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Preaching for *Shalom:* Life and Peace[1]

Al Tizon

Abortion-on-demand, drugs, war, and gun violence—issues against which this author has fought as an activist through the years—have something in common: they diminish and destroy life. The driving conviction for many activists is the sacredness of life and the ethical call to resist the violence that seeks to destroy it.

To fight against violence and destruction—or more positively, to protect life and to work toward peace—seems agreeable enough to all. After all, "only psychopaths and sociopaths can without remorse destroy the lives of others,"[2] and "No sane human being would say that war and conflict are preferable to peace."[3] And yet, just from the short list above, good Christian people find themselves on the opposite sides of each of those issues. Many of those who fight against abortion, for example, are conservative evangelicals, who view protesting government-sponsored war as unpatriotic. And many of those who denounce war are political and theological progressives who see a woman's right to choose as paramount over the life of her unborn child. A proper view of the kingdom of God, however, sees the inconsistency within both conservative and progressive positions.

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[1]Adapted from *Missional Preaching: Engage, Embrace, Transform* by Al Tizon, copyright © 2012 by Judson Press. Used by permission of Judson Press. It was also one of the lectures given at the 2015 William Menzies Lectureship, Asia Pacific Theological Seminary in Baguio City, Philippines.

[2]Lowell O. Erdahl, *Pro-Life/Pro-Peace: Life Affirming Alternatives to Abortion, War, Mercy-Killing and the Death Penalty* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 14.

[3]Cynthia Wedel, "Is Peace Controversial," in *Preaching on Peace,* eds. Ronald J. Sider and Darrel J. Brubaker (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982): 18.

Shalom (Life and Peace) in a Violent World

Abortion and war—the issues most people associate with life and peace respectively—are extremely sensitive; as such, to make a case for the relationship between life and peace can potentially offend just about everyone! The life-peace connection, however, can serve as a bridge across the conservative-progressive divide; for the gospel of life and the gospel of peace are the same gospel. We are called to be both "pro-life" and "pro-peace" in the most authentic sense of these terms. These "pro-" terms are hopelessly loaded in the Western nations, as political activists have co-opted them for their own ends. However, in Asia, these terms are not impacted by political ideologies and thus have the ability to create a bridge between those who protect life and those who make peace.

Several Christian social activists-theologians in the 1980s and 90s, such as the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin and Ronald J. Sider, did significant "bridge work" across party lines by employing terms such as *consistent life ethic,*[4] *completely pro-life,*[5] and *the seamless garment,*[6] thus creating language for people who desire to live and vote according to the higher laws of life and peace.

Whatever terminology is used for this bridge work, it refers to "a moral commitment to respecting, protecting, and enhancing human life at every stage and in every context."[7] The purpose statement of the organization appropriately called "Consistent Life: Voices for Peace and Life" provides a practical angle to the definition, by stating, "We serve the anti-violence community by connecting issues, building bridges, and strengthening the case against each kind of socially-approved killing by consistently opposing them all."[8]

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[4]Joseph L. Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life," in *Seamless Garment*, ed. Thomas A. Nairn (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 7–20.

[5]Ronald J. Sider, *Completely Pro-Life* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1986).

[6]Even though the term has been attributed to Bishop Joseph L. Bernardin, it was actually coined by Eileen Egan, a member of the Catholic Worker and peace activist, in a 1971 interview. See M. Therese Lysaught, "From the Challenge of Peace to the Gift of Peace," in *The Consistent Ethic of Life,* ed. Thomas A. Nairn (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 112–13.

[7]David Gushee, "The Consistent Ethic of Life," *Christian Ethics Today: Journal of Christian Ethics* 7/1 (February 2000).

[8]Consistent Life Homepage, www.consistent-life.org/index.html (accessed 3 December 2010).

