



Talk about Shalom

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This issue comprises the edited presentations and summary of the October 2002 MCC Peace Committee meeting in Winnipeg, Manitoba, on the topic "Whither the Mennonite Public Witness? Prophetic Ministry and Political Realism." We offer them as a reminder that our duty to witness for God's peace is even more urgent in time of war.

The Mennonite Public Witness in Canada

by Bill Janzen

The title for this seminar asks about the future of the Mennonite public witness and how it can be prophetic. A friend of mine said recently that when people say they are being prophetic, that should be taken as a sign that they are not. In fact, the Bible has many words for our calling. Being prophetic is only one of them. Others call us to be salt, light, sign, and mustard seed, to seek justice, to live obediently, and to speak the truth.

Though we should not be fixated on the term "prophetic," it has important dimensions. It suggests challenging a basic, long-term trend. Certainly, there are many trends that should be challenged: the enormous "weaponization" of the world, involving both large government armies and many less official groups; the injustice of the global economic system with the rich getting richer while 30,000 children die every day of preventable causes; and the Western policies toward the Arab world. Prophetic words are needed.

Two Theological Considerations

Two Anabaptist theological emphases have a particular bearing on our public witness. The first is our high view of the church. We see it as a voluntary body, as a living sign of God's presence in this world, as belonging to its members, under God and the Scriptures, and as global in scope. In sermons I have often used passages that emphasize this theme. Ephesians 3:8–10 states: "[T]his grace was given to me . . . to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God . . . might now be made known." First Peter

2:9 states: "[Y]ou are . . . a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

I believe this high view of the church is reflected in the calling of MCC Canada (MCCC). When MCCC was formed in 1963, it was not just to administer service programs. It was to ensure that the leaders of Canadian Mennonite and Brethren in Christ groups would come together and talk about the issues of our time and seek to discern the response that God wanted from the church.

The second theological consideration is Anabaptism's seemingly low view of the larger society and its institutions, including government. Anabaptism seems unsure as to whether there is a moral basis for them. It seems to say that if God revealed himself to the church, then it is not certain that he also revealed himself to the world, since God would surely not have given two revelations. Also, if the church is the vehicle for carrying God's revelation into the world, then the good things in the world must have come from the church, not from other sources.

This low view of the larger society and its institutions has been articulated by our theologians and it is evident in our confessions of faith. In my opinion, however, it misses some things. We need to find a better way of affirming the importance of politics. It is about ordering the relations among people, about the proper distribution of resources, goods, and opportunities, about restraining the human tendency toward greed, about promoting justice and peace, and about sup-

Peace Advocacy Resources

Esther Epp-Tiessen, Peace Ministries Program Coordinator for MCC Canada, announces the publication of a resource for peace advocacy in Canada: *Public Witness for Peace: A Toolkit for Christians*.

Included are historical developments in Mennonite and Brethren in Christ peace witness in Canada, biblical motivations for public peace witness, risks and blessings of public peace witness, practical suggestions for different forms of witness, and stories.

The toolkit is available in PDF in both looseleaf and booklet formats at <http://www.mcc.org/canada/peace/>.

In the United States, the *MCC Washington Office Advocacy Handbook* is available from the office at 110 Maryland Ave. NE #502, Washington, DC 20002. Ask also for their brochure of other available resources.

Part of this handbook can be downloaded from <http://www.mcc.org/us/washington/advocacy.html>.

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porting the good within an imperfect, “fallen” community.

If we look at Canadian Mennonite history, in contrast to our theology, we find a more affirmative view of government and politics. In a number of settings over the last 150 years, Canadian Mennonites have been active in government and politics, particularly at the local and provincial levels, in ways that exceed the Mennonite percentage of the population. (See Ted Regehr in “Resources,” p. 11.) This suggests that Canadian Mennonites believe government is important, that they see it as an area where they can serve God, and that they have a sense of “the common good.”

The importance of politics is almost self-evident: functioning hospitals, schools, and sanitation systems contribute to a positive social life; clarity as to where our property ends and our neighbour’s begins contributes to peace; and a stable currency contributes to human well-being. Many of us vote with at least some thought for policies that will benefit people in need, in accordance with Christ’s teaching about loving our neighbours. Governments can be instruments of peace and justice.

Much Old Testament teaching supports this. The prophets criticise rulers and judges who were unjust, took bribes, and didn’t care about the poor. But the prophets never say that there should not be judges and rulers. They do not say that all the problems would be solved if only everyone practised more sacrificial love. They assume that there have to be rulers and judges, meaning governments. They only want them to be fair, just, and compassionate.

To speak affirmatively of government raises the issue of power, force, and defence. A certain power is inherent in government. In my work as MCC director in Ottawa I do not endorse the use of force or violence. I try hard to propose nonviolent measures, but there are some uses of force that I am not eager to criticize. Most Mennonites accept that there is a role for police forces. More difficult is the claim of a Canadian general that the 1994 Rwandan genocide would not have taken place if his plea for a few thousand troops had been heeded.

Even though we will not easily settle the question of force, I wish our articulated theology could affirm the idea of government. A look at Catholic natural law theory and the Reformed (Calvinist) approach to the Bible might be instructive.

Historical Developments

Historically, Mennonites have made representations to governments on exemption from military service, immigration, land settlement, and education. In the two world wars, in Canada the focus was on seeking exemption from military service, not on urging the government not to fight. During World War I, when Mennonites were being criticized, Bishop David Toews wrote: “We do not require any one to shed his blood for us. We would rather die ourselves or languish in prison or leave our home and again settle in some wilderness, as our forefathers have done, than to require a sacrifice of any kind by any one on our behalf.”

