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BAPTISM

A Witness to the Nations

From Church Practice to Public Policy

BY MARTIN SHUPACK

Mennonites and Brethren in Christ place great emphasis on Jesus' teaching that the church is a "city on a hill," demonstrating the reign of God to the nations. But how, exactly, does this occur?

The church, by the power of the Holy Spirit, incarnates the character of Christ and implements—publicly and visibly—the practices of God's reign. This provides a living model for the nations. In addition, members of this community proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ and commend the ways of God to society at large. The nations may initially respond with rejection and persecution. But in time they may be transformed by this witness.

For example, Christians created the first hospitals in the Roman world. This prompted the emperor Julian, an opponent of Christian faith, to lament the "scandal that . . . the [Christians] care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help we should render them." He then began establishing hospitals with public funds.

Sometimes the meaning of a Christian practice for public policy is less obvious. What, for example, are the policy implications of baptism and communion? Inspired by John Howard Yoder's book *Body Politics*, this year the *Washington Memo* will explore the message for the nations of these and other basic Christian practices.

The apostle Paul writes, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:27–29). Paul's point here is the unity and equality of believers through baptism, not the eradication of all differences.

Congregations that live out the meaning of baptism will experience transformed relationships and unity across the lines of division and conflict in the world. Many Peoples Mennonite Fellowship in Dallas, Texas, highlighted on page 7, is a new example.

Nations which respond positively to this witness will adopt public policies and nurture cultural values that promote mutual respect, equal rights, equal treatment, and unity with justice among peoples and nations of diverse ethnicities and cultures. Accordingly, articles in this *Memo* advocate for such public policies. Lacking faith in Christ, the nations cannot be expected to act completely according to God's will. But the church's witness can help move them more in this direction. ■

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BY J. DARYL BYLER

While countries often make decisions narrowly based on their national security interests, the church offers and calls for a much broader perspective.

Baptized Into One Body

When our small MCC delegation visited Iraq in May 2002, we met with doctors, educators, farmers and government officials. But we made a special point of connecting with Iraqi Christians. At a time when war between the United States and Iraq seemed imminent, we wanted to tangibly declare our bond in Christ that transcends national allegiances and borders.

We carried along oil lamps from North American Mennonites as gifts for the Iraqi church. “We greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who binds us together as one,” wrote James Schrag and Dan Nighswander, Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada leaders, in letters that accompanied the oil lamps.

The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995) says that, in our baptism, we are “incorporated into Christ’s body on earth, the church.” Anabaptists understand the body of Christ to be a “holy nation” with global reach (1 Peter 2:9).

In Christ, human differences—nationality, race, class and gender—are not erased. But they are no longer the basis for assigning value, power and status in relationships.

“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free,” writes Paul (1 Corinthians 12:13). Each part belongs (vv. 14–16). Each part is necessary for the well-being of the whole (vv. 17–21). No part is insignificant (vv. 22–25). The body suffers or rejoices as a whole (v. 26).

Paul and other early church leaders understood that Gentiles—once considered inferior by the Jews—were to be incorporated into the body of Christ as full heirs to God’s promises made to Abraham and Sarah (Galatians 3:29).

The body of Christ was formed, “not by the victory of one part over another, [not] by the conversion of the Gentile world to Judaism, but by the harmonious union of the warring elements into something altogether new,” writes New Testament scholar Francis Beare. “The Gentiles . . . are not beaten into submission to the religion of Israel, but are given an equal part in the making of the new [humanity].”

All this is instructive for the public policy witness of Christians living in the United States. As the world’s dominant military and economic power, the United States is now able to impose its will on other nations. With increasing frequency, the United States has threatened to act alone or has acted without regard for the interests of others. Sadly, this pattern will only serve to isolate the United States from the rest of the world.

U.S. churches must give witness to a different way of relating globally. For Anabaptists, the Mennonite World Conference provides a practical forum for such relationships to emerge.

Those who have been baptized into one body begin to model mutual relationships and equitable sharing of resources. And while countries often make decisions narrowly based on their *national* security interests, the church offers and calls for a much broader perspective: What best serves the *global* security interests? Ironically, in the long run, national interests are best served by considering global interests.

