

CHRISTIAN PEACEMAKER TEAMS, SOLIDARIST NONVIOLENT
ACTIVISM, AND THE POLITICS OF PEACE: PEACE WITNESS THAT
CHALLENGES MILITARISM AND DESTRUCTIVE VIOLENCE

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Christian activist groups are often associated with right wing, conservative culture, especially in the North American political context. While such elements are certainly present in some faith communities, this article examines an alternative emerging expression of Christian group identity, which does not correlate well with left-right dichotomies and is oriented not towards other-worldliness, but is focused on justice in the here and now. Specifically, it looks at the methodological and theoretical foundations that encourage Christian Peacemakers Teams to engage in acts of violence intervention and prevention in a spirit of solidarity. This article assesses whether such a solidarist methodology has the potential to function as a dialogue of life, one that supports cultural, biological, and religious diversity. Further, it argues that this peace witness is an essential expression of Christianity in today's world.

War, social injustice, poverty and ecocide are phenomena which the vast bulk of mankind has participated in and accommodated to throughout recorded history.

—George Lakey, 1973¹

The greatest religious challenge of our age is to hold together social action and spiritual disciplines.

—Walter Wink, 1998²

INTRODUCTION: IS CHRISTIANITY NECESSARILY RIGHT WING AND CONSERVATIVE?

My interest in Christian Peacemaker Teams, while not based on personal participation in their violence intervention and prevention efforts, does not grow out of a vacuum. This interest was fostered by my training and teaching in the areas of theology, political science, and peace studies. One key experience that spurred my reflection on the general relationship between faith and politics for me was an informal lecture given by then-MP Bill Blaikie. Blaikie, a long-time New Democratic Party Member of Parliament and now a Member of Manitoba's Legislative Assembly, is also an ordained United Church minister. Reflecting on issues of social justice in terms of his political and spiritual roles, Blaikie argued that it is a mistake to assume that Christians are necessarily right wing and conservative (in the common terms of North American politics). He noted that this assumption rests on false premises, given the historical example of the social gospel movement in Canada.³ Such a politically engaged form of Christianity was a driving force in the establishment of the social safety net, including the Medicare system,⁴ which is a key symbol of Canadian identity. Blaikie argued that religion is often assumed to be opposed to socially progressive legislation; in practice, this means that the political discourse on religion is silenced in favour of a form of Christianity that is supportive of a right wing agenda in the North American context.⁵

In surveying the scholarly literature dealing with the intersection of politics and religion in Canada, Michael Gauvreau and Olivier Hubert note that common conceptions in Canadian academic writing are, first, that religion has faded and will continue to fade away with modernization and, second, that faith, particularly Christianity, acts as a socially conservative force.⁶ Nonetheless, in the international context, the study of religion and its relationship to political conflict has been a growth area in academic studies since 1994;⁷ much of the literature, however, seeks to establish religion as a cause of violence.⁸ While religion is blamed in part, and sometimes justifiably, for everything from armed conflict to imperialism to Canada's residential school system, this article takes a critical step back and examines the solidarist faith-based effort at violence intervention and prevention undertaken by Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT). While acknowledging the role of religion, particularly Christianity, in oppressive colonial projects, this article argues that despite the ambiguous role of religions in conflict

and systemic violence, CPTers, by practicing their version of the politics of peace, are participating in a “dialogue of life” wherein people from different communities come together to work on joint projects of violence intervention and prevention. It further argues that CPTers’ participation in this dialogue of life is marked by a commitment to integral justice—one respectful of social, cultural, and biological diversity.

CPT: BORN OF A CHALLENGE

A differentiated consciousness regarding the politics of peace was present during the establishment of CPT, which was initiated by thinkers in the Anabaptist tradition. The immediate impetus for CPT’s violence reduction project came from Ron Sider’s address to the 1984 Mennonite World Conference in Strasbourg, France. This speech called on Christians of the world to band together to form a Christian peacemaking “army” that would use nonviolent direct action to intervene in situations of violence and conflict.⁹ With his novel response to mass society’s critique of pacifism as “cowardly,” Sider’s speech repositioned the methodology of conscientious objection to warfare.¹⁰ Specifically countering the notion that pacifism ought to be passive, Sider set a significant challenge for pacifist Christians by stating that they ought to be willing to die by the thousands in order to take up God’s call to end war once and for all.¹¹

