

geous African American civil rights leader who was shot and killed in 1968, believed that redemption comes through interventions of truth, painful though they may be. John Dear writes in *Our God is Nonviolent*:

“On August 5, 1966, King led six hundred blacks and whites into the all-white Marquette Park section outside of Chicago, where they were met with shouts, rocks, bottles, and bricks. With every green lawn and white house the marchers passed, the violence got worse. A few minutes later, a knife was thrown at King, just missing him and striking a white onlooker instead. When critics charged him with provoking violence, King responded as he had throughout the South. ‘We do not seek to precipitate violence. However, we are aware that the existence of injustice in society is the existence of violence, latent violence. We feel we must constantly expose this evil, even if it brings violence upon us.’ If violence is brought out into the open, King maintained, ‘then the community will be forced to deal with it.’”

“Direct nonviolent action may appear only to provoke, or even alienate, opponents and observers. But if it is truly rooted in nonviolent love,

it will lead to a revelation: the truth about society and its violence and oppression, and the silence that often accompanies them. And then the necessary reconciliation will follow. First hearts and minds will be changed, then the policies and systems that perpetuate the injustice will be altered.” (pp. 19-20).

A faith which claims that God is redeeming the world through the execution of its leader would hardly be expected to make the avoidance of trouble a key tenet of its teaching. Neither would it expect large things to be accomplished without prayer and sacrifice, including church-wide financial sacrifice. Such a vision has an address, rent to pay, training to finance and mouths to feed.

IN CONCLUSION

CPT’s *FAITH* (prayer, politics and pacifism), its *LOVE* (healing, hospitality and honesty), and its *TRUTH* (travel, talk and trouble) are anticipations of resurrection. We are responsible for the implications of faith, initiatives of love and interventions of truth. God does the resurrections.



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Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) is an initiative of the historic peace churches with broad ecumenical participation. CPT sends teams of trained peacemakers into situations of violence and areas of militarization to support local efforts for nonviolent solutions to lethal conflict. The work of CPT is guided by a Steering Committee comprised of representatives from sponsoring denominations and organizations: • Church of the Brethren • Friends United Meeting • Mennonite Church Canada • Mennonite Church USA • Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America • Congregation of St. Basil (Basilians) • Every Church a Peace Church • On Earth Peace Assembly • Presbyterian Peace Fellowship

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INTERVENTIONS OF TRUTH

by John Stoner



INTRODUCTION

Does the church have an alternative to the world’s destructive military responses to troubled regions like Kuwait, Somalia and Bosnia? Is there another power to confront evil, a power which grows out of moral and spiritual commitments?

Somewhere the thought must be introduced that violence and war are not the answer.

Christians must ask, “If it is believed that war is the answer to the raging of evil, then what is the answer to the raging of war?”

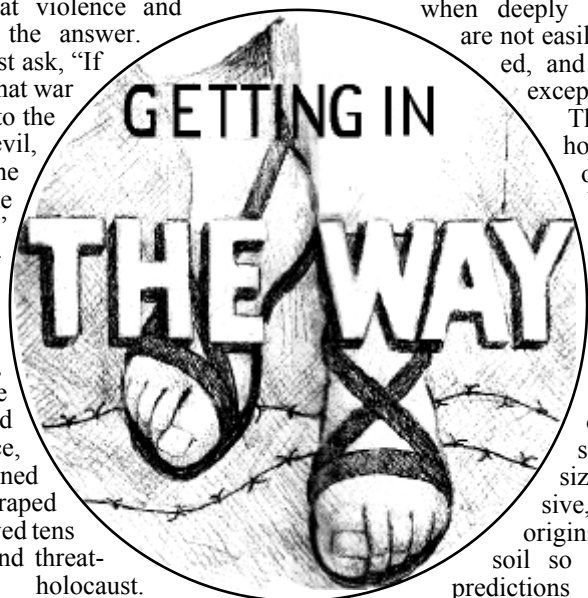
Some people believe that World War II was the “good war”, but in its wake came the world arms race, which has ruined economies, raped the earth, starved tens of millions, and threatens nuclear holocaust.

