



Peace Advocate News

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Matthew 5:9

Peace begins when you make your peace with Jesus, accept Him as Savior and follow Him as Lord.

Volume 13:1

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The importance of Hope

In the search for peace, hope is a precious commodity. Especially when people are in a place they did not create and cannot change, it is desperately hard to hang on to hope. Slipping into despair is far too easy. Despair is very powerful. It can mask options that may exist. It can turn a person's thoughts inward and pull them away from others. Despair can make the situation and needs of others around a person harder to see. For some, despair can even lead to irrational thoughts and actions that can hurt both self and others.

How does a person hang onto hope, or recover it once it is lost? Clinging to the Lord, prayer, and pouring into his word are invaluable. However, sometimes reclaiming hope also requires help from others. Open your eyes to the people around you. Sometimes an act of kindness, a word of understanding, offering respect, inclusion, or acknowledging gifts and giving the opportunity to use them can be important tools for restoring hope to someone in despair. There is a great need to listen well and guard against making assumptions about people that put them in boxes they cannot get out of by themselves.

Lord, be with us. For those who are struggling to hold onto hope, remind us you are there, even in the gloom of despair. For all of us, help us to look for the good in people, and encourage them rather than discouraging them. Help us guard against bullying behavior in our dealings with others – our bullying and the possibility of theirs.

Gun Violence In 2019

Gun violence continues to be a serious problem in America. It is far worse here than in other wealthy countries. The U.S had the 28th highest rate of gun deaths in the world in 2017, but all the countries with higher rates were countries with a major gang or drug trafficking problem. Even most of the world's poorest countries have far lower gun death rates than the U.S.

Nurith Aizenman & Naec Silver. "How the U.S. Compares With Other Countries In Deaths From Gun Violence." NPR.

See: <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2019/08/05/743579605/how-the-u-s-compares-to-other-countries-in-deaths-from-gun-violence>

A major factor is that the American attitude toward guns is different than the attitude in other countries. The rate of gun ownership in America is much higher (nearly half, 46%, of all civilian owned guns in the world are owned by Americans.) making guns more readily available in the U.S than in other countries. It is estimated that there are 393 million civilian guns in the U.S. compared with only 71.1 million in India which is the country with the second highest number (according to a Switzerland-based Small Arms Survey report). Countries with stricter gun laws and fewer civilian guns have much lower gun death and injury rates. Americans are 51 times more likely to die by gunfire than people in the United Kingdom, for example. America also has another dubious distinction. In August, Kara Fox of CNN stated that, "When it comes to gun massacres, the US is an anomaly. There are more public mass shootings in America than in any other country in the world" (How US gun culture compares with the world. August 6, 2019). Other countries, Australia and New Zealand for example, responded to mass shootings by putting in place much stricter gun laws. The result has been a major reduction in gun deaths there. (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41488081>)

Here are some U.S. statistics.

- In 2019 15,304 people died in gun incidents in the U.S. That is 502 more people than died due to gun violence in 2018.
- There were 417 incidents in which more than 4 people were injured or killed. That is 80 more such incidents than there were in 2018 (Though there is no one universally accepted definition of a 'mass shooting' in the U.S., the definition of 4 or more people injured or killed in one incident is a fairly widely accepted one.).
- In 2019 694 children under the age of 11 were injured or killed compared to 667 in 2018.
- 3,073 teenagers were injured or killed in 2019 compared to 2,873 in 2018.

Source: The Gun Violence Archive at <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/past-tolls>

DEMOCRACY, ON THE SLIPPERY SLOPE

by Clyde C. Fry, District Creation Stewardship Advocate

There is Peace and Justice in God's Natural Law It is the Foundation of all Creation

Carl J. Richard, in *The Founders and the Classics* (1994), wrote:

"In the eighteenth century the greatest compliment one could pay another was to call [a person] 'disinterested.' To be disinterested was to place justice above all considerations, including one's own interests and those of one's family, friends and political allies."

Justice is rooted in loving kindness and humility. Micah 6:8, *"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly....."* The three are inseparable; you cannot have one without the other two. This requirement is not just for people of faith who feel loved and humbled in the presence of God. It is for all people because it is written into the nature of creation itself; a creation whose majesty draws us to it and whose overwhelming power reveals our finite nature and humbles us. These foundations are sometimes known as natural law which is even referred to in the first sentence in the *Declaration of Independence*: *"the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God."*

It's one thing to tolerate Imperfection, It's another to try to Justify it!

