WHY THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT IS A MOVEMENT FOR PEACE

July 8, 2013

Statisticians inform us that the past decade has seen a drop in the number of armed conflicts around the world and fewer war-related deaths than any decade in the past hundred years.[1] While any reduction is welcome, I doubt that such statistics are reassuring to the people of Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, South Sudan, Somalia, or the Congo. And I guarantee you they are little comfort to millions of us in the United States where political leaders speak of the "war on terror" as a permanent feature of life in this era.

I suppose it is possible, with an eye on statistics, to argue that Australia largely escaped the military slaughter of the past century. But tell that to the 100,000 Australians who died in conflict in such places as Gallipoli, Fromelles, Tobruk, El Alamein, New Guinea, Yongju, Malaysia, Long Tan, Baghdad, and Kandahar. You know, far better than I, that Australia's national character has been shaped by the "Anzac spirit," with its idealized conception of war, and by a firm conviction that security is derived from military force, including alliances with those whose weapons are bigger than yours. When President Obama spoke to the Australian Parliament in 2011, anti-war groups derided this country as a loyal subsidiary of the U.S. military industrial complex.[2]

I leave it to you to decide to what extent such statements are hyperbole, but I trust we all agree that war remains a horrifyingly prevalent reality in these early years of the twenty-first century, and that it should be a major concern for the churches in both of our nations. I imagine you also agree, however, that our churches have often failed to be effective in the cause of peace. Martin Luther King, Jr., though phrasing it as a question, was far more blunt: "What," he asked, "more pathetically reveals the irrelevance of the church in present-day world affairs than its witness against war?[3] In this presentation, I will contend that the ecumenical movement can and should be the setting, the vehicle, for effective and faithful Christian witness on behalf of peace in this violent age–and then invite your response.

•   •   •

Forty years after its German publication, <u>And Yet It Moves</u> remains one of the most insightful books ever written about the ecumenical movement. The author, German educator Ernst Lange, argues passionately in the book's closing chapter that "the

---

[1] See http://filipspagnoli.wordpress.com/stats-on-human-rights/statistics-on-war-conflict/statistics-on-violent-conflict/

[2] See http://stopwarcoalition.org/barack-obama-julia-gillard-we-accuse-you-of-complicity-in-war-crimes/

[3] From "A Knock at Midnight" at http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_a_knock_at_midnight/

ecumenical movement is a movement for peace."[4] Lange takes it as given that the
church has a scriptural mandate to work for the peace of the human family–or, better, to
participate in God's mission of peacemaking. And, like Dr. King, he contends that the
mind-boggling power of modern weaponry makes the division of humanity into warring
groups, nations and ideologies dangerously–disastrously!–obsolete.[5] The church, as an
instrument of God's shalom, must proclaim and demonstrate the interdependence of the
human family–and that is the very purpose of the church renewal movement we call
"ecumenical." Ecumenism, Lange concludes, is "the way in which the Christian
churches really serve the cause of peace."[6]

I want to bolster both of Lange's claims: 1) that peacemaking is not simply one item on
the ecumenical agenda (ecumenism is a movement for peace in human community),
and 2) that the visible unity of the church, ecumenism's often-stated goal, is essential to
the Christian witness for peace. Such claims are not to be taken for granted! In the
history of the church, those who have emphasized peacemaking have often feared that
unity would blunt the prophetic edge of their proclamation, while those who have
emphasized unity have often feared that radical peacemaking would prove divisive.
That's why the Historic Peace Churches–Mennonites, Friends (Quakers), Brethren–
have generally been sectarian, while churches inclined toward collaboration have
generally left matters of war and peace to the individual conscience.

The ecumenical movement, at its best, has rejected this dichotomy. In the words of
former World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary, Konrad Raiser, the
question of war and peace "is not an additional or an external concern that is thrust
upon the churches seeking peacemaking and rebuilding communion among each other,
but is integral to the emergence of the ecumenical impulse and the ecumenical
movement."[7] And the realization of a common Christian position on war and
peacemaking–or, at least, a convergence toward it– is one of the true, if under-
appreciated, triumphs of ecumenical dialogue.