Purportedly to end one dreadful holocaust, the advocates of war set in motion the engines of another immeasurably greater holocaust. As John Dear has said, “In a sense, World War II never ended; it became the nuclear arms race” (*Our God is Nonviolent*, p.2). If that was a good war, what would a bad one look like?

To its credit, the church does show signs of becoming increasingly uncomfortable with war. As Christians fight Christians (or Muslims, or Serbs, or Croats) in one place after another, the church is not pleased with the behavior of its members. So it preaches a few sermons, convenes a conference or two and wrings its hands, yet generally ends up siding with those who justify violent intervention. Destructive institutions, when deeply entrenched, are not easily discredited, and war is no exception.

There is, however, another possibility for the church. It is called Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT). Its outlines are still dim, its size unimpressive, but its origins are in a soil so fertile that predictions of growth cannot be dismissed as flights of fantasy.

Indeed, its roots are found in the pivotal event of history. CPT is based on the implications of faith, initiatives of love and interventions of truth which have come down from Jesus of Nazareth. Serious observers of the human drama do not take this kind of parentage lightly.



IMPLICATIONS OF FAITH

Christian Peacemaker Teams is an implication of Christian faith as understood in the Anabaptist and historic peace church traditions. CPT is rooted in the life of Jesus, who is the guiding example and energizing gift of faith to those who follow him. Prayer, politics and pacifism are implications of the faith practiced by Jesus and his followers.

PRAYER

Before his public ministry began, Jesus lived in solitary prayer for 40 days in the wilderness. In his desert experience he sought the will of God for his life. Filled with the Spirit of God at his baptism and guided by the words of the prophets, Jesus probed the shape and method of his vocation before he set out to live it.

Prayer precedes mission and action. For CPT this means that both the corporate and individual mission must find their direction and energy in prayer. "Nonviolence is rooted in prayer," says John Dear in his book *Disarming the Heart* (Herald Press, 1993). "As a way of life that resists evil, speaks the truth, risks suffering and death and enters into the process of global transformation, nonviolence relies entirely on God. It begins with prayer, with a heart open to the God of peace."

Prayer for CPT began ten years ago when Ron Sider proposed to the Mennonite World Conference that followers of the nonviolent Jesus should launch a nonviolent army over the years. Prayer has been a central part of every CPT training, conference and public action. Today scores of individuals wrestle in prayer with their call to volunteer for a CPT team, or for a three year term with the Christian Peacemaker Corps. CPTers pray for

direction, for courage, and for strength to avoid hatred and bitterness.

Life and death questions are involved in the CPT movement. The peace churches face a crisis of spirit and vocation. God is calling them to a task and commitment in the 90's which outstrips the conscientious objection and alternative service program of the '40's. It is indeed time for wilderness and Gethsemane sized prayer.

Jesus' prayer in the desert continued through his public ministry and culminated in the crisis of Gethsemane, where the temptation to abandon his commitment to love his enemies shook him to the very core. It is clear from the life of Jesus that the nonviolent struggle for justice is not easy, but also evident that his "hunger and thirst to see right prevail" (Matt. 5:6) led to resurrection. The disciples who slept through the prayer in the garden proceeded later to rely on the sword. The church is called to stay awake in prayer, to watch with heart alert. Nothing less can disarm human hearts of violence and arm them with the greater power of love.

POLITICS

Jesus' faith took him straight into the world of politics. CPT, if it is a movement of faith, will likewise engage political powers in the struggle over love and truth.

"The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the good news," said Jesus (Mark 1). When Jesus put the word "kingdom" at the center of his message, he made politics unavoidable. Kingdoms and kings were the centers of power and objects of loyalty and allegiance in that day. Power, loyalty and allegiance are what politics is about. When Jesus announced an alternate kingdom of God, he issued a challenge to every reigning king who claimed the allegiance of the people.

An influential book written in 1972

with the wind, the birds, and Jesus, it is not awed or imprisoned by them. At times the travel will be to the halls of power, in Jerusalem, Rome, Washington and Wall Street, where oppression is plotted and guards forbid entrance. The troubled globe cries out for interventions of truth through travel.

TALK

Truth is expressed in communication. Indeed, it is often discovered in communication, emerging in the midst of talk among seeking people. So when Jesus arrived, he talked, listened and responded.

