

Biblical Faith and Walking Down Paths of Peace

Mark Vander Vennen

*Talk given at “Rediscovering Calvin: Resources for Renewal Today” Conference, June 20, 2009
Emmanuel College, University of Toronto*

“Peace is not a goal to be achieved but a way of life to be lived.”

Desmond Tutu, Foreword to *Hope in Troubled Times: A New Vision for Confronting Global Crises* by Bob Goudzwaard, Mark Vander Vennen, and David Van Heemst.¹

If we seek a new, viable vision of common security, where do we begin, and what might the work of John Calvin contribute? I propose that we begin by exploring what is happening now and then try to drill our way down towards deeper foundations, trusting that paths of discovery will open up.

We could start with the conflicts in Afghanistan or Iraq, or Darfur, North Korea, Palestine or elsewhere. But I propose that we end rather than begin there. I suggest that a more systemic view is needed.

Let us begin instead by grappling with the difficult observation that the 20th century was the most violent century on record, and by far. More people died as a result of war in the 20th century than in any previous one. The encroachment of war and violence into human life was unprecedented in both breadth and depth. For example, around 1900 about 5% of those killed in war were civilians. By 1990, 90% of those killed in war were civilians.² The 20th century was the first one to hear the term “world war”, and it was precisely in the 20th century that humankind developed and deployed weapons capable of destroying the earth many times over. To support that development, seemingly permanent, debilitating structural imbalances entered industrialized societies and their economies. World War 2 consumed more firepower than all previous wars in human history *combined*. In turn, the Vietnam War consumed more firepower than all earlier wars combined, including World War 2. Later, the monthly

average of firepower used in the first Gulf War, the so-called Desert Storm, was significantly higher than the monthly average used in Vietnam. To correct a common misperception, only 7% of the munitions dropped in Desert Storm, the so-called Virtual or Anti-Septic War, were precision-guided bombs.

What are we to make of these troubling, startling developments? The question is important, because the trends show no signs of abating in the 21st century. I propose to examine one area that surfaces in this sketch—an area that seems to be left out of current policy debates at all stages, whether before, during or after a given conflict. That is the role of technological development in driving military and political practice, and the embeddedness of that military technological development in the economic prosperity of the West. I shall illustrate by briefly describing two new weapons systems and global arms trade.

Bio-Electromagnetic Weapons

An enormous amount of military research and development in the last several years has gone into what are called “bio-electromagnetic” or “directed energy” weapons. These weapons essentially use microwaves to alter the neurological patterns of people. Already in 1998, in an article entitled “The Mind Has No Firewall”, U.S. Lieutenant Colonel Timothy Thomas, recognizing that such weapons were already under development in both the U.S. and Russia, implied that the mind is the next battlefield.³ The false thinking is that temporarily altering the mind—or using electromagnetic waves to cause temporary intense pain, such as on the skin—is a more humane form of combat. There are reports that prototype systems are currently being used in Iraq.⁴ These reports are not confirmed by the Pentagon, but they are confirmed by some U.S. soldiers who are operating the devices there. They were also confirmed to me privately by a retired senior official at the Pentagon. One soldier has said that occupied Iraq has become a “saturation environment” of electromagnetic radiation.⁵ Soldiers also report,

however, that the use of these devices is affecting US soldiers themselves, causing headaches, disorientation, loss of impulse control, spacing out, rage, and other symptoms.⁶ This is one of several new technological forms of “friendly fire”. The use of such weapons is against international law. But nowhere does the appropriateness of such weapons enter the public debate, including by those who subscribe to the so-called just war theory. Why is that?

Depleted Uranium

Depleted uranium is a heavy metal used on American and other weaponry since the first Gulf War. Depleted uranium gives weaponry a harder surface and improved penetration. It is radioactive, and its radioactivity has a half-life of 4.5 billion years. 325 tons of depleted uranium were dropped in the first Gulf War. 800 to 1,000 tons were dropped in the initial Afghanistan bombing, and between 1,000 and 2,000 tons were dropped in the invasion of Iraq.⁷ There is controversy about the health effects of depleted uranium. But the scientific evidence is growing that the impacts can be devastating and can alter genetic structures. Of the 700,000 American soldiers deployed in the first Gulf War, 240,000 of them are now on permanent disability, many suffering from the mysterious “Gulf War Syndrome”, while half of all soldiers deployed there have reported serious illnesses.⁸ It is said that 378 American soldiers died in the Gulf War. But 11,000 veterans of that war have died since the war ended.⁹ These are soldiers who were young and in good health at the beginning of the war. There is an alarming rate of birth defects of children of Gulf War veterans. In a small US government study, 67% of children born of Gulf War vets had serious illnesses or birth defects; uranium was found in the fathers’ semen which then was transmitted to the mothers of their babies.¹⁰

There is some evidence that Saddam Hussein used some chemical weapons in that war, and that usage may play a role in the Gulf War Syndrome. Further, there is no firm evidence of a link between depleted uranium and the Gulf War Syndrome. But the scientific evidence is moving strongly in that

direction. It is noteworthy that parallel symptoms and birth defects are found in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iraq—the places where depleted uranium has been used. In each of these places, as with the American veterans, the birth defects now happening rival the birth defects that have been occurring in Chernobyl since its tragic radiation leak.

