The Well Votes To Become a Peace Church

This month The Well, a Seventh-day Adventist congregation in Chattanooga, TN, voted to join the network of peace churches. The network is growing, now with five congregations in the process of becoming peace churches. Look for more details on this development in the future (Facebook).

Shall I or Shall We War?

Posted 08/28/14
By Mark A. McCleary

I suggest that the President, war pundits, grieving families, and every “I” and “We” consider war according to counsel. I trust in the practice that a multitude of input is safer than impulsive reactions (Prov. 11:4). (LINK)
News Round-up
Posted 08/28/14

Four news stories covered by Adventist News Network and Adventist Today. (LINK)

Love Your Enemy?
Posted 08/27/14

Denis Kaiser, a presenter at the recent symposium on World War I held at Friedensau Adventist University, has written a reflection piece on WWI for *Adventist World*—“Love Your Enemy” (August 2014, pp. 24-27). (LINK)

Adventists Asked to Follow Example of First Recycler God
Posted 08/27/14

The Adventist Review has been posting updates on the International Conference on the Bible and Science. News editor Andrew McChesney reports on two presentations regarding environmentalism or creation care. (LINK)

What is Central or Peripheral to Adventism, to Adventist Peacemakers?
Posted 08/24/14
By: Jeff Boyd

Chris Blake uses the language of *central* and *peripheral* when discussing the priorities of faith. In the past few weeks, two communications from Ted
Wilson have hinted at what is central and peripheral to Adventism, at least as Wilson envisions it. (LINK)

The Moral Imagination
Posted 08/14/14
By: Jeff Boyd

If we can’t imagine a response other than military action, then that is the only something we’ll advocate for in the public space or work for in our sphere of influence. (LINK)

We Are Our Communication
Posted 08/10/14
By: Barry Casey

What is becoming clearer to me is that we are, all of us in this tortured, dark, yet beautiful world, bound to one another. The death of one—any one—impoverishes all of us. This, I am convinced, is not New Age ignorance disguised as bliss. It is, rather, part of the virtues of humility and courage that Jesus and others exemplified. We cannot not communicate. All that we are, says the Dhammapada, is a result of what we have thought. Our revolution begins from the inside—and affects the world. (LINK)

Adventist Church President Releases Statement on Religious Minorities in Iraq, Syria
Posted 08/09/14

The Adventist News Network (ANN) released a statement by Seventh-day Adventist Church President Ted N. C. Wilson regarding the situation in Iraq and Syria. (LINK)
**Shall I or Shall We War?**

by APF

Submitted by Pastor Dr. Mark A. McCleary  
Senior Pastor, Liberty Seventh-day Adventist Church, Windsor Mill, MD

In the 60s, the musical group Chilites rhetorically asked, “War, what is it good for? Absolutely nothing. Say it again!” Marvin Gaye, the soulful balladeer, caused us to reflect on war’s impact when he asked, “What’s going on?—Brother, brother, brother, there is far too many of you dying. Mother, mother, mother, there is far too many of you crying.” These lyrical prophets speak to the reverberating issues and negative impact of war, then and until now.

Shakespeare’s Hamlet pondered this topic at the micro and interpersonal level when he asked, “To be or not to be, ah, that is the question?” George Hebert Meade describes the individual and socialization via the metaphor of “I” and “Me.” The former is the individual as idiosyncratic initiant, and the latter as the situated person within society, sending and receiving influencing messages. Thus, **Shall I or We War?** indicates the personal and public dynamics and decisions involved in war.

Christopher Marlowe stated, “Accurse be he that first invented war.” On the other hand, Francis Edward Smedley declared, “All is fair in love and war.” Ironically speaking, both are right in my opinion. War is terrible at the individual and corporate levels, and yet the effectual ends of war seem to legitimize even the terribleness of war. Perhaps William Sherman’s assertion helps explain this conundrum—“the legitimate objective of war is a more perfect peace.” This seems to be the battle cry of jingoist protagonists and religious pulpiters who are pro-war in Iran, Korea, the Middle East, or wherever USA Manifest Destiny is hampered. This is especially the case after the recent beheading of the American journalist by Isis. It seems similar to the nationalist pep-rally-like rhetoric of George W. Bush after 911—“the folk who did this will hear from us soon.” Bush made this prediction before any alleged hijacker was identified and before he launched what turned out to be a bogus hunt for weapons of mass destruction. Said weapons, if found would have been used to confirm Iraq and Sadaam Husein’s blame for the 911 tragedy. Shall I or shall we war? According former President Bush, “Yes.”

