

About Methodists United for Peace with Justice

Methodists United for Peace with Justice organized in 1987 as a national association of laity and clergy. Stimulation for organizing was the 1986 pastoral letter and foundation document of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, *In Defense of Creation: The Nuclear Crisis and a Just Peace*. Since then the quest for global nuclear disarmament has been a major focus. As an extension of our work, our chair serves as chair of the Interfaith Committee for Nuclear Disarmament (see www.zero-nukes.org).

We have a commitment to work with all denominations within the Methodist family in the United States. We therefore encourage Pan-Methodist cooperation on children's issues and other justice concerns.

Annual dues are \$25 (\$15 for student or fixed income). To join, provide your name, mailing address, phone number, and e-mail address and send your dues payment to 1500 16th Street, NW, Washington, D.C 20036. You can also join on-line at www.mupwj.org.

Aftermath of Iraq War suggests a new vision for humankind.....

by James Hipkins, Editor, Peace Leaf

Dr. Robert Mueller, former assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, was speaking in San Francisco just before the Iraq War began. His comments are a challenge to humankind in the aftermath of a period of war.

I want to share with you some of the insights he shared which are visionary and powerful figures for the post-war world.

He commented that "he feels honored to be alive at such a miraculous time in history. He said, "I am so moved by what's going on in our world today. Never before in the history of the world has there been a global, visible, viable, and open public dialogue and conversation about the legitimacy of war."

He commented: " Is war legitimate? Is it illegitimate? Is there enough evidence to warrant an attack? What will be the consequences? What will happen after a war? How will this set off other conflicts? What might be the peaceful alternatives? All of this is taking place in the context of the United Nations Security Council, the body that was established in 1949 for exactly this purpose."

He noted that it had taken us more than fifty years to realize that function, the real function of the United Nations. It is at this point in history that the United Nations was at the center of the stage.

He said, " We, the world community, waging peace. It is difficult, hard work. It is constant and we must not let up. It is working and it is an historic milestone of immense proportions. It has never happened before --never in human history-- and it is happening now--waging peace through global conversation.

As we reflect on Dr. Mueller's words, it is clear that the aggressor was so angry and upset that the line of the warheads and the gathering of the military forces burst forth in one night's bombing of Baghdad.

Every moral principle that had been used for centuries to determine whether a war was just or unjust was thrust aside. It was as if some force had lunged forward and grabbed the arm of humankind and shook them to point them in a new direction.

During the days prior to the beginning of the Iraq War the largest peace demonstrations in the history of the world were taking place. In every continent people gathered by the thousands to join in the echo of "Peace Not War". In countries who had never had peace demonstrations found themselves swept up in the movement of a giant wave of affirmation that the world should "Give Peace A Change".

Dr. Mueller commented that "this is what waging peace looks like".

Do we not find ourselves today at a most unique spot in the history of the world? Never before have so many in so many countries pled for peace. Is this not the time for the world to rethink the meaning of living in a world community? How can we bring to the United Nations a new birth of hope and optimism? How can we keep alive the spark of hope which has been ignited in the hearts and minds of people in every corner of the globe?

You will find in this issue of the Peace Leaf a proposal by Harold Bidmead of Norway that could suggest a serious new direction for a world hungry and desperate for peace.

At the same time we must confront in the United States a point of view that is diametrically opposed to world peace. The Project for the New American Century has outlined and guided the Bush Administration in the development of a point of view that insists that the American view is the only acceptable view in today's world. It sounds as if they have laid out the foundation for an American Empire encompassing the world.

Dr. Mueller has given us a great challenge. Can we keep alive the vision of a world waging peace, as we work our way through the reconstruction of Iraq? Will this not take the best thought and plans that humankind can muster in order to enable peace to prevail? The United States has the unique opportunity to sense the mood of the world and grasp the moment to suggest that the United Nations must take the lead in rebuilding Iraq and in the birth of their new government.

Your editor feels as if we are at a cross-roads. One road leads to a hope-filled world. The other road leads to division, disunity and chaos. Hopefully, in the midst of all the turmoil and struggle for power, people will not lose sight of what occurred in the United Nations at it debated the issue surrounding Iraq and its former leader. Waging Peace is not just a one time event. It is the commitment of a life-time.