Where is the hue and cry over this shame?¹¹

Arming the Enemy

Consider further the macabre reality that, particularly for economic reasons, especially the U.S., Russia and the United Kingdom are aggressively engaged in an arms trade by which they sometimes arm their own enemies, or arm both sides of a conflict. Consider that:

- 1) The five members of the United Nations' Security Council (the United States, Russia, Great Britain, France and China) are the five largest exporters of weapons around the world, accounting for 77% of the world's arms exports.¹²
- 2) Combined, the United States, Russia, China, and European countries account for 94% of all global arms transactions, which are often executed for reasons more economic than strategic. In the United States weapons manufacturing is the most heavily subsidized industry after agriculture. Global arms trade sales agreements increased by 41% from the period 2001-2003 to 2004-2007, even as worldwide deliveries dropped slightly.¹³
- 3) Two of the current top arms clients for the United States are India and Pakistan—fantastic post-911 growth markets that require rough parity in terms of new arms sales, so that the strategic “balance” between India and Pakistan is not disrupted.
- 4) From 1998 to 2001, the United States, Great Britain and France earned more income from arms sales to developing countries than they gave in aid.¹⁴

The theme I want to draw out here is that these developments—new weapons research and development, and global arms trade—have become deeply embedded in our globalized economies. Prior to World War 2, one could still distinguish between a war-time and a peacetime economy. The war-time economy was a “vertical” segment of the economy. No longer is that the case. Weapons development is now an indispensable, structural component of the economic and industrial growth of the West, for reasons as much economic as strategic. The U.S. spends more on military spending than the next 45 highest spending countries in the world *combined*.¹⁵ 43% of the U.S. federal fiscal budget is spent on military matters, and about half of its accumulated debt of \$8.6 trillion is due to past military spending.¹⁶ In today’s economies vast numbers of corporations play a direct or indirect role in weapons production—and at fantastic profit margins.

Clearly, these unprecedented developments have not made the world a safer place. The world currently spends close to \$1.5 trillion annually on weapons, up from \$1 trillion in 2004.¹⁷ It simply cannot be said that insecurity today is due to a lack of military capacity. Perhaps then never before has the need for alternatives been more pressing, even more possible and realistic, than it is today.

An Initial Assessment

With that in mind, let us now attempt our first drill down. What do we notice here? For me and for my co-authors, we detect two realities that are the flip sides of the same coin, or two ways of describing the same reality. The head of the coin is increasing *compulsion* at the heart of Western societies. Strikingly, these and parallel developments appear to be impervious to attempts to control or redirect them. For example, when the Iron Curtain fell, commentators eagerly awaited the long overdue “peace dividend”: at last the West could repair the structural imbalances caused by the Cold War and redirect financial resources away from military requirements and towards care for the poor and the earth. That redirection did not happen, despite the absence of a military threat, nor is it happening today, when

reallocating less than 10% of all global military expenditures would meet the entire UN Millennium Development Goals—substantially reducing global poverty and thereby removing many seeds of war.¹⁸ What is the constraint that seems to prevent all governments, whether “left” or “right”, from implementing the desperately needed peace dividend?

Today, the use of bio-electromagnetic weapons and depleted uranium is against international law, various arms control agreements and treaties, and in some cases U.S. military law. Yet these technological developments are given complete room to be implemented and used, with almost no questions asked. Policy and norms of justice, respect for the dignity of people and environmental integrity do not inhibit them. One’s political orientation appears to be altogether irrelevant. Consider William Swanson, Chief Executive of Raytheon (the 5th largest military contractor in the United States and the primary contractor for electromagnetic weapon development). When asked if he was concerned about the impact of a new Democratic administration on Raytheon, he said: “We've been in business going on our 86th year, we've plotted out how we fared in both Democratic and Republican administrations, and actually we fare better on the Democratic side.”¹⁹

Indeed, it is largely military technological development itself that dictates the next steps in military policy.

For example, listen to one of the rationales given by U.S. Democratic Representative John Murtha in 2005 when he made an appeal to withdraw troops from Iraq: unless troop withdrawal happens, he warned, the skyrocketing costs of care for military personnel and injured veterans will drain money away from the modernization of US weaponry.²⁰ Anxious companies had to be reassured that troop-related costs in Iraq would not serve to reduce weapons development and manufacturing contracts. There is now a competition between care of soldiers and military technological development, and technology is winning.

Clearly, the tail side of compulsion then is *dissociation* and *marginalization*. Attempts to control these developments appear to be immaterial, irrelevant. Accompanying rising compulsion, inflexibility, or domination is the ineffectiveness or impotence of approaches used to try to address them. In this area the West suffers, at its centre, from compartmentalization, from a lack of integration. Never has society developed more power (even the power to destroy the world many times over); yet in proportion to its compulsive fixation on absolute security, perhaps never has society experienced such powerlessness in relation to what it has created. Or, perhaps better said, never have the stakes of powerlessness been so high.

Where does our apparent ineffectiveness in controlling means of destruction come from? The only human process that I and my co-authors believe can adequately explain this social development is the process of idolatry, a process we explore in our book *Hope in Troubled Times*. In the face of a grave, life-endangering threat, a goal, such as achieving material prosperity or guaranteed security, becomes uncommonly important. Myths (in non-Western societies) or ideologies (in Western societies) then develop around the goal. They serve as the value framework, the meta-narrative which justifies relinquishing human agency to whatever means are chosen to achieve the goal. This is the process of idolatry, which is the incarnational aspect of mythical or ideological energies. Idols—in this case, military-technological development—are the concrete social means by which the adherents of the myth or ideology seek to realize the objective—in this case, guaranteed security. Life then narrows down to finding the most advantageous interaction with the idol, leading to the point where eventually the idol is given complete sway in the legal, economic, political and social realms of society, in order for it to actually deliver the prized objective. The idol then operates with impunity, but it also betrays its makers with an unforgiving vengeance.

In the book we trace the history of the guaranteed security ideology from this perspective, beginning with the Renaissance, through the French Revolution, the development of “total war”, the Cold War, and the war in Iraq. Ideologies are earth-scorching, hurricane-like energies that stop at nothing, overturning the requirements of justice, international law, human rights, and the integrity of the environment until they achieve their ends. And we detect under the influence of the guaranteed security ideology an increasing loss of flexibility in Western society’s ability to confront human conflict, an extreme narrowing down of options over time until now the military option is largely embraced as the only real option.

