

Discernment

So that you may be able to discern what is best. *Phil. 1:10*

Christianity and Violence

■ Christ's entry into this world is both the promise of peace and the harbinger of violence. Herod's malicious slaughter of Bethlehem's children marked an early encounter between the hostility of the world toward God incarnate. Jesus Himself warned His disciples that He came not to bring peace but a sword, for "I have come," He said, "to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'" (Matt. 10:34-35).

Jesus thus puts aside the speculation that His first appearance on earth means the consummation of history. On the contrary, His appearance leads to division. The challenge for His followers is to navigate amid the divisions, to "be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matt. 10:16), to not cause violence but to live prudently within it. This is an ethical challenge of the highest order.

Recent years have only intensified the need for careful ethical reflection on the relationship between violence and peace within Christian experience. In post-Christian Western cultures, antipathy toward violence of any sort has become the foundational morality by which to measure words and actions. Consequently, the Christ who brings the sword of division is even less welcome today than in prior decades. Last November, for instance, the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago urged the Southern Baptist Convention to modify its large scale evangelism effort in Chicago this summer.

Why? Because, as the Council wrote to denomination President Paige Patterson, "a campaign of the nature and scope you envision could contribute to a climate conducive to hate crimes." The heightened sensitivity to violence and to all its potential causes places some traditional North American missionary activities under suspicion. The Council's concern over how the Southern Baptists will represent Christ acutely demonstrates the difficulty faced by all believers who seek to live the gospel in a hostile culture.

Of course, outside the West, some Christians face increased persecution, with disturbing recent reports coming from Sudan, Indonesia, and India. In turn, many Christians risk their lives to extend the message of justice and peace to troubled regions, both locally and globally, rife with conflict. Christ's message of peace must be lived in a world that at times trumpets a heightened sensitivity to the moral wrong of violence,

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but also displays an ability to embrace violence when it satisfies appetites, seeks vengeance, establishes political power, or rejects the gospel. This issue of *Discernment* draws us into the moral dimensions of violence as experienced by today's Christians. In doing so, it takes an initial step into the mystery of serving the Christ who brings a sword in the name of peace.

Kenneth Chase, director of CACE

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Christians, Violence, and Injustice

Understanding God's character is critical in our response.

By Gary Haugen

■ Think back to what you were doing in the spring of 1994. I was leading a regular suburban life, working at the Department of Justice and raising a family outside Washington, D.C. Meanwhile, in another part of the globe, in an African country, statistically 80 percent Christian, 800,000 people were being hacked to death by their neighbors in about eight weeks.



Photos by Dave Witting

Gary Haugen says Christian professionals can and should shine light into the world's dark places.

The number is hard to comprehend. In Kosovo last winter and spring, somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000 innocent people were taken from their homes and executed. In Rwanda, between 10,000 and 20,000 innocent people were

executed every day. The Justice Department assigned me to the United Nations to help direct the international effort to find the leaders and perpetrators of these atrocities, which had grown out of a bitter civil war between two tribes, the Tutsis and the Hutus.

Though relatively low level violence had gone on for some time, the genocide came suddenly. The Tutsi rebel army was outside the country and the Hutu president seemed, at least to Hutu extremists, to be moving toward some kind of shared power with the Tutsis. The extremists opposed that, setting up militias around the country. Their plan apparently was to take advantage of any chaos in the country to eliminate their Tutsi enemies.

Plan Put into Action

The Hutu president was killed when his plane was shot down. There was plenty of chaos, and the plan was put into action. Within hours Tutsi bodies began to appear in the villages and cities throughout Rwanda. Tutsis had seen this kind of ethnic violence before, so they began to run to schools, stadiums, and churches for safety—also in the hope that no one would hurt all of the women, children, and elderly people who gathered in these places.

The Hutu militias broke down whatever defenses were set up, and Hutu mobs took over. These were not mobs of elite killer paratroopers but of average people—farmers, school principals, tailors, clerks. The mobs hacked everybody to death with machetes, iron rods, or big clubs with nails hammered into them.

Cataloguing the Carnage

Eventually, the Tutsi rebel army successfully invaded and kicked the Hutu militia and government out of the country. With peace restored, we went in. I was presented with a list of about 100 mass graves and massacre sites. Most were churches. They were littered with thousands of corpses. Blood lines on the walls were knee-high.

