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THY KINGDOM COME

Ambassadors for Christ

BY RACHELLE SCHLABACH

Jesus said to them,
 “All authority in heaven
 and on earth has been
 given to me.”

—MATTHEW 28:18

This issue of the *Washington Memo* is the second in our two-part series looking at “two-kingdom” theology.

Anabaptists have long affirmed the distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. But what exactly that means for our daily lives has been understood differently throughout history and by diverse Anabaptist groups.

In general, those with roots in Switzerland and southern Germany tended to draw a definite line of separation between church and state, acknowledging the state would bear the sword but calling Christians to non-violence. The articles written at Schleithem in 1527 called on Christians to separate from evil, and said that Christians should not serve in government. Followers of this tradition were content to be quiet, loyal citizens, only speaking up when the state forced them to go against their beliefs by fighting in war. This began to shift in the 1950s and 1960s, with a growing emphasis on the “Lordship of Christ” over all creation, including governments.

In contrast, many of those with Dutch and North German roots have been more willing to speak to government and even work actively within politics to transform those structures to reflect biblical values. Menno Simons’ writing provides a basis for this interpretation. He called on government officials to do justice, deliver the oppressed

and restrain “manifest deceivers” non-violently. By doing this, he said, “you may enlarge, help, and protect the kingdom of God.”

Today’s *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995) affirms the church’s role to “witness by being ambassadors for Christ, calling the nations (and all persons and institutions) to move toward justice, peace, and compassion for all people.”

But just as has been the case for more than 400 years, Anabaptists are still working out what this means for the situations we face in our lifetime. In this issue Daryl Byler reflects on the language churches use when speaking to government (p. 2) and gives us an update on the impending war (p. 7). To guide our thinking on two-kingdom theology, we print excerpts from denominational statements (p. 3) and have included biblical passages for further reflection. Two congregations share their responses to the Sept. 11 attacks (pp. 4–5) and Judy Zimmerman Herr of MCC’s Peace Office tells us of some of MCC’s deliberations on the church’s role in speaking to government (p. 6).

Our hope is that these stories will encourage others within the church to begin a similar dialogue. May God give us wisdom to discern the role of the church in our present-day situation. ■

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BY J. DARYL BYLER

At the name of Jesus every
knee should bend, in heaven
and on earth and under
the earth, and every tongue
confess that Jesus Christ
is Lord, to the glory of God
the Father.

—PHILIPPIANS 2:10-11

Language Barrier

After many trips to the Middle East, I am slowly learning a few Arabic words. I still rely heavily on translators. Often, however, it is the smiles and gestures of friendship which communicate most clearly to me.

Working on Capitol Hill sometimes feels like being in another country. There is a disconnect between the language and culture of the church and that of Washington.

From the church's humble roots at Pentecost to its global reach in the 21st century, the affirmation "Jesus is Lord!" has been central for Christians. For Anabaptists, this profession means seeking to follow Jesus' example—loving one another (even one's enemies), caring for those in vulnerable situations and living as signs of God's reign.

But what about those who don't recognize Jesus as Lord? The words of Jesus are hard enough for the church! Certainly governments are not expected to understand or apply them, are they?

Paul declares that Jesus is both "head of the church" (Colossians 1:18) and "head of every ruler and authority" (2:10). And because Jesus is Lord of all, our witness is incomplete if we only address individuals and not structures. The proclamation "Jesus is Lord" has both personal and political applications.

For this reason, the MCC Washington Office mission statement calls for "providing and encouraging prophetic witness to

the way of Christ on matters of U.S. public policy." This implies that God has one standard—the way of Christ—toward which the church and all authorities are called.

But practically, how does one bridge the gap when government officials speak the language of power and national security interests, while the church speaks of the cross? One is a language often rooted in fear. The other is a language of faith.

In a September 1996 letter urging former President Bill Clinton not to again bomb Iraq, then MCC U.S. board chair Rich Garber began with his native faith language. "Mennonites and Brethren in Christ are from a faith tradition that calls us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44), and teaches us that only good is powerful enough to overcome evil (Romans 12:21)," wrote Garber. "We believe that peace cannot be built with weapons of war or threats of violence, but only with plowshares of justice, respect and truthful dialogue (Isaiah 2:4)."

