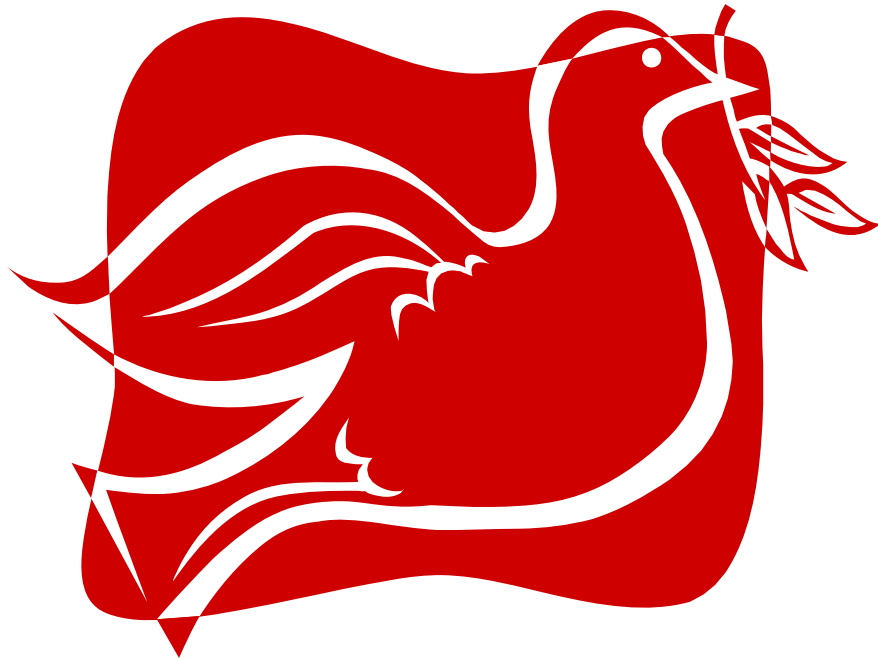


***WHY WE MUST BE NONVIOLENT IN A VIOLENT WORLD:  
A Theology of the Olive branch***

*Carol Raymond (Spring, 2007)*



*We cannot pray to You, O God, to end war;  
For we know that you have made the world in a way  
So that all of us must find our own path to peace,  
Within ourselves and with our neighbors.  
Therefore, we pray to You instead, O God,  
For strength, determination, and courage  
To do, instead of just to pray,  
To become, instead of merely to wish.<sup>1</sup>*



There are some who say that attempting to replace war with a just and lasting peace is folly. In recorded history since 3,600 B.C.E., over 14,500 major wars have killed close to four billion people. Indeed, American historian Will Durant has estimated there has only been twenty nine years in all of human history during which a war was not underway somewhere.<sup>2</sup> This fact makes a striking statement about the world in which we live. Violence remains the single most popular means to resolve conflict. As God's creation we, the community of faith, are responsible to God and to others who share this world. Down through the ages scripture has given us a clear message of peace as consistent with God's desire for covenant relationship. To be in this covenantal relationship a decision must be made by religious peoples everywhere to develop the moral sense of conscience against the evils of war. This call to nonviolence must be understood as an urgent invitation from God and is not to be underestimated or taken lightly. One must be committed to the nonviolent way of life while understanding the consequences of such action. One must be aware of that committing to this mission can bring enormous sacrifice and conflict. For this reason a truly dedicated apostle must be grounded in a deep and living faith with God at the very heart and center of life. God as revealed in Jesus Christ has offered Christians the model extraordinaire. As a Christian apostle for peace the commitment to follow his model carries enormous responsibility. It takes a different kind of apostle, one filled with the love of Christ, to have the courage and the determination to speak and act on behalf of God's purposes against the injustices of war. Sometimes flying in the face of convention and culture, the apostle for peace must dare to speak a theology of the olive branch.

Identification with the olive branch symbol expresses what it means to be associated with the peace movement. The oldest recorded symbol for peace is found in 2,350 B.C.E. in the Hebrew Bible book of Genesis.<sup>3</sup> A dove, carrying an olive branch to Noah in the ark, gave us this symbol.