A letter dated October 7, 1938, went beyond the desire to be exempted and focussed on preventing war. A week earlier leaders in Europe had reached the Munich Agreement. With it, Adolf Hitler agreed not to expand beyond certain limits. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had a leading hand in reaching this agreement. Greatly relieved, some thirty-two Manitoba Mennonite bishops, representing nearly all Mennonite groups in the province, sent this letter to Chamberlain to express their appreciation. Unfortunately, the Munich Agreement reminds us that not everything that looks like peace leads to peace.

Other Canadian churches have a different history. In the early decades of the twentieth century many, influenced by the Social Gospel Movement, developed a very active public witness. They addressed the government on a minimum wage, compensation for workplace injuries, restrictions on child labour, regulations on how many hours a person could work in a day and how many days per week, as well as housing, health care, and education. To the extent that Canada still has a “social safety net,” it is due in part to this Social Gospel Movement.

The Social Gospel Movement also had a substantial pacifist emphasis. The objective was to build a world in which there would not be war and, strange as it may seem, many Social Gospel people became convinced that the way to build such a world was to throw every effort into the First World War, believing that this war would end all wars. Richard Allen, author of the 1973 book *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914–1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), concludes that the Social Gospel Movement’s pacifist emphasis was somewhat naive and not very effective and may have been counterproductive.

After World War II there was little social protest. The economy was expanding and social programs were growing. Conditions for most people were improving. Also, Canada's foreign policy supporting the containment of communism enjoyed wide support including church support, in part because its architect, Lester Pearson, was a "son of the manse." On these issues Mennonites were not significantly different from other Canadians, though in a war we would have sought exemption. The "public witness" of the churches was largely in support of what the government was doing.

In the 1960s this post-World War II consensus began to break down. There was an unusual idealism reflected particularly in the American civil rights movement. Also, African colonies were gaining independence and their leaders articulated a hopeful vision. At the same time not everything in the postwar agenda was going well. International development was far more complex than expected. Domestic poverty was a serious problem. Aboriginal issues started to press. And the Vietnam war was in the headlines. In the face of these realities, Canadian mainstream churches organized interchurch coalitions. They would pool resources, hire staff, do research, develop strategies, gain a hearing, and make a difference. Eventually there were more than a dozen ecumenical coalitions—the second wave of the Canadian Social Gospel. But they addressed only one part of the earlier consensus. More conservative interchurch groups were formed to address the social changes in relation to pornography, abortion, homosexual behaviour, Sunday closing laws, and gambling.

MCC Canada was involved in coalitions on both sides. We also did quite a lot under our own name. We made submissions to the government on foreign affairs, defence, development aid, refugees, pornography, tobacco advertising, abortion, religious freedom, and capital punishment. We addressed issues that related directly to our work, both in Canada and abroad, as well as issues rooted in our supporting constituency. We had our own identity. I believe we spoke meaningfully and represented our churches fairly well.

The Present Situation

The present situation has its own character. Canada's international role has become substantially weaker. One reason relates to the formation of the European Union. The desire of the Europeans to take common positions on foreign policy issues has left Canada more beholden to the United States. It is harder for Canada to form single-issue

partnerships with individual European countries. One Canadian observer says that now there are more areas where we have very little power, where we either follow the lead of the United States or face the economic consequences that Canadian society deems unacceptable.

Not all is lost, however. That same observer adds that there are other areas, "on the margins and away from the headlines," where the Canadian government can make a difference and that sometimes nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can help it to do so. Current examples include the civil war in the Congo, the decades-long war in the Sudan, and the proliferation of small arms. Lloyd Axworthy, Canada's foreign affairs minister until 2000, started a Peacebuilding Fund. He also initiated several major studies. One is called *The Sanctions Decade: Assessing UN Strategies in the 1990s*; another is entitled *The Responsibility to Protect*, relating to international action, or inaction, in Rwanda, Kosovo, Bosnia, and Somalia. These reports have gained considerable attention in the United Nations.

Another sign of hope for us is that a number of MCCC staff have considerable access to government officials. This does not mean that government does our bidding but we have opportunities to speak. Surely, we should make the most of them and we should equip ourselves for doing so. One way of doing this is by working in coalitions. Coalitions give us access to expertise and often they increase the chances of getting a hearing. When it comes to bigger issues, such as the general direction of the Canadian International Development Agency on which we are now working, it is vital that we cooperate with other NGOs if we are to make a difference.

The question of the extent to which we should work through coalitions is difficult. Coalition involvement can help us to be "prophetic," at least to appear to be so, but it is also true that we have done some of our best work when we've acted on our own, as in the areas of employment development, refugees, victim-offender reconciliation, disability concerns, mental health, and what became the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. These ideas came from people in our churches. We represent a "hands-on" people; we have vast "hands-on" programs in Canada and in many parts of the world. We must not become so involved in coalitions that we make it difficult for the MCCC board and constituency to "own" our work.

Also to be noted is that Mennonite Central Committee Canada is not as central for the

Peace Videos Available

Change of Command, a forty-minute video produced by MCC in 1999, presents the stories of military veterans whose inner voice clashed with their military duties. For all, a deepening commitment to Christ's way of peace changed the course of their lives. Courage, coupled with God's grace, brought healing and vision for the future. Study guide included. To purchase (\$35 Cdn./\$25 U.S.), contact 888-563-4676 in the United States and 888-0622-6337 in Canada. Available for loan from all MCC offices.

Peacemakers: The Path Is Made by Walking is a twenty-minute MCC video. Salvadoran civilians who spent the 1980s in contested territory tell stories of the *guinda*, the desperate trek through the mountains in flight from an army responsible for repeated massacres. The *guinda* is a journey without a path, haunted by uncertainty. Today in El Salvador, amidst the challenges of unfinished grieving, ongoing poverty, and postwar violence, there is no clearly marked path to peace. Salvadoran peacebuilding organization and MCC partner Yek Ineme has taken up the journey, working alongside communities to identify causes of social conflict and explore nonviolent alternatives for change. For grade 9 to adults. To purchase in English or Spanish (\$35 Cdn./\$25 U.S.), contact 888-563-4676 in the United States and 888-0622-6337 in Canada. Available for loan from all MCC offices.

