

## "CHRISTIANITY: BOMB OF VIOLENCE OR BALM OF PEACE?"

Lee Barrett

As I was writing this essay, the morning news was recounting the current list of Palestinian strikes against Israelis, and Israeli retaliations against Palestinians. Then a story about Palestinian children playing "suicide bomber" was followed by the roster of U.S. troops who had been killed by Iraqis during the past week with vague references to the "neutralization" of Iraqi pockets of resistance. In fact, that morning a full 65% of the news stories on CNN featured tales of lethal violence.

This barrage of televised violence suggests a phenomenon that is so global that it cannot be due to the uniquely evil character of a few individuals or organizations. The sheer frequency of the episodes and the cross-cultural universality of their recurrence points to some systemic root. The propensity to violence cannot be dismissed as a mere cognitive failure to appreciate "otherness." The wound is far deeper than that.

We are frightened by the violence in the news, especially when we admit that it is echoed by a violent streak in our own hearts. Consequently, social scientists and philosophers have attempted to account for the severity and pervasiveness of humanity's disease. The recent investigation is different from the older quest to identify psychological mechanisms or social dynamics that foster violence. In past generations, analysts had focused on factors like childhood traumas (Alice Miller), poverty and social marginalization (Ervin Staub), the projection of an unacknowledged shadow side onto others (Karl Jung), the desire to win an illusory immortality by exercising the power of life and death over others (Ernst Becker), and hostility toward other competitors for desired objects (Rene Girard). All these theories suffered from a tendency to reduce the sources of violence to single dynamic, none of which were subject to empirical verification. The new quest for the roots of violence has taken a more "cultural/ideological" turn. Today's theorists are more sensitive to the ways in which belief systems and cultural practices shape human psyches, for good or ill.

The new quest for the roots of violence is extremely conscious of one shocking contemporary phenomenon: much of our world's violence seems to be motivated by, or at least exacerbated by, religious passions. Ever since the rise of militant Sunni and Shiite fundamentalism in the 1970's, and the equally virulent ideologies of the Christian right, social commentators have been riveting public attention on the mysterious connection of religion and violence, with an intensity of focus that has not been seen in western culture since the end of the Thirty Year's War. From the tensions in the Middle East, to the hostilities in northern Ireland, to the conflict between India and Pakistan, one of the primary motivating factors is manifestly religious conviction. This correlation of religion and violence leads to the troubling suspicion that perhaps religion itself begets violence. George W. Bush's claim that all great religions are religions of "peace" seems to be empirically falsifiable. Historical evidence seems to suggest the contrary. In fact, George Bush's own personal religion does not seem to be of a particularly peaceful sort.

It is only one aspect of this possible connection that I hope to explore. Most of us Christians, and I include myself in that number, are not competent to explore the roots of

violence in Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, or any other religion. Our proper and primary task is to worry about the log that may be in our own eyes. Are there ways in which Christianity itself inadvertently promotes violence? For more than a decade many U.S. theologians have been exploring precisely this issue. The investigation has generated much corporate self-analysis, self-examination, and sometimes self-flagellation. In extreme instances, the critics of traditional Christian teachings give the impression that human history would have been the peaceable kingdom if only Christianity had not troubled the waters. This effort to discern the violent flaw in Christianity has spawned an opposite and equal effort to exonerate Christianity from all fault. Most of the members of this party then proceed to identify multiple ways in which Christianity actually serves as an antidote to humanity's propensity toward violence. So we end up with two opposing camps, one suggesting that Christianity is the root of all violence and the other arguing that only Christianity can save the world from violent destruction. I will propose that there may well be some truth on both sides. Consequently, we will examine both sets of arguments, hoping to sort out those aspects of Christianity that are potentially dangerous from those that contribute to God's reign of peace.