By January 1986, a document concerning “Christian Peacemaking Teams” had been circulated for discussion by the Council of Moderators and Secretaries of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Churches in North America. The proposal was crafted in response to “violence and terror unprecedented in human history stalk[ing] the earth,”¹² and followed the Council of Moderators and Secretaries’ endorsement of the basic concept of CPT. At that time, it was proposed that CPT membership require a five month period of training in active nonviolent resistance and discipleship to Christ, followed by a two year placement.¹³ In keeping with the grassroots nature of the response to Sider’s call, addresses to write for further information at that time were in Akron, Pennsylvania and Winnipeg, Manitoba.¹⁴

The images of peacemaking and the politics of peace were already quite differentiated and contextual in that 1986 document, which drew upon the interventionist example of a Chilean Christian pacifist group formed with strong support from “Church leadership.” The document notes that partnership with this “anti-torture organization” would be desirable, both

because “outside involvement [was] welcome” and “police officers were deeply moved by the love expressed by members of this group as they were arrested.”¹⁵ The language surrounding the use of “techniques of non-violent direct action” emphasized the promotion of peace, the quelling of suffering, and the reduction of violence in favour of justice and freedom. The document expressed the hope that more Christian denominations would eventually join CPT.¹⁶

The controversial nature of this proposal revealed discordance about the proper role of Christians in relation to the politics of peace. The Anabaptist tradition has generally held that the sword (that is, the use of physical violence) is not an acceptable means to counter overt and systemic violence. The question is whether it necessarily follows that members of Peace Churches in particular, and Christians in general, ought to actively confront violence. When combined with a sort of dualism that sees the concerns of the world and the concerns of faith as separate, the response to this dilemma can be withdrawal from political processes and an aversion to social protest. This is the type of dualism that Walter Rauschenbusch identifies with individualistic theology that allows personal pietism to take the place of Christian social duty.¹⁷

ACTIVE NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE

In contrast to such lack of engagement stand the principles and practice of active nonviolent resistance. Based on the premise that cycles of violence and oppression can only be broken effectively through nonviolent means, active nonviolent resistance seeks to effect positive social change in the face of injustice. Active nonviolent resistance and third party involvement in conflict to foster peace both have a long history; CPT is by no means the first group to be devoted to their practice. The International Committee of the Red Cross (founded in 1863) is the first modern organization to urge combatants to “honour the moral and symbolic force of an outside neutral party.”¹⁸ In the area of accompaniment, two organizations that share many similarities with CPT, Peace Brigades International and Witness for Peace, were founded with some Christian involvement and support prior to Ron Snider’s 1984 speech at the Mennonite World Conference.¹⁹ Peace Brigades International, founded in 1981, practices a strategy of “protective accompaniment,” focused on the protection of human rights within a framework of non-partisanship and non-interference. In this nonviolent methodology,

“teams of volunteers backed up by an international support network . . . accompany human rights defenders and communities in areas of conflict.”²⁰ Witness for Peace was founded in 1983 in response the United States Government’s support of “low-intensity warfare” in Nicaragua. Since then, Witness for Peace has expanded its activities to other areas in the Americas including accompaniment actions in various Latin American contexts as well as protest and activism work in the United States.²¹

Perhaps the best known individual proponent of active nonviolent resistance is Mohandas Karamchand (Mahatma) Gandhi (1869-1948). Gandhi was a complex character who moved between the global North and South under conditions of empire and was influenced in his activism by the both eastern and western thought traditions. These influences included his education in Law at University College, London; his contacts in his student days in England with activists such as London vegetarians; and his reading of historical documents and religious scripture. Gandhi’s work with Muslim leader Khan Abdul Ghaffar (Badshah) Khan demonstrated his desire to work across faith lines in nonviolent struggle.²² Gandhi’s example has informed the work of CPT.²³ Gandhi himself was influenced by Christian thought and social activism, such as the example of the nineteenth century “learned blacksmith” Elihu Barat’s campaign to create a transnational union of Christian workers ready to strike upon the declaration of any war.²⁴

Building on this heritage and decrying the self-referential pietism mentioned above, former U.S. Institute of Peace Scholar and biblical theologian Walter Wink describes a “third way” linked with the path of active nonviolent resistance. Wink argues that Jesus, whose life is representative of this third way, was an innovator in the area of nonviolent resistance. In Wink’s exegesis, Jesus’s teachings acknowledge the profound implications of a spiritual perspective on nonviolent activism. Jesus was born in Galilee, a backwater of the Roman Empire. The *Pax Romana* into which he was born was by no means a just peace. It was built on the toil of women, slaves, and labourers. Jesus experienced kinship with these people. The Empire’s policies, such as tax farming and exorbitant interest rates, victimized the Galilean peasantry, and caused less wealthy Jews to lose control of the land.²⁵ Conditions such as leprosy and mental illness afflicted those to whom Jesus ministered.²⁶ These misfortunes were seen by some as being the result of personal sin or the unfaithfulness of the Jewish people to God.