Our Way of Viewing Peace and Conflict

In my view there is a second, closely related reason for our almost complete marginalization or dissociation from the dynamics of military developments and conflicts, one which we also explore in the book. It is what I call *our way of viewing war and peace*.

The church and the public policy discourse share the same interpretive framework for understanding the issues of war and peace. That framework is the just war/pacifist polarization. We all use the same lens. When a conflict happens to catch our attention, we approach it by asking the question of permission: can we and our governments “morally” permit ourselves to take up arms in this conflict, or not? Once we have answered this question, then for all intents and purposes we behave as if we have exhausted the issues of war and peace.

This deserves a lengthy treatment which I cannot provide here. But permit me a few comments.

First, let me be very clear that I am referring specifically to the just war/pacifist polarization as *a way of seeing* war and peace, as a *hermeneutic*, as an *interpretive framework* which has the effect on its adherents of appearing to be exhaustive. I am not denigrating just war per se: some good international law is rooted in just war theory, for example. I am not speaking about the legitimacy of self-protection,

which both just war theorists and most pacifists accept. Nor am I denigrating nonviolence, which in my view is essential. I am speaking strictly about our *way of viewing* war and peace.

The just war/pacifism polarity is our hermeneutic, the lens by which we exegete contemporary events, historical events and all of the material in the Bible related to war and peace. Yet the just war/pacifist polarization does not address or understand, nor was it designed to understand, the fundamental embeddedness of peace and conflict in social, economic, cultural and historical realities. It does not grasp the developmental phases of conflict, which are quite predictable, or the types of interventions that are appropriate at each developmental stage. Further, the just war theory itself, by its own definitions, does not apply today. Not surprisingly, then, in the contemporary context it itself has been conscripted by the ideology of guaranteed security. It has undergone any number of ideological contortions which can be historically traced. That is why some commentators used the just war theory to argue vehemently that the Geneva Conventions, originally based on just war principles, no longer apply in the case of Guantanamo Bay, just as, based on the same just war theory, there were equally passionate arguments for and against the invasion of Iraq and the nuclear arms race during the Cold War. The just war theory is an extraordinarily feeble or weak policy instrument and intellectual construct. It is unable to mount an adequate defense against the undermining of its most basic principles. But that is no wonder: it came to Augustine via Cicero and Graeco-Roman legal theory, and then to Aquinas, Calvin and many others. It is not a Scriptural construct—on the contrary, it has its origins in *autarcheia*, the Greek doctrine of the self-sufficiency of states, which in turn influenced the Treaty of Westphalia and the foundation of the modern nation-state. I challenge anyone to show me the rootedness of the just war theory in Scripture.

Yet none of this seems to stop Christian commentators from generating interminable debates trying to apply the just war/pacifist polarization to specific contemporary conflicts. That has left us all

extraordinarily vulnerable to the ideology of guaranteed security and its process of idolatry.

Methodologically, each time our first approach to a conflict is to ask whether we can take up arms or not, we reactivate our marginalization from most of the contemporary dynamics of peace and conflict, including the technological and economic drivers of military policy described earlier. We tacitly contribute to the patterns of compulsion and segregation spun by the ideology.

Indeed, the just war view is itself dissociative. It separates out or compartmentalizes peace and conflict. Like the ideology itself, it is therefore anti-anthropological. It does not have a view of the human propensity towards violence. The British philosopher John Gray observed: “Nothing is more human than the readiness to kill and die in order to secure a meaning in life.”²¹ In a moment of candour rare among commentators, *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen, reflecting on his support of the Iraq invasion, wrote, “In a post-Sept. 11 world, I thought that the prudent use of violence would be therapeutic.”²² Martin Luther King Jr., in the context of violence, wrote, “Jesus puts us on the path to personhood.”

What do these statements mean? Anthropologically, the just war theory has no answer. It has nothing to offer to here. That is not its fault: one cannot blame it for not addressing what it was not designed to address. But it becomes extraordinarily problematic, and even unconscionable, when we privilege it by using it as our hermeneutic for understanding human conflict.

A New Anthropology

I therefore suggest that we need a new way of viewing. And for that, we need an adequate anthropology. We need an understanding of human nature which grapples deeply with the human propensity towards violence and the meaning that humans attach to it, which seeks integration rather than compartmentalization, and which grasps Scripture. Perhaps here we have reached a foundation upon which a new vision of common security can be framed.

How do we go about locating such an anthropology? Let me begin with this quote: “Even before presenting ‘a theory of God’, a *theology*, the Gospels present ‘a theory of man’, an *anthropology*.”

I am not sure which is first or second—theology or anthropology—nor do I think the sequence is terribly important, and I would augment it with a statement from John Stek, my former Old Testament Professor at Calvin Seminary, that “the Bible is about God, humanity and the earth, and not any of these in isolation.” The point is that I think this statement provides a first clue towards locating an integrated anthropology, and I celebrate the fact that it was made by Simone Weil.²³

Let me then add this quote: “Our vocation is not simply to *be*, but to work together with God in the creation of our own life, our own identity, our own destiny....to work out our identity in God.”

Here I find a profound covenantal—and Calvinian—understanding of the relationship between God and humanity, covenantal in the sense not of “baptism” but of precisely positioning the relationship between God and humanity according to the ancient near Eastern legal covenantal structures presented in the narratives of the Bible. This is not the erasure of self that seems to happen in some contemporary Christian circles. Rather, in my view, this is a celebration of the human calling, in relation to God, to actively walk down paths of healing, restoration and peace. The fact that the statement was made by Thomas Merton,²⁴ no less a Catholic than Simone Weil, does not in my view detract from its Calvinian truth but rather confirms it.

To understand this relationship, we need to go back to origins, and to read Scripture again as if for the first time, using John Calvin’s principle of “letting Scripture interpret Scripture”.