As Christians, our baptism has much broader implications than we may have first imagined. ■

WASHINGTON MEMO is written by Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office staff. It interprets national legislation and policy, seeking to reflect biblical concerns for justice and peace as represented in the work and statements of MCC U.S. and Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. All biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

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Responding to Prison Rape

Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured (Hebrews 13:3).

The present U.S. prison and jail population is more than two million. It is estimated that one out of every ten inmates has been raped.

Prison rape is an unacceptable cruelty that further increases violence and crime, the transmission of HIV infection and other serious diseases, racial hostilities, suicide and prison unrest. It is a significant problem for youth, the physically weak, and female inmates.

Inmates deserve humane treatment. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that institutional neglect of prison rape is indeed cruel and that prisoners' safety must be upheld. Many advocates and a group of bipartisan policymakers think so as well.

In any given year in the United States, 500,000–600,000 inmates return to society. Ex-offenders are to be reintegrated and welcomed back in our communities. Advocacy, policy, and ministry must address the issues prisoners face—employment, housing, education, treatment for substance abuse, and prison rape—before, during, and after incarceration.

The Prison Rape Reduction Act was introduced in last year's session of Congress. The bill would shed more public light on this concern by requiring annual reports from the Department of Justice. It would

also help establish standards and give grants to state and local governments to enhance the prevention and prosecution of prison rape. You can urge your members of Congress to support this bill, for it will be reintroduced in this session.

Our Lord has instructed us to visit and care for those in prison as if we are encountering him (Matthew 25:36). Baptism further extends this commission by demonstrating that every person—whatever his or her background or experience—can be united with Christ. It is the action that prevails against the threats, trauma, sin and death in the world (and from such things as prison rape). Baptism brings newness of life, a sense of healing, and welcome into the family of God. ■

BY DAVID M. WHETTSTONE

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CAPITAL QUOTES

“Those who choose to live in denial will eventually be forced to live in fear.”

—President George Bush, signing the resolution authorizing force against Iraq, October 16, 2002.

“The United States is an overwhelming presence right now, there's no doubt about that. Everybody will tell you that. I sometimes think that there's an unwarranted fear that the United States will use that power in the way that other overwhelming powers did.”

—Unnamed senior official in the Bush administration (Washington Post, Sept. 1, 2002).

“It is as though we are determined to regress to the most primitive condition of existence in the animal world, of the survival of the fittest.”

—President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, on the failure of the global community to live up to commitments to reduce the gap between

Pontius' Puddle



R-E-S-P-E-C-T

A Call for Mutual Relations . . .

BY J. DARYL BYLER

. . . with the Middle East

When the Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations invited several Mennonite Central Committee staff to his home in New York City in 1995, I wasn't sure what to expect.

What I experienced was an incredible Persian meal, gracious hospitality and fascinating conversation. The ambassador peppered us with questions about Mennonites. He was curious about why MCC wanted to work in Iran.

The ambassador also wanted to tell us about Iran. Did we know that Iran provides assistance to more refugees than any other country in the world? Were we aware that women comprise nearly half of the students at Iranian universities and that there are more women in the Iranian Parliament than in the U.S. Senate?

It was clear that the ambassador was proud of Iran's rich history, art and culture.

The ambassador—now the Iranian foreign minister—expressed hope for the day when diplomatic relationships would be restored between Iran and the United States. But he said this would not be possible without mutual respect. Iran would not settle for the kind of heavy-handed relationship that the United States had with Iran prior to the rev-

olution in 1979—including a U.S.-backed coup to overthrow the democratically elected government of Iran in 1953.

The desire for mutual respect is a theme I have heard again and again while traveling in the Middle East. For example, Iranians and Iraqis—whose cultures highly value human dignity—believe that the United States simply doesn't appreciate their countries or treat them with respect. Instead, the United States maintains a threatening military presence in the Persian Gulf, restricts trade and brands them as terrorist states.

Iranian and Iraqi government officials admit that there are serious policy differences between their countries and the United States. And they are open to dialoguing about those differences. But they don't want the United States to dominate or dictate the conversation or relationship. Unfortunately, U.S. President George W. Bush's recent labeling of Iraq and Iran as part of an axis of evil did little to improve the spirit of respect.

