



ADULT STUDY

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PARTICIPANT HANDOUT
Session 4

Faithful Citizenship: An Adult Lenten Study

Global Security and Governance

“Why Don’t I Feel Safe? Why Do They Hate Us?”

One of the biggest issues of our times has to do with different aspects of security. That opening question, “Why don’t I feel safe?” touches several aspects of life. The Bible assumes that human society needs armed forces to maintain social order (Rom. 13:1–7). But retaliation and revenge are discouraged (Matt. 5:38–39), and peaceful, conciliatory living is enjoyed (Rom. 12:14–21; 1 Tim. 1:12–13). Issues of crime prevention, justice, and social well-being are challenging from any perspective, including the Christian. Although we know that no one is guaranteed freedom from all trouble and danger, the Psalms do honor God as our stronghold and place of safety.

During this session, we think about ways we can think about security and safety as faithful citizens.

A Broad Topic

“Security” is a big topic! It covers several important issues. **Immigration** has always been controversial in American history. German, Irish, and Asian immigrants were scorned by many Americans during the 1800s, who were concerned about the American jobs going to persons in these groups. More recently, undocumented

immigrants from Mexico and other areas have been an object of concern and discussion. Americans have been divided among those who favor protection of illegal immigrants as they work toward citizenship and those who want to see better border security before we deal with workers and citizenship.

During the Obama administration, the **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)** was a relief measure for undocumented immigrants who came to America as children to protect them for renewable periods from deportation and to allow them to receive work permits. The DREAM Act (the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act) was a never-passed congressional bill that would have given legal status to undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children and attended school in the United States. Many of these so-called DREAMers identify as Americans.

Our relationship with other countries is ever-evolving and encompasses many security issues. North Korea has been an issue for many years. Security issues with Russia have also been in the news, as well as the nuclear capability of countries like Iran. The terroristic threat of ISIS is also an ongoing issue that is used to justify the presence of U.S. troops in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq.

Contemporary terrorism has raised issues not only of security but of civil liberties. Is the monitoring of a person's behavior a violation of civil rights or an essential part of the preservation of our overall liberties? There are numerous pros and cons about the important question of civil liberties and what is meant by "terrorism prevention."

Gun violence—expressed in a gun-wielding person opening fire in a school, mall, church, office, or other public facility—is a frightening issue in our time. The recent examples of church shootings has increased security concerns in congregations. Should we lock some of the doors during worship service? Should we have an armed security presence in church or in our schools?

Police killings of African Americans, many of whom are unarmed, is an urgent topic as well, not only as a safety issue for African Americans but also in the ways our race relations are often characterized by fear. Names like Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Alton Sterling, Tamir Rice, Philando Castile, and others have come to symbolize the issues involved in the use of force by law enforcement and the state of race relations in the United States.

World peace is something we all love and long for, but we don't know the best way to affirm and achieve it. Human beings seem never to outgrow war; a tragedy of the modern age is that while our technological and scientific advancements could advance world peace and human reconciliation, technology has been used to make war more horrible, with higher death tolls and greater casualties among civilians. Nuclear weapons, so far used only twice in warfare, potentially have an even greater capacity for death and destruction.

In the difficult world of international relationships, peace seems to come only through the very difficult work of negotiations, verification of weapons, cooperation between and among governments, and other factors. Sometimes negotiations just do not seem to work, since both parties need to have similar and mutual goals.

The **anti-Americanism** of parts of the Arab and Muslim world is complicated. Part of our leading question, "Why do they hate us?," is answered by the long-standing resentment toward the United States and the West regarding Israel. Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem and other formerly Palestinian lands is a source

of decades of resentment from the Arab world (which includes Christians and Muslims). Another point of contention is the fact that many Arabs live under authoritarian regimes that buy arms from and are supported by the U.S. government. In his book *The World Is Flat*, columnist Thomas Friedman points out that most Muslims do not support violent extremists. He says that when Islamic radicals and fundamentalists look at the West, they see only the openness that makes us, in their eyes, decadent and promiscuous but not the freedom of thought and inquiry that also result from our openness. A scary aspect of these extremists is not only their physical danger but their undermining of trust by using everyday things like cars, airplanes, shoes, and clothing to conceal bombs. It is trust and openness that make a world of cultural exchange and community possible. Fomenting distrust and division undermines such openness.¹

War Is Good for "Absolutely Nothin'."

