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# Responses to Terrorism

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## Introduction

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The offerings in this issue are an attempt to put the events of last September 11 in a broader perspective, that of a world where there is much diversity of opinion among Muslims and where many people understand if not participate in hatred of the United States.

Consider this premise: As long as the U.S. continues to absorb a disproportionate share of the world's resources and continues to support the manifestly unjust rule of Israel over the Palestinians, there will continue to

be many people in the world who hate the United States, and some of them will continue to use terrorist tactics.

This issue is in two parts: first, listening to the voices of Muslim people and people from Europe as they consider these events; and second, beginning to think about how these events affect our peace theology.

Searching for a biblical metaphor for 9-11 and what follows should lead us not to "holy war," but to sackcloth and ashes.

—Editor

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## September 11 from Another Perspective

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by Yousef Daneshvar

Since September 11 everybody keeps saying that the world has drastically changed, that the world will never be the same as it was before that incident, and that it will never be safe as it was before. But as a Middle Easterner, I am wondering: Has the world ever been safe?

As an example, my country, Iran, was ruled for 50 years by the incredibly cruel dynasty of Pahlavi formed by the U.K. The dynasty was controlled by the U.S. in the last 25 years of its reign. Many people were killed, tortured, and disappeared during that period. The Islamic Revolution in 1979 put an end to the atrocities of Pahlavi and threw off the yoke of American dominance. But this was not the end of the story. In 1980 Saddam Hussein took advantage of the

unsettled conditions after the revolution and invaded Iran under the pretext of some baseless territorial claims. The West including the U.S. did not hesitate to support Saddam in various ways. As a result, thousands of Iranians died and became disabled in the eight-year war to defend their country.

Needless to say, I, as a Muslim, cannot possibly have any other approach than strong condemnation to those who created the tragedy of 9-11 and sincere sympathy to those who lost their loved ones in that tragedy. I remember that day; my wife and I were watching TV. As we watched the shocking scenes of the terrorist attack there were some speculations that some Muslims had done that but my wife kept saying,

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Ten years ago, early on a January morning, bombs rained down from the sky and caused great buildings in the city of Baghdad to fall down—hotels, hospitals, palaces, buildings with mothers and soldiers inside—and here in the place I want to love best, I had to watch people cheering about it. In Baghdad, survivors shook their fists at the sky and said the word “evil.”

... There are a hundred ways to be a good citizen, and one of them is to look finally at the things we don't want to see. In a week of terrifying events, here is one awful, true thing that hasn't much been mentioned: Some people believe our country needed to learn how to hurt in this new way.

This is such a large lesson, so hatefully, wrongfully taught, but many people before us have learned honest truths from wrongful deaths. It still may be within our capacity of mercy to say this much is true: We didn't really understand how it felt when citizens were buried alive in Turkey or Nicaragua or Hiroshima. Or that night in Baghdad.

And we haven't cared enough for the particular brothers and mothers taken down a limb or a life at a time, for such a span of years that those little, briefly jubilant boys [who celebrated on September 11] have grown up with twisted hearts. How could we keep raining down bombs and selling weapons, if we had?

—Barbara Kingsolver, *Los Angeles Times*, September 23, 2001

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In a time such as this, when we have been seriously and most cruelly hurt by those who hate us, and when we must consider ourselves to be gravely threatened by those same people, it is hard to speak of the ways of peace and to remember that Christ enjoined us to love our enemies, but this is no less necessary for being difficult.

—Wendell Berry, *In the Presence of Fear*, p. 6

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“I cannot believe a Muslim may do such a ruthless thing.” I could not believe it either. The reason was obvious: life, in general, and human life, in particular, are so highly valued in the Qur'an that it is hard to believe a practicing Muslim can be involved in any way in such a vicious act of terror. The Qur'an, for instance, considers the crime of slaying one soul as big as that of slaying mankind altogether and it regards saving one soul as significant as saving mankind altogether (Qur'an 5:32).

With all this, why should somebody be able to commit such a horrendous crime in the name of Islam? I wish this question attracted more attention after 9-11 in the West than it actually did. Sadly, in Western media, particularly American, this “why” question was heavily overshadowed by the “who” question. Even when they addressed it they treated it so superficially. Some purported that violence was endemic to Islam. They tried to validate their theory by appealing to a completely distorted conception of *jihad* (holy war), which has nothing to do with their claim.

### A Wrong Reading?

Some others were fair enough to accept that Islam was a peaceful religion and thus put the blame on a wrong reading of Islam, which is becoming the typical way of explaining the current bloody conflicts in the Middle East. The so-called war on terrorism is justified by theories that try to account for the tragedy by exploring the religious convictions of those who created it.

If some followers of a religion see it, rightly or wrongly, as part of their religious vocation to slaughter others as infidels, why should the others not be given the right to use every weapon in their arsenal to eradicate them? As to the concern about the thousands and thousands of civilians who may get killed, disabled, and displaced, the inevitability and legitimacy of “self-defense,” according to these theories, legitimizes these “collateral damages.” It sounds like a pretty convincing argument but it loses its strength when the whole truth is known. True, those accused of committing this terrorist action follow a cult they have forged of themselves rather than Islam. There is, however, one more important fac-

tor to be taken into consideration here and that is the sinister reality of the relationship between the Islamic world and the West, particularly the United States. The atrocities that are being committed on Palestinians by Israel every day with the limitless support of the U.S., the imprisonment of Muslims in most Middle Eastern countries by American-backed despots, and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children due to the American-led sanctions against Iraq are a few out of thousands of symptoms that there is something deeply wrong with the principles governing this relationship. It is the policy behind these atrocities that fosters the evil of terrorism.

It is no secret today that the two biggest troublemakers in the Middle East, Saddam Hussein and the Taliban, are the direct outcome of this policy. On the other hand, terrorists can easily take advantage of the frustration stimulated by this policy to recruit soldiers and raise money for their inhumane goals. This is the indirect fruit of the same policy.