The world would be a safer place if U.S. leaders would share meals and face-to-face conversation with their Iraqi and Iranian counterparts, rather than trading threats through the media and seeking to paint one another as evil. ■

The desire for mutual respect is a theme I have heard again and again while traveling in the Middle East.

BY RACHELLE SCHLABACH

. . . with North Korea

In the fall of 2002, North Korea admitted to a U.S. official that they may be developing nuclear weapons. While their confession is certainly troubling, some analysts see it as a sign that they are willing to discuss an end to the program.

The United States has chosen to work this out diplomatically instead of militarily, for which they should be commended. But the subsequent U.S. decision to cut off all discussions with the North Koreans does not help build trust.

The United States insists that the North Koreans must stop their nuclear weapons program *before* any conversations can start. In contrast, South Korea and Japan believe that dialogue would lead to a halt in the North's nuclear program.

Clearly the North Koreans are aware of the difference in power and military might between them and the United States. Economically, North Korea is struggling to stay afloat while the United States has vast financial resources.

Militarily, the United States has thousands of nuclear weapons and maintains 37,000 troops along the Korean border. It is not clear that the North Koreans have even one nuclear weapon.

In 2001, a top North Korean general told a visiting U.S. scholar, "I don't know anybody who believes that we need nuclear weapons, but everybody is thinking in that direction in view of the hostile policies of the Bush administration."

The current relationship between the two countries is based more on fear and exag-

geration of threats than on any sense of equality and respect. Yet a foundation of respect is critical to any meaningful dialogue.

Those of us who are baptized into the family of faith and called to the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18) should call on the Bush administration to begin frank, respectful conversations with the North Koreans about issues of mutual concern. Doing so could begin to break down some decades-old divisions and create a space for peace to grow. ■

The current relationship between the two countries is based more on fear and exaggeration of threats than on any sense of equality and respect.

... in Economics

BY MARTIN SHUPACK

In 1997 several representative of faith groups met with an Assistant Secretary of Treasury. We wanted the U.S. government to lead an international initiative to cancel the debts of impoverished countries. Our host responded that the United States might support giving these countries some assistance in making their debt service payments, but opposed accelerating debt cancellation. This, he explained, would diminish U.S. leverage over their economic policies.

Rarely do U.S. officials clearly admit to wanting to run the affairs of other countries. But it was the admission, not the reality, that was surprising. The United States uses various means to shape the economic policies of developing countries.

Debt is not the only means of control. The United States, Canada, European Union and Japan use the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other global institutions to impose their will on developing countries. Key WTO negotiations are held in secret invitation-only consultations with the most powerful governments and a selection of developing country representatives. Governments in the global South do not have the political or economic resources to successfully promote the interests of their people.

For example, the rich industrialized countries set rules that require developing countries to dismantle support systems for small farmers and open up their markets to rich countries' agricultural products, manufactured goods, services and corporations. But these same wealthy countries use various barriers and subsidies to keep many developing country products out of their own markets.

At the December 1999 WTO meeting, African delegates formally protested that, "We, the Ministers of Member States of the Organization of African Unity, wish to express our disappointment and disagreement with the way in which negotiations are being conducted. . . . There is no transparency in the proceedings and African countries are being marginalized and generally excluded on issues of vital importance for our peoples and their future." Similar complaints were made after the 2001 WTO meeting.

As part of the church's witness, baptism into Jesus Christ signals that all nations must end domination and embrace a new kind of mutual respect and equality among peoples in global political and economic relationships. ■

"African countries are being marginalized and excluded on issues of vital importance for our peoples and their future."

—AFRICAN TRADE MINISTERS

From “Keep Out” to “Welcome Home”

BY BETHANY SPICHER

Immigrants and refugees are in danger of being labeled security risks rather than national assets.

It's midnight at the train yards in Matamoros, Mexico. You and ten friends have left coffee fields and factory jobs, walked through deserts, clambered over fences, eluded the Border Patrol, and finally lowered yourselves into the belly of a grain car. “Just a short ride,” the smuggler promises; he collects his money, then slams the hatch. You're left in darkness, waiting.