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A reader writes:

We should not expect biblical people to be familiar with 20th century science. When we insist the science of biblical days is correct the science of the 20th century is wrong, we usually have "egg on our face."

We have a much more important roll with science! Science is a monster (WW1, WW2, crime, etc.) Science is wonderful! (could feed the world, educate citizens, control over-population, eliminate inherited birth defects, etc.)

If only science could be guided in the right direction, we would have a wonderful world.

At Christmas time, we are reminded that God sent the baby Jesus into the world to show us how to live in peace.(instead of a mighty warrior) Jesus taught us to pray the Lord's Prayer. We would feed the hungry, educate good citizens, control over-population, eliminate inherited birth defects, etc. Could it be that we need to apply Jesus' teaching to modern times? Could it be that guiding this wonderful monster(science) is our responsibility.

Charles E. Morrison, Ironton, OH

HAROLD S. BIDMEAD writes from Kolbotn, Norway.....

THE LOGICAL ALTERNATIVE

Millions of protesters against a US-led war on Saddam Hussein have demonstrated that they want peaceful solutions of international disputes. Millions, usually the same people, regard the so-called "United" Nations as the only alternative problem solver. They fondly imagine the UN to be a law-maker, a source of law, of **just and impartial** law, a law-enforcement agency. Not so!

In the last resort, the UN is an organization than can seek to maintain peace only by threatening war. Thus it is scarcely logical to regard the UN as a *peacekeeping authority*. Nor is it even an *authority*, since its own Charter gives it no power to do anything else but make *recommendations*. Its Members, being sovereign (Article 2) are not bound to follow any recommendation, not even States that voted in favour.

Itself unable to take action, the UN can in the last resort merely appeal to one or more of the Member States to make war or enforce warlike measures such as sanctions, which punish the weak, the poor and the innocent rather than the guilty. Being sovereign, its Members will of course engage in war or impose sanctions only if they would have done so anyway, even if the UN had never existed. As a peacekeepers the UN is thus a negligible factor in world affairs.

Our present choice is thus between two evils, war or appeasement. Appeasement would not have prevented Mussolini from invading Abyssinia, nor Hitler from conquering the whole of Europe including Britain. Yet just

when Saddam Hussein was teetering and Iraqi dissidents were about to eliminate him, granted him a reprieve.

Considering that the ignorant, unthinking and badly educated are in a majority in this world, it might be logical to assume that the minority have the right idea. But look how at the end of WW2 the self-proclaimed elite revived the League of Nations under the name of the United Nations, despite the ignominious failure of the former! The physicians prescribed "the mixture as before."

It seems logical to conclude that the vast majority of the world's population hates war and demands something better than the UN to provide the alternative. What is needed is genuine peacekeeping authority with the *de jure* and *de facto* power to reach decisions without shady horse-trading and to enforce such decisions peacefully without having to beseech possible lawbreakers to carry out its decisions on its behalf.

If such an authority compromised all the nations of the world, all with voting powers, it would be like a barrel of fruit containing many rotten apples. It would fail as ignominiously as our two world leagues. Yet such a union of the democracies would be potentially so successful that all others would clamour to join, and democracy might spread like wildfire across the despotic world. Remember the dramatic collapse of the Communist empire!

The governing body of such a union would of course have to be controlled by a democratically elected parliament, and would be constitutionally empowered to deal only with a limited list of power. *e.g.* defense (including anti-terrorism), foreign policy, civil aviation and power tot ax for its own existence. All other powers would remain with the national governments and citizens where they already rest. (Ingierkollvn. 74 N-1410 Kolbotn,Norway)

KUCINICH PROPOSES DEPARTMENT OF PEACE-Congressman from Ohio

It will include the following:

- Establish a cabinet-level department in the executive branch dedicated to peacemaking and the study of the conditions that are conducive to both domestic and international peace.
- Headed by a Secretary of Peace, appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate.
- Mission of the Department: hold peace as an organizing principle; endeavor to promote justice and democratic principles to expand human rights; strengthen non-military means of peacemaking; promote the development of human potential; work to create peace, prevent violence, divert from armed conflict and develop new structures in nonviolent dispute resolution.....
- Department will create and establish a Peace Academy, modeled after the military service academies, which will provide a 4 year concentration in peace education. Graduates will be required to serve 5 years in public service in programs dedicated to domestic or international nonviolent conflict resolution.
- Principal officers are listed in the formal proposal.
- The first day of each year, January 1st will be designated as Peace Day in the United States and all citizens should be encouraged to observe and celebrate the blessings of peace and endeavor to create peace in the coming year.

