

Meeting In Exile

Gerald W. Schlabach

Gerald W. Schlabach is associate professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota, and director of the university's Justice and Peace Studies Program. He is lead author and editor of *Just Policing, Not War: An Alternative Response to World Violence* (Liturgical Press, 2007) and co-editor of *At Peace and Unafraid: Public Order, Security and the Wisdom of the Cross* (Herald Press, 2007). From 2001 through 2007 he was executive director of Bridgefolk, a movement for grassroots dialogue and unity between Mennonites and Roman Catholics.

For the three “historic peace church” colleges of Indiana to join together in the Plowshares Peace Studies Collaborative and its new *Journal of Religion, Conflict, and Peace* is altogether welcome and obviously fitting. The term “historic peace church” that links the Mennonite Church, the Religious Society of Friends, and the Church of the Brethren is, however, somewhat less obvious. Or rather, it has come to seem obvious mainly by historical accident, and then by force of habit. If the term had emerged in a context other than the United States in the years leading up to World War II, after all, other historic Christian communities might have been included, so, too, if the term ever undergoes revision in the twenty-first century.

Just what constitutes a “peace church” in the first place? The question is deceptively simple. So let me begin by complicating it! A brief story may illuminate the complexity.

In 1998 the first formal international ecumenical dialogue began between Mennonites and Roman Catholics. Delegations selected by the Mennonite World Conference and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Church Unity began with a general theme, “The Healing of Memories,” which allowed them to learn to know one another personally, challenge one another honestly, and explore one another’s traditions. As they did so, one of the two or three most obvious topics to explore was this very question—what is a peace church? On the Mennonite side, the reason to take up this topic was obvious, for “the peace witness” is basic to Mennonite identity. Only later did long-distance observers such as I learn one of the driving reasons from the Catholic side: even though Mennonites are by far the smallest Christian tradition out of the dozen or so with which the Vatican sustains formal bilateral ecumenical dialogues, Pope John Paul II himself seemed to have taken a special interest in it. For among all of these dialogues, the one with Mennonites was the only one where peace and the Christian contribution to peacemaking are clearly on the agenda. And peace was very close to Pope John Paul’s heart.

At the third annual meeting of the dialogue in 2000, therefore, what it means to be a peace church was a prominent topic. Early in the week, two Mennonites and one Catholic theologian brought papers that addressed this question directly. One of the Mennonites was Mario Higueros, a Guatemalan who was then dean of the Mennonite seminary for Central America. Professor Higueros surveyed Mennonite convictions about biblical peacemaking of course, but it is always nice when academic work in theology includes concrete examples. Much to the surprise of the Catholic delegation, the example that he held up as the model of a peace church was the Guatemalan Catholic Church. During the previous decade the church had not only helped to broker an end to Guatemala’s bloody 35-year civil war, it had become the country’s foremost defender of human rights. A few days after the Archdiocesan Human Rights Office released its massive four-volume report in 1998, documenting the systematic harassment, torture, disappearances, massacres, and scorched-earth ethnic cleansing of the Mayan people, all of which resulted in an estimated 200,000 deaths, the bishop who had supervised the project was himself martyred.

For Professor Higueros to hold up the Guatemalan Catholic Church as a model “peace church” was, no doubt, a small but significant act of peacemaking and a sign of hope in and of itself. But we should not let his ecumenical generosity shine so brightly in our eyes that we miss the subtler details in the background. It is the very complexity behind this story that will prove most illuminating. At least four features of the back story are significant, and it will be the task of this paper to elaborate upon them:

1. Though Higueros was now participating in ecumenical dialogue at the highest level, his first and most formative ecumenical conversations had begun at the grassroots, as Central American Christians encountered one another more deeply in the struggle for peace and justice. Thus ought we to recognize *the interdependence of top-level and grassroots ecumenicity as we work to restore the unity of the church and its witness for peace in the world.*
2. As a representative of the Mennonite tradition, Higueros was articulating a peace theology that begins in a commitment to follow Christ even to the cross, rejecting all recourse to violence in faithfulness to a way of love that calls us to extend God’s love even to enemies. Thus would “historic peace churches” continue to insist upon *the normative nonviolence of Jesus Christ in the face of temptations to take shortcuts for peace with justice.*
3. In his respect for the Guatemalan Catholic Church’s heroic defense of human rights, however, Higueros was also embracing another approach to peacemaking, one that begins with a commitment as much philosophical as biblical, grounded as much in natural law as in Jesus. Pope John XXIII articulated this explicitly when he affirmed that all Catholic social teaching has as its first principle the dignity of every human person.^[1] Thus do some non-historical peace churches, so to speak, insist upon *the heroic defense of human rights in the face of temptations to preserve a limited and complacent “peace” for ourselves alone.*
4. The convergence of the last two points may seem so obvious to readers of a journal such as this that it hardly needs noting. Yet the two different approaches and starting points have historically led to rather different conclusions—and still can do so in the face of the toughest ethical questions about how to respond to egregious injustice. The fourth feature of this story, then, is that to be a peace church in the twenty-first century we will have to develop a global, transnational perspective in solidarity with brothers and sisters such as Professor Higueros, who remind us of our deep need for fresh ways to hold both approaches together. From them we must learn, in fact, *the dogged refusal to sacrifice any of the above for the sake of another of the above, precisely because the international perspective of a global Church requires that we hold them together.*

“Peace”

The definition of a peace church would seem to be obvious. A peace church is a church that is for peace, right? The problem is that to say we are for peace is to say almost nothing. No, to say we are for peace is sometimes to say less than nothing—to obfuscate—because it can so easily be a way of hiding our bloody tracks.