Garber then shifted to language more understandable to policymakers: "Even if you do not accept this theological understanding . . . we are compelled to ask: What possible good can come from further provocative violent acts? How will more missiles make the Gulf region more stable?"

Other MCC letters to government officials have affirmed particular policies as a small step toward the more radical biblical vision. In 1999, MCC wrote U.S. senators, urging them to ratify the nuclear test ban treaty as a first step toward "the longer-term goal of eliminating nuclear weapons from the face of the earth."

By using language which is familiar to policymakers we can urge them to make the best decisions possible within their current "culture."

Our only hope of making the language of faith clear and accessible for policymakers is rooting it in the lived-out example of the church. Perhaps this is why Jesus implores the church to let our light shine brightly. ■

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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To contact the MCC U.S. Washington Office, please see our address on the back page. See our weekly commentary at www.thirdway.com and visit our web site at www.mcc.org/us/washington.

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Two Kingdoms

Excerpts from Church Statements

“Confession of Faith,” U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, updated 2001

God has given governments authority to maintain law and order and to punish wrongdoers. Followers of Christ respect and pray for those in authority so that peaceful order may prevail. We deplore the loss of life in the exercise of state-sanctioned violence.

The primary allegiance of all Christians is to Christ’s kingdom, not the state or society. Because their citizenship is in heaven, Christians are called to resist the idolatrous temptation to give to the state the devotion that is owed to God. As ambassadors for Christ, Christians act as agents of reconciliation, and seek the well-being of all peoples.

“Political Involvement,” Mennonite Brethren general conference, 1966

The Christian, as a member of the church and of the kingdom, must evaluate and judge all social institutions and political structures in the light of Christ’s teaching. He must witness against evil in all areas of life . . . The prophetic voice of the church will be a vote of protest against racial discrimination, social injustice, economic exploitation, and political corruption. It will also be a voice of proclamation of the truth, love, and righteousness that are to govern all human relationships.

“Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective,” 1995*

The church is the spiritual, social and political body that gives its allegiance to God alone. As citizens of God’s kingdom, we trust in the power of God’s love for our defense. . . . The only Christian nation is the church of Jesus Christ, made up of people from every tribe and nation, called to witness to God’s glory.

In contrast to the church, governing authorities of the world have been instituted by God for maintaining order in societies. Such governments and other human insti-

tutions as servants of God are called to act justly and provide order. . . .

We witness to the nations by being that “city on a hill” which demonstrates the way of Christ. We also witness by being ambassadors for Christ, calling the nations (and all persons and institutions) to move toward justice, peace and compassion for all people. In so doing, we seek the welfare of the city to which God has sent us.

We understand that Christ, by his death and resurrection, has won victory over the powers, including all governments.

We witness against all forms of violence, including war among nations . . .

“Articles of Faith and Doctrine,” Brethren in Christ Church—North America, 1995

Jesus Christ commissions the church to make disciples of all the world’s peoples. . . . The people of God are also called to be a redemptive influence in the world, confronting corporate sin and seeking to overcome evil with good. They are to be a voice for righteousness, peace and justice.

The church recognizes the place God ordains for government in society. As Christians, we pray for the state and those who are in authority. At the same time, we believe loyalty to Christ and the church, which is trans-national, takes precedence over loyalty to the state. ■

Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than any human authority.”

—ACTS 5:29

CAPITAL QUOTES

“We’ve got influence, power, prestige and clout beyond any nation in the history of the world. It brings forth a certain amount of envy.”

—Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage (Washington Post, Sept. 1, 2002).

“If globalization continues to be conducted in the way that it has been . . . [it] will continue to create poverty and instability. Without reform, the backlash that has already started will mount, and discontent with globalization will grow.”

—Joseph Stiglitz, 2001 Nobel laureate in economics.

“What are we going to do about the United States?”

—Emil Salim, chair of a meeting leading up to a U.N. summit on

*Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pa. 15683. Used by permission.

