

Midwest Peace Summit Keynote Address

*Midwest Peace Summit
Indiana University, Purdue University, Indianapolis
April 5, 2008*

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Yield to overcome
Bend and be straight
Empty and be full
Wear out and be new
Have little and gain

These words from the 22nd chapter of the Tao Te Ching express what in Buddhist philosophy is called “value inversion” or turning upside down the values we normally associate with worldly. A comparable proverb is found in the Christian gospels where it says that in the Kingdom of God, “Those who are last will be first, and the first, last.”

In this lecture I will be looking at Peace Studies and nonviolence through the lens of value inversion, and it is both fitting and ironic that I would be speaking on nonviolence one day after the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

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When considering nonviolence, the obvious question for people unfamiliar with the concept is: How can anyone who fights using nonviolence ever succeed in bringing about reform when they are challenging a powerful government with ready access to law enforcement and military might? Why is it that such activists, in their struggle against injustice, are not killed or jailed by authorities early in their resistance to put an end to their menace? My answer to these questions is that ethical nonviolent activists know how to place themselves in a position where they are more dangerous dead than alive.

Through their leadership, they can restrain the vengeful instincts of their followers, appeal to the moral conscience of the people, and in doing so, demonstrate how it is to the advantage of their adversary to let them succeed.

Allow me to give two examples. It was 1964, and the civil rights movement was in full swing. Lyndon Baines Johnson was President of the United States. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., having been influenced by the teachings and success of Mahatma Gandhi in India, was leading a nonviolent movement that was asking for federal legislation to guarantee equal rights for Black Americans. Challenging Lyndon Johnson in the presidential election campaign was the republican candidate, Senator Barry Goldwater. Senator Goldwater argued that federal civil rights legislation was not necessary, pointing out that we already had the 14th and 15th amendments to the US constitution granting the rights of citizenship and voting rights to black Americans, and that the enforcement of those rights was the responsibility of each individual state. Goldwater's position was one of "states' rights."

Another important player in this socio-political drama was the black leader Malcom X. Malcom X sought equal rights for Black Americans but stated that they should secure their rights by "all necessary means," and that included the use of violence.

So which of these important figures did the democratic incumbent President, Lyndon Johnson choose to support? He couldn't support Barry Goldwater because Senator Goldwater was his political opponent in the presidential race. He couldn't support Malcom X because in doing so he would be condoning violence and possible anarchy in American society. He decided wisely to support Martin Luther King, because King had seized the high moral ground, was appealing to the moral conscience of America, and advocated strict adherence to the principle of nonviolence. Rev. King had placed himself in a position where it was advantageous for Lyndon Johnson to support him and thereby let him succeed.

A second example is found in Mahatma Gandhi's influence over the people of India. After Gandhi's successful nonviolent civil disobedience campaigns in South Africa, the British were well aware of his ability to mobilize the Indian people in ways that crossed religious and cultural boundaries. But in 1922, Gandhi realized that many Indian citizens lacked the discipline and moral restraint to carry out successful

nonviolence. The violence committed by marching Indian peasants in Chauri Chaura prompted Gandhi's fast of February 1922 and his calling a halt to his planned campaign of tax resistance through non-cooperation. In doing so, he demonstrated to the British his almost sagely influence, and his ability to restrain the vengeful and undisciplined Indian revolutionaries poised to launch violent protest against British rule. To execute Gandhi would be to remove the primary voice among Indians calling for restraint. The most the British could do was to censure or imprison him. Winston Churchill perhaps expressed it best when he said: "It amazes me that Gandhi should be allowed to go undermining our position month after month and year after year." In the end, Gandhi's nonviolent teachings appealed to the moral conscience of the world. He succeeded in placing himself in a position where it became advantageous for the British to let him succeed.

While history tends to view Gandhi as a political figure, I find him more understandable as a spiritual leader for whom the independence of India was actually a secondary goal. His primary focus was providing a spiritual path for his followers and, more inclusively, the Indian people -- Sikhs, Hindu and Muslim alike. Consider, for example, his concept of *satyagraha*.

Gandhi saw *satyagraha* is a Christ-like sacrificial concept to be used in campaigns of nonviolence where one willfully subjects oneself to an injustice so as to attract public attention, making the injustice visible. Often translated as "soul-force" to distinguish it from physical force, Martin Luther King spoke of "soul-force" in this famous "I have a Dream Speech." When Rosa Parks sat in the front of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, refusing to give up her seat, she was publicly arrested and taken to jail. In doing so, she performed an act a *satyagraha*.