*“And the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf.”<sup>4</sup>*



Speculation as to why the olive leaf is used centers around the idea that olive trees take a long time to produce fruit; therefore it is impossible to cultivate olives in time of war. The olive branch was seen as a symbol that God had ended the war against humanity. When the world ceased to function as God intended, the result was conflict, hostility and stress. It is clear from this account that flowing from God's nature and at the very heart of God is the activity of peace.

It is impossible here to think of God's intent for the world without reference to the Kingdom or Reign of God. The kingdom is where God's Holy Spirit is in control, where justice and peace reign. For Christians, the Reign of God was ushered in with the birth of Jesus Christ, who is often called the Prince of Peace.

*"For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace".<sup>5</sup>*



Living lives consistent with God's plan has been the work of the Christian church. The Reign of God is the immediate fruit of God's love, and the reason for the church's action in the world. The message brought by the Prince of Peace is a message of love. Love is a radical foreign language to those who have experienced only violence and bloodshed in their lives. Love is God's language; a language humanity fails to comprehend. Love is uncalculating in its pursuit. It perseveres even when opposed. To have the power to understand how wide, how long, how high, and how deep God's love really is means encountering it in the person of Jesus Christ. Through this encounter can one begin to know a passion that wishes the highest and best for another, and is willing to sacrifice all, and even then it is so great it will never be understood.<sup>6</sup> Love in its mystery is the essence of the unknowable God, the God who is at the fringes of understanding and at the borderline of questing. When a seeker's heart yearns for that essence, focusing on the One who is Creator of love, the seeker's gratitude is expressed through prayer.

A life of prayer is foundational to becoming an olive-branch theologian. Peace apostles must pray fervently for Christ to be walking beside them. They must pray for the world, for a land without prayer, in a year that wants more war. In the Psalms David gives apostles a pattern to follow. The Psalmist looked forward each day to the worship of and encounter with God. Through regular daily prayer, Bible reading, and meditation one receives God's peace.

*"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.  
I do not give as the world gives."<sup>7</sup>*

Peace advocates would be wise to heed the work of God's agape love as evidenced in communities such as the monastic order of St. Benedict. For more than 1,500 years Benedictine communities have dedicated their lives to the principles of peace. Their vision of shalom community presents a paradigm for what olive-branch theology should be about. Following the



Rule of St. Benedict, monks worship five times a day, praying and chanting the Psalms. Often the evening prayer is followed by the Great Silence, where the real work of prayer and scripture reading is done. In the solitude of quiet, God's desire for the love of the heart, the human heart, even the heart that is broken, is met.<sup>8</sup> In praying the liturgy of the hours along with the monks one can hear the world groaning in its suffering because it does not know the God of love.

Peace apostles must also learn to preach a different worldview, the worldview given them by Christ. They must be the prophetic voice, the conscience of a world that has lost its bearings. The example of ethical prophecy is singularly the God who was revealed in Jesus Christ. His is the image of fullness, what it means to be human. Jesus reformed the moral life within society with his witness to the claim that all persons had equal value. Every person who claims to be

a Christian must be intentional about aligning his own personal sense of morality with this ethic. It is impossible to preach peace without living in solidarity with Christ. With Jesus as the model apostles are invited to become what God meant for them to be: peacemakers. In a society where violence and oppression exist on a massive scale, peace apostles must claim a heightened sense of moral indignation against each life extinguished by war. Each person's death diminishes us.<sup>9</sup> With Christ's power of love, peace advocates must dare to speak the urgent message of nonviolence in a violent world. For olive-branch theologians, this prophetic preaching for social change without the use of force is of highest priority.

