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FEAR OF VIOLENCE

Naming the Fears Behind U.S. Security Policies

Proclaiming Peace

BY DAVID M. WHETTSTONE

“Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence.”
—Genesis 6:11

Our world lives in constant contradiction to God’s desire for peace. Many people in the United States and around the world fear violence not only from individuals, but from governments.

Christians in the Anabaptist tradition have come to learn the careful work of peace-making and restorative justice. This work moves us—in the company of others—to face our fears, and it takes us through them to establish understanding and right relationship. The Spirit moves and empowers. There is some success with individuals and groups, and even sometimes with nations. Still, the modern world is a violent world.

Within its duty to protect citizens and maintain peace, governments too quickly use force and great power, resulting in the harm of others. We who live in the United States bear the burden to stop this dynamic. How then do we speak to government?

Psalm 72 suggests a standard for a righteous ruler or authority: “For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight” (vv.12–14).

Our advocacy to seek peace is rooted in our understanding of salvation and mission. This comes through the presence of Christ in our lives: “So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near” (Ephesians 2:17). We are following Christ who will eventually overcome thrones, dominions, rulers, and powers. “And through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:20).

The goal of this year’s *Memo* series is to consider with care the fears of our constituents and partners. This issue focuses on U.S. Americans’ fears of border crossers (p. 3), gangs or terrorists (p. 4) and “drug dealing countries” (p. 5). In turn, it examines government responses that, in the name of increasing security, have often done violence to others. The Washington Office high school essay contest winners suggest that there are alternatives to violence (pp. 6–7). We, along with them, must practice the presence of Christ as we advocate for peace. Hopefully, we can even convince governments. ■

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BY J. DARYL BYLER

Responding to violence with violence has only increased the number of terrorist recruits. The U.S. government continues to warn of more attacks on U.S. soil.

Refusing to Recycle

“What time is it?” asked one of the three youths approaching me on my walk home from work on Capitol Hill. In the brief second that I broke stride to glance at my watch, another youth pulled a gun and announced, “What we really want is your money.”

As armed robberies go, this one seemed rather tame—no yelling, no pushing, no punching. It happened so fast that I barely had time to feel afraid at the moment. But today, nearly two years after the robbery, whenever several teens walk toward me on the street, my heart beats a little faster and I feel a tinge of fear.

The fear of violence breeds many responses. It causes some to cower or seek cover. Others choose to arm themselves or react aggressively.

There has been a palpable fear of violence in the United States since Sept. 11. To assuage these fears, the Bush administration has launched a global war on terror—in the process, killing an estimated 12,000–15,000 Afghan and Iraqi civilians, along with untold thousands of Taliban, Al Qaeda and Iraqi fighters. More than 1,000 U.S. and allied troops have died.

But responding to violence with violence has only increased the number of terrorist recruits. The U.S. government continues to warn of more terror attacks on U.S. soil.

To justify our violent response, we first demonize the “enemy” as less than human. We then feel free to kill or abuse our enemies. The lurid pictures of U.S. troops tor-

menting Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib prison offer vivid warning that, when we choose to enter the cycle of violence, we easily stoop to the very behaviors we claim to deplore.

What is the alternative? Should we allow violence to spread unanswered? There is no fail-proof method to guarantee that we will never be victims of violence. But there are things we can do.

First, we can acknowledge that violence comes in many forms—including *direct violence* like terror attacks and *structural violence* like occupation or oppressive economic policies. It is too easy to only emphasize the type of violence in which we do not participate.

Second, we can refuse to continue the cycle of violence. The Bible calls for a radically different response: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. . . . Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good,” Paul challenges (Romans 12:17,21).

The church certainly must apply this principle. But governments will do well to find applications as well. Their efforts to restrain violence must be transparent and uphold rigorous legal standards designed to protect both the accused and nearby innocents. Governments must increasingly move toward non-lethal methods of apprehending criminals.

Third, we can address the roots of violence. Injustices and loss of hope are often contributing factors to violence. Both the church and the state can work creatively to build a just society.