<p style="text-align:center">*　　*　　*</p>

It is important to recall that the historical development of ecumenism has been
decisively shaped by periods of intense international conflict. The Life and Work
movement, one of the streams that formed the WCC, was born amid the debris of World
War I. Those four years of carnage were, in effect, a Christian civil war–Protestant
Britain (and Australia), Roman Catholic France, and Orthodox Russia allied against

---

[4] Ernst Lange, And Yet It Moves, trans. Edwin Robertson (Geneva: WCC, 1979), p. 147.

[5] See Lange, And Yet It Moves, p. 160; Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Christmas Sermon on Peace" in James
M. Washington, ed., A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King,
Jr. (New York: Harper Collins, 1986), p. 253.

[6] Lange, And Yet It Moves, p. 147.

[7] Konrad Raiser, "Remarks to the Bienenberg Consultation" in Fernando Enns, Scott Holland, and Ann
Riggs, eds., Seeking Cultures of Peace (Telford, PA: Cascadea Publishing, 2004), p. 20.

Protestant German, Roman Catholic Austria, and Orthodox Bulgaria–with no mechanism or platform for bringing the churches together for dialogue and possible common witness. It was this lacuna that the Lutheran archbishop, Nathan Søderblom, and others sought to fill with their conferences on the life and work of Christian community. As the participants at the first conference (Stockholm, 1925) put it, "The world is too strong for a divided church."[8]

The World Council itself was formed during, and deeply influenced by, the German Church Struggle of the 1930s and, especially, by World War II. The 1937 Oxford Conference on Church and Society, a conference that called for the establishment of the WCC, also made this seminal declaration: "If war breaks out, then pre-eminently the church must manifestly be the church, still united as the one Body of Christ, though the nations wherein it is planted fight each other.... The fellowship of prayer must at all costs remain unbroken."[9] Willem Visser't Hooft, first General Secretary of the WCC, called these sentences "the charter of the ecumenical movement"[10] and incorporated them into a letter sent to all members of the "World Council in process of formation" once war actually began. The letter also lamented how miserably the church had failed to be the church in the First World War, called on the churches not to present the war as a holy crusade, and urged Christian leaders to prepare for the future by "seeking to ascertain from fellow Christians in the opposing camp what terms of peace might create a lasting peace."[11]

The ecumenical movement was further defined by the Cold War, by the fact that, even at the height of nuclear tension, the Iron Curtain did not prevent regular contact between churches east and west. Ecumenical leaders repeatedly expressed a profound sense of relatedness in the face of political and military conflict. "I find," said the Norwegian bishop, Eivind Berggrav, to a meeting of the WCC Central Committee in the 1950s, "that the New Testament demands of me that I shall be wiling to accept as a full brother in Christ a man who seems to me quite dangerous in his political or economic views."[12] A well-publicized demonstration of such relationship came when the Russian Orthodox Church joined the WCC at the Council's assembly in 1961, the very eve of the Cuban missile crisis. This, said the assembly's delegates, is "a dramatic confirmation of our faith that God is holding his family together in spite of sin and complexity, and is a sign of hope for the world."[13]

---

[8] Quoted in Paul Abrecht, "Life and Work" in Nicholas Lossky, et al., eds., Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement (Geneva: WCC, 2002), p. 691.

[9] J. H. Oldham, ed., The Oxford Conference: Official Report (Chicago: Willett and Clark, 1937), p. 47.

[10] W. A. Visser't Hooft, Memoirs (London: SCM Press, 1973), p. 73.

[11] Visser't Hooft, Memoirs, p. 110.

[12] Quoted in Visser't Hooft, Memoirs, p. 225.

[13] W. A. Visser't Hooft, ed., The New Delhi Report: The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches (New York: Association Press, 1962), pp. 108-9.