History is filled with those who dared to preach God's way of nonviolence. A prophet not only speaks the word but lives it moment by moment. In our time and within the Christian tradition, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) is the one who points us back to the peacemaking of Christ. It is not often that we come into the presence of certain persons in history who stand out as if they are the voice of God. Dr. King was one who understood the sacrifices and cost of commitment to peace, yet continued to preach the worldview of a peace apostle. His vision for justice was rooted in his Christian heritage, rooted in the deep and living faith in God. Dr. King's commitment to the Bible as his primary source book was nourished in his childhood. It was the Bible that led him to choose the more excellent way of love and nonviolent protest over hatred and violence. Excerpts from his speech delivered August 28, 1963 at the Civil Rights Rally at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. echo his prophetic preaching and witness.





10

*There is something that I must say to my people, who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice: In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.<sup>11</sup>*

His famous “I have a dream” speech reaches its highest point with echoes of the prophet Isaiah: “I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low ... and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.”<sup>12</sup> Biblical promises of “peace on earth and goodwill toward all” were Dr. King’s watchwords. His hope for an end to war then raging in Vietnam was rooted in Isaiah’s vision that people will “beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”<sup>13</sup> To critics who accused him of being an extremist, Dr. King said that he stood in a long line of extremists, including the prophets, Jesus, the apostle Paul, and the Protestant reformer Martin Luther. For Dr. King, the question was whether or not we would be extremists for hate or for love, for injustice or for justice, for evil or for goodness. To critics who demanded he stick to the issues of civil rights, view his reply in opposition to the war in Vietnam. [Download the clip at <http://www.peace.ca/king.wmv>.]

Given the reality of war and its pervasiveness through history, what, then, has gone terribly wrong with God’s vision for the peoples of the earth? What has driven humanity to oppose God’s purposes? Sociologists, anthropologists and political scientists all have their theories. Some think that war is the human response to some sense of injustice, or discrimination. Others see it as the universal human desire to exact retribution and vengeance for bloodshed. Others see the root causes of violent conflict as the economic insecurity of poverty and unemployment; or of political insecurity and social insecurity. With order lacking in a society the culture is reduced to lack of trust, discrimination, and chaos. In violent cultures the instinct that propels humans to become close to each other is in conflict with the impulse that works toward the annihilation of all living things. Sigmund Freud argued that all of human history has been a tug-of-war between those two instincts.<sup>14</sup> In commenting on war, former war-correspondent Chris Hedges writes, “The hidden need in humans to justify our reason for living through ingesting the barbaric and

uncivilized narcotic of war exposes a capacity for evil that lurks not far below the surface in all of us.”<sup>15</sup>