Any murder investigation begins with the body, so we had to catalogue the cause of death and the basic identity—male, female, child—of the victims. We would just pick up a skull and start recording by the thousands. Sometimes we had to use bulldozers to uncover the mass graves.

This happened in our world, in a country missionaries say was the birthplace of the East African Christian revival.

In a Bombay Brothel

Now shift to another part of the world, India, where we got to know a girl named Joytey. When she was 14 she went to a distant village to earn money as a domestic servant to help her family. After about three months, she began heading home. But four women enticed her onto the wrong train and gave her drugged tea. She woke up in windowless room on the third floor of a brothel in Bombay.

For the next three years, about 20 customers a day paid small amounts of money to rape this child. By the end, she had been forced to have three abortions. She had engaged in unprotected sex in a city with a horrific AIDS epidemic.

UNICEF says that a million children every year are forced into prostitution. Other experts say

it's a million in Asia alone and another million in the rest of the world.

Bonded Slavery

Take the case of another child, named Shawna. When she was 7, she was living with her very, very poor family in a village in India. Her mother was giving birth to her baby brother and needed about \$25 to pay for a doctor. The only way they could get \$25 was from the local moneylender, who demanded that the family sell Shawna to him. She was made to roll cigarettes by hand six days a week, 12 hours a day, sitting in one place on the floor. If Shawna didn't roll 2,000 cigarettes a day, she was beaten. She was paid about six cents a day.

After three years, when we met her at 10 years of age, she was not one penny closer to paying off her debt. This is bonded slavery. While it is illegal in India, we believe there are some 15 million children in such circumstances there, rolling cigarettes, making jewelry, making fireworks, and breaking rocks with little hammers.

Seeking Justice

How do Christians respond? In Scripture there is a constant call to seek justice.

Jesus got upset at the Pharisees because they neglected the weightier matters of the law, which He defined as justice and the love of God. Isaiah 1:17 says, "Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow." Isaiah 59 is the only place where the word appalled is used for the way God feels. He feels appalled. Verses 15 and 16 say, "The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, He was appalled that there was no one to intervene." Isaiah 58 complains about the fact that while the people of God are praying and praying and praying, they are not doing anything about the injustice.

God's Character

But the overwhelming nature of violence and injustice in our world can paralyze us and cause us to be

disengaged. We can only engage violence and injustice by understanding God's character and His attitude toward violence and injustice.

The Bible describes injustice as the abuse of power. In every context in society, some people have more power than others. Using that power to take from other people is injustice.

Injustice has two ingredients: coercion, which includes actual or threatened violence, and deception. Proverbs 10:11 says, ". . . the mouth of the wicked conceals violence." John 3:20 reminds us that everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

Exposing the Darkness

If you go into the red-light districts of the developing world, you will see women and girls mingling out in front of or on the first floors of the brothels. No one is holding them. They may even be calling for customers to come in. What you don't see are the cages on the third or fourth floor where the children and women are locked away and beaten. It doesn't take long before they give up any attempt to run. The coercion—the violence—is hidden.

Therefore, to combat injustice, you always first expose the truth. For example, suppose you're a missionary in Bombay, and you notice that some of the girls aged 13 or 14 in your street program aren't showing up anymore. You ask around and learn

that they've been abducted into a brothel run by local police. What could you possibly do about that?

Here's what our organization does. We send Christian professionals whose expertise is shining light where there is darkness. They are called criminal investigators. They infiltrate these brothels either directly or by using other investigative access. They bring surveillance equipment—tiny cameras, perhaps—to bring the light of day into these horrific places where children are being forced to be prostitutes. Let's say that you had in your hands a videotape of these children at a particular place in Bombay, and you've clearly documented the girls, the people holding them, and the conditions.



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We take this material to the chief of police. He has a choice. He can either do something about it, or he can do nothing. But if he does nothing, he runs the risk that we will take the information someplace else, and he will be terribly embarrassed. So go ahead and rescue the girls, get your picture in the paper for doing it, and then everybody wins—except the brothel-keepers, of course, who get arrested.

The key is exposing the truth, bringing light to the darkness. There is no darker place than these massive places of forced prostitution. In one of these places a little girl was identified and taken out. When she was in the brothel, she prayed to Jesus that she’d be rescued. Jesus answered that prayer through us. We were able to identify her, work with our police contacts, conduct a raid on the brothel, and get her out. Now she’s at a Christian after-care facility. She is not being raped anymore.

