



Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace

The Power and Promise of Peace

LENTEN FAST – WEEK THREE

FASTING FROM THE HIDDEN VIOLENCE OF MILITARISM

Definition

Militarism is the result of a process whereby military values, ideology, and patterns of behavior achieve a dominating influence over the political, social, economic and foreign affairs of the state. In time, unchecked militarism requires unlimited and seemingly inescapable sacrifices from individuals, nations and the world community.

Background

Unlike racism or sexism, which can be clearly verified by the victims themselves and the societies they inhabit, militarism is a stealthy process. We know homelessness and hunger rob people of dignity and life, but many of us are hard pressed to name the ways militarism brings similar deprivation. Complex and safely endorsed in the name of national security, militarism is embedded in and conveyed through the major institutions of societies. Submerged in patriotic appeals and national pride, militarism remains elusive.

Militarism is not limited to any one particular type of political economy e.g., monarchy, oligarchy, theocracy, democratic capitalism, socialism, or dictatorship. Nor is it the legacy of any particular party. In the United States, militarism has grown under Democratic and Republican administrations alike; it has enjoyed bi-partisan support for decades.

The Response of the Churches to War and Militarism

With the exception of the historic peace churches, most Christian churches have—until recently--been largely silent or willing instruments of states engaged in war. Just war criteria viewed as central and instructional for mainline churches whose countries prepared for war, have rarely, until the current war in Iraq, been invoked to establish the churches' resistance to their nations' foreign and military policies. It was not, moreover, until the early twentieth century that governments began to acknowledge the

right of individuals to refuse to serve in the armed forces on the basis of their faith and to protect these persons through law.

Mindful of the devastation caused by WWII and the dangers of the escalating arms race during the "Cold War," the World Council of Churches responded. During the past forty years it convened a number of conferences and issued statements of increasing urgency on militarism, the threat of nuclear weapons, the need for disarmament, Salt II, and the cost of the arms race to societies. During the 1990s, the WCC conducted seminars and conferences focusing on violence and nonviolence and, in 2000, launched the ten-year program "Decade to Overcome Violence" (DOV) which runs concurrently with the United Nations Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World (2001-2010).

Since 1975, statements of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA addressed many of the same concerns cited above. Reflecting the positions of American member churches, the NCCCUSA also passed resolutions on registration for selective service (draft), chemical weapons, and the nuclear weapons freeze. Meanwhile, the churches were clear. Lutherans called for "a rethinking of the meaning of national security and multinational arms control" while the United Church of Christ observed "billions are being spent for arms, while people's basic needs such as food, housing, health care and education are under-funded." (12th General Synod of the UCC, 1979). Meeting in their General Assembly in 1980, the United Presbyterian Church in the USA presented a stark choice: "We are faced with the decision either to serve the Rule of God, or to side with the powers of death through our complacency and silence."

The Effects of Militarism on Societies and Individuals

Although seldom immediately visible, the cumulative effects of militarism are enormous and long lasting. Some of these results are as follows:

- ***The misuse of resources and talents:*** The bill for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq along with the war on terrorism will come to over 300 billion dollars and increase the national debt for years to come, reducing and eliminating funds for domestic services and programs as well as non-military foreign aid.
- ***The diminished collective security of people in the name of national security.***
- ***An increasingly armed and anxious world more fearful and more dependent than ever on military solutions to problems generated, in part, by militarism itself.***
- ***Psychological dependency on imminent and potential enemies:*** as enemies both rationalize the process of militarism and justify its proponents' addictions.'
- ***The undergirding of racism, anti-Semitism, and ethnic and religious fanaticism and hatred:*** As people build arsenals to defend themselves against dangerous enemies, their suspicions of those who differ from them deepen. Old stereotypes continue while new projections create new sources of enmity and fear.
- ***The erosion of civil liberties:*** as fearful publics cede more powers to the state to hunt, charge, prosecute and imprison those it deems dangerous (e.g., U.S. "Patriot Acts").

