

**The 22<sup>nd</sup> A. J. MUSTE LECTURE at HOPE COLLEGE**  
***THE WEAKNESS OF WAR, THE POWER OF PEACE***

*Thomas Arendshorst, February 27, 2007*

Thank you very much. I feel very honored to be here, and to have been asked to deliver the 22<sup>nd</sup> A.J. Muste Lecture. A.J. Muste was a driving forefather and guiding light of the modern peace and justice movements in the United States, and past Muste lecturers have included prophetic American leaders. Martin Luther King credited Muste as the mentor of American nonviolent direct action. Hope College is justly proud of this great American, A.J. Muste. I'm pretty intimidated.

I'm not an academic or a professional speaker. The only chances I get to be heard for a half-hour or more are long solitary walks and driving trips by myself. On the other hand, that means that I'm used to an appreciative audience, so you've got your work cut out for you.

The title of my talk is "the Weakness of War, the Power of Peace." In addressing these topics, I want to make one personal bias clear. Peace, and war, are not inherently partisan issues. Indeed, my core points are that peace is in everyone's interest, and war serves nobody's interest --- except for people with imperial or criminal intent. Peace and war are not just American problems, but I will use examples that are familiar to us Americans, examples that should hit home. My hopeful goal is to shed light, not blame. Every one of us has done violence to others.

\*\*\*\*\*

There's a Cherokee story about an old man who sat with his grandson by the fire one evening and told him about a battle that goes on inside the hearts of all people.

"My son," he said, "two wolves battle for all people's hearts. One is Violence. It is anger, arrogance, fear, jealousy, greed, self-pity, guilt, lies, and superiority. The other is Peace. It is joy, love, hope, humility, kindness, generosity, truth, compassion and faith."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: "Which wolf wins?"

The old Cherokee answered, "The one you feed."

For more than a generation, the greater American Dream of opportunity and justice for all has taken back seat to values centered around individualism and the power of short-term profits. As the pendulum of social sentiment and political leadership has swung toward a more dominating, judgmental set of biases, those biases have narrowed our approach to the values that define who we are. Our United States has moved insistently toward magnifying privileges for its most wealthy elite, neglect of disadvantaged Americans, and toward a false American dream of militaristic global empire.

For those of you who were born after 1960 or so, it's important to understand that our American political culture has not always been this way. From the 1930s into the '70s

our United States invested strongly in economic and political opportunity for neglected and disadvantaged Americans. It was a time when public policy embraced hopes for justice in the form of the recovery from the Great Depression, the postwar Marshall Plan, the American Civil Rights Movement, the War on Poverty, and initiatives like the Peace Corps. Economic prosperity accompanied these investments --- the historically consistent “Trickle-Up” effect of increasing aggregate demand.

Real peace encompasses a wealth of positive values, like the Good Wolf in the Cherokee story. This is peace in the biblical sense of Shalom, the Islamic sense of Salaam. It is also crucially real: if you talk about “peace” with people living in areas of violent conflict, they will tell you that peace is inevitably, invariably connected to Justice: fairness, freedom, equality, and opportunity. Finally, peace as a way of life is profoundly powerful, able to humble cruel tyrants and move the world toward justice.

The cultural shift in American values has also shifted America’s impact on others around the world. We need to constantly critique ourselves. What are our highest personal values? It’s not possible to value community and competition equally. What are the dominant values of our broad society? What do we want and hope for them to be? The values we choose to serve determine whether our actions will serve conflict and violence or justice and peace.

I aim to talk with you tonight about several things:

- the nature of war and of peace,
- the paradoxical weakness of war,
- the surprising power of peace,
- and finally, how understandings about peace and violence fit together with the values that guide how we live.

I called Leo Tolstoy about the presentation of this lecture, and he suggested that I first talk about “War,” and then “Peace.”

## **THE NATURE AND MAKINGS OF WAR**

Conflict is inherently human. One person’s needs inevitably differ from another’s, so conflict constantly arises between people and peoples. Perceptions of unmet human needs and human rights violations are primary causes of conflict.

Rather than deny conflict, the key is how we respond. Do we find ways to meet our differing needs together? Or does one side try to impose its needs over the other, through violence? All of this is obvious and familiar in our own lives. How do you respond to a child’s tantrum? What do we, as a city, do when the bridge traffic becomes an intolerable mess? Do we talk together, negotiate some mutually acceptable solution, or light up the explosives?