St. Augustine is famous for counseling Christian soldiers that their only desire when waging a war must be peace.^[2] Yet Augustine also knew another truth that almost renders meaningless his pastoral counsel to soldiers. Everyone seeks peace anyway—*everyone, always, even the most vicious monsters.*^[3] They seek it at least for themselves, for their own. To counsel soldiers to seek what they are already seeking anyway, then, is at best to offer them a platitude and at worst to hand them a blank check.^[4]

Examples abound of how widely divergent positions can all describe and justify themselves as working for peace. At roughly the same time in the mid 1980s the revolutionary Sandinista government in Nicaragua was describing its military defense as a *lucha por la paz* (a struggle for peace) while their nemesis Ronald Reagan was naming a new generation of nuclear missiles “Peacekeepers.” More recently,

neoconservative Catholic commentator George Weigel has argued that if mainline American churches really want to be peace churches they need a clearer and more robust understanding of statecraft, war, and how its use can contribute to the peace of a well-ordered society.^[5] While I am not convinced that Weigel's own position enjoys the "moral clarity" that he claims,^[6] his critique of mainline Protestant thought on war and peace is not altogether misplaced. When, for example, the Methodist Church declared itself a peace church in the 1980s while affirming the legitimacy of both pacifism and just war, the two most prominent Methodist representatives of those two positions—Stanley Hauerwas and Paul Ramsey—found their church's position incoherent enough that they joined forces in a book entitled *Speak Up for Just War or Pacifism*.^[7]

Now, since everyone is for peace, I can hardly begin to survey all possible positions. If I limit my comparison to two, therefore, that is partly because they are the ones I know best. More than that, however, it is because they diverge enough to lay out the issues we need to face in order to be peace churches in the new millennium, yet also converge enough to give us hope that a truly catholic, ecumenical understanding of what it means to be a peace church might yet emerge to meet the challenges of that new millennium.

Mennonites represent one historic way of being a peace church. Along with the Society of Friends (Quakers), and the Church of the Brethren they share the label of "historic peace churches." That these three church families share that label is something of an accident of history. If the term had been coined prior to the Civil War, Moravians would also be among them; if it had been coined in the earliest decades of the twentieth century, newly emerging Pentecostal groups would have been among them. It was because Mennonites, Quakers, and Brethren took the lead in forming a coalition to press for the legal rights of conscientious objectors to war and military participation in the years when World War II was looming, and then administered programs of "alternative service" during the war, that the term "historic peace church" applies mainly to them.^[8]

Of course, to carry through on convictions against war and military participation even amid a war so widely considered just—the "Good War" against Hitler and fascism—does say something about the theological depth and historical vigor of these churches' convictions. The historic peace churches have thus provided the most basic historical definition of a peace church, even though their theologies are hardly identical. In the first instance, a peace church is a church that discourages or even prohibits its members from participating in warfare, at least as armed combatants. Whether their members should accept noncombatant roles or policing roles, however, is something that the historic peace churches themselves have debated both internally and among themselves.

This empirical, historical definition of a peace church certainly responds to a deeper theological one. Perhaps because everyone is for peace, Mennonite theologians especially insist on a restricted definition. Theologically, they argue, a peace church is one that understands the life, teaching, and gospel of Jesus Christ to preclude anyone who would follow him as a disciple from the use of lethal violence, even in the service of a just cause. Nonviolence is to be normative for all Christians. It is at the core, not the periphery, of the gospel, working its way through all Christian theology, shaping our entire worldview.

Admittedly, the fact that this position seems to be clearest about what it is against and what Christians in this tradition should refuse to do presents a difficulty. *Nonviolence*, the *refusal* to kill, nonparticipation in the military—all of these are negatives. That pattern prompts some critics and even some friends to characterize the position itself as an essentially negative one. It does not help that yet another related term, *pacifism*, sounds to most ears in our culture like *passive-ism*, even though it stems from Latin words for (active, positive) *peacemaking*.

Now, to characterize the position of Mennonites and other historic peace churches as essentially negative

is probably a misunderstanding. For again, because everyone is for peace, Mennonites and others have reason to insist on a clear marker for testing whether a person is committed to seeking peace in consistently peaceful ways. The situation is logically identical to the Roman Catholic call for a “consistent ethic of life.” Everyone will say they are for life, but the test case is often the hard case: whether someone is against abortion and euthanasia even in difficult situations. In both cases, to see these positions as merely negative (anti-war or anti-abortion) is to miss their positive life-oriented points, mistaking a means test for the ends they seek.

Still, saying this does not remove the difficulty. For in both cases, credibility increases exponentially when proponents emphasize and live out what they are *for*. Noisy protesters outside an abortion clinic may briefly get more attention; but pro-life activists who welcome difficult children into the world, care for them in trying circumstances, and propose social policies to empower others to do the same, will earn a lot more credibility in the long run. So too for those who work and witness for peace.

