merely to highlight some of the significant themes of the gathering, and to indicate some areas of general agreement and diversity. Elsewhere in this newsletter (see p. 7) is the epistle from the meeting, which was worked through collectively by the participants and which also indicates some areas of agreement.

All three traditions shared a common move from expressing their peace convictions mostly as opposition to participation in war or violence, to indicating the need for justice and positive actions to build peace. Several participants traced this history in the various traditions' statements or official confessions, as well as in stories of activities. However, this shift comes with some different language about such action.

For example, it was acknowledged that the Quaker tradition, originating in the context of the seventeenth-century English Reformation, does not share the same reservation about participation in governance structures that many Mennonites and Church of the Brethren have, whose origins are lodged in the Anabaptist traditions of the much more violent sixteenth-century European Reformation. Recent history has seen a closer convergence of these trajectories, though some differences in emphasis remain.

On the one hand, some of those present highlighted the need for developing peace practices and for working to change or influence structures toward justice. On the other were voices reminding the group of the need to be suspicious of a total perspective or overall strategy. Manifestations of injustice around us call for a response, but that response needs to be informed by a history of suspicion about militancy, about confident claims on cause and effect. A repeated phrase was the warning not to assume that we can have “handles on history.”

Topics Discussed

Discussions might be summarized under several general topics:

1. *Peacemaking is central to faith.*

How peace is central to faith is envisioned by some via the image of cross, the costly discipleship that peacemakers take up. In this stream of thought the more humble word *nonresistance* is preferred to the more

confident *nonviolence*. As with Christ, and like the early Christians, our path of peacemaking leads to an inevitable clash with the forces of darkness and violence, which experience such peaceful witness as a threat and respond with harsh repression. The cross of Jesus stands as an icon for the Christian and the costly path of Christian discipleship.

For other participants, the more compelling image is that of resurrection. The peaceful path of Christ leads to overcoming violence, to hope and vindication by God. Although violence continues to present itself, it has been fundamentally defeated and the icon of faith becomes the peaceful victory over that which destroys life.

The spirit of God represents another image for understanding peace as being at the core of faith. God's presence in all creation, and especially in all people, presents a sign of hope and expectation for the fulfillment of God's reign. To live in that light presents a path to faithfulness and God-like living.

2. *Peacemaking includes justice-making.*

Although all present agreed that it is important for a peace testimony to connect with the world around us in a way that is effective, our discussions focused on the nature of that effectiveness. In a complex world of many interactions, too narrow a focus on effectiveness can lead to either naïve analysis on the one hand or excessive interest in control on the other. “Making history come out right” is for some the shorthand expression for a too narrow and naïve preoccupation on cause and effect relationships, especially when responding to injustice.

Shedding light on this were two very useful presentations. One, by Ann Riggs of the United States, focused on the life of the early Quaker John Woolman and the question of style, of living within culture while at the same time speaking to issues of cultural injustice. Woolman reflected optimism, was modest, and did not criticize harshly. His protests were steady, long-term, consistent, and relentless. He became “familiar from within” before attempting intervention.

Another presentation by Alfred Neufeld of Paraguay looked at the task of national history writing. Peacemakers who take up the task of interpreting the meaning of national experience can contribute to the way events are presented to future generations.

In both of these presentations, and during much of the conversation, there was caution against the lure of “total perspective” or imposing truth. The attempt to force human

activity through short time frames often becomes violent, or plants the seeds of violence. “Making history come out right” remains the image of this temptation. Justice work and peacemaking take care, take time, and resist this kind of false effectiveness.

3. *How God works.*

Underlying these conversations were questions of how we understand God and how God works in the world. A focus on the cross points to God’s paradoxical defeat of the powers of this world through what appears to be weakness. For most participants at the consultation, this would be the dominant image. Connected with this notion was the image of God’s patience, and the call for us to partake of this patience. The image of patience indicates both a willingness to engage with the other, with those who think or believe or act differently, and also a refusal to coerce or impose our own way. If God is seen as acting in this way, wooing human beings but not forcing them, we are also to follow this mode of being in the world. Patience is not withdrawal, but a willingness to engage, while not imposing.

In contrast to this dominant theme at the meeting was a word from the situation in Nigeria. Church of the Brethren pastors there speak of the need for God to be seen as strong, as punishing the wrongdoer. In a

situation in which they are being mistreated and killed because they are Christians, these church members appeal to the Old Testament image of a God of vengeance. This was a provocative word for participants in a peace conference, and not one that was readily embraced. The topic remains on the agenda for further discussion.