Primeval Memory

Merton and Calvin both allude to a precise positioning of the relationship between God and humanity. Consider an illustration of this relationship in the story of Noah and the Flood.

There is a strange text in Genesis 6 which is given as the backdrop or reason for the Flood:

“When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, ‘men who had made a name for themselves.’”

Reformed Old Testament exegete Meredith Kline argues persuasively that “sons of God” should be translated “sons of the gods”, which of course is a designation of royalty in the ancient near East.²⁵ He then suggests that this text refers to polygamy, specifically to the forming of the first royal harems. Lamech, who boasts to his wives Adah and Zillah that he is avenged 77 times for wounding someone, ten times more than his ancestor Cain, the first murderer, is an example of a royal son of the gods with his harem. The Nephilim, who were giant militarists like Goliath—they reappear as the giant warriors who terrified the spies approaching Canaan—were the offspring of these unions. They were “the heroes of old, men who made a name for themselves”. They were the larger-than-life picture of the monstrous egos of the time.

In other words, the Flood was sent in response to the oppression of women and to the militarism of the time.

Now I shall make three structural linkages. First, it is striking that the stories and myths from every region of the world except southern Africa contain a Flood story. Structurally the stories are very similar. Every story takes place shortly after the creation of the world. In every story the world is quickly overcome by a gigantic amount of violence, so much so that the god or gods who made the world deeply regret having done so. And in every story the god or gods find one righteous figure who has not succumbed to the wickedness. In the ancient near east, the righteous one was usually a person.

In native North American flood stories, the righteous one is often an animal, such as a beaver or otter. The god or gods then send a destructive flood, while saving the righteous one, in order to make a fresh start.

It is as if in the primeval memory of humankind there is a recollection of a Flood, a cleansing of violence by the Creator soon after the creation of the world.

But there is a striking difference between the Biblical story and the others. As far as I can tell, the Noah story is the only one in which the righteous figure remains the same figure from the beginning to the end of the story. In all of the other stories, after the Flood the righteous one becomes immortal, becomes a god, a hero. It is as if our fallen imagination cannot sustain the idea that humankind can play a role similar to the one played by Noah in the survival of the earth against the overpowering forces of violence. Positioned in contrast to the other stories, the Noah story seems to say that, overcome with fear and insecurity, we do not need to invent and delegate our responsibility to heroic images of ourselves, heroes who carry out more exploits against the overpowering, terrorizing violence that inhabits our hearts and roams the earth. The living God has already accomplished the victory. God has defeated the giants, the Nephilim. Through the story God is inviting us to be fully human, to occupy our rightful place. We do not need to be oversized Goliaths or undersized victims. Instead, we are invited to be the right size, to be human, to walk with just the right-sized steps down paths of peace instead of violence and oppression.

This story is paradigmatic of the relationship between God and humanity.

The second linkage is tied to the first. Myths and stories from all around the world describe the tense drama of filling the newly formed earth with enough people to ensure the survival of the human race. This too seems to reflect a primeval human memory, recalling a time when events seemed to occur on an epic, monumental scale. Beginning with Genesis 2, the unfolding of “generations” or “toledoths”

in Genesis is the Biblical account of this early filling of the earth. “Toledoth” is a Hebrew word meaning “generation”, and the word “genesis” is the Septuagint translation of “toledoth”. The book of Genesis is structured as a series of ten “toledoths”.

It is striking that 20th and 21st century technology, especially nuclear military technology, has its own “toledoth” structure. We speak of “generations” of weapons. This reflects a false filling of the earth, a counter-story, a parasitical lineage, a monumental aggrandizement of violence reminiscent of the kingly militarists and their heroic offspring, the Nephilim. The Biblical language surrounding the Hiroshima bomb is astounding, including references to “little boy”—a new incarnation—and “Trinity”—captured in Thomas Merton’s astonishing poem “The Original Child Bomb”.²⁶ An early nuclear submarine was called *Corpus Christi*, the body of Christ. This is linked to what we might call Nietzsche’s “will to create”, which we refer to in our book. Ideology takes root in the death of God, in the elimination of creation that flows from the death of God, and in the need to fill the subsequent negative space with a self-made creation that assumes the form of what has been vacated. In the words of John Gray, “Like repressed sexual desire, faith returns, often in grotesque forms, to govern the lives of those who deny it.”²⁷

Thirdly, the Noah story is also structurally linked, through Lamech, to the story of Cain and his original founding murder. This brings to mind the seminal work of René Girard on violence, which in my view no anthropology can ignore. Through an extensive exploration of myths across cultures, Girard has come to see violence as inter-subjectivity, driven by imitative desire, gone horribly wrong, which then focuses on creating a scapegoat as a way of containing the uncontrollable contagion of violence. A founding murder myth lies at the origins of culture. To his amazement, he found in the Scriptures, from beginning to end, and contrary to all myths, a definitive exposure and overcoming of the scapegoat mechanism, culminating in Christ. In my view, Girard is the Freud of violence studies,

and no less significant a thinker than Freud. For Freud, everything emanates from the incest taboo; for Girard, everything emanates from the founding murder. Both take as their point of departure the same myth: the Oedipus story.²⁸

Ideologies, which are modern-day successors to myths, are searing scapegoating energies which require for their existence the profound dehumanization of an obstacle, an enemy.

An Integrated Emphasis

Against these origins, the Scriptures unfold, and the Scriptural material on peace and conflict is virtually inexhaustible. Jacob's wrestle with God shattered his strategy of military preparedness. The morning after the encounter, Jacob reversed his strategy and presented the fledgling nation of Israel to Esau, whom he knew "would live by the sword", in complete military vulnerability. From that point forward, the Bible contains a very powerful, *integrated* twin emphasis: where God's people practiced an economy of care for all that was marginalized—the poor, the widow, the orphan, the land itself—and *at the same time* accepted a level of vulnerability by refusing to adopt the military conventions of the day, there God would bring prosperity and peace. In Leviticus 26, immediately after the Jubilee legislation (Leviticus 25), and after a book of entirely non-military laws, God declares that "if you follow my decrees there will be peace in the land and rest from your enemies". In other words, God makes an inseparable link between obedience to non-military laws (so that, for example, "there should be no poor among you" (Dt. 15:4)] and military security.

