



Pastor's Column: The Danger of Fear

Recently I saw the film “Children of Men.” The premise of the film, which takes place in 2027, is that the whole of humanity has been infertile for nearly twenty years. The cause is not given explicitly but at one point in the film a virulent flu is mentioned that spread as a pandemic across the world around that time. As the crisis deepened, women were not able to carry children to full term, then they were not able to conceive at all. By the time of the film society has been childless for an entire generation. A popular celebrity is a young man who is the youngest person in the world. The world mourns his loss when he is killed while being mugged on a street late at night.

This infertility has strange effects on society. The government of Great Britain, where the story takes place, distributes antidepressants and suicide kits for those in despair. Society looks inward in an attempt to find meaning. This manifests itself in an intense xenophobia, a fear of outsiders, which results in a government policy of rounding up illegal aliens and putting them in large camps.

The main character is a man in his forties who had lost a child when he was an infant. He and his wife separated after the baby's death, both of them unable to cope with their loss. The man is accosted by a terrorist group which supports incorporating illegal aliens into society. It turns out that his wife is one of the leaders. They kidnap him because of some contacts he has with a government official who can get a person a pass out of the country.

At this point the main theme of the film emerges. The man is introduced to a young black African woman who is an illegal alien—and she is

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Rev. Craig L. Cowing, Pastor

pregnant. Some of the terrorists want to use her as a bargaining chip in their political plan, and want to make a lot of publicity out of her unique situation. The goal of the leadership of the group is to secret her out of the country to a mysterious group on an island known as the “Human Project.” This group will care for her and help determine how it is she could have become pregnant, and how this might benefit society.

The man's father-in-law comes up with a plan to get them into a large camp for illegal aliens. The camp is a walled-off portion of London which looks like it has gone through at least one war. While they are there the government launches an offensive against terrorists who are planning an uprising. In the midst of this the baby is born. The most striking scene in the film is when the woman and man are leaving the building they are in to try to get to the shore to meet a boat that will take them out of the country. As they walk through the halls of the large building the occupants look in amazement at the newborn infant. They have not seen a baby in nearly two decades. The youngest have never seen an infant at all. The crowds part as the man and woman pass through. As they leave the building an officer who is leading the assault on the building sees the infant and orders the firing to stop. Soldiers part and drop to their knees in silence as they see the mother and child pass. As soon as they are clear of the building the firing starts up again.

The film ends as the man and woman make it to the rowboat from where they will row to the

freighter that will take them to the Human Project. The man dies, however, having been mortally wounded in the assault they passed through.

The film draws on several themes. Fear dominates the story—the fear of death, the fear of outsiders, and conversely, a search for security. As they seek to escape this fear the man, woman and child become almost a modern Holy Family, finding shelter in a dirty room with nothing but an old mattress for the mother to give birth on. As I watched the scene of the man, mother and child passing through the crowd of soldiers I thought about how we often view children in the world. We are momentarily caught up in romantic views of children, but we pause only for a moment for them, turning our attention back to daily life. Children continue to suffer, though, regardless of whether or not we are paying attention to them.

Perhaps the most profound theme of the film is one I have already mentioned—the effect of fear on society. Many societies through the centuries have withdrawn collectively out of fear, with disastrous

results. Nazi Germany is an extreme example, although certainly not the only one.

Think about the effects that fear can have on a person—it causes us to withdraw from the world in order to conserve resources. It invites selfishness and an unhealthy preoccupation with conserving resources. It can cause a person to forget about the needs of others.

We still live in a world that is preoccupied and distracted by fear. Part of the church's mission can be to help overcome fear and to model (through practice) an openness to the world in which resources are shared in love.