First a terminological digression is in order. Considerable controversy has arisen concerning what exactly "violence" is. The problem has been to distinguish "violence" from legitimate acts of coercion (like restraining a child who insists on playing in traffic) that compel a person's actions against her own will, and from invasive forms of persuasion. This has led to a fascination with such questions as : Are forms of education that do not encourage critical distance from the learning process instances of pedagogical violence? Are economic regulations that do not promote universal health care a form of violence? Is Gandhi-like civil disobedience a form of social violence? Most of these terminological disputes have been unhelpful, as quests for essences often are; usually the conclusion has been that we simply do not know the meanings of our words. As a counter strategy, I propose that we take a cue from the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who suggested that we consider the ways in which ordinary people employ concepts in their ordinary lives. So let us not ask for the essential meaning of "violence," but rather let us ask about its use. In their daily existence, people manage to successfully communicate with one another with the concept "violence," saying things like "That was a violent crime," or "That is a violent family." These widespread typical uses of "violence" can guide us. (I am reminded of the judge who quipped, "I can't define 'pornography,' but I know it when I see it.") Most frequently, it has a nuance of physical harm. Intentional, hostile agency is typically implied, that disregards the well-being of the victim. By analogy, "violence" is less centrally used to connote malevolent damage to a person's dignity, autonomy, or self- esteem. In ordinary discourse, references are habitually made to psychological and social violence. Social structures that impose poverty or constrict opportunities can be said to be "violent." We shall use "violence" to cover this loose family of related usages, not worrying about the exact boundaries where violence fades its legitimate coercion or aggressive persuasion.

Now back to our main theme. When it comes to theories that endeavor to expose the roots of violence in Christianity, we suffer from a confusing embarrassment of riches. There are almost too many theories, some of them contradicting the others. We will

consider the various proposals one after another, ranging from the most specific to the most broad, and from the easiest to correct (if the critique is valid), to the most difficult.

1. The first theory of Christian violence does not locate the source of the problem in anything essential to Christianity. Rather, the violence-producing culprits are to be found in tragic aberrations in Christianity's historic development. The problem has nothing essentially to do with the Bible, or the original church of the apostles, but with a post-apostolic ecclesial fall from grace. Here the most popular candidate for the source of the declension into violence is the Constantinian revolution. According to this argument, the unholy alliance of church and empire served to introduce an ethic of martial and penal violence into a religion which had been steadfastly non-violent. After Constantine the empire was sacralized and its defense became a sacred duty. The rulers of the social order became the presumed instruments of providence. Preservation of the social order and the (violent) status quo became the decisive criterion of all ethical behavior. Consequently, the cross, the symbol of non-retaliation against enemies, was metamorphosized into a sword. This set the stage for the evolution of the crusader notion of meritorious violence, linked to the image of the warrior-Christ. According to this view, had it not been for the post-Constantinian church's complicity in the Kingdom of This World and its violent underpinnings, Christianity would have remained innocent.

2. A second theory locates the problem in certain specific strands of the Bible which are regarded as peripheral to the Bible's main dynamics. Most notably, the rampant militarism in the Old Testament is singled out for opprobrium. The conquest of Canaan and its suggestions of genocide, as well as the aggressive imperialism of the David monarchy, have been particularly troubling to Christian ethicists from Clement of Alexandria on. Behind these passages Old Testament scholars have discerned an ideology of the God of Israel as a divine warrior, leading the hosts in lethal battle. Most of these critics go on to conclude that this glorification of divine rage and military might is reversed and corrected by the more central pacific message of Jesus and many of the prophets.

3. A third argument, similar to the second theory's focus on a particular strand of biblical literature, locates the dangerous material in passages that valorize retributive justice. According to this critique, much of the deuteronomic tradition presupposes the "lex talionis," the law demanding an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. This ethic is nothing more than a recipe for quid pro quo violence, in which the pain of the original offense is balanced by the equivalent pain of punishment. The whole system is a careful calibration of violences. Behind this economy of reciprocal terror lies a primitive delight in vengeance, a primal desire to gloat at the sufferings of one's enemies, evident in the prophets' yearnings for the destruction of Assyria. Having exposed the potential evils of retributive justice, these critics usually juxtapose it to Jesus' more felicitous rejection of returning evil for evil.

4. A fourth and more troubling extension of this trajectory of biblical suspicion detects retributive violence in the New Testament itself and in the doctrines of atonement that it has inspired. Here matters become very sensitive, for the meaning of the cross, the historic core of Christianity, is at stake. According to these critics, the basic grammar of the doctrine of the atonement is saturated with violent rhetoric, so that violence is

indirectly validated by it. Because the killing of Jesus has been regarded as the focal point of the sacred narratives, they observe that Christianity has enshrined violence at its very heart. As long as the cross remains the central symbol of the religion, an act of murder is glamorized as the necessary foundation of the drama of salvation, and horrific violence is thereby justified. The implication, according to these critics, is that violence is redemptive. Accordingly, they set out to expose the legitimization of violence implied by most of the traditional theories of Christ's atoning work. In the "classical" theory of the early church, the crucifixion was interpreted as a conflict between Christ and Satan, in which Christ triumphs through sheer force, trickery, or superior resources, all of which involve forms of violence that are suspiciously similar to the strategies of Satan. This tends to invite the believer to identify with the victoriously combative Christ and use aggression and guile against the perceived enemies of the gospel.

