

¹⁸ Hall, "Religion and Violence," 368.

¹⁹ Robbins, "Religious Movements and Violence," 14.

²⁰ Ibid, 24.

²¹ Hall, "Religion and Violence," 368.

²² Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, 72.

²³ Ibid, 82-85.

Andrew Lumpkin is a 2006 graduate of the Divinity School of Wake Forest University and serves as political consultant in Virginia.

Responses

Bill Gramley

Lumpkin's article in this issue clearly describes six basic reasons why religious groups or churches have gotten involved in supporting war and violence. But there is one aspect of this that needs to be highlighted. It is the fact that the church, as such, does not engage in war. It simply supports and justifies the wars and violence that nation states perpetuate. This means that many followers of the Christian faith give greater loyalty to "the nation" or what we call patriotism than they do to the nonviolent example and teachings of Jesus Christ.

One of the earliest creeds of the Church was the statement that "Jesus is Lord." Many Christians really believed that and sacrificed their lives during periods of persecution rather than deny the lordship of Jesus Christ. Some believers refused to bear arms. They simply did not buy into the practices and ambitions of the society or empire in which they lived.

And there were various times in the history of the Moravian Church when members refused

to bear arms. For some years in the colonial era of America the Moravians established villages of peace in Ohio for the Native Americans in an effort to get these people to forsake fighting. The Moravians at that time believed that the teachings of Jesus took precedent over the policies of the warring powers. In short, there was something about faith in Jesus that implied a different lifestyle and attitude.

This was also true much earlier in Moravian history when the Brethren of the Ancient Unity actually lived by the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. While they were somewhat separated from the state, they did live by an alternative form of daily life in contrast to the usual violence and power plays of the state.

Certainly in the 20th and 21st centuries most churches, including the Moravian Church, have given unthinking consent to the belligerent foreign policies of our national government. The exceptions have been the Quakers, Church of the Brethren, and Mennonites. Those policies are mostly in favor of using threat, subversion,

upholding dictatorships, and military force to carry out the wishes of the leaders of the state and thereby the wishes of the people. The catch phrase of “national security” is used over and over again to justify everything from wiretapping to the torture of prisoners to the actual overthrow of other governments or their leaders. And often anyone who dares to question these practices is denounced as unpatriotic. This can be translated to mean that national security or the nation itself is our main god.

To change this or overthrow this god would be as difficult as it would be to suggest that professional football teams start playing touch football rather than tackle. And so we are deeply imbedded in the belief that physical power or the “big stick” is the way to conduct our lives. And that is a very, very long way from the teachings of Jesus Christ who actually said we are to love our enemies, be peacemakers, and forgive those who trespass against us!

If you think I am overstating all of this, let me remind you that in 1968 at the Provincial Synod of the Southern Province a resolution prepared by Ted Bowman and me to allow the creation of a Moravian Peace Fellowship was defeated by a vote of 144 to 8. That’s how strongly members felt about even allowing anyone to pursue the path of peace or refuse to bear arms.

Since March of 2003 or soon thereafter as news reporters became embedded with American troops and others in Iraq we have had almost daily by-lines from Baghdad. The war in Iraq has clearly dominated the news for the past five years. And what has the Moravian

Church had to say or do about this war? The PECs have participated in some ecumenical statements to the President expressing concern about the war, but little else has been offered to church members or by church members to say that just maybe this war is not in accord with the teachings of our faith.

A few ministers and a few congregations (Central in Bethlehem, Home in Winston-Salem and perhaps others) have broached the subject of war, peace, violence, and the stewardship of the nation’s budget. But there have been no clear resolutions opposing our national policy or discussion resources made available that I am aware of. The reason we remain silent is because we don’t want to seem unpatriotic. We cannot seem to stop worshipping this idol which truly is our addiction. I can’t find any differences between what the state says and what the church says. We are so intertwined. Oh, yes, we do espouse Jesus as Lord, but in reality we love what the nation does more.

Nowhere among the many words that we can use to describe life in Christ or the purpose of the Church can we find a call to hatred and war and bloodshed or the torture of people. Moreover, the Church is not called to establish political or material power, to build itself or its members or leaders into advocates of tyranny or oppression or enslavement. If anything, the Church should be prophetic and call into question such inhumane practices.

Finally, I noted an article in the *Winston-Salem Journal* on May 29, 2008, reporting that one hundred countries have agreed to

stop making and using cluster-bombs (which spray devastating bomblets over large areas and can blow up later when people pick them up). Guess what? The United States, Russia, China, Israel, India, and Pakistan did not participate in shaping this ban and haven't agreed to it. I quote a paragraph in the report: "In Washington, a spokesman for the State Department, Tom Casey, said that such weapons are an important part of the American arsenal." I wonder what a spokesman for Jesus would say?

The Rev. William Gramley is a retired Moravian minister living in Winston-Salem, NC.

Gil Frank

Generally speaking, humankind has a tendency toward violence when things do not go the way that individuals, groups and nations desire. We most often consider violence only to have occurred when physical force and action is used against another, whether it be a person, a group, a nation, or some other earthly entity. However, violence is rightly defined as abusing and doing harm to someone through thoughts, looks, and words, as well as actions. Most of us do not stop to consider that any harmful way in which we interact with one another is a form of violence. For any interaction between two or more people, an unkind thought or word, gossip, a reacting frown, a threat, domination, aggressive behavior, or undue physical force are examples of violence that disturb what could and should be a peaceful and meaningful

relationship. In most situations, we do not have to look beyond ourselves for daily examples of this expanded view of violence.

In his relationship with the established religion of the day, Jesus expressed dissatisfaction with the current practices that existed in the Jewish faith; and he did this with words and actions that disturbed the leadership and status quo. Jesus' intent was to return the Jewish people toward acknowledging and worshipping God without the extreme legalism and pomp promoted and practiced by the existing leadership.

With words and actions that disturbed the leadership and status quo of his day, John Hus also expressed dissatisfaction with the current practices and excesses that existed in the Roman Catholic Church. His intent was to return the leadership within the church to a more simple style of living that modeled the life of the Apostles, centered on the law of Christ as found in the gospels, and emphasized helping people at all levels of society.

Both Jesus and John Hus worked for improvements by staying within the existing religious establishments using reasonably peaceful and meaningful approaches. Both were willing to come to the table and discuss their feelings and to reach agreements on changes that would result in more appropriate religious practices. I can think of no examples from their ministries in which they called for violent, physical action against another person or group or for the specific establishment of a new religion. It was the leadership of the Jewish faith and the Roman Catholic Church who