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## OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD

*Naming the Fears Behind U.S. Security Policies*

### Overcoming Evil in Puerto Asis

BY LORA STEINER

**“We reaffirm the mission of the church to call to conversion and transformation of life, and that this be evident in daily living.”**

On Saturday, Sept. 4, unknown armed men entered the Christian Missionary Alliance Church in Puerto Asis, Putumayo, Colombia. The church was in the middle of its evening worship service—singing hymns—when the gunmen opened fire. Three people were killed and thirteen were wounded.

The next day, several churches in Puerto Asis held a service together in that same church. They called it “an expression of their trust in God over and above the climate of fear.” That evening, they committed themselves to continue working to build peace in their country.

In a statement issued just a few days after the shootings, the churches of Puerto Asis called for all people to respect human life, places of worship and the dignity of those who choose not to participate in the conflict. “We make a call to reject the use of weapons and violence,” they said. “We reaffirm the mission of the church to call to conversion and transformation of life, and that this be evident in daily living.

We believe that the grace and transforming power of our Lord Jesus Christ are His gift to all of humanity, including those that committed these acts of violence.” The churches offered all those who witnessed the events a powerful example of choosing to not be overcome by evil.

In this issue, our last of the year, we end our series on true security with a vision of what it might look like to overcome evil with good. In previous issues, we addressed the fears behind U.S. security policies, including fears of vulnerability, scarcity, violence and strangers. By hearing the fears of those who live inside and outside of the United States, we hope to better listen to ourselves and to each other. In this *Memo*, we address the free trade agreement in Central America, border security, the assault weapons ban, human rights in Vietnam and a proposal for how churches can be prepared for future crises. We have also included our true security vision, offering biblically-rooted alternatives to current U.S. policy.

Through all of this, we recognize that overcoming evil with good is no easy task. In fact, the verses in Romans 12 read like a rich litany of some of the most difficult tasks we’ll ever be called to. *Bless those who persecute you. Rejoice. Weep. Live in harmony. Don’t repay anyone evil for evil. Leave vengeance to God. Feed your enemies.* And then, *don’t be overcome by evil.* But we are also reassured that we are never alone. We walk with our churches, with our community—including our sisters and brothers around the world—and with God.

At the end of their statement, the churches of Puerto Asis declared that death is not the last word, quoting Psalm 23. “We shall fear no evil,” they said, “Because the Lord is with us.” ■

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BY J. DARYL BYLER

**One fallacy of the U.S. approach is the belief that evil can be isolated to certain governments, groups or individuals, then eliminated with smart bombs, tanks and military assault weapons.**

## If Not War, Then What?

“Americans do not yet have the distance of history,” President George W. Bush told a packed crowd at Washington’s National Cathedral several days after the terrible attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. “But our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil.”

It is an ambitious agenda—to purge the world of evil. And if it could be done with military might, President Bush would deserve full credit for a valiant effort. But overthrowing troublesome governments and wielding overwhelming force against suspected insurgent sites in Iraq have done little to “rid the world of evil.” To the contrary, a senior CIA analyst, writing anonymously in *Imperial Hubris*, says that U.S. actions in the “war on terror” have only created more terrorists.

One fallacy of the U.S. approach is the belief that evil can be isolated to certain governments, groups or individuals, then eliminated with smart bombs, tanks and military assault weapons. In reality, the nature of evil is much more complex and integrated, as Jesus warned in a parable about trying to prematurely separate weeds and wheat (Matthew 13:24–30).

But if “war is not the answer,” as one popular bumper sticker proclaims, what is?

Drawing on the teachings of Jesus, Paul offers the only promising framework for ridding the world of evil—one that engages evil with good (Romans 12:9–21). The church should fully embrace Paul’s frame-

work for its own practice, while calling governing authorities to do so, step-by-step, to their level of understanding.

Perhaps building on Jesus’ imagery of unclean spirits returning with a vengeance to an empty house (Matthew 12:43–45), Paul warns against trying to disarm evil without being firmly rooted in a good alternative. And so Paul entreats: “hate what is evil” and “hold fast to what is good” (v.9); do not “repay evil for evil” but “take thought for what is noble in the sight of all” (v.17); and do not be “overcome by evil” but “overcome evil with good” (v.21).