In this way, we see that each of the two parties involved in the dispute provides the other with the excuse and strength to keep on with their immoral activities. They together have entangled the world in a vicious cycle that may break only when the world is destroyed. The logic and acts of the two parties of this conflict are astonishingly similar. Each follows an ideology that justifies, in its own eyes, whatever it does: one grounds itself on “national interest” and the other on some cultish beliefs. Both kill innocent victims or inflict suffering on them in the name of “self-defense.” Both think that the most appropriate means to make things right is violence. Both believe that the end justifies the means. Finally, both are saying that “you are either with me or with my opponent.”

In my opinion, things will never get better as long as the U.S. is not ready to revise its foreign policy and to base it on respect for others instead of looking at them as the means of fulfilling its “national interest.” In other words, the U.S. needs to recognize and treat others as human beings, not as objects with which it can play every game it wants. All those who long for peace have to convince the U.S. government to revise its inhumane foreign policy in favor of a humane one. From my perspective as an Iranian, this appears to be the only way to face the problem at its root causes.

*Yousef Daneshvar is a Ph.D. student at the University of Toronto under the MCC student exchange program with Iran.*

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# September 11 in the Egyptian Press

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by Jon Hoover

The Egyptian press published condemnations of the 9-11 attacks by Muslim and Christian religious leaders and the government, but it was not permitted to report the widespread jubilation over America's tragedy. The sole exception was a weekly that devoted eleven pages to Egyptian rejoicing. The average Egyptian Muslim links the United States with mass starvation of children in Iraq and Israeli aggression against the Palestinians. Although very distasteful, gloating is thus understandable.

In addition to the attacks, the Egyptian press focused on Arab and Muslim suffering in the West: threats, murders, harassment of veiled women, negative portrayals of Arabs and Muslims in the media, and damage to mosques and Muslim shops. Americans who assisted Arab and Muslim neighbors and demonstrated against the impending war were noted, and President Bush's call not to mistreat Arab and Muslim Americans and his visit to the Islamic Center in Washington D.C. were appreciated. However, one skeptic doubted that the official American policy of differentiating terrorism from Islam would reach an American populace fed on superficial television analysis controlled by Jewish interests.

## Who Were the Perpetrators?

Some journalists did not believe that the 9-11 attackers could have been Muslims. Muslims lacked the expertise and their faith forbade killing innocents. Others argued that the U.S. had insufficient evidence to implicate Osama bin Laden. Many believed that Israel had the most to benefit from the attacks. The former Egyptian ambassador to Israel blamed the Israeli security agency Mossad for the tragedy.

Several writers were concerned not to let Zionist interests create an atmosphere of religious strife. One noted that America was not Christian—"America has no religion except its interests, and no values except its existence"—and he warned that talk of a religious war must not undermine the unity of Christians and Muslims in Egypt.

Others gave religion a stronger role. Muslim leaders in Egypt condemned bin Laden's version of Islam, but they also ruled that religious law prevented Muslims from joining a coalition with America. Some insisted that President Bush's one-time use of "cru-

sade" for his campaign against terror represented his true intention. Thus, Egypt was right not to join America against fellow Muslims in Afghanistan, and Muslims should prepare for war with "vanishing" Western civilization.

The Egyptian government stood back from an American coalition, probably out of deference to the sentiments just noted, and President Mubarak explained that the U.S. could show its strength by not taking revenge. Yet, progovernment columnists also observed that Mubarak had been calling for an international coalition against terrorism for years. Throughout the 1990s, the Egyptian government fought a war against Muslims of the same ilk as those charged with the 9-11 attacks. The attacks vindicated Mubarak's warnings to Western nations against harboring terrorists.

## Islam and Peace

Great effort was devoted to promoting Islam as a religion of peace. Commentators advocated deeper grounding in Islam to prevent the likes of bin Laden from hijacking the religion. However, not everyone was convinced of the need to protect Islam's image. One columnist observed that it was not even proven that the 9-11 perpetrators were Muslims. Another noted serendipitous effects: renewed interest in Islam had emptied the libraries in Paris of their Qur'ans, and President Bush had spoken truth when explaining that terrorism was not Islam's real face.

Egyptian journalists revealed much distrust of the U.S. and Israel and great concern for the welfare of Muslims and Islam in the wake of the 9-11 attacks. Resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would improve Egyptian attitudes toward Israel and the U.S. Beyond that, however, there remains the considerable diversity among Muslims over the political import of their faith and their ongoing internal battle for the meaning of Islam in the face of modern culture. 9-11 brought this century-old struggle home to the Western world with unprecedented force. Perhaps it also provides an unprecedented opportunity to show greater sensitivity to Muslim neighbors of all persuasions now that we better grasp the gravity of their struggle.

*Jon Hoover is a Mennonite from Lancaster, Pa., on staff at Dar Comboni Arabic Studies Institute, Cairo, Egypt.*

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## An Afghan Responds

I can tell you that Afghans generally condemn the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center [and the Pentagon], but they are strongly upset about the military actions of the United States in Afghanistan.

Afghans are 99 percent Muslim. They don't know what Arabs are doing in Afghanistan, but they [perceive] that Arabs are Muslim. Most Afghans respect any Arab or Taliban because of their Muslim faith. Generally Afghans don't like any foreigners, especially those with blue eyes and red [skin] color.

The roots of the 9-11 acts may vary from psychological to mental, from religious to [lack of] self-esteem and resulting aggression, from regional to continental. Global injustice and a major imbalance in the distribution of power, happiness, well-being, and wealth may also [contribute to] this event.

What is happening between the United States/Israel and Muslims is obvious to the world. We call it *zullam* or animosity and cruelty. It means inhumane actions and reactions under unbalanced conditions. These kinds of actions easily create responses of revenge.

How to make things right again is a very big question. This needs mass understanding and collaboration, accepting risks, and inviting politicians and militants to peace workshops and symposia. We also need to create opportunities for joint work and joint study for Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

The United States will be respected if it takes an active part in the rebuilding of Afghanistan. If they create jobs for Afghans they will never fight. If Afghans get education, they will hate fighting.