These days many Christians, in the name of political expediency, forget, overlook, or excuse the moral/ethical misbehavior and the unjust conduct of political leaders who side with them in some treasured issue that they believe must be upheld at any price. They argue that God has always sought to accomplish his will through a flawed humanity (Romans 3:23, 24). That's obvious since God's normal way of working in the world is through human minds and hands; but when one persists in and even flaunts those flaws, toleration is no longer an option and attempts at justification is a sin. Paul, in Galatians 6:1 write's *"...if someone is caught in any kind of wrongdoing, those of you who, in their spirit, know better should gently put them on the right path."* That we are flawed beings is no excuse for shoddiness, for we are called to live lives of excellence (Matthew 5:48; see also, 2 Corinthians 13:5-11). When a society or a political party chooses to live by its lowest common-denominator, the outcome is disastrous! Political expediency often dismisses the use of the Christian scriptures outside of the Church hoping that it does not apply to the secular world; I obviously disagree. Principles of conduct are not restricted to the Church; they have universal application; wherever truth is, God is.

Political, not Partisan -- Dialog, not Argument

All Christians must be politically astute and involved, but we must not be partisan. Partisan politics has become a destructive habit in America, and as George Washington pointed out in the beginning of our nation, it is a grave danger to our democracy. Political action depends upon open dialog, not angry argument. It depends upon finding mutual agreement, not taking sides. America needs, at its center, citizens who thoroughly sift through ideas, build consensus, and resist the snipers from the far right and far left.

You may be surprised to learn that the U.S. Constitution does not mention, anticipate, or see the need for political parties. Unbridled ego and insatiable greed create the need for political parties. In our first President's farewell address to the nation in 1796, Washington warned against political parties and the damage that they can do.

"They [political parties] serve to organize faction, to give it an artificial and extraordinary force; to put, in place of the delegated will of the

nation, the will of the party, often a small but artful and enterprising minority of the community; and, according to the alternate triumphs of different parties, to make the public administration the mirror of the ill-conceived and incongruous projects of faction, rather than the organ of consistent and wholesome plans digested by common councils, and modified by mutual interests."

Washington continued:

"The alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissension....is itself a frightful despotism [and can lead at length] to a more formal and permanent despotism. The disorders and miseries, which result, gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an individual; and sooner or later the chief of some prevailing faction, more able or more fortunate than his competitors, turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of Public Liberty."

Our two major political parties have taken on the characteristics that President Washington warned us about with the result that our government is treading water and losing its influence here and around the world.

Carl J. Richards writes: *"Membership in a political party inevitably [involves] defending the indefensible vices of one's allies [in] attempting to dominate one's fellow citizens in order to satisfy a narrow self-interest."* There are many demagogues in political parties. These are leaders who make use of popular prejudices and false claims and promises in order to gain power. These are the *"alternative facts"* and the *"fake news"* propagandists. The creation of division, suspicion, fear, and confusion are the means by which they rise to power. Among the things that we forget is that people should be judged by the life choices that they make and the lives that they live, and not just by the positions that they take. That's what the New Testament points out in I Timothy 3:1-13. What counts are your life-habits; how you have lived in the past and how you are living now.

Our constitutional democracy intended for people to run for office as free-standing individuals who present themselves for election based on their character, background, and ideas; not because of their party affiliation. Our political parties have divided us, elevated election costs so that only millionaires can run for office and have doomed the less well-heeled to forever be beholden to campaign funders and the special interests that they represent. In our two-party system office-holders are often too distracted from fulfilling their sworn duties because of the need to constantly campaign and strategically vote to please their sponsors and to protect their jobs.

Special Privilege Cheats the Common Good, Divides the Nation, and Endangers Democracy

Our political parties and the special interests supporting them, seek dominating power. They seek control, with majorities in both houses of Congress and a member of their party in the Whitehouse, so that they can do their will. We have ample evidence, in issues like *gun control* and *health care*, that the parties *will* and the special interests that support them, does not represent *the people's will*.

In 2018, Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, both of Harvard University, co-authored the book, *How Democracies Die*. They point out that when people who have enjoyed power and status in a society for a long-time fear that they are losing it, they will band together in an attempt to maintain their privileges, often without concern for the powerless and without regard to who gets hurt.

Democracy is not treasured by those who constantly lose elections or whose views are not given respectful consideration. If they come to believe that *the system* will never include them, they can lose faith in it and seek its downfall. They will struggle to modify the system to their advantage by inventing techniques like the election and appointment of partisan and often unqualified judges, gerrymandering (manipulate the boundaries of a body of voters so as to favor one party or class), voter obstruction by purging voter rolls, restricting voting access, and planting suspicion that the voting system is not trustworthy. These are common attempts, on the part of minorities, to *rig the democratic system* so that there will be a small voter turnout, thus giving them a better chance to prevail.