We have heard, all our lives, about the reasons for authoritarian force and for war. “Spare the rod and spoil the child.” “You can’t make an omelet without breaking a few

eggs.” “The best defense is a good offense.” “These people only understand violence.” “Better than us.”

Is war justifiable? Augustinian just war doctrine imposes very rigorous limits on war: war may be used only as defense against overt aggression, only after exhausting all possibilities of nonviolent means, and only in proportionate response (1-for-1). Just war doctrine is not accepted by everyone. Our own government claims it is too limiting. My subject tonight is not whether war is ever justified. My thesis is that war is always a poor, ineffective choice, and that peace, in the fullness of its powerful options, is always strong; always preferable; and always necessary if we hope to achieve durable, legitimate results.

Almost 350 years ago the Western world organized itself into sovereign states, whose rulers came to see their relationships as governable by the use or threat of force. This approach to political and international relations is known as “Realism.” The logic of political realism has developed from these assumptions and principles:

1. States hold all authority to govern.
2. Each state acts in its autonomous “national interest,” historically identical to the king’s and aristocracy’s interests.
3. States hold monopolies over the means of violence. Nobody but the ruling governments have police, armies, and WMDs. States hold the ultimate authority.
4. Political authority legitimizes itself. Whatever the state says is law. The state gets to officially define “truth” and “justice.”
5. Outcomes are predictable and controllable. This is a big one. This is the contribution of Machiavelli, the illusion of controllability.
6. Because “justice” and “truth” are defined by whomever is in power, and because outcomes are predictable and controllable, then the ends justify the means. All that matters is results, the bottom line; what the state does to get results is OK.
7. “Security” (again, as defined by the state, the privileged) is more important than, and may substitute for, “the Common Good.”

This is the logic of state power, political “realism.” Is this hard, cold logic of “reality” legitimate? Well, history has exposed some holes:

- 1) Even democratic states respond to the dictates of a very few, very powerful people. “National interest” rarely reflects the interests of people below the highest stratum of power.
- 2) In a globalizing, interrelated world that blurs or dissolves national boundaries, states can no longer legitimately claim ultimate authority. In contrast to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries when these concepts were developed by ruling elites, the world needs increasingly globalized, democratic, integrative governance today.
- 3) The control of the means of violence invites the abuse of violence. A powerful military is extreme power, and power corrupts. The privilege of military power rapidly translates to the violent protection of that privilege, and tends to demand that its military muscles get exercised.

- 4) There are as many truths and histories as there are people to tell about what happened. The state's privilege to judge truth and justice is a corruption of this reality.
- 5) Outcomes are not either predictable or controllable. We know this in our own lives, through relationships between men and women, driving in traffic, personal finances, rearing children, in everything we try to control. This undeniable reality of uncontrollable outcomes is part of what led Mohandas Gandhi to insist, with Jesus, that it is how we live and relate to others, not outcomes and ends, that God values.

In 1979 the Soviet Union sent its military into Afghanistan to support the pro-Soviet Afghan government against a fundamentalist Muslim revolution supported by the United States. The Muslim insurgents operated as what we now call "terrorists," and the repressive Afghan government terrorized their own people. The overwhelming military might of the Soviet army drove the Muslim forces underground and into Pakistan, but could never control the guerrilla resistance. Is this sounding familiar? Nor could the massive Soviet army prevent freedom-fighting terrorists from Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, the US-supported Taliban, from infiltrating and gaining eventual political power. After years of exhausting war that killed two million people and devastated the ancient culture and sustaining agriculture of Afghanistan, the USSR retreated with their hammers and sickles between their legs, leaving tank ruins and mine fields that are still there twenty years later. Civil war raged on for several more years.

There are consistent realities than are common to all violent conflict, including war.

1. First, violence is cyclical; violence begets further violence. Violence escalates in spirals. War serves to breed more war. Humiliated, suffering losers hope for vindication and revenge. Winners assume that their glorious superiority will reward them in future wars. Anyone who argues for war as a way to peace is either a fool or a liar.
2. Second, people resort to violence and fight wars in two cases --- grievance, and greed. People fight: 1) when they've run out of the patience, hope, and will to achieve their needs without violence; and 2) when they perceive they can get what they want or need through their overwhelming advantage in the means of violence. You fight either because you can crush the other or because the other has crushed you for too long.
3. Third, violence & war are always about power, virtually always economic power.
4. Fourth, war always features active exclusion & intolerance. Violence & war require that one group of people think of another as "different," "primitive," "dangerous," or "evil." You have to dehumanize and "other" someone in order to attack him or her. "Othering" enables us to conceive of others as "bad," while we think of ourselves as good and virtuous. Immediately prior to the Rwandan holocaust of 1994 the Hutu-run government radio spewed an escalation of dehumanizing rants against Tutsis, calling them "cockroaches" and "snakes," finally urging Hutus to massacre them. Which they did.
5. Fifth, the proponents of violence & war always, always, recruit support through false appeals to religious, ethnic, & nationalistic allegiances.

