

## BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

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We're at war. That's what our President keeps telling Americans. "We're at war," he said in his first weekly radio address after the events of September 11. "The United States will do what it needs to do to win this war."<sup>1</sup> When did it last happen that we were attacked on our own soil on this continent, I've tried to remember. The War of 1812? Well, we've been attacked now, and we're at war.

As you all know, there are a few problems here. The first, and a major one, is "Who's the enemy?" Another is: "How do we fight an alleged enemy like Osama bin Laden without creating a much larger enemy than we started with?" How do we avoid potentially playing into terrorist hands by bringing on the "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West that historian Samuel Huntington has been speaking of since the end of the Cold War?<sup>2</sup>

This morning, during University Public Worship, in a Christian service, I'd like to review with you the Christian Church's perspective on war.<sup>3</sup> I'm sorry if that means this sermon will sound didactic, when at least some of you might want it to sound prophetic. Yet, I think it's important for us -- or maybe I should just say it's important for me -- to restate the church's traditional teachings on war in relation to our current crisis. When can or should we go to war as Christians? How should we go to war? Are there any limits once war is declared?

There are three traditional Christian positions on war: first, pacifism, which held sway for the first three centuries of the Christian era as the church was persecuted within the Roman Empire<sup>4</sup>; second, just war theory, which was first articulated by Saint Augustine, among others, after the Emperor Constantine converted in the fourth century and founded the Christian empire<sup>5</sup>; and third, crusade, first initiated by Pope Urban II in 1095 to liberate Jerusalem and the Christian Holy Lands from the Muslims, whom the Pope called wicked, accursed, and alienated from God.<sup>6</sup>

Let's start with crusade, also called holy war.<sup>7</sup> President Bush used the word "crusade" to describe America's planned response in the early days following September 11, but quickly dropped the term. An eminent scholar of Islam at Georgetown University, John Esposito, wrote a decade ago that "Few events had a more shattering and long-lasting effect on Muslim-Christian relations than the Crusades...For Muslims, the memory of the Crusades lives on as the clearest example of militant Christianity, an earlier harbinger of the aggression and imperialism of the Christian West...For many [Muslims], [European] colonialism [in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries] conjured up memories of the Crusades"<sup>8</sup>

There are a number of passages in the Bible that present war between the ancient Israelites and their enemies as a crusade, in the sense of an unambiguous battle by the forces of good against the forces of evil. The prophetess Deborah speaks for God in sending forth the Israelites against the army of Canaan: "The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you."<sup>9</sup> After the victory she exults, "So perish all your enemies, O Lord!"<sup>10</sup>

Joshua enters the promised land by "slaughtering all the inhabitants of Ai,"<sup>11</sup> putting to the sword everyone in Hazor, before burning it to the ground,<sup>12</sup> and killing every living being as he fit the battle of Jericho, "both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys."<sup>13</sup>

There are few theologians today who would defend the concept of Christian holy war or crusade. It has traditionally involved applying an absolutist good-versus-evil distinction not just to enemy military forces, but to whole peoples. Crusaders have repudiated not only evil deeds that the enemy does, but also who the enemy is as a whole. Matters of degree have been morally irrelevant from a crusader viewpoint.<sup>14</sup> God has been seen to champion only one side and not lament the loss of enemy lives. The crusader's view is morally simplistic, seeing conflict as an either-or, a battle between pure good and unadulterated evil. There's an assumption too that a crusade can eradicate evil people and effects once and for all, without the risk of bringing on new evils that may be every bit as bad -- or even worse -- than the one's currently being fought.<sup>15</sup>

A more mainstream position of Christian theologians and ethicists these days, recently reiterated by Pope John Paul II, is that of just war. Saint Augustine explained that although Jesus called upon his followers to be peacemakers ("Blessed are the Peacemakers"<sup>16</sup>), achieving a just and lasting peace may ironically require waging war in the proper selfless spirit to restore the benefits of peace. Criteria for justifiable resort to war through the centuries have included the following: Defensive, not offensive war; prosecuted by a legitimate governmental authority, not private armies; begun only as a last resort after all peaceful alternatives have been exhausted; with a clear declaration of war aims; calculated to produce greater good than evil; with a reasonable chance of success; prosecuted with the intention of a better and more just peace and not out of hatred and revenge. Just war teaching has also limited the means by which war can be waged. It forbids any direct and intentional attack upon civilians, as opposed to military personnel, and it demands doing the utmost to avoid unintentional harm to civilians when attacking military targets. Also, a principle of proportionality requires that no more force be used than is necessary to achieve the declared military objectives.<sup>17</sup>