As terms go, the word *shalom* conveys the consistency between life and peace in a concise way, as it captures the biblical vision of wholeness. Translated most often in the English as "peace," it can also be defined as "the fullness of life."[9] *Shalom* is what results when God reigns as Redeemer and Lord. Life and peace characterize *shalom* existence. As the National Council of Catholic Bishops' "Challenge of Peace" statement says, "No society can live in peace with itself, or with the world, without a full awareness of the worth and dignity of every human person."[10]

The fundamental enemy of life and peace is death-dealing violence, which manifests on every level of human existence, from world wars to hatred in the human heart, and everything in between. According to the biblical story, humanity's propensity toward violence is a consequence of the Fall in Genesis 3. Indeed, the first murder is recorded in the very next chapter when Cain killed Abel (Gen. 4:8-10). According to Walter Wink, "The Fall affirms the radicality of evil."[11] And this evil includes humanity's bent toward violence. Wink goes on to say that the Fall points to a deeper reality of the human condition—"a layer of sludge beneath the murky waters that can be characterized only as a hellish hatred of the light, of truth, of kindness and compassion, *a brute lust for annihilation*" (emphasis added).[12] From bullying to domestic abuse, from homicide to genocide, from terrorism to torture, we live in a dangerously violent world.[13] The gospel of the kingdom counteracts this violence by offering "the third way" of Jesus, which essentially refers to the way of nonviolent engagement.[14]

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[9]Sider, *Completely Pro-Life,* 11–31 (see esp. 15–16).

[10]Quoted in Lysaught, "From the Challenge of Peace to the Gift of Peace," 114.

[11]Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 69.

[12]Wink, *Engaging,* 69.

[13]I would include in this list the violence to the unborn. For many, however, I recognize the violence of abortion is not readily apparent. To those who are interested in learning more about such violence, see "Types of Abortion Procedures," American Pregnancy Association. www.americanpregnancy.org/unplannedpregnancy/abortionprocedures.html (accessed December 3, 2010).

[14]Wink, *Engaging,* 175–93.

Cultivating *Shalom*, a Culture of Life and Peace

Peace activists Alan Kreider, Eleanor Kreider, and Paulus Widjaja make a biblical case for the church to become "a culture of peace . . . in which unreconciled enemies are reconciled . . . unforgiven people are forgiven and . . . they are given a common mission—to share the 'good news of peace' with all nations."[15] And given the connection between life and peace, it makes sense to extend it to "a culture of life and peace," i.e., a culture of *shalom.* What are some characteristics of Christians and churches that are being cultivated in the fertile soil of *shalom*?

Respect for Life at Every Stage

The groundwork for this characteristic has already been laid, but a brief expansion of it here locates it among the core elements of a *shalom* person and a *shalom* church. To ones who have been restored in Christ to a right relationship with God, the Creator and Giver of Life, life takes on intrinsic value. Lutheran bishop Lowell Erdahl points out, "While Christianity has no monopoly on reverence for life, it is a central Christian affirmation."[16] Biblical faith teaches that life has intrinsic value because God created it (Gen. 1-2). Furthermore, human life carries particular value because humans were created in God's own image (Gen. 1:26-27). Zac Niringiye notes, "Whereas the other creatures are made 'according to their kinds,' humanity is made 'in [God's] image, in [God's] likeness.'"[17] As such, although all life warrants our respect, human life deserves our deepest and highest respect.

As if it is not enough to value life simply because God created it, we should also consider the truth that "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). "It is crucial to see," asserts Ron Sider, "that the biblical teaching about eternal life does not

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[15]Alan Kreider, Eleanor Kreider, and Paulus Widjaja, *A Culture of Peace* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005), 16–17.

[16]Erdahl, *Pro-Life/Pro-Peace,* 14.