For further information contact Dennis Kucinich at www.house.gov/kucinich

FOR PEOPLE OF FAITH: An Urgent Call Your endorsement is Needed.

As people of faith, we understand that God created the universe and everything in it. Our world is an astonishingly beautiful, rich complex, tiny piece of that creation, teeming with life and beloved in God's sight.

Since the nuclear age began in 1945 this glorious world has been faced with a fundamentally new kind of threat from nuclear weapons. Their vast power could destroy not only the present world, but with long-term radiation effects and the possibility of nuclear winter, nuclear weapons could destroy the future. Even when they are unused, their production and deployment cause significant environmental degradation, divert massive resources from human need, and add destabilizing fear to tense political situations.

Contemplating the use of nuclear weapons is an affront to God. Preparing to unleash such destructiveness runs against all the life-giving creativity that comes from God. As people of faith, we affirm life and all that nurtures it. We abhor nuclear weapons and the destruction they portend. As people of faith, we choose life (Deuteronomy 30:19).

AN URGENT CALL END THE NUCLEAR DANGER

A decade after the end of the Cold War, the peril of nuclear destruction is mounting. The great powers have refused to give up nuclear arms, other countries are producing them, and terrorists are trying to acquire them.

Poorly guarded warheads and nuclear material in the former Soviet Union may fall into the hands of terrorists. The Bush administration is developing nuclear 'bunker busters' and threatening to use them against non-nuclear countries. The risk of nuclear war between India and Pakistan is grave.

Despite the end of the Cold War, the United States plans to keep large numbers of nuclear weapons indefinitely. The latest U.S.-Russian treaty, which will cut deployed strategic warheads to 2200, leaves both nations facing "assured destruction" and lets them keep their total arsenals (active and inactive, strategic and tactical) at more than 10,000 warheads each.

The dangers posed by huge arsenals, threats of use, proliferation, and terrorism are linked: The nuclear powers' refusal to disarm fuels proliferation, and proliferation makes nuclear materials more accessible to terrorists. The events of September 11 brought home to Americans what it means to experience a catastrophic attack. Yet the horrifying losses that day were only a fraction of what any nation would suffer if a single nuclear weapons were used on a city.

WE URGE YOU TO GO TO OUR HOME PAGE www.mupwj.org/index.htm to endorse this urgent call. You will find more detailed explanation at the site.

Messianic Unilateralism

by James R. Hipkins

The debate over whether the United States should invade Iraq and the recent release of the new statement by the administration of its new policy for international relations raise some very serious issues. The first major issue: the emergence in our national policy of a messianic vision of the United States. The Bush administration seems to see itself as the arbiter for the world of who is approved and who is not approved as a nation and who has the right to exist. Governments appear to the Bush administration as if they are created by nations but they need the approval of the United States. If Bush approves, they will be allowed to exist in their present form and pattern. If their present form is unacceptable to the United States, Bush reserves the right to initiate forces that will allow for a change in the government. This raises some very serious concerns about the basis of the United States mission and purpose.

In the administration's new objectives they view the world from a messianic stance. What is the source of this messianic view? What legitimates it as a valid concept on which to base U.S. foreign policy? Who declared the U.S.A. to be the Messiah and assume the leadership of the entire world?

Messianic views usually have a religious base. In this case it appears the administration has taken a religious concept and appropriated it for political purposes. A messianic view has divine world mission. It moves with directness to impose its views upon those who are not enlightened. Its mission is to make sure others adopt the thought system that will obediently follow the leadership of the messianic group. The messianic group can engage any nation that defies its leadership or presumed power. The messianic mind understands that the mission compels them to challenge any that threaten to stand in the way of the fulfillment of their role. In this particular case, it appears that the mission is domination of the world. Let anyone try to challenge the leadership of the United States and the U.S. has stated clearly that it intends to teach them their place in a world that is dominated by only one super power. This power will remain in the hands of the Chosen Messiah.