Christian Peacemaker Teams also deal in words and conversation, language and communication. Freedom of speech is one of the main freedoms curtailed when travel is obstructed and human contact restricted. This is why laws of trespass seldom serve the human cause, and why disciples from St. Peter to Liz McAlister and the Berrigans have crossed forbidden lines to speak where they were ordered to remain silent.

After Jesus traveled into Jerusalem he talked in the temple, the center of power, religion and commerce. There he condemned economic exploitation, called for faith in God, taught the practice of forgiveness, challenged the leaders to rule justly, declared the love of God and of neighbor to be the greatest commandment and warned of coming judgment. He concluded the talk by drawing attention to a poor widow putting her two small copper coins into the treasury, which, he said, was "everything she had, all she had to live on" (Mark 12). "This poor woman," said Jesus, "has given more than the wealthy who deposited great sums." His words revealed how she was a victim of the great temple establishment which sucked up the very substance of her life to maintain its extravagance.

Jesus traveled to the centers of

power and there he spoke about the sins of those who abused power in his society. For Christian Peacemaker Teams this is specific and decisive guidance. The prophets of Israel, and Jesus in his role as the greatest of them, consistently identified the central manifestation of sin as the abuse of concentrated religious, political and military power. In contrast, when the church becomes Christendom and allies itself with coercive power rather than with truth and love, it shifts the definition of sin away from concentrations of personal and corporate power which challenge the sovereign rulership of God, and focuses talk about sin on the failings of the weak and outcast on the margins of society. This is a subtle shift, but one which commits the church to preserving the surface tranquillity of the oppressive status quo by passing over the sins of the oppressors.



TROUBLE

It is clear that Jesus' interventions of truth led him through travel and talk into trouble. It was not a process of merely stirring up trouble, but of exposing oppression. Jesus' ride into Jerusalem on a donkey and the events which immediately followed brought the pattern to its climax. We may object and say that that process was unique and unrepeatable or that we have found a better process, but we cannot easily discount the dynamics of that movement from travel to talk to trouble.

Martin Luther King, Jr., the coura-

political powers, the church too often suppresses truth to avoid trouble. Christian Peacemaker Teams will risk offending those who abuse their power to maintain their position when loving them demands telling painful truth.

In summary, initiatives of love lift the struggle for justice above the downward spiral of violence against violence. Healing, hospitality and honesty introduce new dynamics into deadlocked situations of conflict, creating space for new responses and unexpected results.

INTERVENTIONS OF TRUTH

Perhaps the most characteristic mode of CPT action can be described as interventions of truth. Communicating and making space for truth where deceit prevails is the work of peace-making. Where lies prevail, death is present. In places of death, interventions of truth are anticipations of resurrection. For Jesus and for CPT, typical interventions of truth involve travel, talk and trouble.

TRAVEL

Truth comes and goes unfettered. Like the wind, it does not stand still, but moves where it wills (John 3). Efforts to contain, border and limit the truth betray lurking untruth. Messengers of truth, therefore, must often travel. One thinks of the disciples in Acts, traveling far and wide on their mission to share the liberating word of the gospel.

Jesus traveled into the world bringing a dimension from beyond.



Even though his life in Galilee and Judea had its fixed points, he did not remain in one place. Following God's direction to go where truth was lacking, he often entered space where others claimed dominion and he was not really welcome. For example, in the holy space of Israel's religious authorities, the synagogue, a man with an unclean spirit asked him, "Have you come to destroy us?" (Mark 1). Again, after crossing the sea into the Gentile region of the Gerasenes, he cast out Legion, the demon of Roman militarism, only to be urged by the people to leave their neighborhood (Mark 5).

In the climactic journey of his life, as the power structure of priests and Pharisees in Jerusalem plotted to kill him, Jesus led a nonviolent procession into the city where they lived. He met their threats of officially sanctioned homicide with a simple act of truth-telling. The harmless donkey which he rode made a clear statement that God's power is not in the beat of the war stallion's hooves. The sight of the donkey placed the option of nonviolence squarely before the expectant populace. It clarified their choice between the nonviolent Jesus and the established religious and political leaders with their sanctions of homicide, reminding the people of Jesus' earlier words, "Beware the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod" (Mark 8). A new leader with a new type of power had arrived in the capitol city. It was their hour of decision.