Another concept central to Gandhi's teaching is that of *tapasya*, a term derived from the Sanskrit "tapas" meaning restraint or austerity. *Tapasya* involves personally reflecting on one's anger and hostile feelings, allow time for that negative energy to be transferred into a positive direction – this experience being a practice not unlike meditation. Furthermore, Gandhi's most controversial concept of was the *swaraj* meaning "home rule," which expressed itself also as individual self-reliance, inspiring Indian citizens to use non-cooperation and to support the boycotts against the British monopolies. His publication *Hind Swaraj* which elucidated his philosophy of home rule

and called on the Indian people to join in a massive non-corporation campaign was viewed as extremely dangerous and censure by the British.

Unfortunately today, Gandhi's principle of swaraj, is often dismissed as isolationism. Interpreted more broadly, it suggests obtaining and maintaining a significant degree of economic independence. This does not mean a nation cannot engage in productive trade relations. Trade is a powerful tool for building positive peace between countries and developing valued cooperative working relationships between nations. What is to be avoided is economic dependence on a particular good such that a nation becomes vulnerable should that product or resource suddenly be disrupted or denied. Economic dependence places a country in a condition where a denial of the traded product could be used as a weapon, and the dependent country feels pressured to go to war to keep the valued product accessible. Adhering to the principle of swaraj prevents such vulnerability from weakening a countries international status.

As an example, the United States has placed itself in a dependent and vulnerable position with its reliance on foreign oil. Even President George W. Bush, in his 2007 *State of the Union Address*, went so far as to say the US is "addicted to oil." This over-dependence on foreign energy has continued to threaten the economic stability of Western nations and is a violation of the principle of swaraj.

Gandhi also was the first to correctly interpret Jesus's teaching of "Turn the other cheek," not as a doctrine of submission, but rather as a teaching of nonviolent resistance. Rather than strike back or run, we are to stand our ground, be willing to take multiple blows if necessary to call public attention to the injustice we are enduring. This interpretation is developed at length in the book "The Powers that Be" by Theologian Walter Wink, a publication I recommend to everyone.¹

Nonviolence then, is not submission or complacency. Rather, it is a form of fighting and works best when one chooses an issue that the public will perceive as beyond compromise. Advocates then intentionally allow themselves to become a public victim of the injustice while seizing the "high moral ground," refusing to engage in unethical and violent behavior. Through such activism, they create a groundswell of public support setting in motion political mechanisms that bring about reform.

¹ Wink, W. (1998). *The Powers that Be*. New York: Galilee Doubleday, pages 101-103.

It is vital, however, that activists seize and hold fast to the “high moral ground,” as once this moral ground is lost, it is almost impossible to gain it back. One can see recently how the protests in Tibet which degenerated into violence merely provide the Chinese government the opportunity to justify their repression. From the Peace Studies perspective, violence is a form of weakness, while nonviolent perseverance is a form of strength.

Is nonviolence always successful? No, but neither is violence or military action always successful. War may succeed in forcing reform, but it rarely results in reconciliation and often sows the seeds for future violent conflict. Furthermore, nonviolent movements, from women’s rights to civil rights, from labor unions to the united farm workers movement in the US, have succeeded in exposing social injustice so as to provoke reforms necessary to achieve their goals with far less loss of life and financial cost than would have resulted from a violent revolution.

Defending Academic Freedom

In September of 2004, the Peace Studies program at Ball State University came under political attack from extremist commentator David Horowitz. Mr. Horowitz and his right-wing organization, *Students for Academic Freedom*, began targeting collegiate Peace Studies programs throughout the country. This attack came in four “waves” of publicity with Mr. Horowitz using the internet to launch a worldwide soviet-style propaganda campaign.

The first wave was the accusation of liberal bias in the classroom. This barrage of publicity made several false and misleading statements about the peace studies program at Ball State, and a “wanted” poster discrediting history professor Abel Alves was displayed at various locations on the Ball State campus (see figure 1). The second wave went so far as to accuse me, the Muslim Student Association, and the Ball State student organization “Peace Workers,” of anti-Americanism and supporting terrorism. Tabloid journalist Thomas Ryan, in expressing the Horowitz position, wrote that peace studies programs were “indoctrinating students and recruiting them to agendas that are anti-American, anti-military and friendly to the terrorist enemies intent on destroying us” (The Star Press, Muncie, Indiana, November 30, 2004). The third wave consisted of

efforts by Mr. Horowitz to have his so called “Academic Bill of Rights” introduced in the Indiana House of Representatives as a piece of legislation. Finally, a year later, Mr. Horowitz published his book *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*, which amazingly placed me along side such prominent authors as Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky. My inclusion in this book has provided me with numerous opportunities to give presentations nationally and even internationally. In the spring of 2007, for example, I was invited to give three lectures in the beautiful Caribbean country St. Lucia. This is an example of what Walter Wink calls the “enemies gift.”² So I have to thank Mr. Horowitz for all the opportunities he has given me, and for all he has done for Peace Studies at Ball State.

