



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

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“Pursue What Leads to Peace” (Rom. 14:19) A Christian Response to Rising Threats of Political and Ideological Violence

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body (Col. 3:12-15).

In the best moments of American politics, people with very diverse viewpoints have found a way to unity, justice, peace, and ultimately, the common good. That is the ideal to which good politics aspires. However, more and more it has become abundantly clear that violent behavior – both physical and verbal – is now seen by many as an acceptable means for carrying out political or ideological disputes. Political speech is often full of insults, fear, anger, and anxiety. Sadly, racism, religious discrimination, and xenophobia are on the rise. People in public office are receiving more death threats than ever before, some of which turn into physical attacks. About half of Americans [expect there will be violence](#) in response to future presidential elections results.

America can do so much better. There is no good reason to resort to violence to resolve political issues. To start, there are countless non-violent and effective alternatives. Dialogue and voting better serve our human dignity, as do peaceful protests, petitions, lawsuits, and civil disobedience in the face of injustice. By contrast, violence harms innocent victims. Violence undermines order and the rule of law. Practically speaking, political violence does not ensure positive or lasting change.

We pray and urge all Christians and people of good will: abstain from political violence of any kind! Instead, “pursue what leads to peace and building up one another” (Rom. 14:19) through dialogue, seeking justice.

Pursue Peace

How does one pursue peace? How can there be peace when something is truly unjust? Pursuing peace does not mean ignoring injustice. Society should stop unjust acts. But good intentions still must bear the Holy Spirit’s marks of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control” (Gal. 5:20). Fully giving in to anger, however righteous, leads to what is opposed to the Spirit: “hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions” (Gal. 5:20). Nothing lasts that is opposed to the Spirit—whether a political movement or anything else—but what is built with the Spirit is indestructible (see Acts 5:38-39).

Through Dialogue

Political dialogue should mirror Christian dialogue by beginning with the God-given human dignity of each person. It is hypocritical for a Christian to “bless the Lord and Father” and then turn around and “curse human beings who are made in the likeness of God” (Jas. 3:9). Dialogue is not about winning arguments; it is not debate. Yes, real dialogue will be hard, but it is essential for finding common ground upon which a solution might be built. It requires openness and vulnerability. Between violence and indifference, persistent and humble dialogue is the necessary path to peace.

Seeking Justice

Dialogue around justice means starting with positive proposals to create social change for the common good. God's justice renders to each person his or her dignity. Education and respectful dialogue around these proposals is necessary for cooperation and agreement, but it will often be a struggle. We need not be troubled when these obstacles arise. Rather, we should always remember that, in the end, "[t]he work of justice will be peace" and "the effect of justice [will be] calm and security forever" (Is. 32:17).

Conclusion

Let us pray, then, that by turning away from violence, away from anger, away from demeaning others who are made in the image and likeness of God, we may work for peace through dialogue and justice. We pray with trust and thanksgiving that the Lord will bless our country, including our political process, and that "the tender mercy of our God" will "guide our feet into the path of peace" (Lk. 1:78-79).

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June 2024