

- A publication of Mennonite Central Committee
- May–June 2001
- Volume XXXIII
- No. 3



## U.S. GLOBAL DOMINANCE

*Blessed are the meek*

**We live in an age which seduces us away from meekness.**

### Learning from Humility

BY DAVID M. WHETTSTONE

*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5).*

Those who are resolutely sure of their actions often claim “might makes right”—peace on our terms. However, meekness quickly refines actions and clarifies one’s use of power and truth. It has a high regard for love and community in this life on God’s earth.

As believers in Jesus Christ, we yearn to be meek. No one ever wants to be accused of the arrogance and unaccountability that fly in the face of this good character and the fruits it can bear.

We live in an age which seduces us away from meekness. We begin to believe meekness is weakness and haplessness instead of purposeful humility. Aspirations and practices of meekness become less of a priority. However, compassionate concerns for the oppressed can bring meekness back to our hearts, our witness, and our community.

Some of these concerns are expressed in the following pages:

Do we hear the cries of those who are dominated by governments armed by U.S. weapons? Will we heed the voices of South

American *campesinos* submerged in violence and whose crops and livelihood are destroyed by our determination to wage a drug war? How many children have to die from our refusal to clean up the toxic wastes from our former military bases in the Philippines? Can we believe that human sources of global warming are creating problems for health and environment? Do we resist the deceptive self-interest of tax cuts, knowing the possible impact on public spending for the common good?

Sisters and brothers across the globe lament these problems. The world interprets their voices as meek. Yet, they should capture the attention of believers who seek justice for those who cry out against oppression.

Meekness is actively seeking justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with our God. It moves us from complacency to resist a moral triumphalism that insists most U.S. actions and expectations are right and fair for everyone. Meekness will give us the courage of self-reflection and change.

In pronouncing this third beatitude, Jesus may have had the Psalmist in mind. This is both a challenge and blessing—for, perhaps we can join the meek who will “delight themselves in abundant prosperity” (Psalm 37:11). This is the fruit of meekness, this is the earth we want to inherit. ■

#### IN THIS MEMO

Stretch Limos	2
Crayon Weapons	3
Capital Quotes	3
Climate Bully	4
Tax Cut Idols	5
War on Drugs	6
Conquest of Humility	7
Sound the Trumpet!	8

BY J. DARYL BYLER

**U.S. military assets are scattered around the world to ensure that the United States gets its *full share*—indeed, many times its *fair share*—of the earth’s resources.**

## Stretch Limos and the Foal of a Donkey

*Tell the daughter of Zion, Look your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Matthew 21:5).*

Leaving the MCC Washington Office on the eve of the presidential inauguration, my walk to the Metro train was detoured by Capitol police who had cordoned off the block for security reasons. Stretch limousines lined the street to deposit their powerful occupants at a pre-inaugural dinner in the Library of Congress. The president himself travels in a bulletproof limousine—part of a noisy motorcade with enough Secret Service firepower to launch a small war.

Several weeks later, I was in Jerusalem. One afternoon I climbed the Mount of Olives to the site where some say Jesus wept over the city (Luke 19:41). From this panoramic view of Jerusalem, one can easily imagine Jesus’ winding route as he descended the Mount of Olives on a colt and ascended the palm-lined path up to Jerusalem.

Jesus had once taught, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). In his “triumphal entry,” Jesus demonstrated just how radically different the reign of God looks.

The way of Jesus—depicted by his donkey ride at a time when many wanted to declare him king—is humble, vulnerable, close to the people, trusting God. The way of Wash-

ington—symbolized by luxurious limousines—is too often pompous, obsessed with self-preservation, distant, trusting the trappings of power.

Sadly, this Washington style is representative of how the United States frequently chooses to engage the world. Far from being meek, it might better be described as dominating. As the world’s undisputed economic and military superpower, the United States knows how to get what it wants.