What David Horowitz failed to realize was that he unknowingly gave me the opportunity to explain and publicize Peace Studies at Ball State, an effort that would soon triple our student enrollment in the program. As one of Mr. Horowitz’s primary targets, I chose a strategy central to the discipline of Peace Studies when addressing this challenge. That is, I “spoke truth to power.” My first task was to expose Mr. Horowitz’s injustice by presenting documentation to administrators at Ball State University proving the accusations being made about my administrative leadership and classroom teaching were either false or misleading exaggerations. This documentation included discussion questions I had distributed in class and questions on my exams which required students to examine multiple sides of issues. But the most convincing evidence to administrators was a letter written by two honors students in my class refuting the accusations being made against me. I also revealed that Mr. Horowitz failed to mention that I had given the one complaining student in my class credit for going to Indianapolis to hear Vice President Cheney speak.

Second, I debunked Mr. Horowitz’s claim that my class on nonviolence was supporting terrorism by pointing out what was obvious to any reasonable American citizen: there are no nonviolent terrorists (*TheStarPress*, Muncie Indana, November 27, 2004). This indisputable truism revealed to the public that the battle being waged here was not between liberal and conservative ideology, but rather between reasoned dialog and extremism (WHTR television news interview, February 20, 2006).

² Wink, W. (1998). *The Powers that Be*. New York: Galilee Doubleday, pages 168-172.

Third, I asserted that there is a difference between liberal education and liberal politics. Liberal education is generally defined as a process whereby students are exposed to a broad range of disciplines. Emphasis is placed on expanding a person's knowledge base so as to help students develop higher-order thinking skills. In addition, students are asked to assess and synthesize information and are challenged to think critically and independently. Liberal political labels and their association with political candidates on-the-other-hand, are a much different matter. Such political associations are, in fact, quite fickle and often change from decade to decade. For example, in the 1960's it was a liberal democratic president, Lyndon Johnson, who led the United States into the Vietnam War. In the first decade of the 21st century, it was a conservative republican president, George W. Bush who led the United States us into a war. In 1968 it was the conservative republican presidential candidate, Richard M. Nixon, who promised a "just peace" in Vietnam that would enable the US to withdraw its troops. In 2004, it was the liberal democratic presidential candidate, John Kerry, who promised to, in four years, bring the troops home. Keep in mind that in 1968, I was one of those liberal hippies that voted for Richard Nixon, the conservative republican candidate!

Clearly, university professors cannot be tossed to and fro in their teaching by the whims of politics. The Boston University paper correctly quoted me when it reported: "Peace Studies examines issues, strategies, leaders and organizations relating to the subject of nonviolence and looks critically at US foreign policy regardless of what political party is in power."³

Finally, I reminded the public that academic freedom is a concept meant to protect faculty who are teaching controversial subjects and engaged in controversial research (Newslink Indiana television interview, November 15, 2006), and that it should not be confused with the issue of student rights.⁴ These strategies placed me in a position where it was advantageous for the President of Ball State University to write a *Guest Column Editorial* supporting my teaching and validating the academic discipline of Peace Studies. I was pleased to discover that Beverly Pitts, the university Provost at the time, President JoAnn Gora and other Ball State administrators, pride themselves in defending the truth

³ Turbovsky, R. (2005). "BU Professors Stay Neutral." *The Daily Free Press*.

⁴ The above mentioned television news interviews and related articles can viewed at the following website: <http://www.bsu.edu/libraries/viewpage.aspx?src=../virtualpress/wolfe/index.html>

and supporting the cherished and necessary tradition of academic freedom (*TheStarPress*, Muncie, Indiana, December 15, 2004). Soon thereafter, the Ft. Wayne *Journal Gazette* and *TheStarPress* of Muncie published editorials condemning Horowitz and calling for our State legislature to withdraw the *Academic Bill of Rights*.

The “New McCarthyism”

Back in the 1950’s there was the fear that the Soviet strategy for taking over the United States was not only a military strategy, but also included efforts to train people in Marxist ideology who would then infiltrate the United States. At that time it was illegal in the US under the Smith Act to profess membership in organizations advocating the violent or forceful overthrow of the United States government. It was feared that, over time, individuals embracing communist doctrine would work to corrupt and indoctrinate the youth in the US, and over several generations, the US would move politically to embrace the Soviet economic and political system.

Senator Joseph McCarthy took advantage of this fear and the Smith Act’s membership provision to intimidate people in sensitive government positions and eventually, harass private US citizens who dissented against US policy or who called into question American social values. Arthur Miller’s famous play *The Crucible* was written to call public attention to the McCarthy “witch hunt.”