In fact, while the distinctiveness of the peace witness by Mennonites and other historic peace churches may be most distinguishable in its test-case renunciation of violence, theologically it has its foundation in the very life-giving person of Jesus Christ. Likewise and in turn, historically it has sought to work itself out in life-giving practices on behalf of others. At the entry level whereby some young believers seek to obey the Bible in fairly literalistic ways, Christian nonviolence may well begin with Jesus teaching his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount not to resist evildoers but to love even their enemies and to pray for their persecutors.^[9] Yet Mennonites do not really base their commitment to peace on literalistic proof-texts. As Mennonite theologians insist, Jesus’ teachings are inseparable from his entire ministry, mission, and person. Together, Jesus’ teaching, ministry, and mission are the ultimate revelation of God’s way of being in the world. The death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth are not simply a cosmic transaction that allows us to escape guilt for our sins and enter heaven. Jesus’ death was his ultimate act of faithfulness to God’s mission of living for others while resisting injustice without recourse to that counter-violence which so often spawns new injustices; Jesus’ resurrection was God’s vindication of this way of overcoming evil.

To say this is not to historicize away the cosmic, eternal reality of God’s work in Jesus Christ, thus reducing it *merely* to its this worldly significance. In keeping with the creedal affirmations of all orthodox Christians, it is because the human Jesus who lived his life on the stage of human history *is* Jesus the Christ—the eternal Word of God spoken and enfleshed among us, the second person of the Trinity—that we are bidden to trust that the entirety of Jesus’ very person is God’s utmost self-disclosure. It is the fullness of God’s self-disclosure in Jesus, in all his humanity, that reveals most fully the character, and seals most fully the promise, of God’s eternal cosmic victory over evil, sin, injustice. That victory is not so much a defeat of God’s enemies as it is a reconciliation that heals the universe as fully as it heals our hearts. “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. ... For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.”^[10] Love for enemies to the point of suffering service and death on behalf of victim and perpetrator alike is in the very character of God, the deepest reality of the universe. That character in turn characterizes God’s saving work both within *and* beyond history.

In practice too, even when Mennonites seem to have begun with a simple biblicist rejection of violence, they have hardly been able to stop there. For decades, the same impulse to take Jesus at his word and obey with a minimum of theological fanfare has made conservative Mennonites and Amish a persistent presence on the scene at natural disasters. Likewise, during the latter half of the twentieth century, Mennonites and other peace churches have been disproportionately represented among staff and volunteers working in nongovernmental organizations dedicated to relief and international development. As one poster summarizes a famous text from Menno Simons, for whom the Mennonites are named,

True evangelical faith cannot lie dormant. It clothes the naked, feeds the hungry, comforts the sorrowful,

shelters the destitute, serves those that harm it, and binds up that which is wounded. It has become all things to all people.

Of course, anyone who tries to help conscientiously in simple straight-forward ways will learn quickly enough that to determine what actually is wrong and what actually will help is not so simple. The 85-year trajectory of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), that generically-named vehicle by which a wide array of Mennonite groups cooperate for relief, development, and global education, is informative here. Through it, Mennonites have moved from care of their own to extending relief to others out of love for neighbor, to development, empowerment, and even liberation. Though they could hardly remain faithful to their understanding of the gospel and participate in armed struggles for liberation, their own work has positioned them well either to discover for themselves that “liberation” not just “development” might be necessary, or else to recognize the persuasiveness of such analysis. If they have sometimes felt the pull of arguments for just revolution, they have accepted its challenge by moving increasingly from what they had once called “biblical nonresistance” toward the affirmation and practice of Gandhian active nonviolence.

One could tell parallel stories about Mennonite engagement with the civil rights movement in the U.S., about the leading role Mennonites have played in developing the concept of “restorative justice” through alternative models of criminal justice, about their influential work at both the theory and practice of international conflict transformation, about their experiments in the nonviolent defense of threatened populations, and about their research on alternative responses to terrorism. But the point would be the same: even when historic peace church positions have begun as a response to a biblical command or an ethical absolute, faithfulness has ceased to be an end in itself. Instead, the impulse to follow Jesus faithfully has required practices issuing in deeper and more complex ways of loving the neighbor by seeking justice and even by seeking a just social order on the neighbor’s behalf. That this tradition insists on naming enemies as neighbors from the beginning can, if anything, be a catalyst in the process.

The Mennonite approach to being a peace church then is this: affirming the centrality of Jesus Christ not only for faith but for the entirety of a disciple’s life in the world has led to a deeper concern and more complex practices in favor of all that makes for the thriving of the human person with dignity. One notes possibilities for both convergence and divergence with other Christian traditions if one notices how one prominent way of becoming a peace church has tended is to move in the opposite direction.

The Roman Catholic Church would never deny the centrality of Jesus Christ theologically, of course.^[11] But traditionally, Catholic moral reflection has found its grounding first of all in “natural law.” The natural law tradition aims to argue on the basis of principles that everyone ought to be able to recognize on the basis of reason, without regard to any particular claims of religious revelation; in the modern era this has seemed especially important for Catholic *social* teaching, since it aims to address wider social orders in which Christian faith cannot be assumed.