Chris Ney of the War Resisters League writes: “As the United States emerged from the Second World War as the world’s leading economy, the Pentagon . . . became the global police force. Through the use of military training for foreign soldiers and the establishment of overseas bases, the U.S. military positioned itself to enforce the rules of the global economy.”

In the Persian Gulf, for example, some 24,000 U.S. troops protect U.S. “strategic” (economic) interests. U.S. military assets are scattered around the world to ensure that the United States gets its *full share*—indeed, many times its *fair share*—of the earth’s resources.

According to Jesus’ beatitude, the current U.S. approach represents flawed logic. Conquering, colonizing and controlling may be the way to exploit the earth and extract its resources. But meekness and humility are the only path for those who wish to inherit the earth.

The meek recognize that the earth is the Lord’s (Psalm 24). The earth is God’s to bequeath. Inheritance is determined by the giver, not the taker. We enjoy the gifts of inheritance when we gratefully receive and share the earth’s bounty, not when we take, hoard, or hold tightly.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ■

---

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.

Staff: J. Daryl Byler (Director), Elisabeth T. Harder, Christina Leaño, Rachelle Schlabach (Managing Editor), Martin Shupack, David Whettstone.

To contact the MCC U.S. Washington Office, please see our address on the back page. See our weekly commentary at [www.thirdway.com](http://www.thirdway.com)

Washington Memo (USPS 130-310) is published bi-monthly by Mennonite Central Committee, Akron, PA. Periodical postage paid at Akron, PA. This issue went to press April 23, 2001.

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE: Washington Memo subscription rates are \$10 for one year; \$18 for two years. Send request and check to MCC, PO Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500. For address changes, send your old address with your new address to MCC. Allow 2–4 weeks for address change. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to MCC, PO Box 500, Akron, PA 17501.

IF YOU ARE A SUBSCRIBER: Please check the top of your mailing label for your subscription’s ending date. If it is within the next three months, please send in your renewal to the address above. Thanks for helping us save paper and energy!

# Crayon Weapons

BY CHRISTINA LEAÑO

Crayons are hardly a match for the U.S. military. But they were the only “weapons” that six-year-old Crizel Valencia had in battling leukemia, believed to be caused by toxic wastes in the former U.S. Clark Air Base in the Philippines. Crizel’s drawings of butterflies and herself, as a little bald girl underneath an umbrella, were later converted into cards sold to pay for her chemotherapy.

The “meekness” of Crizel’s drawings contrast starkly with the dominating military presence the United States had in the Philippines for almost a century. Although cloaked in terms of “mutual defense” or “joint interest,” the thrust of the bases, as one commander of Clark Air Base once said, was to “provide the punch to protect our [U.S.] trade initiatives and economic interests.”

This self-inflated attitude is reflected in the U.S. military’s refusal to take responsibility for the toxic legacy on these bases.

The United States carries its presumptuous attitude around the world. The U.S. military is present in some 800 locations in over 140 countries across the globe, ranging from communication sites to major naval bases. Yet the United States spends only about \$180 million annually for environmental concerns on these overseas bases—a fraction of the nearly \$4 billion total yearly environmental budget of the Department of Defense.

Many countries are starting to call the United States on this blatant disrespect. Frustrated with direct negotiation, the Panamanian government has turned to the United Nations to raise its concerns over the U.S. mishandling of leftover unexploded ord-

nance. Other peoples and governments—from Okinawa to South Korea, Vieques to Bermuda—also continue to raise this issue with the United States.

So the inheritors of U.S. global dominance challenge it the best that they can. Even if it only means using crayons. Today, in memory of Crizel’s humble yet enduring spirit, her drawings are being sent to members of Congress and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to remind them of U.S. responsibility in the Philippines (see Sound the Trumpet on p. 8).

Let us also be comforted that Crizel, who died last year, now has the inheritance that God has promised—filled with the butterflies and flowers once found only in her crayon-colored pictures. ■

## CAPITAL QUOTES

*“We will not do anything that harms our economy, because first things first, are the people who live in America.”*

—President Bush, explaining why the United States will not regulate industrial emissions of carbon dioxide, which contribute to global warming.