It is good to passionately oppose evil. All evil is counter to God’s design. But in rejecting evil, we must with even greater fervor embrace that which is good. Otherwise, we seem indistinct from the evil we denounce. It is right for the United States to condemn the acts of those who plan and perpetrate terror. But this reproach rings hollow so long as the United States refuses to alter its own unjust policies that help fuel acts of terror.

Furthermore, our response to evil must be widely understood to be morally superior to it. Sadly, this has not been the case with regard to U.S. conduct in Iraq. There are no excuses for Saddam Hussein’s brutal dictatorship. But in unseating a dictator, U.S. actions have reduced a country to chaos, leading to the deaths of some 15,000 Iraqi civilians. And efforts to promote democracy and human rights have been badly undermined by U.S. abuses of Iraqi prisoners.

The current U.S. approach in its war on terror offers no hope of ridding the world of evil. Indeed, it raises the risk of being overcome by evil. A far better alternative is for the United States to hold fast to what is “noble in the sight of all”—acting justly and in a spirit of mutuality in the global community; and consistently upholding human rights and showing respect for the rule of law.

In practicing Paul’s framework and calling governing authorities to do likewise, the church offers a gift to the nations—the possibility of true security. ■

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# Walking Humbly in Vietnam

In September, MCC celebrated 50 years of service in Vietnam.

This celebration comes at a time of much controversy surrounding religious freedom and human rights in Vietnam. In March, Vietnamese authorities arrested four Mennonite church leaders, and in June, arrested Mennonite pastor Nguyen Hong Quang. There have been reports of harassment by Vietnamese authorities, including confiscation of church property and destruction of personal property.

In its recent *International Religious Freedom Report*, the State Department designated Vietnam a “country of particular concern,” noting that while the constitution makes provisions for religious freedom, the government places many restrictions on religious groups. This designation could lead to economic sanctions.

First Corinthians 12:25–26 reminds us: “Each part [of the body] should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it.” In this spirit, many Christians in the United States are asking the United States to put pressure on the Vietnamese government. But is this the most effective way to help our Vietnamese brothers and sisters? How should we “speak truth to power,” when it isn’t our government we’re speaking to?

*By remembering the history.* For many Vietnamese, the “U.S. War” (as they call it) is still a very emotional issue. A Vietnamese man I met insisted that it isn’t fair for the United States to speak about human rights issues. “After all,” he said, “They invaded Vietnam!” Human rights, while important, are often seen as another way to attack Vietnam.

*By learning the context.* Within the past two years, the United States has slapped tariffs on Vietnamese catfish and shrimp exports, after U.S. producers complained that these products were flooding their markets. To the Vietnamese, it was a direct assault on their livelihoods and a decision that—as MCC worker Jonathan Moyer can attest—affects the lives of many people every day.

*By speaking with humility.* In the past ten years, the Vietnamese government has very slowly but steadily been opening new options for churches. If the U.S. government puts pressure on Vietnam, it could actually have the opposite effect intended, and slow down this process. Placing pressure on Congress could also result in sanctions against Vietnam, which are more likely to adversely affect the people who are already hurting, rather than convince the government to act differently.

*Through prayer and assistance.* The Mennonite Church in Vietnam welcomes our support. Mennonite Church USA ([www.MennoniteUSA.org](http://www.MennoniteUSA.org)) has also set up a way to send letters and donations to the families of those being detained. ■

BY LORA STEINER

**How should we “speak truth to power,” when it isn’t our government we’re speaking to?**

## CAPITAL QUOTES

*“People with HIV/AIDS in Central America do not have five years or more to wait for affordable AIDS drugs to become available.”*

—Antonio Girona of Doctors Without Borders, lamenting the new trade restrictions on generic medicines.

*“It looks as though we provided numbers that made the situation look more palatable than it is. I don’t believe for a moment there was anything sinister involved, but I do understand how it looks.”*

—Michael Nicely of the Border Patrol, on the agency’s new policy of not including migrants’ skeletal remains in border death counts released to the media.

*“Until those policies change, the United States has no option but an increasingly fierce military response to the forces marshaled by Bin Laden, an option that will prolong America’s survival but at as yet undreamed of costs in blood, money and civil liberties.”*

—A senior CIA analyst, in *Imperial Hubris*, on U.S. policies viewed as harmful by Muslim and Arab communities.

