

Invitation to a Christian Witness for Peace in Iraq

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We invite you to join thousands in a "Christian Peace Witness for Iraq." As followers of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, our faith compels us to make our voice heard—to repent of our complicity with the invasion and occupation of Iraq and to renew our commitment to peacemaking. We ask you to join us in praying for peace, studying the Scriptures, learning nonviolence, lighting candles of hope, and gathering together for an ecumenical public witness on March 16, 2007, the fourth anniversary of the war in Iraq. We stand in solidarity with sisters and brothers in other faith traditions and ask their prayers and support for our witness.

Just as Jesus wept over Jerusalem because it did not know the things that make for peace, we weep over Washington, D.C., because of the tremendous human suffering and loss of life that have resulted from our government's policies toward Iraq. We are convinced that peace in Iraq cannot be won militarily. It is time to bring the troops home and to support a comprehensive peace process there.

We believe, with Martin Luther King, Jr., that "the ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it.... Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.... The chain reaction of evil-hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars—must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation."

Peace Witness Focus

1. End the U.S. Occupation. Like Isaiah, we are called to raise our prophetic voice, saying that security cannot be achieved through military domination of one people over another. We call on one another to find genuine security in God, who insists that we build just relationships with all people. We call on the President and Congress to bring

our troops home from Iraq, to remove our military bases and to stop threatening Iran and other nations.

2. Support Our Troops. Like Jesus, who healed the sick and preached good news to the poor, we are called to be a pastoral presence to our country. We call on one another to care for soldiers and their families who give so much of themselves in times of conflict. We call on the President and Congress to provide generous support for veterans and active-duty soldiers and their families as they seek to rebuild their lives.

3. Rebuild Iraq. Like Paul, we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves and to care even for our enemies. The lives of our sisters and brothers in Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, and across the Middle East have been turned upside down by the war. We call on one another to financially support relief efforts in Iraq through our denominations. We call on the President and Congress to lead the way in funding international reconstruction of Iraq and providing humanitarian aid for shattered Iraqi families, for our experience in other conflicts has taught us that such assistance is the most effective path to real security for all people around the world.

4. Say NO to Torture. Like the disciple who learned to put away the sword, we are called to treat others as we want to be treated. We call on one another to learn and practice the discipline of active nonviolence: to resist violence and injustice and to construct the culture of peace and reconciliation that we all desire. We insist that our government treat all enemy combatants humanely and take decisive action to ensure that torture is banned by all agencies of the United States government.

5. Say YES to Justice. Like Mary, who praised God for lifting up the lowly and filling the hungry with good things, we long for a world free from hunger, homelessness, environmental

destruction, injustice, and oppression. We call on one another to do justice and show mercy to make our vision plain. We call on the President and Congress to create a federal budget that puts priority on meeting basic human needs instead of on making war. Let us together begin to fashion a just peace dividend that is both renewable and lasting.

Public Witness, March 16, 2007

These preparations will culminate in public Christian witness for peace on March 16 in Washington, D.C., and elsewhere. We will share in an evening ecumenical worship service at the Washington National Cathedral, a candlelight procession to the White House, and a late night peace vigil, during which some participants may engage in "divine obedience" (civil disobedience) and risk possible arrest. We invite you to come to Washington, D.C., or to join similar public witness events in your community. We will provide resources for this invitation on our Web site <christianpeacewitness.org>. We invite you to register your participation on the Web site.

We believe that until the Christian community is willing to take risks for peace, to put its words into action, to publicly witness that the war in Iraq is wrong, more people will die, more violence will shatter more lives, and we will all be less secure. Let us commit to the fullness of the gospel vision of justice, peace, inclusive community, and wholeness. Let us choose life that we and our children and the people of Iraq may live! ■

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES: *Luke 19:41–42; Isaiah 31; Luke 7:22; Galatians 5:13–15; Romans 12:19–21; Matthew 26:51–52; Matthew 7:12; Deuteronomy 30:19; Luke 1:46–55; Micah 6:8*

For the list of partner organizations

visit <www.christianpeacewitness.org> and go to "partner orgs."

The Adventist Peace Fellowship Advisory Group has endorsed participation in this witness and a visible Adventist presence is being planned. Check <www.adventistpeace.org> for more information as it develops. I would urge, though, if you feel a conviction, that you not necessarily wait for directions or permission. Act, initiate, and if you let me know (dmorgan@adventistpeace.org) what you are doing, we will publicize it. We can also then look for opportunities to link together.