Wink concludes that, along with the early Christians, Jesus opposed this interpretation of events, without ever denying the spiritual reality of the accompanying multi-dimensional suffering.²⁷ To those enduring the forces of empire, he preached love for one's enemies. Jesus invited women, foreigners, the poor, and those who were considered sinners and outcasts to eat with him. This scandalized some elements in the communities that shared Jesus's faith tradition.²⁸ On Wink's reading, the very survival of the table fellowship stories in the canonical Gospels shows their profound importance for earliest Christianity. In these narratives, Jesus is giving testimony to the way that God's divine love shines and rains down equally upon everybody.²⁹ Such a spiritual interpretation did not mean that love for one's enemies ought to result in acceptance of systems of domination. If everything had a spiritual reality and everything belonged to God, it meant that everything had a purpose that was ultimately subservient to God's love. However, in the face of the oppressive powers of empire, most people in Jesus's time seemed to respond in one of two ways: passivity or violence.

The first option, passivity, meant submitting to these forces, that is, acknowledging and submitting to their power. The second response, violence, meant armed rebellion, that is, being willing to both fight and die for freedom from such oppression. In the ancient Jewish context, this option ended in the last stand at Massada, the scattering of the people of Israel, and the destruction of the temple. In this context, according to Wink, the early Christian witness testified that those who lived by the sword opened themselves up to the vengeance of the sword and, further, were likely to precipitate the deaths of the innocent.³⁰

The only sustainable alternative in the face of the pervasive myth that violence can solve social and political problems is, for Wink, the aforementioned third way, a path of neither passivity nor violence.³¹ Wink finds this third option embodied in the work of people like Mohandas Gandhi, Leo Tolstoy, Muriel Lester, Dorothy Day, César Chávez, Hildegard Goss-Mayr, Mairead Maguire, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, (Daw) Aung San Suu Kyi and Martin Luther King Jr., who took up the challenge of confronting what Wink calls the Domination System in a creative manner.³²

In Christian terms, accepting this challenge leads to a faith-based praxis of direct confrontation of violence, which lies at the heart of the original CPT proposal and its current work. The resultant controversy is not new, even in Christian circles. For instance, in a letter addressed to

Martin Luther King Jr., several Alabaman religious leaders asked King not to come to Birmingham because those leaders felt he was part of a movement “directed and led in part by outsiders” and his brand of civil disobedience was too confrontational.³³ King responded to this charge by that his brand of nonviolent activism was “unwise and untimely” by writing his famous “Letter from Birmingham Jail.”³⁴ The 1980s saw a similar debate over active peacemaking as it related to the “Peace Church” in Anabaptist traditions.

Against the background of this debate between the value of nonresistance and active nonviolent resistance, enough momentum had been gained by late 1986 that Mennonite and Brethren in Christ leaders could move CPT beyond the proposal stage. A December 1986 letter from the transitional CPT organization in Chicago (the eventual location of the US office) urged the upcoming assembly of these Churches to fully approve the initiative. The letter stated that “peacemaking is most of all the work of God. It requires the nurturing of the Spirit of God within ourselves. It recognizes our own complicity in violence and oppression.”³⁵ New forms of “public witness” extolled in the document centred on “identifying with suffering people, reducing violence, mediating conflict, and fostering justice.”³⁶ As will be explored below, the language of faith-mandated peace witness is crucial to CPT’s participation in the politics of peace. In Techny, Illinois, the assembly as a whole endorsed the idea that nonviolent direct action was an appropriate Christian response to the violence plaguing the world.³⁷

Despite heated debate, the conference proclaimed the “Techny Call,” centred on four creed-like statements, which were unaltered from the Chicago document mentioned above:

1. We believe the mandate to proclaim the Gospel of repentance, salvation, and reconciliation includes strengthened biblical peace witness.
2. We believe that faithfulness to what Jesus taught and modeled calls us towards more active peacemaking.
3. We believe a renewed commitment to the Gospel of peace calls us to new forms of public witness which may include non-violent direct action.
4. We believe the establishment of Christian Peacemaker Teams is an important new dimension for our ongoing peace and justice ministry.³⁸