For MCC resources, visit the MCC Web site at <http://www.mcc.org/respub.html>.

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The issues of truthfulness and integrity must always be on our minds.

public witness of the Canadian Mennonite people as it once was. Many of our people now support other organizations, such as Christian Peacemaker Teams and Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Also, many make their witness through political parties and governmental service. Mennonites have become a diversified people.

Concluding Comments

To what extent should MCCC work with the coalitions? How should we structure ourselves to best utilize our gifts and be

most faithful to our calling? These are important questions. They tend to draw most of our energies. But they are not the most important. The issues of truthfulness and integrity must always be on our minds. Analyzing issues honestly, reading historical events wisely, assessing responsibility fairly, judging trends accurately, making critiques constructively, advancing alternative policies in faith but without claiming too much for them—these are enormous daily challenges.

Bill Janzen is the director of the Ottawa Office of MCC Canada.

Biblical Basis of Public Witness

by Martin Shupack

How does an Anabaptist theology of public policy advocacy undergird our work at the Washington Office?

Scripture has a vital place in our work. Our mission statement lifts up biblical themes of “justice for all, with special concern for poor and oppressed people, nonviolent peacemaking, care for the earth and religious freedom.” We have biblically based devotional reflections at weekly staff meetings and articulate a biblical basis as we witness to government and write articles. Our advocacy practices draw on theological underpinnings and raise certain theological questions.

Love for the Neighbor

The first question, then, might be “What do we at the Washington Office understand to be the primary reasons and motivation for policy advocacy work?” Why do we spend our time doing this? What is the basis of our hope that our efforts can make a difference? And how do these convictions shape the character of our advocacy?

Most of us at the Washington Office would say our primary motive is love of neighbor. Our advocacy arises from MCC’s field experience. MCC partners repeatedly ask that MCC and North American Mennonites call on our governments to change policies that harm them and adopt helpful policies. Discharging the debt of love to suffering sisters and brothers is the most immediate theological basis for the work we do.

We love our neighbors when we raise their concerns, speak up on their behalf, amplify their voices, and assist them to get a hearing when they speak. This means our partners’ concerns shape our positions. But we are not

mere passive channels for their views. Their messages often must be translated into the Washington policy framework with all its limitations and compromises. This can be an occasional source of tension with some partners and friends.

Lordship of Jesus Christ

The other major biblical basis for our work is the lordship of Jesus Christ over all creation. This was the product of Mennonite thinking in the 1950s and 1960s, reflected in John Howard Yoder’s *The Christian Witness to the State* (see “Resources,” p. 11). We combine convictions about the lordship of Christ and Jesus as God’s standard for human practice with a modified two-kingdom theology. The result is that we call on government to take steps in the direction of God’s will based on values that make sense to them. We rarely call on government to implement the full standard of Christ.

So, for example, we don’t call the U.S. government to embrace pacifism, but we urge it to rely less on armed force, decrease military spending, ratify the nuclear test ban treaty, and subject military aid to human rights standards. Similarly, we don’t urge the government to implement full-blown Christian economic discipleship. But we do call for it to cancel the debts of impoverished countries, provide more development assistance, and establish more just trade relations.

This raises questions about how we negotiate the prophetic/pragmatic tension. For example, we can never be sure whether we are asking too little or too much of the government. We sometimes feel that we are compromising too much—where is the authentic prophetic message? Will we have a greater impact if we put our energies into a more ambitious wit-

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ness, even if short-term success is unlikely? But even our incremental approach often appears radical to policy makers.

One way we deal with this tension is, as often as possible, to state our ultimate standard, but then to name the incremental step we are asking for now. For example, Jubilee USA statements on debt cancellation call for 100 percent cancellation of the debts of impoverished countries without structural adjustments. We say this in letters to policy makers, public statements, media work, and communications with Jubilee constituents. Yet as a step in that direction, we also say that we support specific legislation that, while falling short of this goal, moves in the right direction.

Alternative Communities

One of the reasons we feel able to take an incremental approach is the conviction that our primary witness on justice and peace occurs in the everyday life of the church as alternative community—a city on a hill. Faith communities practicing the way of Christ in areas of servanthood, nonviolence, use of power, and economics is the best way to communicate our message to the nation.

The “city on a hill” mode of witness means, in part, that the Washington Office grounds its advocacy in the lived experience of MCC volunteers and partners. Indeed, we find that MCC’s service programs around the world and the field knowledge that this brings helps policy makers take us more seriously, giving us respect and a hearing.

There has been considerable theological and sociological thinking around how such alternative communities can have a transforming effect on society. For example, one of the greatest barriers to creative alternatives in public policy is a failure of imagination, a lack of belief that a more just and peaceful solution is really possible and can actually work. Seeing a lived alternative in actual practice can expand policy makers’ understanding of what is possible and bring hope.

In 2001 I set up meetings at the State Department for MCCer Fidèle Lumeya, who is from the Congo. We met with six or seven of the people most in charge of U.S. policy toward the Congo. They indicated that they had been hearing weekly about how bad things were and were ready to hear new horror stories from Fidèle. It seems that they had a steady stream of Congolese urging the United States to do something.

Fidèle told them that he was not there to talk about horrors, but about hope. He then

went on to describe the mediation and peacebuilding work the churches were doing in the eastern Congo. The good work of peace was already going ahead. What the United States could do was to provide appropriate funding to these efforts. The United States ought not overwhelm the area with more money than it can use, nor intervene militarily, nor work some miracle. Just help the work already in progress.