In Christ



Church Calendar February 2006

Date	Time	Event	Place
Tues. Feb. 6	6:30 PM	Church Night at the Country Store	Country Store Thrift Shop
Sun. Feb. 11	8 PM	Harmonic Healing Concert	Chapel
Tues. Feb. 19	6:30 PM	Growth Committee s	church office.
Tues. Feb. 19	7:30 PM	Church Council	Chapel
Sat. Feb. 24	6 PM	Ethnic Potluck Supper	Fellowship Hall

Church News

Bring Your Pennies to Church!

Don't forget to bring your pennies and pocket change to church! The "Pennies for People" milk bottle was recently emptied and needs to be refilled! Grants from Pennies for People benefit various organizations in New York State. Linda Bull is the chairperson for Pennies for People for the New York Conference of the UCC.

Harmonic Healing Concert Sunday, February 11 at 8 PM

The next Harmonic Healing Concert is February 11 at 8 PM in the chapel. Come and spend an hour in

meditation and relaxation as you absorb the healing sounds of Tibetan singing bowls. This event is free and open to the public. These events are informal--come as you are. Bring a pillow or cushion to sit on. Dates for upcoming concerts are March 11, April 1, May 13, 2007. Dates for later in the year will be released soon.

Change in Office Hours

Beginning on January 16 through May 1 Craig will not have office hours on Tuesdays. He will be teaching a class in Fishkill during that time. Regular office hours will be Wednesday through Friday, 9 AM to 12 noon.

Annual Meeting Sunday February 18 after Worship

The Annual meeting will be on Sunday, February 18 after the worship service. We will meet in the Fellowship Hall for a potluck lunch followed by the meeting.

Ethnic Potluck Supper Saturday, February 24 at 6 PM

Beginning on Saturday, February 24 at 6 PM we will have a monthly Ethnic Potluck Supper which will be open to the community. This will be an opportunity to share recipes and enjoy fellowship together. Our first supper will have an Italian theme. If you would like to come and bring a dish please speak to Anita Hawkins who will be coordinating the supper. You may leave a message for her at the parsonage at 845-496-1393.

Caps for Kids Tops \$27,000

The Caps for Kids project is in full swing with winter here, such as it is. Please consider giving a cap as a reminder that sometimes it's cold. Each hand-knit cap costs \$10 and all proceeds benefit Church World Service projects to help children in Africa who have been adversely affected by HIV/AIDS. Please contact Janet Steeves at 496-3329 for more information.

The Mary Merriam Flower Calendar

The Blooming Grove UCC has established a flower calendar to provide altar flowers for Sunday Worship. The calendar is named in honor of Mary Merriam who lovingly and gracefully cared for the altar and flowers for many years and is warmly remembered by members of the congregation. Sharen Casazza will maintain the physical calendar and will seek donations from members of the congregation to cover the \$50.00 cost. On the first and third Sundays of the month fresh flowers from Flowers By Joan will be placed in the church's brass vases and placed on the altar in memory of or in honor of whoever placed the donation. Please contact Sharen Casazza at Box 8, Blooming Grove, NY 10914 to place a donation. Please specify clearly for whom the flowers are donated and

include a check to Blooming Grove UCC for \$50.00

Sanctuary Flowers for January and February

01/07/07 – by Jeff & Hilarie Moore in memory of Mary Lou Moore)

01/21/07 – by Margaret, James & David Casazza in honor of Janet Steeves

2/4/07—by Rev. Craig Cowing and Anita Hawkins in memory of Jose Martin-Lopez

02/18/07 – by Jeff & Hilarie Moore in memory of Wallace F. Moore

Church World Service News A Rainbow of Caring...Church World Service Tools and Blanket Program

On Sunday, March 4 we will hold a Tools and Blanket Sunday. Our money will help families in underdeveloped parts of the world in emergency situations, and families struggling to grow their own food. Arlene Roberts will be coordinating this program.

The Tools and Blankets program is a mission opportunity that can involve all ages. Some 8,000 congregations and groups across the U.S. hold TOOLS & BLANKETS events, providing more than \$3.7 million to help people in some 80 nations, including the U.S. The right tool at the right time can make a world of difference in the lives of children and families faced with an emergency or struggling to keep food on the table.