Human history is a record of war in various manners—between men and women (James Thurber), Civil War (100 Years War in England and between the North and South in the USA), pre-1989 Cold War between the USA and its democratic allies and the USSR, and lastly, the Medieval Crusades until today’s Christian West versus the Islamic fundamentalists. How ironic that a popular Christian hymn, **Onward Christian Soldiers**, written by Sabine Baring-Gould, affords Christian individuals and groups to sing heartily, “On onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before. Christ the royal master, leads against the foe, forward into battle see His banners go.” Shall I or shall we war?

The New Testament writer, James, explains the cause of war when he says, “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war” (James 4:1, 2, NKJV). Perhaps, the mention of war sends chills up your back. However, on this side of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, history and present media outlets report that war is a present and future reality for individuals and global society.

**Conclusions**

God’s guidelines for Israel, in anticipation of encounters with non-Jewish peoples as they traveled to and later occupied the Promise Land are as follows:

- War is with an enemy and not a friend.
War is a final reaction to oppressive interactions that would not respond to positive peace negotiations.

War, sanctioned by God, is to protect His people from the corrupting influence of the aggressor and infidel.

War, authorized by God, will result in salvation for His people and their land.

The Lord, maybe not some individuals and groups, loves all people—Iraqis, Palestinians, Israelis, Ukrainians, and Koreans—"For God so loves the world..." (John 3:16). God is no respecter of persons, regardless of nationality or ethnicity, gender, or social-economic status. I suggest that the President, war pundits, grieving families, and every "I" and "We" consider war according to counsel. I trust in the practice that a multitude of input is safer than impulsive reactions (Prov. 11:4).

I look forward to the day when all wars—Ferguson, MO, environmental upheaval, legislative, religious, micro and macro—will be moribund.

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight is in the fear of the Lord, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist. "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:1-9, NKJV).
**News Round-up**

by Jeff Boyd

**Adventist Church Files Amicus Brief for Workplace Religious Freedom Case at Top U.S. Court** (Ansel Oliver, ANN, 27 Aug 2014)

The Seventh-day Adventist Church filed an amicus brief today urging the United States' top court to accept the case of a Muslim girl who was denied a job because her hijab—a head-covering—violated a company's policy. The Adventist Church's “friend-of-the-court” brief is joined by seven other faith groups for the case Equal Employment Opportunity Commission vs. Abercrombie & Fitch Stores, Inc. [complete article]

**Adventist Church Sponsors Its First Religious Liberty Festival in Britain** (Victor Hulbert, John Surridge, Dan Serb and ANN staff, ANN, 26 Aug 2014)

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Britain held its first religious liberty festival, in which Church leaders offered an overview of religious freedom developments and urged Church members to continue defending rights for people of all faiths and beliefs. More than 2,000 people attended the “Free to Worship” festival on Saturday, August 16, the second of a two-day event at the Bethel Convention Centre in West Bromwich. [complete article]

**Adventist Leaders Speak Out on Unrest in Ferguson, Missouri** (Adventist Today, 21 Aug 2014)

Pastor Daniel R. Jackson, president of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in North America, released a statement early Thursday morning (August 21) about the ongoing civil unrest in Ferguson, Missouri. “As a part of the larger family of America, Seventh-day Adventists grieve with Michael Brown’s family and extend our heartfelt condolences for their tragic loss,” he said. “We are praying for our Ferguson community family who are in such great pain.” [complete article]

**Adventist Church’s Anti-abuse Initiative Set for August 23** (Ansel Oliver, ANN, 15 Aug 2014)

Seventh-day Adventist world church leaders are calling on all Adventist congregations to designate a portion of their August 23 church service to mark the EndItNow Abuse Prevention Emphasis Day. The Adventist Church’s annual day of emphasis brings awareness to the issues of domestic violence, sexual abuse and other forms of mistreatment. [complete article]
AW: Love Your Enemy?

by Jeff Boyd

Denis Kaiser, a presenter at the recent *symposium on World War I* held at Friedensau Adventist University, has written a reflection piece on WWI for *Adventist World*—“Love Your Enemy” (August 2014, pp. 24-27).