Afghans may not be happy if food is given, but they will be happy if food factories are built and if they learn how to find their own food.

—Professor Abdul-Ghani Taj, peace advocate among the Afghans living in Peshawar, Pakistan. See the interview of him in the January–March 2000 issue of the *Peace Office Newsletter*.



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# Post-9-11 Reflections on the Response of Indonesian Muslims

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by Duane Ruth-Heffelbower

**[I]n conversations with people here in Indonesia, I have met no one who approves in any way of the U.S. response and its war on terrorism. That includes both Christians and Muslims.**

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The time will soon come when we will not be able to remember the horrors of September 11 without remembering also the unquestioning technological and economic optimism that ended that day. . . . This optimism rested on the proposition that we were living in a "new world order" and a "new economy" that would "grow" on and on, bringing a prosperity of which every new increment would be "unprecedented." . . . The dominant politicians, corporate officers, and investors who believed this proposition did not acknowledge that the prosperity was limited to a tiny percentage of the world's people and to an ever smaller number of people even in the United States; that it was founded upon the oppressive labor of poor people all over the world; and that its ecological costs increasingly threatened all life, including the lives of the supposedly prosperous.

—Wendell Berry, *In the Presence of Fear*, pp. 1–2

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I was on an airplane between Tokyo and Singapore returning to Indonesia from the United States at the time of the World Trade Center attacks, arriving home the next day to find the papers full of the first horrible pictures of the disaster. Everyone I met in airports expressed sympathy.

In the three months since, I have discussed the significance of the 9-11 events with many Indonesians, Muslim and Christian. While there are personal variations in the responses they tended to follow certain themes.

No one I have spoken to directly thought the attacks were a good thing. Everyone has said that the attacks were horrible, unjustifiable crimes against humanity. News photos showed demonstrators in Indonesia waving signs supporting the attacks, but those were obviously made-for-television events.

Since the new president of Indonesia, Megawati Sukarnoputri, quickly joined the group condemning the attacks, and was the first foreign head of state to visit Washington after the attacks, those who want to depose the female Indonesian president have been trying to use her response as a political lever, claiming she sides with anti-Islamic forces.

Nevertheless, in conversations with people here in Indonesia, I have met no one who approves in any way of the U.S. response and its war on terrorism. That includes both Christians and Muslims. Muslims all wonder how the U.S. can be so dense as to think they can invade a Muslim nation, indiscriminately killing civilians, and have Muslims accept it. Christians are appalled that the country most identified with Christianity is acting in such an irrational, hateful way.

Muslims I have talked to condemn the attacks, but say they can understand the motivation of those who did it. The attacks are seen as a reaction to the new colonization of the world by companies identified as American backed by the force of American arms. These new versions of the Dutch East India Company attempt to homogenize the colonies, holding their religion and culture in contempt while supporting corrupt rulers who sell out their own people.

The response of the U.S. government is seen as showing once again the arrogant hypocrisy of a nation that claims to teach others how to honor human rights while violating them when its own interests are served.

## A Restorative Response

In Indonesia there is the concept of being unable to control your emotions. Indonesians are generally very controlled, not showing emotion when wronged. When things build up too much, and a person loses control of the emotions, people don't approve but they understand. That is how 9-11 is seen by some of the people I have talked to. The evil done to so many people in so many places by American greed finally became too much for some people. They will not be the last.

U.S. support of Israel is always mentioned in these conversations as an assault on Islam, and one that shows a deep disrespect. The lack of respect and the lack of economic justice in American dealings with the Islamic world are seen as almost irreconcilable. Several people specifically referred to the U.S. as the new Roman Empire.

The model I use for teaching reconciliation has four steps: (1) to come together with a commitment to be constructive; (2) to acknowledge the injustices each participant feels; (3) to restore the equity between the participants; and (4) to be clear about future intentions.

In the case of reconciling the injustices that led to 9-11, the first item is the biggest problem for my colleagues. They see the Muslim world, as well as the two-thirds world generally, being quite willing to constructively engage the United States in a process of reconciling injustices. What they can't imagine is U.S. willingness to do the same.

In victim-offender work it is pretty rare to have an offender who has not been caught come forward to ask for help in reconciling with the victim. It is also rare for a more powerful group to seek reconciliation with a less powerful group. The U.S. is seen in Indonesia as an offender who has not yet been caught, or as an entity so powerful that it operates with impunity. These people view 9-11 as the beginning of the collapse of American impunity.

Once the United States learns that it is not immune to the forces and concerns that guide most nations, the process of reconciliation will have a chance to operate. I am hopeful that the process of self-reflection can begin without more tragedy.

*Duane Ruth-Heffelbower was director of peace programs for MCC Indonesia until December 2001.*

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# Conversations with Muslims after September 11

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by Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger

**O**ur MCC assignment in Qom, Iran, gave us many opportunities to talk with people about the events of September 11 and the war in Afghanistan.

The first reaction to the news of 9-11 was shock; how could this happen in the United States of America? Quickly following was sympathetic grief for the innocent people killed. We received phone calls, personal inquiries, and gifts of food in support of us as Americans at a time of tragedy.

A second response was in Tehran, the capital of Iran, where two hundred people joined in an expression of sympathy for those killed and Seyed Mohammad Khatami, president of Iran, was quick to express condemnation of the attack and empathy for the United States.

Third, there was a clear condemnation of any persons involved in carrying out these events, saying that if they were Muslims, they were in name only. An Iranian would find it difficult even to consider the possibility that a Muslim may have been involved in the attack. The Qur'an clearly condemns such action:

We (God) prescribed to the children of Israel that whoever slays a soul, unless it be for manslaughter or for mischief in the land, it is as though he slew all men; and whoever keeps it alive, it is as though he kept alive all men. (5:32)

Next was a positive expression of hope that maybe this regrettable criminal action will help the leadership of the United States to reshape its foreign policy particularly in the Middle East. Finally, there has been a sustained interest and intrigue about what happened, why, by whom, who benefits, and what is next.