Build a Rainbow of Caring! You. Your family. Your congregation.

Warm blankets for five refugee children... \$25*
Wheelbarrow, hoe, shovel, and rake for a rural family... \$57

Nets and other equipment for a village fishing cooperative... \$100

Family shelter kit: a family-sized tent, ground cloth, plastic sheeting, two poles, and four blankets... \$172

Partial **secondary school** tuition for an AIDS orphan or other vulnerable child... \$300

Well pump, piping, and hardware for a village water system... \$1,000

Tools such as tents, bedding, plastic sheeting, and other emergency supplies in the wake of natural disasters and human calamities... Priceless!

Our Kits at Work

Health Kits and other kits from Church World Service have benefited people in Indonesia affected by heavy flooding. So far CWS has provided 135 Health Kits,

135 blankets, 101 School Kits, and 426 Baby Kits in addition to 36 tarps and 61 shovels and other materials for cleaning up. They have also distributed clean water to four villages, helped to clean seven wells in two villages, and provided a water purification unit in another village. The water purification unit will handle the needs of three sub-districts.

Last year our church sent 37 School Kits, 28 Health Kits and 85 Baby Kits in addition to \$285 for shipping costs. This is where your help is being distributed to people in need around the world.

Revised Common Lectionary Texts for February/March 2007

4 February 2007:

Isaiah 6:1-8, (9-13)

Psalms 138

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

11 February 2007:

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Psalms 1

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

Luke 6:17-26

18 February 2007:

Transfiguration Sunday

Exodus 34:29-35

Psalms 99

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Luke 9:28-36, (37-43)

21 February 2007:

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or

Isaiah 58:1-12

Psalms 51:1-17

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

25 February 2007:

1st Sunday in Lent

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Psalms 91:1-2, 9-16

Romans 10:8b-13

Luke 4:1-13

4 March 2007:

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Psalms 27

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

11 March 2007:

Isaiah 55:1-9

Psalms 63:1-8

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 13:1-9

18 March 2007:

Joshua 5:9-12

Psalms 32

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

25 March 2007:

Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalms 126

Philippians 3:4b-14

John 12:1-8

Overcoming violence: an ecumenical Christian task

Speech by Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia at an international conference on "Violence and Christian spirituality" sponsored by the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in cooperation with the WCC and the Boston Theological Institute

27 October 2005

(This is an excerpt. To read the whole speech, go to <http://overcomingviolence.org>)

***The promise and power of peace vs.
the reality of violence***

As the theme of the annual focus for 2004 indicates, peace does have power and peace is a promise. Some have suggested that the motto of "Overcoming Violence" may be a mistaken assessment of the Christian calling in face of the startling violence in our world. None of us will pretend that we will eradicate violence and establish world peace within a decade. The desire and aspiration to overcome the spirit and logic of violence in a Christian and ecumenical spirit, however, is rooted in the gift and promise made to his disciples by Christ himself: "My peace I give you", and "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called children of God". As Christians we believe in the power of the peace given by Christ and revealed through his resurrection by God's creator spirit. This is a peace we are given by Christ and that is the peace we proclaim – no less than that. Christ gives peace differently from the way the world gives peace. And this peace is in stark contrast to the reality of our world. We do recognize the need for true peace not only in the world, but also in our churches and communities. The global reality is one of

increasingly indiscriminate violence, a violence that has gotten out of control. It has been clear in times past where the demarcation lines were between legitimate and illegitimate violence. This seems to be no longer the case, from the international arena - as the UN security council's sessions over the last couple of years have demonstrated, to the national level - where ethnic or civic groups reserve the right to fight against what they identify as state terrorism, to the neighborhoods - where youth, vigilante groups or gangs claim the right to protect themselves against any threat, individual or official.