Now there is a striking parallel between Senator McCarthy’s intimidating tactics in the 1950’s and the extremist political climate that has evolved in the United States since 9/11. The fear now is not subversive communist infiltrators but would-be terrorists, and also people who may privately embrace extremist Islamic views. Rather than the Smith Act, it is now the controversial Patriot Act. David Horowitz, in using extremist language that accuses peace studies professors like myself of supporting terrorism, and falsely accusing the Ball State Muslim Student Association of having ties to terrorist organizations, is clearly invoking the Patriot Act in an attempt to intimidate Americans who believe it was a mistake to invade Iraq or who identify themselves with the religion of Islam. In addition Mr. Horowitz, succeeded in convincing several Pennsylvania state legislators in states like Pennsylvania to hold public hearings to investigate political bias and indoctrination universities. The Pennsylvania Select Committee on Academic

Freedom in Higher Education committee held nine days of hearings and ultimately concluded that there was no evidence to support claims of political bias and indoctrination. It was an especially bitter defeat for Mr. Horowitz, particularly when you consider that the legislative committee had a republican majority. These historical parallels with the 1950's McCarthy campaign is the reason I call the blatantly offensive, dishonest, and sensationalized tactics of *Students for Academic Freedom* "The New McCarthyism."

There are some people who say that by invoking McCarthyism I am over-reacting to Mr. Horowitz and his legislative campaign against higher education. But consider what might have happened had the war in Iraq, which is now in its sixth year, been a success. What if the war had ended by the time President Bush landed on that US aircraft carrier to announce that major military operations were over; let's imagine the war only cost the US 50 billion dollars as Donald Rumsfeld had predicted; let us pretend subduing Iraq had been a "piece of cake" as Vice President Cheney asserted before we invaded; let's imagine that Karl Rove and the Bush administration had succeeded in establishing a permanent conservatory majority in the US congress, and that professors like me who spoke out against this war from the beginning were successfully branded as "unpatriotic."

In this scenario, and in the context of the prevailing pro-war frenzy of five years ago, I believe it is very possible that the Patriot Act could have been interpreted to apply not only to me but also to Muslim students at our universities. I assert it is very possible that many Muslims in America could have been interned much like Japanese citizens in the US were sent to internment camps during WWII. I do not consider this at all an over-reaction given the obscene hate mail I received that was provoked by the Horowitz propaganda machine. My point is that our struggle for freedom in America and the right to dissent against our government's policies is never over. As expressed by the British historian Lord Acton:⁵ "Absolute power corrupts absolutely." Indeed our national leaders, regardless of their political party affiliation, have the potential to abuse power and become deluded even to the point of justifying torture, denying habeas corpus, and ignoring the rules set forth at the Geneva Convention.

⁵ Lord Acton's full name was John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton,

Nonviolence as a Spiritual Path

When I link nonviolence with spirituality, the first thought most people bring to mind are moral teachings common to the great world religions such as the golden rule, or Jesus teaching that we should love our neighbor and pray for our enemies, the teachings of nonviolence in Indian philosophy, or the Dalai Lama and his emphasis on cultivating compassion. But this is not what I mean when I speak of nonviolence as a spiritual path. For you haven't experienced the spiritual value of nonviolence until you have received hate mail for speaking out against injustice; you haven't experienced the spiritual value of nonviolence until you have been publicly slandered, or until someone has left you a profane or obscene phone message on your voice mail.

In many cultures, fire has been used to represent the supreme spirit. In the Hindu tradition, it is the deity Shiva, the bringer of enlightenment and destroyer of ignorance, who is depicted dancing within a ring of fire. In Judaism, it was God who spoke to Moses through a burning bush; and in Christianity, it was the fire of the Holy Spirit that descended on the Apostles at Pentecost. But this fire of the spirit is not a cozy campfire around which people sit to share stories or sing hymns. No, the spiritual fire I am speaking of is the fire of Prometheus. In Greek mythology, it was Prometheus who stole fire from the gods and brought it to earth, an act that led to his eventual demise whereby he was stretched out and chained to a rock with a vulture gnawing at his liver. This Promethean fire, I propose, is the fire of enlightenment that unveils truth and, in doing so, challenges injustice and makes it visible.