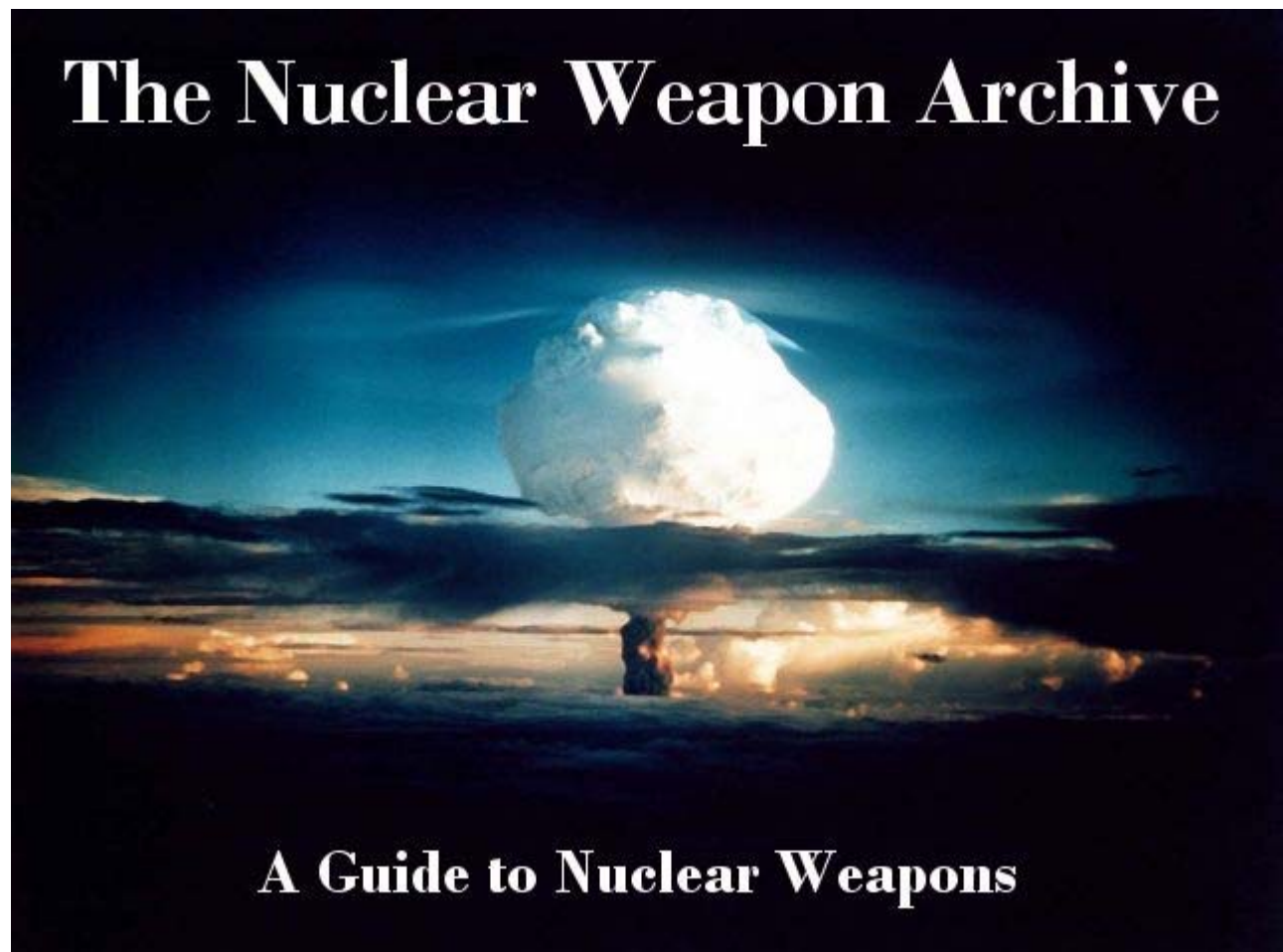
*Ramses II at Kadesh*

Indeed, according to the Jesus’ words in the Gospel of Mark, the source of evil does not lie outside a person, in impure things, but inside a person, in the impure heart.<sup>16</sup> In pursuit of purity, persons and entire communities in the history of the world have sought to cleanse the world of the ‘other’ by driving out those who were unclean. This will to become pure translated itself into politics in Germany in the early decades of the last century, and into the politics in Serbia, Rwanda and Darfur in recent times. Those who want a pure world seek to push others out of their world. Its program segregates and kills and drives out, strips, beats and dumps people outside their own space, as in the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

*A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers who stripped him, beat him and went away leaving him half dead.<sup>17</sup>*

They generate hatred and revulsion against the other so that their sense of right and wrong is justified. “Sometimes”, writes Miroslav Volf, “this hatred is a projection of our own individual or collective hatred of ourselves; we persecute others because we are uncomfortable with strangeness within ourselves. We do this not because we do not know better; but because we refuse to choose better. We are uncomfortable with anything that blurs our boundaries and rearranges our symbolic cultural maps.”<sup>18</sup> Despite this pattern, there have been prophets in every age crying for that which is the intent of God in covenant with humanity. Apostles of olive-branch theology in this era must urgently and prophetically sound the call against hatred and violence and cry out in favor of choosing Christ’s moral ethic against the evil within one’s heart.

The United States is currently engaged in a war in Iraq endeavoring to play out the role of aggressor/oppressor as promoted in its foreign policy. This nation has spent \$1.2 trillion to fund that war; the President is asking for 99.5 million more.<sup>19</sup> In the Bush Administration, social programs such as health care are being cut to make room for more dollars for war-fighting. Nuclear weapons are the alarming new White House policy objective. Two decades after the Cold War ended, in January 2002, Bush asserted a need for a revitalized nuclear weapons complex. Key to this program is Complex 2030, a scenario that is designed to meet the Administration's 'perceived' threats of terrorism in the twenty-first century.<sup>20</sup>



See <http://nuclearweaponarchive.org>.