One of the few changes from the Chicago document was the order and phrasing of the closing paragraph to emphasize a more communitarian and God-centred reading of peacemaking: “We want to acknowledge our complicity in violence and oppression. Peacemaking is most of all the work of God. The Spirit of God will nurture the work within us.”³⁹ By this time, the founders of CPT had, in light of this God-centred reading of peacemaking, reflected upon and modified Ron Sider’s ideas. This shift resulted from a theological critique which argued that Sider’s image was too anthropocentric and overly focused on the premise that war could be eliminated because humans now had the technical knowledge to do so. In place of such a technique-oriented approach to conflict resolution, the CPT founders preferred the language of peace witness. In a significant sense, the CPT founders were echoing Rauschenbusch’s belief that ethics can unite religion and life.⁴⁰

IDEAS INFORMING ACTION

Working from this integral perspective, the first formal delegations were dispatched in 1990 to Kaneshake and Kahnawake in response to the “Oka Crisis.”⁴¹ CPT’s inaugural overseas actions took place in 1991 in Iraq. Following this, in 1993, CPT’s first peacemaker corps was dispatched to Haiti; by this time, the main constitutive elements of current CPT policy and practice were in place.⁴² Since that time, CPTers have undertaken a number of actions both throughout the Americas and in the Middle East.⁴³ They currently have permanent violence reduction efforts in Columbia, Iraq, Palestine, and the Great Lakes Region of Africa. In 2009 they also committed to a “periodic project” in Kenora, Ontario as part of their Aboriginal justice programming. CPTers are also active in the borderlands region of the southern United States.⁴⁴

These interventions have been undertaken with a spirit of embedded engagement, expressed through an integral interplay among context, theory, and the capabilities of CPT. Reflecting on this aspect of CPT’s work, Jesse Hirsh has labelled it “3-D dialogue.”⁴⁵ In this integrative fashion, CPTers have developed a methodology of violence intervention and prevention that is congruent with a liberatory, religious worldview characterized by respect for local cultures. This demonstrates the contextual character of CPT’s firm commitment to nonviolence. For instance, in terms of solidarity, the organization is constitutionally required to work on an invitation dynamic—CPT

will only enter a cross-cultural situation when a group that is experiencing oppression invites CPTers into that specific context.⁴⁶ It follows that the transformative dimension of CPT's work requires not only engagement in nonviolent action but also engagement with context (specifically, the situations and landscapes of the people with whom they stand in solidarity).

A framework for violence intervention integrated with such a solidarist focus was already present in CPT's earliest discussion documents, produced in 1987 by the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo. On the subject of neutrality, one of these documents stated, "[s]ome people would encourage CPT to be non-partisan but it will not be possible to be neutral on questions of injustice, poverty, hunger, and oppression."⁴⁷ When the realities of conflict situations call for it, CPT will exercise a preferential option for the oppressed, and will stand in solidarity with that group. Yet, in standing in solidarity, CPT always hopes to invoke the power of nonviolent resistance. Members of the organization will never sanction or participate in physical violence in their role as CPTers. Significantly, from a peace studies perspective, they are nourished in this commitment by spiritual reflection.

CPTer Wendy Lehman found that her reading of Wink's *Engaging the Powers* during the Middle East conflict provided an "excellent study of the historical, scriptural, and spiritual dimension to Christian Peacemaking."⁴⁸ This, combined with Wink's logic that peace cannot come into existence without peacemakers, compelled Lehman to return to Hebron. After being released from an Israeli prison, she again chose to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people despite the threat of re-imprisonment should she return to her solidarist nonviolent activism in the West Bank.⁴⁹ This is a form of public witness and violence "deterrence"⁵⁰ in an integral sense.

IMITATION AND EDUCATION

As indicated by the brief overview above of its constitutional history, CPT is not neutral in the sense of being committed solely to pragmatically ending violence. Rather, justice, fairness, and spiritual health are also key concerns. CPT strives to understand violence in many forms, including the cruelty of chronic hunger, labelled by one CPTer reflecting on the Haitian context as "the violence of the stomach."⁵¹ Understanding the connections between different forms of violence increases the likelihood that CPT's actions will result in a just and sustainable peace.