# Security and Red Beans for All

BY MARTIN SHUPACK

**Our government apparently believes that we will be more secure as U.S. economic power expands and U.S. capital, goods and services dominate the globe.**

Manuel farms on the outskirts of Managua, Nicaragua. He grows *rojos chiquitos*, small red beans that are favored by people throughout Central America. But the U.S. government is funding research to help U.S. farmers produce this bean and market it to Central Americans. Manuel fears that free trade with the United States will ruin him and millions of other small farmers in Nicaragua.

Catholic bishops and Protestant church leaders in Central America disagree about many things. Yet because of their concern for people like Manuel, both groups are critical of the U.S.-Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA),\* encompassing the United States, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica. These religious leaders agree that trade treaties must promote authentic human development and lift up the poor. They provide visions of human security and well-being significantly at odds with U.S. trade policies.

In addition to church leaders, many Central American citizens' groups, farmers' organizations and labor unions oppose CAFTA. They criticize its closed and undemocratic negotiations. They believe that many farm families will be bankrupted by subsidized U.S. imports. They fear that new rights for foreign corporations will increase exploitation of urban workers. In addition, CAFTA restrictions on using inexpensive generic medications will make it extremely difficult for Central Americans to acquire affordable medicines for HIV/AIDS and other diseases.

To be sure, some people can make a lot of money from CAFTA, including U.S. agribusiness exporters, service providers and pharmaceutical companies, as well as Central American traders.

\* "Joint Statement [of U.S. and Central American Catholic Bishops] Concerning the United States-Central American Free Trade Agreement" and "Pastoral Letter of the Council of Churches of Latin America: Nicaragua, Costa Rica & Panama," available at [http://www.tradejusticeusa.org/issues/trade\\_agreements/CAFTAOverview.htm](http://www.tradejusticeusa.org/issues/trade_agreements/CAFTAOverview.htm)

CAFTA is only one of many free trade agreements that the United States is urging on developing countries. Our government apparently believes that we will be more secure as U.S. economic power expands and U.S. capital, goods and services dominate the globe. Yet this expansion has brought more poverty to many places in the global South and greater inequality everywhere.

Human security for all requires fair trade, not free trade. If the U.S. government wants to overcome the evil underlying U.S. and global insecurity, it must do good, by negotiating trade agreements that embrace these just and compassionate values:

- Wide public awareness, participation and consensus precede any enactment of free trade agreements, to ensure that the interests of ordinary people, not elites, are primary.
- National governments retain the ability to protect and strengthen the livelihoods of small farmers and farm workers—often a majority of the population—especially against heavily subsidized products from the United States and Europe.
- Developing countries have the right and ability to manufacture or import affordable generic medications to use against HIV/AIDS and other devastating diseases.
- National governments retain the authority to regulate foreign investment in order to achieve broad-based national development.
- Essential public services, such as education, health care and water, are exempt from trade provisions that can make them too expensive for low-income communities.
- The international community takes concerted action to protect labor rights and the environment.

President Bush plans to submit CAFTA to Congress for ratification shortly after the U.S. election or next year. Now is a good time to tell the president that CAFTA will not benefit Central Americans or us. ■

# There Is No “Away”

We use a lot of paper in the MCC Washington Office. So before I left for a visit to the U.S./Mexico border, I found myself helping a co-worker with the dirty task of replacing the office printer cartridge. Afterwards, I scrubbed the ink off my hands and sent the cartridge away.

It turns out that my border visit took me to the very *maquila*, or factory, where I may have mailed our cartridge. At Sumex, a subsidiary of Xerox, I witnessed factory workers—some covered in ink—cleaning and refilling thousands of cartridges. For ten hours of work—often with loud machinery and harsh chemicals—they are paid ten dollars. It was a reminder: “away” for me is always “here” for someone else.

When *maquila* workers go home, “here” is a *colonia*, or settlement, of ramshackle houses, broken-down cars and washed-out roads. It’s also here in the *colonias* of Nogales, that Borderlinks, along with West Coast MCC, has founded Centro de Paz por Ambos Nogales (CPAN), or Center of Peace for Both Nogales-es.

In the last decade, fences, stadium lights, motion detectors and hundreds of armed Border Patrol agents have cut Nogales in two. On both sides of the city, CPAN provides conflict resolution workshops and “safe spaces” for negotiation. Borderlinks director Luzdy Stucky describes CPAN’s vision as “bringing people to the table”—not only factory workers and *colonia* residents, but also *maquila* managers and even Border Patrol agents.

On our visit to the U.S. Customs and Immigration Services, I asked an officer if, given the deaths on the border (346 this fiscal year) and the instability in border communities, our attempts at security might not be backfiring.