Other critics focus on theories of the atonement that suggest a struggle or tension between justice and mercy in God's own self, a tension which is somehow resolved through the death of Jesus. In their assessment, some of the reflections of Augustine and Luther relocate the violent conflict between Christ and Satan in the inner being of God. God's internal violence is externalized in the crucifixion of Jesus. When this doctrine is inscribed in the psyches of believers, they then become prone to go and do likewise by venting their inner tensions on innocent scapegoats.

The doctrine of atonement that attracts the most sustained criticism is, of course, the "western" or "Latin" satisfaction view and its derivative theory of penal substitution. According to authors like J. Denny Weaver and Anthony Bartlett, the "western" theory is most flagrantly rooted in an ideology of retributive violence. For Anselm, the font of the theory, the violence done to God's honor had to be compensated by an equal amount of righteous violence, enacted in the death of Jesus. The violence of Jesus' crucifixion served as an exchange commodity in the divine economy. According to Weaver and Bartlett, this becomes explicit in Calvin's and subsequent Reformed theologians' theory of penal substitution, in which Jesus becomes the innocent substitute target of divine wrath. The violence that God had directed against Satan in the classical theory is now directed against humanity, or rather, humanity's representative. Many feminist theologians, including Rebecca Parker, Joan Carlson Brown, and Rita Nakashima Brock, condemn this model of atonement as a valorization of innocent suffering and as a stimulus for child abuse. Furthermore, the mandate that the innocent Jesus submit to violence conditions women, who historically have been exhorted to imitate Christ's obedience, to accept patriarchal abuse. In the view of all these authors, the motif of the substitute victim serves as an incentive for troubled Christian societies to search for social scapegoats. Consequently, the inner violent tensions of Europe and North America have been historically projected outward onto heretics, witches, Moslems, and Jews. The only solution, according to these analysts, is to abandon violent views of the atonement entirely, and instead to regard Jesus' death as a tragic by-product of his commitment to the non-violent reign of God.

5. A fifth attempt to identify the roots of Christian violence discovers the problematic strand in the apocalyptic heritage. At the end of history God will right all wrongs through a spectacular cataclysm of violence. The portrayal of the defeat of Satan

abounds with images of unrestrained violence that have exercised and almost erotic fascination on generations of Christians. The prospect of Armageddon suggests that violence, even though it is God's violence, undergirds the order of the universe. The expectation of the delayed violence of the Apocalypse unconsciously programs Christians to proleptically anticipate the final catastrophe by staging mini apocalypses of their own. All the objections raised against the classical model of atonement and against retributive justice can be raised here as well. The only difference is that here the ultimate triumph of retribution is postponed until later.

6. A sixth and broader criticism of Christianity's violent propensities emerges from certain feminist theologians and a smattering of deconstructionists. They argue that any view of God as a transcendent "Other," providentially governing the cosmos from a secure position beyond it, is implicitly violent. For Rosemary Reuther the problem with the classical theistic understanding of God as a mighty sovereign is the non-reciprocal nature of the power relationships. Therefore the traditional language about divine omnipotence trades on the root metaphor of God as a despot. God has all the power and we have none at all, unless God chooses to give it to us. Any drastically asymmetrical power relationship like this is based on the implied threat of force. We should obey God because God is sufficiently powerful to obliterate us. These theologians then conclude that this understanding of God's transcendence then undergirds social hierarchies, with their implied threats that underlings should submit to the powers that be, whether they be the male gender, wealthy classes, privileged races, or militarily powerful nations, or expect destruction. Just as God governs the cosmos, so masters should govern slaves, and men should govern women. Resistance to this cosmic order will be met with severe reprisals. These authors conclude that nothing less than a total revision of the doctrine of God itself will cure Christianity's violent tendencies. Only a more interactive model of God's involvement with the cosmos promises to counteract this legitimation of the use of superior force. God must be reimaged as the "Lover" or "Friend" of the world, rather than as its "Lord."