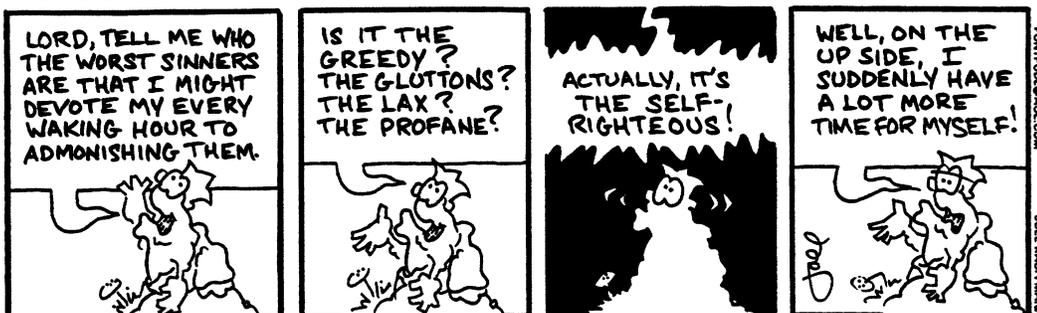
*“U.S. global . . . influence will be unparalleled . . . in 2015. This power not only will ensure America’s preeminence, but also will cast the United States as a key driver of the international system. . . . Some states—adversaries and allies—will try at times to check what they see as American ‘hegemony.’”*

—From a recent report by the CIA’s National Intelligence Council.

*“Perhaps the most effective way of stilling the prophetic voice is to encourage the faith community to become dependent on the temporal powers. . . . Money quiets opposition in a way that persecution cannot.”*

—Florence Kimball, of the Friends Committee for National Legislation, in reference to President Bush’s Faith-Based Initiative.

## Ponius' Puddle



# The Climate Bully

---

BY RACHELLE SCHLABACH

Nearly every child has met up with a bully who, when confronted, denies doing anything wrong and in fact, blames the other child, saying *she* is the one who should be punished.

It is all too easy to see a similar pattern in the U.S. response to global climate change. The United States and other industrialized countries have largely created the problem over the past century with their excessive emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. The United States *alone* produces 25 percent of all human-produced carbon dioxide emissions, despite having only 4 percent of the world's population.

Yet the Bush administration has decided not to cap carbon dioxide emissions from power plants, and has announced its refusal to participate in an international climate change treaty. Their argument is that they will not make any changes which could harm the U.S. economy, and that developing countries must make changes as well.

Too often forgotten are the costs of *not* addressing climate change—health care expenses related to air pollution, the high price that industries like insurance and agriculture will increasingly have to bear if climate change continues, and lost opportunities for investment in renewable resources. Worse, this attitude assumes that monetary considerations are somehow separate from sustainable living and taking responsibility for our choices.

China is often held up as a country that must make changes before the United States will. But compared to its rate of economic growth, China's emissions levels are about half what might be expected. Further, per capita energy use in China has stayed about even since 1990, while U.S. per capita consumption has increased by 15 percent.

Earlier this year a U.N.-appointed group of scientists released the most comprehensive report on climate change yet. They concluded that the earth's average surface temperature will increase between 2.5 and 10.4 degrees Fahrenheit in the next 100 years. Such an increase will mean more storms, flooding and droughts.

And the cause of climate change is clear. According to Dr. Robert Watson, the group's chair, "human activities, without any doubt whatsoever, are changing the atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases."

The panel also found that developing countries are most vulnerable and much less able to adapt due to their limited financial and technical resources. As many as 50 million to 100 million people in parts of Asia will be at risk by 2080 if predictions for sea level rise hold true. Small island nations in the Pacific are at risk of disappearing entirely.