One of CPT's central tenets is that its members do not engage in physical violence. This does not mean that CPT is non-confrontational. This insight is at the core of its peace witness, as represented by the CPT slogan "getting in the Way," which carries two meanings. First, it signifies that CPTers physically put their bodies in the way of violence. This is a form of presence, particularly in overtly violent situations where other groups concerned with human rights violations might shy away from direct nonviolent confrontation. Second, it signifies CPTers' understanding that in so doing they are following a peculiarly Christian path ("The Way"). Such witness challenges all Christians to engage deeply with the idea that following Jesus (The Way) might mean embracing nonviolent direct action. Indeed, CPT extends this aspect of its identity to all its praxis-based programming by expressing the conviction that "[w]e know that lasting peace and security can never come about through violence. No war will ever end all wars."⁵² Thus the heart of CPT's work can be seen as exposing the myth that violence can effectively solve social and political problems.

CPT actions are also educational: through their interventions, CPTers model nonviolent creativity. By providing such a model, they invoke some positive dynamics of a Girardian mimesis in support of an understanding that nonviolent resistance is the only means to sustainably bring about a substantive and just peace. In so doing, a Christian following CPT's example practises something akin to Cheryl Kirk-Dugan's reshaping of *imatatio Christi* in a holistic sense.⁵³ In this manner, the model of Jesus's life provides a loving example for familiar and social relationships (The Way). In sociological terms, this type of faith witness leaves little room for the embrace of violence. This does not mean that CPT is perfect or that CPTers never feel the temptation to use violence when embedded in a difficult context. However, the nature of this peace witness does mean that CPTers find it difficult to accept violence on the theoretical and spiritual levels. CPTers are, therefore, well poised to come back from the brink should they feel tempted to use violent means.

CPT has opted for a sort of reflective, deliberate, and chosen naiveté in terms of its violence intervention and prevention efforts. Most CPTers are deeply prayerful people who recognize that they do not have all the answers in a given situation, but still engage contemporary power dynamics in a spiritually informed way in order to exercise their peace witness. Recognizing a spiritual dimension to all things and organisations, as in Wink's

integral worldview,⁵⁴ can only enhance the prospects for sustainable peace. An integral worldview holds that the reality of conflict is both material (but not just material) and spiritual (but not just spiritual). Such an understanding is absent in an overly technical approach to conflict resolution. My use of “chosen naiveté” above is not meant as a demeaning label; on the contrary, it denotes the way that this type of peace witness understands the weight and power of oppression and violence in the world and nonetheless *chooses* to make a considered effort actively to practice an integral version of the politics of peace.

It is noteworthy that CPTers are not paralyzed by their understanding of the power of systemic and structural violence; rather, they view such factors as issues that require a Christian response.⁵⁵ The powerful basic idea that CPT uses to explain itself rests on simple reflection-based questioning, mentioned as part of Sider’s 1984 speech. At that time, Sider called on Christians to consider what would happen if they prepared for nonviolent peacemaking with the rigour and training that armies devote to war.⁵⁶ As CPT is following Gene Sharp’s lead in using the language of militarism to describe nonviolent actions that are the inverse of militarism,⁵⁷ a contradictory tension exists. From a Girardian perspective, this tension may be obvious: CPT risks falling into the “imitator paradox”⁵⁸ by defining itself in relationship to the structures of covert and overt violence even though the organization has been constituted to wage a war of love against such oppressive forces. Consider the flow of the previous sentence; the concept of “waging a war” is militaristic, but perhaps, given the discourse of struggle in our society, this militaristic framing may be seen as subversive. Given current patterns of language use, however, the problem of framing struggle in such terms is hard to avoid.

To qualify this analysis, I am certain that CPTers have engaged in acts of deconstructing language (as demonstrated by their motto, “getting in the Way”) and are unlikely to become militaristic-style oppressors should they ever achieve their goals of eliminating ruinous violence, systemic oppression, and war. While, in practice, CPT makes every effort to employ a consensual decision making model, one the founding premises of the organization is that its membership is meant to bring military-style discipline and commitment to peacemaking. The challenge will always be to strive not for an exogenous, imposed military-styled discipline, but rather, as a reviewer of this article put it, to foster “an endogenous discipline in solidarity with

indigenous discipline, a far more sustainable discipline if we want sustainable results.”