The ultimate danger of those, in our democracy, who fear a loss of power and privilege, is their vulnerability to the purveyors of dictatorial forms of government. The following top the list: autocrat (*government from the top down where the top has unlimited power*), plutocrat (*government by a controlling class, usually of the wealthy*), theocrat (*government in which leaders of the dominate national religion control or equally share the leadership of all civil and social institutions*) dictator (*one who holds absolute power through violent control.*) Remember what Lord Action said: “Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

Our Original Sin: Racism

Our democracy can be messy and sluggish because of American idealism. In theory, as least, we believe in full citizen equality and participation; on that basis we seek to *form a more perfect union*. We are a diverse people of numerous races, religions, and cultures. *This* reality has both enriched us and divided us. We have a long history of violence and racism in both the founding and conduct of our social, national, and international affairs. The majority of our founders were white Europeans. Their culture, featured private ownership and the domination of nature for human use. These values clashed sharply with the majority of the American continent’s native population whose governments were made up of communal councils (including women) and who had a spiritual connection with the natural world, seeing it as an extension of God’s presence. They had no word meaning *religion* because the living of all life was spiritual. They had no concept of *original sin* since all of God’s creation is good. The human struggle was not caused by sin but from the failure to recognize and live in harmony and in peace with all of God’s living creatures.

The colonists, *colonized*. They divided the land with hundreds of private boundaries and defended their holdings by whatever means necessary. Native peoples, who once wandered, planted, and hunted freely, were pushed on to *reservations* where their traditional way of making a living was almost impossible; desperate poverty was the result. Some were forced to subscribe to Christianity on pain of death, and some were forced into servanthood. Most of the treaties that they had with the white dominant culture were never honored by that culture – they were given sovereignty, but had no citizenship rights.

Black slavery began in 1619 when blacks were imported to Jamestown, Virginia to work in the plantations. The cheap labor that slaves provided widely spread throughout the English colonies. Black slavery existed for over 200 years, eventually leading to the secession of the slave-holding states from the union which resulted in the Civil War. Today, because of our deep divisions, there is both public and private talk of secession and civil war, even by our current President.

It is a sad fact of our history that anyone without a white skin and European origin was, and for some, still is considered to be inferior. In September 2019, the *Department of Homeland Security* announced that it now considers *White-Supremacists*, their violence and their plots, to be as great a threat to our country as the *Islamic State* or *al-Qaeda*. There are 36 known hate groups, of various types, in Ohio alone. For a reliable list of the types and locations of hate groups, go to www.spicenter.org/hate-map/by-state.

In Summary

The practice of *Consumer Democracy* and its dependence on fossil fuels, has driven us into a climate crisis. *Climate Change*, at this time officially denied in our nation (the President calls it a “hoax”), but widely accepted by our citizenry and the rest of the world is creating all kinds of havoc. I began this essay, by saying that justice is built into the nature of creation itself. If we treat creation unjustly, it will retaliate. Our consumer excesses are warming the climate and depleting resources at such a dangerous rate that we will soon be forced, at great cost, to change the way we live and produce. Nature will not be put off by anything, including technology; it will have its way with us. The idea of constant growth and expansion must be challenged and changed in favor of the idea of sustainability and renewability. Fossil fuel use is the main culprit and must be the first thing that we modify in spite of the powerful forces that resist even small changes. The major fossil fuel producers are all planning to increase production and energy use in the coming decade!

We Americans value the idea of *rugged individualism* and personal *independence*. In our idealism, however, we want to build a “*more perfect union*”. There is nothing wrong with being strong individuals unless that individualism creates disunity. We are called to be a community; all for one and one for all. Our national motto used to be: *E pluribus Unum*, which is variously translated: “*Out of many, One*,” “*One out of Many*,” “*One from Many*” and was recognized in 1782. In 1956 the Congress adapted, “*In God we Trust*” as the new motto. In the history of the world, the words *God* and *Bible* have always been topics that humanity has constantly argues about and never finds consensus. They are not unifying ideas. The new motto hasn’t done us much good. We are a deeply divided nation who must again seek to build unity out of diversity – out of many, one.