So the natural law tradition necessarily begins with philosophical considerations rather than biblical claims. When Pope John XXIII summarized Catholic social teaching in his encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, biblical and theological reasons were certainly at work, but he stated its starting point in the form of a philosopher’s *first principle*: “This teaching rests on one basic principle: individual human beings are the foundation, the cause, and the end of every social institution. ... On this basic principle, which guarantees the sacred dignity of the individual, the Church constructs her social teaching.”^[12] When John XXIII applied Catholic social teaching to the pressing agenda of world peace in the early 1960s, he did so by reformulating the tradition in the language of human rights. His groundbreaking encyclical *Pacem in Terris* lays out the social and economic as well as the legal and political conditions needed if respect for human rights is to be full-bodied and real. The Cuban missile crisis of 1962 may have underscored the danger of global annihilation through the worst possible kind of war, but Cold War militarization was already killing

millions around the globe by siphoning resources away from the poor, hungry, and illiterate.^[13]

As Father Drew Christiansen, S.J., projects the Catholic vision of peace and peacemaking, it begins with 1) a commitment to human rights and proceeds from there by way of three additional elements: 2) integral or authentic human development; 3) solidarity both between Christians around the globe and within the whole human family; and finally 4) the building of world order through international law and diplomacy, but also increasingly through the practice of active nonviolence in resistance to public evils.^[14] Intimately connecting all four elements is the Catholic conception of the human person. While the dignity of each individual person is, as John XXIII said, the bedrock principle of Catholic social teaching, Catholicism does not understand the human person individualistically. Human beings are by nature social creatures who are born in relationship and become who they are through their ongoing relations with others. The dignity of the human person is therefore bound intimately together with the communities in which they are embedded; the common good to which each person contributes must be one that simultaneously promotes the dignity of each. No vision of peace is adequate, in fact, unless it extends to “the positive realization of the dignity of the whole human family.”^[15] As *Pacem in Terris* insists, the goal of all public authority is to uphold this common good in a way that safeguards human rights. “Authentic” and “integral” human development is not economic development alone, as quantified and charted apart from the higher values that economies and enterprises are meant to serve. Authentic development is the growth and thriving of human beings in all of their spiritual, social, and intellectual dimensions.

Clearly there are vast tracts of convergence and overlap between the historic way of being a peace church and the emerging way of becoming a peace church that we observe most prominently in Catholicism. The biblical language of love for neighbor, extended to all and confirmed in love for enemies, overlaps with the more philosophical language of respect for the dignity of every human person, extended to all and confirmed in defense of the most vulnerable. The practices by which Christians endeavor to live out love for neighbor are practices by which to create the conditions that allow human beings to live with dignity. In principle, historic peace churches and emerging peace churches can agree and collaborate on many of the tasks entailed by the Catholic vision of peacemaking, especially authentic human development and widening ties of human solidarity. Although Mennonites remain far more skeptical about the constructive role that public authorities may play in peacemaking, given the latter’s recourse to military force, the crucial role that international law has to play in an age of globalization and the global “war on terrorism” may even make collaboration possible on some of the tasks associated with building “world order.”^[16]

But the starting points still do matter—Jesus or natural law? Notice that when I lined up the implications of love for neighbor and respect for human dignity just now, the ways that the two traditions tested their core commitments were not quite parallel. For Mennonite theology and ethics, the ultimate test of neighbor love is a love for enemies that precludes killing them even in defense of a just cause. For Catholics, the ultimate test of respect for human dignity is defense of the weakest, most innocent, and most vulnerable among us. But what if an enemy is attacking an innocent? What if genocide, ethnic cleansing, or other egregious human rights violations are occurring and the international community has the resources to intervene militarily in order to tamp down the situation? Suddenly we seem to be back to one of the oldest and thorniest debates in Christian ethics, back to the parting of ways that has led some Christians to renounce all violence and other Christians to argue for its just, limited but judicious use.

Fortunately, if we must revisit this question yet again we can do so with fresh resources. The twentieth century, for all its violence and inhumanity, is also the century in which Mahatma Gandhi broke out of the cycle of injustice, violent resistance, and fresh injustices with creative and humanizing ways of nonviolent struggle. Thus he broke through the impasse between pacifism and just war. Gandhian nonviolence has proven remarkably, unexpectedly, capable of overthrowing tyranny after tyranny. In many cases it has not just been a better and more moral way of turning back long-entrenched tyranny but the only way to do so. And the single biggest historical example is the one that John Paul II himself inspired and helped lead—

the break-up of the Soviet Empire. That experience has in turn fed back into official Catholic teaching, as the pope has come to celebrate nonviolence not just as a heroic or saintly act of renunciation by individual Christians, but as a public force on the world stage.^[17] So even with regard to the defense of civilian populations against violations of human rights, there is much room for convergence and collaboration.^[18] It is abundantly clear by now that at the very highest level of Catholic social teaching, proactive work for justice and authentic human development is the *first* resort; when such work meets resistance and is followed by diplomacy, conflict transformation, and active nonviolence, we have seen the next resort; and a lot more work is necessary before we can be sure we have exhausted these resorts and arrived at the question of *last* resort.

And yet that question still does lurk. The question of whether Christians may properly employ lethal violence in exceptional cases, as a last resort, remains. It may even be the final major and essential theoretical difference that remains between historic and emerging peace churches. But it has not gone away, and commitment to defend human rights in the face of modern inhumanity only makes the question more poignant.

