

BUILDING A HERITAGE OF PEACE, LOVE AND JUSTICE

Frank W. Carpenter, D.Min., November 16, 2008.

St. John's UU Church, Cincinnati, OH

MEDIATION;

I invite you to a visualization:

Be comfortable, feel yourself settling securely as you rest in your chair.

Feel your breathing moving in and out.

Sense yourself in an unexpected place, familiar but one you visit less often than you need.

It is your favorite space in all the world.

You see its beauty, its colors, hear its music, scent its perfumes.

In this place you trust everything completely.

Release your fears, let go of your darkness, rest in its beauty.

Yes, this place is your place, this place is peace, your heaven.

Here we are still....

Peace be with you. Amen.

SERMON:

Visualize your spiritual journey.

Imagine yourself walking along your path.

You come to a sign post at a Y intersection. The post has two signs pointing to two different paths.

One sign has written on it "TO HEAVEN."

The other sign has written on it, "TO A DISCUSSION ABOUT HEAVEN."

According to oral tradition among Unitarian Universalist, when you come to this sign post, you will go to the discussion about heaven.

Now equally, imagine you come to another sign post. Whether the choice is the same, you decide. One sign says... "PEACE." The other sign says, "TO A DISCUSSION ABOUT PEACE."

For several years our association of congregations, the UUA, has been engaged in a discussion about armed conflict and peacemaking. Thanks to Howard Tolley and St. John's peacemakers, we have had an ongoing discussion here as well, engaging the UUA process.

At the end of October, the draft Peacemaking Statement of Conscience was released. There is much good in it. It urges us to support the UU Office at the United Nations, as we did in the service we celebrated Dewali. It also calls us to learn about compassionate communication, which a number of us are doing on a biweekly basis in the NonViolent Communication group with Maria Yunker. [draft SOC:
<http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/issuesprocess/currentissues/peacemaking/121606.shtml>
]

The current statement is only a draft, however. We are supposed to tell them what we think about it and they will revise it. And that is a good thing, because Howard and I are disappointed with what we have seen. We hope you will look it over and figure out how we can improve it.

Howard and I fear that the draft Statement does not offer UU's any clear guidance on issues of armed conflict and peace. For example, in the question of inner peacemaking it merely says, "We covenant to develop spiritual practices that impart internal peace." [line 125] This is important, for if we do not have an experience of peace, if we do not know what peace is, how will we be able to be part of peacemaking in the lives of others?

Also, the issue of conscientious objection to armed conflict is important. Yet the draft barely acknowledges the issue. This is a step backward from statements made before supporting conscientious objectors. A sense of frustration hangs over the statement, expressed at one point, "amid the harsh realities of war and peace, there are no easy answers." Rather than any clear guidance for us to respond to issues of armed conflict and peacemaking, we are given only some reshuffling of words. We read, "The former just war criteria become Just peacemaking guidelines." [line 70]

Some of this wording may feel like technical ethical vocabulary. Bear with me, I hope if not to lay out the territory clearly, at least provide a clear map.

Indeed, I think that the problem is that we lack a clear map of this issue of 'just war.' I find that most of the discussion about "just war" leaves out a crucial component. If you want to have a just war, and if you're going to have one, surely you want it to be just, there are six traditional criteria: just cause, legitimate authority, right intention, last resort, proportionality, and probability of success.

What interests me is often the discussion is only five of the six. The one we hear about most is just cause: “he punched me first.” The one we hear least about is “legitimate authority:” ‘I’m the decider!’ The decider gets to decide who punched who first; in fact the decider gets to decide to punch first. For UU’s to have clear guidance on peacemaking, we need clear guidance on who’s the decider.

In September 2004 the UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan publically stated that the Iraq War was illegal. [Sands, LAWLESS WORLD, 175] This criterion of ‘just war,’ “legitimate authority” has become very personal for many American families. Would you go kill people in another country knowing the secretary general of the UN had declared the war illegal? How would you feel if your daughter was raped or killed in that armed conflict? Today, a majority of soldiers in Iraq think it’s illegal. One Iraq veteran MIKE TOTTEN has said:

General Petraeus, you may not remember me, but you once led me. You’re no longer a leader of men. You’ve exploited your troops for your own gain and have become just another cheerleader for this occupation policy that is destroying America.

http://www.democracynow.org/2008/11/11/on_veterans_day_15_vets_of

Petraeus has lost any legitimacy for this veteran. What is the source of Petraeus legitimacy as a general in the United States Armed forces? In his article in the UUworld, Paul Rasor speaks of a “properly constituted governmental authority.”