We should think more than we emote. These days we are a reactionary people, making mountains out of mole-hills. We get all pumped-up by some wagging tongue where emotion overcomes logic (James 3:12) and we are victimized by lies, exaggerations, and half-truths with the result that we become quarrelsome and angry. The Apostle James writes:

Where do all the fights and quarrels come from? They come from your passions...You want things, but you cannot have them, so you are ready to kill; you covet things, but you cannot get them, so you quarrel and fight...humble yourselves before God and he will lift you up” (see James 4:1-10). Paul writes “Avoid the godless talk and foolish arguments of those who think that they are so smart.” (1 Timothy 6:20).

Postlude

“We are always blinded and blunted by the anguish of the times in which we live. We are torn by the desire to go back to some place in the past that we falsely perceive was more holy and safe than what we have today when the only path that is open to us is to push aside our nostalgia and our fears and move forward with thoughtful consideration, courage, and openness.”

-Source unknown
Winter 2020



A New Year

Starting a new year is a time that is always a mixture of excitement and sadness; and a good time for reflection on what has been and on what is to come. If the passing year has been a good one, there will be the warmth of remembered pleasures and the satisfaction of service given and accomplishments realized to carry into the new year. If the passing year has been a trying or sad one, its end may bring relief and longing for better things to come.

For many in our world, the prospects for the new year do not seem promising. The political realities we live in are not encouraging or hopeful. We may feel more like we are standing on the edge of disaster than with infinite possibilities in front of us. A number of key world leaders and many citizens are focusing more on themselves and their own wants and need for power or control than on the good of everyone. Ideological differences have become all-consuming and truth, reality, and morals in decision making seem to have been forgotten.

Like each new day, a new year has endless possibilities and no mistakes in it as we stand at its dawning. However, our past choices and each new decision made will impact our future options and how easy it can be to change course or correct past wrongs. Each of us should remember to turn to the Lord for guidance; get the facts; consider the consequences for ourselves and others; and seek wise council when making decisions. We should insist that our leaders do the same. In Christ, the possibility for a bright future is there, but we have been given the responsibility that comes with making choices!

Worship Resources

Make Praying for Peace Part of Your Worship

Remember in prayer:

1. The **people and Wildlife of Australia** facing an unprecedented fire season. 136 fires are burning; at least 1,300 homes destroyed; at least half a billion animals have died or face extinction as a result of the fires. Australia has 300 native species. 81% of them are found only in Australia. The fires have already burned 18 million acres.
2. The **people of Iran and the political leaders involved on all sides**. Recent U.S. actions initiated heightened tension in the area resulting in an increasingly dangerous

exchange of threats. Pray for restraint and reason to prevail. Pray that all sides seek dialogue not violence. See Church of the Brethren statements on the situation in Iran, see <https://mailchi.mp/brethren/no-war-with-iran> and www.brethren.org/news/2020/church-signs-faith-statement.html

3. **Pray for our brothers and sisters in Nigeria. Nigerian Brethren pastor Lawan Andimi** was abducted by Boko Haram on January 3. He is a district leader and a leader in the larger church in Nigeria.
4. **Puerto Rico earthquake victims. A 6.4 magnitude quake hit January 7th**. The entire island is affected. 3 power plants were badly damaged. Everyone lost power; many also lost water at least for a time. The island has been experiencing tremors since December 28th.
5. **Those affected by gun violence** – see the article above on gun violence in 2019.
6. **On-going mis-treatment of children & parents by immigration authorities at the U.S. border**. They continue to be housed in unsafe conditions with no medical care. The goal is to make seeking asylum as hard and unpleasant as possible. Nothing is being done to help improve conditions in Central and South American to make it safe and possible for people to stay in their homes. When people are faced with possible death or torture, they will flee.
7. **Pray for people forced to flee their homes in this hemisphere**. People from Venezuela, El Salvador, Guatemala, & Honduras.
8. **The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and surrounding countries** – As of January 1st in DRC, there have been **3,382 cases of Ebola**, including **2,232 deaths**, **1,114 survivors**, and patients still under care. More than 30 new cases were reported in December.
9. **The victims of gun violence and for those willing to commit such senseless acts.**
10. **All people in this world who live with war.**
11. **People facing torture.**
12. **Child Soldiers**
13. **Girls & Women** facing abuse & violence every day
14. **Those continuing to wage war by remote control** – they push buttons here that hurt or kill men, women, children on the other side of the world
15. **Those in prison for their beliefs or persecuted for reporting genocide & other human rights abuses** including: reporters in Myanmar, opposition leaders in Cambodia & Russia, those working for change in Central America.

Look for Peace & Reconciliation Resources on the Northern Ohio District Website.
For access go to: www.nohcob.org



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