Finally, we can trust that, even if we are harmed, we are never outside God’s providence and care. Perhaps only people with faith can act at this level. Facing Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace for their refusal to bow down to his golden statue, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, declared that, even if God didn’t save their lives, they would refuse to worship the king’s idols. Jesus modeled this same trust when facing his crucifixion.

Violence only begets violence. Sometimes it doesn’t pay to recycle. ■

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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Arks or Drones, Life or Death?

As summer temperatures soar above 100 degrees, thousands of Latin American migrants are beginning the journey north. On the 300-mile line that divides the Sonoran desert into Arizona and Mexico, two new border security initiatives are waiting.

Border Security Initiative A

Name: Arizona Border Control.

Strategy: Create an impenetrable militarized zone of equipment and personnel. Apprehend, detain, process and deport the migrants who make it through.

Supplies: Two hundred sixty new Border Patrol agents (to augment the 1,800 already in Arizona), remote video cameras and electronic footfall sensors (designed for use in Vietnam), unmanned aerial drones (similar to those deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq).

Cost: \$10 million.

Border Security Initiative B

Name: No More Deaths Campaign.

Strategy: Construct "Arks of the Covenant" desert camps. Provide water, food and medical help to prevent deaths of border crossers. Recruit Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) to train volunteers. Listen to the stories of migrants. Hold a vigil. Pray.

Supplies: water, tents, misting systems, tortillas, beans, first aid kits.

Cost: Most labor and materials donated by volunteers from church groups and human rights organizations.

Which initiative is likely to increase border security? Despite fences, lights, sensors and a seemingly endless supply of Border Patrol agents, variations of Plan A have failed to stem the flow of migrants. Meanwhile, deaths in the desert are on the rise (210 in Arizona last summer) and reports

of Border Patrol abuses proliferate, often in the name of the war on terror. In Douglas, Ariz., near a CPT ark, residents report agents marching people down the road at gunpoint and harassing the town's children.

The No More Deaths Campaign, on the other hand, refuses to see terrorists in the migrants who are risking their lives to seek jobs or families, choosing instead to welcome strangers, as Christ commanded (Matthew 25:35). In addition, the Campaign's principles call for legislation that provides for family reunification, addresses worker rights, adjusts the status of undocumented immigrants and recognizes the root causes of migration in U.S. foreign and trade policy.

Aerial drones or arks of the covenant? It's the age-old question. "Today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live." (Deuteronomy 30:19). ■

BY BETHANY SPICHER

On the 300-mile line that divides the Sonoran desert into Arizona and Mexico, two new border security initiatives are waiting.

See www.nomoredeaths.org or www.cpt.org for more information

CAPITAL QUOTES

"We've got to stay the course, and we will stay the course. The message to the Iraqi citizens is, they don't have to fear that America will turn and run."

—President Bush, of the U.S. presence in Iraq.

"Questions that ought to be stated loudly in this chamber are instead whispered in the hall. Those few senators with the courage to stand up and speak out are challenged as unpatriotic."

—Senator Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.) urging debate on Iraq war policy.

"At a time when the United States faces very real terrorist threats . . . the administration's absurd and increasingly bizarre obsession with Cuba is more than just a shame; it's a dangerous diversion from reality."

—Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.) on high U.S. spending for undermining Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

Pontius' Puddle



The Threat of Death

BY DAVID M. WHETTSTONE

If government and the public are satisfied with erasing the problem by executing offenders, might we be in danger of overlooking the long-term needs of life-affirming, preventive efforts?

Government officials sometimes believe that the threat and use of force will bring about compliance and peace. One extension of this conviction is the use of the death penalty. A rationale for this position is that the death penalty is to be reserved for the most heinous of crimes.

A prosecutor or an elected official may hold to the belief that the threat of capital punishment leads to more effective law enforcement and can deter the most awful acts of violence. Often refuted, this deterrence argument has never been settled or proven. A further presumption is that government, through capital punishment, can fulfill society's desire to find balance in "a moral universe" when a life is taken through murder.