Kaiser provides a brief history on the first world war and the Adventist response to it, including the formation of the Reform Movement. Kaiser explains:

As armies mobilized, young Adventists were conscripted and dragged into the machinery of war. Some denominational leaders in Germany lost their nerve and assured the military authorities that its conscripts would defend the homeland with weapons even on the Sabbath. At the same time they sought to convince church members that the Old Testament readiness for war was still applicable today.

This position was, admittedly, not entirely new for Adventists in Central Europe. Yet the fact that these leaders practically told church members what they expected from them was certainly unique. A number of individuals voiced their discontent and opposition. The subsequent turmoil and contention could apparently only be stopped by disfellowshipping the “troublemakers,” resulting in further alienation, antagonism, and hard feelings. This internal “war” eventually led to the establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement.

Kaiser then turns to an ethical exploration of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, arguably the portion of scripture to which Christians (i.e., followers of Jesus Christ) should first turn when attempting to discern Christian moral responsibility. “In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) Jesus outlined the laws of His kingdom and gave us a glimpse of the wide framework in which He addressed moral and ethical issues. John Howard Yoder, a Mennonite theologian and ethicist, detected seven ethical principles in that sermon that I find helpful in considering how we can apply biblical principles under changing conditions and circumstances.”

Kaiser concludes the article by considering the Adventist Church’s mission. “God’s children should be characterized primarily by the attempt to resemble God’s character of perfect, excessive, and reconciling love to friends and enemies. Ultimately, Seventh-day Adventists consider it our mission to proclaim the three angels’ messages ‘to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people’ (Rev. 14:6) to draw people to Jesus so that they may not perish but be saved.”

The complete article can be read online [here](http://adventistpeace.wordpress.com/2014/08/27/aw-love-your-enemy/).
As noted previously (link), the Adventist Review has been posting updates on the International Conference on the Bible and Science. News editor Andrew McChesney reports on two presentations regarding environmentalism or creation care. Steve Dunbar, a marine biologist at Loma Linda University and co-editor of Entrusted, asked the group, “Should Seventh-day Adventists care for the environment more than the rest of the world?” Dunbar continued:

“It’s interesting that some research has been done, and what it has found is Christians are measurably less interested in caring for the environment.”

Dunbar said he was reminded of the Israelites’ complete apathy toward the environment as described by God in Jeremiah 12:10, 11: “Many rulers have ravaged My vineyard, trampling down the vines and turning all its beauty into a barren wilderness. They have made it an empty wasteland; I hear its mournful cry. The whole land is desolate. And no one even cares” (NLT).

“No one cares,” Dunbar said. “What a statement for God to say about Israel, His chosen people. Not even one cares.”

He said Adventists more than anyone have reason to care about the environment because they should understand the biblical teaching that the Earth is owned not by humans but by God.

The second presenter to address environmental issues was Jo Ann Davidson, a professor at Andrews University Theological Seminary. Davidson shared “that the Bible contains a ‘robust doctrine’ in support of the environment from the first pages of Genesis to the last pages of Revelation, and she said that Adventists needed to adopt ‘a more worldly attitude.’” She continued, “It seems curious to me and even remarkable that Seventh-day Adventist Christians who believe in the divine creation of this world … have rarely acknowledged that the biblical parameters of stewardship involve more than money.”

The entire article can be read online here.

About these ads
What is Central or Peripheral to Adventism, to Adventist Peacemakers?

by Jeff Boyd

Chris Blake uses the language of central and peripheral when discussing the priorities of faith (see “In Christ There Is Neither Conservative Nor Liberal,” Adventist Review). In the past few weeks, two communications from Ted Wilson (Seventh-day Adventist world church president) have hinted at what is central and peripheral to Adventism, at least as Wilson envisions it.


As with other difficult questions, the pioneer leaders studied the issues using the Bible as their guide, and concluded that the position most consistent with biblical principles was noncombatancy (the conscientious objection to bearing arms). The primary reason for this position was that Adventists serving in the U.S. military would be forced to compromise their loyalty to God if they obeyed the commands of their officers. The two Bible commandments most directly involved were the fourth—to keep the Sabbath holy, and the sixth—not to kill.