Policy advocacy can point to this witness of the churches and tell its stories, but it cannot replace the church as a city on a hill. Rather than moralize to policy makers—a strategy that is not welcomed—we can point to creative, lived alternatives. So if we want our advocacy to be more prophetic and to expand policy makers’ sense of the possible, we do well to help make more visible the faithful practices that our churches already carry out.

Yes, the church is broken, too, and we need to admit our failings. But Anabaptist theology includes the conviction that the church really is able to live in substantial faithfulness to Christ’s Way by God’s grace and the Holy Spirit’s power, and to serve as a model and guiding light to the nations.

In our witness we take an ad hoc approach. We don’t promote comprehensive solutions to the world’s ills, such as democratic socialism or free trade or anti-capitalism or world federalism. We don’t even promote a comprehensive Christian or moral vision of public policy.

Apart from the presumption of thinking that we could know enough or have enough power to pursue such grand solutions, perhaps our ad hoc approach arises from the Anabaptist emphasis on servanthood and the way of the cross. To push comprehensive, systemic solutions represents an attempt to be lords rather than servants.

In the same spirit, our advocacy emphasizes developing respectful relationships with policy makers—as difficult as that sometimes feels! I still remember how hard it was in a Witness for Peace trip to Nicaragua in 1984 to be civil to the U.S. Embassy official we met with, after having met the mothers of young people tortured and killed by the U.S.-backed “contras.”

This creates a challenge in relating to some secular organizations that share similar goals, but emphasize confrontation and often demonize policy makers. We don’t want to act “holier than thou” and be aloof from other activists who are pursuing the same objectives, but neither can we endorse

Peace Theology Research Project

MCC is beginning a two-year project on peace theology, with the help of Mennonite Foundation of Canada, the Schowalter Foundation, and the Frank Epp Memorial Fund. The project involves three researchers/writers: Duane Friesen from Newton, Kansas; Lydia Harder from Toronto, Ontario; and J. Robert Charles from Goshen, Indiana. The project will include consultations in various locations throughout the United States and Canada, culminating in a larger conference during the summer of 2004 and publication of a book of essays.

The project assumes that followers of Jesus are called to be a blessing among the nations, living between the tension of the exilic model of sojourners/pilgrims and the call to live faithfully in the land (“seeking the peace of the city”). Anabaptist theology has focused much of its thinking about peace on the former image. Significant work at practical levels in peacebuilding and restorative justice need to be taken into account in our theological thought. In addition, Mennonites and Brethren in Christ work in professions such as law and social work that take us into the structures and ordering of our societies. How does our theology about peace address these arenas? How do we contribute faithfully to order and security in our societies? These are some of the questions the project will address.

Faith communities practicing the way of Christ in areas of servanthood, nonviolence, use of power, and economics is the best way to communicate our message to the nation.

When I first came to Washington and started working on debt relief for poor countries, I was told how much Congress hated the idea. Jubilee 2000 changed the picture and secured significant debt cancellation. The outcome, however, was limited and incremental. We succeeded in getting regular public debt service payments for 26 countries (potentially 41) cut by an average of 30 percent, rather than the 100 percent we hoped for. And eligibility was conditioned on implementation of the free market/free trade structural adjustment programs that have devastated so many poor communities.

We considered this a limited success, though some of the Jubilee groups in the global South labeled it a dismal failure. Yet Senator Ted Kennedy ask one Jubilee activist how was it that we were able to be so successful. His reform projects, Kennedy said, usually took ten years to get passed. What was the secret of such a miraculous success in only two to three years?

So what is prophetic and what is pragmatic? What looks incremental to us often seems utopian to policy makers! That is the situation we operate in. Yet I am inspired by the words of the former coordinator of Jubilee 2000 Uganda, who told a group of us in Washington, "Because of your work for debt cancellation, there are children alive today in Uganda who would not be." That's the kind of recognition that makes our efforts worthwhile.

— Martin Shupack

Even incremental steps may make most sense when presented in terms of the biblical narrative.

some of their methods. How we negotiate this relationship is an open question.

Mediating Language

As the church we seek to live by certain values, we understand reality to be a certain way, and we have a language to express all this. But the nations do not share many of these understandings or values. Nor do they have the resources of faith, as we do. So how do we communicate with them?

One approach is simply to apply directly the untranslated biblical moral standards to public policy. For example, we could seriously urge the United States to embrace pacifism and destroy all its weapons. Some critics seem to think that Mennonites do a lot of this sort of thing, though I personally haven't seen it. I've already indicated that this is not our approach. But sometimes I wonder—why not? As long as it was done humbly and not self-righteously, might this not have a transforming effect on the nation in the long run?

Another approach is to use so-called "middle axioms" as a mediating language. We find areas of harmony between biblical concerns and national values, and use these values in our advocacy, expressing our concerns in the language of society at large. For example, in opposing a U.S. attack on Iraq, a letter from religious leaders including MCC Executive Secretary Ron Mathies argued that "the pre-emptive use of military force establishes a dangerous precedent" and that "U.S. military action has the great potential to further destabilize the region." This is language that policy makers understand. They may not agree, but we are in the same semantic universe. At the same time, this language expresses the biblical concern for peace.

Another mode of mediation is to point to universal moral principles, knowable to everyone. We express values that appeal directly to people's needs and feelings. For example, in urging the U.S. government to improve the ability of poor countries to obtain HIV/AIDS medications, we appeal to the universal concern to alleviate human suffering and save lives.

Yet for some, using middle axioms or universal principles is inadequate. Christopher Marshall, a New Zealand theology professor with Mennonite ties, recently wrote a book calling on Christians to bring the biblical story into the public square when we promote human rights (see "Resources," p. 11). Translating Christian values into non-religious middle axioms is inadequate, he

believes; these values need to be embedded in the Bible's account of creation-fall-redemption-consummation. I can appreciate Marshall's point.