Congress is considering death penalty options with at least two bills:

The Gang Prevention and Effective Deterrence Act of 2003 (S. 1735) in the Senate creates new death-eligible offenses for adult gang members through federal prosecution. The offenses can come from state crimes in which community standards have not called for the death penalty. There is a current trend that many federal prosecutors are seeking the death penalty more often than they did in the past at the request of the Attorney General, in spite of their initial recommendations against such actions.

The Terrorist Penalties Enhancement Act of 2003 (H.R. 2934). Senator Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) has introduced this bill (S.1604) in the Senate. U.S. House Representative John R. Carter (R-Tex.) has introduced this bill in the House. He states, "We must protect our neighborhoods from the

threat of violent crimes which, unfortunately in today's world, includes the threat of terrorist attacks. Congress must act to protect U.S. citizens from such attacks and to bring justice to those who threaten our freedom. I decided to run for Congress in response to the greatest domestic terrorist attack in history on September 11, 2001. I am sponsoring this legislation today to put all would-be terrorists on notice that they will receive the ultimate justice should they decide to plan a future attack."

More death penalty categories will not deter those who are determined to commit acts of terror. Presently, there are 20 federal death penalty offenses for crimes of terrorism. They are also supplemented by other federal and state death statutes. H.R. 2934 would create 23 new death penalty offenses. These penalties would be attached to a very broad and far-reaching definition of terrorism. For instance, a dispute as to whether someone materially supported an organization deemed terrorist may lead to a sentence of death.

The death penalty also complicates efforts to obtain the assistance and cooperation of countries that have abolished the death penalty, or to set an example for those countries with poor human rights records.

Deaths from terrorist and gang violence are particularly shocking, usually have a large scale impact and have tremendous effects on victims and the public. Losses are to be grieved and taken seriously. Under difficult circumstances, we must ask what are the ways to prevent further loss of life? But if government and the public are satisfied with erasing the problem by executing offenders, might we be in danger of overlooking the long-term needs of life-affirming, preventive efforts that would greatly reduce gang and terrorist violence? ■

Fear and Hope in Colombia

PARTNER STORY

The contrast between the beautifully appliquéd banners that María* and Alba hold up before my eyes and the context that they live in strikes me as sharply as the contrast between heaven and hell. Their art depicts their dreams of a world of color, community, love, abundance, beauty and hope. The colors of their neighborhood, Cazucá, seldom vary from the brown of dust and the dark red of bloody death.

Cazucá is an unrecognized slum built on mountain land, sold to displaced people (internal refugees) under illegal terms. The inhabitants struggle to survive under the threats of a very unsanitary environment, sporadic, unclean water service, hunger, miserable housing, a severe lack of schools and the constant presence of illegal armed groups. Let us hear their cry.

“We fear death. In recent months, young people have been killed by the illegal and legal armed groups almost daily. Whenever we hear that another teenager has been shot, each one of us fear— is it my son?”

“One night we were working in the community kitchen until late. At 7 p.m. we were going to leave for home, but as we opened the door we saw a grenade in front of the door and men shooting at the boys in the house in front of us. We hit the ground, terrified. Yet we tried to fill our hearts with courage. We turned our thoughts to God—our All-Powerful Creator. God takes care of us because it is God who has given us life; no one can take this life away from us before it’s time.

“The insecurity here arises out of people’s basic needs. Economic misery lies behind the violence. Very few people in Cazucá are employed. We can send out countless resumes and knock on every possible door, but no options materialize. Out of this reality arises a battle to be the strongest, for only the strongest survive. We are casualties in a power struggle. Here power doesn’t come from having money, but rather from weapons. The powerful use their force to take away the little that we have. They made one woman even pull down her underwear to see whether she might be hiding money there. We feel so humiliated.

“While others in this world are trying to build mansions, the best we can do is try to protect our lives. The so-called American dream of consumption is just an illusion for us; when we try to pursue this lifestyle, it only breaks our families apart.

“We have chosen to reject violence and we refuse to trust in military power. Weapons produce fear in us, not security.