[17]Zac Niringiye, "In the Garden of Eden – I," *Journal of Latin American Theology* 5/1 (2010): 26.

refer to some ethereal, spiritual fairyland totally unrelated to human history and the created order."[18] In other words, the idea of eternal life is not limited to a future bliss but also to abundant life now (John 10:10). Apparently, God deemed the world valuable enough to heal, and every human life as valuable enough to save in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, asserts Baptist ethicist David Gushee:

> Every life means every life, without exception. That includes two-month-along developing human beings in the womb, poor babies in Bangladesh, impoverished children in ghettos, abused wives and children, civilians in war zones, wounded soldiers at Walter Reed, imprisoned detainees in the war on terror, aging people in nursing homes, mentally handicapped people, people convicted of heinous crimes. Everyone.[19]

Based upon the life-giving doctrines of creation and redemption, a person's worth is not based upon his or her age, physical or mental condition, socioeconomic status, or usefulness in society. As Christians, we need no other reason to affirm the value of human life than the fact that each and every human being is made in the image of God and is profoundly loved by God. To do violence to the living therefore—to harm, injure, kill—is wrong. "Thou shall not kill" (Ex. 20:13).

One of the most powerful and beautiful truths about the death and resurrection of Christ is that the final enemy of death has been defeated (1 Cor. 15:54-57). Through Jesus' ministry of life-giving words, liberating deeds, atoning death, and resurrection power, life—and not death—has become the final word for all time. As a result, in the power of the Spirit, followers of Jesus—*shalom* people—challenge death and all its ways, resisting unthinking absolutism and respecting life at every stage from womb to tomb.

We need to be prayerfully sensitive to extreme cases in which the tragic choice to end a life may be permissible, such as when one life is endangered by another. However, societies go tragically awry when

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[18]Sider, *Completely Pro-Life,* 18.

[19]David Gushee, "Opinion: Retrieving a Consistent Pro-Life Ethic," *Associated Baptist Press* (7 March 2007) www.abpnews.com/content/view/1950/120/ (accessed 12 December 2010).

they make exceptions to the law of the land, such as abortion-on-demand, capital punishment, and preemptive war.[20] More could be said about these types of exceptions; but rather than focus on them, the emphasis here is the normative rule for *shalom* people—namely, to respect, defend, and protect life, from the unborn to the elderly and everyone in between who are threatened by the death-dealing violence of this world.

Human Flourishing

But *shalom* is not satisfied with merely the defense and protection of life; it seeks the fullness of life. Another way of putting it is that *shalom* people are ultimately not "anti-" people but "pro-" people. We are truly "pro-life" in the sense that we participate in activities and institutions that cultivate human flourishing. Although human flourishing is a largely philosophical term that has synonyms such as *happiness, self-actualization, empowerment,* or *transformation,* I believe the term is especially effective in conveying the *shalom* image of human beings blossoming to their full potential in harmony with God, one another, and the rest of creation. An InterVarsity Christian Fellowship document introducing a conference on human flourishing states, "We are called to nurture life within ourselves, our communities, and in our world. Abundant life is a quality of the kingdom of God and from this root grows our commitment to human flourishing."[21] Being truly *for* life and not just *against* death, *shalom* Christians seek to enable all persons, from conception to old age, to flourish in the name of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Spirit.

Practically, this commitment to human flourishing means helping broken, vulnerable people—those diminished by poverty, oppression, and conflict—move toward wholeness. In the words of theologian Vinay Samuel, "[The poor] need their personhood . . . restored."[22] Samuel goes on to elaborate on ten dimensions of personhood, which include the physical, psycho-emotional, social, ethical, and spiritual

[20]Erdahl, *Pro-Life/Pro-Peace,* 24-28.

[21]"Human Flourishing—A Thematic Overview," InterVarsity www.intervarsity.org/gfm/download.php?id= 6649&version_id=9219 (accessed December 10, 2010).

[22]Vinay Samuel, "Mission as Transformation," *Transformation* 19/4 (October 2002): 244.

areas of the human person that need restoration and development.[23] For those who are against abortion, for example, a commitment to human flourishing should manifest in activities such as finding adoptive homes for children, taking in foster children, and supporting ministries to assist young, single mothers. And for those who protest gun violence and war, a commitment to human flourishing should be expressed in activities such as caring for veterans, grieving with families who have lost loved ones to war, and participating in reconciliation work between warring factions.