I want to approach this history from another direction. Over the centuries, Christians have not only found themselves on different sides of particular conflicts, they have obviously disagreed on whether or not war is ever justifiable–to the point of clear division in the body of Christ. The Augsburg Confession, to take only one example, states that "Christians may without sin...punish evildoers with the sword, engage in just wars, and serve as soldiers. We, therefore, condemn the Anabaptists who teach that these things aren't Christian."[14]

These profound disagreements, even anathemas, were brought into the modern ecumenical movement. The report from the Oxford conference of 1937 outlines "two widely divergent views regarding war, along with several that are intermediate," but goes on to argue that the movement cannot rest content with the cataloguing of disputes.[15] The world situation demands the articulation of common ground!

Somewhat astonishingly, common ground has, in fact, been discovered, thanks to decades of ecumenical study, dialogue, and shared experience. In what follows, I want to name five elements of this growing convergence. It probably goes without saying that churches continue to disagree over whether to support war or violent revolution as an option of last resort; but these five "principles" still demonstrate the remarkable extent to which old disputes have been overcome. Listing elements of convergence in this way does not do justice to their historical context (which is always important); but, in my judgment, these principles constitute a shared Christian position that transcends their historical and political setting and constitute an ecumenical theological convergence every bit as important as Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry.

1. "War is contrary to the will of God."[16] Already at Oxford, the churches had said together that war as a method of settling disputes is incompatible with the teachings and example of our lord, Jesus Christ. "No justification of war must be allowed to conceal or minimize this fact."[17] But this eight-word sentence from the report of the WCC's first assembly (Amsterdam, 1948), repeated numerous times in subsequent statements, is even more pointed: "War is contrary to the will of God." It may be that war is, at times, a necessary evil, but it is still "inherently evil"[18]–which means that Christians should never identify warfare with the purposes of God. To put it another way, "crusade" or "holy war" is not an acceptable Christian position. God's will is for shalom. No one should go to war in the name of God.

---

[14] "Augsburg Confession," Article 16.

[15] Oldham, ed., The Oxford Conference, pp. 162-67.

[16] "The Church and the International Disorder" in W. A. Visser't Hooft, ed., Man's Disorder and God's Design: The Amsterdam Assembly Series (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), p. 218.

[17] The Oxford Conference, p. 162.

[18] W. A. Visser't Hooft, ed., The Evanston Report: The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), p. 132.

I need to reiterate that this is not a strictly pacifist position; and indeed, ecumenical conferences have not endorsed pacifism. For example, the delegates to the WCC's ninth assembly in 2006 adopted a statement on the "Responsibility to Protect," affirming (through gritted teeth) that "the fellowship of churches is not prepared to say that it is never appropriate or never necessary to resort to the use of force for the protection of the vulnerable."[19] The focus of the statement, however, is on preventing such situations from arising (a point to which we will return), and the statement never suggests that God blesses such military intervention, no matter how well intentioned. Even Reinhold Niebuhr, an influential critic of pacifism, rebuked those who invoked divine guidance for the "ungodly" act of war. Presuming God's sanction for our violence, argued Niebuhr, is simply another form of sinful pride.[20] Because war is contrary to the will of God.

2. "There are some forms of violence in which Christians may not participate and which the churches must condemn."[21] This line comes from the report of a two-year study process–entitled "Violence, Nonviolence, and the Struggle for Social Justice"–that was commended to the churches by the WCC's Central Committee in 1973. The study was prompted, in large part, by efforts to oppose systemic racism in South Africa and the United States (King had been scheduled to preach at the Council's fourth assembly in 1968), and remained the WCC's most substantial work on the subject until the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV, 2000-10). Once again, the churches did not agree on whether violent resistance is ever appropriate or necessary in situations of oppression; but they did agree, in a strengthening of just war criteria, that some forms of violence must always be precluded, are never to be endorsed by Christians. These include "the conquest of one people by another or the deliberate oppression of one class or race by another...torture in all forms, the holding of innocent hostages and the deliberate or indiscriminate killing of innocent non-combatants."[22]

This last point helps undergird the broad ecumenical denunciation of nuclear weapons. The strongest statement came from the WCC's assembly in 1983: "The production and deployment of nuclear weapons, as well as their use, constitute a crime against humanity."[23] Christians, said the assembly, should work for the elimination of these

---

[19] Luis N. Rivera-Pagan, ed., God, in Your Grace: Official Report of the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (Geneva: WCC, 2007), p. 307.