Violence has many faces: personal, inter-personal, and collective, and it comes in many forms: physical, psychological, sexual or in the guise of negligence and deprivation. According to the World Health Organization, which has set up a very helpful typology of violence in its World Report on Health and Violence, physical violence kills over 4000 people each day. Most of these victims are not the victims of collective violence such as war or terrorism, but they are victims of violence much closer to home: suicide and interpersonal violence. Let us be aware that today as we meet here, tens of thousands die of hunger. And no one knows how many children, women and men are being injured physically, emotionally or mentally through violence. The WHO report makes it clear that it is not simply political conflict, war or terror that threaten the lives of people everywhere. The threat of violence is at home, in the neighborhood - for a growing number of people, in the daily circumstances of their lives.

Now the world is responding to this situation with growing concern and determination. The UN-Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World is addressing violence in many different ways and has generated significant alliances and measures to prevent violence and educate for peace. The World Health Assembly has declared violence prevention to be a public health priority, thus requesting all member states to establish violence prevention programs within their health ministries. In this context the churches united in the World Council of Churches have, from the beginning of the discussions concerning such a decade, taken action to respond to the challenge of violence by declaring the years 2001 through 2010 a Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) and have made it a priority of our common witness.

As I have already indicated, the goal is not so much to eradicate violence, as it is to overcome the spirit, the logic and the practice of violence by actively seeking reconciliation and peace. This is an eminently

ecumenical task, and it is ecumenical in the widest sense of the word, because preventing violence cannot be accomplished by any one particular group and its program, or by any specific movement. Preventing and overcoming violence must be done collaboratively by churches together and jointly in cooperation with governmental and civic institutions and peoples' grassroots initiatives.

Christians must join these efforts in their own right, as followers of Christ and as sisters and brothers, in spite of their differences and divisions. They join the struggle as partners and members of civil society, and as close friends and allies with one another - as sisters and brothers indeed. Just as violence does not recognize any differences between countries, ethnicities and cultures, violence does not recognize differences between Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox or Pentecostal. Violence is our common plague, and non-violent love, peace, justice and reconciliation are our common calling.

As we set out together to meet the challenge before us, several issues must be considered if we want to remain both realistic and hopeful.

A globalized context (geo-political)

Globalization is a reality on every level, not just economic. Terrorism appears to be globally networked, as is the war on terrorism. The effects of that global war affect people in their activities and dignity almost everywhere. The phenomenon of domestic violence is increasing in African homes as well as in European, Asian or American homes. The proliferation of small arms spans the globe, just as Coca-Cola and McDonald's do. We must therefore take globalization and its derivatives into consideration as we plan our common actions towards proclaiming the good news of peace.

Conclusion

We Christians of diverse traditions may not be able to come to an easy agreement on many things regarding creed or polity. But we can join hands in overcoming violence, as Jesus has overcome violence, by affirming dignity, refusing to judge, doing justice and loving mercy. Let not our differences get in the way of this Christian ecumenical task which is our mission to the world in Christ's name.

The different Christian traditions clearly have different contributions to bring to this mission, and all are needed, all are significant. The historic peace

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*In this issue of The Newsleaf:
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Overcoming Violence
... and more!*

churches have a long experience in addressing issues of injustice and violence from a perspective of Christian discipleship, both personal and as communities. Both the Protestant and Catholic traditions bring a highly valuable experience of working with civic and governmental institutions, while upholding the gift of grace and the challenge to be engaged. Then there is the deeply rooted and long -standing vision in Orthodox

faith and life for a spirituality of holistic peace, integrating creation, human life and the Trinity, working together for salvation and reconciliation.

These are but sketchy allusions to the treasures of our traditions, all of which are needed as we face the challenge of overcoming the spirit and the logic of violence, as we build up peace, proclaim justice and foster reconciliation. May Christ's spirit be in us and among us as we engage together in this ecumenical task.