In the case of children like Shawna, we looked at the law and learned that all you have to do is get the child to make a claim of bonded labor, and then the burden of proof shifts to the moneylenders to prove that it’s not. Also, we took video cameras and interviewed the moneylenders, getting them to brag about all the kids they had in bonded labor. Another tactic was to purchase one of the children by paying off the debt and getting a receipt. That becomes a document, which is an admission on the part of the moneylender that he had bonded them in the past. We took all that evidence to the magistrate and had Shawna and about

500 other bonded slaves released.

A Matter of Showing Up

The tragedy of Rwanda is that nobody intervened. It would have taken very little to stop the violence, because all the killing was done with machetes and sticks. If the United States and the international community had shown up with any kind of military force, the men who were hacking away would have run right back to the villages they had come from. That wouldn’t have solved ethnic violence in Rwanda, but it would have stopped the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of innocent people. But nobody showed up.

We, as Christian voters in a world superpower, didn’t show up. That is either a sobering reality about the incredible stewardship of power that we as Americans and Christians should have, or it can be a sobering moment of hope to realize that ours is a God of justice, and He’s prepared to use us to make a difference.

That’s the basis for hope. That’s why we can have a passion for confronting violence and injustice in the world. If we begin to believe in and reacquaint ourselves with God’s passion for justice, He will perform the miracles necessary to rescue the oppressed. The fantastic and unbelievable thing about it is that He will use us to do it. We are the ones who know Jesus Christ. The world needs a witness of hope, and God doesn’t have another plan apart from us.

Quotes

“In his classic, *The City of God*, Augustine urged Christians to avail themselves of the protection offered by the law of the land. Modern Christians should do the same.”

■ Charles Colson, “BreakPoint” commentary, September 27, 1999.

“When the Bible talks about justice and injustice, it doesn’t start giving us a litany of the perpetrators. It gives us a litany of the victims, the wounded ones—the widows, the orphans, the aliens.”

■ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “*The Contours of Justice: An Ancient Call for Shalom*,” in *God and the Victim*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

“It is naive to believe that forgiving another, whether for a single failure or a lifetime of harm, is ever entirely finished. In truth, the more fully we face the harm we have suffered, the more deeply we must forgive.”

■ Dan B. Allender, “‘Forgive and Forget’ and Other Myths of Forgiveness,” in *God and the Victim*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

“It is a horrible fact that modern economics and high technology do not always work in favor of justice and freedom.”

■ Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1997).

Real Victims

The cult of victimhood worships the hurting individual.
The worship of the living God serves the hurting individual.

By David Neff

■ A review of *God and the Victim: Theological Reflections on Evil, Victimization, Justice, and Forgiveness*. Edited by Lisa Barnes Lampman and Michelle D. Shattuck (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

I suspect that *God and the Victim* will not sell a lot of copies. For one thing, the title is a downer. For another, the subtitle promises theological reflection—a phrase that can signal aridity, abstraction, and an eerie disconnection from real life.

For yet another, while criminology, sociology, and legal studies have been paying attention to the needs and rights of crime victims for some decades now, pastors and theologians have not widely taken up the topic of victimization nor focused ministry on the 35 million people in American society who become crime victims each year. It's not a hot topic in church circles. But it should be. And the book should be more widely read than it will be.

The book's subject matter should not be confused with that bastard child from the liaison of pop psychology and the Twelve Step movement, to wit, the cult of victimhood whose rites we celebrate on talk shows and during political conventions.

In a 1996 *New Republic* essay recently recovered from a compost heap on the floor of my office, Jean Bethke Elshtain properly rails against using undifferentiated pity as a tool of political motivation. She distinguishes pity from compassion, as sentimentality is distinct from solidarity. And she notes that Christian compassion is rooted in theology, "a whole structure of belief," and that the Christian responds not simply out of generic pity, but "as a person abiding by a particular moral framework." Pity is a

response of the moment. Compassion is a response of principle. Rooted compassion endures.

Offending God or Harming the Neighbor?