4. *“Overcoming Violence.”*

The question of whether we can claim the language of “overcoming” was a refrain throughout the consultation. While participants did not want to withdraw from activity that may bring more justice and peace to the world, some raised questions about whether we are comfortable using language that seems overly optimistic and triumphalistic. While we make truth claims, they must be made in a confessional tone. Participants voiced the need to focus the Decade discussions not on violence, but on the church’s calling to peace.

The consultation clearly touched on central themes of faith. Those present acknowledged that this is only the beginning of the discussion, and expressed hope that there will be chances to carry the conversation further, perhaps by focusing on one of the themes noted above.

Judy Zimmerman Herr and Robert Herr are codirectors of the Mennonite Central Committee International Peace Office.

To get more information about the purpose of the Bienenberg Consultation, a list of participants, and the texts of the papers presented, visit www.peacetheology.org through December 31, 2001.

If God is seen as acting in this way, wooing human beings but not forcing them, we are also to follow this mode of being in the world.

Remarks to the Bienenberg Consultation

By Konrad Raiser

I welcome very much this opportunity to pick up the thread of dialogue between the Historic Peace Churches and the churches represented in the World Council of Churches since some of the Historic Peace Churches are themselves members of the World Council, so it’s not between them and us, but it’s a dialogue within the family.

The particular context in which this dialogue might take shape is the initiative that the World Council has undertaken by decision of its Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, to proclaim the years from 2001–2010 as an ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence.

The ecumenical community has been struggling with the question of war and peace, violence and nonviolence, and reconciliation in a way ever since the beginnings of the ecumenical movement. The whole history of the World Council of Churches has been inscribed into that context. It is not an additional or an external concern that is thrust upon the churches seeking unity and rebuilding communion among each other, but it is integral to the emergence of the ecumenical impulse and the ecumenical movement.

But it is probably also one of the most prominent examples itself of how the ecumenical movement, and the World Council

In these more than fifty years of ecumenical dialogue, I think insights and convictions have grown, there has been an increase of clarity around the central thrust of the Christian commitment. I think that we have finally arrived at the point of proclaiming a Decade to Overcome Violence is in itself a witness to this growth in conviction.

[T]he Vancouver Statement on Justice and Peace . . . included the rejection of the spirit, logic, and practice of deterrence; it declared not only the use, but also the stockpiling and production of nuclear weapons as a crime against humanity and urged the churches to refuse any act of support of or participation in wars fought with weapons of mass destruction.

of Churches, deals with a conflict in its own midst—not by exclusion, not by normative decision making, but by engaging a continual process of dialogue. And in a way I would hope that someone will one day do an analysis of this particular dialogue about violence and nonviolence, about war and peace, as a model for how churches can deal with ethical, but probably not only with ethical concerns in their midst, where deeply held convictions about understanding the central thrust of our Christian witness stand against each other.

I think, the way the World Council of Churches itself has struggled continuously again and again with coming to a more common mind of what is the Christian witness of reconciliation and what it demands of the churches is a model case from which a number of important lessons, also in terms of the question of a nonviolent approach, can be gained.

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Grappling with Violence

One of the most controversial programs of the WCC has been the Program to Combat Racism, which as you know included the humanitarian support for liberation movements that were also engaged in armed struggle. And the World Council had to respond to the question: How can this be brought in line with a basic Christian commitment to nonviolence? You will know that in this conflict the World Council never crossed the line of justifying violence. And I hope that the World Council will never cross the line. It stayed with the statement by the Central Committee at Addis Ababa in 1971 not to “pass judgement on those victims of racism who are driven to violence as the only way left to them to redress their grievance and so open the way for a new and more just social order.”

But this is a different statement from the one where violence as a last resort is justified. The World Council has never said so, and I repeat, I hope will never say so. However, that discussion prompted a study process on violence and nonviolence in the pursuit of social justice. In 1973 the Central Commit-

tee received the report of the study, which I think still remains the most thorough ethical and theological discussion of the issues involved and still has a lot that remains important even for contemporary discussion.

This report did not come out with one received normative line. It focused on formulating critical questions for self-assessment to those holding opposing positions, and thus saw the World Council of Churches precisely not coming to a final magisterial statement, but in facilitating, engaging, urging the continuation of the critical dialogue, of mutual accountability. And these questions are addressed with equal seriousness to those who have been and continue to be defenders of the principled position of nonviolence and to those who have been and continue to be defenders of a just war tradition.

The discussion then took a new turn in 1975 at the Nairobi Assembly where the World Council was confronted with a motion from the Dutch churches, urging the World Council to start a program to combat militarism. It was obviously inspired by the model of the Program to Combat Racism and the feeling was that the struggle had to be extended to embrace militarism and its consequences as well. And in that particular Assembly a resolution on the world armament situation included the statement that the churches should be prepared to declare that they are ready to live without the protection of arms.