6. Sixth, violent conflict makes all sides victims.
7. Seventh, war always damages innocents. War is not merely about soldiers fighting and dying. Since World War I every war has massacred populations of civilians. War crushes communities, shreds families, destroys economies and infrastructures, and foments disease. Far away from active war, we Americans tend to lose sight of what war really does.
8. Eighth, war traumatizes the soldiers who are thrust into its maw. Very many combatants never recover their lives.
9. And ninth, the drums of war always drown out and discredit wise discussions and competing values.

In recent years a “new war” paradigm has emerged, characterized by globalized flows of weapons and money and by violence aimed as much at civilians as soldiers. Any group, not just states, can own major weapons wield terrible violence. Many new wars have little or no connection with control of government or territory, but are focused on profit --- diamonds, gold, oil – or a climate of fear. The United States’ invasion and occupation of Iraq has paid a quarter-trillion taxpayer dollars in four years to military and weapons industries and to mega-engineering corporations such as Bechtel and Halliburton. The U.S. war has devastated Iraq, but has gained no victory.

The new wars are being fought outside usual state and international systems. They don’t fit the “realism” paradigm. Grievances and the means of violence are now transcending state boundaries, as globalizing forces burst beyond state and international rule of law. Terrorism --- the frustrated, angry response of fundamentalist extremists to perceived injustice --- has adapted as part of this new pattern.

### STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND STRUCTURAL JUSTICE

At this point, I want to speak for a minute about the concept of structural violence. War is only the most obvious kind of violence. The many forms of structural violence impose grinding systems, often integrated deeply into law, that limit people’s basic physical needs and freedoms. Examples of structural violence are: water, health, and power systems that exclude certain groups of people; societies that lock people in hopeless poverty and outside of decision-making processes and opportunities; and repressive police-state policies of imprisonment, torture, “disappearances,” and murder. Examples of severe structural violence include our own United States’ history of slavery and long-lasting racial discrimination against African Americans, South African Apartheid, Nazi Germany in the 30s, and Chile’s repressive military rule under Augusto Pinochet.

The elimination of structural violence depends on structural justice --- developing underlying processes that are fair to all, inclusive, nonviolent, and transparently accountable.

### THE NATURE AND REQUIREMENTS OF PEACE

What is “Peace”? One person might say that “Peace is the absence of war.” But another might say, “No, I think peace is living in a harmonious community.” Yet another might insist that “Real peace is an inner, spiritual, state,” or “communion with God.”

All of these are peace. People who study conflict and peace speak of the mere absence of war as negative peace. But what can make peace last? “Positive peace” is the term they reserve for what the Bible calls Shalom, the integration of structural justice, harmonious community, inner spiritual peace, and freedom from violence. In this way, “positive peace” is consistent with concept of God’s Kingdom.

“Positive peace,” then, requires freedom from both overt and structural violence. Positive peace includes “structural justice.” A fundamental reality that has emerged from peace studies is that sustainable peace requires structural justice --- the assurance of basic needs, rights, freedoms, and dignity. Positive peace requires a mutuality of relationships that assures the fair distribution of resources, opportunity, participation, and justice. Another name for sustainable, positive peace could be “JustPeace.”

In 2005, as part of our studies at the Kroc Institute Sharon and I lived in Nairobi, Kenya, for six months. I worked as an intern for the Nairobi Peace Initiative- Africa. NPI was originally formed by four activists --- two Kenyans, a Ugandan, and an American Mennonite. At that time in the darkest years of Daniel Moi’s dictatorship, speaking the word “peace” was sedition. Kinyanjui, Kobia, Ekwaro, and Miller risked torture and death to meet and talk about changing Kenya. At that time Kenya struggled with deep poverty, and was endangered by war and conflict in neighboring Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda, and Somalia. The NPI founders recognized that political and economic development could not happen as long as people were traumatized by violence. Further, they understood, when no one else seemed to, that economic development, political freedom, human needs, human rights, and freedom from violence were all one integrated web. They understood that “peace” must necessarily include all those pieces, and that this positive peace, or JustPeace, was the identity of lasting positive change. NPI grew to be the first peace-dedicated organization in East Africa, perhaps in all of Africa, and continues to impact policy and mentor others today.