7. A seventh equally sweeping charge is that Christianity's very monotheism is the ultimate font of violence. The theological heirs of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida exercise impressive ingenuity in detecting the violence hidden in any effort to define the "truth" or "meaning" of any phenomenon. For them, the basic problem with monotheism is not just the asymmetrical power disparity, but rather the fact that monotheism claims to be the exclusively accurate interpretation of the universe. Monotheism's mantra is "You shall have no other gods," implying that the other gods are false. This anti-syncretistic dynamic inevitably generates hostility toward all rival construals of ultimate reality. According to this critique, any human group that adheres to an all-encompassing ideology, imagining that it possess a handle on the way things really are, must dismiss all who think otherwise as being either evil or misguided. Ideologically monolithic groups tend to fear dissenting opinions as being delusions that are dangerous to society and to the soul. Such opinions should be silenced, through force if necessary. In the current jargon, all "totalizing discourses," of which monotheism is the archetype, are intolerant. Most of the critics in this camp go on to propose that not only is monotheism dangerous, but its claims to know the "truth" are bogus. Our current awareness of the degree to which

cultural perspective and social location condition perception casts suspicion on all claims to absolute knowledge. As the philosopher Richard Rorty has remarked, "No one knows much of anything about much of anything." As a result, a profound epistemic humility, a humility that monotheism unfortunately tends to rule out, is in order. Theologians of this variety conclude that the only way for Christianity to become less violent is to jettison its claims to exclusive truth and entertain the possibility that alternative construals of reality, involving other conceptions of the divine, may be equally valid. Beliefs about the nature of things should be held lightly and tentatively.

So, we are confronted with seven very different attempts to unearth the roots of violence in Christianity and seven different proposals concerning the transformation of Christianity into a more consistently pacific religion. Given the historic churches' often sad implication in atrocities, all of these critiques should be taken seriously. At this point in human history we cannot afford to ignore any diagnosis of our dilemma, no matter how unflattering or far-fetched it may sound. However, these critiques are certainly not without their flaws. Most dangerously, most of them tend to be reductive, arguing that if something might lead to violence that it probably will lead to violence and therefore should be eliminated from the faith. As a consequence, they exhibit a lamentable tendency to throw out the baby with the bath water. Their extremes have provoked a series of responses attempting to exonerate Christianity from all accusations of intrinsic violence. It is to these responses that we shall now turn.

1. Let us begin with the accusation that the Constantinian linkage of church and state inevitably enmeshed the faith in state-sponsored violence. In response, many U.S. ethicists have appealed to a tradition running from Augustine to Reinhold Niebuhr in which the spheres of the state and the church are seen as distinct but ideally interactive. Yes, these theologians admit, the state all too readily identifies its own interests with the will of God and all, easily enlists Christianity to justify its self-serving recourse to violence. And, yes, the idolatrous pretensions of ethnocentric and nationalistic Christianity should be resisted. But to argue that God never works through secular institutions, including the state, would drive a wedge between God the Creator and God the Redeemer and foster a kind of de facto Manicheism. A basic, non-negotiable Christian conviction is that God the Creator is still providentially active in the created order, including the messy world of political institutions and dynamics. The extremely tricky thing in the Christian life is the question of discerning which political actions and dynamics are more in accord with God's will than others. Because in this fallen world all social and political institutions use some means of coercion, which in extreme instances may involve some form of violence, Christians cannot totally avoid all traffic with violence without abandoning responsible participation in the created order. This is tragic and lamentable, but unavoidable. Consequently, strategies like just war theory have been developed by Christians as tools to gauge when state-sponsored violence really is legitimate.

2. In response to the accusation that the militarism and genocide in the Old Testament tends to reproduce itself in the psyches of subsequent Christians, some theologians, like George Lindbeck and David Steinmetz, have argued that the church has always employed a variety of interpretive strategies to neutralize the danger of violence.

The Alexandrians developed the habit of allegorizing potentially offensive passages into a fine art. The Antiochenes discerned their true meaning in their typological prefiguration of the drama of salvation enacted in Jesus Christ. Early historical critics were able to regard the texts of terror as primitive stages in the history of the development of Israelite religion. Of these strategies, many contemporary "post-liberal" theologians look to allegory and typology as being the most promising. They preserve a strong sense of biblical authority, avoiding the quagmire of trying to determine which passages in scripture are authoritative and which are not, and at the same time nullify the temptation to engage in acts of copycat violence. If the Canaanite tribes are not thought of as specific ethnic groups, but as symbols of all that is opposed to God's will, particularly the resistances to God in one's own community and in one's own heart, then the tendency to visit righteous wrath upon others need not arise.