Responding to climate change is part of our obligation as stewards of God's creation. It is also a matter of seeking justice for our neighbors, by ensuring that they are not the ones who pay for our lifestyle choices. We must humbly confess our role, taking heed to remove the beam in our own eye before asking others to remove the speck in theirs.

As people of faith, we can model what it means to be stewards of God's creation and to respect our sisters and brothers across the globe. We can encourage our government to make policy shifts toward incentives for using renewable energies and increasing energy efficiency, even as we work to reduce our consumption of fossil fuels.

The world is watching to see if the climate bully is ready to be a responsible classmate. ■

**Developing countries are most vulnerable—and much less able to adapt—to the effects of climate change.**

# The Idolization of Tax Cuts

According to recent polls, most Americans have not caught the tax cut fever raging in Washington. It is a sign of health to resist the idolization of a few extra dollars for personal spending, especially when public spending for the common good must be sacrificed.

In February, President Bush introduced the main elements of a federal income tax relief agenda, which he estimates would cost \$1.6 trillion over the next 10 years. The major pieces of this plan have already been granted preliminary approval in the House, but the Senate has resolved to pursue a smaller package of cuts. The legislative process and debate are far from over.

Rather than being swept along by the rhetoric of self-interest, may we consider some of the complicating realities of a tax cut of this magnitude. The Bush tax relief plan:

- *Disproportionately favors those who have the most.* The administration has indicated that the top 1 percent of U.S. wage earners would get 22 percent of the total dollar value of the tax cut, while the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities puts the estimate closer to 36 percent of the benefits. Twelve million families with incomes below 150 percent of the poverty line would receive no tax reduction, even though many pay sizable payroll (Medicare and Social Security) taxes.
- *Doubly disadvantages those most in need.* Not only would tax reductions bypass the poorest citizens, funding would have to be reduced for the social programs on which they greatly depend. More than 11 percent of our neighbors live in poverty (including almost 14 percent of children) and more than 15 percent are without any form of health insurance. The churches simply cannot meet all their basic needs. It is wrong, then, to deny our government the resources it needs to adequately fund education, low-income housing, health care, Social Security, food and nutrition, and other programs.
- *Depends upon a theoretical surplus.*

The 10-year surplus of federal revenues are merely *projections*—which may not materialize. Furthermore, the term *surplus* refers to what is left after needs have been met. Congress, however, has taken steps to cut taxes before it passes a budget. The budget, which reflects our national priorities, is being shaped by the cost of these cuts.

Cutting taxes need not run counter to responsible resource stewardship. But the poorest households should benefit, too. Opportunities to suggest alternatives to the whole of President Bush's mammoth plan include:

- Doubling the child tax credit as proposed, but urging that it be made fully *refundable*. Families who do not owe income taxes but pay other federal taxes would then also receive the credit.
- Supporting efforts to allow non-itemizers to claim a tax deduction for their charitable contributions, which may encourage persons to donate more to churches' work with poverty.
- Urging an increase in and expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which provides relief from the burden of payroll taxes on low-income families and individuals.

The idolization of tax cuts, especially in the midst of great need, runs against the grain of our Christian vocation. As taxpayers who follow Christ's model rather than our own self-interest, may we uphold the vision of an equitable and responsible tax policy that allows government to serve the common good. ■

BY ELISABETH T. HARDER

**Twelve million families with incomes below 150 percent of the poverty line would receive *no* tax reduction under Bush's plan.**

## HELPFUL WEBSITES

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org)  
The President's Agenda for Tax Relief:  
[www.whitehouse.gov/news/reports/taxplan.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/reports/taxplan.html)

# U.S. Arrogance and the War on Drugs

---

BY MARTIN SHUPACK

**The irony of U.S. drug-war arrogance is that the program is a failure.**

The U.S. drug certification process is a much-resented example of foreign-policy hubris. Every year the U.S. government “certifies” whether or not other countries are doing enough to stop the flow of illegal drugs into the United States. Countries where drug production or transit take place must implement U.S.-designed law enforcement and military policies to eliminate these activities. If U.S. officials judge they are not doing enough, they will be “decertified” and may lose economic assistance and trade benefits.