At issue for peace apostles is the idea that focusing on war funding distorts the nation's perspectives, rallying the country around a military cause while failing to address the wrenching issues of health care, poverty, and unemployment. Some consider the war in Iraq a 'just' war and have even gone to battle saying God is on the side of the Western world. One questions the humanity of those perpetrating the war where the recurring theme is of a raw, untamed evil at work in the world. This theme is the epitome of a human-constructed society that exalts evil, and justifies war. Seduced by material wealth and power, this nation's power has been used toward the wrong goals. Perhaps it can be said that the United States has a character defect in its culture. It does not possess the virtues of forgiveness and repentance but is engaged in an endless cycle

of revenge and retaliation. Those claiming that this is a Christian nation should acknowledge that the USA has fallen short in its witness to the world by failing to act out the principles at the heart of the gospel message. The blood of innocent victims is on their hands, and still they continue to go to war. Nonviolent advocates for peace must join with other prophetic voices against the power of evil with the strongest power of all: love.

On March 21, 2007 over 3,000 Christian Peace advocates rallied in Washington, D.C. in an act of civil disobedience (See <http://www.micahscall.org/article.php/20070317033435837>.)



*Carrying their message from the National Cathedral to the White House, a massive nonviolent witness marked the anniversary of the Iraq war with a Christian Witness for Peace. Braving rain, sleet and finally, snow.... Over 4,000 people gathered at the National Cathedral and New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington DC Friday evening for the Christian Peace Witness for Iraq. The service at the cathedral was amazing, opened by a procession of candles and with words by the Dean of the Cathedral. He said that though the sanctuary was used for many different purposes, it always had a historic role as a place of peace and that though there may be many different thoughts on how to end this war, we were united in our desire to bring it to an end.<sup>21</sup>*

According to Robert Linthicum in his book, *Transforming Power*, “It is important for Christians who are involved with any kind of ministry to have an articulated and acted out theology of power.”<sup>22</sup> Nonviolence as power can be both a political strategy and a moral philosophy, used in efforts to gain social or political change. These activists and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave us a contemporary example of the ways in which to practice nonviolence through civil disobedience, nonviolent resistance, and techniques for social change without the use of force. The idea of Christians wielding power responsibly is one not easily introduced, however. Most contemporary Christians shy away from tactics such as confrontation, civil disobedience, and yet these are the very tools that must be used. These are the tools necessary for peace apostles practicing the theology of the olive branch. A call to transformative action is clear.

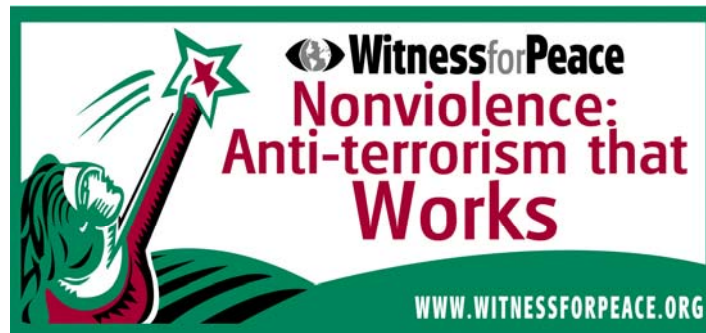




## ...and How are the Children?

2007 Conference • March 9-12 • Washington, D.C.

At the 2007 Conference of Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington D.C., over 1,000 men and women of faith from all over the country met to advocate for the children of this nation, voiceless because they aren't old enough to vote. On behalf of the children of the United States and the world, members of Christian churches and faith-based organizations called on Congress to embrace new spending priorities, using the nation's resources for peace, not war! But the practical question remains: How does one dismantle the U.S. military machine without economic collapse? How can the U.S. move from a defense budget to an offense budget? In calling this nation's representatives to task, people of faith advocated for security strategies that moved resource allocations away from current U.S. wartime policies. They asked that military aid be cut, the aid which fans the flames of conflict in Iraq, sending funding instead for relief and reconstruction in Iraq. Finally, on March 30, 2007 as a result of persistence and hard work of those advocating for peace, the debate in Congress shifted from "if" to "when" the U.S. leaves Iraq. This is just the beginning. Prophetic apostles of peace must relentlessly press for an end to the war by keeping the pressure on the nation's leaders. They must continue to advocate for a bill that vetoes the funding of more troops to Iraq, and insist on a firm date to end the military presence there.