3. Other theologians have proposed that a clarification of the meaning of "retribution" can prevent excessive retributive violence. It need not be conceived as wrathful vengeance taking sadistic delight in the sufferings of the enemy. Biblical imagery that suggests such cruel gloating need not be taken literally, but can be regarded as metaphoric expressions of the common human experience of moral outrage. There is something morally repugnant about the prospect of abusive people taking pleasure in their victory over the people they have harmed. In a moral universe, vice should not be rewarded; hurting others should not lead to culprit's happiness and pleasure. (Immanuel Kant was very sensitive to this matter.) Consequently, the language of retribution can be seen as an effort to redress the shocking reality that malefactors are often gleefully unrepentant. The perpetrator of the crime, not the victim, should experience discomfort. In this view retribution is not an ecstasy of violence, but an attempt to disconnect vice and pleasure. As such, the discomfort visited upon the abuser should not be excessive; it should only be sufficient to ensure that offender's pleasure in the hurtful deed is undermined. Biblical passages that seem to revel in the woes of Israel's persecutors should be interpreted as poetically exaggerated expressions of this moral conviction.

4. A veritable host of responses have been generated by the criticisms of the traditional doctrines of the atonement. In the United States, this is where most of the theological action has occurred. Writers have argued in a variety of different and sometimes contradictory ways that a focus on the redemptive significance of the cross need not lead to violence, and that, if properly understood, atonement theory actually undercuts violent tendencies. Some theologians have rejected Anselmic views, favoring a non-violent reconceptualization of the classic "Christus Victor" model. J. Denny Weaver and Susan Bond interpret the death of Jesus as breaking the cycle of retaliatory violence. The crucifixion unmasks the powers of evil and violence and establishes the superiority of Jesus' non-violent praxis. Jesus defeats Satan (the power of violence) precisely by accepting death at the hands of his enemies rather than by opposing them and perpetuating the cycle of violence. Paradoxically, the means to Jesus' victory is the testimony of his non-violent acceptance of death.

On the other hand, some theologians revive Abelard's focus on Jesus' death as a manifestation of God's radical love. The meaning of the crucifixion is God's bottomless response of self-giving love to a hostile and violent humanity. The events on Golgatha

constitute God's unimaginable act of self-giving to God's foes. Christ's willingness to hand himself over to his enemies welcomes them and us into a radically new mode of life. Jesus' unconditional love invites a repetition in our own hearts.

Finally, other theologians attempt to revive more Anselmic views in ways that counter the accusations of violence and divine child abuse. For example, William Placher has argued that because Christ has endured the destruction that the disturbers of God's shalom should receive, the implication is that we humans need not and should not set out to punitively destroy sinners ourselves. David Wheeler has contended that a painful sacrifice is simply the inevitable cost of restoring any relationship that has been broken and damaged by one of the parties. Similarly, Shirley Guthrie has proposed that "western" views of the atonement are struggles (sometimes inept ones) to articulate the conviction that God has identified with sinners and taken into God's own self the consequences of human estrangement. All of these authors agree that the atonement is not a prototype of child abuse because all the persons of the Trinity are (in different ways) active in the Incarnation, suffering along with broken humanity.

5. The objection that Christian apocalyptic encourages violence has also met its challengers. Miroslav Volf suggests that apocalyptic literature actually authorizes our relinquishing of violence. We humans can and must give up "retaliatory strategies because eschatologically it is God who has a monopoly on all violence; it is God, and not we ourselves, who will take drastic measures to set all things right. Other theologians have maintained that the violence in the apocalyptic passages should be read symbolically. Satan and the powers of evil are defeated by the Word, not by physical force. In fact, the power of violence is vanquished by the gentleness of the Lamb. In this view, apocalyptic talk about judgment and condemnation really intends to signal the dire consequences of rejecting God. The suffering is really not externally imposed by God, but is brought on by the sinner's own self. Apocalyptic rhetoric does not function to justify ideologies of violence, but to warn humanity that the imperative to live our lives in accord with God's purposes must be taken with utter seriousness.

