

## COMMENTARY

### **The War in Iraq**

Bill Gramley

My dear friends, it is May 11, 2006 as I prepare my words to you. This morning USA Today revealed the fact that one of our nation's security agencies has been monitoring phone calls and e-mails from millions of Americans. In particular this agency did not tell us what they were doing. But the fact that they have been doing this secretly is only one more item on a long list of very questionable activities that President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, and others in the Administration have been carrying out. Usually these things are kept secret from us, from "we, the people," that is, from the citizens of this democratic and open society with our various Bills of Rights and judicial system and a Congress elected by the people.

I am writing to you basically because I have yet to hear any minister speak about or discuss the war in Iraq. And that war, of course, has implications for many aspects of our daily lives. In fact, the only thing I've heard besides prayers of intercession in the three plus years that we have been waging war in Iraq was a reference to some American contractors who were killed brutally and dragged through the streets of a city in Iraq. The minister who mentioned this did not mention specifically this incident but raised the question about "who will bury the dead?" This might have happened during Holy Week. I'm not sure. But that's been about all I've heard.

I don't get around to many churches to get a sense of whether I am right or wrong about this silence, but thus far I really haven't heard anything at the churches I do attend.

And I worship pretty regularly. In short, I don't know of any Christian congregations that have suggested that maybe this matter of war and violence, of secrecy, of deception about how and why we got into this war, about the way some of our soldiers and C.I.A. agents have treated prisoners, or about any number of other questionable actions related to terrorism and anti-terrorism is relevant to our faith. I admit that I may have missed some sermons or discussion groups that dealt with these things, but I think what I haven't heard from the few churches I know about is typical of the majority of churches of all faiths.

And since I have not gotten any guidance in these matters, I get what information I get from Eugene Robinson, Paul Krugman, and the numerous other columnists in my local newspaper and from *The New Yorker* which I read and which I confess does take what can be called a "liberal" point of view. Maybe you do the same thing — sort of keep up with the issues from liberal, moderate, or conservative sources. So I'm prejudiced or biased or whatever, but I read other columnists who are conservative, too. And yet that is not the issue I'm getting at. I am

saying that I don't read any clergy writings on the subject or hear any comments from them. There seem to be no biblical references to these topics, no connection of theology, Christology, or personal faith in Jesus Christ with what is going on in the social and political realm.

The first question, then, is this: Should the Church, the Christian community, the earthly Body of Christ — or whatever name you want to give us — address this matter of the war in Iraq and its many tentacles? I think we should, but I also think we are silent because President Bush told us after the tragedy of 9/11/2001 — almost five years ago — that we ought not to panic but go about our lives as we normally do. So we have gone about our lives as we normally do except for one thing. We have allowed this Administration, often with the approval of Congress, to go about this war and justify it and all its costs and losses of lives and deceptions and hidden prisons and various surveillances and refusals to admit mistakes because we are fighting terrorism. As long as we are fighting terrorism we the people are willing to put up with a few inconveniences at the airport or in the subway and give our approval to the massive amounts of money we are spending both on the actual war in Iraq and in building up a huge Department of Homeland Security and its multitude of components.

So we have trapped ourselves. We have bought into the President's point of view — even though he switched from going into Iraq to get rid of Saddam Hussein and his weapons of mass destruction and his deck of fifty-two cohorts to the purpose of creating democracy there. Naturally, when he throws that word "democracy" at us,

we are likewise swayed into believing that this is a good thing to offer other countries. Fight terrorism. Create democracy. It doesn't matter how we go about that so long as we go about it. But he never mentions why we aren't doing similar things in parts of Africa and Asia where other dictators and totalitarian governments exist. These days only thirty-six percent of the American people believe our President is doing a good job in spite of his rhetoric and questionable candor.

Still, the silence from the Church abounds. And all I am trying to say to you at this late date is that we ought to raise a few important questions. Here are some:

Does the Church find something redemptive in being silent in the face of deception, secrecy, retaliation (e.g. the Valerie Plame case), abuse of prisoners and lack of legal counsel for some, and the bombing of civilians?

Does the Church have a responsibility to be prophetic and question the pursuit and promotion of war and violence or is that irrelevant to the teachings of our Lord and Savior?

Should the Church say something about the stewardship of our resources, of how we use the contents of the earth? Is there such a thing as asking people who have made mistakes to apologize and repent and work to correct those mistakes?

What does the word "salvation" really mean? Is it only for our souls or does it include the "cosmos," the word for "world" that John used in John 3:16? What is the Gospel about anyway, the Gospel and all those teachings Jesus gave us

about loving, forgiving, healing, redeeming, and having compassion? Does justice have a part in our faith?

What does it mean for more terrorists to have come into being as a result of our policies? And what does it mean when people blow themselves

up like kamikaze pilots in order to kill others for the sake of their convictions in comparison to what we in the church are willing to give up for the pursuit of our convictions — which are what?

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*Editor's note: Subscribers to the Hinge are encouraged to send in their own commentary, sermons, and other items for publication.*

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## Book Note

Erika Geiger, *Erdmuth Dorothea Countess von Zinzendorf: Noble Servant*, tr. Julie Tomerlin Weber (Winston-Salem, NC: Blair Publisher, 2006).

Erdmuth Dorothea von Zinzendorf was one of the most significant women in the history of the Moravian Church. In fact, she was one of the most interesting and active women of the 18th century in Europe and her story should be known outside the Moravian Church. Thanks to Blair Publisher, now it can be. Julie Tomerlin Weber's translation of Erika Geiger's biography of the countess is a lively read designed for non-specialists that will be enjoyed by Moravians and non-Moravians alike. In it we learn that Erdmuth was an active co-laborer with her more famous husband, and she deserves credit for being one of the architects of the famous Moravian communal system, developed at Herrnhut, that was brought

to Pennsylvania and North Carolina. She was also one of the business managers of the far-flung Moravian mission endeavor. Though she was a mother who gave birth to twelve children, she risked her life traveling through the Baltic in a vain attempt to win the release of Moravians imprisoned in Russia. By her work and personal example, she also helped break down the barriers of race and class that continue to bedevil the world. We see her on the cover in the simple garb of a Moravian woman illuminated by an inner happiness. Her biography offers a shining example of a life of active faith and sincere devotion to Christ.