[20] See Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), pp. 283-84.

[21] "Violence, Nonviolence and the Struggle for Social Justice" in Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, eds., The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 217.

[22] Kinnamon and Cope, eds., The Ecumenical Movement, p. 217.

[23] David Gill, ed., Gathered for Life: The Official Report of the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (Geneva: WCC, 1983), p. 137. Several U.S.-based denominations produced statements on nuclear weapons in the years following the WCC's assembly in 1983.

weapons and should refuse to participate in their manufacture. This concern receded as an ecumenical priority after 1989 (as if the threat posed by nuclear weapons had gone away!), but, in recent years, has again become a focus of attention–and not just thanks to New Zealand's protest against nuclear-armed and nuclear-powered warships.

3. <u>Non-violent resistance is central to the way of peace.</u> This principle seems implicit in all of the others, but is of such importance that it merits separate mention. The 1973 study acknowledged that, despite the example of the American civil rights movement, in which churches were highly involved, "far too little attention has been given by the church and by resistance movements to the methods and techniques of non-violence in the struggle for a just society."[24] Subsequent studies and assemblies, however, have commended the practice of non-violent resistance, without overlooking the fact that it, too, is highly political and potentially co-opted. Such specific initiatives as the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel reflect this growing, and shared, commitment. The formulation I have chosen–non-violent resistance is central to the way of peace–is adapted from the final statement of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC), a conference culminating the Decade to Overcome Violence, in 2011.[25]

4. <u>Peace is inseparable from justice.</u> Ecumenical statements have approached this principle from different directions–for example, the WCC's Nairobi Assembly (1975) insisted that peace is foundational to justice since militarization distorts social and economic priorities, taking the greatest toll on the poor;[26] while the following assembly in Vancouver (1983) stressed that "without justice for all everywhere, we shall never have peace anywhere"[27]–but the basic affirmation is that they belong together. Thanks to the DOV, this affirmation has taken the form of a new paradigm beyond the old alternatives of just war and pacifism. The message from the IEPC puts it directly: "...we are moving beyond the doctrine of just war towards a commitment to just peace."[28]

At the heart of the "just peace" paradigm is a simple but profound insight: It is not enough to react to the threat of war; the church, with the help of God, must be proactive in its efforts to change those conditions that set the stage for violence. The United Church of Christ theologian, Susan Thistlethwaite, in an essay following 9-11, offers a concrete example of what this might mean for public policy. Afghanistan, as she puts it, needed a Marshall Plan after the period of Soviet occupation, but the U.S. and other

---

[24] Kinnamon and Cope, eds., <u>The Ecumenical Movement</u>, p. 217.

[25] "An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace," par. 9 at http://www.overcomingviolence.org/fileadmin/dov/files/iepc/resources/ECJustPeace_English.pdf.

[26] See David M. Paton, ed., <u>Breaking Barriers: Nairobi 1975</u> (London: PSCK, 1976), pp. 124, 181.

[27] Gill, ed., <u>Gathered for Life</u>, p. 132.

[28] "Glory to God and Peace on Earth: The Message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation at http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/resources-dov/wcc-resources/documents/presentations-speeches-messages/iepc-message.html.

wealthy countries did not act because Afghanistan didn't then seem vital to their national interests. "We let poverty and oppression rule," she writes, "and now we are reaping the results."[29] Similarly, working for peace in Iraq in 2003, while important, was too late. The church in 2003 needed to be working for peace in 2020 by addressing those issues–poverty, AIDS, illiteracy, international debt–that may well contribute to future conflict. Seen in this light, the decision to use armed force <u>always</u> represents a failure of governments–and churches–to work proactively for justice.