## Responses to the War

The response of Iranians to the military action in Afghanistan was initially one of regret—regret that again many innocent people will be killed through the use of destructive military force against a perceived enemy. The Iranian people clearly declare that the Taliban represent a form of Islam that is in name only. Our Iranian friends have expressed hope that this will be the end of Taliban influence in Afghanistan. But they are very worried that the United States will maintain a military presence there.

The hope that the U.S. will reshape its leadership role in the world has roots in many

directions. First, the people of Iran lived under the abuse of others for hundreds of years, then under the abuse of their own ruler, the late Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who was supported by the U.S. government. Iran also has a 20-year history of support for the Palestinian people in their resistance to the encroachment of Israel on their homeland. Iranians see the U.S. government as supporting Israel much more than the Palestinian people and this is perceived as a great injustice. Iranians also perceive the U.S. government as using power and military force in an arrogant manner.

There are many suggestions for action. One is that the U.S. government should not act unilaterally in opposing terrorist action but should act as part of the United Nations. The Iranians are interested in peace and understanding with the U.S. on the basis that international differences be settled by international law rather than by military force. However, there is an understandable Iranian skepticism that the U.S. prefers military force to the rule of international law.

In our view, we need extensive people exchange programs with countries with large Muslim populations. We need North Americans who have the interest and feel the challenge to learn the language, the history, the poetry, and the culture of Muslim countries.

We had supper one night in December at the home of an Iranian family in Qom. We sat on Persian carpets around a colorful oil-cloth covered with dishes of dates, rice, salad, and meat. I (Wallace) shifted my position frequently to relieve pain from an old injury. Later in the evening we were talking of the need for direct people-to-people contact as the only real solution to national tensions. The host said, "We need to know people like we know you; we need to know that your leg hurts when you sit on the carpets with us." He then quoted from Sa'di, an Iranian poet, and quickly gathered paper, ink, and a stylus cut from a hollow reed and wrote in flowing Persian script:

Of shared heart  
Or shared tongue  
Shared heart is best.

*Wallace and Evelyn Shellenberger are MCC volunteers in Qom, Iran, under the Iran student exchange program.*

**We need North Americans who have the interest and feel the challenge to learn the language, the history, the poetry, and the culture of Muslim countries.**

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Does Israel face a problem of terrorism? You bet. It is appalling that Israeli citizens are being blown up in discos, pizza parlors and public streets. Israelis justifiably are bitter and angry.

But conditions in the West Bank and Gaza also have never been worse. Palestinians are reacting violently as the rat cage tightens.

Tragically, the most unspeakable terrorism against Israelis will be applauded by virtually every Palestinian until their own desperation is alleviated and their sovereign state has been established.

—Graham E. Fuller, former vice chairman of the National Intelligence Council at the CIA

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# Europeans on Terrorism and the U.S. Response

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by Hansulrich Gerber

For people in Europe [terrorism] is a problem but not the top problem. Unemployment, health, domestic violence, poverty, food, and housing are far more immediate and threatening issues than terrorism to the majority of people around the world.

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We know quite well how the problem [of terrorism] should be addressed, if we want to reduce the threat rather than escalate it. When IRA bombs were set off in London, there was no call to bomb West Belfast, or Boston, the source of much of the financial support for the IRA. Rather, steps were taken to apprehend the criminals, and efforts were made to deal with what lay behind the resort to terror. When a federal building was blown up in Oklahoma City, there were calls for bombing the Middle East, and it probably would have happened if the source [had] turned out to be there. When it was found to be domestic, with links to the ultra-right militias, there was no call to obliterate Montana and Idaho. Rather, there was a search for the perpetrator, who was found, brought to court, and sentenced, and there were efforts to understand the grievances that lie behind such crimes and to address the problems. Just about any crime . . . has reasons, and commonly we find that some of them are serious and should be addressed.

—Noam Chomsky, 9-11, pp. 23–24

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The tragedy of innocent deaths caused by brutal acts of violence is unspeakable, and that goes for New York or Washington just as it does for Belgrade, Sarajevo, and Belfast. Europeans from these cities and elsewhere have expressed strong and genuine sympathy over the events on September 11—even those that had been bombed months earlier by U.S. forces in Yugoslavia. As time goes on and the unilateral and single-minded U.S.-waged “war against terrorism” unfolds, Europeans begin asking questions of concern and consternation.

### 1. *Why is the war on terrorism being imposed on us?*

People in the United States had a terrible wake-up call to a reality known for a long time to the rest of the world: senseless and gruesome attacks on civilians as they go about their everyday life. Now, all of a sudden, terrorism is the world’s top plague.

For people in Europe it is a problem but not the top problem. Unemployment, health, domestic violence, poverty, food, and housing are far more immediate and threatening issues than terrorism to the majority of people around the world. The U.S. government and media are saying in unison that terrorism is the biggest single threat to humankind. The irony is that the issues mentioned above are ever increasing, also in the U.S. Is terrorism perhaps a welcome excuse for not addressing these issues?

Since World War II and until recently, the United States imposed the anticommunist agenda on the world, using nearly every conflict to this end and neglecting countless perhaps smaller but more real problems people were struggling with. Many of today’s big problems outside of the U.S. are direct or indirect consequences of the Cold War. Will the world again become subject to a misled and disproportionate U.S. agenda?

### 2. *How can war effectively address terrorism?*

The Council of Europe in the 1980s declared terrorism to be the worst enemy of democracy. Many European countries have suffered from terrorism after World War II. Their history documents the counterproductiveness of warlike responses to terrorism: War breeds terrorism.

Indiscriminate prosecution of suspects and disregard for human rights in their treatment

may satisfy primitive instincts cultivated by tabloids (they don’t deserve any better), but serve to expand and strengthen the networks of people ready to subscribe to or commit acts of violence. In the Middle East, closely watched by Europeans, the Palestinian *intifada* exemplifies that mechanism. Violence works in a spiral and states tend to play a crucial role in accelerating it.