To make this very concrete for God's people, God prohibited them from acquiring and using the most advanced weapon of the day: the horse and chariot.

The horse and chariot gave an army a huge military advantage, and it was used by the thousands against Israel. From a human standpoint, militarily it would have been absurd not to have them, no less absurd than David attacking the military machine Goliath unarmored, with a slingshot. There were no

chariots in Israel until David, who kept 100 of them (2 Samuel 8:4)—rejecting the dictum God gave to Joshua in Joshua 11:1-9 to burn chariots and hamstring horses. Solomon then acquired thousands of them and traded them with the surrounding nations (1 Kings 10:26-29). Micah 1:8-16 climaxes with verse 13, where God (based on the Hebrew text) calls Israel’s militarization by means of the horse and chariot “the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion”. The Hebrew word for “beginning” here means “chief”, “cardinal”, “paramount”, “pre-eminent”, “of the highest rank”. In other words, Israel’s acquisition of the horse and chariot was the “paramount” sin of God’s people. The prophets, particularly Isaiah and Micah, rail against Israel’s horses and chariots and list them with Solomon’s other idolatries (Is. 2:6-8, the same list as is found in Deut. 17:16-17; see also Micah 5:10-14). “There is no end to their horses and chariots!” (Is. 2:7). Israel was not to go back to Egypt to acquire horses and chariots (Dt. 17:16-17; Is. 31:1-3); God’s curtain of water at the Red Sea was to close off that way of life altogether for Israel (Is. 43:16-18). The only use of a horse in the ancient near East was to pull a chariot; it was not a beast of burden, such as a donkey or an ox.

The horse and chariot is the biblical symbol of military power (Ps. 20:8). It is Yahweh’s horses and chariots that are victorious, not any of the nations’, including Israel’s (see the story of Elisha in 2 Kings 6:15-17).

All of the prophets appeal to God’s people on the basis of this twin, integrated emphasis—this is their central message.

In the New Testament, Jesus vindicates this emphasis on an economy of care and the refusal to adopt the military conventions of the day. His vindication is explicit—indeed, it is at the center, the heart of his mission on earth. In his well-known inaugural sermon, Jesus takes upon himself the Jubilee mission of the Scriptures (Lk. 4:18-19):

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me
because he has anointed me to

preach Good News to the poor.
 He has sent me to proclaim freedom
 for the prisoners and
 recovery of sight for the blind,
 to release the oppressed,
 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor [the year of Jubilee].

Then, in the Triumphal entry, marking the beginning of his Passion, Jesus uses the ancient Near Eastern form of a victorious king returning home to his capital city from battle. The people of the city come outside of the city walls to greet the king and usher him in on his impressive horse and chariot. The Greek word for this ushering in of the returning king is the same word used in Thessalonians (1 Thess. 4:17) when it says that we will “meet Jesus in the air”—we usher him back down to the earth, not up to heaven. But contrary to every expectation, Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey instead of a horse and chariot (Zech. 9:9-10; Lk. 19:41-44). The linkage is explicit in the Old Testament prophecy: “See, your king comes to you...gentle and riding on a donkey. I will take away the war-horses from Ephraim and the chariots from Jerusalem (Zech. 9:9-10)!”.

The military impetus of the Triumphal Entry is not somehow an interesting element in the story. *It is* the story. It is the vindication of the entire Old Testament material about shalom, and it indicates the fundamental nature of Christ's kingship. One cannot underestimate either the drama of the event or its clarity to the people of the time. It would have been something like meeting a squadron of F16s in a hot air balloon. This was how this king would approach the palpable militarist oppression of the Jews by the Roman empire. Yet in my 53 years of attending Palm Sunday services in Reformed churches, not once have I heard a sermon which has even in passing mentioned its military context: a troubling example of marginalization. I hope that my experience is an exception. But I fear that we have missed altogether the meaning of the beginning of Christ's Passion.

Now we come to Romans 13. What is the nature of the “sword” of Romans 13, and does it have any limits? If so, how do we find those limits? I would suggest we find them by using the Calvinian

principle of letting Scripture interpret Scripture. In contrast, however, typically Reformed just war scholars are guilty of the most extreme “Biblicism” with Romans 13, whereby a text is lifted out of context and simply applied to today’s world. As an example, Reformed philosopher Arthur Holmes states that two Biblical passages apply to the issue of war and peace: the sixth commandment, which prohibits murder, and Romans 13.²⁹ It is therefore shocking what he dismisses, even as he later makes reference to Old Testament stories. He proceeds to dismiss the relevance of the sixth commandment. Then, reflecting on Romans 13, despite his and others’ best intentions, the effect of the approach is to inadvertently participate in what I sometimes label the Marcion heresy in reverse. Marcion was the early church theologian who argued that the God of the Old Testament was the God of wrath and vengeance, while the God of the New Testament is the God of love. Too often, however, for Reformed scholars the God of Romans 13 and later is in effect a God of wrath and vengeance (led by “the state”), while the loving God of the Old Testament was directly involved in the rescue of Israel.

Do we really think that Jesus now wants the state, his “servants” (Romans 13:4), to adopt a different approach, one antithetical to the whole thrust of the Scriptures, and to his own life and mission? Does the introduction of “those who are in authority” (Romans 13:1) bring in a whole new reality? Not in the least. Those in authority after Christ are no more given different rules than the kings of Israel were given when they were installed. The people of Israel begged for a king for military reasons (“we want a king who will lead us in battle like all the other nations!”). God “downloaded” certain of his activity to the kings, just as he does to the “state” after Christ. But the kings were explicitly required to undertake an *integrated* rule: they were to practice the same “ludicrous” peacebuilding, the same rejection of horses and chariots etc., and the same Jubilee justice, just as God had required of Israel prior to the kings. I believe that the same is true of the “state” of Romans 13.