This concept of just peace, which is increasingly endorsed by the ecumenically-engaged churches, is a critique of both pacifism and just war. Violence, the churches now acknowledge, is not only a feature of war, it is embedded in the status quo, even when there is no apparent conflict. The Pax Romana, the "peace" maintained by the might of the Roman army, was hardly non-violent for slaves or Jews or other persecuted people in the time of Jesus. Authentic peacemaking will seek to "unmask" such structural violence and to advocate vigorously on behalf of those victimized by it. A pacifism unattuned to this ongoing, often hidden, warfare, a pacifism that is "an excuse to retreat from public responsibility into sectarian reservations of spiritual life,"[30] may actually be detrimental to the cause of peace.

On the other hand, an insistence that justice is a prerequisite for peace may simply be a new form of the just war tradition. Justice and peace need to be held in dialectical tension if Christians are to avoid the divisive disputes of earlier generations.

5. "<u>Reconciliation stands at the heart of the gospel message</u>."[31] This may sound obvious to anyone who has pondered such biblical texts as 2 Corinthians 5:16-20; but the emphasis on reconciliation at recent ecumenical conferences has been touted as nothing less than "a new paradigm for mission."[32] It implies the church's involvement with perpetrators as well as victims, and its responsibility to participate in the reconstruction of societies (e.g., Rwanda or Liberia) on the other side of war or the revolutionary struggle against oppression.

The idea that peacemaking should "aim at the conversion and not the destruction of the opponent," looking toward the possibility of restored relationship, was already present in the 1973 report on violence and nonviolence.[33] Over the following three decades, however, ecumenical discussion focused more on liberation than reconciliation. Current

---

[29] Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, "New Wars, Old Wineskins" in Jon L. Berquist, ed., <u>Strike Terror No More</u> (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002), p. 265.

[30] This comes from a study paper prepared for the NCC's Centennial Assembly in 2010. It can be found at http://www.ncccusa.org/witnesses2010/christian-understanding-of-war.pdf.

[31] "A Letter from Athens" in Jacques Matthey, ed., "<u>Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile</u>": Report of the <u>WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism</u> (Geneva, WCC, 2008), p. 325.

[32] Robert Schreiter, "Reconciliation as a New Paradigm for Mission" in <u>Come Holy Spirit</u>, pp. 213-19.

[33] Kinnamon and Cope, eds., <u>The Ecumenical Movement</u>, p. 217.

proponents of the new paradigm stress that reconciliation, if it is authentic, must include a concern for justice; but, seen in historical context, there is a different tone–symbolized by the move from the WCC's Program to <u>Combat</u> Racism to its Decade to <u>Overcome</u> Violence (subtitled "Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace").

Reconciliation truly emerged as a dominant theme at the 2005 Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Athens, from which my formulation of this principle–"reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel message"–is taken. The message of that meeting is unmistakable: The church is called beyond political action to participation in the healing mission of God–creating safe, hospitable spaces where truth can be spoken and heard, helping to rebuild relationships, and fostering the sort of tough-minded forgiveness (not forgetfulness) that makes a different kind of future possible for both victim and offender. We hear in this the clear influence of the "truth and reconciliation" processes that have had such impact, with church leadership, in South Africa, Central America, and other parts of the world.

*   *   *

I hope that these five principles, now widely endorsed by churches involved in the ecumenical movement, demonstrate both how central peace is to the movement's agenda and how extensive is the convergence toward a common Christian position–a convergence every bit as significant, in my judgment, as, say, the widely-celebrated agreement on justification by faith. There is, however, a sixth principle, running throughout modern ecumenism, that must be highlighted because it seems so often overlooked: <u>The unity of the church is itself crucial to the Christian witness for peace</u>.

Part of the point is sociological: Divisions in the body of Christ frequently exacerbate political conflicts and hinder effective peacemaking–which must be undertaken ecumenically. The Methodist or Greek Orthodox response to war makes as little sense as the Presbyterian or Roman Catholic response to climate change! Such issues are simply too large to be tackled in denominational isolation.