The promotion of human rights often occurs within a group's larger agenda. If biblical people fail to tell their own story of peace and justice, we may find ourselves inadvertently promoting someone else's story—that of liberal individualism or the progressive left, for example. But this is not our intent. We do not share these ideologies' basic assumptions or ultimate visions.

So, in addition to using middle axioms, we also do advocacy using explicit biblical models. For example, each year on Good Friday we participate with other church offices in an "Economic Way of the Cross." We walk to various government buildings—Congress, the White House, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund—and treat each of these as a station of the cross. At each station we read Scripture, pray, and read a text that identifies the injustices of that institution, and those committed by ourselves as well, which crucify Christ anew in the flesh of his people throughout the world.

In this way, and others, we lift up the biblical narrative and bring it to bear on current economic justice issues. This approach is different from calling on government to implement the full biblical standards. Instead it recognizes that even incremental steps may make most sense when presented in terms of the biblical narrative.

Being Effective, Being Faithful

Are some of these mediating languages more effective than others? More faithful? Should we, as some suggest, move beyond the notion of "witness" from the outside and seek to develop a common framework of truth in which church, state, and public can all share? These are questions to consider.

I'd like to close with a plea. Because Mennonites' most distinctive feature is our peace theology, we tend to focus our theological inquiries about public policy on the government's use of force. There are, to be sure, some serious unresolved questions for us here. What about law enforcement and police actions? What about armed humanitarian intervention in chaotic situations? What do we say when opposing the violence between nations conflicts with our opposition to the violence of ethnic cleansing? What can we advocate government do about terrorists that is a viable alternative to war? If we call for law enforcement, does that accept the use of lethal force if necessary?

Or do we simply not have a dog in these fights? If the nations paint themselves into corners through their injustices and violence, is it our job to get them out? Should we focus instead on the root causes that can lead to peace in the long run?

In addressing these important matters, I hope we do not weaken the Mennonite peace testimony, especially at this time. What we rather need are new resources and further encouragement to strengthen our biblical and historical conviction that war is not the will of God.

Beyond these things, Mennonite thinking on public policy advocacy will do well not to focus exclusively on the issue of government's use of force, but to have a broad scope, working to strengthen in a multitude of ways our mission to seek the peace and well-being of this place of exile and sojourn.

May God give us the grace in Jesus Christ to do so.

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If the nations paint themselves into corners through their injustices and violence, is it our job to get them out?

Prophetic Ministry and Political Realism: Toward a Pacifist Theology of Public Witness

by John D. Rempel

Christian work for justice needs no justification, ultimately, beyond the biblical mandate to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. It is good to keep this simple thought in mind as we grapple with the challenge of turning love into justice for our neighbor in a broken world where the form love must take is often unclear.

The goals of my paper are (1) to outline, from a biblical point of view, how love is possible, and (2) to explore the role of the church in advocating specific principles and actions to the state so that it can act more justly.

Biblical Reflections

The definitive claim of the New Testament is that in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection the potential of the universe was restored to what existed at creation. The power of evil to thwart God's purposes has been overturned; God's rule over the world is being reestablished.

Grace is stronger than fate. This claim makes us gasp for air! As a flat statement—especially in dealing with problems like poverty and war—it is seldom true to our experience. Working in the public sphere is the most withering test of theological claims imaginable! Still, if God's mandate for his fallen yet beloved creation is to turn love into justice, theology is accountable to politics.

What is "justice"? What is "politics"? Justice is treating people according to principles of fairness and equality. Politics is the principles and mechanisms we pursue to further the common good. I have offered the sim-

plest possible formal definitions. But in a pluralistic world their content cannot be assumed. In the course of the twentieth century, "internationalism," cooperation among nations, has developed universal norms and institutions—most importantly the United Nations.

Even though moral preference is given to concepts like "democracy" by the West, whose cultures and economies dominate the world, they cannot claim universal assent. Al Qaeda is an unmistakable reminder of that. But Western political notions are problematic for Christianity as well because capitalism and socialism both assume human autonomy. In them the chief end of humanity is humanity and not God.

This problem becomes explicit in the church's public witness to institutions of power (government, business, civil society). But it is implied in the church's overall responsibility to the world. Let me try to relate the mission of the church to this fundamental problem. Its mission is to demonstrate and proclaim Jesus' resurrection as the ultimate grounding of goodness in the world. Our question here is how to do that in relation to institutions of power.

But other questions need to be dealt with before we can approach the one that interests us. I name only three: How does advocacy express the church's calling? How is the church's social witness shaped by the social order it inhabits? How does the fallenness of creation influence the relationship between the kingdom of God and the principalities and powers?

Justice is treating people according to principles of fairness and equality. Politics is the principles and mechanisms we pursue to further the common good.

Biotech Updates

Many readers of the *Peace Office Newsletter* are concerned about issues related to biotechnology and food security (see the April–June 2001 *Newsletter* issue on this topic).

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety has recently been ratified by the required number of nations and will become international law on September 11, 2003. An excellent article on the treaty and related issues is available at <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines03/0616-02.htm>.

Another helpful article, “Genetically Modified Morals: A Global Food Fight,” by Kathleen McAfee, is found at <http://www.commondreams.org/views03/0613-09.htm>.

Still available from MCC is *Harvest in the Balance: Food, Justice, and Biotechnology*, which looks at biotechnology and genetic engineering through a variety of lenses and raises questions about the effects on farmers and food-insecure people around the world. To order or for more information, contact Esther O’Hara at <geo@mcc.org> or at the return mailing address on the back page.