Like Prometheus, Jesus is also said to have brought the spiritual fire to humankind, and his fate was not unlike that of Prometheus. But instead of a rock, Jesus was stretched out on a cross; and instead of vulture, it was a sword that impaled his liver. So it is that Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his essay entitled *History*, referred to Prometheus as the “Jesus of old mythology.”⁶ (O’Day, 1934: 14). It is this Promethean fire that brings

⁶ In artistic renditions, the wound in Christ’s side is traditionally placed over the liver as indicated by the descriptive phrase in John’s gospel “. . . there came out blood and water” (John 19:34). The “water” in this passage is believed to refer to bile. It may be significant that the account of Jesus being pierced by the spear only occurs in the Gospel of John. John’s Gospel begins by equating Christ with the powerful Greek concept of Logos. Could it be that the apostle was

enlightenment and exposes social injustice, making a person more influential, and eventually more dangerous, dead than alive. For the influence of such individuals, from Jesus to Gandhi to Martin Luther King, lives on as the sun continues to shine even through the darkest and most violent periods of human history. When you are singed and tempered by this spiritual fire, then you understand why the practice of nonviolence is a spiritual path.

Religion's Dark Side

It is no coincidence that many figureheads in nonviolent movement -- Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, Bishop Desmond Tutu, and the current Dalai Lama, as examples -- have also played roles as spiritual leaders. Social justice issues have the power to attract and unite people of diverse of diverse cultural and spiritual backgrounds, but I want to make a distinction here between spirituality and religion, because religion has a dark side that needs to be addressed. While the Spirit can bring people together, inspire them to speak out against injustice and call for social, political and economic reforms, religion more often divides humanity and can be used to justify violence and reinforce class divisions.

Misguided religious belief has reinforced the view that violence can play a redemptive role in an individual's life or in the spiritual identity of a nation. In monotheistic cultures, religiously motivated political leaders have used redemptive violence in their attempt to impose an order believed to be sanctioned by God. It comes to serve a sacrificial purpose, believed to free a person from evil or fulfill what is believed to be a sacred prophesy. According to theologian Walter Wink who bases his theory of redemptive violence on an ancient Babylonian myth, redemptive violence:

enshrines the belief that violence saves, that war brings peace, that might makes right...

The myth of redemptive violence is the story of the victory of order over chaos by means of violence. It is the ideology of conquest, the original religion of the status quo...

Religion exists to legitimate power and privilege.⁷

intentionally evoking the Promethean image so as to appeal to those familiar of Greek philosophy and mythology?

⁷ Wink, W. (1998). *The Powers that Be*. New York: Galilee Doubleday, pages 42-48.

Tragically, the great religions of the world, particularly the three Abrahamic faiths -- Judaism, Christianity and Islam -- have, at some time in their recorded history, engaged in redemptive violence. Four glaring examples are 1) the ancient Israelites believing that God commanded them to make war as they entered the land of Canaan which they believed was their "Promised Land" (Numbers: chapters 31-34); 2) the Christian Crusades - the battle cry for which was "God wills it," 3) the present-day jihadists in fundamentalist Islam, and 4) fundamentalist Christians who support today's Middle-East conflicts out of the belief that they are a necessary prelude to the return of Christ. This is not to say that all expressions of redemptive violence are the same, only to emphasize that the common underlying characteristic of redemptive violence is the belief that God has commanded or sanctioned its use. Throughout history when redemptive violence has reared its ugly head, it has shown itself to be a highly destructive ideology that sows the seeds for future animosity and violent conflict.

Ironically, military intervention against redemptive violence is often counterproductive. It plays into the hands of the perpetrators, providing them the opportunity to fulfill their redemptive mission. It tends to strengthen rather than weaken the enemy, as siblings and relatives seek vengeance for the death of their family members, and it often results in a low-grade perpetual war or continual violence as we have seen in the on-going conflict in the Middle-East and in the US led war in Iraq. The deadly effect of redemptive violence is also exhibited in modern-day terrorism.

Recently the number of American soldiers killed in Iraq reached 4000, not to mention the number of Iraqi and civilian deaths, the conservative estimate now believed to exceed 100,000. In addition, the American public is becoming increasingly aware of the war's psychological casualties among not only our brave soldiers but also their families in their efforts to cope with their loss, debilitating injuries and repeated extended deployments. Even conservative columnist George Will pointed out in his article dated August of 2006, that 2004 democratic presidential candidate John Kerry was right when he said that confronting terrorism requires a different set of strategies, ones that emphasize cooperation between intelligence gathering and law enforcement over military intervention. (Will, 2006:6A). I would further add that it also demands peace-building

initiatives and incentives that appeal to moderate factions within the countries and religious traditions involved in the conflict, giving moderate voices ample opportunities to be heard.