Towards A New Vision of Common Security

These are mere beginning hints at Biblical elements that could help to inform a contemporary anthropology. But from the foregoing, we can surmise that a Biblical anthropology suggests the *integration* of carefully chosen vulnerability with care for others and the earth. It is opposed to compartmentalization, to the segregation of peace and conflict from their embeddedness in social, cultural, economic, historical and political realities. This is a reflection of becoming fully human: taking right-sized steps on this earth, not heroic, over-sized or under-sized steps, in relationship to the living God, who holds us and this world in his hands, and who picks us up when we stumble down paths of peace. I do not know how peacebuilding, overcoming violence, is otherwise possible.

What might this offer towards a new vision of common security in today's environment? Let us begin by considering the term "guaranteed security" itself. If security cannot be guaranteed—and the evidence is becoming overwhelming that it cannot—then that implies that peace is impossible without accepting levels of strategic vulnerability, carefully chosen and coordinated with a deliberate effort to meet real human and environmental needs. Undergirding this is the reality that embracing genuine mutuality, justice, mercy, compassion, truth, equity, an economy of care and environmental integrity is impossible without also embracing certain levels of vulnerability as an intrinsic, inescapable component of peace, even in the midst of threat.

At the beginning, I promised to end by addressing a specific conflict. On this foundation, consider three concrete possible ways of peacebuilding today, the third of which addresses the current situation in Afghanistan.

Integrated Public Justice Advocacy

As we saw earlier, new weapons research and development and military capacity expenditures, together with global arms trade, are now an indispensable, structural component of the economic and industrial growth of the West. That means that developing greater common security is inconceivable

without a corresponding drop, however small, large or temporary, in the material prosperity of the West, particularly the United States. Reducing dependence on lethal weapons of indiscriminate destruction—in order to finally generate a peace dividend—will slow down economic growth. There can be no sustainable peace without a conscious or deliberate relaxation of our obsession with a constantly increasing Gross Domestic Product. By the same token, making our economies sustainable is inconceivable without a simultaneous commitment to peacebuilding. Consequently, our advocacy for sustainable economies is dissociative and ineffective if it does not explicitly include advocacy for peace; by the same token, advocacy for peace, if it does not include advocacy for justice and sustainable economies, is compartmentalized and unintegrated. Integration of public justice advocacy efforts is essential.

Integrating “International Relations” with Peacebuilding Processes

Often two tracks are pursued in the quest for peace. They are “political realism,” embraced especially by governments and political commentators (and seldom questioned by the mainstream media) and “local peacebuilding activity”, typically undertaken by members of warring communities as well as by non-government organizations (NGOs) focused on peacebuilding. Too often the two tracks are not integrated, even if consultation between them is taking place. In fact, frequently they work at cross-purposes. Political realists usually put little faith in the impact of peacebuilding efforts on particular conflicts and sometimes actively oppose them. They view them as “namby-pamby” social work at best, and as undermining their strategic objectives at worst. For their part, peacebuilding actors can stereotype and dismiss government and political “realists” as interested only in the expansion of power and self-interest, and they can consider government agendas suspect by definition.

However, as the sophisticated work of John Paul Lederach has shown, where the efforts of government policy and local peacebuilding are integrated, there peace is built.³⁰ Using his extensive

experience in conflicts around the world, Lederach emphasizes the necessity of building platforms for conflict transformation at three levels of society, in coordinated fashion, and with approaches tailored to each level. These include: 1) the grassroots level at which people live and NGOs work; 2) the level of civil society leadership, including medical doctors, teachers, lawyers, and religious leaders; and 3) the level of government leaders, whether elected or appointed, and their policy advisors. Different interventions apply at each level and at each developmental stage of the conflict, building on what Mary Anderson has shown, namely that local capacities for peace exist in every conflict—especially among women—no matter how dire.³¹ Promising opportunities of this nature exist in every confrontation. Why then do governments, with their considerable power and resources, support militarist power-holders and military-technological solutions in their quest for peace instead of seizing upon and supporting these capacities? Where governments integrate their efforts with these impulses, there the prospects for peace become immensely brighter.

Afghanistan

These reflections are all too poignant in relation to the current conflict in Afghanistan. In the first nine months of 2008 there was a 40% increase in civilian deaths there.³² By 2007 there were two times more air strikes in Afghanistan than in Iraq. The U.S. military spends about \$100 million per day in Afghanistan, while the average amount of all international donor's aid there per day is \$7 million. This is an astounding ratio, but it is a precise reflection of the impact of the ideology of guaranteed security, namely to narrow down the wide range of possible responses to conflict to the military-technological option. It reflects compulsion or constraint in the midst of society, both Western and Afghani societies.

In terms of the aid itself, there is a significant shortfall in pledged aid; most countries, including the U.S., have delivered less than half of their committed aid. Not only that, but Oxfam has estimated

that 40% of aid flows immediately out of Afghanistan to corporate fees and profits. Meanwhile, 90% of all public expenditures in Afghanistan comes from aid.³³

Clearly, there is an urgent need to fundamentally reverse the ratio of military spending to peacebuilding and development spending in Afghanistan. With that support, opportunities can be sought—and they exist, as they have from the beginning of the conflict—to engage substantial elements of Afghani society in developing platforms for conflict transformation, involving multiple processes of negotiation and reconciliation at the levels of people-to-people, civil society, and political actors.