The underlying theme of justice is crucial to understanding the nature of sustainable peace. Equally, it is critical to understand how injustice is central to structural and overt violence. War and peace are intimately tied to people’s experiences and perceptions of justice and injustice.

## **THE PARADOXICAL WEAKNESS OF WAR**

We’ve reviewed the nature and makings of war and peace. What’s this about “the paradoxical weakness of war?”

The numbers don't lie. At the beginning of the twentieth century, aggressive war "succeeded" --- that is, defeated the opposing army and gained conquest --- 50% of the time. By 2000, after the aggressors in both World Wars lost everything and others like Soviet Afghanistan and American Viet Nam ended in debacles, the odds of successful aggressive war had plummeted to 20%. And these are the results of military powers who chose to attack, fully confident of easy victory.

The paradoxical truth is that war is terribly ineffective at accomplishing its purported aims. Can you think of a war, other than World War II, that didn't spawn further violence over time? Can you think of a modern-era war that actually produced sustainable freedoms for subject populations? Interestingly, the aims of war are almost always defined very differently afterwards than they were at war's outset.

If our United States has entered its wars for purposes of peace, freedom, democracy, or even American safety from foreign aggression, then our wars have been a sorry mess of failures and follies. We have fought or sponsored wars in Viet Nam, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Congo, Iran, and elsewhere, supposedly to protect or achieve democracy. But all have actually either supported repressive military dictatorships and mega-corporate interests or tried to overthrow democratically elected governments. In Viet Nam, Iraq, and Iran, our wars have led to killing millions (yes, millions) of people and have devastated living conditions --- and we or our clients have ended up losing the wars.

War is a primitive, woefully ineffective tool. The Blunt Instrument fails to deliver.

There's one catch to this analysis of the weakness of war. This catch has to do with objectives. If the real objectives of any war are to profit from war, or to devour and subjugate others, then war can make great short-term sense. If the determining value of war is carnivorous predation without concern for the long-term future, then war is not stupid and weak.

Nevertheless, a pervasive American culture of faith in the effectiveness of violence shields us Americans from the reality of war's impotence. Why would we be irrational, or even unwise, about something as important as making war? Well,

- 1) We've been geographically isolated from the grotesque realities of war, courtesy of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, for the last two hundred years. Except for families devastated by the loss of military children and parents, we Americans know war only as a remote, abstract, safe experience.
- 2) The United States today is the most powerful military and economic entity in the history of the world. War has fueled American technological and military expansion. The U.S. has over 700 military bases in foreign countries around the world. That kind of wolf exudes confidence, and demands to be fed.
- 3) The unique experience of World War II has become the myth that substantiates every new American desire for war, even though no other war has come within a mile of reproducing its unique justifications.

These American cultural pro-war biases are supported by a collection of fraudulent

myths:

1. The myth that “the ends justify the means”;
2. The myth of “redemptive violence,” the false faith that violence can end violence;
3. The myth of “instructive violence,” where the victim nods and says, “Now I see; I’ll be good now; thank you.”
4. The myth of “virtuous violence” --- the Wild West - Rambo - Violent Action Hero myth;
5. The myth of “manifest destiny,” the confidence that God has destined the United States to rule over others;
6. And the guiding delusion that American “national interests” are somehow the same thing as giant profits for giant corporations.

Is defensive war against invasion more viable? Certainly, prevailing wisdom does not question the right of self-defense against actual invasion. But current American policies vividly reveal the horror of war based on claims of “defense” against threats without actual foreign invasion.

The concept of unilateral “pre-emptive” war allows a military state to invade at will, claiming “threat.” Hitler and other aggressors through history have used the claim of outside threat to justify aggressive war. Our own official policy declares that we will attack anyone we believe might ever attack us, whenever we choose. It is as absurd as allowing the bully on the playground to punch little kids in the mouth whenever he wants, as long as he says he thought they might hit him. Pre-emptive war forces everyone in the world to arm against us for their own protection. We, not underground terrorists, have become the world’s greatest fear.