—Douglas Morgan, Adventist Peace Fellowship

Why I Want to Witness for Peace | BY DOUGLAS MORGAN

NOT LONG AGO, I read a story—one I had read before—but it struck me in a new way and with such force that it has kept returning to my mind ever since. And now, here it is again as I think about why I want to be part of the Christian Peace Witness for Iraq on March 16, 2007, and why I want to encourage other Adventists to support it, too.

Probably you, too, are familiar with this strange little story—more like a mini-episode, really. But perhaps you, like me, may begin to wonder whether we have allowed its explosive power to dent the confines of our familiarity.

It takes place on a mountain in Palestine—Galilee, more specifically—where a man and his followers have gathered on a spring day not quite two thousand years ago. It comes at the very end of Matthew's account of the story of Jesus (Matt. 28). Some women are giving out the story that the Jesus who had just been very publicly executed by crucifixion and buried was no longer in the tomb when they went to visit it. This despite the fact that the Roman imperial authorities had sealed the tomb shut (Matt. 27:62–66).

The women are also saying that an angel and then Jesus himself had given them a message for his disciples—meet me in Galilee. Jesus' followers find the designated mountain but, amazingly, when they see him, some doubt, or hesitate. Perhaps they have arrived in a semi-resistant frame of mind, miffed that Jesus had given them instructions through women, rather than talking to them directly.

Whatever the reason, Jesus does not rebuke their doubt. He simply makes a stupendous, audacious claim: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." All authority. Not just in heaven, certainly not just in some blissful constellation of clouds or some disembodied realm of Ideals, but *on earth*. Not just some day way off in the future, but *now*, already a done deal.

How absurd and offensive, this assertion of authority, both then and now. Plainly, Rome had full authority in Jesus' world. To say otherwise was sure to stir up trouble. As for me—and I suspect for many today—the very word *authority* grates harshly on my sensibilities. Racial oppression, subordination of women, suppression of critical

thinking, militarism, that old-time Adventist dogmatism, legalism, and judgmentalism—all these make up the stuff of “authority.” Indeed, “question authority” has long been a fundamental tenet of my personal creed.

But the man on the Galilean mountain keeps drawing me. The earlier parts of his story tell me that he taught and lived peace, love, justice, compassion, and reconciliation like none other, and that he went to a cruel death when he could have summoned twelve legions of angels to annihilate his persecutors. If that’s true, and if it’s also true that this same man came out of tomb, resurrected from the dead, then I want to join his followers in worshiping him.

Then his claim of authority becomes the good news that this Jesus—the Prince of Peace and Lord of Love—is in fact the world’s true ruler. His authority of self-sacrificing love—an authority that doesn’t coerce or lose patience even with those who doubt when the evidence is right before their eyes—becomes the basis upon which I can question all other authority.

It also authorizes me to act as an agent of his kingdom and establishes a framework for defining my mission. Having been gripped in a new way by the story that discloses his authority, I want, more than ever, everything I do to somehow, some way, bear witness to the good news of his kingdom, a gospel that calls people from every nation, culture, and ethnicity into a community of disciples who observe what he commands.

Therefore, the agenda that drives my interest in the Christian Peace Witness for Iraq (CPWI) is, in a word, *soul-winning*. I’d like to help get the word out that Jesus is the world’s true Lord. I’d like to help win souls to give their allegiance to the Lord who pronounced blessing on peacemakers, who commanded his followers to love their enemies—not to retaliate against violence or defend his cause with the sword—and who made treatment of the poor and powerless the benchmark for the behavior of those who would share the inheritance of his eternal kingdom.

As Charles Scriven has put it, peacemaking—“the making of human wholeness through the practice and preaching of the love of God”—is the heart of our evangelistic mission (see “The Peacemaking Remnant: Seven Theses” at <www.adventistpeace.org>). I see March 16, 2007, as a great opportunity to evangelize. ■

Douglas Morgan is professor of history and political studies at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Peacemaking vs. Pacifism | INTERVIEW WITH DOUGLAS MORGAN

Jesus didn’t get involved in politics. How can you get mixed up in a political protest and claim to be acting in his name?

It seems to me that peacemaking, like action for religious liberty, flows directly from the gospel of Jesus and thus transcends the interests of any political party. I would point out that for a century and a half now, Adventists have addressed specific issues in the legislative and governmental arenas on behalf of these gospel principles, not on behalf of partisan political interests or for the seizure of political power

Yes, Adventists have devoted much more energy to religious liberty than to peacemaking. A significant historical record for the latter also exists, though. In fact, I can recommend a good book about that. It’s called *The Peacemaking Remnant: Essays and Historical Documents*, and it’s available from the Adventist Peace Fellowship, <www.adventistpeace.org>, and at Amazon.com.