The real point, however, is more theological. God's gift of reconciliation is for the world; but the church, in the words of the apostle Paul, is entrusted with this message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). And, as Paul's letters make clear, the church is to deliver the message not just by what it <u>says</u> or even by what it <u>does</u>, but by what it <u>is</u>–by the way its members live with one another. Ecumenical conferences have repeatedly affirmed that the church is to be a sign, a demonstration project, of God's intent for all creation, which we often sum up with the Hebrew word <u>shalom</u>. The church isn't just the bearer of the message of reconciliation; it is, or is to be, the message embodied.

To put it negatively, the message of peace is constantly undercut by the sorry state of the messengers–still divided by race, neglecting the needs of sisters and brothers who worship God incarnate under different labels, acting more like competing corporations than members of a single body, unable to break bread together at the table of reconciliation, failing to recognize our connection to followers of Christ who live in

nations that our nation calls "enemy." That is why a consultation sponsored by the U.S. National Council of Churches in 1995 declared that "the divisions in the Body of Christ in the world are a counter-witness to the peace sought and proclaimed by the church as the follower of the Prince of Peace who prayed that his disciples might be one."[34] The churches, said participants in the consultation, must repent of past antagonism toward one another, seek common ground through hearing one another's histories, and recognize that "the movement toward unity...is itself a sign and model of their peacemaking vocation."[35]

I certainly don't mean to suggest that holding unity and peace together is easy! There are times when, in the course of working for peace with justice, Christians must take sides against sisters and brothers in the church. To take an extreme example, the ecumenical movement's outspoken struggle against the violence of the apartheid system caused some Reformed churches in South Africa to withdraw from the WCC, and became the focus of criticism for many others.[36] But even when taking sides, our understanding of church must be shaped more by theology than politics. Even in such moments, we must recognize that the "they" we oppose are, in some fundamental sense, "we"–because the story by which we live tells us that we have been linked in communion beyond human agreement. This, itself, is a profound testimony to God's shalom.[37]

<div style="text-align:center">*　　*　　*</div>

I hope this has been a useful look at what the ecumenical movement has said about war and peace. But let me now reiterate the obvious. Despite the fact that ecumenically-engaged churches are forging a once-unthinkable consensus regarding war and peace, the churches' witness in times of conflict remains ineffective.

One reason is that numerous churches (generally speaking, conservative evangelical and Pentecostal) have not participated in–or, consequently, embraced–the convergence I have been outlining. As a result, it is not unusual to see the spectacle of some church leaders opposing, while others are supporting, impending combat on the part of their

_____

[34] Jeffrey Gros and John D. Rempel, eds., <u>The Fragmentation of the Church and Its Unity in Peacemaking</u> (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 221.

[35] Gros and Rempel, eds., <u>The Fragmentation of the Church</u>, pp. 221-22.

[36] Another example is the German Church Struggle of the 1930s and participation in World War II. Ecumenical leaders generally called on the WCC, then in process of formation, to stand firmly against Nazism and to call the churches to support the struggle against it, while still working together for eventual reconciliation. One of these was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The ecumenical church, he wrote, "cannot just say, 'There should really be no war, but there are necessary wars' and leave the application of this principle to each individual. It should be able to say quite definitely: 'Engage in this war' or 'Do not engage in this war.'" Dietrich Bonhoeffer, <u>No Rusty Swords</u>, Edwin H. Robertson, ed., (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 162-63.

[37] See Chapter 6 below.

nation. Another reason, however, is that the official teachings of the churches, certainly including their ecumenical commitments, are too lacking in authority to shape the opinions and behavior of people in the pews. And without congregational investment, church statements "from the top" have little influence on public policy.

In such a situation, the churches may need to focus less on top-down pronouncements and more on programs of congregational formation.[38] More specifically, I recommend promotion of the following corporate "disciplines" which, if practiced, may help form a peacemaking sensibility in local communities.