I don't know about you, but this view scares me. It frightens me because it is based on sheer ignorance of the great diversity of cultures and people throughout the world. Countless researchers have written that each culture has a scale of values that is unique. The values from one culture to another are not identical. In fact, some cultures may rate a value as the most important. Another culture may not include that value in the basic values which people pursue in their daily life. This does not make one group wrong and another right. It merely confirms the fact that cultures differ greatly from one another. Religion is only one of the many forms that feed the value structure of cultures.

Unfortunately, in many cross cultural situations people from the United States tend to assume that they are right. The world just does not understand how right we really are today. This unfortunately is a view that has alienated

people on every continent. In fact, this view is so prevalent in our culture that even when we go as tourists to other countries we often display our arrogance by belittling the local expressions. This is offensive to anyone who has any empathy for others as well as an insult to the people to whom we are displaying our arrogance. I recall being on a holiday in Singapore and being so embarrassed by the aggressive loud behavior of American tourists that I would quickly seek to absent myself from that area of the city.

It is perfectly clear that the Bush Administration is so possessed by its messianic vision that it cannot understand why everyone in the world does not want to be just like the United States. Why should other countries have any cultural pride? It is as if the old vision of manifest destiny still controls the Bush view.

When the Messianic view is linked to unilateralism an explosive mix of ideas occurs. The Bush administration has determined that it does not need to dialogue or relate to the rest of the world in the search for a world at peace. Rather, it lays out what the world must do if it wants the right to exist in a world with the United States. Is it any wonder that some nations in the world recoil at our suggestions and actions? Is it any wonder that people in other countries look at us with contempt? In their minds they are saying, "Who gave the USA the right to decide who is permitted to exist and who isn't entitled to their nation?" The Bush Declaration affirms that we do not need others nor do we have any compelling reason to consult them about the world. The United States has abrogated many of its international treaties, disarmament agreements and other treaties that forged a world united in the pursuit of peace. The crowning action in recent months was the refusal of the United States to join the World Court in The Hague.

We find ourselves in a very precarious world with an ideological administration guiding us through a critical period of history. There is nothing more frightening than seeing the emergence of fundamentalism in religion and politics becoming bedfellows. It is one thing to acknowledge a different view than Islamic leaders about religion; it is another thing to belittle their religion and their religious faith. It is tragic that this will be the perverted view of our leadership through this period of great national tragedy and danger. Unfortunately the pages of human history are filled with those who assumed messianic views in various periods of history. From the Crusades to the Inquisition, the emergence of Pol Pot and Hitler, Stalin and others have sought to compel others to accept their view of the world. The messiah wears many outfits. They may not be the same color or the same stripes, but the views are so similar, the world should take note. In the end they all suffer the same fate--condemned by history for the evil they perpetrated during their reign.

New Nuclear Weapons Development

by Friends Committee for National Legislation

Background

Buried in the Bush Administration's budget request to Congress are provisions that would shift U.S. nuclear weapons policy dramatically in the wrong direction. For more than 50 years, the U.S. has worked to delegitimize the use of nuclear weapons. Instead of following the lead of past administrations by reducing U.S. reliance on these dreadful weapons, this Administration is purposing the development of a new generation of nuclear weapons. The Administration and some members of Congress are now attempting to implement a policy that would raise the profile of nuclear weapons and lower the threshold for their use.

Nuclear "Bunker-Busters"

Since the end of the Cold War, some civilian military planners and nuclear scientists have argued for creating a new class of earth-penetrating nuclear weapons. These weapons are sometimes referred to as "bunker busters" because they would be designed to burrow into the ground to destroy underground military facilities that are protected by 100 to 300 feet of concrete or rock.

The Energy Department's budget request for Fiscal Year 2005 included \$27.6 million for the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP). The RNEP would use an existing nuclear weapon, redesigned for use against underground bunkers. It would have the explosive power up to 70 times that of the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima.