Notice, however, that I said “theoretical” difference. The difference between these traditions that may very well determine Christian practices and facts on the ground is actually something else. I have lingered long over the word “peace” in “peace church” in order to clear the way for another more unexpected point: our real hang up in agreeing on what it means to be a peace church may not lie in the meaning of “peace” but in the meaning of “church.” Having converged at least in principle on so much of what it means to work as Christians for peace, Christian leaders are not going to make a lot more progress on that most difficult “last mile”^[19] of agreement concerning “last resort” until they return to it after redoubling their efforts (as the saying goes) to “let the church be the church.”

“Church”

If “peace” says a lot less than one might think, “church” says a lot more. We tend to take the meaning of church for granted—to think we know what church is, to assume that church is whatever we’ve experienced church to be. To be sure, a local church community is always the place to ground one’s Christian life, the place to start many new initiatives, and never a place to leave behind. But the slogan of social activists applies here too: “Think globally, act locally.”

The fancy word for the study of the church and its nature is “ecclesiology,” and it is a huge topic. Much ink and not a little blood have been spilled over how to recognize the true church, what are the “marks” of the church, how it should be governed, and so on. This is not the place to arbitrate all those disputes, but there is something we should notice: whenever Catholics use the word “catholic” (small c), Protestants use the word “ecumenical,” and Evangelicals cite Christ’s Great Commission to go into all the world, they are acknowledging, implicitly agreeing upon, but often ignoring one key point of consensus concerning the nature of Christ’s Church: It is *katholou*—throughout the whole. It is gathered and spread throughout the *oikouméne*, the whole inhabited world. And now more clearly than ever. For despite whatever faults, the modern missionary movement has given us a church that geographically is truly global.

What does this have to do with war, peace, and what it means to be a peace church? In a word: citizenship. When ordinary Christians go to war, most often it is not because they have seriously examined the tradition of Christian pacifism or the efficacy of active nonviolence and found them wanting. Nor, most often, is it because they have used the Just War Theory and found that a given war fulfills all the criteria for a just war. No doubt some Christians have exercised their consciences in these ways and for doing so they deserve the highest respect, even when prudential judgments differ about given wars. But when ordinary Christians go to war, most often it is because national loyalty trumps Christian loyalty—because

love of country trumps love of neighbor, at least as Jesus understood such love.

As launched by St. Augustine, even the just war tradition insists, after all, that in fighting to defend the innocent neighbor one must still endeavor to extend Christian love of neighbor to the enemy. Christian pacifists doubt, of course, that it is really possible to love the enemy one is attempting to kill, as Augustine believed,^[20] but let's stipulate that this might just be possible and give the tradition its due. For however dubious may be the just war commitment to loving one's enemies even in war, it does represent an acknowledgement that Christian love of neighbor is qualitatively different from pagan love of neighbor. "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"^[21] The answer to Jesus' question here is that of course they do the same, and so do we. All too often we let some other loyalty and some other love define our stance toward those who threaten us; we then make enemies of many more, and easily assume that all who are not with us and our kind are against us. Then and thus, ordinary Christians go off not to arguably just wars but to wars of national self-interest or even crusades where "necessity," honor, or the righteousness of "our side" seem so clear that the morality of our actions needs little examination.^[22]

Love of country is a tricky thing for Christians. At one level, it is surely not wrong. I for one love the grandeur of America's land, the energy of its people, the wisdom of its constitution. I love its baseball, its jazz and blues, its diners and bowling clubs and skylines. I love my revitalized multicultural neighborhood of Hmong, African Americans, Hispanics, and Anglos, literally in the shadow of our stately Minnesota capitol. Amid everything I have just said to distinguish Christian love of neighbor from pagan love of neighbor, Christian love still *includes* our geographical neighbors even if it does not confine itself to them. Social activists who do not share a deep love for the society they claim to want to better are hypocrites, ideologues, or simply doomed to foolish ineffectuality.

But what really is a Christian's true country or nation or (now that we are using the word again) homeland? The Second Vatican Council helped to recover the ancient Christian answer to that question by speaking of the Church as a "pilgrim Church" that will continue on its "earthly pilgrimage," "toward the heavenly city," "until there be realized new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells."^[23] Though some might interpret this to endorse an otherworldly piety that sees a Christian's home in heaven alone, note that what the council here endorses is a thoroughly biblical hope that does not expect either God or God's people to rest in heaven until the earth as well as the heavens are made new. This is a hope that the Old and New Testaments share.^[24] It is the hope of St. Paul^[25] and the Apostle's Creed in a resurrection not just of our souls or spirits but somehow our bodies. It is the hope assuring St. Augustine that the communion which characterizes the heavenly city is already stretching to include among its citizens those of us who are now making our way through the earthly city.