This certification procedure has generated significant resentment among Latin American governments and people. According to Jorge Castaneda, the new Mexican foreign minister, “Certification is a thorn in hemispheric relations.”

Under U.S. pressure, many countries have intensified punitive and often indiscriminate law enforcement measures and increasingly use their military forces to combat drugs. The Bolivian Congress has set up a parallel court system for alleged drug offenders and some suspects have been imprisoned up to four years before being tried. Ecuador now allows a person to be detained merely on suspicion of drug trafficking. Mexico amended its law code in a way that makes it easier to convict suspects on the basis of confessions extracted under torture.

The whopping U.S. billion dollar aid package for Colombia is intensifying the civil war, undermining the peace process, and increasing human rights violations, according to Colombian Mennonite leaders. This aid package has enabled the Colombian military to spray huge amounts of farmland in the coca-growing regions. In the process, large areas of food crops have also been fumigated, devastating local farmers and multiplying hunger.

One mayor’s office in the Valle del Guamez issued a statistical report based on complaints registered in just one of the sprayed municipalities. Over 8,000 hectares of fumigated land had been planted in food crops, not coca. More than 5,000 people reported health problems related to the spraying, including diarrhea, vomiting, fever, rashes, and headaches. Over 171,000 farm animals were affected and many died. While the U.S. government claims that the herbicidal agent, glyphosate, does not harm humans or animals, U.S.-marketed glyphosate products warn users not to allow contact with people “either directly or through drift.”

The irony of U.S. drug-war arrogance is that the program is a failure. Getting rid of production and trafficking in one country simply shifts these activities to other countries. For example, when coca eradication programs decreased cultivation in Peru and Bolivia, Colombian cultivation increased. Today in the United States, drugs are cheaper and more available than ever. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld made this point in his recent Senate confirmation hearings, saying, “I am one who believes that the drug problem is probably overwhelmingly a demand problem, and that . . . if the demand persists, it’s going to find ways to get what it wants; and if it isn’t from Colombia, it will be from somebody else.” Yet the U.S. government shows no indication of changing its misguided and destructive policies.

President Bush and Congress would likely have more success by ending the U.S. bullying certification program, adopting a public health approach to the tragedy of addiction in our own country, and seeking a multilateral strategy in which the United States acts as a true partner with other countries to end the trade in illegal drugs. ■

# The U.S. Government and the Conquest of Humility

IN OTHER'S WORDS

Someone once said the shortest road between human beings and the truth is a story, and I would like to begin this reflection with one.

“They say that a woman arrived at her home and caught her cat by surprise with his paw in the fish tank, taking one of the fish out to eat it. When the owner scolded the cat, he replied, “I wasn’t going to consume it; I was only taking it out so that it wouldn’t drown.”

The cat justified his actions, saying he was saving the fish. But we all know that if we take fish out of water, they die. Moreover, we know that cats like to eat fish.

Sometimes governments act like the cat. They say they are doing a particular action to save the people, but instead of saving, the people are left under threat of death. This is what happens with the spiral of arms. Governments want to convince their citizens that arms can guarantee security, but they know that arms are used to guarantee the government’s power.

By their very nature, arms have the function of producing death, destruction or fear. For that reason they are the preferred instrument of violence to illegitimately take over power. In light of these ideas we can examine the behavior of the U.S. government toward the Colombian people.

Many Americans, particularly youth, suffer from profound existential and spiritual emptiness which leads them into desperation. They try to fill the space with work, high-risk games and drugs. This produces a huge demand for drugs—alcohol, cigarettes, cocaine and others. The U.S. government could legitimately use taxpayer money to strengthen programs to offset drug consumption in their country and diminish the levels of demand.

The Colombian government is also conscious of the deep inequalities and social injustice within its borders. The social crisis and armed conflict have led many

people—as an escape from misery—to support themselves by cultivating plant material for drugs consumed in the United States.