RNEP proponents claim that, because the weapon penetrates the earth before detonating, it would be a "clean" nuclear weapon. In reality, this would be an extremely deadly weapon. If detonated in an urban setting, tens of thousands of people could receive a fatal dose of radiation within the first 24 hours. More would be killed or injured by the extreme pressures of the blast and thermal injuries arising from the heat of the explosion. Still more casualties would result from the resulting fires and the collapse of buildings from the seismic shock that the explosion would produce. According to Sen. Jack Reed (RI), "They [RNEPs] are really city breakers, not bunker busters."

Advanced Nuclear Weapons Concepts

During much of the Cold War, the three weapons laboratories had teams of scientists and engineers studying advanced weapons concepts. Studies ranged from modifications of existing weapons, to improvements for next-generation weapons, to exploration of new weapons technologies and weapons for new missions. With the end of the Cold War, the laboratories wound down their advanced concepts programs. The Administration has requested \$9 million for FY 2005 for this program.

The Advanced Concepts Initiative is based on Cold War thinking which should be abandoned. It sends a message to the rest of the world that the U.S. is again thinking about nuclear weapons production. Our most talented scientists should be working on more socially productive things than building instruments of mass death.

Reportedly, the driving force behind developing new nuclear weapons is not coming from military commanders. The military has other conventional weapons that are equally effective, but that do not have the problems associated with nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons would pose significant dangers to U.S. military personnel operating in the battlefield environment, and would lower the threshold for nuclear war. Overall, U.S. military leaders have concluded that using nuclear weapons is imprudent and unnecessary.

A Step in the Wrong Direction

The U.S. has strongly criticized Iran and North Korea for moving to obtain equipment to produce weapons-grade nuclear materials and the ability to deliver them as nuclear bombs. The U.S. government has also expressed concerns about continuing nuclear programs in Pakistan and India, as well as growing concern that nuclear materials could fall into the hands of terrorist groups, such as al Qaeda. U.S. development of so-called “usable” nuclear weapons undermines U.S. demands that these countries not seek to acquire nuclear weapons.

Why is the Administration abandoning cooperative international arms control efforts and instead seeking to develop new nuclear weapons? If the U.S. will not lay down its nuclear weapons and stop developing new ones, why should anyone else--especially those that feel most threatened by the new U.S. policy of preventive war?

Building new nuclear weapons will further weaken already struggling international efforts to halt the spread of nuclear weapons. U.S. influence with the international community will erode further if it seeks to upgrade U.S. nuclear weapons while demanding that other countries such as Iran and North Korea disarm.

Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, recently said that, instead of developing new nuclear weapons, the U.S. should send a message to potential proliferators that “[e]ven though we have nuclear weapons, we are moving to get rid of them. We are going to develop a system of security that does not depend on nuclear weapons because that's the way we want the world to move.”

The Bush Administration is leading the world down the wrong path. Instead of adhering to our obligations under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) by reducing reliance on the most horrific weapons ever created and working for global disarmament, the Administration is seeking new uses for nuclear weapons. Adopting such a nuclear posture is a step backward, and a virtual invitation for other nations to opt out of their NPT obligations as well.

Conclusion

Congress should halt all programs aimed at developing a new generation of nuclear weapons. Citizens are urged to ask their senators and representatives to vote against funding the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator and the Advanced Concepts Initiative when the defense authorization and energy and water appropriations bills reach the floor.

Pan-Methodist Advocacy for Children

Since the 1970s bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, and United Methodist Churches have conferred on matters of mutual concern. Since the 1980s a succession of Pan-Methodist commissions have explored cooperative relationships. In 2000 this effort was consolidated into the Commission on Pan-Methodist Cooperation and Union.

One product of this cooperation is the Pan-Methodist Campaign for Children in Poverty. Local congregations in all four denominations observe Children's Sabbath. In July 2003 Pan-Methodist bishops came to Washington for advocacy on children's issues in cooperation with the Children's Defense Fund.