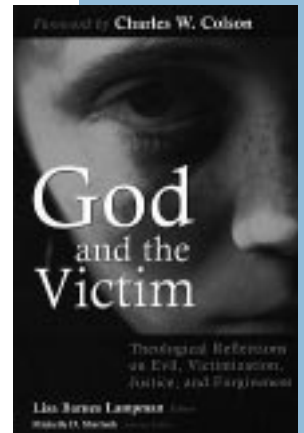
God and the Victim aims to provide such a theological rootedness for compassion toward crime victims. It surveys biblical notions of justice and wholeness (here Yale's Miroslav Volf and Nicholas Wolterstorff are most helpful),

and it struggles with the growth toward forgiveness that is ultimately demanded of victims (skillfully sketched by Duke Divinity School's dean, L. Gregory Jones). But while there is a consistent theology of forgiveness and an inspiring vision of healing in this book, there are contrasting understandings of the sin that calls for forgiveness—resulting from differing views of God's love, His law, and His justice.

On the one hand, evangelical patriarch Carl F. H. Henry's essay, "Responsibility toward Victims' Rights," expresses a classic understanding of sin and of its subset, crime. For Henry, crime is "an

offense against God ... a repudiation of His honor, a violation of the dignity of the Sovereign of the universe, a rejection of transcendent divine law, a thumbing of one's nose at God's revealed will." From this perspective, Henry writes that "punishment of the criminal" is not to reform the offender or promote the safety of society. "The true purpose of punishment," he writes, "is to acknowledge God's Lordship, to vindicate His honor, to preserve His dignity.... It anticipates the final decisive judgment of evil and the universal vindication of right."

"Pastors and theologians have not widely taken up the topic of victimization nor focused ministry on the 35 million people in American society who become crime victims each year."



David Neff says the guilt of the criminal and the hurt of the victim must be addressed for justice to be done.

God, then, is “the unrequited victim of a criminalized society.”

Rather than draw implications for ministry to victims from his theology, Henry moves directly to addressing victims themselves. While affirming that God loves and cares for victims in their plight, his main message to victims seems to be: Get a grip. God in His infinite holiness was more victimized by this crime than you were. You think you have problems. God has been “aggrieved by criminal abuse in a way we cannot fathom.” Thus putting matters into perspective, Henry urges victims to “rise above it.”

Rising above it is, no doubt, a good thing. But as a pastoral exhortation it seems a bit short on empathy.

On the other hand, Howard Zehr, a sociologist at Eastern Mennonite University, stresses that a crime’s offense is not so much a transgression of the rules, even the divine rules, so much as it is a violation of a victim. “God’s heart is wounded by the hurt of the victim more than by the sinner’s breaking of the law.”

Zehr outlines a theology of justice that seeks not the removal of guilt but the restoration of health and wholeness (the biblical concept of *shalom*). He cites a provocative 1996 journal article by Julian Pleasants, which argues that the church broke “from its earliest traditions” and “came to view criminal behavior as a violation of a higher authority. Offenses became not violations of individuals but sins against God.... From there it was a short step to the idea that salvation is gained primarily by making things right with God in order to avoid punishment.” Thus “traditional Christianity has worked to release the offender from guilt while leaving the victim still hurting.”

This theological focus on the guilt of the offender had a parallel development in secular law. Several of the volume’s contributors hint at this development, which was explicated in 1986 by Daniel Van Ness, who then directed Justice Fellowship, the public policy arm of Prison Fellowship. In his book, *Crime and Its Victims*, Van Ness traced that shift in English law to William the

Conqueror and his son Henry I. As a result of their legal innovations, victim-centered legal customs, which punished crimes by ordering restitution, were replaced by new law codes that defined felonies as violations against the king’s peace, and which levied punishment by imposing fines payable to the crown. Such fines often impoverished offenders, leaving victims no hope of restitution.

These parallel thought structures—in law and in theology—narrowed the definition of justice, dealing only with the guilt of the criminal and leaving the hurt of the victim unaddressed. Such was not God’s intent, says Zehr. Once again citing Pleasants, he writes, “God’s plan was to reinforce the impor-

tance of human victims by identifying with them.” Most of Zehr’s reading of crime and victimhood is a recovery of a biblical and theological tradition largely lost under the influence of Roman law. For the sake of ministry to victims, this is a tradition the church needs to recover, as it lends itself directly to motivating ministries of reconciliation and service, and even to the fostering of forgiveness between victim and offender.

I Feel Our Pain

In an age of identity politics, many are swept into victim status who never experience abuse or oppression. I tasted this in 1999 as I became more deeply aware of my Sicilian family’s 16th century roots in Kosovo. After 400 years of my clan’s life in Sicily and nearly 100 years of my immediate family’s assimilation into American life, I still felt a twinge of identification with the Kosovar Albanians and their plight!

