



CANADIAN CONFERENCE
of Mennonite Brethren Churches

ARTICLE 13 [MB Confession of Faith]

Love and Nonresistance

COMMENTARY

There have been many debates through the years about whether this article, “Love and Nonresistance,” should be relegated to a secondary role in our confession of faith. We have argued over how a citizen can be subject to governing authorities and also refuse military service. Or we have debated how this topic can be given such prominence in comparison to the centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our biblical teaching on the article has languished in many of our churches because of such questions.

Teaching on this article must start with the good news of the gospel and develop out of a biblical concern for faithfulness as disciples of Jesus Christ. Peacemaking is rooted in the biblical teaching that Jesus is our peace. He broke down the walls that divide and alienate people, and created a new humanity (Eph. 2:14-22). Jesus called his followers to a life of sacrificial love in which even our enemies should be treated with grace and forgiveness (Matt. 5:43-48). We have often interpreted these teachings too narrowly, for instance as a prohibition against killing or going to war. It is that, to be sure, but it is more. Peacemaking goes beyond a reactive response to military involvement. Biblically it is understood proactively as seeking reconciliation and peace, and extending forgiveness and blessing to our neighbors, even our enemies.

This article is not an optional part of our confession. It describes our response to the violence, suffering, and injustice that is so much a part of contemporary society. It is particularly needed today because of the hatred and violence so prevalent in our families and neighborhoods and on the streets of our cities. This confession makes explicit our commitment to alleviate suffering, reduce strife, and promote justice as part of our witness in today’s world.

Peacemaking Begins with the Gospel

The heart of a theology of peacemaking is the reconciling work of Christ on the cross. Jesus came to address the broken relationship between God and humanity. In his sacrificial death our Lord not only redeemed us but reconciled all humanity into one. He broke down the walls of hostility between opposing cultures, societal factions, and between male and female (Gal. 3:28ff). He destroyed the barriers which divide people. Through his death, former enemies are reconciled to live at peace as brothers and sisters in Christ (Eph. 2:11-18).

Our Lord not only made it possible for enemies to be at peace, but he called us to a ministry of reconciliation and peacemaking (2 Cor. 5:11-21). Jesus taught that the way of peace lies in extending forgiveness to those who have sinned against us, to bless our enemies rather than curse them (Matt. 5:43-48), and to bind up the wounds of those who are injured even if they are different from us (Luke 10:25-37).

Peacemaking Rather than Pacifism

The call to biblical peacemaking challenges us to be more than passive nonresistors. The word “peacemaker” combines the meaning of well-being or wholeness with the idea of action. A peacemaker is one who actively intervenes in situations of conflict in order to establish peace. Jesus teaches that one of the ways to live as peacemakers is to refuse retaliation. The idea is both clear and radical. Do not resist but turn the other cheek. Do not insist on legal rights. Surrender personal property. Do not resist those who demand assistance. Give money instead of lending when a loan is requested (Matt. 5:38-42). Luke observes that we should refuse retaliation because of who God is. He is a God of grace and mercy. We should therefore respond to oppressors in like manner (Luke 6:32-38).



This proactive biblical warrant for peacemaking is not only emphasized in the Gospels. The apostles describe the life of the believing community in the same manner. Followers of Christ are to serve their enemies (Rom. 12:20; 13:8-10), return good for evil (Rom. 12:17, 21; 1 Pet. 3:9), do good to all people (Rom. 12:17; Gal. 6:10), and pursue peace with all people (Rom. 12:18; 14:19; 1 Pet. 3:11).

Peacemaking involves more than refusing to retaliate, however. It includes loving oppressors. Jesus is unambiguous. We are to love the people who hate us (Matt. 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36). He counters the morality which says “love your neighbors and hate your enemies” by challenging his followers to love even enemies (Matt. 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36). We are to pray for our enemies (Matt. 5:44). Rather than destroying them, we are to love in order to enhance and enrich their lives (Luke 6:27-36). We are called to respond in such extraordinary ways that we communicate the mercy of God and reflect His nature (Matt. 5:46-47; Luke 6:27-36). Indeed, peacemaking always has Christ’s mission of the church in mind, to fulfill our Lord’s command to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18-20).

Peacemaking and the Kingdom

The redemptive work of Christ creates a new community of God’s people who live together according to a new order based upon the teachings and example of Jesus. Jesus called people to respond to this kingdom by repenting, believing, and becoming members of the kingdom community. It is a unique community made up of people who were once enemies but are now reconciled to God and with one another. Their mission is to be ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18).

This new kingdom community lives in a unique relationship to the world system. The people of God are *in* the world but not *of* the world (John 17:15-16). They see themselves as pilgrims, strangers, and aliens whose citizenship is otherworldly (Heb. 11:8-16; 1 Pet. 2:9, 11; Phil. 3:20). They stand over against the worldly kingdom by keeping separated from the practices of the world. The apostle Paul describes this stance toward the world system as nonconformity (Rom. 12:2). Having been transformed so as to know and do the will of God, the people of God now live in love and unity with each other, leaving vengeance to God, and practicing suffering love (Rom. 12:14-21).

This new kingdom community has a new way of accomplishing its mission. It is the way of love rather than violence. Christ was clear in his comments to Pilate: “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place” (John 18:36). When the Christian’s value system comes into conflict with the world system, priority is given to the kingdom of Christ. Christ is our example. In the face of ridicule and hostile forces he modeled purity of heart and a loving and gracious spirit: “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly” (1 Pet. 2:23).

Peacemaking Inwardly and Outwardly

Jesus summarized the whole of his teaching with the command to love both God and neighbor (Matt. 22:37-40; Luke 10:25-37). The teaching of peacemaking must embrace both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of our love. The Scriptures emphasize that love for God can never remain only an upward and inward focus. Our love must extend to our neighbor. Jesus was clear that our neighbor includes anyone who is in need. Like the lawyer in Jesus’ day who asked “Who is my neighbor?” we want to limit neighbor love. Neighbor love includes all people—minorities, people of color, the poor, the aged, the physically and mentally challenged, and so on. Peacemaking is driven by a love that knows no social or cultural conditions or limitations.

Teaching on peacemaking should start in the family, the most basic social relationship. How we live within the home is more indicative of our peacemaking convictions than our nonparticipation in the military. Our focus on peacemaking must also include neighbor relations in our community. As peacemakers we respond with love and compassion to our friends and neighbors next door, to our business associates in the office, to our students in the classroom, to the stranger on the street. Peacemakers are concerned to do good for rather than condemn other races, welfare recipients, strikers, criminals, employers, employees, and others commonly criticized and even hated.



Moreover, peacemaking makes little sense in the social-political sphere if it does not also impact our relationships within the church. Christ's teaching on loving our enemies is especially relevant for those in the church who fight and feud with one another. Indeed, peacemaking must begin in the household of faith. Wherever the seeds of enmity and malice have been sown, peacemakers sow love by word and deed.