To carry this a step further, Methodists United for Peace with Justice is facilitating a Wednesday-in-Washington for Pan-Methodists from Maryland. This will take place on June 16, 2004. Invited are clergy and laity from congregations of the four denominations in Maryland. They will meet in the United Methodist Building across the street from the U.S. Capitol. Following an issues briefing by the Children's Defense and worship together, participants will meet with Maryland senators and representatives or their staffs and urge support for legislation serving the needs of children, especially children in poverty.

In November 2003 the Commission on Pan-Methodist Cooperation and Union endorsed this pilot project with the hope that it could provide a model for local and state Pan-Methodist advocacy for children. We will share the results of this learning experience.

Further information about Pan-Methodist cooperation is available on our website at <http://www.mupwj.org/methodistfamily.htm>.

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SILENCE IS NOT AN OPTION FOR CHRISTIANS!

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Throughout the world more than 29 different religious bodies have sought to express their opposition to war against Iraq. At the same time they also echo the need to contain and eliminate all weapons of mass destruction.

There are several groups whose statements catch the sense of the opposition to the position taken by the United States. I want to share several bits of information for your thoughtful reaction.

Bishop Sharon A. Brown Christopher, President of the Council of Bishops, The United Methodist Church wrote on October 4, 2002 the following:

"Without question, Saddam Hussein is in gross violation of numerous United Nations resolutions, President Bush is to be commended for calling the United Nations to accountability on this score. The United States and the United Nations should take steps necessary to ensure compliance.

But a preemptive war by the United States against a nation like Iraq goes against the very grain of our understanding of the Gospel, our church's teachings, and our conscience. Preemptive strike does not reflect restraint and does not allow for the adequate pursuit of peaceful means for resolving conflict. To be silent in the face of such a prospect is not an option for the followers of Christ."

On November 4, 2002 the World Methodist Council, Youth Committee produced a most challenging statement. In the statement they had these provocative and informative words to share:

"Inspired by Christ's death and resurrection, we believe the course of history is guided by self-sacrificial love, not political and military violence. Therefore, it is necessary for us to take stances against any action in which one group of people seeks to violently impose their will upon an other group.....In light of the example of Christ, and as the threat of military action against Iraq continues to increase, we are deeply concerned for the Iraqi people as well as the international community. We are troubled by the inevitable human costs of war in Iraq. We are not convinced that the gain for humanity, through military action in Iraq, will be greater than its loss. A military attack on Iraq will only add to over twelve years of human suffering created by the United Nations economic sanctions. The sanctions have already scarred a whole generation of Iraq's youth, caused untimely deaths of more than one million Iraqi civilians and violated international human rights.....We believe the current Iraqi crisis is one of humanity. ..The WMCYC is convinced that only when threats are replaced by principled negotiations, and violence is replaced by non-violence, the people of Iraq, and the world, will live in greater security, dignity, and harmony with each other."

If you go on line you will find a wide number of views expressing opposition to war with Iraq. If you wish more information on positions various groups have taken, I would refer you to the following site: <http://www.zero-nukes.org/howtogettozero/htm#disarmingiraq>. You can also go to the home page of the National Council of Churches for further statements of religious bodies as well as other concerned groups.

We share with you five things you can do to help prevent War with Iraq. These were in the October 2002 issue of the FCNL Newsletter;

- Continue communicating with your members of Congress. Contact newly elected members. Talk to them about the unanswered questions concerning the war with Iraq. Urge them to help stop the rush toward war.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local paper supporting peaceful alternatives to war with Iraq. Mention your members of Congress by name.
- Encourage community groups to pass resolutions opposing war and supporting peaceful alternatives. Religious bodies, professional associations, clubs, unions, and local governments can all become involved.
- Be a visible presence for peace. Help build diverse coalitions in your community to witness for peace through vigils, demonstrations, and other ways. Together, these local efforts help demonstrate active, nation-wide opposition to a war against Iraq.
- Participate in the interfaith Season of Peacemaking observances in your community.

WAR IS NOT THE ANSWER

As a final thought on this issue, I want to share some of the thoughts by the Board of Directors of the American Friends Service Committee that they addressed to President Bush.