This short overview omits that those who enlisted were disfellowshiped, but there certainly isn’t room to cover every detail of this early period in such a short article. After considering various aspects of Adventist practice and history, Wilson addresses the question of the church’s stance today:

Gary Councell, director of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, addresses this question in his book, Seventh-day Adventists in Military Service: “Though the Seventh-day Adventist Church advocates a noncombatant position, pacifism, military service, or noncombatancy are not tests of church membership. The denomination does not act as the conscience for any member or military commander, but it does seek to inform the conscience and behavior of both, so decisions can be made with a maximum of understanding and thought.” [Gary R. Councell, Seventh-day Adventists and Military Service (Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, 2011), pp. 30, 31.]

Thus, while the official church position is that of noncombatancy—conscientious objection to bearing arms—the decision as to whether or not to serve in the military and bear arms is left to the conscience of the individual.

The church supports Y (noncombatancy), but members are allowed to practice X (combatancy) or Z (pacifism).

Compare this openness to disagreement regarding noncombatancy with a second topic—creation. Wilson spoke about creationism to open the International Conference on the Bible and Science in Las Vegas, Nevada (15 Aug 2014, Adventist Review coverage). Wilson supported a 6-day (6 x 24 hours) recent creation. “We believe that the Biblical creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 was a literal event that took place in six literal, consecutive days recently as opposed to deep time.” This is the most common view held by Adventists, as I understand our history, so it is not
noteworthy in itself. The notable feature of the speech was the boundary-drawing that marks off who is a true Adventist. Wilson stated,

If one does not accept the recent six-day creation understanding then that person is actually not a “Seventh-day” Adventist since the seventh-day Sabbath would become absolutely meaningless historically and theologically and most of our Biblically based doctrines centered in Christ and His authoritative voice would become meaningless as well. The person may claim to be an “Adventist,” but in reality without the clear Biblical understanding of the foundational Sabbath doctrine and God’s authority as Creator and Sovereign of the universe, it is really impossible to arrange a meaningful theological construct that would lead to or be acceptable for a belief in a literal second coming of Christ. (“God’s Authoritative Voice,” 18 Aug 2014)

To be a true Seventh-day Adventist, one must believe in (1) a literal six-day creation that (2) happened recently (approximately 6,000 years ago; “Wilson: No Room for Evolutionists in Adventist Schools”). To be a true Seventh-day Adventist, one must agree with both features.

Comparing these two stories reveals what is central to Adventism and what is more peripheral, at least as understood by the current president. A recent, 6-day creation is central or fundamental, so there is apparently no room for alternate views, even on how recently this creation occurred. Social constructs of peace and nonviolence are considered more peripheral, so there is significant space to state where the church stands, while leaving room for personal conviction.

What do you think?

1) According to your understanding of Adventist history and biblical ethics, how central is shalom to the church, to God’s kingdom?

2) What guides our valuation process of determining what is central and what is peripheral?

3) Is it better for church leaders to lay down absolute boundaries (e.g., creation article) or to state a given position and allow diversity of thought on the topic (e.g., military article)? What are the pros and cons of either approach? What are the useful limits of either approach?

4) Creationism is certainly important to Adventist peacemakers, no matter our various understandings of the details of origins. How do aspects of this doctrine affect our actions, values and lifestyles today (e.g., made in the image of God, creation was “good,” God being the source of life, or relationships between humans, between humans and the rest of creation, between humans and God)?

5) The science and faith conference is a 10-day event. If the church were to convene a similar gathering on Adventist peacemaking, what themes would you want covered?

About these ads
The Moral Imagination

by Jeff Boyd

Note: I write from a North American perspective, specifically from the United States.

The questions we ask greatly determine the answers we find. Therefore, I believe Christian peacemakers need to be intentional about the questions we prioritize. Which of the following questions are productive, distracting, dangerous, or beyond our sphere of influence?

- What should the Ukrainian government do to ensure the integrity of its borders?
- What should the Iraqi government do to protect religious minorities?
- What should Hamas and Israel do to enable peace and security in the region?
- What should the US military do in Iraq and Syria to protect US interests?
- What should the US government do around the world to protect minorities and stop genocides?
- What should Christians do in situations of violence and injustice?
- How can Christians live, work and serve in ways that promote true peace?

For me, the final two questions are the most critical; however, judging from the conversations I have within my Christian social circles as well as the content that appears on my Facebook wall-feed, they are the most ignored.

I occasionally hear this comment in the context of the first five questions: We have to do something. Unfortunately, it seems that for too many of us, the military option is the only something that comes to mind.