Christian Peacemaker Teams is committed to travel as necessary, to hear the stories of the oppressed and to bring these stories back. Telling the stories can reduce human rights violations by shining the light of international attention on the behavior of persons who abuse their position and power. The stories also link people, prayer and resources across dividing boundaries and distance.

Truth carried by CPT has a decent respect for national boundaries, but as

(revised 1994), *The Politics of Jesus* by John Howard Yoder, profoundly challenged Christendom's myth of the nonpolitical Jesus. With a careful exposition of texts in the gospels, Yoder demonstrates that Jesus intended to establish a community of people who would love their enemies rather than kill them. In this Jesus performed a highly political act. The establishment of his alternate community meant that kings lost the loyalty of their subjects, because the highest duty of subjects was to defend the kingdom from its enemies with the sword. A nonviolent community subverted the very heart of a community based on violence. That subversion upset the kings and priests in Jesus' time, and 2000 years later it still challenges presidents and their religious allies.

People of faith who have declared their allegiance to God have thereby made every allegiance to presidents and premiers of lesser importance. This is a crucial political implication of Christian faith, and its practice in the real world creates tension and conflict.

Christian Peacemaker Teams have experienced those tensions when they have practiced "civil disobedience" -- which in their view is the lesser side of "divine obedience." Such is the worship of God according to Jesus.

PACIFISM

The prayer of Jesus led him to a politics of pacifism. The nonviolence, or pacifism of Jesus, was his means of struggle for justice. Filled with compassion for the oppressed, the poor, the sick and the hungry, Jesus actively confronted the oppressors, spoke the painful truth, and stirred up trouble, but always nonviolently.

Let's note one such intervention.

Jesus was in the synagogue on the Sabbath (Mark 3). It was the sacred space and holy day of those who defended the law and controlled the synagogue. Eagerly they watched to see whether Jesus would break their law by healing a man with a withered hand.

"Come forward," Jesus said to the man. Then he asked, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent.

Then he looked at them with anger, and was grieved at their hardness of heart. He healed the man, and the Pharisees went out and conspired with the Herodians how to destroy him (Mark 3). His intervention of truth got him into trouble.

Susan Mark Landis returned from a CPT trip to Haiti and wrote this about the team's public walk to the Haitian slave freedom statue across from the presidential palace:

"...we saw no groups of military on the watch, and I felt safe taking part. The Haitians who walked by were overjoyed to hear the songs and feel our presence supporting them during a difficult time. Never would I have dreamed that these simple acts would have meant anything. Yet, one man stopped and told a member of our group, 'Seeing you here gives me hope.' To this man, knowing that some North Americans were aware of the turmoil of life in Haiti, and caring, gave strength to continue."

The active nonviolence of Jesus generated the opposition which ultimately executed him on the cross. CPT is committed to the practice of active nonviolence. It can be expected that this will generate strong, even violent, opposition. Some of that opposition is likely to come from Christians who reject the pacifist implication of faith. It may be necessary to ask whether these people are Christians or "Crestians." (The author apologizes in advance to Christians who might take

offense at the following paragraph. He assumes that no apology would be necessary to those who have suffered and died by the hand of “Crestians” if they were here to speak.)

Crestians are Christians without the nonviolence of Jesus. The word is a linguistic mutation which expresses the church’s mutation of the meaning of Christ (Messiah). The historical Jesus permitted himself to be identified as the expected Messiah (Christ) only after he had painstakingly removed himself from the military images of the Davidic kingship. In view of this it is astounding that people who now bear the name of Christ should consider it reasonable to don the warrior’s helmet. The crest of that helmet, rather than the Christ of the donkey and the cross, is surely a more apt symbol of the spirit of modern Christians who reject the pacifism of Christ. Hence the name Crestians.

In summary, CPT is rooted first in the implications of faith: prayer, politics and pacifism. In addition, CPT aspires to the initiatives of love which Jesus also incarnated: healing, hospitality and honesty. We turn now to these.