In our world of nuclear, chemical, and microbial weapons, we do face risks. Thankfully, every other government that controls well-developed nuclear weapons systems knows it cannot afford to unleash them. The wild cards are anarchists and millennial zealots. They are very real threats. But it is painfully obvious that the crime of terrorism is a problem for police, not war. Massive war against non-state terrorists is as misguided as a bazooka against bees.

It’s impossible to eliminate all the risks these monstrous weapons create; this is reality. But the relative risk of war monstrously outweighs the risk of terrorism. War is the real terrorism.

## **THE SURPRISING POWER OF PEACE**

But does peace offer any realistic alternatives to war? Even if political realism is jaded and faulty, is there a peaceful alternative we can trust?

The American culture’s prejudice against peaceful resolution of conflict is deep and strong, too:

- Any objection to war fervor calls up allusions to the appeasement policy of Neville Chamberlain.
- Four decades of Cold War brinksmanship solidified American suspicion of “peaceniks.”
- We Americans generally think of “peace” only as “negative peace,” the absence of war, and we tend to think that pacifism is the only alternative to war --- an alternative that seems naïve and even self-indulgent in the face of violence.
- “Peace” becomes an “un-American,” subversive word when we fear the outside world, or when American pride or profits are at stake.
- Our cultural failure to connect peace with the deep fairness of structural justice and the common good has left us with only a shrunken, abstract peace to think about, just a time between wars.

### NONVIOLENT ACTION FOR PEACE

Again, these American prejudices don’t square with reality. In contrast to the paradoxical weakness of war, two arms of active peacemaking have proven to be surprisingly powerful.

Through the 1930s and ‘40s Mohandas Gandhi led the Indian people in massive boycotts and nonviolent civil disobedience that led to end of the British Raj and opened a new future for India.

In the 1980s Lech Walesa and Solidarity organized Poland’s labor force, galvanized the Polish people, and gradually ground Poland’s dictatorship to its knees and opened Poland to political and economic freedom --- all without any loss of life.

In South Africa during the 1980s, long-suffering blacks developed strikes and boycotts until Apartheid lost its crucial support of business and multinational corporations, forcing President de Klerk to peacefully negotiate a new, democratic, black-majority government.

In 2000, young Serbians organized against the brutal dictatorship of Slobodan Milosevic, calling themselves OTPOR, “Resistance.” Using cyber-age communications and the teachings of Gene Sharp and America’s Albert Einstein Institution, OTPOR galvanized Serbian discontent. They generated massive, amazingly nonviolent protests and strikes that immobilized Milosevic’s government, opening Serbia to new, democratic government and freedoms that continue today.

These are all examples of strategic nonviolent action, the arm of active peace available to oppressed peoples.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his followers to “turn the other cheek” if an enemy should strike them. This has traditionally been read as a call for passive acceptance of violence, something that seems unrealistically self-sacrificial. What Jesus was really teaching was nonviolent action. An enemy --- maybe a Roman soldier ---

socks you in the face. He does that in order to force you into submission, to get your cowering obedience. But, wait! Instead of whimpering and complying, you tip your other cheek to the bully and say, "Hit me again, big boy. You cannot make me be your slave. I refuse to be your victim. You can hurt me, but you don't own me. I am not in your power." Jesus taught non-violent action, the peaceful response that subdues violent domination.

Strategic nonviolent action is the process of non-compliance with unjust force, combined with consistent, specific demands for needed change. Oppression and intimidation are powerful only as long as their victims accept and obey their violent commands. Power exists only to the extent that people consent to be governed or controlled.

During the American Civil Rights movement of the 1960s entire communities of black civil rights protesters in the American South refused to submissively comply any longer with racist Jim Crow laws or be cowed into obedience any more by physical abuse and lynchings. They organized boycotts of racists' stores, refused to ride segregated buses, and clogged the systems their white oppressors wanted to use. When Bull Connor and other racist bullies turned up their violence in full view of the rest of the country, the moral conscience of the American public woke up and magnified the pressure for change. This mobilization of the "third party" of social conscience, what some call "moral jujitsu," is often the machine of deep and lasting social change. When racist injustice and violence failed to control their victims, the American racist oppressors gave up control in order to end the disruption of their own society. In city after Southern city and state after state, the system of oppression crumbled, until African-Americans finally gained real citizenship.