- ***The intensification of the modern cultural fascination with technology and expertise that achieve goals quickly and efficiently unencumbered by fundamental questions of good and evil and indifferent to the moral dimensions of any given act, strategy, or use of weapon.***
- ***The global arms trade:*** The research, design, sale and distribution of weapons without or without rationales for their need—have become legitimate functions of governments and a very profitable (citizen subsidized) industry for corporations.
- ***The triumph of doublespeak.*** When people become convinced that they must destroy in order to save, wreak havoc in order to free, terrorize in order to protect, and fight regional if not world wars in the name of ethnic, ideological or religious superiority and peace, it is evident how language itself can be co-opted in the service of militarism (whether by states or by terrorists).

In time, members of militarized societies lose their capacity to recognize and to tell the truth. They can no longer imagine alternatives to violence. They exist, but without the sense of the precious nature of the earth itself—its fragility and beauty, its power to sustain all of life. Alienation overcomes trust and a sense of connectedness. Faith falters or becomes fearfully rigid. Enemies increase. The vision of God's shalom is supplanted by armed defiance and assurances of military invincibility. God weeps but the people can no longer respond. Compassion—like truth—is one of the early casualties of war, the fruit of militarized societies. *(Note: Part of this reflection on militarism is taken from "Waging Peace on Behalf of Hungry People" (ELCA resource))*

The Church Responds: Personal Ways of Resisting Militarism

Fast

Identify the films, music, radio and TV programs, books, magazines, political and religious figures and groups that rationalize, exploit, glorify and profit from militaristic values. Identify the ways you may be supporting these militarizing elements and limit your exposure to them; find ways to reduce their influence in your life, build relationships with those who differ from you, become an informed advocate of alternatives.

Study the texts for the Fourth Sunday in Lent from the Revised Common Lectionary

First Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Second Reading: Rom 5:1-11

Gospel: John 9: 1-41

Pray

O Holy God, help us to discern your will for us and give us the courage to serve accordingly. We know that obedience to the way of Jesus can be lonely and costly. Be present with us in our journey as we seek to bless our enemies and to love our neighbors as ourselves. All this we ask in the name of the One Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Amen

Educate Yourself and Others on the Hidden Costs of War and Militarism

1. For a quick summary of how your personal federal taxes were allocated and the ways the average household income in any every state is allocated. go to www.nationalpriorities.org.
2. For a visual depiction of the problems facing humanity that could be solved using just 30% of the world's annual military expenditures, see www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/theme_a/mod02/www.worldgame.org/wwwproject/index.shtml.
3. For a current list of the all the casualties in the Iraq War (US, coalition forces, and Iraqis), log on to www.bodycount.org.

Create and Support Alternatives

1. For stories of nonviolence check out these two websites: "Resources Advancing Initiatives for Nonviolence" (www.rainonline.org) and "The WCC Decade to Overcome Violence Program" (www.overcomingviolence.org).
2. To obtain training in nonviolence, consult your denominational peace fellowships or go to Fellowship of Reconciliation's website (www.forusa.org).
3. Become familiar with the Center for Conscience and War (NISBCO), which provides counseling and legal options for persons whose faith or ethics result in their refusal to serve as combatants in the armed services. (www.nisbco.org, email: nisbco@nisbco.org).
4. Envision and support a world in which international peace teams would be available to nations in which civil strife is mounting or relations with other nations are increasingly strained. Members of these teams would be multi-lingual, attentive listeners, committed and skilled practitioners of nonviolence and advocates of human rights, who are knowledgeable with respect to international laws, Geneva Convention and covenants that protect these rights. (www.globalpeaceservice.org).
5. For an example of a nonviolent team in action in Sri Lanka, go to www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org.
6. Fashion and sustain communities committed to nonviolence in all aspects of life. Join the ecumenical network Every Church a Peace Church (www.ecapc.org).



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