A Prophetic Voice

In Hannah's prayer in the Old Testament, Hannah prays (I Samuel 2:4), "*The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength.*"

Prophecy is not so much about future predictions but rather about speaking from the interior of events, from the inside of history. That is where she is speaking from. Do we have the faith, in today's ideologically constrained environment, where heroic giants are granted almost complete immunity and impunity, to see what Hannah sees, namely that the means of warfare have been broken, and that the ones who speak violence and war are in fact the ones who are stumbling? She has gotten her anthropology just right; she has understood perfectly the relationship between humanity and the living God.

Mark Vander Vennen, MA, M.Ed, R.S.W., is a marriage and family therapist and registered social worker. Currently he serves as the Executive Director of the Shalem Mental Health Network (www.shalemnetwork.org), an Ontario-wide mental health organization, where he works with both survivors and perpetrators of violence.

Mark has been actively engaged in issues of peace and conflict for 30 years. His essays have appeared in numerous periodicals and he is a frequent public speaker on issues of violence and reconciliation. Mark holds Masters degrees in philosophy (Duquesne University) and psychology (University of Toronto) and he wrote a Master's thesis on the impact of war on the second generation of a family system. He has also studied at the Free University of Amsterdam and at Calvin Seminary.

With Bob Goudzwaard and David Van Heemst, Mark recently co-authored *Hope in Troubled Times: A New Vision for Confronting Global Crises* (Baker, 2007), Foreword by Desmond Tutu. In 2009 the book was published in an updated Dutch-language edition in the Netherlands.

Mark can be reached at markvv@shalemnetwork.org.

ENDNOTES

¹ Bob Goudzwaard, Mark Vander Vennen, David Van Heemst, *Hope in Troubled Times: A New Vision for Confronting Global Crises*, Foreword by Desmond Tutu (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Publishing House, 2007), p. 10.

² UNICEF, Information: Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, “Patterns in Conflict: Civilians Are Now the Target,” p. 1, retrieved at <http://www.unicef.org/graca/patterns.htm>.

³ Timothy L. Thomas, “The Mind Has No Firewall”, *Parameters*, Spring 1998, pp. 84-92.

⁴ See, for example, Bryan Bender, “US Testing Nonlethal Weapons Arsenal For Use In Iraq: Program Fuses High Technology with Psychology”, August 5, 2005, *Boston Globe*; Steven Komarow, “Pentagon Deploys Array of Non-Lethal Weapons”, *USA Today*, July 24, 2005, retrieved at http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2005-07-24-nonlethal-weapons_x.htm; “Electromagnetic Weapons: Come Fry With Me”, *The Economist*, January 30, 2003; Lester Haines, “US fires up crowd-roasting microwave gun: 'Less than lethal' Silent Guardian unveiled”, January 25, 2007, *The Register*, retrieved at http://www.theregister.co.uk/2007/01/25/microwave_weapon; Peter Clarke, “Microwave Beam Weapon Reportedly To Be Deployed in Iraq”, *Eetimes Online*, Global News for the Creators of Technology, August 21, 2004, retrieved at <http://www.eetimes.com/news/latest/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=47900605>; “Star Wars in Iraq”, a documentary on the U.S. use of experimental weapons in Iraq, produced by Maurizio Torrealta and Sigfrido Rannuci for Italy's RAI TV; and William Thomas, “Microwaving Iraq with 'Pacifying' Rays”, January 26, 2005, retrieved at <http://www.envirosagainstar.org/know/read.php?itemid=2301>.

⁵ William Thomas, “Microwaving Iraq with 'Pacifying' Rays”, p. 1.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 2.

⁷ As noted in, among other sources, Leuren Moret, “Depleted Uranium: The Trojan Horse of Nuclear War”, *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues*, July 1, 2004, pp. 9, 14, 15. Some estimates are as high as 2,200 tons used in the Iraq invasion.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 10.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 10.

¹¹ On April 15, 2009, the Belgian government passed a law prohibiting government services and Belgian financial institutions from investing in firms that manufacture, use or possess armour and munitions that contain depleted uranium—the first country to pass such legislation. See the International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons (www.bandepleteduranium.org).

¹² As recorded in Richard F. Grimmett, “CRS Report for Congress; Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 2000-2007”. Calculated from p. CRS-21, Figure 1, “Worldwide Agreements Value 2004-2007”.

¹³ *Ibid*. Both figures are calculated from p. CRS-21, Figure 1, “Worldwide Agreements Value 2004-2007”.

¹⁴ As noted in a report entitled “The Arms Industry” by Control Arms, retrieved at http://www.controlarms.org/the_issues/arms_industry.htm, p. 1.