Our mission toward human flourishing—our proactive striving to help fellow human beings reach their God-envisioned potential (even as we strive to do this ourselves)—is the necessary affirmative aspect of our commitment to *shalom*, which "calls us to reverence life, to support everything that enhances and ennobles life and to oppose everything that degrades and destroys life."[24]

The Way of Nonviolence

The way of nonviolent engagement constitutes a third characteristic of *shalom* people. We take seriously the teachings of the Master to love our enemies (Matt. 5:43-48) and to put away the sword (Matt. 26:42), and we interpret Jesus' death on the cross as his way of overcoming hate with love and evil with good (Matt. 26:53; Rom. 12:17-21). We see neither retaliation nor passivity as acceptable responses to the world's death-dealing violence; we see a third way.

Popularized by New Testament scholar Walter Wink, this "third way" is the radical way of nonviolent resistance, based primarily upon the teachings of Jesus concerning turning the other check, giving one's undergarment, and going the second mile (Matt. 5:38-42; Luke 6:29-30). Contrary to popular interpretations that these illustrations teach victims to subject themselves to further humiliation and pain in response to bully tactics, Wink shows that they actually convey resistance by denying a bully the power to humiliate while simultaneously seizing the moral initiative in the situation. For

[23]Samuel, "Mission as Transformation," 245–46. See also Al Tizon, *Transformation After Lausanne* (Oxford, et al: Regnum; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 145–147, where I go into more detail in interpreting Samuel's concept of personhood.

[24]Erdahl, *Pro-Life/Pro-Peace,* 19.

example, in Jesus' time and culture, "turning the other cheek" would force an offender to strike the victim on the left cheek, which was willfully offered. But this action actually elevates the victim to equal social status—the exact opposite of what the striker intended. Nonviolent resistance disarms the violator while maintaining the dignity of the victim. According to Wink, this and the other two illustrations demonstrated a third way of response to dominant violators of human dignity and life—not the first way of violent retaliation nor the second way of cowering acquiescence, but the third way of nonviolent, righteous resistance.[25] Wink cautions, however, that we must be responsible in teaching nonviolence to victims of domestic abuse, racism, and the like, lest we teach them the way of passivity and cowardice.[26]

In order for nonviolent righteous resistance to be useful, it must be operationalized. Peace activist Richard K. Taylor offers five principles that can help guide *shalom* Christians in the way of gospel nonviolence:[27]

1. A deep faith in God and God's power (Rom. 1:16; 2 Thess. 1:11). Gospel nonviolence is so contrary to fallen human nature that it takes nothing less than deep faith to enable us to practice it—even for Jesus (see Matt. 26:39).
2. A resolve to resist injustice—or, stated more positively, a strong sense of justice (Jer. 7:5-7; Mic. 6:8).
3. Goodwill toward wrongdoers (Luke 6:35-36; Rom. 12:14-21).
4. A willingness to suffer for what is right (Matt. 5:10-12; 1 Pet. 2:19-21).
5. A refusal to inflict suffering on others (Zech. 7:9-10; Matt. 22:39).

If these guiding principles seem superhuman, it is because they are; go back to Principle 1!

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[25]Wink, *Engaging,* 175–86. I have hardly touched the surface of Wink's brilliant exegesis of these passages. For its full impact, one must read Wink's book, especially the pages listed here.

[26]Ibid., 189–93.

[27]Richard K. Taylor, *Love in Action: A Direct Action Handbook for Catholics Using Gospel Nonviolence to Reform and Renew the Church* (Philadelphia: R.K. Taylor, 2007), 16–20.

Waging Peace

Finally, *shalom* Christians understand the proactive aspect of peace—namely, the call to make peace, to initiate it and help shape the world by it. It is not enough to keep the peace or to respond nonviolently to enemies of peace; we must also advance to make peace. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peace*makers,* for they will be called children of God" (Matt. 5:9).