As some of you know, this has become the source of inspiration for some of the new peace movements at least in the European context, in particular in my own country, in Germany, where the movement “Living Without Arms” has been one of the strongest allies in the Christian peace movement. The process continued in 1981, when there was a hearing on nuclear arms and disarmament in Amsterdam. This hearing was decisive in preparing the Vancouver Statement on Justice and Peace that included the rejection of the spirit, logic, and practice of deterrence; it declared not only the use, but also the stockpiling and production of nuclear weapons as a crime against humanity and urged the churches to refuse any act of support of or participation in wars fought with weapons of mass destruction.

The final documents of the World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation in Seoul (1990) included a commitment to promote a culture of active, life-affirming nonviolence. That wasn't easy. And I think in that form it was the first time that the World Council expressed itself as

clearly in defense of nonviolence as the form of building peace. I still remember the passionate discussions both in the drafting committee and then the plenary of the Seoul Convocation around this, particularly discussions with those who were strongly involved in the struggle against apartheid.

And to have the World Council, which had been seen as the symbol of leading the struggle against apartheid, come out with a clear commitment to active and life-affirming nonviolence seemed to disavow those who were engaged in a militant struggle against racism. In Canberra, in the Assembly of 1991, the time was apparently not quite right (it was the time that the Gulf War was fought) to make this formulation of the Seoul Convocation part of a resolution of the Assembly. But that is part of the nature of the discussion in the World Council of Churches. You will never move in a straight line, but you move.

A Focus on Overcoming Violence

And so I am delighted that now, ten years after the Canberra Assembly, the WCC has been prepared to launch a Decade to Overcome Violence. In 1994 the Central Committee met for the first time in South Africa, three months prior to the dismantling of the apartheid system in the first free elections of South Africa. An attempt to relaunch the discussion about alternative ways of conflict resolution had been under preparation.

And it was then sparked and stimulated by a call by the Methodist bishop, Stanley Mogoba, who was deeply involved in the anti-apartheid struggle and had been a prison inmate for many years, who said that now that we are almost at the point of having succeeded with the Program to Combat Racism, now is the time to start a program to combat violence. Don Miller can describe very vividly the debates that took place at the respective committees and then at the Central Committee itself, which led to the decision to initiate a program to overcome violence.

The Council as an organization didn't quite know how to handle it. And it took quite some time until a focus emerged for this program to overcome violence. The focus took shape in the "Peace to the City" campaign. And I think it is important to refer to this because here a methodological insight took shape, which I hope will also shape the Decade to Overcome Violence.

The campaign of Peace to the City started contextually, by taking seriously the experience of communities, Christian and other, in particular situations, confronted with the manifestation of everyday violence, not so much in the conventional forms of war, or even civil war, but violence in homes, violence in communities, violence in the streets, violence in places of work, and the experience of those who were not prepared to accept such violence as inevitable and therefore had begun to develop imaginative forms of resistance, of trying to transform violence. And the aim of the Peace to the City campaign was essentially to make such endeavors visible, to establish networks among them, to help them learn from each other and encourage each other, and to make their witness known more widely.

The methodological insight was that in our work to overcome violence, we need to build on experience from within concrete situations. We need to focus principally on networking and coordinating. The focus should not in the first instance be to offer normative definitions of violence. The effort should not be to redraw again and again the line between nonviolence and violence. All of this may be necessary but it is of very little interest to those who are actively involved in situations of resisting violence.

It is the victims who know what violence is and how to resist in a situation of violence. And this also implies a change in the role of the WCC. In the Program to Combat Racism, the WCC was very much the leader of the program. In the case of the Decade to Overcome Violence, the World Council will take a different role. It will more be the role of the motivator of what will hopefully become a dynamic involving the churches themselves and the Christian communities, in which they will be the ones to determine the specific approaches.

It also means the deglobalization of the discussion. So much of the ecumenical discussion, and I'm afraid also the Historic Peace Church discussion, has been fascinated by the question of war. But today violence is present in human communities in so many forms that the question of war, traditional war, becomes almost an exception. As long as we stay within these large structural analyses, we will not come close to where violence is experienced by people every day—in particular, violence against women.

However, fundamental theological, social, and political challenges of course are implicit in the objectives of the Decade.

[The Bienenberg Consultation] was a very important meeting for us. Fifty years ago, the World Council of Churches asked for help from the three Historic Peace Churches and we were unable to say anything together. We offered three separate reports. This summer we were able to engage our differences positively, beginning to find our commonalities, speak together to the WCC and the wider ecumenical community in written statements and in constructive discussion at the WCC offices in Geneva, and agree that we have much, much more to say theologically to one another and together. My impression was that the those at the WCC with whom we met have found our papers, our suggestions, our epistle, and our discussion with them very useful. Together we made a contribution that no one of our communities could have made alone.