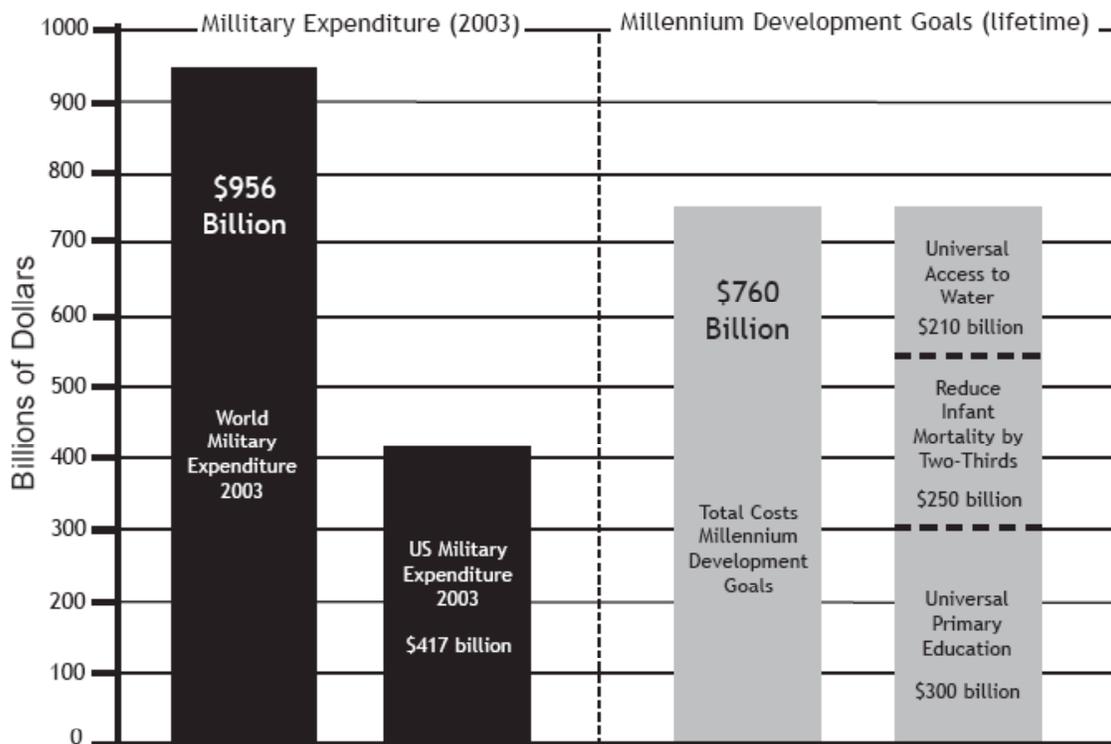
¹⁵ Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, “The FY 2009 Pentagon Spending Request—Global Military Spending”, Christopher Hellman, Travis Sharp, posted February 22, 2008, retrieved at http://www.armscontrolcenter.org/policy/securityspending/articles/fy09_dod_request_global.

¹⁶ The U.S. government spending estimate is made by the Friends Committee on National Legislation, and it includes interest payments on past military-specific debt (Friends Committee on National Legislation, “How Much of Your 2008 Income Taxes Pay for War?” posted March 26, 2009, retrieved at http://www.fcnl.org/issues/item.php?item_id=3553&issue_id=19). See also Friends Committee on National Legislation, *Washington Newsletter*, March, 2006, No. 705, p. 5.

¹⁷ The Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, *op cit*, puts global military spending in 2008 at \$1.47 trillion (U.S. dollars). The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute notes in its *SIPRI Yearbook 2005* (Chapter 8) that 2004 was the first year that world military expenditures exceeded \$1 trillion.

¹⁸ As noted by Economists for Peace and Security, “Military vs. Social Spending: Warfare or Human Welfare”, p. 1 (www.epsusa.org). The copyrighted article contains the following graph:

 **ECAAR** **Military vs. Social Spending:**
Warfare or Human Welfare



In 2003, the world spent more than \$900 billion on its militaries, with the US contributing nearly 50% of the total. World military expenditure in one year is greater than would be required to fulfill the Millennium Development Goals in 11 years. If 10% of world military expenditure, or 20% of US military expenditure, were diverted yearly, the MDG could be fully funded.^{1,2}

¹⁹ Quoted in Reuters, “Defense execs welcome Bush budget but warn of dip”, February 5, 2008, retrieved at <http://www.reuters.com/article/politicsNews/idUSN059451820080205?sp=true>.

²⁰ As noted by William D. Hartung, “Soldiers versus Contractors: Emerging Budgetary Reality?”, World Policy Institute, February 10, 2006, 1, 2, retrieved at

<http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/arms/reports.html>. Murtha stated, “Personnel costs are skyrocketing, particularly in health care. Choices will have to be made. We cannot allow promises we have made to our military families in terms of service benefits, in terms of health care, to be negotiated away. Procurement programs that ensure our military dominance cannot be negotiated away” (p. 2).

²¹ John Gray, *Black Mass* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2007), p. 186.

²² Quoted in Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2007), p. 391.

²³ As noted by René Girard, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2007), p. 12.

²⁴ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1961), p. 32.

²⁵ Meredith G. Kline, “Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1-4”, *Westminster Theological Journal* 24.2 (1962): 187-204.

²⁶ In Thomas Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1981) 291-302. “Original Child Bomb” was written in 1962.

²⁷ *op cit*, p. 191.

²⁸ See, for example, René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins Press, 1977), *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins Press, 1989), *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* and *I Saw Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. with a Foreword James G. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001). See also his more recent work, *Oedipus Unbound* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004) and *Evolution and Conversion*.

²⁹ See, for example, Arthur F. Holmes, “The Just War”, September 15, 2001, retrieved at <http://www.intervarsity.org/news/the-just-war>. Just war theorists also often make the bizarre claim that only the just war approach takes the pervasiveness of evil seriously enough; pacifist approaches minimize the reality of evil. Imagine pressing this claim with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. or Mahatma Gandhi.

³⁰ It is not possible to do justice to the depth and breadth of Lederach’s work here. See John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington D.C., United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), *The Journey Towards Reconciliation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1999), *A Handbook of International Peacebuilding: Into The Eye Of The Storm* (with Janice Moomaw Jenner) (San Fransisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002), *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003) and *Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Social Change* (New York: University of Oxford Press, 2004), as well as Jarem Sawatsky, “Extending the Peacebuilding Timeframe: Revising Lederach’s Integrative Framework”, *Peace Research*, vol. 37, #11, May, 2005, pp.123-130.

³¹ Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace—or War* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999).

³² This and subsequent statistics are taken from Peaceful Tomorrows, “Afghanistan: Ending A Failed Military Strategy”, November, 2008, retrieved from <http://www.peacefultomorrow.org/article.php?id=914>, p. 5. September Eleventh Families for Peaceful

Tomorrows is a compelling organization formed by family members of victims of the September 11, 2001 attacks. They seek to ensure that the deaths of their family members are not used as a reason for revenge. They have had a keen interest in the plight of Afghanistan since their inception. The phrase “Peaceful Tomorrows” comes from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 6.