BY KATHLEEN KRECKLOW

Kathleen Krecklow is the administrative assistant at First Mennonite Church of Upland, California.

God has made known to us the mystery of his will . . . to bring all things together in union with Christ, things in heaven and things on earth.

—EPHESIANS 1:9-10

Hearing Diverse Views

Here at First Mennonite Church of Upland in southern California, “two-kingdom theology” has not been hotly debated and that is not really a surprise. Being a diverse congregation, about 40 on a good Sunday, our members bring many different individual qualities and life circumstances to our life together.

There are 12 first languages represented among us. We have members and regular attenders who have been, or are, a part of the U.S. military. We are used to different ideas, different cultures, different worship experiences, different interpretations of biblical passages, different life choices, different everything. Because of our diversity you are likely to find almost every viewpoint that is possible on the current issues in our country.

We have church members who, immediately after Sept. 11, 2001, felt and still feel now, that it would be just to act militarily to achieve retribution for the terrible acts that were committed that day and to root out those who would commit further acts of violence.

Interestingly, these are not necessarily the church members who have been or are currently in the military. For the most part they are members who come to us from other countries where they lacked the freedom they have enjoyed in America.

Other church members believe that government should be ultimately accountable to the laws of God. No matter what has been

done to us, our government simply should not lower itself to the level of those who chose to commit violence upon any of God’s children.

Some of us feel sorrow that any person in the world would have to live in circumstances that would foster such hatred. Can we find it in our hearts to forgive?

Some who are currently in the military have questions and concerns about what path some of our country’s leaders wish to take to deal with these acts. Some feel that there is a need for us to be prepared to defend the United States, but that we should not be involving our country in the military problems of others.

Amidst this diversity of opinion, members of our congregation share the conviction that a commitment to follow Jesus’ command to love one another comes first. We are all called, first and foremost, to be peacemakers. It is not our job or calling to decide who is right or wrong on a certain topic. Our job is to listen to and love each other. This is where it begins, with our small congregation of believers.

We can also act as peacemakers by writing letters, making phone calls or placing our signature on a petition. We can reach out and make our voices heard until the day that God’s love, and the teachings and sacrifice of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, will be the deciding factor in how anyone—individual or government—chooses to approach their brothers and sisters. ■

Pontius’ Puddle



Tied In Knots

Pittsburgh Mennonite Church's Response to Sept. 11

Like many people of faith around the world, we were driven to our knees by the events of Sept. 11, 2001, asking God for comfort and a sense of direction. As an urban congregation with many international participants (German, Mexican, Colombian, Indian, Canadian, Korean) we had to be careful about who we defined as “us” and “them.” As a Christian congregation in a Jewish neighborhood, with Muslim sisters and brothers in the city, we needed our faith to provide more answers than the evening news. As a peacemaking congregation in a country rapidly at war we were challenged to think creatively about how to be a voice of restraint.

We tried to make sure any attempts at responding were rooted and grounded in prayer. We held a prayer service of lament on the night of Sept. 11. Our regularly scheduled church camp-out that weekend had lots of extra time for hymn singing by candlelight, as well as prayers for peace.

While we mourned the loss of life in New York, Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C., we also felt compelled to ask the bigger questions about the impact of U.S. policy that creates and fuels such hatred. We also prayed that our government would not wage war in an effort to ease the grief of the American people.

Our fall Adult Sunday School series was laid aside, and instead we used that time for ongoing processing of Sept. 11 and the events that followed. Editorials from the church press and Pittsburgh paper, in addition to resources from Sojourners and the Peace and Justice Committee of the Mennonite Church, provided jumping off places for discussion. We also spent time looking at “two-kingdom theology” and the historic Mennonite perspective. We were not of one accord on our political perspectives or theological conclusions. We did seem to be of one accord on the seriousness of the times and our need for God’s guidance.

Other things we attempted:

- We organized a peace shelf in the church library.
- We had postcards available for those who wished to write to policy makers in Washington about stopping the bombing in Afghanistan.
- We wrote a letter of support to the Islamic Center in Pittsburgh.
- We sent a letter to the editor of the local newspaper encouraging restraint.
- We had peace book covers available for children to use at school through the Peace and Justice committee.
- One member designed a peace flag to fly instead of the U.S. flag.