—Ann K. Riggs, a Quaker participant in the Bienenberg Consultation who works in the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C.

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One issue requiring additional conversation is whether God is a pacifist. This discussion has very profound and I believe potentially fatal implications for peace theology. If God is revealed in Jesus and we agree that Jesus taught and embodied nonviolence, and if there is nothing of God that is not revealed in Jesus (and in the Spirit), as standard Trinity doctrine proclaims, then God must be a "pacifist." On the other hand, if God is not a pacifist, and thus intentionally uses violence in the world, then those who carry out God's violence are actually doing God's will—and who are we to oppose God/God's violence, and why should we not help God/God's violence?

—J. Denny Weaver

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[W]hat is needed in order to strengthen the ability of Christian communities not to be manipulated in a nationalist or ethnocentric struggle, as has happened in the former Yugoslavia?

Superficially, one can point to the difficulty whether the Decade is about stopping, resisting, or struggling against violence, or about building peace by transforming violence. In the first instance, we stay within the mindset that has been shaped by the Program to Combat Racism, and so many ecumenical struggles, where it was essentially a struggle against, a prophetic struggle.

If, indeed, we are serious about overcoming or transforming violence, different demands will be made. And I think you know about that critical transition from the long tradition of reflection among the Historic Peace Churches. Is it a decade against violence or is it a decade for active nonviolence? The second part of the title of the Decade is important: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace. It was important for the Central Committee in giving shape to the Decade to add this positive direction, which of course was implied in the word *overcoming*.

There was a long discussion in Johannesburg on which word to use, because "combating" violence didn't seem commensurate with the objective. I said to Don Miller before we went to lunch, "If I had been aware at the time of the language that had emerged among the Historic Peace Churches of transforming violence, I would probably have preferred that."

When we proposed "overcoming violence," obviously we were aware of the central significance that this term *overcoming* has in Romans 12:21. And against that background, I am not at all unhappy that we have this term. But it has not, of course, protected us against the misunderstanding as if the World Council pretended that "we know" how to eliminate violence from the face of the earth. I have said in response to several questions in this regard, "The main reason for starting the Decade amongst the World Council of Churches is that the churches have a problem at that point." And it is only if we begin to tackle this problem that we can begin to remove one of the sources for continuing the mentality of violent approaches to conflict.

There we have to start. And therefore we need a Decade. Not that at the end of a Decade we believe that everything will be resolved. But that perhaps we will have contributed to a change of consciousness, a change of mentality among the mainline churches.

Theological Struggles

We all know too well that struggling for justice may be and is in many instances the cause of conflict or disruption, maybe even violence. That struggling for reconciliation and peace may end up in smoothing over some of the deeper issues of injustice we also know.

And the charge that this is cheap reconciliation still needs to remain present in our analysis. The World Council resolution of 1983 contains the sentence, "There can be no peace anywhere unless there is justice for all everywhere." I think after the conflicts in Bosnia, after the genocide in Rwanda, we cannot simply repeat that sentence unless we add that there can be no justice anywhere unless there is a minimum of peace and readiness to live in constructive dialogue amongst all everywhere.

Unless we are prepared to go into the center of our ways of understanding God, of understanding the drama of salvation, unless we come to terms with the question whether in fact God required sacrifice in order to do justice, the violent sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, we will never come to the core of the mentality that occasionally even justified violence.

We have to review the ways in which we talk about justice. In reading in one of the papers, I became aware that a new understanding of justice, in terms of restorative justice over retributive justice, is one of the contributions that has come from the Historic Peace Churches—a contribution that I value very highly but that still has to be received within an ecumenical setting of discussion about the demands of justice.

And finally, we have to enter the difficult discussion of ways in which religion and religious loyalties have been used to legitimize violent conflict. In fact, why is it that Christian communities and other religious communities have had so little ability to resist this political misuse and manipulation of their religious traditions? So what is needed in order to strengthen the ability of Christian communities not to be manipulated in a nationalist or ethnocentric struggle, as has happened in the former Yugoslavia?

So there is a lot of challenge involved in initiating this Decade, and one might ask oneself whether the World Council of Churches and its member churches have fully appreci-

ated what they have accepted here—and whether in fact they have what it takes to respond to this challenge. I would hope that the answer can be positive, but I think there is a deeply rooted tendency in the churches to consider violence as an external phenomenon, external to the churches—something the churches can comment on, that the churches can try to do something about, but that ultimately doesn't touch their own lives.

They are ready to mobilize against violence, to offer analysis of the destruction of violence, and then theological and ethical comments. But it is much more difficult to uncover the hidden roots of violence in our own traditions and to engage in the process of repentance and transformation. This is the challenge that we have to face.