Identity politics can be powerful when genuine oppression exists. It can be poisonous when it is a tool of demagogues who build a power base on ancient harms and build walls rather than bridges between communities.

Nearly as odious is the individual victimhood offered to nearly everyone by the therapeutic/talk show society. (Think here of the acid-tongued Wendy Kaminer’s 1992 book, *I’m Dysfunctional, You’re Dysfunctional*.) Victim status is marketed to us all, but we experience it as individuals. And we draw

“God’s heart is wounded by the hurt of the victim more than by the sinner’s breaking of the law.”

our identity from the elevation of our real or imagined personal traumas.

However, the contributors to *God and the Victim*—most notably philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff and recently retired Old Testament and preaching professor Elizabeth Achtemeier—call us back to community. God’s justice is about the restoration of community, but not just any community (the buzzword *du jour*, and a fuzzword at that). It is a divinely instituted covenant community.

As Achtemeier writes: “Daily, we human beings attempt to shake off our creaturely dependence on our Creator and to be our own gods, creating our own future and our own right and wrong.... All possibilities for individual and corporate community have been shattered, and we now live on a planet where we simply cannot get along with one another.” That’s individualism.

She continues: “The result is that God ... sets out to make a new community, living in a land flowing with milk and honey, that knows how to live in righteousness and justice under His guiding lordship.” That’s covenant community.

The cult of victimhood worships the hurting individual. The worship of the living God serves the hurting individual.

Practicalities

Finally, although subtitled as *Theological Reflections*, this volume contains several helpful chapters on pastoral and outreach issues.

Counselor Dan Allender contributes two excellent chapters: one on myths about forgiveness, the other on the nature and experience of evil. Allender advises against linking forgiveness to forgetting: “When we try to forget the wrongs we have suffered, we lose our perspective on our personal history.... Because we are terrified that we cannot face the past without being overwhelmed by pain, we never taste the wonder of God’s forgiveness—both of our own sin and of the sins of those who have harmed us.”

In a more theological chapter, L. Gregory Jones agrees: The hope Christ offers “comes through the return of memory, not its erasure or its denial. Christ redeems the past; He does not undo it.... As forgiven sinners, we can learn to tell the story of our life differently—presumably, more truthfully—

because we are freed of the burdens of telling forgetful or deceptive stories.”

Marlene Young, executive director of the National Organization for Victim Assistance, sketches a continuum of victim care. She guides us through the full range of the emotional landscape traveled by the traumatized. And she offers a helpful catalog of services the churches and community groups can offer to victims. If fear of dealing with the traumatized paralyzes a church leader, the specific suggestions for ways to aid victims will help.

Harold Dean Trulear also asks what churches can do, but he first calls congregations to self-examination, to an assessment of why “with our theology and current lifestyle, ministry to crime victims has received such a low profile.” Without such soul-searching, such ministry can become “just another program,” an example of “what Jacques Ellul calls the ‘false presence of the kingdom,’ where Christians of goodwill participate in worthy, even biblically based causes because of fad or fashion rather than a clear directive from God.” When ministry proceeds from the media attention given to a problem rather than from spiritual discernment, Trulear warns, “the work often ends when the cause is no longer front-page news.”

In the book’s final chapter, Lee Earl sketches how local congregations can minister to crime victims. Earl recounts how during his years as a pastor in Detroit he was confronted by violent crime: A neighbor, Alice Johnson, was shot to death in front of his church as she was walking home with her children. Beginning by holding a funeral for Alice and providing meals for her family, Earl’s church began to construct a ministry to crime victims.

“The rituals of the Church are meaningless if they reach only up and not out,” writes Earl, reflecting on the inseparability of love for God and love for neighbor. It is this theological holism that bears fruit. “When Twelfth Street Baptist Church began to reach out to the community after Alice’s death,” he writes, “we did not set out to reduce crime.... We hoped to establish, maintain, and demonstrate the presence of God in the midst of that community and to do what the Lord had called us to do. What we discovered in the process is that in doing ministry the way that Jesus commanded, we had an impact on crime.”