6. Other theologians have contested the claim that strong views of divine transcendence encourage violent attitudes. They object that God's "otherness" or "sovereignty" do not function as symbols of despotism. The language of providence does not suggest the arbitrary whims of a cosmic tyrant. Rather, such discourse indicates that there is a power that sustains us and orders our lives. We finite creatures are not the source and ground of our own existence. As Augustine, Calvin, and Schleiermacher were well aware, down deep we humans feel a radical dependence on a power that supports our very being. That ontological relationship cannot be anything but asymmetrical. Because the language of transcendence points to our ontological dependence rather than to a dictatorship of cosmic proportions, it need not have any nuance of coercion or violence. In fact, the observation that the transcendent God of Christianity is conceived as being a tri-unity further militates against the accusation of divine violence. Recent years have witnessed a surprising revival of theological reflection on the nature of the Trinity, most of it exploring the prospect that in God's own self there exists differentiation within unity. This means that God is not defined as monolithic power, but as an intrinsic relationship of self-giving and joyful mutuality. Nothing could be farther from implications of violent

domination.

7. Finally, many theologians have puzzled over the contention that monotheism itself is intrinsically violent. They admit without apology the obvious fact that Christianity does indeed make truth claims, which imply that opposed claims must be false. This, however, is not a monopoly of monotheism; all world-views presuppose that their own way of construing reality is preferable to alternatives. All understandings of the nature and purpose of human life are gambles that one particular view rather than others will help human beings navigate their way through life. The problem is not the fact that Christians hold beliefs, but rather the way in which the beliefs are held. Many "post-modern" evangelical and orthodox theologians recognize that Christianity is one unverifiable wager among other contenders. Given the objective uncertainty of our faith, generosity must be extended to other perspectives. At the very least, violence cannot be employed to establish the hegemony of one's own admittedly unprovable world-view. So, what does this cursory overview of these hotly contested pro's and con's teach us about Christianity and violence? In all the arguments and counter-arguments a repeated dynamic can be discerned. One side insists that certain words inevitably encourage violence, and the other side counters that they do not. Perhaps this recurrent pattern suggests that the problem is not the content of the words, but rather is their use. Maybe the potential for inciting or reinforcing violence does not reside in the words as much as in their employment. Perhaps we can conclude that certain words, if used in certain ways, can foster violence, but that, if the same words are used in different ways, they may not encourage violence. Metaphors and evocative language can mean a host of things depending on the specific contexts of their use. Any words, any language, can be commandeered in the interests of inflicting harm upon others. A perfectly pure language, impervious to all sinful uses, is spoken only by the angels in heaven. Perhaps we Christians should spend less time trying to invent a pristinely non-violent discourse and spend more time reforming the complex network of practices that give our words meaning.

The critics do alert us to one crucial fact: violent metaphors can be exceedingly dangerous, especially when literalized. Therefore the church must exercise constant vigilance when they are used to shape Christian lives. In fact, the church must attend much more carefully to its catechetical function (broadly construed as all the factors that socialize individuals into the faith), in order to make certain that its biblical and doctrinal vocabulary is not co-opted to support ideologies of violence and aggression. We must be more diligent in communicating the genuinely Christian meanings of concepts like "atonement," "transcendence," and "apocalypse." For example, we must reinforce corporate practices in our churches that make it clear that violence in the Old Testament should not be read as a call to engage in nationalistic holy war, but as an expression of the incompatibility of God's righteousness and our unrighteousness. We must preach, teach, counsel, and act in ways that make it clear that the cross is not a celebration of God's rage directed against an innocent victim, but is rather a declaration that reconciliation with us hurts God, and that God is more than willing to bear the pain. We must structure our communal lives so it becomes evident that apocalyptic themes are not an invitation to gloat over the sufferings of our enemies, but are an admonition that we must take our

lives with utter seriousness. A problem in the United States may be that many main-line churches have not really addressed these themes in any sustained, coherent ways, perhaps because they are confused about them or afraid of them. But we cannot back off from this task, however daunting it may be. We cannot allow our cherished vocabulary to contribute the proliferation of global animosity; the stakes are exceedingly high. While we monitor the employments of our language, sensitive to the possibility of abuse, we must also rejoice that Christianity can draw from its rich treasury unique resources to oppose the current rise of violence. Christianity possesses a built-in defense against violence, enshrined even its seemingly violent rhetoric. In the history of the church, the biblical, liturgical, and doctrinal language of God's wrath has often been used to expose the utterly heinous nature of non-love. Again and again, even after complicity in political violence, our heritage has returned to the conviction that the one thing that God must hate and reject is the triumph of hatred. With that core belief we can face a violent world with serenity, resolution, and hope.