Dr. Konrad Raiser is general secretary of the World Council of Churches. This article is excerpted from his remarks to the Bienenberg Consultation.

Epistle from the Historic Peace Churches

TO: Our brothers and sisters in the Historic Peace Churches and in the wider ecumenical fellowship of Christians

FROM: The International Historic Peace Church Consultation "Theology and Culture: Peacemaking in a Globalized World" at Bienenberg Theological Seminary, Switzerland, June 25–29, 2001

Greetings in the name of the Prince of Peace.

We, members of the Historic Peace Churches—Mennonites, Friends and Church of the Brethren—are gathered in Bienenberg Switzerland to assess our contemporary theologies of peace and justice in preparation for the Decade to Overcome Violence. We come from all parts of the world, although we lament the disproportionately small participation of those from outside Europe and North America. We come with a commitment to listen to each other, to honor our differences and celebrate our commonalities, and to work together for the culture of peace which is God's will for our broken world.

AFFIRMATIONS

Together we affirm the following:

- Essential to the good news of the gospel is the teaching, example, and Spirit of the crucified and risen Christ, who calls us to witness to the transforming power of God's Kingdom of peace, justice and reconciliation—for this nonviolent way of life is at the very heart of the gospel.
- The good news of the gospel is more than a renunciation of violence in the struggle

for justice and reconciliation. It is a call and a gift to seek to develop a culture of peace that creatively addresses and overcomes the many causes of violence in the contemporary world.

- The good news of the gospel calls us to regard seeking justice as central and integral to a nonviolent way of life. The commitment to nonviolent love and to the struggle for justice belong to one another and are not to be separated.
- A careful study of the Scriptures discloses this unity of nonviolent love, the struggle for justice, reconciliation, and the creative search for a culture of peace. In the Sermon on the Mount, love for the adversary includes reproof and creative confrontation of evil, but does not include competing with the violent methods of evil. In the New Testament account, the early church did not avoid confrontation for the sake of the Truth.
- We are called to find creative nonviolent ways to address situations of conflict in the search for justice. These include solidarity with the victim, binding the wounds of the oppressed, addressing the needs of the poor, seeking genuine understanding and empathy with all partners of the conflict, efforts for reconciliation when possible, learning to forgive, and genuine love of enemy.
- We are called to witness in the hope and anticipation that God may use our witness to bring reconciliation and a culture of peace with justice. Therefore the effectiveness of our witness is always an important consideration, but not the only consideration. We are called to a patient and per-

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Quaker theology puts a very strong emphasis on the Spirit, which leads us toward the goal of overcoming violence and empowers our ability to follow these leadings. The Anabaptist traditions are strongly Christocentric, looking especially to following the teachings of Jesus. We have, I think, work to do together to articulate for ourselves and for our ecumenical partners a fully Trinitarian theology of peace. We have hardly touched at all on what I see as a potentially fruitful area of discussion on Anabaptist ways of speaking of Christus Victor and Quaker understandings of the Atonement.

—Ann K. Riggs

The search for peace is not the possession of the peace churches, but is a deep common yearning of all Christians, people of other faiths and all of humanity.

sistent trust that God will make use of our obedience in ways that often surpass our understanding. The willingness to accept suffering is therefore a part of our witness for peace.

- We are called to experience the providential intercession of the Spirit that may carry us through situations where the use of violence, even as a last resort, has been renounced.
- Our witness proceeds from worship, prayer, study and discernment within the discipline of the community of faith. At the same time our witness reaches out to the civil societies and ecological environments within which we all live. Peace in its depth includes spiritual, communal and political dimensions as well as a care for the earth.
- The different ways of understanding these affirmations in our various doxological, theological and ecclesial traditions serve to strengthen them, rather than to weaken our commitment to them. Indeed, the affirmations themselves express our belief in a reconciliation that allows for difference.

CONFESSION

At the beginning of the 21st century, does the title “Historic Peace Churches” fit the Church of the Brethren, Mennonites and Friends? In many places, we have become indistinguishable from the society around us. Some of us would challenge the extent to which we identify with and conform to our respective states. Is our peace witness simply historic, or does it stand as a challenge to the modern forms of national religion? Our churches’ peace witness arose within contexts of suffering and persecution. Today, many of our churches, especially in the North, exist in a position of privilege in our societies, and no longer speak from the vantage point from which our ethic arose. This fact, far from calling into question the radical nature of the gospel, could instead stand as a call to repentance. Many of us have been too inattentive to our brothers and sisters who live in situations of real suffering, whether in the Southern Hemisphere or in the North, and even within our churches and homes. We do not seek suffering for its own sake; yet too many of us practice a comfortable and conformist ethic of peace, which is incompatible with God’s mission to overcome the evils of this world. We deplore the apparent inability of this very consultation to more fully reflect the realities in which many of our churches in the Southern Hemisphere find themselves.