<http://www.uuworld.org/assets/php/printer.php>

Our Constitution defines what a “properly constituted governmental authority” is for Americans. Article I, Section 8: says that Congress is the branch to declare War. Article II, Section 2 says “The President shall be Commander in Chief of the army..., when called into the actual Service of the United States;”

Today, what authority the Congress itself might have had in declaring war has by in large been given up to the Executive Branch of the government. Whether it was Johnson in the Vietnam War or Bush in Iraq, Executive control of the intelligence bureaucracy has allowed them, as Sir Richard Dearlove, the chief of MI6, said to British cabinet members, “the intelligence and the facts were being fixed around the policy.” (Sands, 184)

For American UU’s, is the national government the “properly constituted governmental authority” to decide what is a ‘just war’? Actually, an Article of the Constitution points us in another direction; Article VI declares not just the Constitution and adopted laws the supreme law, but also all treaties. While those treaties include those signed with various Indian nations, the US also has signed treaties forming the United Nations and the Geneva conventions.

We may long remember Colin Powell’s presentation to the Security Council on February 5th, 2003, as an embarrassment, not only a personal embarrassment for him but also for our intelligence community as George Tenet sat behind him like a goon ready to pounce.

However, there is another take on that gathering at the United Nations. The main concession Powell wanted before he would offer his full support for the Iraq War was the involvement of the international community in the invasion, as opposed to the unilateral approach some advocated. His success in persuading Bush to take the case of Iraq to the United Nations, may in the long run be more important than what he said, the fixed intelligence he presented. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colin_Powell]

This acknowledgement of the authority of the UN Security Council by Powell suggests a new and improved Powell Doctrine may be emerging: the government of the United States is not a legitimate authority to unilaterally declare war.

Visualize again your spiritual journey. Perhaps this is the ethical path on your spiritual journey. You have come to another of those sign posts. The question is, should the United States enter into armed conflict with or without a UN vote? One sign says, the "US decides;" the other, the "UN decides."

Here is a decision point. The Peacemaking Statement of Conscience needs to offer UU's guidance. Is there for Unitarian Universalists a presumption for international accountability when engaging in armed conflict? I think so.

But is that good enough for you? Are you satisfied with allowing a governmental authority, national or international, decide what is a just killing of your fellow human beings? Perhaps it can decide whether it is legal, and that is important. But just?

John Paul II stated before the 2003 war that this war would be a defeat for humanity which could not be morally or legally justified. <http://www.cjd.org/paper/jp2war.html> Do we not turn to other voices than that of the state to understand justice, to deepen peace? Does government supply all our answers?

One of the great voices in our UU history is Henry David Thoreau. His "Resistance to Civil Government" – later CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE - was a protest against the American war on Mexico; our reading from Thomas Merton draws upon him. Thoreau wrote:

Must the citizen even for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every [person] a conscience then? I think we should be [persons] first, and subjects afterwards.... (Paul Hawken, BLESSED UNREST, 78)

In America, guided by the principle of the separation of church and state, a space opens up where church and state are not identical; a power greater than the state is acknowledged in adopting this separation of powers. Some will see a higher power in the prophet from Nazareth and Jesus' teachings of turning the other cheek. Quakers, Mennonites recognize in his teaching a higher calling than any the state can place upon them. The state may define what is legal, but Jesus will say what is just. And for many people of faith – and not only of the Christian faith – the concept of a 'just war,' or of a 'justifiable war,' is an oxymoron.

Let's get back to our spiritual journey. Visualize your path. Up comes another sign post: two signs: one says "governmental organization," and the other says "ethical voice."

I believe that the Statement of Conscience should speak clearly on this. Is it enough that some secular authority declares an armed conflict just for us to agree? Are we, as Thoreau might say, merely creatures of the state? Do we have rights merely at the pleasure of the state, a thought horrifying Wm E. Channing? Or can we turn our vision to a higher point of view?

I think at this point we can hear the timbers begin to crack. Most Unitarian Universalists would not turn their consciences over to the state, no more than you would turn yours over to the person sitting next to you in the pew. We might all agree that the UN is an appropriate arbiter, but there our agreement begins to break down. At this point we need to pick up our sign posts and walk with them. We can put a variety of signs on these new posts, but let me address only two. One sign says 'individual decides,' the other 'congregation decides.'

This sign which has the word 'individual' on it points to that part of St. Johns' typically UU language in our mission statement. However much our faith transcends the finite, here we "Celebrate beliefs that respect freedom of thought"

Yet as the sign post holds together the two signs of 'congregation' and 'individual,' so our mission holds 'freedom of belief,' and 'caring community' together. The individual wanting to be isolated, would not be listening to our struggles this morning. A congregation, we are individuals in community. We carry our signs: atheist, humanist, Christian, Hindu, pagan, Muslim, changing signs as we go, in dialogue with one another.

The UUA is an association of congregations. We are based on congregational polity. I think that the Peacemaking Statement of Conscience should say that for UU's the decider is the congregation. That's the goal post.