It's rush hour on the shore road in Key Biscayne, Florida. You and 200 others have left persecution and poverty in Haiti, paid your life's savings to the boat owner, sailed for days in blazing sun, escaped the Coast Guard. Finally, the boat grinds on rock, everyone cheers, children splash ashore, men dodge traffic, sirens scream. You'll spend the night in prison, waiting.

Last fall, in the same month, 11 Mexican immigrants died on a train to Iowa, and more than 200 Haitian immigrants were detained off a boat in Florida: victims of a global economy that rolls out the red carpet when it is *corporations* that relocate, and a national government that closes the doors when it is *people* who migrate.

With wages depressed by ruined economies or communities fractured by oppressive governments, Mexicans and Haitians come to the United States to pick our fruit, pack our meat, clean our offices, and build our homes—to fill jobs no one else wants. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that, as the U.S. workforce ages, the number of low-skill, low-wage jobs will increase—from 53.2 million in 2000 to 60.9 million in 2010. Even as the U.S. economy posts “Help Wanted” on every corner, the U.S. government enforces “No Trespassing” at the borders.

For Mexicans, “No Trespassing” means miles of metal fence, hundreds of flood lights, and Border Patrol agents behind every bush. Migrants skirt around cities to hike through deserts, where more than 2,000 people have died since 1995. For Haitians, “No Trespassing” means waiting in crowded detention centers for months without attorneys, and writing complex asylum applications in English without translators. While other refugees are freed to work while their status is determined, Haitians are detained until they prove “credible fear” of persecution. Some give up: fear of abuse in prison is worse than fear of death at home.

Easy as it is to blame amorphous forces like “the market” and “the government,” it is ultimately “we the people” who support economies with our dollars and policies with our votes. If we find that sisters and brothers from Mexico and Haiti are suffering, we've got to become advocates—for their sake and ours. As the newly-created Department of Homeland Security takes shape, immigrants and refugees are in danger of being labeled security risks rather than national assets. In response, we can advocate for sane border policies for Mexican immigrants and against discriminatory detention laws for Haitian refugees.

Not only are we part of the market and the government, we are the *church*. We've got to learn how to keep house so that Mexicans and Haitians will not have to leave their homes; or so that when they do, they will be welcomed in our own. And this isn't about charity. The U.S. economy depends on immigrants' wages, the U.S. government runs on immigrants' taxes. If anyone stands to benefit from houseguests, it is the U.S. church—which could use a little converting by immigrants' faith. As the church, we believe that Christ has inaugurated a new definition of who's in and who's out of the house. In the kingdom of God, the lights are on, the door is open, and dinner's waiting. ■

Breaking Down the Dividing Wall

The wind off Lake Ray Roberts made the day feel colder than its fifty-some degrees, but the sun was bright and the beach was clean and the gathered of Many Peoples Mennonite Fellowship would not be denied our community's first baptism.

Galatians 3:28 shaped our lakeside service, in which we thanked God for the young man we were about to baptize, Gabriel Guerrero, and for his decision in the wake of Sept. 11 to follow Jesus in embracing peacemaking rather than violence. When Gabriel and his two *pastoras* went into the water, there was much splashing in the Spirit and rejoicing in the Lord. It felt so holy and so joyful all at once, as though we were all three reborn in that moment, as though Another stood in the water with us, leading us into the reign of God.

When we read Galatians 3:28 ("no longer Jew or Greek") as baptismal language, Acts 10:34–35 ("God shows no partiality") sharpens the point. In Christ Jesus, there is still African-American and Latina/o, Asian and Anglo, with all our valuable particularities and beautiful pluralities, but without the prejudices of the world. In Christ Jesus there is still male and female, since both are made in the diverse image of God, but there is no privileging of one gender over another.

The only partiality we respect is Christ's concern in Matthew 25:40 for the least of these, what liberation theology calls God's preferential option for the poor. God's call to love neighbor as self means we must hear the call of the oppressed neighbor, and respond with repentance for personal sin, and radical restructuring of society to remove the causes of oppression.

Looking at us, some have wondered whether men would accept women as pastors. Casual observance reveals that men make up more than half the gathered community on most occasions, so that does not seem to be a problem.

