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Editor's Notes

Stuart Love
slope@pepperdine.edu

D'Esta Love
dlove@pepperdine.edu

Michael T. McRay
mtmcray@gmail.com

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Editors' Notes

D'Esta Love and Stuart Love

All around Jesus there are manifestations of war. Messianic expectations within Israel consider the coming Christ as a leader of a final war. As early as the temptations, Jesus rejects violence as the way he would conduct his ministry (Matt 4.8–10; Luke 4.5–8). Apparently, even the disciples seek to cast Jesus, their leader, in this role (Matt 20.20–27; Mark 10.35–45; Acts 1.6). But he refuses. And the disciples misunderstand. They misinterpret and know not the Messiah as “the suffering servant,” the advocate of non-violence in a violent world. With a kiss Judas betrays the Son of Man as others surround him with swords and clubs as they seek Jesus as if he is a bandit (Luke 22.52). Jesus’s followers immediately react by asking, “Lord, should we strike with the sword?” And before Jesus can answer, one of them strikes the slave of the high priest and cuts off his right ear (Luke 22.50). The response of Jesus is immediate: “No more of this!”

“No more of this!” should be the new creational response to all expressions of violence, whether they are physical, psychological, political, or social. The death of Jesus on a Roman cross and his resurrection from the dead is God’s apocalyptic answer to all demonstrations of cruelty and violence. Yes, we are engaged in a holy war—but as peacemakers we are equipped by means of the armor of God. Around our waists is the belt of truth, our breastplate is righteousness, and—as we walk—we proclaim the gospel of peace. Always, the kingdom’s shield is faith, its helmet is rectification, and its sword is the Spirit. Violence in all of its forms belongs to the old world of flesh and death. We are called to the Spirit’s fruit of unlimited freedom and resources—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. That is why Paul proclaims that “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2.20). And that is why Paul makes the “mercies of God” his ethical foundation as he calls us away from conformation to this world to the transformation of our minds renewed always by our search for the will of God that is “good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12.2).

For some time your editors have sought a guest editor to explore the theme of war, violence, and reconciliation. Finally, we have found such a person: Michael T. McRay. Some of you may know him as an author, advocate, educator, and speaker living in Nashville. He also teaches as an adjunct instructor in restorative justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation, storytelling, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and international conflict resolution at Lipscomb University. In addition, Michael has traveled Israel–Palestine, Northern Ireland, and South Africa interviewing, capturing stories and analyses of the complexities of conflict and reconciliation. We could continue enumerating his qualifications to edit this issue, but enough has been said to sensitize your interest in his leadership regarding this complex and difficult topic.

In addition, your editors have invited two others to contribute to the issue. Following the articles Michael has collected, we share a pastoral piece by CLETUS HULL entitled, “The Power of the Cross and Healing in a Pastor’s Ministry.” In it, Cletus develops a theology of prayer centered in the cross of Jesus. Finally, we close the issue, most fittingly, with a very relevant piece by ACU professor JERRY TAYLOR, known by many as a voice of the times, who addresses the current racial climate in our nation. In his own words, “he prayerfully, critically, wisely seeks to navigate through the current racial strife unfolding in America and that continues to escalate.”

Continue to pray for *Leaven*, especially in our transition of editorial leadership to JOHN BARTON and MARK LOVE in 2017.

Manifestations of War

Michael T. McRay

I have never fought in a war, but I've seen its shadows.

When I was younger, I walked the beaches of Normandy. When I was older, I stood silent before the ovens of Auschwitz. In 2012, I jumped broken walls to hide from Israeli bullets flying at unarmed protestors in the West Bank. In 2013, I spun my words any way I could to convince prisoners not to slice through their bodies with razors clutched in captive fingers. I've sat with an Israeli father whose daughter was killed by a Palestinian suicide bomber, and with a Palestinian whose brother was shot by an Israeli soldier. I've heard the grief of a Northern Irish widow whose husband was murdered by the IRA, and I've talked with a black South African from Gugulethu who recounted his violent resistance to apartheid.

I've never lived through war, but I've smelled its residue.