Nonviolence can be effective if prophetic voices for peace convince the U.S. nation/state that it has an obligation to protect not through a policy of military buildup but through a more preferable avenue of peaceful negotiation. Apostles must speak out advocating Christ's principle of love in peace-making action. Peace building, advocating for peaceable change, must engage the tools of mediation, negotiation and dialogue in conflict-resolution, exposing the myth of redemptive violence that fuels the current culture. With the basic belief that all persons have sacred worth, negotiation can be successful if enacted through these methods. Advocating for peace with the belief that it is important to move U.S. policy from the role of aggressor toward a role of mediator, a changed worldview can be achieved. This new way of being in the world would be viewed as a paradigm shift by other countries that see America as a world leader. It would revolutionize the U.S. image and surprise global security proponents.

As an example of peaceful negotiation, Christian leaders from the U.S. traveled to the Islamic Republic of Iran on February 25, 2007. Iran's recent interest in building nuclear power plants has alarmed the international community and threatened peaceful relations with the U.S. The delegation represented a diverse group from United Methodist, Episcopal, Catholic, Baptist, Evangelical, Quaker, and Mennonite traditions. They were J. Daryl Byler, Director of the Mennonite Central Committee; Jeff Carr, Chief Operating Officer of Sojourners; Ron Flaming, Director International Programs, Mennonite Central Committee; Edward Martin, Director of the Mennonite Central Committee's Asia program; Jonathan Evans, Special Representative for Iran of the AFSC (Quakers); Mary Ellen McNish, General Secretary, AFSC (Quakers); Shanta Premawardhana, Assoc. General Secretary of the National Council of Churches USA; Maureen Shea, Director of Government Relations, the Episcopal Church; Patricia Shelly, Executive Board of Mennonite Church USA; Geraldine Sicola, Assoc. General Secretary for International Programs, AFSC (Quakers); David Robinson, Executive Director for Pax Christi USA; Joe Volk, Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation; and James Winkler, General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church.



(See [http://www.nccinterfaith.blogspot.com/2007/2/pressconference.Delegation to Iran February 26, 2007.](http://www.nccinterfaith.blogspot.com/2007/2/pressconference.Delegation%20to%20Iran%20February%2026,%202007.))

*“Believing it is possible to build bridges of understanding between the two countries and further believing that military action is not the answer, the delegation was committed to the God who calls for just and peaceful relationships within the global community. During the visit the group met with Muslim and Christian leaders, government officials and other Iranian people. The final day included a meeting with former President Khatami and current President Ahmadinejad. The meeting with President Ahmadinejad was the first time an American delegation had met in Iran with an Iranian president since the Islamic revolution in 1979. The meeting lasted two and one half hours and covered a range of topics, including the role of religion in transforming conflict, Iraq, nuclear proliferation, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. What the delegation found most encouraging from the meeting with President Ahmadinejad was a clear declaration that Iran has no intention to acquire or use nuclear weapons, as well as a statement that the Israeli -Palestinian conflict can only be solved through political, not military means. He said, “I have no reservation about conducting talks with American officials if we see some good will.” The group believed it possible for further dialogue and that there could be a new day in U.S.-Iranian relations. The Iranian government had already built a bridge toward the American people by inviting the delegation to come to Iran. Additional steps in building bridges between the two nations are necessary. These include a call for immediate engagement in direct, face-to-face talks; cessation of using language that defines the other as ‘enemy’; and promotion of more exchanges between religious leaders, members of parliament and Congress, and civil society. The statement issued by the delegation upon its return to the U.S. said, “As people of faith, we are committed to working toward these and other confidence building measures, which we hope will move our two nations from the precipice of war to a more just and peaceful relationship.”<sup>23</sup>*