Historian Dominick LaCapra of Cornell University points out that humans have a habit however, of petitioning history with violent events.⁸ We often speak of periods before and after a particular war, such as the antebellum period in US history meaning before the civil war. The “Atomic Age” is marked not by the splitting of the atom as much as it is by the use of nuclear weapons on Japan, and we now repeatedly hear often references to our pre and post 9/11 world. We have allowed the terrorists to define our age, or as Osama Bin Ladin poetically phased it, “change the face of history.” I personally long for a time when we would instead petition history by great human peacetime achievements, such as pre and post polio vaccine, or before and after the Apollo moon landing.

Let us not be naïve, however, about the public’s political perception of war. For the victor, violence does save. But what it saves is the material rather than the spiritual; what it saves are the treasures we have laid up on earth, not the treasures we are to lay up in heaven. What it saves are our worldly attachments and material comforts, at the expense of our nation losing its soul.

The Inner Struggle

Every 1000 years, there surfaces an unhealthy preoccupation among many religious believers with what is known as the apocalypse or the “end times.” Since the early 1990’s, politicians have been using religious and apocalyptic rhetoric in a misguided attempt to legitimize the use of military intervention. Before the first Gulf war, for example, politicians referred to Saddam Hussein as a “lawless man,” a phrase used to describe the antichrist in the Apostle Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians (see II Thessalonians. 2:3-12). In his justification for the second Iraq war, President George W. Bush characterized the nation of Iraq as part of the “axis of evil,” with the conflict in Iraq being described simplistically as one of “good versus evil.” The Reverend Jerry Falwell, in an interview on CNN, said that the US should “...hunt down and kill the terrorists in

⁸ “Critic on Violence,” keynote address given by Dominick Dapra at the International Conferences on the Humanities, Honolulu, Hawaii, January 5-9, 2003.

the name of the Lord.” Moreover, in several of his speeches, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the President of Iran, has spoken of the imminent return of the “Twelfth Imam,” an Islamic messiah figure who he claims will re-establish the nation of Islam, bringing to the world justice and peace (Heyking, 2005:1-2). Ahmadinejad has also called for the destruction of Israel, and has said that nations supporting Israel will be consumed in the “fire” of the Islamic Nation’s fury.⁹

The Greek word for apocalypse, however, means simply “uncovering” or “unveiling” and does not inherently carry connotations of violence, war, or catastrophe. While verses in the Bible and the Qur’an associate war or catastrophe with the apocalypse or “Day of Judgment,” most of these scripture passages no longer make sense in the context of our modern-day scientific understanding of the universe. The stars, being light years away and moving at tremendous speeds, will never “fall from heaven” as it says in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 24 verse 29, and the sky could never tear or split open as it says will happen in the Qur’an. Furthermore, the bellicose symbols found in scripture are more meaningful when interpreted as metaphors for the mystical experience or for an inner spiritual struggle, as depicted by the Apostle Paul in the following passage from Ephesians 6: 14-17.

Stand, therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. (Ephesians 6:14-17)

The belief in the inevitability of a violent apocalypse is especially dangerous because it risks making war in the Middle East a self-fulfilling prophecy. If a violent apocalypse does occur, particularly if it involves a nuclear exchange as many religious fundamentalists predict, there will be no miraculous transformation of the Earth as envisioned in the book of Revelation (Ch. 21:2). There will be no descent of a New Jerusalem from heaven above, no idyllic Earth re-appearing before us. Rather, there will be destruction, massive carnage, disease and death on a scale that dwarfs Hiroshima, Katrina and the Asian tsunami. Humanity cannot afford to have a violent apocalypse, as

⁹ For more discussion on religious language being used by world leaders, see: “Iran, Bush and the second coming,” at www.perspectives.com/blog/archives.000376.htm

we would be left with a world that would take decades, perhaps even centuries to rebuild. A first step in derailing such religious madness is to promote theologies that reject religiously motivated violence and equip moderate Jewish, Christian and Islamic religious leaders with the knowledge to speak out against bellicose fundamentalism and defend the allegorical or symbolic interpretation of scripture. And given that the word apocalypse means simply “unveiling,” it would be possible for the world to have a nonviolent apocalypse in the form of a collective revelation unveiling our common humanity and the divine image in which everyone is created.

Unfortunately, hard-line confrontational policies of the Bush administration have unleashed the “law of unintended consequences” and placed the US in a highly weakened posture in the Middle-East and the world. Consider the current dilemma with Iran. If we attack Iran, it will simply give the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad the excuse to launch a barrage of missiles onto Israel and on oil facilities in the Middle-East, calling it self-defense. We can't invade Iran with ground forces; as General Colin Powell has pointed out numerous times, coalition forces are spread too thin. Nuclear weapons are not an option either, as the radiation would contaminate the entire region including Pakistan, our ally in the so-called war on terror.