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Violence Confronts Today's Missions Efforts

By Stan Guthrie

■ Every year for the last two decades, Australian missionary Graham Staines had attended the annual meeting of a small church in Manoharpur, a remote village in eastern India's Orissa state, without incident. On January 22, 1999, Staines and his two sons—Philip, 10, and Timothy, 6—attended the gathering. When the day ended, they said their good-byes and climbed into a jeep to get some sleep before making the five-hour drive to Baripada. There Staines' wife, Gladys, and daughter Esther, 13, awaited.

But at about 1 a.m., a mob of between 50 and 100 people circled the van, chanting to the Hindu monkey god, "Long live Hanuman!" As terrified villagers looked on, the mob set the vehicle on fire, killing all three occupants.

Indian Christians say that the public forgiveness subsequently expressed by Gladys Staines may open many hearts in the country, which has been riven by interreligious violence in recent years. The Hindu extremists behind the attack, however, continue to accuse churches and missionaries of converting tribal peoples through bribery or force, charges that Christians vehemently deny.

Violence and the Gospel

From the beginning of the church, the followers of the Prince of Peace have been accused of violence and coercion, sometimes with reason. The church has often corrupted, and been corrupted by, state power, as the Crusades and the Inquisition demonstrate. For two centuries, for better and for worse, Protestant missionaries rode the coattails of the colonial powers to spread the gospel of peace.

At the same time, history confirms the apostle Paul's warning that "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Redemption, after all, was purchased on a blood-stained Roman cross. Jesus cryptically reminds us

that "the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force."

Religious Reactionaries

Despite the collapse of Soviet communism and the apparent triumph of the supposedly "Christian" West, Western missionaries, along with Christian brothers and sisters from other lands, are far more often on the receiving end of violence today. Islamists control the rules of debate in Indonesia and the Arab world; fundamentalist Buddhists are cracking down against Christians in Sri Lanka; and right-wing Hindus are terrorizing Christians in India. In Latin America, three Christian missionaries have been held for seven years by narco-terrorists.

In 1998, FEBA Radio, in consultation with local Christians and expatriates in the South Asian island nation of Maldives, began broadcasting Christian programming into Dhivehi, the local language, to share Christ's love. The response was immediate: The Islamic government, which prided itself on the republic's 100 percent Muslim status, kicked out all foreign Christians "for life" and rounded up and jailed Maldivians suspected of being Christians. The locals were eventually released, but a message was sent. A missionary observer noted, "The local media called the radio program the greatest attack on their nation since the Portuguese conquest in the 16th century."

Role of Rhetoric

Sometimes triumphalistic and insensitive evangelical rhetoric has inflamed latent non-Christian passions. A Christian article on the Internet describing Hinduism as demonic became front-page news in India, contributing to the poisonous interreligious atmosphere there. Of course, while evangelicals are called to love their non-Christian neighbors, few Christians involved in reaching Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Parsees, or animists for Christ feel an obligation to love their religions as well. After all, these systems offer alternate worldviews that deny Christ as Lord and Savior, helping to keep their



Photo by Ken Benintendi

Christians in India and around the world are receiving close scrutiny from their non-Christian neighbors.

adherents in spiritual darkness.

Jesus Himself, speaking about the narrow way that leads to life, dumped cold water on the wishful religious thinking of His day. He spared few harsh words for His religious opponents, calling them vipers, blind guides, fools—seemingly as often as He gently wooed the downtrodden victims of false religion into His Father's kingdom.

William Carey, the flag-bearer of modern missions, illustrates the dilemma. Carey had great respect for Indian culture, translating not only the Bible into dozens of its languages, but various Indian classics into English. Yet he also opposed the brutal Hindu ritual of *sati*, during which a widow was thrown alive onto the funeral pyre of her husband.

And yet, just as most Bible-believing Christians chafe when their faith is equated with the actions of the Crusades, some Indian Christian leaders say evangelicals need to use more discretion when discussing Hindus. Christians from the West, gearing their appeals for prayer and money to Westerners, no longer have *carte blanche* with their cherished freedom of speech. The same technology that has helped evangelicals broadcast, print, transmit, and carry the gospel to most of the world's nations also allows many formerly distant peoples to listen in on their fund raisers and strategy sessions.