General Douglas MacArthur, commander in three wars and son of another distinguished commander, declared at the end of his life, "I am a one hundred percent disbeliever in war." "War is all Hell," General William T. Sherman famously cautioned young men whom he feared glorified conflict. Many song lyrics and hymns stress love and peace, and a famous Motown song by Edwin Starr from 1970 declares that war is good for "absolutely nothin'."^{**}

^{*} William Manchester, *American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur 1880-1964* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1978), 4.

^{**} Edwin Starr, "War," *War and Peace*, Motown Records, 1970.

The Bible and Security

Several biblical themes address issues of security. These concepts are, in turn, very interrelated. First, the theme of security itself is a theme in the Old Testament history and prophecies as the Hebrew kingdoms struggled for safety and security amid international threats. God is sometimes named in terms of secure places: our refuge in time of trouble (Ps. 46:1), our dwelling place (Deut.

33:27, RSV), our rock (connoting a secure, solid place, perhaps a vantage point, as in Ps. 42:9). Although we tend to look at these assurances in spiritual ways, the people in the Bible saw God in terms of physical protection from armed enemies, as in Psalms 138, 144, and others.

The theme of *shalom*, peace, also pervades the biblical story. Often it is the inner peace of someone who trusts in God, for instance, “my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure” (Ps. 16:9). The person who obeys God and follows God is secure in God even when encountering evil situations (Ps. 112:7). The saving God rescues the threatened, allowing them to be as the sure-footed deer, set secure on the heights, even after encountering the enemy or on facing evil, suffering, and death (Ps. 18:33).

Isaiah 33:13–16 connects security and a right relationship with God. In verse 14, the people are worried about the flames of judgment as well as the flames of military conquest. Who will survive and become secure? Those who are righteous, disdain bribes, despise the gain of oppression, and show other qualities that reflect a concern for justice.

Isaiah 19:19–25 is a remarkable, eighth century BCE passage that depicts Israel, Egypt, and Assyria as a trio of peaceful countries. This is a shocking image because these kingdoms were enemies (e.g., Isa. 10:5–27; 19:1–18; 20:1–6). Pick any three modern nations or ethnic groups at odds, and you’ll sense how radical that passage is. The vision of a peaceful society of international cooperation is similar to the visions of the prophet Amos, who also sees the beauty of a “peace-full” society.

Shalom means not only the conclusion of conflict but also peace as prosperity, well-being, and holiness. The New Testament Greek word for peace, *eirene* (pronounced eye-RAY-nay), also means wholeness and harmony, as well as a connection to righteousness (e.g., Jas. 3:18, 1 Pet. 3:11). Although churches sometimes give social ministries second shrift to evangelism, Jesus’ own preaching included the needs of others: for instance, Matthew 11:5, where Jesus explicitly focuses on people in need, and Luke 4:18–19, where he identifies the poor and oppressed as his concern.

Justice is also related to these other concepts. God gives peace to the righteous (e.g., Isa. 9:7) but no peace for the unrighteous (e.g. Isa. 48:22). Although you may think that the phrase “‘peace, peace,’ when there is no

peace” comes from founding father Patrick Henry, he is quoting Jeremiah (6:14, 8:11), for whom the false prediction of peace is symptomatic of the people’s wickedness.

In the Bible, justice is not just satisfaction of a grievance or legal retribution, both of which imply a distinction between public and private life. The Bible links justice, righteousness, and peace together. In Psalm 89:14, God is enthroned on justice and righteousness; justice is a quality of God, who shows no partiality in God’s dealings with us (Deut. 10:17; Job 34:19; Rom. 2:11; etc.). God’s righteousness and justice are based on his plans for a kingdom of justice where peace, loving kindness, and righteousness will prevail.

Interestingly, our contemporary ideas about justice are often about who deserves justice and insisting that individual rights are upheld. The Bible does reflect this (e.g., Lev. 19:15), but in the Bible, there is also a strong quality of undeserved justice, in the sense that God’s grace is never earned. We see this illustrated in Jesus’ relationships with all kinds of people and with the Bible’s call for us to care for the poor and to include them in our social care (e.g. Lev. 25:35; Deut. 15:1–11).