The US has stumbled militarily into a disadvantaged position where, in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the US has to win, while all the insurgents have to do is not lose. History teaches us that military scenarios such as this most often fail. Similar positions occurred when the Soviets occupied Afghanistan and the US fought in Vietnam. As for Al-Qaida and Osama Bin Laden, we have basically played into their hands. For Bin Laden's goal was not a military victory over the US but an economic one, and I'm sure he likes nothing more than to see the United States spend billions of dollars on a winless war.¹⁰

Now there are those supporters of the war in Iraq who fear that if we do not fight the terrorists in the Middle-East, we will be fighting them in our own backyards. A comparable fear existed with respect to communism and Vietnam in the 1960's. A justification for our prolonged military effort in Vietnam was the “communist cancer --

¹⁰ Pentagon would be wise to take a lesson from that great Buddhist scripture, the Tao Te Ching, where it says "A mighty army tends to fall by its own weight" (chapter 76).

the fear that if South Vietnam falls to communism, all of Southeast Asia would soon be communist. But South Vietnam fell, and despite our lost military effort, 15 years later the Soviet Union and its East-Block communist neighbors were desolved.

Last year, a stir was created from a poll that revealed that 25% of young American Muslims believed terrorism is justified under certain circumstances. If this is the case, why is it that terrorism is not already rampant in our country? The answer is that most Muslims in America are successful people who treasure their children and their families, have benefited from the American systems of government and higher education and have much to live for. Many times I have been told “there are no moderate Muslims,” yet I have many friends at the Mosque in Muncie, Indiana who hold moderate views and who publicly have condemned terrorism.

There is a dynamic multi-faith grass roots organization in Muncie called *Awaken* that was started and is led by two prominent Muslims, Dr. Sabar Bahrami and his wife Bibi. This organization has raised funds and built a girls school and medical clinic, both of which are now providing services in a remote village in Afghanistan. The week after 9/11, Dr. Bahrami received threatening telephone calls. When he and Bibi heard of me receiving hate mail and being accused of supporting terrorism because of my involvement in Peace Studies, they could not believe such harassment could happen in America. This is what the Bahrami’s came to America to escape! In the end, as our present military and political quagmire grows old and our apocalyptic delusions fade, we will finally rid ourselves of our terrorist paranoia. We will withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan, and having exhausted our military options, will keep a watchful eye through intelligence gathering while building positive relationships by providing beneficial health, educational and employment opportunities to people of Arab decent as our means of overcoming hatred. To paraphrase Martin Luther King Jr., we must counter their force with soul force, and we must match their ability to hate with our ability to love.¹¹

¹¹ King, M. L. (1958). *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Circle*. (New York: Harper & Row. Pgs. 13-16).

A Christian Nation?

Today there is a fascinating race occurring between two excellent candidates in the Democratic party. I do not believe this to be a negative as it is often portrayed in the press. The citizens of East Central Indiana are becoming energized and politically active as these two national level candidates begin paying attention to Muncie, a city that is usually under the national radar, particularly when it comes to positive news.

I must praise Senator Barack Obama for way in which he has addressed the issues of race, and religious faith, the non-adversarial attitude he has projected, and his call for dialog and understanding. Such peace-building efforts are much needed today, and a grass roots organization called the Muncie Interfaith Fellowship has been active promoting dialog when these issues have reared their ugly head in Muncie over the past five years.

A vocal minority of Christians in America hold our Founding Fathers intended the United States to be based on Christian morals and beliefs. This romanticized view of US history, however, does not hold up when you examine the legislative policies and moral behavior of those who penned and approved the US constitution.

For example, Article 1 section 2 of the US Constitution includes the infamous “three-fifths compromise” which, for the purpose of taxation and representation, counted only as three-fifths of the African slaves in slave holding states. This was a politically expedient move to forge an agreement that would unite slave and free states enough to ratify the US constitution. Despite the fact that the words “three-fifths of a person” did not appear in the language of the Compromise, its rhetoric nevertheless reinforced the notion that the phrase “all men are created equal” found in the Declaration of Independence did not apply to people of African descent.

Not only did our Founding Fathers agree to this compromise, most of them, including Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, owned slaves. In addition, our Founding Fathers excluded women from having the right to vote, and merely stood by politically as women continued to be denied the right to own property, inherit their husband’s wealth, attend college and gain custody of their children in cases of divorce.

In the late 1700's and early 1800's, it was not Christian evangelicals who led the movement to abolish slavery. It was the more liberal Quakers who, unlike other Christian denominations, allowed women to speak in church!

Understanding the legislative decisions of our Founding Fathers is not a question of liberal vs. conservative interpretation. It is a question right or wrong. Slavery was wrong, the three-fifths compromise was wrong, denying women equal rights was wrong. While the Founding Fathers admirably instituted democracy and our precious Bill of Rights, their legislative policies and moral actions are in many ways an embarrassment to Christianity and tell a much different story to women and Afro-Americans.