We know that there will not be world peace before Jesus returns—“wars and rumors of war” are signs of his return as the only hope for the world. Isn’t it rather futile to work for peace between nations?

Adventist health care practitioners engage in the arts of healing without any illusions that their work will bring about the eradication of all disease or even that their efforts will result in permanently perfect health for the individual they are treating. They heal because God is a healer and they want to make that healing tangible in the lives of suffering people, even while the world remains under the curse of disease and death.

Would not the same be true of Adventists who work for peace in complex and seemingly intractable situations of human conflict? Jesus said peacemakers would be called children of God. For me, that’s reason enough. And though whatever impact for peace we make will always be provisional and imperfect, it seems to me that the difference made in the lives of suffering people can be just as real and beneficial as successful surgery.

Even if this is so, peace activism seems like a diversion from the distinctive Adventist mission of preparing the way for Christ’s return by proclaiming the Three Angels’ messages throughout the world.

I have become convinced of just the opposite. I don’t think a call to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, to follow in the way of the Lamb, can be very compelling if nonviolence and peacemaking are nowhere to be seen.

On June 12, 1898, when the United States was making its first foray into imperialism, *Review and Herald* editor A. T. Jones wrote in his paper that only

when Christians are clear about loving their enemies and not killing them will "this world have a chance to know that God has sent Jesus Christ into the world, and has loved us as he loves Jesus Christ."

I take it that Jones is saying that without something like authentic discipleship when it comes to war and killing, our latter-day Adventist message will be hampered in bringing people to a clear and definitive knowledge of Christ so that they can make the critical decision for or against him.

So I see peacemaking as intrinsic to an Adventist evangelistic witness, not a diversion from it. And there is another reason. The present war has been driven to a considerable extent by people who claim to be Bible-believing Christians, but whose vision of God's plan for history makes them trenchant advocates of U.S. dominance of the globe through overwhelming military might. America rules, and that's the way God intends it.

But read what Ellen White has written in the *Desire of Ages* about the mission that the risen Lord gave his followers:

Christ tears away the wall of partition, the dividing prejudice of nationality, and teaches a love for all the human family. He lifts men from the narrow circle which their selfishness prescribes. He abolishes all territorial lines and artificial distinctions of society. He makes no difference between neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies. He teaches us to look upon every needy soul as our brother, and the world as our field. (823)

Your talk of peace and love and all that sounds nice, but it's quite naïve. Don't you realize that armed forces are necessary in an evil world and that we would not enjoy the freedoms we have without our military strength? And remember, the apostle Paul tells us that "the sword" is ordained of God for the restraint of evil.

As I have struggled with this question, I ran across an article some time ago that made a distinction between "liberal pacifism" and "messianic pacifism" that I found useful. Liberal pacifism has as its target the total or near-total disarmament of the nations and a renunciation of war as means of resolving conflict. Messianic pacifism renounces weapons of war out of allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord, the one invested with full authority in heaven and on earth.

As a "messianic pacifist," I participate in a public witness such as that planned for March 16, 2007, with two purposes in mind. One is that we might influence public officials to "do the things that make for peace"—in this instance not perpetuate the folly and futility of war in Iraq. The hope here simply is to reduce violence and suffering and promote nonviolent means of resolving conflicts, rather than some comprehensive, utopian transformation as "liberal pacifism" might envision.

It seems to me that, as a follower of Jesus, I have to care—deeply care—about measures that move us in the direction of peace, however partial and fragile. But the basis upon which I urge governmental entities to take these incremental steps is not the Sermon on the Mount or loyalty

to Jesus as the world's true sovereign, but on the government's own claims to be an instrument of peace and justice (as found, for example, in constitutions, laws, official proclamations, and the like).

At the same time, though, there is that second and overarching purpose of bearing witness to Jesus as the Prince of Peace. The hope here is that action for peace in his name will be one means of attracting people to his kingdom and cause, to become his disciples and observe his commandments.

One more thing: Since I, perhaps foolishly, brought up the "p" word, I want to say that the Adventist Peace Fellowship, and as far as I know the CPWI, do not make *pacifism* a criterion of involvement. The key principle is *peacemaking*.

But how do you know what particular military and diplomatic policies are best for peace? After all, the Iraq war overthrew a brutal, menacing tyrant and the United States has not incurred another terrorist attack for five and one-half years. Do you think you have the "Jesus-approved" foreign policy? Joining an antiwar march to "bear witness for Jesus" implies that you do.

I don't know for certain that the conclusions I've drawn are the right ones, and I certainly can't claim to know the mind of God. I can only claim to act out of a desire to serve Christ, guided by convictions growing out of my own study of the evidence.

