

The Consistent Life Ethic and the Historic Peace Churches

Mennonites, the Church of the Brethren, and the Religious Society of Friends, which cooperated together in the "New Call to Peacemaking" project, have centuries of experience in the insights of pacifism. This is the understanding that violence is not ethical, nor is the apathy or cowardice that supports violence by others. Furthermore, the appearance of violence as a quick fix to problems is deceptive. Through hardened hearts, lost opportunities, and over-simplified thinking, violence generally leads to more problems and often exacerbates what it was supposed to solve. Nonviolent solutions take longer and take more work, but they are more long-lasting and are genuine solutions.

We have long understood that the same dehumanizing attitude that underlies one kind of violence underlies them all – whether direct violence with intended targets, or structural violence such as poverty that kills by callousness. From war to the death penalty, from misogyny and racism to bigotry against those with disabilities or any other "outgroup," opposition to one is opposition to all. Conversely and positively, re-humanizing and love applied to one area spreads around to them all.

Yet in the past few decades a political way of thinking has arisen that sows divisions by having different politicians and advocacy groups offering the insights of protection of

the vulnerable to only some groups of people. Some care for the children in the womb, children recently born with disabilities, and the vulnerable among the ill. Yet they are not as clear about the problems of war or the death penalty or policies that could help solve the problems of poverty that threaten the very groups they assert protection for. They weaken their case by their inconsistency. Others are very sensitive to the problems of war and the death penalty and poverty while using euphemisms to avoid the realities of feticide and infanticide, and allowing the "right to die" become the "duty to die" in a society still infested with far too many prejudices against the vulnerable. They also hurt the case for peace by not applying the same principles across the board.

If there is anything that historic peace churches are good at, it's the development of conflict resolution skills. When asked what we do instead of dealing with conflicts with war and other violence, this is what we develop. As we consider not mere positions but interests behind the positions, are we able to come up with creative solutions? We also have assertive services ranging from crisis pregnancy centers to Christian Peacemaker Teams, all of which address the roots of the problems. When we apply what we know in love, can we multiply the number of vulnerable people who are protected from harm?

"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."
Matthew 25:40

Mennonite: From Article 22 of the Mennonite Confession of Faith -

"Led by the Spirit, and beginning in the church, we witness to all people that violence is not the will of God. We witness against all forms of violence, including war among nations, hostility among races and classes, abuse of children and women, violence between men and women, abortion, and capital punishment."

Brethren: From Pastor Wesley Brubaker, <http://www.brfwitness.org/?p=390>

"We seem to realize instinctively that abortion is gruesome. We try to avoid any discussion of it, and we are especially anxious to avoid any visual aids that show it as it is . . . We need to offer leadership in the pro-life movement. In this area, the historic peace churches have been very conspicuous by their absence. Often at pro-life conferences, the question is raised, 'Where are those opponents of war?'"

Friend: From Susan B. Anthony, *The Revolution*, July 8, 1869.
See www.prolifequakers.org

"Guilty? Yes, no matter what the motive, love of ease, or a desire to save from suffering the unborn innocent, the woman is awfully guilty who commits the deed. It will burden her conscience in life, it will burden her soul in death; but oh! thrice guilty is he who, for selfish gratification, heedless of her prayers, indifferent to her fate, drove her to the desperation which impelled her to the crime."

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We invite you . . .

Life is the most sacred gift we are given, whether we are Christian, Buddhist, Jew, Muslim, or atheist. The sacredness of life extends across national boundaries and party lines.

However, historic peace churches have a special kind of insight and experience to bring to the table that can enrich all those who are called to action on these issues and these connections. So we especially call on peace church members to become more aware of what it means to be truly peaceful to all, and help others to become aware of it as well.



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MISSION: We are committed to the protection of life, which is threatened in today's world by war, abortion, poverty, racism, capital punishment and euthanasia. We believe that these issues are linked under a 'consistent ethic of life'. We challenge those working on, or interested in, all or some of these issues to maintain a cooperative spirit of peace, reconciliation, and respect in protecting the unprotected.

The Consistent Life Ethic and the Historic Peace Churches



In today's fragmented world, where voices of nonviolence and human equality need to be heard, Consistent Life emerges as a voice for multiplying instead of dividing.

We witness to the human rights of all – women, children in the womb, those on death row or with disabilities, global neighbors and victims of war, of poverty, and of racism.

Would you like to join us?