To wage peace takes on at least three practical dimensions. First, *shalom* Christians forgive, as they bask in God's forgiveness for them (Matt. 6:14-15). A church cannot promote peace in the world unless it learns to extend forgiveness even to those who have done great harm. The story of Eric Irivuzumugabe comes to mind. A Tutsi who survived the infamous Rwandan genocide, Irivuzumugabe learned to forgive the Hutus, who massacred many of his loved ones and friends.[28] The story of the Amish community that extended forgiveness to the man who murdered five of their children and injured five others in a school shooting in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, also comes to mind.[29] These stories speak of "the divine logic of forgiveness."[30] To forgive is to wage peace.

Second, inseparably related to forgiveness is the practice of reconciliation. We are commanded not just to love our neighbors but also to love our enemies. The ministry of reconciliation ensures that forgiveness goes the distance (Rom. 5:18-20). In a sermon on loving our enemies, Martin Luther King Jr. preached, "We can never say, 'I will forgive you, but I won't have anything further to do with you.' Forgiveness means reconciliation, a coming together again. Without this, no man can love his enemies."[31]

And third, *shalom* Christians engage in subversive acts of compassion and justice. By "subversive," I mean to emphasize that we aid those suffering due to political conflict or injustice, not just because

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[28]Eric Irivuzumugabe, *My Father, Maker of the Trees: How I Survived the Rwandan Genocide* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009). For a short article adapted from the book, see "Seventy Times Seven," *Prism* 17/1 (Jan/Feb 2010), 9–11.

[29]This story can be found in Donald Kraybill, Steven Nolt, and David Weaver-Zercher, *Amish Grace* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

[30]Kristyn Komarnicki, "The Divine Logic of Forgiveness," *Prism* 17/1 (January/February 2010): 2.

[31]Martin Luther King Jr. *Strength to Love* (New York: Pocket Books, 1968), 43.

they need desperate help, but also as a statement to the powers that their decisions destroy lives. To wage peace is to oppose war and injustice by helping the suffering poor who are so often caught in the crossfire.

Preaching for *Shalom*

The following three guidelines can help missional preachers who aim to cultivate *shalom* in their congregations.

Consistent Ethic of Life and Peace

We preach a commitment to life because we are committed to peace, and we preach a commitment to peace because we are committed to life. We see the relational consistency between them in the kingdom of God, so we preach life and peace together. "To set the mind on the flesh is death," penned the apostle Paul, "but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom. 8:6). We preach this consistent ethic despite pressure to conform to a particular political ideology. As both conservatives and liberals draw their lines in the sand, it becomes increasingly more difficult for people to challenge any part of the respective agendas of the right or the left. "The power of [political] Party identity is so profound," writes Gushee, "that otherwise thoughtful people lose the capacity for independent reflection."[32]

God forbid that conservatives question American-declared war or help in the work of gun violence prevention, and God forbid that progressives join in the fight against abortion-on-demand or speak out against the dehumanization of women through pornography. Gushee speaks for himself, but captures the conviction needed for missional preaching, when he declares, "As a Christian, I believe that no force is to be allowed to compete with God's word for the government of my life in any aspect. This includes Party loyalty."[33] Preaching for *shalom* does not cater to left or right ideologies; we preach the kingdom God, which respects and promotes life from womb to tomb, consistently and courageously.

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[32]Gushee, "Opinion."
[33]Ibid.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

We preach forgiveness and reconciliation, which are fundamental to the good news of Christ. They are fundamental in the sense that the Christian faith rests completely on the God who has seen fit to forgive and reconcile. In response, we extend forgiveness and reconciliation to others. The parable of the wicked slave in Matthew 18 forcefully illustrates this. We know the story: In his mercy, the king forgave a slave of all his debt. But later on, that same slave found another slave who owed him money; and when the second slave could not pay, the first slave had him thrown in jail. When the king found out, he told the one he had forgiven, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?" The king then had him imprisoned until he paid his whole debt (Matt. 18:21-35).