THE PROBLEMS OF STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE, RACISM, AND THE CONNECTIVITY OF VIOLENCE

In practice, the tensions inherent in the concept of the imitator paradox are perhaps most profoundly operative in the manner that “getting in the Way” often rests on the value of white, Western, and Christian lives being more highly valued in the intervention context than those of the people immediately implicated in the specific conflict. Although it is important to note that most CPTers are aware of this tension, the problem with solidarist action in this regard is perhaps obvious. The CPT intervention methodology reflects Sider’s hierarchy of bodies, which in practice has translated into CPT’s deployment of “privileged bodies” to contexts of violent conflict. A local Palestinian in Hebron, for example, does not have the same protection in his or her own indigenous context as North American white privilege may give a CPTer in that same place. In accordance with contemporary sociological and cultural theory, CPTers are aware of the way these dynamics of privilege and racism are present even in North American interventions. As such, they are increasingly cognisant of the problematic nature of what educational sociologist George Dei labels the “mythology of racelessness” and the manner in which it can be used to avoid “complicities while claiming innocence.”⁵⁹ While in New Brunswick at Esengenopetitj during what became known as the “Burnt Church Crisis,” Matthew Bailey-Dick explored the core motto of CPT: “I know my identity as a white person is significant. ‘Getting in the Way’ must be both an outward task of nonviolent action and an inward journey through which I wrestle with the privileges I enjoy as a white person.”⁶⁰ Issues arising from cross-cultural violence intervention and prevention are, as mentioned above, addressed through an invitation dynamic present in CPT’s work, through diversity training in its formative programming,⁶¹ and in the consensual decision making processes undertaken when forming action plans for a specific cross-cultural context.

What I suggest might “redeem” CPT in terms of the tensions described above is the way its work differs substantively from an expression of an ethics of technique (and thus digresses deliberately from Sider’s vision). More specifically, while a worldview marked by the primacy of technical knowledge assumes that human beings are the sole agents who cause and effect change,

CPT's specific form of theistic spirituality guards against such assumptions. Additionally, while CPT frequently uses technique-oriented knowledge, it may avoid becoming a technique-centric organization by its solidarist commitments, which tend to encourage the formation of relationships beyond the technical. For instance, CPT necessarily embraces the power of a white, Canadian life to stand in the way of violence. However, because CPTers do this in a spirit of solidarity that is conscious of power dynamics and can only come into being by an invitation to a community context that is necessarily relational, they tend to avoid subscribing to a paradigm of intervention that relies solely on technique. Thus, as part of what CPT terms its "ministry of presence,"⁶² and through its use of the power of the global media, it employs a form of creative nonviolent resistance to shame oppressors into supporting human rights regimes. CPT always attempts to do so in a manner that does not foster new cycles of oppression and suffering. Owing to its understanding of systemic oppression, CPT also refuses to endorse any means towards an end that contributes to spirals of violence. Perhaps most significantly, CPT has also integrated the value of what Wink identifies as Jesus's third way for transforming disputes into its training methodology and practice. CPT will not endorse violence as a means to achieve its goals. The organization agrees with Wink that violence cannot resolve social or political conflict.

While many believe that violence can effectively solve our problems, CPT, through both its work and foundational principles, upholds the importance of a dialogue of life centred on peace witness. When embedded in a context, for example, CPTers practice daily devotionals and try to enact what they consider to be the basic Christian values of spiritual community, respect, and love.⁶³ These spiritual and pragmatic "checks" should be helpful in preventing a slip into an overly technical form of peacemaking on CPT's part. For example, CPT employs the power of Western bodies attached to citizenship documents to intervene in violence; however, they do so with an explicit commitment, which is central to their participation in the politics of peace: to end aspects of the oppressive situation that support the violence of racism. These commitments are manifest in the anti-racist education component that has recently been integrated into CPT's training framework.⁶⁴ In making such adjustments to its training methodology, CPT is realizing the connections between different forms of violence as described by people like Hélder Câmara, whose *Spiral of Violence* essentially describes a methodology for nonviolent political and liberationist action based on love.⁶⁵ Such

a liberationist approach without resort to physical violence should serve as a corrective to the emergence of any overly technical manifestation of CPT's ideals. This corrective is an instance of a hermeneutical circle in action, as CPTers are actively encouraged by their group dynamics to turn towards their reflective faith life and consider what it means to stand in solidarity with the poor, the oppressed, those of different ethnicities, and those of different faiths. In practice, this love-based methodology necessitates that, although members are asked to make a faith commitment and self-identify as Christian, CPT welcomes people of all sexual orientations, denominational affiliations, and ethnicities into its membership. CPT is also committed to standing in solidarity with people of all faiths (and none), of all genders, of all sexual orientations, and of all ethnicities who suffer the burdens of oppression.⁶⁶ It is thus difficult to see this form of Christian activism as ever conforming to a stereotype of right wing conservatism.