Everything—everything—depends on a God of love who orders the universe for good. The world is in compassionate hands and cannot be taken out of them.

The life of the church as an alternate society is the precondition of an authentic witness. The church is credible to the extent that it lives out what it calls public institutions to implement (fairness, equality, inclusiveness, preferential option for the poor). Thus, church-based advocacy derives its integrity equally from the community it represents and from the causes it gives voice to. This leads us to the question nobody seems to have an answer for: Can the church ask the state to practice the Sermon on the Mount or similar imperatives in other religions?

Are there social orders whose values are more compatible with the gospel than others? Are there states in which church and state are partners, or at least collaborators rather than rivals? As Western Christians, we claim that democracy is closer to Christian faith than is totalitarianism because it accepts the rule of law, safeguards individual freedom, and fosters the pursuit of truth. But democratic countries are also relativistic, individualistic, and materialistic in the extreme.

Finally, comes the problem of the fall. Why even ask such an abstract question? What I’m trying to get at is the tug of war in every human institution (including the church) between the use of power for self-sacrifice and the use of power for self-aggrandizement. Lord Acton insisted that “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

There has been a school of theology through the centuries, which Pilgram Marpeck represents, which holds that through Jesus’ death and resurrection the potential of creation has been restored. Does such a hopeful picture of God’s work apply only to the church or to the world at large? Much hinges on the answer. If one answers it expansively, there can be many agents of God’s will and much collaboration toward the common good.

Some Theological Claims

Everything—everything—depends on a God of love who orders the universe for good. The world is in compassionate hands and cannot be taken out of them. From overuse such theological formulations have become so banal that we become impatient with them. But I am reminded of their indispensability as I work with colleagues whose inspiration is the hope of human perfectibility.

Christian faith is Trinitarian. When we confess the Father, we mean that of God which upholds creation. When we confess the Son, we mean that of God which entered and rescued the world. When we confess the Spirit, we mean that of God which abides in the church and the world to carry out its rescue.

Why am I repeating something we all know? Because a Trinitarian understanding of God means that the church and the world are not two solitudes with no bridge between them. In the language of early Anabaptism, “within the perfection of Christ” and “outside the perfection of Christ” are not absolutely separate. Though the ultimate work of God is to lead all people and all of creation to Christ, God is not absent from it now.

The church is the means to that end—it is the new humanity spoken of in Ephesians (2:11 ff.), or, in Alain Epp Weaver’s suggestive phrase, “a polis which through its embodiment of particular practices, serves as an analogical anticipation of God’s kingdom.” The genius of Anabaptism was the passion with which it discovered the possibility of being transformed in one’s being and one’s relationships by Christ now. Its central teaching was the church and the new way of living possible in it.

To lose that belief would be to forfeit our birthright. Only this Christocentrism makes clear that our grounding is not a liberal or leftist social order, democracy, human rights. However much we believe (as I do) that there is common ground between these values and those of God’s reign, they are not ultimately what we believe in. We work for them because of what we believe in. So, how do we hold this gospel birthright, recovered in Anabaptism, in tension with the Trinitarian claim that God’s purposes and presence are not confined to the church?

This is how I would say it. God is at work throughout creation—the resurrection restores its potential, the Holy Spirit animates it. It would not be out of place to ask: How do you talk to an oppressed farmer in Sri Lanka or a mandarin in Ottawa about the resurrection? And I would offer two answers. One of them is to offer a direct, personal witness of the hope that is within you (1 Peter 3:15–16); you will know the time when a word is called for to complete a deed. The other is that the resurrection is a hidden power that you can count on in the pursuit of alternatives to violence, oppression, and despair. You’re talking about the resurrection when you put your shoulder to the plow with the Sri Lankan farmer. You’re talking about the resurrection when you’re convinced of the need to plan for the global environment, not simply that of your own country.

So far I’ve been talking about the beliefs and mission of the church. What about the beliefs and mission of those we collaborate with? Our partnerships with NGOs are at the heart of our public witness. I will not

focus on them because in many ways they are like us. The really tough questions concern “the state,” governments and intergovernmental agencies, like the United Nations.

State and Church

The state is part of the fallen but restored order of Christ’s rule. On the cross the powers, among them the state, sought the defeat of God’s reign, but were themselves defeated (Col. 2:13–15). In the resurrection God’s ordering of the world was restored. In it the state has a derivative and provisional role. When it is faithful to that calling, the state is an agent of God to preserve good and limit wrong. By contrast, the church is a direct representative of God’s reign but it is the means and not the end of God’s purpose.

The state and the church almost always think that the other one does not realize certain givens of the human enterprise. The state is convinced that the church does not grasp the workings of evil in the world; the church is convinced that the state does not grasp the workings of good in the world. Both of them believe that the other one misunderstands the nature of power. Both compete for the loyalty of those in their sphere of influence.

The church errs when it declares, in an eschatological rush, that the state is no longer necessary. The state becomes apostate when it makes absolute claims for itself or presumes to make absolute judgments about historical realities, such as the idealizing or demonizing of any given social order.

Both of them can forfeit their role as agents of the resurrection. Thus, there can never be a conclusive partnership between them. This is where John Howard Yoder’s notion of middle axioms is of value. A middle axiom is an assumption shared by two parties to which they are both accountable. In some countries, for instance, society and church agree that women are the equal of men and should be treated that way. Where this is an agreed-upon assumption, the church has two mandates. One of them is to “walk the walk,” practicing gender equality in the community of faith. The other is to “talk the talk,” calling the state to foster a value it has accepted as just.

There is only one set of moral norms for the whole created order, grounded in God’s revelation in Christ. Because of human rebelliousness God has brought the church into being as the sign of the kingdom and recast the state as a servant of the kingdom, to foster the common good and restrain expressions of evil. The state does not have the role of conquering evil in the world or bringing about the ultimate good.