The presentation of an oil lamp to Ayatollah Taskhiri, as a sign of solidarity between Iranians and Americans on March 2, 2007. We as apostles for peace encourage Americans to light such lamps as well, so that we can remember and stand in solidarity with Iranians.<sup>24</sup>

The question is before us. What must prophetic apostles do to further encourage the examples of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the recent Christian delegation to Iran? The commitment to peace building is a dangerous, risky way of life. But it is no less costly than the risk God took when negotiating our salvation. The nation and the world are in desperate need of authentic witness. It is the obligation of peace apostles to speak out with Dr. King, and act with the Peace march on Washington, as proponents of the Christ of love. In his sermon at Riverside Church, New York on April 4, 1967, Dr. King preached against the silence of the church. He pronounced judgment on the cowardice of Christians who sanctioned things as they are by refusing to give voice against the principalities and powers of the nation.<sup>25</sup> It is time to break the silence. Those who are called to be peace-builders must name themselves as such in their relationship to God. They must rise with courage to the commitment for peace-building out of complacency and comfort. They must take the gospel to the streets when the streets need it the most. It is up to them to be God's voice for this generation. It is up to them to introduce the Reign of God on earth. It is up to them to challenge the systems of domination in the world and through the power of love live the gospel story in their work for peace. To survive as a human being is possible only through this kind of love. Love in its mystery has its own power.<sup>26</sup> There is no other way 'to' peace. *Peace is the way.*<sup>27</sup>



28



## Notes

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Reimer, Rabbi Jack: Toolkit for Faith Communities, Children's Defense Fund  
We Cannot Merely Pray
- <sup>2</sup> Hedges, Chris: Anchor Books, New York, NY 2002  
War is A Force That Gives Us Meaning, pg 158
- <sup>3</sup> [www.religioustolerance.org/noah](http://www.religioustolerance.org/noah)
- <sup>4</sup> NRSV, Genesis 8:11
- <sup>5</sup> NRSV: Isaiah 9:6
- <sup>6</sup> NRSV: Ephesians 3:19
- <sup>7</sup> NRSV: John 14:27
- <sup>8</sup> Merton, Thomas; HarperCollins Books, San Francisco, CA:2001  
Dialogues with silence, pg 127
- <sup>9</sup> From civil rights speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. August 28, 1963.
- <sup>10</sup> [http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/I-Have\\_A\\_Dream](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/I-Have_A_Dream)
- <sup>11</sup> <http://www.holidays.net/mlk/speech.htm>
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid
- <sup>13</sup> NRSV: Isaiah 2:4
- <sup>14</sup> Hedges, Chris: War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning, pg 158
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid, pg 3
- <sup>16</sup> NRSV: Mark 7:15
- <sup>17</sup> NRSV: Luke 10:30
- <sup>18</sup> Volf, Miraslov: Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1996  
Exclusion and Embrace, p 78
- <sup>19</sup> Winkler, Jim, UMC General Board of Church & Society, Global Security Track lecture  
Ecumenical Advocacy days, Washington D.C. March 9-12, 2007
- <sup>20</sup> Berrigan, Frida; Sojourners magazine, April 2007, A Nuclear Surge, pg 7
- <sup>21</sup> <http://www.micahscall.org>
- <sup>22</sup> Linthicum, Robert; Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill; 2003  
Transforming Power: Biblical Strategies for Making a Difference, pg 12
- <sup>23</sup> U.S. Interfaith delegation document, Ecumenical Advocacy Days, March 9-12, 2007.
- <sup>24</sup> <http://www.newyorktimes.com/iran>
- <sup>25</sup> <http://nccinterfaith.blogspot.com>
- <sup>26</sup> Hedges, Chris; War is a Force that Gives us Meaning, p 184
- <sup>27</sup> A.J. Muste
- <sup>28</sup> <http://www.fcnl.org>