Here we come to know peace. If we do not have an experience of peace, if we do not know what peace is, how will we be able to be part of peacemaking in the lives of others? The Dalai Lama writes, "Although attempting to bring about world peace through the internal transformation of individuals is difficult, it is the only way."

On our spiritual journey to heaven, we have come across several sign posts. The UUA's Peacemaking Statement of Conscience needs to address these decision points:

- US decides versus UN decides;
- Governmental agency versus ethical voice;
- Individual decides versus congregation decides.

In interaction in congregations peace can unfold. We are at peace, and make our world peaceful by being intentional about it. Please join us in our deliberations.

**Response by Howard Tolley to Frank Carpenter’s Sermon
“Building A Heritage of Peace, Love, and Justice”
and the November 2008 Commission on Social Witness Draft Statement of
Conscience**

Since early 2007 Frank and I have interacted in a quasi-academic, quasi-activist initiative to determine whether our denomination should renounce all violence and war – part of a four year process leading to General Assembly approval of a Peacemaking Statement of Conscience. My acute disappointment at the just released UUA Commission on Social Witness draft Statement of Conscience turned into outrage after attending St. Johns First Friday Flicks this month.

Along with four other members I saw an extraordinary anti-war film selected by Karen Miller. “Taxi to the Dark Side” clearly documents how our President, his Vice President and Secretary of Defense are all guilty of war crimes a la Nuremberg. They initiated a war of aggression against Iraq and authorized coercive interrogation that resulted in the deaths and torture of POWs in US custody at Bagram air base in Afghanistan, Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, Guantanamo Bay Cuba and unnamed secret sites.

In 2006 they persuaded Congress to provide retroactive immunity to all who, based on authorization granted by official legal memoranda, had committed what would otherwise have been violations of the U.S. War Crimes Act and the Convention Against Torture. Despite investigations launched by Congress, the President elect has indicated that he does not want a “witch hunt.” Our incoming Commander-in-Chief has also promised to send more US troops to fight the “good war” – the deadly conflict in Afghanistan where for centuries foreign occupiers have failed.

At this point of moral challenge, the CSW has drafted an SOC that I believe betrays the UU fifth principle on the right to conscience and democratic process and retreats from strong anti-war UUA statements on conscientious objection and peacemaking adopted in 1967 and 1979. Unwilling to forthrightly acknowledge its support for just war, the CSW calls instead for “Just Peacemaking” -- a euphemism for the use of violence to achieve justice. The draft SOC expressly supports personnel who make decisions to engage in military service without offering any similar endorsement to

pacifists who decide to be conscientious objectors – a clear retreat from the 1967 resolution. The draft statement recalls that in World War I the Unitarian Association threatened to withdraw support from pacifist congregations that refused to support the war but never mentions the UUA's 1979 support for war tax resisters and our denomination's opposition to military programs in high schools and colleges.

Our 5th UU principle affirms the right of conscience and the democratic process, but the draft SOC falls short on both counts. The process obligates the CSW to solicit input from Congregations in order to draft a statement representing their views. St. Johns has twice submitted lengthy recommendations on schedule, I served as one facilitator in a series of national teleconferences, and Frank has participated on a select Core team that offered recommendations. The CSW has disregarded our most cherished proposals that balance support for just war with affirmation of the right of conscience and that call for democratic procedures when UUs support military action.

As an individualist product of the 1960s who invariably questions authority, I offer a caveat to Frank's conclusion this morning when he stated: "I think that the Peacemaking Statement of conscience should say that for UU's the decider is the congregation." While I applaud Frank's call for Congregational independence of UUA dictates, we must similarly respect each individual member's right of conscience to dissent from a Congregational resolution that either condemns a particular war or supports a humanitarian intervention in a place like Darfur.

Unlike Catholics who have an infallible Pope to tell them which wars are just, individual UUs exercising a right of conscience affirmed by our 5th principle may not accept as final the conclusions of their congregations or even their most revered ministers about when to fight evil and when to oppose a military crusade.

I am so disenchanted with the undemocratic CSW and the SOC's failure to honor the right to conscience that Frank has some persuading to do before I can support adoption of an SOC. Rather than retreat from the anti-war statements of forty years ago, I would prefer that the UUA say nothing at this time. On Sunday December 14 at 10 am Frank and I will conduct a forum to discuss how St. Johns' should respond to the SOC. I hope that forum draws a larger turnout than this month's First Friday Flicks.

This angry peacemaker found it difficult to respond today with nonviolent communication. I apologize if my response has sounded like an angry tirade since I should be modeling the nonviolent communication endorsed by our Congregation's peacemaking resolution. My spirits will be lifted this week if the Board approves adding the word "peace" in 12 different languages to the St. John's sign – a proposal approved by all 21 of those who cast ballots in the recent Congregational Poll on the Pole.

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