In contrast, I want to suggest another possibility here that lies beyond the politics of the left and right as they are normally conceived, namely, that in grouping together to challenge militarism and the effects of destructive violence, CPTers are in fact fostering an important form of "justice as healing,"⁶⁷ in which their group activities help shift the Christian image of life on Earth towards an integral peace witness. CPTers are active in this regard, despite the fact that Christianity has far too often been brought into the service of oppression and domination. However, given that over two billion people profess the Christian faith,⁶⁸ a vital peace witness among the followers of Jesus is sorely needed in the contemporary context. This statement is particularly true if one accepts Wink's argument that contemporary Christianity ought to be unambiguously committed to nonviolence as the sole effective means of truly helping to liberate people from the forces that oppress them.⁶⁹ In this light, the peace witness of CPT stands in active opposition both to those who argue that faith in Jesus ought to be "passive" or privatized and to those who use Christianity as a means to justify violence, empire, ecological destruction, and segregation around the world today.

In this regard, important ethical implications emerge from the CPT project that might be characterized as identity-shaking "dangerous memories."⁷⁰ That is, CPTers take nonviolence as a core principle for Christian peace witness. They put this principle into practice by actively seeking to reduce violence in the world. However, as soon as violence is understood to include more than only war, terror, or other acts happening "out there,"

then a significant challenge arises for CPTers trying to live out their peace witness in authentic way. When they (or others) realize that violence has many expressions, and try to live in a holistically peaceful manner so as to reduce political, social, intellectual, and ecological forms of violence, they challenge more segmented perspectives which, for instance, might consider the mere absence of armed hostilities to constitute peace. Further, CPTers explicitly confront violence by putting themselves in harm's way. If their work at all represents reflective action undertaken in light of key principles of the faith, it immediately calls all Christians to consider their own peace witness and the challenges of holistic peaceful living amid the ever-present reality of covertly violent structures and systems.

The relationship between Wink's work and the peace witness of CPT is somewhat dialogical on this point; that is, Wink's thinking has influenced CPT and CTPers, while Wink, later in his academic career, has also interacted with CPT stories.⁷¹ For instance, in commenting on the narratives presented in *Getting in the Way*, Wink writes, "These harrowing accounts of nonviolent interposition read like first century martyrologies. The courage of these Christian Peacemaker Teams is breathtaking and will serve to challenge others to similar heroism."⁷² My research for this article, however, has led me to conclude that CPT is better located within the framework of peace witness than being linked to martyrdom. Wink is undoubtedly correct in asserting that the "heroism" of CPT lays down a challenge to a Christianity that is in many aspects too complicit in systemic and overt violence. This challenge, however, is unrelated to a thirst for martyrdom or to unreflective activism. Rather, CPT's work is more of a challenge on the level of peace witness. Many CPT members are willing to pay the ultimate cost and lose their life for the cause; this conviction is not without its contemporary appeal.⁷³ *Getting in the Way* is, after all, representative of putting one's body in harm's way for the sake of the CPT's ministry of presence. Nonetheless, despite Ron Sider's 1984 exhortation in Strasbourg that Christians be willing to die in the thousands for peace, CPTers' ways of being and their engagement in nonviolent activism are specifically designed to avoid such an outcome. Martyrdom is not the goal;⁷⁴ the goal is violence reduction.⁷⁵ Christian peace witness of this variety—precisely because of the differentiated view of violence reflected in its praxis—is able to confront injustice at both its points of application and its origin. Given the scarce resources in the current global economic and ecological crises, this is perhaps the only way to move

towards sustainable peace. In this way, even CPT itself is linked with what Wink labels “the powers that be”⁷⁶ in terms of its funding structure (based on donations that become less frequent in an economic downturn). It also shows, however, that systems of domination carry within themselves the potential for change when they are confronted by creative people working within a solidarist framework. The current economic crisis has thus become a moment of creative opportunity for CPT as it reforms its peace witness to make do with less capital flowing through the system.⁷⁷

CONCLUSION: A CREATIVE RESPONSE SETTING A SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE

The creative dimension is most poignantly displayed in CPT’s violence intervention and prevention work, where creativity acts to quell violence. This approach differs from certain elements of the activist community that I have been exposed to in Canada and the United Kingdom. Certain activists are keen to engage social issues but seem not as well poised to undertake reflective “pause for thought” prior to entering a situation of conflict. This disconnect always left me a bit nervous when interacting with some of my activist friends. Certainly, in this regard, I have not been exposed to anything like the spiritually deliberative methodology for nonviolent activism of CPT.