What is problematic is that our conference's salary guidelines reward the educational accumulation of the privileged pastor, effectively disadvantaging the Latina pastor doing the same work. We have decided to average our salaries and split the difference, enabling Esther to benefit a bit from Tammerie's privilege, and allowing Tammerie to enter in another small way into solidarity with Esther. This structural change makes our commitment as real as the water pouring off a young man and his two pastors.

Structural healing is needed, because the Body of Christ is broken by racism, sexism, materialism and other ways of coveting power and privilege. Jesus is our healer, our peace: "in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us" (Ephesians 2:14).

By Christ's leading, we have taken down as many barriers as possible: our community includes worshipers of various ethnicities, denominations, even different geographic locations. Anyone who feels called to join us in our journey is welcomed on the Way. When we open ourselves to the power of Jesus' nonviolent love, we open ourselves to transformation: fear becomes desire, individualism becomes community, power becomes solidarity.

At Many Peoples, in celebrating baptism into Christ's death and resurrection, we let our divisions be put to death that we might be transformed into new life, recreated as a people healed together, redeemed together, liberated together, working for each other's justice, in love. ■

IN OTHERS' WORDS

BY ESTHER MARTINEZ AND TAMMERIE SPIRES

Esther Martinez and Tammerie Spires are co-pastors at Many Peoples Mennonite Fellowship in Dallas, Texas.

Pastor Spires notes: Many Peoples Mennonite Fellowship is an anti-racist community of faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. We began working in love for justice January 15, 2001 (Martin Luther King Day) and started public worship one year later—again on Martin Luther King Day.

**By Christ's leading,
we have taken down
as many barriers as
possible.**

GUN VIOLENCE CONFERENCE

The Ninth Annual Citizens' Conference to Stop Gun Violence will be held February 21–22, 2003 in Arlington, Va. The conference will cover a broad range of topics, including a focus on youth and gun violence. Registration fee is \$135. For more information, contact the Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence, 1023 15th Street, NW, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 408-7560; conference@efsgv.org.



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SOUND THE TRUMPET!

Over the past year, we asked readers to respond to a variety of issues. Here is a summary of where they stand.	
Civil Liberties	The USA PATRIOT Act has resulted in a push for greater latitude in exercising law enforcement, prosecution, and intelligence gathering procedures, as homeland security and terrorism prevention are further refined.
Colombia	Congress approved funding to begin protection of an oil pipeline in Colombia. A budget bill, containing nearly \$400 million in military aid for Colombia and a shift from counter-narcotics to counter-terrorism, awaits action.
Global AIDS	Congress failed to authorize a substantial increase for global HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. Actual U.S. spending on global AIDS for 2003 may increase by \$200 million to approximately \$1 billion, far short of the \$2.5 billion needed annually from the United States.
Immigration	Congress voted to create a Department of Homeland Security, which will include both the service and enforcement arms of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Advocacy groups are wary of legislation that would label immigrants and refugees "security risks."
International Debt	Congress failed to pass legislation to cancel enough of impoverished countries' debt to ensure that they did not spend more than 10 percent of their national budgets for debt service payments, or 5 percent for countries with serious health crises.
Iraq	Congress authorized the use of military force against Iraq, but urged the president to first work through the United Nations to seek immediate disarmament. The U.N. Security Council passed a unanimous resolution granting broad powers to weapons inspectors. Iraq has agreed to the conditions and inspectors have returned to Iraq.
Mandatory Military Service	The Universal Military Training and Service Act requiring young men to do basic military training and education for six months to a year, never left committee. The suggestion that public duty and service are closely tied to military readiness will reappear in the coming Congress.
Racial Profiling	The President and Attorney General stated this practice must cease. Yet incidences continue to be reported, and a bill aimed at stopping the practice made no progress in the past Congress. There is little chance for successful reintroduction in the 108th Congress.
TANF	Unable to reconcile House and Senate versions of welfare reform renewal—especially in regards to work requirements, childcare funding and marriage promotion—Congress extended TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) as is until March.
U.S. Militarism	President Bush has requested \$396 billion for military spending in 2003. Congress has already appropriated more than \$355 billion of this amount, and the total will likely reach nearly \$400 billion.