Kreider and colleagues note, "God's command to his people is not simply to accept his forgiveness; it is to act forgivingly to other people. It is not simply to be reconciled to God; it is to be reconciled to other people."[34] Preaching for *shalom* calls God's people to forgive others as our heavenly Father has forgiven us (Matt. 6:14-15; 18:21-35), and it calls us to seek reconciliation wherever conflict and brokenness reside, just as God has reached out to be reconciled to us (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

Peacemaking unto Death

We preach sacrificial peacemaking. We preach that "a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace" (Jas 3:18). As the late Vernon C. Grounds once preached, "The God of peace . . . summons us, as disciples of Jesus Christ, to be peacemakers in our marriages, our homes, our friendships, our neighborhoods, our churches, our places of business and work, our country, and our world."[35] Making peace in a world bent on violence and death is not easy; in fact, it is impossible without the resources available to us in the Spirit. In the same sermon, Grounds told his audience that, "God has

[34]Kreider, Kreider, and Widjaja, *Culture of Peace,* 111.

[35]Vernon C. Grounds, "Spiritual Weapons for Waging Peace," in *Preaching on Peace,* eds. Ronald J. Sider and Darrel J. Brubaker (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 62.

put at our disposal effective weapons for the waging of peace."[36] He went on to say that the Christian's ultimate weapon is prayer—"a weapon infinitely more powerful than all the guns and bayonets, tanks and planes, battleships and bombs of all the nations in all the world."[37]

In addition to urging God's people to pray for peace, preaching for *shalom* denounces acts of violence, from domestic abuse to homicide to genocide to war. Some issues are clearer than others. Torture, for example, has no place in the gospel and therefore preachers should have no qualms denouncing such a practice from the pulpit, even if it implicates one's own government. The same can be said of the genocide of whole peoples in places like Darfur in the Sudan. The long term violence between the Philippine government and the Muslims on the island of Mindanao is another case in point—as Aldrin Peñamora details for us elsewhere in this issue. These types of atrocities require prophetic preaching that openly confronts despotic governments, as well as inspires the church to engage in ministries of compassion, justice, and advocacy.

This type of preaching is dangerous as it inspires the redeemed in Christ to risk their lives; for often, the powers turn on peacemakers. This is the "sacrificial" part of peacemaking. For example, Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), an organization that applies "the same discipline and self-sacrifice to nonviolent peacemaking that armies devote to war," forms teams that "seek to follow God's Spirit as they work through local peacemakers who risk injury and death by waging nonviolent direct action to confront systems of violence and oppression."[38] The story of Tom Fox exemplifies the ultimate sacrifice of peacemaking. A CPT member working in Baghdad, Fox was abducted in November 2005 along with three other CPTers. While the other three were released after four months in captivity, Fox was not; he was shot dead and his body found on March 9, 2006.[39] Preaching for *shalom* aims to strengthen the church's commitment to peacemaking in a violent world no matter the cost. In light of the cross, which our Lord

[36]Ibid., 63.

[37]Ibid., 64.

[38]"Mission Statement," *Christian Peacemaker Teams,* www.cpt.org/about/mission (accessed December 13, 2010).

[39]"U.S. Hostage in Iraq Confirmed Dead," *BBC News* (March 11, 2006) http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/ middle_east/4795678.stm (accessed December 13, 2010).

endured in order to show another way—a third way—can we preach anything less?

The grand biblical vision of *shalom* captivates missional preachers, and as such, we preach a consistent ethic of life and peace, we preach forgiveness and reconciliation, and we preach radical peace-making. We do this in the context of rival messages of violence, retribution, terrorism, and death. "The great challenge of Christians," ethicist David Gil says, "is to move out into the world and into our neighborhoods with another message and another agenda—that of our Lord of Life and Prince of Peace."[40]

[40]David Gil, *Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 215.