The two governments could form an alliance to look for life-giving solutions to the social crises in their societies. Instead their alliance supports their own interests, behind a smokescreen of fighting against drugs. Almost behind citizens’ backs, representatives of the two governments met and wrote in English, without translating into Spanish, a plan that is mainly military, arms-focused and anti-environmental.

This war strategy, called “Plan Colombia,” favors the Colombian government’s struggle against insurgents, a U.S. government presence in the Andean region, and opportunities for the U.S. defense industry to sell arms. It does contain a small portion for social aid. However, only if this portion had been the majority would it have offered life-giving solutions to both societies.

These two governments have chosen a strategy of deception, like the cat. War is the art of deception; through destruction and death, war attempts to lead us to victory and conquest. Humility, on the other hand, is the path of truth and life that leads us towards God’s inheritance—the earth. Humility and war are antagonistic realities—the first cannot conquer but only reaches out in love, and the second feeds on hate and only knows how to conquer.

As the global family of faith, we must carry out our mandate to be light and salt and to proclaim the Prince of Peace’s message of love and life. We must stand against those that try to manipulate and deceive us. If our governments use our taxes for war and death, we will demand that they use them to bring life to the message, “blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

May God bless and guide you, and may God’s peace continue to push you onward. ■

BY RICARDO ESQUIVIA BALLESTAS

Ricardo Esquivia Ballestas directs Justapaz, the peace and justice organization of the Mennonite Church in Colombia.

Translation provided by Bonnie Klassen of Justapaz.

**Humility and war are antagonistic realities.**

MCC has produced a packet entitled, “Turning Toward Peace: Dollars and Letters for Colombia,” which includes background information on Colombian peace efforts, tax resistance and advocacy regarding Colombia. To receive a copy, contact Titus Peachey at (717) 859-1151 or [ttmp@mcc.org](mailto:ttmp@mcc.org).

# SOUND THE TRUMPET!

ISSUE	SUMMARY	ADVOCACY NEEDED
U.S. BASES IN PHILIPPINES	Nine years have passed since the last General Accounting Office study on environmental problems at the former U.S. bases in the Philippines. (GAO is an investigative arm of the U.S. Congress). An updated GAO study could be an important tool to raise awareness among members of Congress and to push for future legislation towards a cleanup of the former bases.	Urge your members of Congress to request a follow-up GAO report to investigate ongoing environmental problems in the former U.S. bases in the Philippines.
LANDMINES	Landmines kill or maim more than 20,000 people each year, mostly civilians. Some 139 countries have signed (and 111 have also ratified) the 1997 Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty. The United States has not. The Landmine Elimination and Victim Assistance Act of 2001 (H.R. 948 and S. 497) urges President Bush to join the mine ban treaty as soon as possible. It also directs the Pentagon to find alternatives to landmines and provides assistance for landmine victims.	Urge your representative and senators to co-sponsor H.R. 948 and S. 497 respectively. For more information, including a list of current co-sponsors and a sample advocacy letter, go to: <a href="http://www.banminesusa.org">www.banminesusa.org</a> .

## USEFUL ADDRESSES



MCC U.S. Washington Office  
 110 Maryland Ave NE  
 Suite 502  
 Washington DC 20002  
 (202) 544-6564  
[mccwash@mcc.org](mailto:mccwash@mcc.org)

Senator \_\_\_\_\_  
 United States Senate  
 Washington DC 20510  
 (202) 224-3121  
[www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)

Representative \_\_\_\_\_  
 House of Representatives  
 Washington DC 20515  
 (202) 224-3121  
[www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)

President George W. Bush  
 The White House  
 Washington DC 20500  
 (202) 456-1111  
[president@whitehouse.gov](mailto:president@whitehouse.gov)

21 South 12th Street  
 PO Box 500  
 Akron, PA 17501-0500

PERIODICALS  
 POSTAGE PAID  
 AT AKRON, PA