1. <u>Pray on a regular basis for those regarded as enemies by our nation or group</u>. Scripture is clear about the importance of this for individual Christians; but the injunction in Matthew 5 surely applies to communities as well. "The churches," said the delegates at the WCC's first assembly (Amsterdam, 1948), "must teach the duty of love and prayer for the enemy in time of war and of reconciliation between victim and vanquished after the war."[39] One reason, of course, is that many of our nation's enemies will likely be Christians to whom we are related in the one body. In the words of the Oxford conference (1937), "if Christians in warring nations prayed according to the pattern of prayer given by their Lord, they will never be 'praying against' one another."[40] Beyond this, <u>every</u> neighbor, seen in scriptural perspective, is an infinitely-valued child of God. Prayer for enemies is a powerful sign and instrument of this human unity that is at the heart of the gospel–and central to the vision of the ecumenical movement.

2. <u>Practice peace in our own congregations, especially by committing ourselves to seek relationship with people we prefer to avoid</u>! It is important to pray for enemies in distant places; but, to paraphrase 1 John 4, how can we speak of relationship with people we can't see if we can't demonstrate relationship with people we see every week? The two groups in the church that are most important for me to engage, writes Barbara Wheeler, are those I have injured and those who most oppose my views.[41] Many of us spend most of our time in church with like-minded friends, people we would hang out with in other settings. This, however, obscures the church's potential as a community of reconciliation and sign of God's will for peace.

3. <u>Seek partnership with a near-by congregation that historically has taken a different approach to matters of war and peace</u>. Learn more about that history, including past

---

[38] Ans van der Bent reaches a similar conclusion in his chapter on "Peace and Disarmament" in <u>Commitment to God's Word: A Concise Critical Survey of Ecumenical Social Thought</u> (Geneva: WCC, 1995), pp. 107-19.

[39] Visser't Hooft, ed., <u>Man's Disorder</u>, p. 219.

[40] Oldham, ed., <u>The Oxford Conference</u>, p. 167. A good tool for this practice is the ecumenical prayer cycle, <u>In God's Hands</u> (Geneva: WCC, 2006).

[41] Barbara G. Wheeler, "True Confession: A Presbyterian Dissenter Thinks About the Church" in <u>The Church and Its Unity</u>, Church Issues Series, No. 1 (Presbyterian Church [USA] Office of Theology and Worship, 1999), pp. 15-16.

persecution. Find out what drives that church's convictions about peace. And then study together some of the ecumenical statements referred to in this chapter.

4. <u>Join with other congregations in a local activity that counters violence</u>. One example that cries out for local engagement in the United States is the ecumenical effort to reduce gun violence through participation in such organizations as Heeding God's Call. U.S. Christians can defend the Constitutional right to bear arms and still be appalled–outraged!–by the senseless status quo in which an American child is twelve times more likely to be killed by gunfire than a child in the next twenty-five largest industrialized countries–combined! This, however, is only one possible issue related to peace. A congregation should decide on the one that is most appropriate, most needed, in its setting and get involved.

*   *   *

I will end by noting that there are numerous other actions we might commend to one another. I hope, for example, that we will begin to teach these elements of the ecumenical convergence on peace in our theological schools, even as we teach the results of Faith and Order and bilateral dialogues. I hope that the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA), through its governing bodies, will challenge the member churches to receive this growing ecumenical convergence and to commend actions such as those I have suggested to their congregations. It is striking to me that there is no reference at all to peacemaking in the the NCCA Covenant. Shouldn't this be part of the churches' mutual commitments?

A passionate, sustained commitment to peacemaking is often associated with one segment of Christian community, namely the Historic Peace Churches. "Another peace protest? It must be those Quakers or Mennonites or Brethren!" What I have tried to show, however, is that costly, insistent peacemaking is <u>not</u> limited to these few. It is the mission of the ecumenical church. <u>All</u> churches should see themselves as peace churches. And all churches should recognize that participation in the ecumenical movement is an essential way for them to live out this calling. Commitment to peace is common ground on which the church can unite. And its unity is, in turn, a sign of the peace that God gives and promises.

Michael Kinnamon
School of Theology and Ministry
Seattle University