Terrorism is less the problem than it is a symptom of deeper problems. These will begin to ease up only as the United States begins to realize that democratic process must not be short-cut, but intensified in order to reduce terrorism and address its root causes. If you abort democracy because a few people attack it, you’re giving them victory.

### 3. *How much do people in the U.S. realize what’s going on?*

Many people in Europe—and elsewhere—do not hesitate to use the term “terrorism” to describe what U.S. secret and military action and money have done to innocent people around the globe. (Examples are the anticommunist rebel movements in Afghanistan and elsewhere that were supplied with arms by the United States. In Laos in the 1970s, U.S. warplanes dropped two tons of TNT per person.) But they wonder whether Americans are aware of this reality. There is a general sentiment in Europe that Americans might be misled by their government and media, at the cost of many people’s livelihoods and lives elsewhere.

More troubling yet, do the U.S. government and its agencies know things no one is supposed to know, and may they have played a part in the tragic events of 9-11? There is a multiplicity of Web sites and listservers that suggest so, some with detailed facts.

The issue at hand is what a hegemonic power does when it is frustrated and feels threatened from outside while ignoring threats from within. The present situation poses a tremendous challenge to the churches in the United States. As their government declares it will freely mix lies and truth to manipulate domestic and world opinion, treats suspects as criminals and worse, before their guilt is even remotely proven, and attacks civilians around the world, what do Christians say? The world is waiting to hear prophetic words of truth.

*Hansulrich Gerber is director of MCC Europe programs.*



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# The Church's Response to September 11

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by Duane K. Friesen

Given the limits of space, I have chosen to write a more confessional statement organized around two central questions.

*1. Will the church be faithful to its calling to be a witness to the way of Jesus Christ in a world of violence?* September 11 reaffirmed for me the roots of a peace theology: a commitment to the way of the Christ of the Sermon on the Mount, a view of the church as a transnational community among the nations (versus the idolatry of flag and nation), and an eschatology grounded in the hope that nonviolent love is ultimately how evil is transformed.

Nothing really changed on 9-11, except that many people in the U.S. were forced to "join history." Many of us were living under the illusion we are immune from the scourge of violence that has been the lot of native people, people of color, and most nations of the world. It is a shallow theology that says, "Now that we have been attacked, the world has changed and we must strike back." September 11 symbolizes how history repeats itself (the terror of Herod the Great at the time of Jesus, lynching in racist America, Nazi genocide, Hiroshima, Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, and the response to occupation by suicide bombers). Peace theology worth its salt is not for "good times," but especially for those occasions when people are most tempted to justify violence because of a terrible evil that has been committed against them.

I am convinced that "staying" the course in our commitment to nonviolence is especially important now if we consider the "face" we Christians present to the Muslim world. The church should disassociate itself from American imperial power. America, where unfortunately "flag" and "cross" are blended, is perceived in much of the Islamic world as a continuation of Western imperialism. The church is called, instead, to be a nonviolent "presence" in the Muslim world. By serving under MCC and similar groups in countries like Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Palestine, the church can address underlying conditions of hopelessness and despair, the very conditions that are the soil for terrorism.

*2. What is our witness to the "powers that be" as they respond to 9-11?* Almost immediately after 9-11, President Bush began

using the rhetoric of war. Congress did not debate, as before the Gulf War, whether war was justified as a "last resort." The rush to war ignored the possibility of defining 9-11 within international law as a "crime against humanity." This would have required the U.S. to mobilize the international community in a "police" action to find the perpetrators, arrest them, and bring them to trial under an international court. (See the accompanying chart.)<sup>1</sup>

The choice of war and use of air power, which endangers Afghani lives in order to save American lives, further devastated the infrastructure of Afghanistan, and led to nearly 4,000 civilian Afghani deaths, more than were killed in the 9-11 attacks.<sup>2</sup> The war has generated intense hostility throughout the Islamic world, which is likely to foster another generation of terrorists.

The paradigm of war has not generated self-examination to determine what "causes" terrorism, whether U.S. policy might be partly responsible for creating the conditions

Peace theology worth its salt is not for "good times," but especially for those occasions when people are most tempted to justify violence because of a terrible evil that has been committed against them.

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## Naming What Happened and How We Respond

### "CRIME"

1. A horrendous crime against humanity.
2. We identify or "name" the act as an immoral act that contravenes international law, thus prompting international support.
3. Emphasis upon justice: the objective is to identify the perpetrators, to arrest them, and to bring them to trial.
4. Actions are taken under the rule of law, and are open to public scrutiny.
5. Pinpoints the doers of the crime, and directs anger to bringing them to justice. Actions respect noncombatant immunity.
6. Searches for motives for the crime. Asks questions such as: "Why do people hate us? Are we partly responsible (for example through actions taken in the Gulf War)? Can we stop the cycle of violence and counterviolence?"
7. Requires long-term thinking, careful reflection and patience. Resists finding a quick fix solution.

### "WAR"

1. An attack on the United States and its identity.
2. We accept the terms of the terrorists, who name it as an attack against the United States.
3. Emphasis upon retaliation: the objective is to seek vengeance.
4. Actions are taken unilaterally ("national vigilantism"), and are only subject to the rules of war (essentially secret, with the use of propaganda to mobilize public opinion).
5. Inevitably leads to "collateral damage"—civilian casualties. Thus we create new victims, and we become like the evil that we deplore.
6. Perpetuates the cycle of violence, seeing violence as redemptive. Creates the danger of breeding more anger and hatred, and fostering the next generation of terrorists.
7. Tends towards short-term actions that make us feel better temporarily, but do not address underlying causes.

—Duane K. Friesen

By putting the effort into a war, U.S. policy makers are not focusing their energy on how to address the underlying material, social, and political conditions within the Islamic world that cause despair and violence.

that generate terrorism. By putting the effort into a war, U.S. policy makers are not focusing their energy on how to address the underlying material, social, and political conditions within the Islamic world that cause despair and violence. One of the sources of hostility toward the U.S. is its Middle East policy. The Bush policy is a dismal failure with its double standard of criticizing Palestinian violence without addressing the underlying cause of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian land.<sup>3</sup>

We should continue to “witness” to the powers that be, though I see little to be hopeful about given the present direction of U.S. foreign policy. Our best hope lies in strengthening our commitment as a faith

community, and from that base investing our energy and resources in the church's service and peace work throughout the world.