We make common cause with earthly institutions because sometimes they can save us from hell. But they can’t get us to heaven. As a church, we need enough humility and love to work with earthly rulers on a next step toward justice, but we do so out of the hope and passion of the heavenly kingdom.

John D. Rempel was Mennonite Central Committee liaison to the United Nations, and has recently accepted a position on the faculty of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind.

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Reflecting on Our Public Witness as Anabaptists

by John A. Lapp

These three offices have helped to shape twentieth-century Mennonites. They may be more beneficial in strengthening and refining the conscience of the church than in extending any particular witness themselves. I think it is important to note that the MCC offices in New York, Ottawa, and Washington are only one part of the peace witness of Mennonite people, a witness that takes many forms.

A second observation I would make: There is considerable difference between today’s social setting and that of the 1960s and 1970s, when the Washington and Ottawa

offices were founded. The sense of being a moral community in North America was more conspicuous then than now. It is good to remind ourselves of this and to reflect on this difference.

A question that we ought to consider would deal with the relative benefits and debits we derive from our work through coalitions. When these offices were envisioned participation in coalitions certainly was not anticipated.

Another contextual factor is what has been called the “fatalism of the status quo.” For

Many politicians don’t think peace is possible. How do we help them to see beyond that limiting idea?

Bluffton (Ohio) College hosted the February 21–23, 2003, meeting of the Intercollegiate Peace Fellowship of Mennonite colleges. Also attending the meeting were the Mennonite College and University Association of Peace and Conflict Studies Professors, nongovernmental organizations, high school students, students from nearby state universities, and representatives from Catholic, Quaker, and Christian Reformed colleges. The event was cosponsored by MCC, the Bluffton College Peace Club, and the Lion and Lamb Peace Arts Center of Bluffton College.

“Building Cultures of Peace” was the conference theme. Here are some quotes from the conference:

“Human rights language enhances nonviolent arguments for political and social change.”
—Julie Mertus

“The truth between Muslims and Christians is ‘God is great.’ Both religions feel that they are so wise that they can define truth in God, so rather than dialoguing they determine killing one another as the best option.”
—Don Mosley

“The assumption exists that violence is truth, and this assumption goes unchallenged in mainstream culture. Nonviolence needs to be looked at as a discipline that could be within an education curriculum.”
—J. Denny Weaver

“A peace tradition resides in multiple religions. We need to cut across religious boundaries and appeal to all religions in order to generate universal peacemaking.”
—Daniel Smith-Christopher

example, many politicians don’t think peace is possible. How do we help them to see beyond that limiting idea?

I wonder whether we spend sufficient time and thought in developing a public theology as a basis for public witness. The church created these offices, and the church’s theology ought to be an orienting theme for their work. Some particular church offices, even specific theologians may want to use these offices to test their theological ideas. We ought to be clear when and where this is appropriate.

What have I heard in these discussions?

1. I heard a shared commitment to this task as a valid Mennonite voice.
2. I heard a call to respond to serious problems for Anabaptist theology that emerge in a public witness.
3. I noted that none of the presentations mentioned the charters or original expectations for the offices.
4. The strategies and tactics these offices use are as important as the verbal witness they make. Perhaps these offices need theological counsel on strategies and tactics as much as on answers or responses to specific issues.

I would encourage us

1. To consider the work of these offices within the totality of the church’s public witness. Most Mennonite and Brethren in Christ peace work gets done elsewhere. Most thinking about peace witness is done elsewhere. These offices are dependent on the conscience of the church community.
2. To continue our tradition of modest statement and self-critical approach. The Christian church has made many mistakes in its public witness throughout history.
3. To recognize the growing weakness of the church in the public sector. How are we salt and light where the public church has less and less influence?

4. To continue to discern what the unique public voice of the church should be, based on who we are as a Mennonite and Brethren in Christ peoplehood.
5. To apply persistent assessment of the crucial questions for Anabaptist peace witness, such as coercion versus violence and prophecy versus politics.
6. To remind ourselves that our peace witness is rooted in a theology, an ethic, a spirituality. All three together constitute a politics.

Globally, we are in a new church situation. The fact that the majority of Christians are in the South means that we must also consider that church in our witness. The survival of the church in other places may be dependent on the politics and Christian witness in the north. The recent assassinations of church leaders in Pakistan, for instance, are no doubt in part the result of U.S. policy in Afghanistan. The advocacy of freedom in one place may negatively impact religious freedom in another place.

One issue I hear given a lot of attention in the church is the role of police. Some congregations are dealing with membership for police officers. Can there be a nonviolent police force? Policing is necessary—but do we need police armed with lethal force? The use of lethal force for me is always wrong. I do not believe policing in a good society should require lethal weapons. One issue in the United States is the militarizing of the police role.

The worldwide Christian church has been called “the lead society of the world.” The question for us is, How can we be that lead society?

John A. Lapp, former executive secretary of MCC, is coordinator of the forthcoming Global Mennonite History series of histories of Brethren in Christ and Mennonite churches on five continents written by Mennonites in those regions.

Theological Issues and Concerns for Ongoing Discussion

1. *The Church as Our Basis for Advocacy:* The church is central to a Mennonite and Brethren in Christ theology of public witness. God calls a people through Jesus Christ from among the nations to be a blessing to the nations. The church as the body of Christ is a global, transnational community.

The church as an alternative society has developed over time, in many cultural contexts, practices that “model” ways of being and doing that serve as a basis for our public witness. Our task is to think out ways we can analogically apply this experience to public institutions. What have we learned

about dealing with abusive or tyrannical persons in our own communities that might apply to the way in which public institutions address tyranny and violence?