An Adversarial Culture

Peace Studies as an academic discipline advocates training in mediation in part as an effort to move our society away from being an from an adversarial culture. Over the past 15 years, television and radio talk-shows have become increasingly debate-oriented, politically charged and abrasive with hosts and invited guests mixing name-calling, stereotyping and labeling in with their discussion of current issues. It is well-known that the US has become a litigation, confrontational, and increasingly violent culture. Peace Studies recognizes the importance of law, but also its limitations. Legally we may solve a conflict, but law itself cannot achieve reconciliation. The law appeals to the intellect, but forgiveness and reconciliation must engage the heart.

In a conversation with a recent graduate from a prominent law school, I discovered that law schools and political science degree programs rarely require indepth training in mediation. And according to the Congressional Quarterly, Law is the profession listed by 218 members of the 109 Congress, followed by 195 members listing as public service or politics.¹² It is hardly any wonder then that our political system is grounded in an adversarial model which frequently slips into partisan gridlock and political bickering.

When lecturing to peace studies classes, I frequently refer to the yin – yang symbol as an illustration of the mutual give-and-take required for a problem – solving approach to conflict resolution (see figure 1). This symbol depicts the complimentary

¹² See www.senate.gov/reference/resourses

flow of opposites co-existing when a condition of balance and harmony is present in the universe. People in Western cultures frequently ascribe Good and Evil to the white and black sides of this image, but such values are not part of the Taoist interpretation. Rather, the “yin” or black side represents mystery, intuition, and the female principle, while the “yang” or white portion symbols clarity, intellect and the stereotypical masculine side of life. The large dots of opposing color in each side of the symbol reveal that the complimentary opposites are not separable but are forever interdependent. This prevents the Taoist duality from being interpreted and applied simplistically.

When teaching, I like to re-draw this symbol to represent different types of interactions between people. Figure 2 represents an uncompromising condition where interacting parties or individuals have “dug in their heels” and are unwilling to bend from their respective positions. When this happens in government, we call this “gridlock.” Figure 3 depicts opposing sides or forces in a state of violence. This, of course, includes physical violence, but also psychological and structural violence as exhibited in acts of intimidation, harassment, discrimination, bullying and verbal abuse.

In our adversarial culture, people are expected, and perhaps conditioned, to behave more like is being depicted in figure 2; that is, strong, assertive, somewhat intimidating, and unyielding. Someone who empathizes with his adversaries and who exhibits characteristics of flexibility and a willingness to compromise, as represented in figure 1, is often seen as weak and lacking in leadership ability. I propose then that American society should invest in mediation training, particularly in its law schools if we are to move away from being a litigation culture. Granted there are obvious violent offenses that are beyond mediation, but a vast number of interpersonal and corporate conflicts could potentially be reconciled through mediation before having to enter and tie up the court system.

There are many grass roots efforts to teach young people peer mediation and conflict resolution skills. The Peace Learning Center right here in Indianapolis, has an excellent program training and sending facilitation counselors into schools to expose both students and teachers to non-confrontational strategies in dealing with conflict. Programs such as these need to be expanded and incorporated in every school district in our country.

Conclusion

While nonviolence is a form of fighting, ethical nonviolent activists are not playing a zero-sum game where one side wins and the other loses. Rather than vanquish their adversaries, nonviolent activists win them over to their side, the activists placing themselves in a position where it is advantageous for their opponents to allow them to succeed. Like Jesus, ethical nonviolent activists manage to survive against great political odds by restraining the vengeful instincts of their followers, appealing to the moral conscience of the people, and in doing so, becoming more dangerous, and influential dead than alive.

The primary purpose of nonviolence is to expose injustice and in doing so, has the power to unit people from diverse religious traditions. Religion itself, however, has a fanatical dark side that must be addressed by assisting all people of faith in developing theologies that reject redemptive violence, respect the discoveries of science, and equip moderate mainstream clergy and clerics to defend the symbolic interpretation of scripture. Political leaders must refrain from using religious or apocalyptic language to characterize international conflicts. While politicians may at times view war as unavoidable, no war is ever just given the large number of physical and psychological civilian casualties that result from armed conflict. Terrorism must be confronted by emphasizing cooperation between intelligence gathering and law enforcement rather than relying so heavily on military intervention. Finally, government support for grass roots organizations engaged in peace-building initiatives, as well as mediation training, should be given a much higher priority in an effort to move our culture away from its preoccupation with attack-oriented, adversarial politics, and forums must be created to give moderate religious views ample opportunities to be heard.