COMMITMENT TO THE DECADE TO OVERCOME VIOLENCE

We who are gathered here express our commitment to the Decade to Overcome Violence, and to all ecumenical work which serves the cause of peace, justice and reconciliation. We urge our churches, whether they are members of the World Council of Churches or not, to commit to active engagement with other Christians in the service of God’s will for peace. We intend to continue the discussions begun here this week, and to broaden the participation to include those who are not here. We intend to share the gifts of our tradition with the ecumenical community of churches through the Decade. We intend to make this a time of renewal and energy for our active nonviolent work for peace, justice and reconciliation.

As we begin this Decade to Overcome Violence together with the ecumenical fellowship of churches, we make the following commitments:

- We wish to deepen our understanding of the peace God wishes to give us, the righteousness with which God graces us, and the justice God requires of us.
- Our witness for peace and our calling to Christian unity are two aspects of the same gospel imperative “that all may be one” (John 17). We admit that we have not always ourselves understood or embodied the necessary link between reconciliation among Christians and the Christian ministry of reconciliation in the world. We pray that, through the Decade to Overcome Violence, we can discover that a commitment to nonviolent peacemaking need no longer be a church-dividing issue.
- The search for peace is not the possession of the peace churches, but is a deep common yearning of all Christians, people of other faiths and all of humanity. We recognize that, in committing to ecumenical dialog and action for peace, we are called to lay aside any prideful tendencies within ourselves to lay special claim to this concern. Instead, we are called to listen humbly to the earnest commitments of others to peace. We must understand and willingly embrace the fact that through ecumenical encounter, we too may be changed. Indeed, a vulnerability and openness to the “other” is constitutive of the peace witness we profess.
- We commit ourselves to urge our respective institutions, with their resources, to engage fully in the ecumenical dialog and

action of the Decade to Overcome Violence. Now is the time to bring forward our gifts with a spirit of generosity.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE DECADE TO OVERCOME VIOLENCE

From our perspective as members of peace churches, we offer the following suggestions for the Decade to Overcome Violence:

- For the churches of our traditions, a commitment to nonviolent action for justice and reconciliation is a mark of the church, a point of confessional status. We suggest pursuing an ecclesiological approach to nonviolence, following on the WCC's recent work in Ecclesiology and Ethics. We strongly affirm the statement from that study, that "ethic is intrinsic to the nature of the church," and suggest this might be a fruitful avenue for building ecumenical consensus in the Decade.
- Much of the world's energy and resources are channeled into preparing for and engaging in violent attempts to resolve conflict, and in misguided attempts to create security. The governments of the world continue to outdo themselves in arming for war. In addition, much creative imagination and energy is absorbed by the interpersonal, social, structural, economic, cultural and ecological dynamics of violence. We all suffer from a lack of energy and resources for creative non-violent conflict transformation. Through this Decade, we urge that significant resources be devoted to experimental

methodologies for positive alternatives to violence, so that our "no" to violence can be followed by the "yes" of love, justice and transforming power.

- Our experience in peacemaking has taught us that overcoming violence is very difficult. We therefore suggest committing ourselves to utilize resources from beyond ourselves, to pray for the courage of our convictions, and to practice patience so as not to impede God's spirit of peace.

CONTINUATION FROM THIS CONSULTATION

The participants here this week are clear that this is not an isolated experience, but is rather one chapter in a story which began long before us, and will continue into the future. We feel the need for more consultations of a similar nature. More fundamentally, we feel the need to continue together, to witness together, to share our differences in love, to embody the reconciliation we seek to call forth in the world, and to strengthen ourselves and the entire community of Christians in our shared ministry of peacemaking.

May you be blessed by the One who calls us to be peacemakers.

The Epistle from the Historic Peace Churches was sent by the Bienenberg Consultation. It was drafted by a listening committee consisting of Eden Grace (Friends United Meeting, U.S.A.), Don Miller (Church of the Brethren, U.S.A.), and Kees van Duin (Mennonite, Netherlands).

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Peace Churches Respond to World Council

By Mark Siemens

"Humanitarian" intervention by military forces has been an issue of concern for peacemakers for a number of years.

The issue was raised sharply by the bombing of Serbia by American-led NATO forces in 1999 with the explicit purpose of stopping then-Serbian President Slobodan Milosovic's policy of pushing ethnic Albanians out of their homeland in Kosovo using threats and violent actions.