"Time, you say, is not on our side, but we believe time is in God's hands and "to redeem the time" means to free the captives and the oppressed, to feed the hungry, relieve the poor, restore justice and practice the arts of reconciliation. In this period of grave peril to the world's safety and to our nation's very soul, many of your most experienced military advisers and statespeople-- even the most hard-headed 'realists'-- are warning against a war with Iraq..... The mark of a truly great power is that it exhausts every opportunity of negotiation and diplomacy and bears the most excessive frustrations and challenges, rather than resorting to its military might. For a great power, war is not the exercise of a preemptive option."

The Role of Communities of Faith by Bishop C. Dale White

In an address on "Morality and Nuclearism" at Ecumenical Advocacy Days 2004, Bishop C. Dale White discussed the impact of war-making systems on the lives of people on Earth. He concluded by discussing the role of communities of faith in countering systems of violence.

My message today is this: as leaders and prophets of communities of faith, we dare not let our people "be at ease in Zion" until they become involved in movements to free our people from the idolatry of systems of violence.

What do we have to offer? History is replete with illustrations of the vital role church groups have played in awakening civil society.

- Christian disciples are well equipped to confront the false theology of idolatrous institutional systems.
- We are skilled in articulating coherent visions for new futures, guided by the accumulated wisdom of the ages.
- We symbolize in our very being the finest values of the human experience.
- We can call upon a host of committed and courageous persons of good will.
- Constant litanies of repentance and forgiveness keep us in touch with the sinfulness of the human condition and the wonders of God's grace.
- Most of all, prayer focuses our attention on the hurts of the human family, softens our attitudes of even our "enemies", and empowers us both to expect and to envision new futures.

Gary Gardner wrote a provocative article in the *State of the World 2003*, the annual publication of the World Watch Institute: "The quickening of religious interest in environmental issues suggests that a powerful new political alignment may be emerging that could greatly strengthen the effort to build a sustainable world." Science can write an objective story about "what is", but we need an emotive story of "what ought to be", the strength of religion. "A sustainable world cannot effectively be built without full engagement of the human spirit."

Gardner says that communities of faith bring at least five strong assets to the effort to build a sustainable world:

- the capacity to shape cosmologies (worldviews),
- moral authority,
- a large base of adherents,
- significant material resources, and
- community-building resources.

Religions are experienced at informing our perspectives on issues of ultimate concern. They know how to inspire people and how to wield moral authority. Thomas Berry points out that religion is one of the major societal drivers of change in the world, along with education, business, and government.

Clearly Walter Wink was right on target when he wrote: “Churches, which continually complain about their powerlessness to induce change, are in fact in a privileged position to use the most powerful weapon of all: the power to delegitimize. But it is a spiritual power, spiritually discerned and spiritually exercised.”

The Council of Bishops agreed: “The Church of Jesus Christ, in the power and unity of the Holy Spirit, is called to serve as an alternative community to an alienated and fractured world—a loving and peaceable international company of disciples transcending all governments, races, and ideologies; reaching out to all ‘enemies’; and ministering to all the victims of poverty and oppression.” (*In Defense of Creation*, p. 37.)

For the full text of Bishop White's "Morality and Nuclearism" go to <http://www.zerounukes.org/religiousstatements2.html#unitedmethodistchurch>.

WELCOME TO THE NEW AGE OF DOUBLESPEAK

In a most amazing act by Congress, passed with little to no discussion, with passage of the Homeland Security Bill there was created among other things, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. Its presence in this legislation inaugurates the dream of those who savor control. They dream of the control of people actions, their minds and their very lives. They envision an agency that can monitor at every moment the lives of every person in the USA.

We have inaugurated in the Defense Department a "Total Information Awareness" system that will allow the government to study the purchases and activities of citizens. It will isolate individuals for further investigation, feeding names into the new massive surveillance system constructed after the events of 9/11.

I don't know about you, but I find this new agency a symbol of the creeping power of government to control the thoughts and minds of people. It places the threat of manipulation ever more forcefully into our daily lives. The only thing that appears to be missing from the new agency is some way to enter into our thoughts and monitor them as we go about our many tasks. Perhaps this already exists. Who knows? Certainly the people do not and they will be the last to know if it does exist.