Even in the pluralistic West, religious rhetoric can be construed as violence, particularly if it so much as hints that Jesus is the only way to God. One member of the Jewish community categorized the Southern Baptist Convention's 1996 reaffirmation of Jewish evangelism as "spiritual genocide." Similar outrage occurred when the Convention published a 1999 prayer guide for the Jewish people. "It's offensive," Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, stated on CBS's "This Morning" program. "It's arrogant. It assumes that the Baptists and the Christians possess the absolute truth. It's this attitude that Jews, on their own, without Christianity, have no future that led to inquisitions and expulsions and is the basis of Western anti-Semitism."

Becoming Seeds

Of course, rhetoric aside, the cross will always be foolishness to Greeks and a stumbling block to Jews. It also remains the imperative of Christian discipleship.

Sadly, Western missionaries are often the first to flee when violence overtakes a country. Locals, who usually must stay behind, can't help but notice. Phil Parshall, writing in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, said that when civil war broke out between East and West Pakistan in 1971, missionaries were on the first planes out. "The national Christians simply could not believe their spiritual leaders would so quickly leave them to face the crucible alone," he said. Lucien Accad of the Bible Societies of Lebanon,

Syria, Iraq, and the Gulf, saw something similar during Lebanon's long and bloody civil war. "What will be the long-term results of such attitudes and action?" Accad asked in *EMQ*. "How can the witness to Christ survive without any witnesses?"

This is not to say that missionaries should always remain. Sometimes local Christians believe it is better for the gospel if missionaries live to minister another day. The Apostle Paul did not think it ungodly to flee persecution at times, yet he faced suffering and martyrdom boldly if they would

advance the gospel. One missionary chose to stay in a particularly hazardous situation while most of his colleagues fled. God protected this worker, who found he had new credibility with the locals. After the violence was over, however, many of the returning missionaries had a difficult time of psychological adjustment.

At the very least, the decision to stay or leave should be made in honest consultation with mature, trusted believers in the danger zone. One of the most sensitive factors is the safety of one's family. While no one wants to put family members at risk, it is imperative that missionaries, particularly those serving in areas with tenuous security, count the full



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"Sadly, Western missionaries are often the first to flee when violence overtakes a country. Locals, who usually must stay behind, can't help but notice."

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Reflecting on God, Pacifists, and Christians in the Military

By Lisa G. McMinn

■ My father made a career of piloting U-2 spy planes for the Air Force. He fought in the Vietnam War and flew over unimaginable, far away places. Even if he could have talked about some of them, I would have struggled to find them on a map, let alone pronounce them—except for the Soviet Union. We all knew about the Soviet Union.



I grew up believing my father had an honorable job. My parents were strong Christians, and they entered full-time ministry with military families through Officers Christian Fellowship after retiring from the armed services. My mother still feels that Christians in the military are part of a final bastion of all

that is good about the United States. I think she's referring to the honor, sacrifice, respect for authority, and strong sense of community experienced among Christians in the military. Believers in the armed forces think it is sometimes appropriate to use force to bring about justice and protect peace.

Drawn to Pacifism

But for the last 15 years I have been an evangelical Quaker, a denomination with a strong pacifist stand against violence of any kind. My husband and I had been attending Newberg Friends Church because of our connection to the Quaker college, George Fox University. We were drawn to the gentle and simple lives of Quakers, people who emphasized the sanctity of human life and living peaceably.

Quakers note that Jesus did not return violence with violence but taught His followers to turn the other cheek, to offer one's coat when one's shirt is demanded, to go the extra mile. Soldiers are not much honored by Quakers, who wonder why Christians use violence in the face of Jesus' testimony of peace. How are soldiers following in the radical steps of Jesus? Yet I have been challenged by the

passion of both pacifist and pro-military Christians who desire to follow God in the task of peacekeeping and peacemaking.

Differing Aspects of God's Character

Richard Foster's newest book, *Streams of Living Water* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), discusses the differing emphases of six Christian traditions, showing that all reflect essential aspects of God's character. Perhaps, in a similar way, Christians in the military and Christian pacifists reflect and emphasize different truths about the same God.

Christians in the military distinguish between sacred and profane violence. Sacred violence is justified military action intended to bring an end to profane violence—oppression, injustice, and other kinds of evil. This is what is known as a “just war.” The Old Testament is replete with examples of God condoning violence to emancipate the oppressed. Sometimes Israel was the oppressed, liberated by God through violence. At times it was the oppressor, brought to justice through violence.