The practical down-to-earth implication of this vision is that the nation with which Christians should identify their primary citizenship is that transnational people called Church. Such a conception of citizenship certainly had practical implications for the Church Fathers of the first five Christian centuries. Critics and defenders of Christianity sometimes described Christians as a third race (or kind, or genus) of men and women, neither Gentile nor Jew, scattered among other nations.^[26] Following the ways of their Lord had constituted them as a Diaspora people with a culture distinguished for the way it reconciled once-warring ethnic groups who were now fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah 2 and Micah 4, beating the swords by which they once fought each other into plowshares.^[27] And yet in other ways they were "distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe."^[28] Their situation was thus analogous to that of "resident aliens," who sort of have their own culture and sort of do not. Resident aliens live in exile and are subject to two sets of laws and customs at once, so they must constantly remember where their true homeland and primary loyalty lie in order to negotiate the tensions.^[29]

Such a designation was in the first instance an objective description of Christians' situation. But clarity about that situation provided wise moral guidance about how to deal with lands and houses and business affairs without holding so tightly to them that times of prosperity might turn them away from the poor, or times of persecution might turn them away from their Lord.^[30] In practice this also gave Christians the freedom to live within any nation or culture, and express the gospel in terms accessible to it, precisely because neither they nor the gospel was captive to any one culture.^[31] The threat of exile was no threat to Christians at all, noted St. Cyprian's ancient biographer, for "the whole of this world is one home. Wherefore, though [the Christian] were banished into a hidden and secret place, yet, associated with the affairs of his God, he cannot regard it as an exile."^[32] The power of this identity is evident in the way it endured well into the Constantinian era in which the church was making its dangerous peace with the Roman Empire. Thus it reemerged as the last word in St. Augustine's long reflections about how the heavenly "City of God" is to journey through the earthly city: the Christian "society of pilgrims," gathered from many nations and languages, was to identify itself with the Hebrew exiles in Babylon to whom Jeremiah had once written, reminding them of their first loyalty even while telling them to seek the peace and well-being of the city in which they found themselves.^[33]

The point of seeing ourselves as resident aliens and exiles, then, is not standoffishness but freedom for authentic Christian service to *all* the lands and neighbors in which Christians find themselves.^[34] The point of letting a global nation called the Church define our primary citizenship is international Christian solidarity in the service of a still-wider human solidarity. In the long arc of the story that stretches all the way from Abraham and Sarah through the continuing struggle of the contemporary church to come to terms with the Second Vatican Council, this—I believe—is the lesson God has been trying to teach us.

In Genesis 12, at the launching of salvation history, God's call to Abraham, Sarah, and their children was not God playing favorites, much less a blank check for God's chosen people. It was God launching a pilot project in order to demonstrate the covenant love and justice that God means to share with all people. Abraham and Sarah were not to hoard God's blessing but to become a blessing for all the families of the earth.^[35]

As we follow the long arc of salvation history forward we find the same pattern in the documents of Vatican II. The Church does not simply administer the sacraments; it is by its very nature the sacrament of the world's salvation, "a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all [human beings]."^[36] Notice that while salvation finds its ultimate realization through eternal communion with God, it begins to take shape now already as a unity within the whole human family. Notice also that as sacramental "sign and instrument" the Church is to be the "real presence" of what God seeks for the whole world, a visible sign of the invisible reality of God's transforming work in the world.

Thus we see a pattern: Blessed—to be a blessing; Pilgrims—who remain engaged in service to the lands of their sojourn; Exiles—who still seek the peace of the city in which they find themselves; A sacrament—which is an instrument making present in the world that very reality towards which it points as a sign.

“Peace Church”

In the long run, it is a growing sense of identity and identification with a people spread through many nations that will make it harder and harder for Christians to kill. This, more than the persuasiveness of Christian pacifism, or the stringency of rigorous just war thinking. Pacifist and just war Christians are already closer to one another than they are to the crusading mentality of Rambo, Dirty Harry, or now, Jack Bauer of the television show 24. To be sure, the difficult question of whether Christians should at least support "humanitarian" military intervention in order to stop egregious human rights abuses has not gone

away and the debate should not go away. Collaboration to narrow the recourse to violence and the scope of militarization, however, will do more for peace than trying to hammer out our final differences, even as it prepares us to face those differences. Such collaboration will have at least four results:

1. It will make alternatives to war and violence viable, confirming and strengthening efforts at “just peacebuilding” that address the causes of conflict, while developing and implementing new forms of nonviolent direct action to defend populations facing immanent attack. Such alternatives will strengthen the credibility of thoroughgoing Christian pacifism.
2. It will make truly exceptional any remaining recourse to armed violence in defense of the innocent against imminent threats to their lives and human dignity. Demonstrating that warfare can in fact be limited to the very “last resort” will strengthen the credibility of the just war position. Why hope that the credibility of both pacifist and just war traditions may grow? Because, in the short run, the potential victims of violence will benefit both ways. And because, in the long run, each needs to hear the challenge of the other at its best, not its weakest, so that the church can move in dialectical fashion toward a new synthesis that transcends the limitations of each. Meanwhile:
3. Collaboration will train us to pay at least as much attention to fellow Christians who bear the cross in Pakistan or Iraq or Sudan or Guatemala as to fellow Americans who wave the flag. Christians in other lands are not necessarily of one mind on policy issues, any more than are American Christians. But the discipline of cross-cultural international conversation will deepen the practice of global Christian citizenship, and often enough it will provide a needed perspective on policy debates in the nation of our residence.
4. Listening together to sisters and brothers who share the Christian faith around the world will in turn create a “feedback loop” or a “virtuous cycle” that reinforces collaboration between historic peace churches and emerging peace churches. Hearing those voices, after all, will prevent pacifists from underestimating the challenge of human rights violations, as surely as it prevents just warriors from treating anyone for whom Christ died in God’s ultimate act of nonviolent redemptive suffering as mere “collateral damage.”