*Duane K. Friesen is professor of theology at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas.*

1. The South African Council of Churches, in a public policy document of November 2, 2001, says, “[W]e are concerned that the rush to portray criminal acts of terror as acts of war has resulted in an unfortunate blurring of individual and collective justice. . . . The idea that ‘They must pay’ is always a notion with serious ethical implications. . . . It is all the more dangerous if we are not completely certain who ‘they’ are.”

2. See the documentation by Professor Marc W. Herold of the University of New Hampshire at <http://pubpages.unh.edu/mwherold>.

3. For an instructive account of perceptions within the Islamic world of the West, particularly the United States, see the National Public Radio documentary “Why Are They So Angry at Us?” (<http://americanradioworks.org/features/resentment/print.html>).

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## Post-September 11 Peace Theology: A Handful of Challenges for U.S. Mennonites

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by J. Robert Charles

Collapsing along with the World Trade Center towers and the later anthrax incidents was Americans' sense of physical security within our borders—an illusion few other nations know, due in part to intrusive foreign superpowers like our country.

On September 11, 2001, U.S. territory was attacked by a foreign “power”—though in this case a “network,” led by Osama bin Laden, rather than a state—for the first time since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor 60 years earlier. Televised scenes from Manhattan and Washington shocked and grieved our nation and most of the world. Thousands of our fellow citizens (and hundreds from other nations) died.

From across the nation came touching expressions of sympathy and solidarity toward New York City and its self-sacrificing fire fighters and police officers. From sister churches around the world through the Mennonite World Conference, U.S. Mennonites received prayers and encouragement.

Collapsing along with the World Trade Center towers and the later anthrax incidents was Americans' sense of physical security within our borders—an illusion few other nations know, due in part to intrusive foreign superpowers like our country. Thanks to regular official warnings that worse may be coming, our country is living in a state of heightened alert. Rallying around the flag is the order of the day. The Stars and Stripes, as well as “God Bless America” and “United We Stand” pins, posters, and decals, are everywhere.

In Washington, political leaders have declared and are prosecuting an all-out “war on terrorism” both at home and abroad. It promises, they tell us, to be a long one. Military and “homeland security” budgets are skyrocketing. For those who remember the “long twilight struggle” of the U.S.-Soviet Cold War that ended a decade ago, history seems to be in an eerie rerun mode.

In this post-9-11 setting, Mennonite peace theology done in and from the United States of America faces a handful of challenges. These are not novel in the sense of being unprecedented. However, these five tasks have received new focus and urgency since al-Qaida carried out their daring suicide strikes and since the U.S. government has responded with an energetic diplomatic and military campaign.

First, we need to explore anew what it could mean to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). John Paul Lederach says we need “a practical theology of the enemy.” I agree, and suggest that we begin with an extremely tough case: Osama bin Laden. There's no use denying that he sees our country as Islam's enemy and is out to destroy us in a religious war, and for



a variety of reasons: U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia, policy toward Iraq, and support of Israel. Could “loving” bin Laden mean to try to understand his grievances (without justifying his actions)? Could “praying” for him include urging our leaders to look for sensible ways to address these grievances?

A second task is to think anew about the command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39). The second verse of a favorite hymn (*Hymnal* 411) reminds us: “I bind my soul this day to the neighbor far away, and the stranger near at hand, in this town and in this land.” While we rightfully resist a local definition of neighbor, neither should we refuse to include our fellow U.S. citizens—those who died in the attacks, or their friends and families. To love these neighbors “near at hand” will mean to refrain from suggesting that the 9-11 victims somehow deserved to die for the alleged political or economic sins of our country.

A third task is to reexamine the place that love of our country could have within a Christian faith committed to Jesus’ way of peace. To be sure, we find no biblical command to patriotism similar to those enjoining enemy- and neighbor-love, and we Mennonites have rightfully refused to our country what God alone deserves: love with all our heart, soul, and strength (Deut. 6:5). Since 9-11, what some might label “America hating” has surfaced among us. Many of us could identify with an October *New Yorker* cartoon showing a couple entertaining friends and confessing, “We’re still getting used to feeling patriotic.” The challenge here is to love our country genuinely—its landscape, people, and culture—without being embarrassed that we can’t join in waving its flag, singing its warlike anthem, giving it a special divine role, or cheering on its armed forces.

The fourth task is to consider the ethical standards we hold up to our public authorities as they respond to the attacks of 9-11—and new emergencies that yet may come. Blessing a military crusade, I think we all agree, is out of the question. But short of that, should we advise total restraint or proportional response—or nothing at all? Do

we urge them to turn the other cheek (non-violence), or do we call for a reply in proportion to the offense (limited violence)? The day after the attacks, the Mennonite Church-USA did the former. Executive director James Schrag wrote to President Bush, calling on him to forsake eye-for-an-eye retaliation that “escalates violence of everyone and that does not work,” and urging him instead “to seek Jesus’ new way of security rooted in our trust in God and our concern for all.” But some of us, less convinced that violence doesn’t work, might incline more to the view expressed recently by John Rempel, MCC liaison to the United Nations, in the pages of *Mennonite Weekly Review*: “Violence is sometimes able to restrain evil, but only good can overcome it. Our role as nonresistant Christians in relation to government is to counsel the state to respond with the least-violent option.”

A fifth task is to continue a debate that was already engaged prior to 9-11, but which may have special relevance now for any of us who lost a friend or family member. It is a properly theological debate: Is God a pacifist? On the one hand, Mennonite theologian J. Denny Weaver sees “potentially fatal implications for peace theology” if the answer is negative. On the other hand stands Miroslav Volf, whose *Exclusion and Embrace*, rooted in the travails of his native Croatia and former Yugoslavia, has been widely read by Mennonites. In his view, “the practice of nonviolence requires a belief in divine vengeance,” and he sees no trace of “a non-indignant God in the biblical texts, be it Old Testament or . . . Jesus of Nazareth or John of Patmos.” Furthermore, Volf finds that “the Anabaptist tradition, consistently the most pacifist tradition in the history of the Christian church, has traditionally had no hesitation about speaking of God’s wrath and judgment.” At issue, perhaps, is just how Anabaptist we wish to be in this matter.