On the one hand, peacemakers reject the use of violence in all forms. But the action against Serbia in response to injustice and

violence in Kosovo was premised on the assertion that the NATO powers and the United Nations had done everything possible to stop Milosovic's aggression short of war, and that war now had to be pursued because it was preferable to allowing the existing unjust and violent situation to continue. (See the October-December 2000 issue of the *Peace Office Newsletter* entitled "Kosovo One Year Later," especially the article by J. Robert Charles, "'The Joyless Victory': NATO's 1999 War in Kosovo.")

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It was very important for the Historic Peace Churches to have an experience together as peace churches. I arrived not knowing whether we still really wanted to be known as peace churches. It was very significant that we could affirm that we still are and still want to be peace churches. Building on that unity, it was very important that we could enter into the dialogue with the World Council of Churches.

—J. Denny Weaver

Do pacifists have recommendations for situations like Kosovo that are compatible with their peace convictions?

Peacemakers now face the difficult task of responding to the broader support attracted by the “redemptive” violence of warfare in support of human rights. This begs the question: Do pacifists have recommendations for situations like Kosovo that are compatible with their peace convictions?

The ecumenical movement embodied by the World Council of Churches (WCC) has also grappled with the issue of military intervention to serve humanitarian purposes. In preparation for a WCC Central Committee meeting to be held in Potsdam, Germany, January 29–February 6, 2001, delegates were asked to consider a study paper entitled “The Use of Armed Force in Support of Humanitarian Purposes: An Ecumenical Approach.”

Historic Peace Church (HPC) members who were scheduled to attend the WCC meeting, led by Eden Grace, Fernando Enns, and Ute Caspers, raised serious questions about the study paper in draft form, including its presumption that Christians “must advocate the use of force in support of humanitarian purposes” in some situations and the use of “last resort” language for such armed interventions, which in the view of the HPC representatives would virtually guarantee that force would ultimately be used.

As a result of the questions raised, the WCC staff rewrote the document and the resulting statement, now entitled “The Protection of Endangered Populations in Situations of Armed Violence: Toward an Ecumenical Approach,” was commended to the churches for study by the WCC Central Committee on February 6, 2001.

The World Council of Churches Statement

After an executive summary of the statement and an introduction giving the history of the concern for the WCC, “The Protection of Endangered Populations” makes a number of assertions that constitute the basis for the ecumenical concern with this issue, starting with the “moral obligation of the international community to protect the lives of civilian populations that are at risk in situations where their government is unable or unwilling to act.”

The document refers to a WCC Central Committee decision in 1992 “that active non-violent action be affirmed as a clear emphasis in programmes and projects

related to conflict resolution.” It refers to earlier discussions on the use of force and observes: “The perspectives of Christians on matters of war and the use of armed force differ radically.” Yet, the document goes on, the WCC Central Committee in 1994 created the Program to Overcome Violence as a way to “counter the rising tide of violence at all levels of contemporary society and promote a global culture of peace.”

The next section aims at reshaping the debate by first reflecting on the meanings of “humanitarian” and “intervention,” and then proposing that instead of the term “humanitarian intervention,” WCC discussions use the phrase “the protection of endangered populations in situations of armed violence.”

Following brief sections on “the responsibility of the international community for prevention of violent conflict” and “impunity, truth, and reconciliation,” the document recommends various nonviolent responses to conflict situations including diplomatic and economic sanctions under the rubric “when prevention fails.”

The document reflects on sovereignty and international law, then proposes “Just Peacemaking: A Christian Approach” predicated on such principles as the “vision of a world of justice and peace” in the Christian gospel and the establishment of governments responsible for justice, peace, and security within their borders. Recognizing that even considering the use of force in the defense of humanitarian principles represents a failure to respond early enough and effectively to the conflict, “The Protection of Endangered Populations” goes on to posit “Considerations and Criteria for Discussions Related to the Protection of Endangered Populations in Situations of Armed Violence.”

Thus the WCC Central Committee study paper implicitly recognizes the necessity that at times Christians will need to support armed intervention for humanitarian purposes.

The Historic Peace Church Response

One of the goals of the Bienenberg Consultation was to formulate a response to the WCC Central Committee document. This response was drafted during the consultation and finalized over the following weeks.

The response is entitled “Just Peacemaking: Towards an Ecumenical Ethical Approach from the Perspective of the Historic Peace Churches—A Study Paper for Dialogue with the Wider Church.”

It begins by affirming a statement of the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1948 in Amsterdam:

War as a method of settling disputes is incompatible with the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ. The part which war plays in our present international life is a sin against God and a degradation of man.

The Historic Peace Church representatives speak of their yearning for the churches “to enlarge this commitment to reject all violence.” Confessing that the HPCs themselves have often failed to live up to Jesus’ standard of nonviolence and have been complicit in violence at various times, the document offers five concerns about “The Protection of Endangered Populations.”

