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Letter to the Editors

Dear Chelsea and Matthew,

What do we do when human beings perpetrate evil and take the lives of hundreds of innocent people? Do those who bomb nightclubs need to be apprehended in order to prevent a reoccurrence? Do we respond when hundreds of thousands are slaughtered? Do those who commit genocide need to be stopped? If so, how do we stop them? Is the use of force - either police or military - ever appropriate? If the use of force is needed, does it automatically spring forth from the head of Zeus, or is it something for which one must train?

These are the kinds of questions each of us must ask in our struggle for peace. One of the realities we face is that there is evil in the world; another one is that the peoples of the earth are divided into nations. As citizens of the U.S., we are blessed to live in a country where the freedoms of religion, speech, and assembly are taken for granted. We have the freedom to criticize our government or to participate in it. In many nations of the world a journal such as PeacePower would never see the light of day. So I laud the publication of your first issue; you are pointing us toward things that are good.

As a minister of the gospel, as well as one who serves in the State, I finish with a couple of thoughts. The first one was offered by Benjamin Franklin at the close of the Constitutional Convention in 1776. A woman approached the great statesman and asked him, "What have you come up with?" Mr. Franklin's response: "A republic, ma'am, if you can keep it." My second thought comes from the

Christian Scriptures: "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right" (1 Pe. 5:13-14).

May we use the tremendous freedoms we enjoy in our participatory democracy to ensure that those who are doing evil are the ones being punished and that those who are doing well are the ones who are commended. This takes great courage on behalf of all. I would even suggest that it is our divine responsibility. Faithful and moral living in our own nation may ultimately spread to others, as well. Blessings to you, and Peace, in the name of the Most High,
Rev. Roger VanDerWerken
LCDR, United States Navy

Dear Roger,

We appreciate and share your desire for security and peace. We have a different perspective on how to go about achieving these things.

When it comes to the difficult situations you have outlined, we can respond in several ways:

1) What are the conditions that led to the problem? These things do not happen in a vacuum. How might we address those conditions?

2) Why aren't we intervening earlier? For instance, while it's often asked "what should have been done to deal with the Nazis in the 1940s," we might also ask, "What should have been done at the end of World War I to ensure that the unfinished business and resentments of that war wouldn't consume the world twenty years later?"

3) *We can articulate a new paradigm of common security, which relies on cooperation at the international level. An opponent who is unable to attack you may make you somewhat secure, but a former opponent who does not want to attack you, and wants to be your partner, makes you secure in a more meaningful, deeper and more reliable sense. (See mettacentr.org for more on common security.)*

4) *Gandhi's Shanti Sena, or "Peace Army," is a potential full-scale alternative to utilizing violence to achieve peace. See www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org. Let us encourage warriors to seriously train to join such organizations.*

We look for guidance not to the world as it is, but as it should be. Only a world in which our common identity as human beings supercedes the importance of all other forms of identification (national, racial, ethnic, religious, cultural) can possibly thrive in the future.

It is true that people are capable of evil acts, and they are also capable of good ones. How might we go about developing the potential for good? And when people do commit evil acts, might we refer to the legacies of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. for guidance on how to reach the hearts of oppressors when their minds are closed to reason? You mention freedoms. We wonder what will result in us regaining the freedoms we've lost in the US over the past six years?

According to Prof. Michael Nagler, "The letter you reference from Peter represents an extreme position within the range of Gospel commentary on authority -- extreme and arguably counter-Christian. Jesus most conspicuously did not submit himself to the Rabbinic authorities of his time (any more than the American colonies of 1776 submitted to George III!). His 'submission' to the Roman-Temple authorities who executed him was intensely subversive. 2nd.Samuel argues strongly that people shouldn't even have a king."

We hope that we will find within our hearts the impetus to do what is right, even and perhaps especially when that includes civil disobedience, a high act of patriotism when the cause is just.

*Blessings to you as well,
Chelsea Collonge and Matthew Taylor*