Let’s liken these tasks to fingers on a hand, each with its own place and function, yet working together. None, taken alone, is sufficient. We should expect and welcome some built-in tension among these five—and even a sore thumb (or two).

*J. Robert Charles is director for Europe and program review manager for Mennonite Mission Network.*

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We are not hated because we practice democracy, freedom, and human rights. We are hated because our government denies these things to people in third world countries whose resources are coveted by our multinational corporations. And that hatred we have sown has come back to haunt us in the form of terrorism, and in the future, nuclear terrorism.

Once the truth about why the threat exists is understood, the solution becomes obvious. We must change our government’s ways. Instead of sending our sons and daughters around the world to kill Arabs so the oil companies can sell the oil under their sand, we must send them to rebuild their infrastructure, supply clean water, and feed starving children. Instead of continuing to kill thousands of Iraqi children every day with our sanctions, we must help them rebuild their electric powerplants, their water treatment facilities, their hospitals, all the things we destroyed in our war against them and prevented them from rebuilding with our sanctions.

Instead of seeking to be king of the hill, we must become a responsible member of the family of nations. Instead of stationing hundreds of thousands of troops around the world to protect the financial interests of our multinational corporations, we must bring them home and expand the Peace Corps.

—Dr. Robert M. Bowman, who directed anti-ballistic missile research programs under Presidents Ford and Carter

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# Working Notes on the Question of Policing, Post-9-11

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by Gerald W. Schlabbach

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## Further Reading

Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret War of Osama bin Laden* (New York: Free Press, 2001; paperback New York: Touchstone, 2002)

Wendell Berry, *In the Presence of Fear* (Great Barrington, Mass.: Orion Society, 2001)

James A. Beverly, "Is Islam a Religion of Peace?" (*Christianity Today*, January 7, 2002, pp. 32–42)

Noam Chomsky, *9-11* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001)

Lee Griffith, *The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002)

Fred Halliday, *Two Hours That Shook the World* (London: Saqi Books, 2002)

Bernard Lewis, "The Revolt of Islam" (*New Yorker*, November 19, 2001, pp. 50–63)

Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996)

Kate Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face* (Oxford, U.K.: Oneworld, 1997)

[http://www.coe.int/T/E/Communication\\_and\\_Research/Press/](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Communication_and_Research/Press/) Click on "Theme files" and "Terrorism" for European views on and actions on terrorism and related issues.

<http://www.npr.org/programs/watc/cyberislam/index.html> The National Public Radio series "Islam on the Internet."

<http://www.islamdenouncesterrorism.com> A Web site quoting Harun Yahya, Turkish Muslim scholar, on peace and related issues.

<http://www.mcc.org/> Click on "Crisis in the Middle East" for current information on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and "Respond Now" for nonviolent ways of responding to current crisis situations.

In the wake of September 11, commentators warning against any rush to retaliatory military solutions have urged policy makers to treat the terrorist attack as a crime against humanity rather than an act of war. (See chart, p. 7.)

That, I believe, was wise counsel. If heeded it would have disciplined military action according to the rule of law, created a more solid international coalition against terrorism, and limited violence by turning the effort to apprehend the criminals into a police action rather than a military counteraggression.

Such counsel raises a question, however: How should people of peace think about policing? The debates among Christians over pacifism and just war theory have given surprising little attention to the moral status of policing, and how it compares with nonviolent action or warfare.

The just war tradition gets much of its credibility by imagining war to be like police action. It thus seems "mere common sense" that war may sometimes be necessary to protect innocent third parties and maintain order between nations, just as police force does within a community. Once wars have been justified in this way, however, very different psychosocial dynamics take over.

Good policing really does turn to violence only as a last resort and is subject to the rule of law. "Community policing" encourages attention to the underlying causes of crime. Military thinkers may claim to do all this too, but the logic of warfare regularly undermines good intentions. "The best defense is a strong offense," so it seems to make sense to strike hard and first. Very quickly, then, key just war criteria of last resort, proportionality, and noncombatant immunity lose out.

## Policing and September 11

I believe there are five possible answers to the question of policing. None of these answers rests altogether easily:

1. *We could simply object to all use of violence.*

*Positive:* Favoring this option is its consistency, at least on a certain level. In its theological form, this approach affirms that God's will for all people always everywhere is peace, that all use of violence is tainted by

sin, and that in Jesus Christ God has vindicated the power of meeting evil with good.

*Negative:* When pacifists make this claim on political rather than theological terms, they tend to overstate their case, in the kind of naïve liberal pacifism that Reinhold Niebuhr once devastated. It also tempts them to abandon their pacifism when the measured use of violence seems in some sense to "work." And in light of Romans 13, even its claim to be biblical is contestable.

2. *We could simply say that we will not object to policing, nor to the use of military force when it corresponds to the policing model.*

*Positive:* This option reflects honestly the fact that we're ambivalent about policing. It may also correspond to traditional Mennonite two-kingdom theology at its best—committed to the ethic of Jesus, while agnostic about how to manage human affairs "outside of the perfection of Christ."

*Negative:* While this option does leave open the logical possibility of objecting to other, more excessive forms of violence, its political possibilities are quite limited. For without some idea of what we affirmatively support, we limit our political advocacy.

3. *A theoretical possibility, at least, would be to register positive support for the military actions of the state when done within the rubric of policing.*

*Positive:* This option promises to open up room to speak within the current political order, and makes it more likely that one will be heard. Some may have already done this in calling for a response to terrorism within the framework of international law.