It can be difficult to voice reservations about this option. "Don't you care?! You just want to be pious and righteous, ignoring the reality of evil injustice. You can't just talk to these tyrants; they only understand the bullet and the bomb."

While I genuinely believe that nonviolence is a productive strategy for people of any world view or religious conviction, I will direct my thoughts here to Christians, specifically Adventists.

First, I think we need to be careful about believing too firmly in the efficacy of violence. Blowback is real. Unintended consequences are numerous. For example, the US supported Saddam Hussein against Iran, but then for various reasons it was determined that his influence in the world needed to be curtailed, so the US took him out. That left a power vacuum, allowing ISIS/IS to expand, which is today's problem. Arming one group today seems to require the arming of an opposing group tomorrow.

We also supported rebels/freedom fighters in Syria, with some calling for much more military support. "The government is killing their people; we must do something." Now we know that IS was one of the groups in Syria that we supported; some even had a photo op with John McCain during his trip to Syria (Counter Current News). Of course McCain didn't intend to support IS, but rushing to the military option can lead to new problems such as this.

Or consider the US involvement in Afghanistan. We supported the freedom fighters against Russia. But then the winners built a nation we didn't like; so we had to go against the ones we had armed. The cycle of violence—the repeated reality that military intervention creates tomorrow's conflicts—should make a person pause, regardless of whether or not they claim to follow the way of Jesus Christ. That is, setting Christian ethics and values aside, this
historical pattern should seemingly diminish our confidence in the effectiveness of military intervention for creating the future we desire (For more on this see chapter one of Subverting Global Myths, Ramachandra, 2008; yes, a bit dated. There are many more examples both current and historical.).

Second, I think we need to take more seriously the injustice-violence cycle. I once came across a statement by Quakers that essentially said, “Don’t ask us to engage in a violent solution to the Nazi problem when you ignored our counsel all along that the Versailles Treaty was bound to foster such problems.” Similarly, throughout the “War on Terror,” some of us have argued that US actions—drone strikes, indefinite detention in Guantanamo, extraordinary rendition, the torture of prisoners in Abu Ghraib, to name a few—act to make recruitment efforts by terrorist organizations all the more effective. Peace activists are not surprised by IS and other radicalized movements; we have been warning about the possibility all along. Naturally, it is not only the acts of the US military that incubate movements like IS; governments in the Middle East are quite capable of stoking it as well. Acts of injustice today—regardless of the actor—create conditions for violence tomorrow.

Third, I think far too many people have failed to develop what John Paul Lederach calls the moral imagination (see The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace, 2005). And here I now speak directly to those who desire to follow Jesus in the real world—this messy, violent, unjust world.

If we can’t imagine a response other than military action, then that is the only something we’ll advocate for in the public space or work for in our sphere of influence. So I ask: What else can Christians do to limit violence and promote a just peace? I believe that any action that supports justice today makes peace possible tomorrow. “If you want peace, work for justice.” There are countless ways to support justice in the world; let your imagination run wild!

Here are some questions to spark your imagination:

If I would go to the Middle East to fight violently for justice, would I go and work nonviolently with a development and relief agency? Consider MCC (positions, story).

If I would advocate for America’s youth to go fight in the Middle East, would I also advocate for Adventist youth to go on a delegation there with Christian Peacemaker Teams?

If I would advocate for American tax dollars to go for military operations, would I also advocate for church finances to support peace and justice ministries and projects?

Do I consider the promotion of peace and justice to be the business of government but not the business of the church? If so, what assumptions is this division based on?

What injustice is some entity in my circle of influence perpetrating or experiencing today? How can I work to promote justice in this area today in order to prevent violence tomorrow?

One significant struggle peacemakers face is the call for instant results. We need to stop the Syrian war now. We have to end the Ukrainian conflict now. We must stop Hamas and Israel from bombing each other now. Somebody has to stop IS now. Because military intervention is perceived as the only effective short-term approach, we too easily ignore the need for longer-term approaches that deal with the roots of the problems. As soon as Country X is “solved,” we must immediately stop the violence in Country Y with another “humanitarian intervention.” We follow the media, jumping from headline to headline, from conflict to conflict—solve each one now (and “my party would never have let it get this bad in the first place”). As Christians, maybe we can find a way to slow down and look at the longer game. Kevin Courtney, who founded Preemptive Love while living in Iraq, shares this conviction:

We need a long-term plan, not just a short-term fix. There are agencies helping Christians, Yezidis, Turkmen, Shabak and others, and those services are necessary. But this isn’t only about what Obama or Maliki must do now. The Christian church needs to reconsider its relationship with violence; that is part of what has landed us and others in this dire situation. We cannot carp about Christian persecution and not talk about violence and our use of violent
solutions. We need a 40- to 50-year plan so that when the time comes to overthrow the next dictator, we are not as blind to our own complicity and stuck with short-term gains. (Huffington Post, 11 Aug 2014)

The questions we ask greatly determine the answers we find, so I encourage Adventist peacemakers to start with the question, *What can I uniquely do as a disciple of Jesus?* Jesus isn’t caught off guard by these violent developments. He said the love of most would grow cold and that there would be wars and rumors of wars. Peace organizations can’t stop all war, but wars don’t end war either. Only Jesus’ return will do that. But here in the midst of great suffering and evil, Jesus blessed the peacemakers and taught many lessons on peacemaking if we have ears to hear them. *The world knows how to use its weapons; do we know how to use the tools of the Spirit? What questions am I prioritizing?*

**A few articles to nurture the moral imagination:**

- [Fr. John Dear, Dismissed from Jesuits](http://religiondispatches.org/2014/03/06/fr-john-dear-dismissed-from-the-jesuits/) (Sweas, Religion Dispatches, 6 Mar 2014)
"Every part of a system is so related to its fellow parts that a change in one part will cause a change in all of them and in the total system. That is, a system behaves not as a simple composite of independent elements, but coherently and as an inseparable whole."

These dispassionate words may not come to mind when we see the shelling in Gaza or watch in horror the videos of what the Islamic State is doing to Christians in Mosul. But they give us a way to deal with these extremes and to understand them.

The quote is from *Pragmatics of Human Communication* (1967) by Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin, and Don Jackson, who were three of the principal researchers at the Mental Research Institute of Palo Alto in the late 60s and early 70s. The pioneering work that they did, trying to understand the connections between communication and human behavior, was an interdisciplinary venture that spanned psychopathology, mathematics, literature, systems theory, and communication studies. They wanted to know how communication as an *interactional process* affected our behavior.

Starting from the axiom that “all behavior is communication and one cannot not communicate,” they arrived at the conclusion that everything we do when we communicate with each other affects all our communication processes and cannot be separated out. Put simply, to say that the actions of person A *causes* the behavior of person B ignores the relation of B to A and the effect B may have on A's subsequent reactions.

Like it or not, they seem to be saying, we’re all in this together. Every time Hamas fires a rocket at an Israeli settlement it is communicating; with the inevitable reciprocation on Gazan villages there is a deadly communication process in place that becomes a feedback loop. Every action results in a reaction which provokes a new action *ad infinitum*.

Furthermore, if we isolate an action in order to find its cause—and thus to blame—we miss the wider context in which that action takes place. We discover that actions happen in a context and that that context occurs within a relationship between people and groups. Focusing on the particular actions and not on the relationship between the parts of this system results in us missing the meaning of the actions that take place.

An example given by the authors is the difference between my foot kicking a stone and me kicking a dog. When my foot hits the stone it will move and eventually come to rest again. But if I kick the dog it may jump up and bite me. The kick has become not simply energy but information; my behavior has communicated something which the dog, rightly so, interprets as an attack and responds accordingly. A kick is not just a kick within a relationship: it sends a message that grew out of the relationship prior to the kick and will affect responses to the kick.

As I read news reports of the actions of ISIS/Islamic State, watched videos, and read the comments of readers and...
viewers I could feel a tension building in me. I could imagine the desperation of the thousands trapped on Sinjar Mountain, the children dying from thirst and exhaustion. And I wanted to obliterate the militants surrounding them on the plains below. It wasn’t enough that American pilots drop supplies to the victims: I wanted to see the bodies of those fighters after the bombs tore through them. I wanted video of them calling out for help as they bled to death.

And then a curious but inevitable thing happened. As the tension in me built the world divided up neatly into right and wrong, black and white, us and them. Crush them all! Barbarians! Stomp their lives out! So they’re killing Christians and ethnic minorities? Damn Muslims!

In a flash I had gone from righteous indignation to murderous wrath, from a generalized tolerance for other religions to a Crusade mentality against all Muslims. From the particular to the general. Kill ‘em all and let God sort it out later.