2. Theology of Public Institutions and Government: Mennonites/Brethren in Christ do not have a fully developed and positive theology of public institutions. Much of our thinking about government has focused on it as being “outside the perfection of Christ,” sometimes in opposition to the church. Bill Janzen noted this history has given us a “rather low view of the role of Government and social institutions.” A more fully developed sense of the positive role of public institutions and government would include some articulation of the role of law in society and the task of ordering society. John Rempel wondered if it might be helpful to see government as an agent of resurrection, though some had trouble with this notion in light of traditional Anabaptist understandings. What will be the core issues in developing a more positive theology for public institutions?

3. Public Witness: We talked about speaking from our identity as church, and with entities that have a different base of identity. The committee discussed whether the concept of middle axioms was helpful in this regard. Marty Shupack described them as providing a translation, from the Biblical narrative to a language that makes sense to those who do not understand themselves or their task in terms of the Biblical narrative. Human rights language may be a useful or helpful example. John Rempel talked about them somewhat differently, as commonly-shared assumptions to which both church and state can be held accountable. In this way, middle axioms play not so much a translating as a linking role. How can we best understand the concept of middle axioms for work in public ministry, where some kind of linking or translating function seems necessary?

4. Prophetic and Realistic: Having heard parallel presentations on the work of Ottawa, Washington and UN Offices under the title of “prophetic ministry and political realism,” we reflected on the meaning of that “and.” The schools of political and theological thought that claim to be “realistic” offer limited accounts of reality, making “realism” a contested term. Prophetic ministry redefines political realism whenever it invites and enables policymakers to expand their imaginations as to what is realistic. This happens when we urge them to think beyond the short-term. It happens when we introduce them to persons, stories and models that represent creative alternatives for

responding to social conflicts and issues. How do we see our work as being both prophetic and realistic?

5. Force and Coercion: As part of developing a positive theology of public institutions, Bill Janzen suggested that we need to think through the kinds of force we consider legitimate. Is the use of force always wrong? When does the government, or other social institutions, legitimately use force? We discussed using different words, such as differentiating between coercion and violence, and ruling out lethal violence as a limit statement. Are there other limit statements we should make in this regard? Would more careful work here keep us from falling into either the kind of two-kingdoms thinking that blesses government exercise of lethal violence, or a kind of monism that implies the government should overlook its responsibilities to maintain security and order in society? How do we find our way between the “realistic” legitimization of violence as a necessity by the state, and a kind of naive pacifism that assumes the state can adopt pacifism as a public policy?

6. A Trinitarian Faith: John Rempel states that “Christian faith in a God of love is Trinitarian. When we confess the Father, we mean that of God which upholds creation. When we confess the Son, we mean that of God which entered and restored the world. When we confess the Spirit, we mean that of God which abides in the church and the world to carry out its restoration . . . that the church and the world are not two solitudes with no bridge between them.” Mennonites have not used theology of creation or natural law as a central part of Christian understanding. How can we incorporate these in our thinking? Is it important for us to do this? Is language of “common good” helpful?

7. Working in Coalitions: We noted the operational issue of working in coalitions. The tension, to some extent, rests with how we can be the extension of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ community that we confess is an important dimension of our work, both practically and theologically. Maintaining/nurturing a public witness that reflects the identity of these communities as an alternate voice can be diminished if our work is done primarily in coalitions with not only other church agencies but also secular groups. What are the important realities to keep before us in this? Is this mainly an issue of balance? Is there a primary and secondary reality here, such that our primary work is translating the concerns of the Mennonite/Brethren in Christ communities that sponsor our work?

Resources on Anabaptist Witness to the State

Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1994).

Duane K. Friesen, *Christian Peacemaking and International Conflict: A Realist Pacifist Perspective* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1986).

Christopher D. Marshall, *Crowned with Glory and Honor: Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition* (Telford, Pa.: Pandora Press U.S., 2002).

Keith Graber Miller, *Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves: American Mennonites Engage Washington* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996).

Ted Regehr, *Peace, Order, and Good Government: Mennonites and Politics in Canada* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: CMBC Publications, 2000).

Gerald W. Schlabach, “Deuteronomic or Constantinian: What Is the Most Basic Problem for Christian Social Ethics?” in Stanley Hauerwas et al., eds., *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Newton, Kans.: Faith and Life Press, 1964; Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2002).

How do we find our way between the “realistic” legitimization of violence as a necessity by the state, and a kind of naive pacifism that assumes the state can adopt pacifism as a public policy?



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8. *Facilitating a Voice:* Our discussion recognized that Mennonite/Brethren in Christ churches, and the Christian church generally, are a global community. Our advocacy is informed by and raises up the needs, concerns and practices of our partners and colleagues in this church in North America and around the world, especially those who are marginalized, impoverished and subjected to violence. We belong specifically to the Anabaptist churches of North America and seek to inform, support and encourage their witness, especially on behalf of the neighbor in need. How do we work with the tension that sometimes arises between the needs of different parts of this global family?

9. *Mutuality of Mennonite Public Witness:* In hearing of the work of the national and UN advocacy offices, and of the work of the staff persons in the MCC Canada Peace Network and the MCC US Peace and Justice

Cluster, we asked to what extent these activities are or should be integrated. We heard examples of the way in which they do interact, as well as affirmation for the differences appropriate for the different contexts. We recognized the affirmation that all of our peace work grows from the life of the church; the question then is how the congregations and denominations are living their peace witness. Earlier ideas of consensus on the institutional arrangement of this common church peace witness may not serve us today. We need conversation points like this one in order to think together about the challenges we face and to call each other to account in remaining true to our Biblical foundations.

Excerpted from the summary of the October 18–19, 2002, Peace Committee meeting prepared by Judy Zimmerman Herr and Bob Herr, codirectors, MCC Overseas Peace Office, along with the Committee.