Obviously, the attacks on New York and Washington three weeks ago failed to meet almost all of the Christian just war criteria, and, as many Muslims have pointed out, similar criteria that are required in Islam. September 11 would be hard to justify as a defensive action, and no governmental authority has claimed responsibility for it. It was not a last resort after all peaceable means had been exhausted. There was no public declaration of war aims, and it would be a bizarre calculus that determined it was likely to produce greater good than evil. Rhetoric from bin Laden's organization and similar groups over the years have sounded hateful and revengeful. And civilians were directly and intentionally targeted, even used as weapons as commercial airliners with passengers aboard were crashed into everyday workplaces in New York City.

Christian just war theory has historically been grounded in the Christian concept of love. Sometimes, it is held, love can obligate us to use force defensively, to protect our citizens from attack, to prevent the perpetrators from striking again, and bringing them to justice while attempting to restore what has been unjustly taken or destroyed. Christian love, though, requires us to understand that all people on this earth are made in God's image and that all must be treated as ends in themselves and never as means to an end.<sup>18</sup>

We are not only to love our neighbors, but also to love our enemies and pray for our persecutors.<sup>19</sup>

In this fallen world we all suffer from sin, and human society is continually beset by conflict.<sup>20</sup> We must make sure that we deal with conflict within certain humane bounds or we'll all lose our humanity in the process. Therefore, in this case, if we don't stay within the bounds of just war principles, we risk ending up no better than the terrorists, and will reap for years, if not for generations, the bad fruit of the evil we sow. Furthermore, in a world now full of weapons of mass destruction -- nuclear, chemical and biological -- that bad fruit could poison immense numbers of people and destroy complete ecosystems.

A third traditional position of the Christian church on war is that of pacifism. It's maintained today by the historical peace churches like the Quakers and the Mennonites, and as I mentioned earlier, this was the prevailing perspective of the entire Christian church during its first three hundred years. That may well have been the result of Christians having no significant access to military power until the Roman Emperor Constantine's conversion in the year 312,<sup>21</sup> but it may also have been because those closest to Jesus in time found that his words could not reasonably have been interpreted in any other way. "You have heard that they were told, 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' But what I tell you is this: Do not resist those who wrong you. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn and offer him the other also."<sup>22</sup> Gandhi explained that it was these words and others in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount which, along with the Hindu Bhagavad Gita, brought him to his personal and political commitment to nonviolence in the struggle for Indian independence.<sup>23</sup>

Martin Luther King, Jr. said that Gandhi's writings led him back to Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount and to a lifelong commitment to nonviolence in the American civil rights movement.<sup>24</sup> Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa is another leader who became committed to nonviolence through the example of Jesus and applied it to the struggle for national liberation in the face of apartheid and daunting military might.<sup>25</sup> None of these leaders, it's important to remember, preached passivity. Their form of pacifism was what the psychologist Erik Erikson has called militant nonviolence.<sup>26</sup> They used means like economic boycotts and mass marches to achieve their objectives, and they were constantly in the front lines of action.

How might nonviolent action be effective in our current crisis? A particularly courageous and audacious proposal I've heard of is organizing a peace march of five to six thousand people (the number that died on September 11) from Karachi, Pakistan to Kabul, Afghanistan.<sup>27</sup> Another, which could go side by side with it, is to supply Afghan civilians in large numbers with clothing, food, and medical supplies as they face the upcoming winter.<sup>28</sup> In fact, U.N. relief workers just announced yesterday that they were deploying a 4,000-donkey convoy to deliver 200 tons of clothing, food, medicine and books to children in the northeastern province of Afghanistan.<sup>29</sup> The U.S. is actually currently the largest source of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan,<sup>30</sup> but Christian peacemakers in this country could finance much more massive aid to desperately-needy people who could otherwise, from their utter deprivation, become more fertile ground for the likes ! of bin Laden to plant the seeds of hatred for the West and grow the next generation of terrorists.

There are several places in the current crisis where the both the pacifist and the just war perspectives coalesce. Clearly the perpetrators of these heinous acts of terrorism need to be found and brought to justice. There's a critical role here for national and international courts, and for careful international police work. Peaceful alternatives to violence, like active and creative diplomacy, must be explored tirelessly. Hatred and revenge must not be allowed to dictate any of our actions.