Strategic nonviolent action collapses if its actors react violently to abuse. The oppressors command overwhelming means of brutality. Violent response plays into their hands.

Nonviolent action, then, demands extreme courage and discipline. Amazingly, massive nonviolent revolts in India, the American South, South Africa, Chile, the Philippines, Poland, Hungary, South Korea, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovenia, Albania, Macedonia, and Serbia have all overcome overwhelmingly powerful regimes and dictatorships in recent decades. Others in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Argentina have pushed repressive governments to change. The world knows the power of nonviolent action now; history will witness many more nonviolent triumphs where the meek will inherit their due.

But aren't people awfully vulnerable when they do this? Yes. People engaged in nonviolent action willingly expose themselves to abuse and death. Early in nonviolent struggles, police often respond with angry cruelty. But when their brutality fails to produce submissive obedience, oppressors look for more effective tactics, and negotiate. The process requires patient courage, but is incredibly predictable, and compellingly logical.

But could black Americans have won their civil rights with violent rebellion? Certainly not --- and the bloodbath would have cost uncounted lives and ensured ghastly repression. Could the people of Serbia, Poland, Hungary, and the rest of the Iron Curtain satellites have overturned their police state dictators with armed revolution? No chance, and their loss would have triggered more severe repression after the massacres.

Nonviolent action:

- is much more effective in producing durable social justice;
- results in much, much less risk of casualties --- to an astounding degree;
- and breaks the cycle of violence, opening the way for the vision of a better society.

## STRATEGIC PEACEBUILDING

Strategic nonviolent action is what oppressed people can do to overcome violent oppression, the first arm of powerful peace. Strategic peacebuilding is the second arm of powerful peace. Peacebuilding is what we can do in our personal lives and what people in conflict and governments can do to develop durable peace. Peacebuilding is the wise, mature, long-range approach to our needs for security from terrorists, our needs for a just and stable American society, and for mutually- beneficial relationships with other peoples around the world.

Strategic peacebuilding includes these principles:

- 1) Peacebuilding is process-of-change work, not tasks and objectives. Peacebuilding is long-term slow, short-term intensive. It aims for long-term effectiveness, not short-term “efficiency.”
- 2) Peacebuilding, because it aims for the long-term growth of sustainable peace, is oriented to the quality of relationships among people. Peacebuilding invests itself in how things get done, rather than specific outcomes --- the means, not the ends. This is a crucial difference between peacebuilding and paper peace agreements.
- 3) Peacebuilding accents analysis and the wisdom of discourse over action. This means embracing the full complexity of issues and systems, the opposite of simplistic fundamentalism. We need to understand the interests and underlying needs of all parties, and to help people in conflict to find “both – and” solutions that meet both one’s need and the other’s, instead of “win-lose” answers.
- 4) Peacebuilding requires nonviolent responses to conflicts.
- 5) Peacebuilding requires tolerance, inclusiveness, and respect for all, the democracy of culture that is the opposite of discrimination. Peacebuilding promotes the values of community and the common good over competitive domination.
- 6) Peacebuilding requires transparency of governing processes, and accountability for actions.
- 7) Peacebuilding is dedicated to the freedom of people to decide, to owning their own processes of change. Thus, peacebuilding means “walking with” rather than prescribing, empowerment instead of supervising.
- 8) Peacebuilding understands that everyone, including a “terrorist,” acts in the perception that her or his cause is just.
- 9) Justice, crucial to peacebuilding, requires fundamental political, economic, social,

& judicial fairness, with distribution of advantages to all.

Strategic peacebuilding is very different from “peace negotiations.” Formal peace agreements between governments can be critically important, especially to achieve negative peace by stopping the fighting. But the weakness of peace accords is that they’re only paper pacts between negotiators in suits. They do nothing, by themselves, to address the root causes, the power-lusts and perceived injustices, that drive violence.

Building peace absolutely requires wise, patient leadership. If you are powerful, it requires short-term sacrifices, investments in the future. We make these kinds of short-term sacrifices for long-term harmony all the time in our own lives. We call them “savings,” “rearing our children,” “building friendships and community,” “being good neighbors,” and “planning for the future.”