“Where then does security come from? From a job that pays enough to put bread on the table and a roof over our heads. From a sense of solidarity among all of us, where we choose to share instead of compete. From respect for all people’s dignity. All people, including those suffering in poverty, deserve affection and love, not humiliation and useless leftovers. Security comes when we learn to call each other by our names, not by numbers or statistics. Hope arises when we look into each other’s eyes and see brothers and sisters. Hope comes when we support each other in our dreams of life.” ■

BY BONNIE KLASSEN

Bonnie Klassen, MCC Country Representative in Colombia, interviewed Maria and Alba and translated their stories.

*Names have been changed.

Security comes when we learn to call each other by our names, not by numbers or statistics. Hope arises when we look into each other’s eyes and see brothers and sisters.

BY KELLY SHENK

Kelly Shenk graduated this spring from Bethany Christian School in Goshen, Ind. Her essay, excerpted here, won first prize in our annual high school essay contest, "Election 2004: Taking a Stand." Students were asked to advise the 2004 U.S. presidential candidates on policy positions from an Anabaptist perspective.

To have a comprehensive pro-life philosophy, the United States should address economic problems and ethnic or religious conflicts.

A Pro-Life Philosophy

The U.S. government is constantly making choices on life-or-death issues. Many politicians use the term "pro-life" to show their anti-abortion position. This term is rarely used in other contexts.

A pro-life philosophy must be wholly pro-life and not merely selective. God created us all and loves us all equally. Jesus taught us that killing is never the correct solution. When someone is killed because there is a problem, the problem is not solved, but avoided.

The pro-life philosophy can be applied to abortion. Between 1973 and 2000, legal abortions in the United States numbered over 39 million. The number of aborted children is more than 30 times the number of soldiers killed in all U.S. wars. President George W. Bush signed a law banning partial birth abortions, making a statement proclaiming that "America stands for liberty, the pursuit of happiness and the unalienable right to life."

However, the United States should be consistent about the right to life. President Bush declared war on Iraq on March 17, 2003 and since then there have been thousands of Iraqis killed, including many civilians. Hundreds of U.S. and coalition soldiers have been killed. In the same way each infant's life is valued, a pro-life philosophy should consider every adult person's life invaluable. Choices should be made in order to preserve the life of each human being.

In 2002, 71 people were executed in the United States. At the end of 2001 there were 3,557 prisoners under a death sentence. Each of these prisoner's lives has value, because God created them. It is not our place as fellow humans to condemn a person to death. Although those sentenced to death are guilty of serious crimes, the death penalty does not undo the crime. By devaluing life, the death penalty could promote a violent mentality and lead to more violent crimes being committed.

The U.S. policy on terrorism does not lend itself towards the preservation of all human life, but only of those who are on "our side." [U.S. policy] promotes an aggressive atmosphere and does not foster reconciliatory feelings or demonstrate the desire to solve terrorism at its foundation. Addressing terrorism's root problems would preserve many lives. In order to have a comprehensive pro-life philosophy, the United States should address the underlying conditions, such as economic problems and ethnic or religious conflicts.

A pro-life philosophy, in addition to preserving lives, has further benefits for the U.S. government. The image of America generated by our government is that America does not value each person's life. If our image is changed, foreign relations toward the United States would improve. In addition, the huge amount of money spent on military operations could be spent on problems such as starvation and AIDS.

God loves and values each of us and desires for human life all over the world to be preserved. Jesus' example on earth showed us a nonviolent way to respond to violent situations. A comprehensive pro-life attitude would be valuable for our government and align it more with the will of God. This would be a beneficial and fulfilling philosophy to adopt. ■

Energy: the Big Switch

**WINNING
HIGH SCHOOL ESSAYS**

With extensive research showing the negative effects of fossil fuels, it is more important than ever that Americans act as responsible global citizens and use resources conscientiously. Conservation must include efforts to quickly move to nature's own sources of renewable energy—sunlight, wind and geothermal heating.

Because state utility companies rarely have clean energy options, going “green” often requires a deeply personal commitment on the part of consumers. The cost and time involved in making the switch is often prohibitive.