I was surprised when he admitted, “Every day, illiterate *campesinos* are outsmarting our best Border Patrol agents.” He continued, “What are our immigration goals? We need to get a group of people together to sit down and talk about this.”

I didn’t remind him that *campesinos* are impoverished, in part, by U.S. trade agreements, but I appreciated his recognition that “sitting down and talking” immigration policy could create a more sane—and secure—border.

After the president failed to deliver on immigration reform promises early this year, Congress introduced a pile of immigration reform proposals. Many are punitive, but some have promise—including the Safe, Orderly, Legal Visas and Reform Act. The bill provides more legal avenues for migrants (which could lessen border deaths), and also offers opportunities for legal status to the undocumented immigrants already here—and it needs the advocacy of many concerned citizens to pass a skeptical Congress.

In the United States, where much of our wealth comes at the expense of the poor elsewhere, our hands are stained with more than ink. As we take ourselves and our government to task, may we learn from our brothers and sisters on the border, and from Jesus, who never turned anyone away. ■

BY BETHANY SPICHER

“Away” for me is always “here” for someone else.

## Stop the War and Welcome Migrants

PARTNER STORY

Mari Cruz embroiders napkins for a living in Colonia Flores Magon, and makes lunch for Borderlinks guests on the side. She dishes out bowls of stew, tells us about her migration from Sinaloa where there are no jobs, and when I ask, “What would you say to the U.S. president?” she has a ready answer: “Stop the war and treat migrants better.” A narrow trail runs over a hill behind her house, and as she and her neighbors sew on the porch, they watch the migrants approach the border and pray for their safe arrival on the other side.

—Bethany Spicher

# Peace Without Weapons

BY DAVID M. WHETTSTONE

*In response to violence in public life, we call the church at all levels to . . . advocate laws for greater restriction of the manufacture and possession of guns whose primary purpose is to kill or threaten human beings. —And No One Shall Make Them Afraid: A Mennonite Statement on Violence (1997)*

**In the weeks leading up to Sept. 13, hundreds of Mennonites from at least eight states signed petitions to have the assault weapons ban renewed.**

The ten-year federal assault weapons ban expired at midnight on Sept. 13, 2004. Semiautomatic assault weapons are modeled after military firearms—spraying a target with massive amounts of bullets in seconds. Ironically, seeds for a new era of violence in the United States may have been planted by the inaction of a Congress and president who are preoccupied with concerns for homeland security.

What led to the expiration? Despite pleas from over 40 grassroots groups—doctors, nurses, teachers, students, law enforcement, activists, parents, children and victims’ families—decision makers, primarily in the Senate, insisted on a simple renewal of the ban, not an improvement. In March, the Senate passed the ban—by a vote of 52-47—as an amendment to a *failed* gun industry immunity bill.

However, leadership in the House would not allow a vote even on simple renewal. It played “political ping-pong” with the White House, each claiming the other did not call for action. During his 2000 campaign, President Bush said, “It makes no sense for assault weapons to be around our society.” But when it came time to renew the ban, the president largely remained silent.

Dozens of police chiefs and officers came to Washington days before the ban’s expiration to plea for renewal to no avail. Some cynically wonder if the National Rifle Associa-

tion’s clout on Capitol Hill ultimately won the day. Congressional offices still hear overwhelmingly from pro-gun forces.

The prophet Habakkuk laments before God: “Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails” (1:3-4). But this does not have to be the final fate regarding gun violence prevention.

In the weeks leading up to Sept. 13, hundreds of Mennonites from at least eight states signed petitions to have the ban renewed. Over several years, young and old have signed and sent in a disarmament pledge to the MCC Washington Office. Many continue praying.

Yet more is asked of us. We must make long term efforts in talking to our neighbors and elected officials—establishing relationships. We will find that some our fellow citizens view guns as a means of self-protection, hunting and sport. On the other hand, we may encounter one of the 67 percent of *Field and Stream* readers from 2003 who say assault weapons serve no legitimate civilian purpose.

The issue is public safety. If assault weapons are readily available, accessible and prolific in our society, we will bear the bitter consequences of acts of terrorism, rage and vengeance empowered by them. Are they necessary for security?