A genuine peacebuilding approach to the conflicts about and in the Middle East would begin with honest analysis of the entire web of root causes, issues, and systems that ensnare all the peoples and nations involved, drawing from all involved parties, including worst enemies. The Middle East is caught in an enormously complex, global system of problems, problems that have both faraway effects and faraway causes. The peacebuilding process would aim to address root causes and reform injustices that harm and humiliate various groups of Muslims, the peoples of Palestine and Israel, and first-world peoples. The process would involve people at all levels, from communities through governments, from educational through judicial systems. A long-term Middle East peacebuilding process would work intensively in current hot spots of high-level violence in Iraq and in Israel/ Palestine. At the same time, peacebuilding would also begin slower processes of change to relieve poverty, meet basic needs, and transform poisoned relationships and faulty or abusive systems. Over years, this could lead to needed changes in international economic and political systems.

Strategic peacebuilding works. Unfortunately, powerful governments invest heavily in militarism and very little in strategic peacebuilding. Nevertheless, non-governmental organizations and civil society groups are hard at work around the world leading peacebuilding efforts in areas of conflict. Clearly, if governments were to commit greater resources to peacebuilding while withdrawing resources from military enterprises, peace would build strength. Reductions in poverty and disease, the great markers of injustice, would be early triumphs.

It will take prophetic leadership to choose peace over war. Only courageous, wise leadership will voluntarily give up the temptation of military control and invest instead in peacebuilding.

Peacebuilding focuses on meeting needs, on mutuality, and on developing systems that are just. Peacebuilding is, consequently, not focused on judgment and retribution. Peacebuilding aims to empower people to resolve root causes of their troubled relationships and conditions. It is highly preventative, while working to transform current conflicts as well.

The charge to war is ADD-impatient, immature, hormone-glutted futility. War's hope for legitimate goals is a desperate gamble against frightening odds.

Active peace, on the other hand, works. Nonviolent action wins. Peacebuilding replaces violent conflict's breeding grounds with just, harmonious processes and systems. Peace is wise, mature, strong behavior. Peace is always appropriate, and always offers hope. Peace is the winner's gamble.

## **PERSONAL PEACEBUILDING**

If nonviolent resistance and transformative peacebuilding are remarkably safer and more effective than armed violence, why are we so willing to wage war? Why don't we approach security as a justice issue, working toward harmony and durable peace? How does all this connect with our individual lives?

It is my belief that the critical connector between the values we claim and the values we live is the vital connection of learning to see the common humanity, the "us" and "we" in all people.

Our relationships with others form circles of concern. Our closest circles are those of family and dearest friends. Outside them are circles of broader community that we claim as "ours." Any close group resists force and selfish behavior. We treat those inside our close circle of concern with cooperative behavior that seeks the common good. Think about your own experience: What makes a "good" parent, brother, or sister? What makes a "good neighbor"?

So, what happens when we interact with others outside our families and close communities? In primitive human societies, "first encounters" between groups who perceive each other as "not us" almost always trigger murderous responses. This is human instinct. Taking a broad view, it might be said that the project of civilization is to overcome this instinct for violence against those who are "not us."

In Christian terms, this is Jesus' theme in the story of the Good Samaritan, when he identifies himself with "the least of these" in Matthew 25, and in his expansion of God's chosen people to include all people everywhere. This inclusive concern is voiced, too, in Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, native American cosmologies, and virtually all religious traditions.

We behave one way with those we know and accept as "us" --- with empathy and cooperative actions that serve the common good. But, despite our polished veneer of civilization, we behave very differently toward those outside our circle of concern. Political leaders and ambitious profiteers manipulate these "othering" instincts all the time. When you hear empire builders getting excited about "making war for democracy" and "defending our American way of life," forgive them: they are responding to

perceived threats out of their primitive instincts. They just haven't gotten the civilization thing down yet.

This hope to stretch our circles of concern is, perhaps, the core challenge of both peace and justice. It challenges us in our relationships with people we see as "different" in our own towns and cities. It challenges us in the ways our decisions and lives interact with disadvantaged Americans of all stripes. It challenges the policies we allow our government leaders to pursue against aliens and enemies far away.

Bigger circles, better world.

We expand our circles of concern. We include more of God's creation as "we" and "us." We reject simplistic approaches and answers. We respect everyone's need and right to determine his or her own life decisions. We risk being unselfish and nonviolent, non-dominating. We question and resist manipulations of power. We invest what we can of ourselves in the justice of helping people who are poor, hurting, or oppressed.

Can we do this? Do we want to live this way, personally and as a society?

In the end, war, and peace are about values. We choose which values we place highest, and shape our lives.

Which wolf wins? The one we feed.

\*\*\*\*\*