For this reason the United States must focus more attention and resources on the development and widespread implementation of renewable energy sources. These technologies, dependent on the Earth's natural cycles, allow humans to utilize the Earth's power without harming or depleting it in

any way. Solar, wind and geothermal power, as well as hydrogen fuel cell technology, are all being used practically today.

It is time for our government to commit to becoming “green.” The cost is not exorbitant. Solar energy could easily become as affordable as other types of energy. But, as one home power advocate emphasizes, “renewable energy threatens utility companies' century-old monopoly and profits.”

The benefits of clean energy are enormous. They include an improved environment and human health, more jobs and a stronger economy, and the reduction of global warming. Homeland security would be improved due to less reliance on imported fuel and less dependence on large nuclear energy factories, which can be high-profile terrorist targets.

The time to begin a switch to clean energy is now. ■

BY ERIN BRANDEBERRY

Erin Brandeberry graduated this spring from Bethany Christian School in Goshen, Ind. Her essay, excerpted here, won honorable mention.

It is time for our government to commit to becoming “green.”

Justice for All

We pride ourselves on having a Constitution with rights for all, but we disregard it [in the case of accused war criminals]. There are 700 people held in the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba—each confined to a six by eight foot cell for 23 hours a day. [Some] detainees have been in solitary confinement for almost two years. They have not been charged with an offense, informed of pending charges or been before a military or civilian tribunal. The Bush administration claims that these men exist outside of the U.S. criminal justice system and that the United States does not need to follow the Constitution. But [a human rights advocate] says, “We cannot, given the nature of the world today, have areas where the rule of law does not apply.”

The United States must form an official policy for how to deal with [such cases]. This would create a standard and decrease illegitimate treatment. The United States should also support the International Crimi-

nal Court, sending a message that it is willing to cooperate with the world instead of making its own rules.

Another human rights issue is capital punishment. Eight hundred twenty individuals have been executed since capital punishment was reinstated in 1976. Since 1973, 113 people have been released from death row with evidence of their innocence. Capital punishment discriminates [against members of disadvantaged groups]. There is no proof that the death penalty decreases murder rates or crime in general.

The early Christians were instructed not to attend public executions, not to execute criminals and not to bring charges against a person who might receive the death penalty. We Christians today need to take action. The more we shed light on [treatment of accused war criminals and capital punishment], the closer we come to having justice for all. ■

BY BETH KAUFMAN

Beth Kaufman graduated this spring from Freeman Academy in Freeman, S.D. Her essay, excerpted here, won honorable mention.

The United States should send a message that it is willing to cooperate with the world instead of making its own rules.



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SOUND THE TRUMPET!

ISSUE	SUMMARY	ADVOCACY NEEDED
IMMIGRATION REFORM	The Safe, Orderly, Legal Visas and Enforcement (SOLVE) Act, introduced this spring, would strengthen employment and labor protections for immigrant workers and create a temporary worker program for future migrants. It would also reverse a 2002 Supreme Court decision that restricted the remedies available to undocumented immigrants mistreated by their employers.	Ask your senators and representative to co-sponsor the SOLVE Act (S. 2381, H.R. 4262).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Believers Church Conference

How do Christians in the Believers Church tradition, living in a democracy that is the world's dominant power, understand their witness for God and their relationship to political authority? This question is the focus of God, Democracy and U.S. Power: Believers Church Perspectives, to be hosted by Eastern Menonite University and Bridgewater College, Sept. 23-25. Speakers include Robert W. Edgar, Dawn Wilhelm Ottoni and J. Daryl Byler. Visit www.emu.edu/churchandpolitics for more information or contact Cindy Smoker, (540) 432-4597; e-mail: churchandpolitics@emu.edu.

Death Penalty Events

The National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty Conference will be held Oct. 14-17 at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. with a focus on murder victims' families and people of color. For more information, visit www.ncadp.org or call (202) 543-9577. Amnesty International's annual National Weekend of Faith in Action on the Death Penalty, Oct. 22-24, invites faith communities across the country to reflect and take action on abolishing the death penalty. Designed especially to support communities of color, the NWFA produces an excellent resource packet. Visit www.amnestyusa.org/faithinaction or call (202) 544-0200.