Most importantly we prayed. For five Wednesday nights we gathered for a simple soup supper, followed by prayers for peace, followed by knitting comforters for Afghani refugees.

Our humble efforts were featured in the local paper and on the Web site of the local peace center, and others came to join us. Around the quilt frames I sensed a deep relief at having something concrete to do with our hands as well as our hearts. Children and adults worked together. Long-time church members and folks who were in the church for the first time worked together. Others brought donated fabric and sent money to buy additional blankets. A Catholic priest from a neighboring parish publicized the project. All together we knotted 34 homemade comforters, and collected over 300 blankets and over \$2,400 dollars towards MCC’s relief efforts in Afghanistan. Perhaps just as important, we met some new friends in Pittsburgh who were also looking for a less violent way to respond to terrorists.

The struggle continues. What is important is to not be immobilized by our grief or our fear. God’s call is more resounding than President Bush’s. Let us break down walls of hatred and build relationships of hope. ■

CONGREGATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

BY CARMEN SCHROCK-HURST

Carmen Schrock-Hurst and her husband Luke were co-pastors of Pittsburgh Mennonite Church until July, when they moved with their three children to the Philippines to be country representatives for MCC.

For in Christ the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.

—COLOSSIANS 2:9-10

BY JUDY ZIMMERMAN HERR

Judy Zimmerman Herr serves as co-director of the MCC International Peace Office.

Dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

—PSALM 22:28

MCC and Governmental Authorities

The question of the role of the church in relation to government is one we bump into repeatedly in MCC. Most of MCC's work consists in some form of trying to build peace—working to strengthen communities, to make sure they have enough food and water and skills to support themselves, to lend a hand as they address the things which impoverish or disempower them. But while we are doing this, we must also speak out when actions of government hurt vulnerable people.

As an arm of the church for performing certain functions, MCC has not formulated an explicit theology of government. But we do attempt to be consistent in how we speak, in this as in other areas. In recent years, the MCC Peace Committee—a group that helps MCC think theologically about its work—has wrestled with the question of governments' use of force and our response and made some recommendations to MCC.

The recommendations assume that the church and the government have different roles in God's creation. The church is the primary instrument for God's action in the world, and it is through the church and its message of Jesus that God reaches out to the world. Christians are called to be messengers of salvation and peace.

The recommendations also assume that God put in place and can use the structures of the world, including governments, for his good purposes. Governments are acting according to God's purposes when they treat people justly and care for the poor and weak. The church serves God by calling government to live up to these God-given tasks. A crucial role for the church is to stretch the imaginations of those who determine governmental policy, to help them see new possibilities for response that may go beyond what they might otherwise have considered.

The Peace Committee recommendations include being very clear about our own identity as pacifist Christians, and as the church. They call us to recognize the positive security that governments organize in our world and to voice our support for this activity, as well as our critique when government acts violently. They recommend that any involvement with government be "ad hoc" in nature and functional, and proceed on the basis of careful discernment. The committee acknowledged that there may be times when we have no practical alternatives to suggest, but that in such cases we will still not legitimate violence.

This discussion affirms the ordering role of government while also giving us space to see the church as carrying a different role, and a platform from which to question some actions of government. We will continue to be confronted by situations in which a response may be far from obvious. For example, we may find ourselves affirming government's role in providing security to its citizens, while at the same time questioning its actions in seeking to do so by bombing another country.

We are called as Christians to be engaged in the world and so we have a responsibility to witness to those in authority, consistent with our faith values. At the same time, we are called to always remember our primary loyalty and identity as followers of Jesus and citizens of God's kingdom. That primary loyalty will be front and center as we interact with governmental authorities. ■

Costly War

By the time this *Washington Memo* reaches homes, the U.S. Congress—and perhaps also the United Nations—will likely have authorized the use of military force against Iraq. Some predict U.S. military action will occur as early as late November. Only a miraculous change of events will stop a war now.