It got even worse when I stumbled across a website that is apparently run by Christians who believe Islam is Satanic. Their comments were raw hatred, all the visceral fear and fury of those who are absolutely certain that their enemy is the Devil and they are on the side of the angels. And these were self-confessed Christians. In the words of George Orwell’s Animal Farm, I looked from pigs to men and from men to pigs, and already I could not tell the difference. And that’s when I remembered Paul Watzlawick and his pragmatics of human communication.

I realized I was confronted with a moral dilemma that I couldn’t face—the slaughter of the innocents. I was helpless to do anything except inwardly rail against the perpetrators. The situation was too complex for me to handle, so I simplified it. I had divided my perceptual world in two: Christians and Muslims. But of course it’s much more nuanced than that. It’s Sunni against Shiite, Kurdish against Iraqis, caliphate against sovereign states, America against rebel forces, economic interests against religious and political ideologies, men against women and children, hate-filled Christian extremists against fanatical Islamic jihadists.

But even that was still too simple, a binary response to something multi-faceted and entangled. I recalled something I’d read years ago by William Irwin Thompson, a cultural historian and philosopher: “We become the thing we hate,” he said. And I remembered, too, how easily we are manipulated by media images, and how adept political and military groups have become at the propaganda arts. Our instant and ubiquitous media draws us all across the lines in the sand. By watching we become changed—and not for the better. All those Christian groups glued to their YouTube videos, who thought Hamas and Islamic State would be in our streets next week unless we nuked them, would be more likely to turn on their neighborhood mosque or to beat up someone wearing a hijab on the Metro.

I am not at all settled on this. I could visualize myself, with the best intentions, running out into no mans land with my hands out, imploring both sides to cease fire, and getting shot before I could make my eloquent statement. Where am I on the non-violence idea? Generally for it, from the safety of my Maryland suburb. Children in Mosul were being beheaded, said a Chaldean-American activist on CNN. Is that true? I shudder to think so, and yet my children have their heads on their shoulders in the sweet summer evening air. Am I to feel guilt because we are safe, our home has not been bombed, my wife and daughter have not been raped? Guilt of that sort doesn’t seem productive and yet my heart can feel the terror and the blind rage and the sheer relief of having survived an attack, all in my imagination.

Hobbes thought the world was a place of constant terror, a life that was, as he famously put it, ‘nasty, brutish, and short.’ Kant was steadfast against lying and murder, for any reason, and Aristotle counseled moderation in all things. Courage and prudence were cardinal virtues that didn’t need to be moderated; how could you be too courageous or too prudent? Dietrich Bonhoeffer, that Christian exemplar of integrity and ethics, said, ‘When a horse is running wild in the street, you stop the horse.’ There is a time for words and a time for action, he seemed to be saying. Pacifist that I am would I hesitate to shoot someone about to murder women and children? The Tao cautions that violence should be the absolute last resort, and be discharged with sorrow and not with triumph.

What is becoming clearer to me is that we are, all of us in this tortured, dark, yet beautiful world, bound to one another. The death of one—any one—impoverishes all of us. This, I am convinced, is not New Age ignorance disguised as bliss. It is, rather, part of the virtues of humility and courage that Jesus and others exemplified. We cannot not communicate. All that we are, says the Dhammapada, is a result of what we have thought. Our revolution
begins from the inside—and affects the world.

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Read my blog @ http://danteswoods.com
The Adventist News Network (ANN) has released the following statement by Seventh-day Adventist Church President Ted N. C. Wilson:

It is with great sadness and deep concern that we have learned of the tragic situation where tens of thousands of Christians and others have been subjected to persecution, coercion, killings, intimidation and lack of religious liberty in certain areas of Iraq and Syria.

I urgently call upon all Seventh-day Adventist Church members around the world to pray for the victims of this extremism in religious intolerance. We also need to pray for various religious minorities who are targeted because of their religious convictions and beliefs.

It is important that the international community act unitedly to stop the persecution of Christian believers and others who represent those who have lived in relative peace with their Muslim neighbors in the Middle East for hundreds of years.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church will do its best to assist victims of this new tragedy, which reflects a total lack of religious liberty, and we will earnestly pray for a positive resolution to this appalling situation. May the Holy Spirit as the Comforter come especially close to those facing immediate persecution and death at this time.

ANN Statement

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