Both the heart and mind must voluntarily not bear arms and trust God for other means of security. Policy can move in this direction. We must give witness to this alternative and see if others agree to this recourse as a way toward a beloved, peaceable world. ■

## MIDDLE EAST ADVOCACY

In response to the Israeli separation barrier, the MCC Washington Office is launching *Bridges Not Walls*—a campaign to collect 5,000 letters and drawings that encourage better approaches for building peace and security. For more information, visit [www.mcc.org/us/bridges](http://www.mcc.org/us/bridges). To order a copy of *The Dividing Wall*, a new MCC video and DVD, call toll free (888) 563-4676 or visit [www.mcc.org/catalog](http://www.mcc.org/catalog).

# Rapid Response Churches

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*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

—Matthew 5:9

Government officials are telling Americans to prepare for the next terrorist attack. They warn of biological, chemical or nuclear attacks on airports, schools and shopping centers. Across the country, health care providers, police, fire fighters and city officials are developing rapid response teams and procedures in case of an attack. What is the church doing to prepare?

First, we need to prepare relationships with other people of faith so that we can coordinate our response in a time of crisis. In the days after Sept. 11, 2001, many Christians worried for the safety of their Muslim neighbors. They offered to accompany Muslim women, provide a protective presence at mosques or be on-call in case of threats. Churches also invited local Muslim leaders to forums, so that people would understand that terrorism is not part of the Islamic faith. For many churches, this was the first time they reached out to the Muslim community.

In preparing for the next crisis, we need to take these relationships another step. In war zones, peacebuilders organize “rapid response teams” to create plans for reacting in times of crisis. Churches can build networks of faith-based peacebuilders who act immediately after a crisis to: 1) condemn the violence, 2) provide public forums for helping communities deal with the emotional, physical and spiritual trauma that results from crises and 3) implement plans for keeping people safe, including those who may share identity with the people responsible for the crisis.

Rapid response networks of faith-based peacebuilders would benefit from training in trauma healing, human rights values, conflict analysis, mediation, dialogue facilitation and the design of peacebuilding processes. They need to be prepared to speak out against theological calls for violence or bigotry against others. For example, Church World Service and Eastern Mennonite University partnered after Sept. 11 to create a program that trains faith leaders to respond to trauma and conflict in times of crisis.

Secondly, the U.S. church can support civic education programs to teach fellow U.S. Americans about the responsibilities of living in a democracy and about civilian-based defense. Civilian-based defense does not mean vigilante-style law enforcement using lethal weapons; instead it uses unarmed civilians to defend against attack by outside forces. On Sept. 11, the only plane that did not reach its target was deterred by civilians who organized to resist the hijackers

During WWII, unarmed citizens of Denmark successfully resisted Nazi occupation and saved a majority of their Jewish population. When Nazis forced Jewish Danes to wear the yellow star, non-Jewish Danes wore the star in solidarity. Danish civilians also coordinated a massive strategy to move Jewish people out of the country on fishing boats at night.

Preparing for future crises offers all U.S. Americans an opportunity to enhance the quality of our democracy by forging new and deeper relationships in our communities. The church can provide moral and structural leadership for citizen-based security, both sounding the call for preparation of nonviolent responses in the face of the next crisis, and in creating training and dialogue programs where people can meet with their neighbors to learn how to strengthen the American democratic tradition. ■

## IN OTHER'S WORDS

BY LISA SCHIRCH

Lisa Schirch is an associate professor of peacebuilding in Eastern Mennonite University's Conflict Transformation Program.

**Across the country, health care providers, police, fire fighters and city officials are developing rapid response teams and procedures in case of an attack. What is the church doing to prepare?**



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**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**High School Essay Contest**

The annual MCC Washington Office high school essay contest provides opportunity for Menonite and Brethren in Christ youth to reflect on public policy and Anabaptist faith. This year's themes include the draft, immigration, the Israel-Palestine conflict, partisan politics and the relationship between the gospel and peace-building. Visit [www.mcc.org/us/washington](http://www.mcc.org/us/washington) for more information.

**Ecumenical Advocacy Days**

This year, the MCC Washington Office Spring Seminar is joining the Ecumenical Advocacy Days for Global Peace with Justice, March 11-14, 2005. Sponsored by a broad range of denominations, the days will include speakers, worship services, issue briefings, advocacy trainings and visits to Capitol Hill. This year's theme, "Make All Things New," encompasses several critical regions and issues: Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, the United States, Eco-Justice and Environmental Justice. Visit [www.advocacydays.org](http://www.advocacydays.org) for more information.

 **Pontius' Puddle**