The task of creating a global, small-c catholic peace church would seem overwhelming if it were not God’s task rather than ours. It would seem merely visionary, if it were not already happening. Yes, we need to institutionalize a widening network of international ties and communication between local churches around the world. But the much-maligned “institutional” churches that sustain global communion through the office and college of bishops already offer an ancient gift from God that we dare not despise or underestimate. Yes, we need to stimulate a deepening consciousness of Christian global citizenship and solidarity that penetrates the so-called “pews.” But the admittedly-messy “free” churches (Anabaptist, Evangelical, Pentecostal) that have done so much to spread the gospel through grassroots lay movements already offer a lively gift from God that we dare not ignore or dismiss. By God’s grace, and through a growing exchange of gifts even among such historically different kinds of Christian communities, we already are the global community that we are still becoming.

So “let the church be the church”—and it will be a peace church.

1. 1. Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* [Christianity and Social Progress], encyclical letter (1961), §219–20.
2. 2. Augustine, *Ep.* 189.6, to Boniface.
3. 3. Augustine, *City of God*, 19.12.
4. 4. The longtime New York Times war correspondent Chris Hedges has given me a certain grudging appreciation for Augustine’s pastoral counsel. Hedges’ recent book, *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2002), makes excruciatingly clear that warfare—all warfare, always—takes on a life of its own and unleashes then feeds a deep human capacity to be cruel for cruelty’s sake. To insist, against this, that only the desire for peace may justly motivate warfare may

make a certain sense. Still, Hedges' work actually confirms in a most haunting way Augustine's other observation that everyone is already seeking some kind of peace anyway, for soldiers (and war correspondents) who have once felt the alluring narcotic of war find themselves edgy and dissatisfied anywhere except the battlefield.

5. 5. George Weigel, "Back to Basics: Moral Reasoning and Foreign Policy 'after Containment,'" in *Peacemaking: Moral and Policy Challenges for a New World*, ed. Gerard F. Powers, Drew Christiansen, and Robert T. Hennemeyer (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1994), 64–68; George Weigel, "War, Peace, and the Christian Conscience," in *Just War and the Gulf War*, James Turner Johnson and George Weigel (Washington, D.C. Lanham, Maryland: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1991), 85–90; George Weigel, "Moral Clarity in a Time of War," *First Things* 128 (January 2003): 20–27.
6. 6. So I have argued in "Clarity, Obfuscation and What Mennonites Should Learn from Weigel Anyway," *Mennonite Life* 58:2 (June 2003).
[Http://www.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife/2003June/schlabach.php](http://www.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife/2003June/schlabach.php).
7. 7. Paul Ramsey and Stanley Hauerwas, *Speak up for Just War or Pacifism: A Critique of the United Methodist Bishops' Pastoral Letter "In Defense of Creation"* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988).
8. 8. Associated with Mennonites are other groups in the family of churches that trace their origins to the Anabaptists of the 16th-century Radical Reformation, most notably the Amish and the Hutterites or Hutterians. In the World War II context, however, these more conservative groups allowed the Mennonites to represent them in negotiations with Quakers and Brethren as together these groups negotiated with the U.S. government.
9. 9. Matthew 5:38-48; cf. the words of St. Paul that echo the Sermon on the Mount in Romans 12:17-21.
10. 10. Romans 5:8, 10.
11. 11. In fact, much of the most creative ferment and exciting development in Catholic moral theology of recent decades has come in response to the Second Vatican Council's call for a more biblical approach: "Dogmatic theology should be so arranged that these biblical themes are proposed first of all. ... Likewise let the other theological disciplines be renewed through a more living contact with the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation. Special care must be given to the perfecting of moral theology. Its scientific exposition, nourished more on the teaching of the Bible, should shed light on the loftiness of the calling of the faithful in Christ and the obligation that is theirs of bearing fruit in charity for the life of the world." Second Vatican Council, *Optatam Totius*, [Decree on priestly training] (1965), §16.
12. 12. John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, §219–20.
13. 13. Drew Christiansen, S.J., "What is a Peace Church? A Roman Catholic Perspective," paper presented at the International Mennonite-Roman Catholic Dialogue, Karlsruhe, Germany, 2000.
14. 14. I have taken this summary from David Smock, ed., *Catholic Contributions to International Peace*, Special Report, no. 69 (Washington D.C.: United States Institute for Peace, 2001), 4–5, <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr69.pdf>. But also see Drew Christiansen, S.J., "Peacemaking and the Use of Force: Behind the Pope's Stringent Just-War Teaching," *America* 180, no. 17 (15 May 1999): 13–18; "After Sept. 11: Catholic Teaching on Peace and War," *Origins* 32, no. 3 (30 May 2002): 33, 35–40; "Whither the 'Just War'?" *America* 188, no. 10 (24 March 2003): 7–11.
15. 15. Smock, *Catholic Contributions to International Peace*, 4.
16. 16. So I have argued in "Just Policing, not War," *America* 189, no. 1 (7–14 July 2003): 19–21; "Just Policing: How War Could Cease to be a Church-Dividing Issue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 41, no. 3–4 (Summer-Fall 2004): 409–30, and my own chapters in Gerald W. Schlabach, ed. and lead author, *Just Policing, not War: An Alternative Response to World Violence*, with Drew Christiansen, S.J., et al. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2007). Representing a wider consensus on the need for peace church theology to address issues of public order and security (though not necessarily through "just policing") is Duane K. Friesen and Gerald W. Schlabach, eds., *At Peace and Unafraid:*

Public Order, Security and the Wisdom of the Cross (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 2005), which was commissioned by the Peace Committee of Mennonite Central Committee.