Moving now to the most immediate and practical level for each of us here, what can we do now as individual Christians to avoid the last resort of full-scale war? Certainly we need to let our voices be heard politically, from direct contact with our legislators and national leaders to public rallies and demonstrations which express our will. We should work with local media to be sure that peaceful alternatives to violence are being covered and that the language of warfare is not being used inappropriately. We need to find creative ways to unite with those in America from whom we might feel most alienated, or who might feel most alienated from us, including our Muslim brothers and sisters -- supporting each other, facing our fears, and working together to uphold the great American values of liberty, equality, and democracy, and the unique American treasures of openness, pluralism, and hope.

Across the country, but especially at an educational institution like Stanford, we must try to educate ourselves about the why as well as the who, what and where of what happened on September 11. It isn't helpful to say that it was the work of madmen or cowards. These carefully calculating people, willing to commit suicide for their cause, were neither. Why would they hate America so much that they would want to do us such grievous harm? Gandhi used to say that if only we could learn to put ourselves in the shoes of our opponents (he never used the word 'enemy' for opponents) seventy-five percent of the world's problems would disappear.<sup>31</sup> Through classes on this campus, through teach-ins and workshops and symposia, as well as a lot of reading and research, we need to understand the roots of the grievances against America and then to see if it's possible to remove those causes at their source without violating our basic values as a nation.

"Blessed are the gentle; they shall have the earth for their possession...Blessed are those who show mercy; mercy shall be shown to them...Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called God's children."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Von Drehle and Alan Sipress, "Bush: Get Ready for Long Struggle," San Jose Mercury News, September 16, 2001, p. 1A.

<sup>2</sup> See Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," Foreign Affairs 72, no. 3 (Summer, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> See Joseph L. Allen, War: A Primer for Christians (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), for an excellent concise review of the Christian church's historical positions on war.

<sup>4</sup> Allen, War, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 31; Judith S. Levey and Agnes Greenhall (eds.), The Concise Columbia Encyclopedia (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 194.

<sup>6</sup> Allen, War, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> John L. Esposito, The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality (New York: Oxford University Press, Third Edition, 1999), p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 39, 49.

<sup>9</sup> Judges 4: 6.

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- <sup>10</sup> Judges 5: 31.
- <sup>11</sup> Joshua 8: 24.
- <sup>12</sup> Joshua 11: 11.
- <sup>13</sup> Joshua 6: 21.
- <sup>14</sup> Allen, War, p.9.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 13-14.
- <sup>16</sup> Matthew 5: 9.
- <sup>17</sup> Allen, War, pp. 31, 46-47.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 31-33.
- <sup>19</sup> Matthew 5: 43-44.
- <sup>20</sup> Allen, War, p. 33.
- <sup>21</sup> Levey and Greenhall, Columbia Encyclopedia, p. 194.
- <sup>22</sup> Matthew 5: 38-39.
- <sup>23</sup> See Mohandas K. Gandhi, The Message of Jesus Christ (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1971), especially pp. 4-5.
- <sup>24</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," The Christian Century (1960).
- <sup>25</sup> Desmond Tutu, "The Blasphemy That Is Apartheid," Africa Report, Vol. 28 (July-August, 1983), p. 6, as cited in R. Scott Appleby, The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p. 35.
- <sup>26</sup> See Erik H. Erikson, Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1969).
- <sup>27</sup> Sri Sridharan, "Peace Is Not An Option: Peace Is The Way" ([BeTheLight@prodigy.net](mailto:BeTheLight@prodigy.net), 9/24/02).
- <sup>28</sup> Letter from the Rev. Carl Scovel to President George W. Bush dated September 24, 2001.
- <sup>29</sup> Mark McDonald and Juan O. Tamayo, "Taliban Unmoved by Pakistan Delegation," San Jose Mercury News (September 29, 2001), p. 20A.
- <sup>30</sup> President George W. Bush, Speech to a Joint Session of Congress on September 20, 2001, San Jose Mercury News, September 21, 2001, p. 21A.
- <sup>31</sup> Pascal Alan Nazareth, "Understanding Islamic Fundamentalism," San Jose Mercury News, September 16, 2001, p. 5P.
- <sup>32</sup> Matthew 5: 5, 7, 9.