First, the HPC document states that “[a] biblically and theologically grounded pacifism regards seeking God’s justice as central and integral to a nonviolent philosophy of life.” It rejects the WCC document’s framing the issue “as if we have to choose between nonviolence and justice.”

“Just Peacemaking” observes that the twentieth century saw a major transformation in the understanding of the relationship of justice and nonviolence, which is now “grounded in a view of Jesus as the one who incarnated the rule of God by healing and transforming lives, by engaging the principalities and powers, and by confronting violence with the cross.”

It indicates that its vision of justice is “holistic and social” and includes “comprehensive visions of human rights that include political, economic, cultural, and environmental considerations.” This view of justice is contrasted with “the narrative tradition of justice rooted primarily in Lockean and Enlightenment views that emphasize individual autonomy and freedom, the protection of private property, the right to exploit the environment, and narrow views of human rights as primarily the protection of individual liberties like freedom of speech and association.”

Second, the HPC document states, “We can identify a number of normative practices for seeking justice within principled pacifism,” in an attempt to further diminish the objection that pacifism is incompatible with a commitment to justice.

The means of seeking justice within pacifism lifted up by “Just Peacemaking” are

1. “Nonviolent forms of defense and social transformation” including the case studies in Walter Wink’s *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) and the alternative history by Elise Boulding, *Cultures of Peace* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000).
2. “Citizen corps of observers/interveners/advocates as a ‘presence’ in situations of conflict,” such as Christian Peacemaker Teams and Witness for Peace.
3. “Acknowledging responsibility for conflict and injustice and seeking repentance and forgiveness,” as exemplified by the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu.
4. “Training persons in the use of cooperative methods and strategies,” as done in the conflict transformation programs in several Brethren, Mennonite, and Quaker colleges, and as described in books such as John Paul Lederach’s *Building Peace* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), Lederach’s *Preparing for Peace* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1996), and Responding to Conflict Programme, *Conflict Skills and Strategies for Action* (New York: Zed, 2000).
5. “The church’s witness and advocacy on behalf of the marginal and those whose lives are threatened by injustice,” such as Christian advocacy for ending sanctions against Iraq and for giving voice to oppressed people as in Michelle Tooley’s *Voices of the Voiceless* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1997). “The capacity to be a genuine advocate on behalf of the most vulnerable is made possible by the recovery of the church’s own identity in the story of Christ’s suffering and passion at the hands of the principalities and powers.”

Third, “Just Peacemaking” holds that “[t]he use of violent force as a ‘last resort’ to secure justice creates conditions that inhibit the achievement of justice. Too often we work under the false assumption that, if we cannot find a nonviolent solution to a conflict, the use of violent force will take care of the problem.”

The HPC document debunks the false dichotomy that “we either had to engage in the violent use of force, or let things

The events of September 11, 2001, in the United States have caused enormous loss and grief, and at the same time have greatly increased the urgency of Christian peace witness. We encourage our readers to visit <http://www.mcc.org/peace/> for MCC’s responses to this crisis and for a variety of reflections and analyses from a Christian peace perspective.

Information about the Afghan refugee crisis and MCC’s response is available at <http://www.mcc.org/afghancrisis/>.

You can also obtain worship resources with peace themes appropriate to these times at <http://www.mcc.org/peace/worship.html>

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continue as they are (do nothing)” and points out how “last resort” thinking reinforces power concentration in few hands and undermines the ability of people to influence their own future.

Fourth, “Just Peacemaking” encourages “the churches to emphasize the distinctive witness to the world that flows from our commitment to the Spirit of Jesus Christ and our identity as the Body of Christ in the world.” It recognizes that political discourse is needed, but advocates that the church speak primarily as the Body of Christ rather than as political actor or analyst.

Fifth, the HPC document carries a reminder that “[t]hough both pacifists and those who reason with ‘just war’ principles seek justice, neither tradition can guarantee that justice will be accomplished.” It points out that “both positions rely on an ‘eschatology,’

an understanding of the way God moves forward in history.” The document restates Christian pacifist conviction that God, and not humans, is ultimately responsible “to make history come out right.”

Signing the HPC document was limited to those who attended the Bienenberg Consultation. Of the 70 who attended, about half signed the final document.

To access the text of the HPC document on “Just Peacemaking,” visit the web site www.peacetheology.org through December 31, 2001. After that date, please write to the MCC Peace Office at the address on this page to receive a copy of the statement. For more reflection on the topic of armed peace-keeping operations for humanitarian objectives, see the May–October 1997 Peace Office Newsletter, “Dealing With Peacekeepers.”