Lost in the build-up for this war has been any serious admission by the Bush administration of the short- and long-term consequences of an unprovoked, preemptive U.S. attack on Iraq. Even though the United States has overwhelming military power, this will not be a “quick and easy” war as it is sometimes portrayed. The costs will be many.

Heavy casualties. Most serious analysts expect massive casualties of U.S. troops and Iraqi civilians—especially if the war is fought on the streets of Baghdad. In addition, yet another war’s devastation on an already fragile Iraqi infrastructure will contribute to extensive postwar suffering and death of innocent civilians and children.

Regional instability. Many who have testified at congressional hearings admit that, even if the United States is successful in overthrowing the current Iraqi government, it could take years of U.S. occupation and tens of billions of dollars to rebuild Iraq or even to keep it from unraveling. Furthermore, a U.S. invasion of Iraq will likely create violent ripple effects throughout the Middle East.

Dangerous precedent. Preemptive military action sets a dangerous example. Will this new “strike before struck” standard apply to all countries who are afraid, or just to the United States? If other nations follow the U.S. lead, we can expect a rapid increase in regional wars and global unrest.

Damaged relationships. In preparing for war, the president has announced the U.S. position and threatened to act alone if other countries don’t support it. This growing and troubling propensity to play superpower solitaire will surely create even stronger anti-American sentiment.

Given this gloomy forecast, what can Christians do?

Our witness to government must be confidently rooted in the belief that God is sovereign and can frustrate the best-contrived plans of the nations (Psalm 33:10). God puts a stop to wars (Psalm 46:9). In Christ, God has disarmed the rulers and authorities (Colossians 2:15). Their power is more limited than they may think.

Still, God calls us to act as partners for peace (Psalm 34:14, Matthew 5:9). During the month of September, more than 17,000 Mennonites signed a letter to President Bush urging him to consider nonviolent alternatives to a military invasion of Iraq. On Sept. 12, Mennonite Church USA leaders James Schrag and Susan Mark Landis met with a White House staff expert on Iraq to express the church’s concern about war.

On November 10, Peace Sunday, Mennonite and Brethren in Christ congregations will be invited to fast, pray and discern what additional peacemaking steps to take. Resources for this event can be found at: <http://peace.mennolink.org/>.

At this point, preventing a war will require a miracle. But, after all, we are people of faith! ■

BY J. DARYL BYLER

Our witness to government must be confidently rooted in the belief that God is sovereign and can frustrate the best-contrived plans of the nations.

NEW STAFF MEMBER

A hearty welcome to Bethany Spicher, who joins the Washington Office staff after a year with *Sojourners* magazine. Bethany is a 2001 graduate of Eastern Mennonite University and hails from McAleveys Fort, Pa. Her home congregation is Allensville Mennonite Church.



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SOUND THE TRUMPET!

ISSUE	SUMMARY	ADVOCACY NEEDED
GLOBAL HIV/AIDS	In January 2003 President Bush plans to travel to Africa. The president has an opportunity to take the lead among nations in addressing the global HIV/AIDS pandemic. Since 1980, 20 million people have died and more than 40 million are currently infected (a slight majority are women and children).	Please call on President Bush to announce a new global HIV/AIDS initiative and to pledge at least \$2.5 billion a year from the United States for prevention, care and treatment.

UPCOMING EVENTS

**“Journey To Jerusalem:
Walking the Path of Non-Violence”
December 6–8, 2002**

This training, sponsored by MCC U.S. Peace and Justice Ministries, will provide a theological dialogue on non-violence, learning what it means to live non-violently and providing options and skills on speaking truth to power. James Lawson, whom Martin Luther King called “the greatest teacher on non-violence in America,” will speak. To register call 717/859-3889 or see www.mcc.org/journeytojerusalem.

**“The Earth is the Lord’s”
Spring Seminar
April 6–8, 2003**

Come to Washington, D.C. at the height of cherry blossom season to hear Anabaptist perspectives on environmental policy. “The Earth is the Lord’s: Public Policy that Honors Creation” will include worship, plenaries, workshops and more. Ask friends and fellow congregants to carpool with you, and look for more information and a registration form in the next issue of the *Washington Memo!*