*Negative:* This option may take us uncomfortably close to the just war tradition, at least when just war thinkers apply their criteria stringently. But the political order may accept this stance a little too quickly, and put to its own uses the support it offers, while simply ignoring its best-intended critique.

4. *An option short of the just war tradition is to become more fluent in the use of "middle axioms." This was how John Howard Yoder urged us to witness to the state—finding points of contact by calling those who practice a different ethic to live up to their own best ideals, while staying within the framework and motivations of our own quite different ethic.*

*Positive:* This approach is careful, rigorous, and realistic. It stays clear about our own ethical convictions, without collapsing one ethic into another—i.e., confusing God’s will as revealed in the way of Jesus with what comes “naturally” for those who are not trusting in him.

*Negative:* The problem with this approach is its abstraction, in two ways. First, it can be so subtle and so nuanced that it fails to communicate well in practice. Second, it may misleadingly abstract us from out of our own sociological reality, where the problem is not that “we” and “they” speak different ethical languages, but that we are they. The ethical challenge of a Mennonite in New York City on September 12 is precisely that she is both a pacifist and a New Yorker.

5. *A final option would be to recognize that both pacifism and the just war tradition have their limits, and honestly collaborate with responsible interpreters of the just war tradition in order to transcend them both.*

*Positive:* To do this would mean dedicating our energy to reducing violence and militarism by combining rigorous development of Gandhian nonviolence with stringent, truly last resort to military action—rather than putting energy into proving that one tradition or the other has been right all along.

*Negative:* Ditto. Why? Everything that is positive about this option can feel threatening, because we would all like to think we have been right all along.

Still, pacifism itself requires finding life by risking it. Another practice in this tradition is ethical discernment through collective consultation. Still another is the honesty that speaks “yea, yea” and “nay, nay.” In order to faithfully practice these, we must talk together, talk honestly—and in this particular case begin by admitting that we are not quite sure what to say about policing.

*Gerald W. Schlabach is associate professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas, Saint Paul, Minnesota.*

I want to see the Americans pay for the support they give Israel and for their starving of Iraqi children.

—Mamdouh Abdullah, an Egyptian taxi driver

Those celebrating must go beyond their initial, immature reaction. It’s *haram* [unlawful under Islam] to fight against those who are not bearing arms against you.

—Muhammad, owner of an Islamic bookshop in Egypt

Initial responses to the September 11 attacks reported later in *The Middle East Times*, December 22, 2001–January 4, 2002, p. 7

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## No Longer Innocent!

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by Lydia Harder

The response of our governments to September 11 rests on a foundation that few will question: the separation of good and evil, terrorist and victim, guilty and innocent, “them” and “us.” As America reacts to these terrible events, it has seemed important to create clear definitions in order to pronounce judgment on the guilty and relay compassion to the innocent. I have become increasingly uneasy with judgments that implicitly suggest that I as a North American am innocent, while my Muslim neighbors around the world are suspected of being guilty. Exploring this unease has led me to struggle with the ambiguity surrounding another division that underlies much of Mennonite peace theology: the division between church and society, between the alternate community of peacemakers and the world beyond us.

Part of my unease arises because I am no longer convinced that the church can easily be “separated” from the larger society in which we live. Not only do I, as a church member, feel the same fear as others do, but I also sense the same loss of control over my own future and the same indignation and anger with those who would threaten us on our own soil. As never before I feel a strong sense of interdependence and solidarity with the rest of society in their fear and need at this

point in history. Despite my ultimate loyalty to God’s reign, I have often felt like a “two kingdom” person, not sure how to justify my involvement and reliance on society with its banks, insurance plans, police force, and army. I feel Canadian, while I vow my loyalty to an alternative community, the church.

In the past my commitment to God has led me to discriminate between various aspects of culture, attempting to choose the way of peace. I have protested violence, tried to live compassionately with my neighbors, and struggled to model peacemaking in my life. I have chosen to live simply—according to North American standards. Yet, I feel enmeshed in many parts of our society even while realizing that living according to God’s reign and living the American dream cannot easily be made compatible. As I trace my use of various products back to their origin, I realize my lifestyle is connected to injustice in other parts of the world. As I remember how I voted in the last election, I cannot escape some responsibility for the actions of our government. Even as I apply for a new Canadian passport I realize that the privileges this gives me come at the expense of others whose travel has become even more limited.

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I have become increasingly uneasy with judgments that implicitly suggest that I as a North American am innocent, while my Muslim neighbors around the world are suspected of being guilty.





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## Muddled Boundaries

The clear boundaries between church and society have become muddled as I reflect on innocence and guilt, good and evil, salvation and sin. It is with the latter dualism, however, that I come to a complete stop. "Salvation" fits only awkwardly into the list of oppositions. After all, salvation is not so much the opposite of sin as the remedy for sin, not so much a state of being as a process of becoming. Sin, as that which separates us from God, can be forgiven so that a new reconciled relationship can begin between sinner and God. And it is this reconciliation that promises to bring together those who are considered good and those who are considered evil, those who are named innocent and those who are named guilty, "ourselves" and those "others." The heart of the good news is that it is God who is building community between those two camps, perhaps even the camps of "church" in its supposed innocence and others in their guilt. The center of the gospel is not our goodness, but God's compassionate goodness toward us, not our innocence but God's action of forgiveness and cleansing, not even our actions of nonviolence but God's supreme action of reconciling love.

But how does this good news help us, who feel we sometimes are "two kingdom" persons, not sure how to live with integrity under God's reign? Can we feel solidarity with others in their guilt, while inviting them into the realm of reconciling love? Can we stand for nonviolence while accepting our complicity in much of the evil within our own society? Can we understand that the church is really the world that has heard and accepted God's forgiveness and love and therefore not innocent on its own merit?

It seems to me that our peace theology will gain depth and power as we acknowledge our ongoing need for God's mercy and grace. Perhaps then we will feel a new solidarity with a hurting and sinful world. Perhaps then we will discover an identity that arises out of God's action not our own. Living under God's reign will then not separate us in our "innocence," but rather create opportunities for powerful actions of peacemaking and reconciliation.

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