Christians in the military, however, are quick to recognize that God has been used to justify unjust violence: the Crusades against infidels, Protestants and Catholics in Ireland, and Israeli violence against Palestinians. Pacifists and militarists alike know we confuse and distort our justifications and uses of violence.

Practical Applications

But as citizens of a country with significant military power, Christians in the United States need to be part of discussions regarding when we intervene. Must we fight for the freedom of the oppressed in other countries? Who benefits if we intervene? While Christians will differ on the answers, we need the contributions of thoughtful Christians in discussions about how the United States will wield power to attain justice and peace.

Yet without the presence of Christian pacifists, we see only part of God's character. Jesus is God

Lisa McMinn says that while Christians can be thankful for both perspectives, they can embrace only one comfortably.

incarnate. As Jesus lived, so we are called to live. Jesus did not set himself up as king but came as a servant. He refused to let His followers take up swords, and He submitted to unjust rulers. Yet He was not passive; He confronted evil in individuals and institutions openly and boldly. Neither are pacifists passive; they do the work of peacemaking and keeping through nonviolent means they believe are consistent with the character of Jesus. Their colleges allow students to examine nonviolent means of conflict resolution. Their churches and colleges host Christian peacemaking conferences, one of which I was privileged to attend in October at George Fox College. We heard about peacemaking teams invited into areas riven with violent factions. The teams try to provide a neutral place where peace talks can take place. Every year there are more invitations than there are teams.

Thankful for Both Perspectives

Both Christian militarists and Christian pacifists are working for justice and peace. Both reflect pieces of God's character, which is too complex, too vast for any one human perspective to fully capture. We can be thankful for both perspectives, though we may embrace only one comfortably. I am thankful for Christians in the military, especially those who receive a solid Christian liberal arts education that helps them sift through the distortions and justifications used to legitimate violent intervention. We have examples like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who believed assassinating Hitler was a sacred violence

“Both Christian militarists and Christian pacifists are working for justice and peace. Both reflect pieces of God's character.”

needed to stop the profane violence against Jews, Gypsies, and homosexuals. His willingness to risk death for his conviction challenges my own complacency and my sense that others will do the hard work of stopping evil.

Yet I am unashamedly an evangelical Quaker, part of a group that values the difficult commitment to using nonviolent means to work toward justice,

reconciliation, and peace. Quakers note with satisfaction that nonviolence has a track record of success. To join Martin Luther King Jr.'s movement, a person had to commit to nonviolence, even when faced with violence. Television images from the late 1950s and early 1960s portrayed Americans accepting beatings in restaurants, during the freedom rides, or in the various peace marches. King modeled his strategy after Gandhi, who applied nonviolent principles in his political struggles

against injustices toward Indians and in the independence movement. Nonviolent means for bringing about justice and peace have worked.

Can we allow both perspectives a legitimate place at the table? I must admit that I feel a bit like I'm selling out my pacifist leanings to suggest this. But the enemy is not the other side of this debate. The enemies are oppression, injustice, and all that is contrary to peace. The easier path is to focus on differences between Christians. The better path, and the harder path, is to ask what it means for us to be instruments of God to promote peace and justice, to partner with God in bringing healing to a broken world.



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Violence Confronts Today's Mission Efforts

cost of following Christ. Not for nothing did Paul extol the advantages of serving God as a single missionary.

Risk-free campaigns to convert the hardened followers of Muhammad, Hanuman, and Zoroaster to Christ—who themselves are willing to die for their

beliefs—will probably continue to bear little fruit. Throughout church history, martyrdom has often preceded church growth. Concerning His own death, the Lord said that “unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”

CACE News & Notes

Conference Notice

■ Is Christianity built on violent theological foundations? Is Christianity dangerous to those opposed to its teachings? Is Christianity complicit with violence? The CACE national conference is designed as a watershed event in Christian ethics, charting a course for an ethic of peace in a violent world. “**Christianity and Violence: Beyond Complicity**” will be held on the Wheaton College campus March 15–17. Speakers include John Milbank, Stanley Hauerwas, Glen Stassen, and Mirolsav Volf. Complete registration information is available at <http://www.wheaton.edu/cace>, or call us at 630.752.5886

Reminder to Readers

■ We welcome your comments and contributions in response to the essays in this issue. Thoughtful, brief (800- to 1,000-word) articles not previously published will be considered for publication. Send them, along with an author photo and biographical information, to Stan Guthrie, c/o the CACE office.

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