The Use of Force

The Bible gives different examples of the use of force. God despises human violence (Gen. 6:11) but helps David prepare for war (Ps. 144:1) and exercises deadly judgment against people, beginning with the flood. Abraham (still named Abram) gathered a wartime force and rescued Lot (Gen. 14). Joel 3:9–10 uses the same imagery as Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3 to urge the necessity of war.

But Jesus rejects these precedents for the behavior of his followers (Matt. 5:9–12, 38–47; 26:52). The early Christians were mostly pacifists, and—despite the example of Cornelius in Acts 10—it took a century or so for church leaders to conclude that it was acceptable for a Christian to undertake the profession of soldier.

The Three Concepts

Our concepts of covenant, community, and the common good have profound meaning for questions of security. Eric Mount writes that although globalization and technology are shrinking the world, the reality of national

sovereignty often impedes international agreement on topics like international peacekeeping, climate control, and human rights. It has often been a dilemma in American foreign policy whether American forces should be used to address crises like civil war and bloody tribalism when they take place in other nations. As Mount writes, “Global community is clearly not about to break out.”²

As we have seen in our previous sessions, the development and dissemination of better stories can be a key component to achieving a covenantal approach to our common humanity and embracing an attitude of audacious openness. As we studied in session 2, the economist Robert Reich described the “morality tales” that underlie the way we view other people and determine whom we think are mostly to blame for social problems. Big government, corporations, undocumented immigrants, refugees, welfare recipients, recipients of foreign aid, Communist governments, overseas industry to which domestic jobs are outsourced: all these are candidates for the culprits in our world, depending (Reich says) on our “morality tales.” But very often, the problems in our world are shared problems that demand the “better stories” that can lead to better solutions.

Mount sees another possible story: a global commitment to human dignity. Without reducing thick moralities or religions to a single common essence, we just may be able to find common cause through a conversation that brings everyone to the table and does not let anyone dominate the discourse about the mutual respect and tolerance needed to encourage human dignity. Religions, with the traditions of hospitality found in many traditions, can certainly help and even lead the way.

Of course, a global civil society will go a long way toward addressing issues of national and global security. In this sense, globalization can certainly help: the Internet, for instance, was a big help in the passage of the land mine treaty several years ago. As Mount writes, this will be very tricky, of course, because security and well-being do need to be protected, but in and through inclusive dialogue and openness among nations.³

We can also “tell stories” of America as a unifying force in the world: the way the Declaration of Independence inspired many democratic movements in other countries, our Marshall Plan of 1947, the influence of American international law on the International Criminal Court in the 1990s, and other examples.

Reassurance

In his book *Principles of Global Security*, John Steinbruner offers the concept of “reassurance.” The growth of civil conflict in parts of the world reveals the difficulty of keeping sufficient military forces active for peacekeeping purposes. Civil conflicts may increase if projected rates of global warning occur, leading to drought and resource scarcity in violence-prone areas. Instead of the Cold War-era doctrine of deterrence, he offers the idea of reassurance, the use of military forces to enforce collaborative rules and cooperative engagement.*

* John Steinbruner, *Principles of Global Security* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2000), 1–11, 18–21, 225, 229.

Church Voices

How can churches respond to these issues? If you consider hunger and disease as security issues, then, of course, the church has for many years helped build international security via overseas ministries, hunger ministries, disaster relief, and other activities! Denominations also have peace and justice components. Among denominations, for instance, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a “compassion, peace, and justice” ministry. The United Methodist Church has an annual “Peace with Justice Sunday,” the offerings from which go for conflict resolution training, peace education, and other ministries. In 2009 the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America had a campaign that addressed the Global Security Priorities Resolution (House Resolution 278) and urged people to write their congressmen. One way to influence Congress to pass appropriations that combat world hunger is to support the church-initiated Washington lobby Bread for the World.

Browsing through the websites of many Christian denominations, you’ll discover statements and resolutions, as well as summaries of specific activities that help bring about a great sense of brother- and sisterhood among peoples and, with it, a reduction of fear and insecurity.

Notes

1. Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Picador/Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006), 481–82.
2. Eric Mount Jr., *Covenant, Community, and the Common Good: An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1999), 108.
3. Mount, 130.

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