The varying reasons set forth for this war have been discredited—massively so. The public has been misled by hundreds of false public statements by high administration officials. It seems clear that the war was driven by a dangerous ideology of American empire—a sort of messianic militarism—rather than prudent and effective deterrence of terrorism. The result has been hundreds of thousands of needless deaths, a planting of seeds of hatred and resentment likely to stoke the cycle of violence for decades, and a horrible mess for which there seems to be no good solution.

And the loudest cheers for all of this, the most powerful political constituency in support of it, have come from the people in America who make the most noise about being followers of Jesus.

In the face of all of this, silence, for me, would be unfaithfulness to the Jesus I have come to know through my own encounter with the New Testament witness, and to whom I have pledged my allegiance.

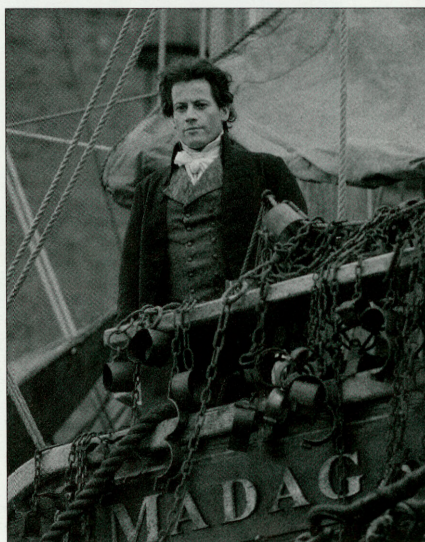
Even if you have some valid points, a protest demonstration like this hardly seems like an appropriate environment for Adventists. An angry spirit, strident denunciations, ridicule of public officials—often vulgar—seem to prevail at such events, not to mention consciousness-altering controlled substances.

I think we sometimes need to stand together with people very different from us in a common cause. That said, the organizers of this action have addressed the concerns you raise with a "Nonviolence Pledge"

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Ioan Gruffudd stars as William Wilberforce, a pioneer abolitionist—but not the author of the song, which became an anthem for the antislavery movement. It was composed by John Newton, a former slave and one of Wilberforce's friends.



history and our own are incredible. I don't know how hard the filmmakers had to work to draw out those matches, but it's pretty blatant. There's a world power defending its empire abroad in a war against insurgents (these ones are in America); the people are kept in too much a state of fear to be amenable to social change; economic hardship is cited as a justifiable excuse for inaction against injustice; understanding the evils of chattel slavery leads activists to realize the evils of the entire economic system that creates rich and poor; anyone who speaks out against the national leader is labeled unpatriotic and seditious; people are always hatin' on the French....

The movie is also packed with tight one-liners. I may have to watch it again with a pen and notebook in hand to jot them all down.

Of course, it's a shame that the movie focuses so

much on white people's work to end slavery, and that there is all of one African character. Presenting the good activism of white abolitionists is the goal of the movie, and it meets its goal. But I am consistently disappointed in us white people that we seem to need to have our hands held through antiracist work, and that we can't just hear the stories of racist oppression and figure out how to act.

The makeup in the movie is amazing; the actors really do look twenty years older than their younger selves. And, yes, the movie has a love story, and, yes, it has busty cleavage and tight pants, if you need that sort of thing in your movie-going ventures.

Oh, and about the song? It was composed at the end of the eighteenth century by John Newton, a former slave ship worker, who wrote it as a sort of confession about the sins he had committed against fellow creatures of God. Newton was one of Wilberforce's friends and role models, and the song became an anthem for the movement. Watch the movie and you'll know even more. ■

Audrey deCoursey is a member of the Church of the Brethren and a M.Div. student at the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California.

Questions

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that all participants are expected to affirm. I think it's rather impressive.

- We will be open and respectful toward each person we encounter.
- We will be positive examples of Christ's love for all people. Whenever possible, our witness will be for the power of that love rather than against the evil that we deplore.
- Our actions will be grounded in our shared worship, prayer, study of the Bible, and reliance on our historic confessions. These are the fundamental building blocks of our faith.
- We will use no violence, verbal or physical, toward any person, especially those with whom we disagree or officers of the law who feel compelled to arrest us as we carry out nonviolent, peaceful protest.
- We will not destroy or damage any property.
- When engaging in nonviolent acts of "divine obedience" that may be seen as breaking the law, we will accept the consequences of our actions.
- We will not carry anything that could be construed as a weapon.
- We will not bring or use alcohol or drugs (except for medical purposes). ■

Note: The pledge is posted at <www.christianpeacewitness.org>