17. 17. Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* [On the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*], encyclical letter (1991), §22, 51–52. On the significance of this document, see Christiansen, “After Sept. 11”; “Whither the ‘Just War’?”
18. 18. Evidence and embodiment of this has been most evident in the collaboration of 23 Christian ethicists from both pacifist and just war traditions to develop the theory of “just peacemaking.” See Glen Stassen, ed., *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1998). For a summary of parallel developments in which Catholic and Mennonite collaboration has been particularly remarkable see R. Scott Appleby, “Catholic Peacebuilding,” *America* 189, no. 6 (8 September 2003): 12–15.
19. 19. The phrase “the last mile” refers to the most difficult part of extending telephone, internet, or cable television technology into new regions or neighborhoods. Companies investing in these technologies speak of the last mile of their high-volume transport lines and end users as the most expensive and technically challenging.
20. 20. Augustine, *Ep.* 138.14-15, to Marcellinus.
21. 21. Matthew 5:46-47.
22. 22. John Howard Yoder, *When War is Unjust: Being Honest in Just-War Thinking*, rev. ed., foreword by Charles P. Lutz, afterword by Drew Christiansen (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 68–69, 89.
23. 23. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church] (1964), §48; Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, [Pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world] (1965), §45, §57.
24. 24. Isaiah 65:17-25; 2 Peter 3:12; Revelation 22:1.
25. 25. 1 Corinthians 15.
26. 26. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 6.5; Tertullian, *Ad Nationes* 1.8.
27. 27. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 29, *Dialogue with Trypho* 90; Irenaeus, *Against Heretics* 4.34.4; Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews* 3; Origen, *Against Celsus* 5.33; Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 52.
28. 28. *Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus* 5.
29. 29. *Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus* 5-6, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, similitude 1; Augustine, *City of God* 19.17, 19-26.
30. 30. *The Shepherd of Hermas*, similitude 1.
31. 31. Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, §58; Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* [Evangelization in the Modern World], apostolic letter (1975), §20. Cf. John H. Yoder’s elaboration of the relationship between the gospel and diverse human cultures in essays such as: “‘But we Do See Jesus’: The Particularity of Incarnation and the Universality of Truth,” in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 46–62; “On not Being Ashamed of the Gospel: Particularity, Pluralism, and Validation,” *Faith and Philosophy* 9, no. 3 (July 1992): 285–300 and “‘See How They Go with Their Face to the Sun,’” in *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 51–78.
32. 32. Pontius the Deacon, *The Life and Passion of Cyprian, Bishop and Martyr* 11. Also, in Gregory Nazianzen, Oration 43, note the testimony of Basil the Great before his interrogator:

Then indeed the prefect [Modestus] became excited, and rose from his seat, boiling with rage, and making use of harsher language.

“What?” said he, “Have you no fear of my authority?”

“Fear of what?” said Basil, “How could it affect me?”

[Modestus:] “Of what? Of any one of the resources of my power.”

“What are these?” said Basil, “Pray, inform me.”

[Modestus:] “Confiscation, banishment, torture, death.”

“Have you no other threat?” said he, “For none of these can reach me.”

“How indeed is that?” said the prefect.

“Because,” he replied, “a man who has nothing is beyond the reach of confiscation; unless you demand my tattered rags, and the few books, which are my only possessions. Banishment is impossible for me, who am confined by no limit of place, counting my own neither the land where I now dwell, nor all of that into which I may be hurled; or, rather, counting it all God’s, whose guest and dependent I am. As for tortures, what hold can they have upon one whose body has ceased to be? Unless you mean the first stroke, for this alone is in your power. Death is my benefactor, for it will send me the sooner to God, for Whom I live, and exist, and have all but died, and to Whom I have long been hastening.

33. 33. Augustine, *City of God* 19.17, 19.26.

34. 34. Cf. the Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, §57: “Christians, on pilgrimage toward the heavenly city, should seek and think of these things which are above. This duty in no way decreases, rather it increases, the importance of their obligation to work with all men in the building of a more human world. Indeed, the mystery of the Christian faith furnishes them with an excellent stimulant and aid to fulfill this duty more courageously and especially to uncover the full meaning of this activity, one which gives to human culture its eminent place in the integral vocation of man.”

35. 35. See Gerald W. Schlabach, *To Bless All Peoples: Serving with Abraham and Jesus, Peace and Justice Series*, no. 12 (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1991); “Beyond Two- Versus One-Kingdom Theology: Abrahamic Community as a Mennonite Paradigm for Engagement in Society,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 11, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 187–210.

36. 36. Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, §1.