For some years now, I have not only been curious about the dynamics of violent conflict, but also passionate in the pursuit of peacebuilding. With my graduate degree, teaching, and books all hovering around experiences of painful conflict and their potential for transformation, I spend much of my time contemplating these notions. The possibility of violence is never far from us, and the mindset of war is not a foreign phenomenon.

In all my engagement with these issues, a few features travel with war regardless of time or territory. We tend to see those we wage war against as dangerous *others*, people different than ourselves, less human and more disposable. We assign to them single stories of identity and purpose, seeing them as nothing more than unnuanced black-and-white descriptors penned from the disdain emerging from presumed righteousness. We dehumanize them by severing from them all complexity. The language of war is the language of enemy, and the language of enemy is the language of fear and condemnation. And none of us escape these circles of complicity.

When I was asked to guest edit an issue of *Leaven* on war and peace, I knew quickly that I did not want to reflect on war in the traditional sense. I did not want another publication analyzing wars abroad, "over there." Instead, I asked that this edition explore the manifestations of war here among us, at home. Where are the places and spaces we are waging war on each other? Where have we adopted the language and philosophies of war in our everyday lives? Most wars now are not waged on battlefields by people in unique uniforms; they are far more insidious, permeating our communities and consciences by people like us and by systems made by us. Each of the following seven essays demonstrates this.

JONATHAN MCRAY shows us how we've waged war against the earth and how, if only for our own survival, we must radically revision our relationship with the ecosystems we inhabit. **LINDSEY KRINKS** flips the war on poverty on its head and exposes how attempts to end poverty tend to look more like criminalizing and removing poor people from our awareness. **JEANNIE ALEXANDER** and **JACOB DAVIS** coauthor an analysis of the war being waged in our prisons against those we have exiled. **FAYE LONDON** reveals well the Cold War mentality of categorical condemnations cast against women, particularly women of color, who do not adhere to sexual or gender conventions. **ZAKIYA JACKSON** offers insightful education and questions for engaging the war white supremacy has continually waged against people of color. **JUSTIN PHILLIPS** addresses the necessary war on the death penalty through the framework of *just peacemaking*. And finally, **MARK CHARLES** pulls back the curtain on the myth of *American exceptionalism*, recharting the map through the landscape of American history to demonstrate the profound platform of injustice this country was actually built upon.

My hope is that these essays reveal that war—both its practices and principles—are sewn into our social fabrics. We must cease thinking of war as a problem of *other* people in *other* places. As Rabbi

Heschel said, “Some are guilty, but all are responsible.” May these pages convict and compel us to right our wrongs and do all we might to build peace on our only earth.

MICHAEL T. MCRAY (MPHIL, CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND RECONCILIATION, TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN) IS THE AUTHOR OF *WHERE THE RIVER BENDS: CONSIDERING FORGIVENESS IN THE LIVES OF PRISONERS*, WITH A FOREWORD BY DESMOND M. TUTU, AND *LETTERS FROM “APARTHEID STREET”: A CHRISTIAN PEACEMAKER IN OCCUPIED PALESTINE*, WITH A FOREWORD BY LEE C. CAMP. AN ADJUNCT LECTURER AT LIPSCOMB UNIVERSITY, HE WORKS FULL-TIME FOR THE TENNESSEE JUSTICE CENTER IN NASHVILLE. HE IS ALSO COFOUNDER OF NO EXCEPTIONS PRISON COLLECTIVE AND FOUNDER/ORGANIZER/COHOST OF TENX9 NASHVILLE STORYTELLING. MICHAEL IS CURRENTLY WORKING ON THIS THIRD BOOK, NARRATING AND ANALYZING THE FIFTY INTERVIEWS HE CONDUCTED DURING THE FALL OF 2015 IN ISRAEL–PALESTINE, NORTHERN IRELAND, AND SOUTH AFRICA ON STORIES AND PERSPECTIVES OF RECONCILIATION AND JUSTICE. YOU CAN FOLLOW HIM ON FACEBOOK, TWITTER, AND INSTAGRAM (@MICHAELMCRAY), OR REACH HIM THROUGH EMAIL AT MTMCRAY@GMAIL.COM.