I mention this as my closing point because I realized that the somewhat unique character of Christian activism working in the mode of CPT is that it avoids a certain form of arrogance that may too frequently permeate other forms of activism, both secular and religious. Peacemakers working in a technical mode may think they have “the answer” to change the world, and religious activists may claim to have God on their side in an arrogant way. But Christians (and others) who affirm God’s sovereignty with humility have a different existential experience; for them, changing the world requires not only human solidarity but also God’s help. They cannot do it on their own. When CPTers integrate this humility into their actions, they avoid the arrogance that sometimes characterizes other forms of activism. In examining CPT’s group dynamics, it is significant that prayer is both part of CPT’s methodology for nonviolent activism and is understood to be part of its support network. In this manner, prayer sustains, invigorates, and motivates CPT’s peace witness. This prayerful approach to its interventions logically follows from a recognition of the way violence and oppressive

structures have a spiritual quality that needs healing. As Harry Huebner suggests, peace witness on this level is related to an exercise of the “prophetic imagination.”⁷⁸ This aspect of CPT’s peace witness is, to adapt a Gandhian mantra, discerning, reflecting upon, praying about, and only then *being* the change we seek.⁷⁹ It also adds a multi-level spiritual dimension to CPT’s work in a manner that is very different from other interposition activist groups who are exclusively committed to nonviolence in a secular and non-partisan fashion.⁸⁰ If asked to summarize the work of CPT in one sentence, I would say: Christian Peacemaker Teams offer a powerful peace witness, one that challenges all humanity (and particularly Christians) to examine their own complicity and guilt in regard to structures of overt and covert violence, which they are explicitly and implicitly supporting by their very being in this world. Indeed, implied by the quotations at the opening of this article, such an integrated application of the politics of peace becomes crucial as Earth’s population approaches eight billion people, and as the violence-incubating pressures of the planet’s reduced carrying capacity on all species are increasingly apparent. Manifesting such an integral peace witness may be the challenge of our times.

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ENDNOTES

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- 3 See James Shaver Woodsworth, *My Neighbour* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972).
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- 16 Currently, CPT is supported by a wide variety of denominations and Christian organizations, ranging from the Roman Catholic Congregation of St. Basil (The Basilians) to the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. See Christian Peacemakers Team Staff, "Getting in the Way."
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- 21 See Witness for Peace Staff, "Mission and History," <http://www.witnessforpeace.org/section.php?id=89>.
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- 28 Ibid., 129.

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- 30 Ibid., 114.
- 31 Ibid., 111.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 A transcribed copy of this letter, originally dated 12 April 1963 can be found at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=533>. The letter was signed by the following leaders: Bishop C.C.J. Carpenter, D.D., LL.D., Episcopalian Bishop of Alabama; Bishop Joseph A. Durick, D.D., Auxiliary Bishop, Roman Catholic Diocese of Mobile, Birmingham; Rabbi Milton L. Grafman, Temple Emanu-El, Birmingham, Alabama; Bishop Paul Hardin, Methodist Bishop of the Alabama-West Florida Conference; Bishop Nolan B. Harmon, Bishop of the North Alabama Conference of the Methodist Church; Rev. George M. Murray, D.D., LL.D, Bishop Coadjutor, Episcopal Diocese of Alabama; Rev. Edward V. Ramage, Moderator, Synod of the Alabama Presbyterian Church in the United States and Rev. Earl Stallings, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama.
- 34 See Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in *A Peace Reader: Essential Readings on War, Justice, Non-Violence and World Order*, ed. Joseph J. Fahley and Richard Armstrong (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 114-28.
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- 41 Kern, "From Haiti to Hebron," 184.
- 42 Ibid.
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- 50 Mark J. Allman, *Who Would Jesus Kill? War, Peace and the Christian Tradition* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary, 2008), 103.
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are modelled in interpersonal and corporate relationships. She sees the potential for such intimacy, when combined with a quest for justice, to break the power of mimetic desire, model reconciliatory relationships, and transform oppressive situations in a society in need of healing. From Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, *Misbegotten Anguish: A Theology and Ethics of Violence* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), 45.

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- 80 I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for eliciting this point.