

## **Margaret Leinbach**

I appreciate Brother Lumpkin's tackling how religions contribute to the violence so prevalent in today's world. I whole heartedly agree that "an understanding of how religion can become violent is integral for a future of peace in our world." His identification of six factors that can increase the likelihood that persons of faith will act violently towards perceived threats can help every person examine those parts of ourselves where (in the words of Mother Teresa) "a Hitler resides in me."

I also appreciate his recognition that "violence of personhood" encompasses more than physical harm to include "psychological, emotional, linguistic, and systemic" actions and inactions that diminish the life and well-being of God's children. While today it is easy to point fingers at our Muslim brothers for denying women basic human rights, Christian history is not guilt free. Today it's hard to grasp when anesthesia first became widely available, that significant numbers of clergy and doctors argued against giving women painkillers during childbirth because of God's words to Eve "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with pain you will give birth to children" (Genesis 3:16a).

Brother Lumpkin's hope that we "learn not to cast stones" but rather practice discernment in how our religious beliefs affect others in harmful ways is a hope I believe most Moravians share and strive to practice in our own faith walks. Yet I have my doubts that we will make significant headway in reducing violence done

in the name of religious beliefs until these questions of Brother Lumpkin are addressed:

Is religion inherently violent? If not, what turns religious adherents violent? Do our sacred texts cause and reinforce a violent worldview?

To these questions, the answer seems to be an obvious and resounding YES! The sacred texts of polytheistic religions abound in stories of one god using violence to conquer another god and violently punishing wayward human beings. The scripture of the two largest world religions, Islam and Christianity, abound in stories and instructions from God to use violence for divinely sanctioned punishment for unbelievers and for God's greater purposes. Indeed religious authorities used these texts to justify both Jesus and Jan Hus' executions for heretical beliefs and agitation.

The biblical text's witness to God using or sanctioning violence as a legitimate form of punishment, leads many Christians to understand Jesus' crucifixion as satisfying God's "justice" for torture and extreme pain as payment for our sins, i.e. Jesus willingly bore the punishment we deserved for our sins and took our place on the cross. Whether one agrees with a substitution theory for the atonement or not, at a very minimum Jesus' violent death shows even when the elements of violence and punishment are not prescribed or initiated by God, they can be accepted by God for a saving purpose. What then are the criteria for religious people to determine whether violence is ever acceptable?

Brother Lumpkin's six factors seem to be present in the mass murders of innocents in the

name of ethnic cleansing we have seen in our lifetimes in Germany, the former Yugoslavia Republic, Zimbabwe and Darfur. Perhaps these six factors are more humanly universal and serve masters beyond religion like ethnic and national beliefs.

Until we can adequately address the primary cause for religious violence—sacred texts testifying to God specifically using and sanctioning human violence for redemptive purposes and to punish unfaithfulness—I fear religious people will remain violent.

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## **Rick Stamm**

This article would make a great five or six piece blog in order to generate replies and discussion. While the intent is admirable I find a number of points I would either disagree with or, at least, want to discuss further with the author. For example, I find it unfortunate that the examples used to support the thesis are a mix of political and religious. The attack of September 11, for one, has been identified by a variety of analysts as more political than religious even though the people carrying out the action probably had strong religious convictions. The same claim could be made for the murder of Rabin and possibly that of Jesus. So, I wonder if it is the religion itself that is prone to violence or just members of the religion who use violence as their way of getting what they want.

As for the factors being described, most have merit to some degree with the exception of Outside Agitation. Mohammad was peaceful until he had power; Christianity was peaceful until Constantine embraced it and gave it power. On the other hand, Anabaptists in early history retreated as they were threatened, and today Christians in Pakistan and Palestine retreat rather than respond with violence. The other factors mentioned are probably worthy of study and would have had a stronger position in this article if they had been referenced against the examples used in the opening so the reader could see how they produce violent action.

The footnote directing the reader to other theories of violence in religion was excellent and I hope there will be many articles in the future opening discussion on these as well. As the author states, “religion has always had a fascinating and flirtatious relationship with violence.” As people following the Prince of Peace it is incumbent upon us to pay attention and respond.

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