All that seems to be missing in the new legislation is the change of the name of the Defense Department. Before WW II it was called the War Department. The next step will be the Department of Peace.

As the editor of the Peace Leaf I feel the need to have a wider discussion of this issue among people who seek a world of peace and justice. I would like to invite the readership of the PEACE LEAF to enter into a dialogue on this issue with the members at-large of our community. I would welcome articles (no longer than 500 words) on the issue, letters, which help us, focus some of the issues. Mail them to me at the editorial office: 3894 Dartmouth Ave. NW, Massillon, OH 44646.

There is one other aspect of the new agency that is of concern to me. This project is headed by a man who already has a place in the gallery of American infamy. He is retired, Vice-Admiral John M. Poindexter. I do not find it comforting to remind myself that he was the master-mind behind the Iran-Contra scandal, the criminal conspiracy to sell arms to a terrorist nation, Iran, in order to surreptitiously fund an unlawful and clandestine project in Nicaragua. He was convicted of five felony counts of lying to Congress, destroying documents and obstructing Congress in its investigation. He was to go to prison but he was saved by a technicality: a poorly written immunity grant by Congress required that some evidence had to be suppressed.

The President has assured us that "Admiral Poindexter has served our nation very well."

Do you feel this is a concern? What can be done about this new agency that lurks within each of our bedrooms and studies? Should anything be done about it, or shall we just forget it and accept what has been done?

SELLING THE THREAT OF SADDAM HUSSEIN

In the most recent issue of The Defense Monitor Michael Donovan, Research Analyst, writes a most insightful article. I would like to share some quotes from it to motivate you to send the Center \$1 and get a copy of the Nov/Dec 2002 issue. (1779 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington DC 20036).

"Just how much of a threat is Saddam Hussein? It has proven to be a contentious question. As is often the case in Washington, the answer varies according to whom you ask. Few argue that Saddam poses no threat at all. But Iraq does insist that the dictator can be contained, deterred, and eventually disarmed. Iraq hawks believe that containment and deterrence are the outmoded policies of the Cold War, and no longer represent sustainable approaches to Saddam's Iraq.

Remarkably, in an effort to enlist popular support for an invasion of Iraq, the administration of President George Bush has repeatedly stressed the one threat Saddam Hussein does not pose-- an imminent threat stemming from an alleged link between Saddam and al Qaeda. It is an association most informed observers, including the president's own intelligence advisors, doubt exists.

There were plenty of people in Washington prior to Sept 11, 2001, tragedy who wanted to oust Saddam Hussein. The lack of clear evidence of Iraqi complicity in the events of that day left many Iraq hawks frustrated in the search for a *casus belli*. Despite Iraq's record of intransigent behavior, there is little to suggest that Saddam represents a looming threat to the region or the U.S. homeland. Undoubtedly, Saddam would like to reassert Iraq's claim to regional preeminence and compete once again for the mantle of Arab leadership. Even a small nuclear arsenal would serve to advance his grandiose ambitions, and one shudders to think how reckless he might become once emboldened by such weapons. But these designs are years away and dependent on erosion of an international consensus determined to prevent such eventualities. They hardly constitute an imminent threat.

For months, the Bush administration has nonetheless marketed the threat in the context of the Sept. 11 tragedy, insisting that "you can't distinguish between al Qaeda and Saddam when you talk about the war on terror." In October, Bush asserted that Saddam was "a man who we know has had connections with al Qaeda. This is a man who, in my judgment would like to use al Qaeda as a forward army" ... Bush is correct in offering that al Qaeda and Saddam are "equally as bad, equally as evil and equally as destructive." What the two are not, however, are allies-- indeed, a good deal of enmity is known to exist between them. Saddam's secularism and self-serving nods toward Islam are abhorrent to Osama bin Laden and his fellow Islamists. Likewise, the evangelical fervor of the Islamists is totally alien to Saddam's crude calculus of power... Bin Laden is known to have viewed Saddam as an apostate. Islamic law holds only one law for apostasy."

The article raises for me the fear again that disinformation is being used just as it was used in desert Storm to justify the operation. Only time will tell, but how many lives will be lost due to hate and pride.