INITIATIVES OF LOVE

Compassionate action is CPT’s method of pursuing justice for the oppressed. By acts of healing, hospitality and honesty toward people who are suffering police brutality, who are denied the right to speak, whose land and homes have been confiscated by oppressive powers or who are denied access to adequate diet, health care and education, CPT penetrates boundaries of isolation and despair. CPTers weave bonds of human caring and invite divine intervention. Such compassionate action is rooted in the life of Jesus, who when he was confronted with



oppressive and violent behavior responded with “transforming initiatives” of love, to use the language of Glen Stassen in his book *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Just and Peace*.

HEALING

Transforming initiatives are surprising responses to aggressive or oppressive behavior. Jesus entered a world of pain and suffering, much of which was caused by the misuse of power by oppressive rulers (rather than by the victims’ sin, as popularly believed). Many voices were calling for the violent overthrow of the oppressors. Instead, Jesus launched a program of healing and teaching. His weapons were compassion and truth rather than coercion and force. His entire way of life and teaching constituted a transforming initiative.

In the life of Jesus healing was a striking alternative to coercive threats as a form of political power. Jesus enacted his message of a new political sovereignty (with its implied threat to all currently recognized sovereignties) by healing Simon’s mother-in-law, a leper and a paralytic, as well as many who were sick and possessed with demons (Mark 1 & 2). Healing was an exercise of the power of this new kingdom. When Jesus commissioned the 70 missionaries he said to them: “heal the sick and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’” (Luke 10). It is clear that the

disciples were to take the message of Jesus into the world by practicing the politics of healing.

In his book *Engaging The Powers*, Walter Wink says, “Compassion is the hallmark of Jesus’ God. Consequently, Jesus’ healings and exorcisms, which play such a major role in his ministry, are not simply patches on a body destined for death regardless; they are manifestations of God’s Reign on earth now, an inbreaking of eternity into time, a revelation of God’s merciful nature, a promise of the restitution of all things in the heart of the loving Author of the universe” (p. 135).

CPT bears witness to this understanding of God when it practices healing initiatives of love.

HOSPITALITY

Hospitality toward outsiders and enemies is another initiative of love rooted in the life of Jesus. Hospitality opens the door, the table, and the heart to those who are excluded by popular opinion. Hospitality is the expression of love toward those on the other side.

In November 1990 CPT sent a team to Baghdad, Iraq in an effort to bridge the gulf between George Bush and Saddam Hussein. It was the trip to the city of the enemy which Jonah refused to take, and one which Jesus apparently saw the ruling authorities in his day refusing to take. Jesus said that those self-righteous authorities would receive no sign except the sign of Jonah. They could see themselves in Jonah’s story (Luke 11).

Christian Peacemaker Teams is an institutional expression of hospitality toward the enemy, an initiative of love. CPT moves beyond individual acts of charity by giving institutional support to teams which act in concert.

At the Krome Detention Center near Miami a CPT team vigiled in support of Haitian refugees being held inside. Security people set off smoke bombs to warn the vigilers. Confronted

by threatening guards, some in gas masks, CPTers softly blew bubbles into the evening air. A CPTer writes: “As the bubbles wafted among the guards, they turned their backs to us, we saw their shoulders relax, laughter and embarrassed smiles replace hostility and fear, and they turned to us and asked, ‘What are these bubbles?’” Gene Stoltzfus answered, “Those bubbles are blessed, brother.”

CPT is an expression of people who choose to believe and act on the command of Jesus, “Love your enemies.” Healing and hospitality are initiatives of love.



HONESTY

Honesty was a third initiative of love expressed by Jesus. Truth was his greatest power and main “weapon.”

Hospitality is the practice of love toward outsiders, and honesty is the practice of love toward insiders. Honesty is the practice of truth in all circumstances, especially ones where silence or falsehood would appear less controversial or more effective.

Christian Peacemaker Teams can be expected to tell the truth to well-positioned insiders from time to time, to people in power who would prefer the cover of silence to the disclosure of speech. CPTers learn this practice from Jesus, who time and again spoke truth in situations where silence or acquiescence would have been easier and safer.

The bold synagogue initiative of love by Jesus (Mark 3) contrasts sharply with the cautious works of charity which mark the church in our time. Being careful not to offend