

Peace: More Than an End to War

Presented by Alan Gamble, Executive Director of the Peace Tax Foundation

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I'd like to thank the organizers of this lecture and weekend conference. Harold, Gary, Susan, Don, Ruth, and many others. They've put in lots of time and imagination, and speaking for everyone gathered here, we really appreciate your efforts.

This is my second time consciously being in this Heartland state of Kansas. The first was when I was about 14 and I came with my dad to Kansas State University for his ag science conference. I have two memories of that trip: eating in a restaurant called LUMS, which advertised "Hot dogs steamed in beer" and then going alone to what my dad and I thought was a Laurel and Hardy film, but turned out to be "Ryan's Daughter", an R-rated movie. (pause—I was 14!) Fortunately, my idea of Kansas morals is not limited to this "first experience" in the Sunflower State!

Well, I'd like to open with a 11 minute film that is not yet rated, and probably never will be. We're in the process of changing some scenes to include the Schmidt family of Goessel and our visit to Senator Brownback's office last month. For those unfamiliar with the work of the National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund, this is an excellent introduction.

[Show "Compelled by Conscience" (11 minutes).]

One of the reasons I gratefully accepted this invitation to come to Kansas and Bethel College was to better understand what it is about this place that could nurture the character of a couple named Marian and Delton Franz. Most of you know they both passed on last year—I'm dedicating this lecture to them. Marian led the Peace Tax Fund from the DC base for 23 years – from 1982, the same year NWTRCC was founded, through 2005. Marian grew up here in Whitewater, and tells the story of welcoming Germans into their home. She attended Berean Academy and according to the yearbook she edited was known as "blondie" and sang in various campus and church ensembles.

Marian met Delton while they were students at Bethel, then after short pastorates moved to lead an interracial congregation in Chicago. They brought their witness of conscience to Washington DC in 1968, where Delton opened the Mennonite Central Committee Washington office, skillfully blending a prophetic witness to Congress with being faithful to their identity as Mennonite followers of Jesus Christ.

I've become impatient for results at times, and feeling ignored after only a year and a half in DC. I want to know what kind of character gets shaped in Kansas that can sustain the kind of patient persistence that Marian embodied.

It seems the Kansas prairie landscape helps clarify what's important in life. With fewer distractions than city-life, spiritual beliefs and convictions are not as prone to compromise for the sake of convenience. Despite challenges, the support network of families is strong. When you know who you are, you are better able to provide guidance to others, and ask tough questions that remind us of why we were created and to Whom we belong.

When I chose to title this lecture "Peace: More than an End to War", I initially wanted to link NWTRCC's statement of purpose including racism and poverty with my experience and understanding

of the teachings of the Baha'i Faith. I promise to do that in a few minutes. But I wanted to dwell for a few more minutes on this issue of identity and conscience.

I'd like to take us back a number of years to the roots of our identity as Americans, as Kansans, and as persons of faith so we can broaden our identity to begin to see ourselves as world citizens of conscience.

A dictionary definition of conscience says it is "a knowledge or sense of right and wrong, with a compulsion to do right; moral judgment that keeps one from violating one's ethical principles." It comes immediately before other useful words I wish we had time to reflect upon: conscientious objector, conscript, consecrate, consensus, consent, consequence, and conserve.

Because an individual's conscience can occasionally lead to anti-social behavior and self-righteousness, it is important to test our personal conscience in light of a community and spiritual wisdom. Most of our consciences were shaped by family, our church community, chosen friends, books, films, scripture, and a variety of experiences that enabled us to deeply know the sacredness of all life.

I am going to read a couple passages, and ask you to guess where they are drawn from.

1. *"The Militia shall be composed of all able-bodied white male citizens between the ages of twenty-one and forty-five years, except such as are exempted by the laws of the United States, or of this State; but all citizens, of any religious denomination whatever, who, from scruples of conscience, may be averse to bearing arms, shall be exempt therefrom, upon such conditions as may be prescribed by law."*

Source? The Militia Clause (Article 8) of the 1861 Kansas Constitution. The basic rights of individual religious conscience were carefully protected the constitution of Kansas, a brand new state. And these rights included an exemption from the compelled supply of military weapons as well as use of those weapons in person.

"Bearing of arms" exemptions for conscientious objectors are found in many other state constitutions, including those that declared themselves to be sovereign governments well before the federal constitution was created and ratified.

The "bearing arms" obligation required that the firearms and munitions were provided by the militiaman himself. Thus, the militia exemption for those citizens with religious conscientious objections applied to both paying for the supply of military armament as well as to active soldiering.

The states could compel men to provide armed service, but this power was properly counter-balanced by the recognition and acknowledgment of individual rights of conscience. And since the Kansas State Militia law of 1861 required that those exempted because of religious conscience pay an annual fee of five dollars to their county treasurer, the 'alternative service' equivalent that was provided by COs of those times supported local community purposes.

The national government began the practice of military conscription without any recognition of the long standing protection of the individual rights of conscience that was, and still is, part of the legal heritage of many states, including Kansas.

When the federal government makes the same accommodation, when objections to paying for weapons as well as using weapons are respected at the national level, then the original balance between military duty and the freedom of religious conscience, as established by the people in states like Kansas, will be restored.

So that was a long exploration of the heritage we come from. What about the source of this passage?

2. *“We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind and, to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women, and of nations large and small, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.”*

Source? Preamble to the United Nations Charter, dated 1945. These words are remarkable in their clarity, power and succinctness. This is a collective declaration “by the people”, not by nation-states. It was proclaimed after millions of lives were destroyed and permanently maimed by the World War. The intent of this declaration is our legacy, the inheritance of each one of us, and I believe we all have the moral strength to maintain practical support for these ideals. One more quote, then it will be your turn to write.

3. *“Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief of his [or her] choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his [or her] religion or belief in worship, observance, teaching, and practice.”*

And this document goes on to say that no one shall be subject to coercion which would impair their freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief, and that the freedom to manifest one's faith is only limited when necessary to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. Source? The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966, which is based on Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This binding covenant entered into international force in 1976, and became American law when ratified by the US Senate in 1992.

Okay. I'm going to ask you to shift the focus of your listening from my voice to your inner voice. We're passing out a guide sheet and postcard to each of you. We'll play some light music in the background for the next 9 minutes, during which I am asking you to write a short statement of conscience about paying for war. The challenge is to discipline yourself to one sentence, ideally with less than 20 words. You can use the reverse side as scratch paper. You can write your statement of conscience in the space provided, and possibly use similar words when writing the postcard to Senator Brownback. At the end of the silence, a few of you may wish to share what you've written. Later, we will collect these words, as well as any financial support, as we offer our gifts.

[Clarifying questions re: task? Play quiet music. End with light bell?]

[Invite audience to read their short statements.]

I'd like to give a short personal summary of how I came to this movement. I grew up in central Michigan, the first of three children of Mary, an occupational therapist, and Joseph, a plant science professor and later designer of drip irrigation systems for fruit tree growers. After college, I taught music as a Peace Corps Volunteer in a small eastern Caribbean island, where I met my wife Prisca and where our two college-aged daughters were born.

My first introduction to conscience and taxes came in 1992 after our family had returned to central Michigan. The Peace Tax Fund was then 20 years old and had just experienced its first Congressional hearing before the House Ways and Means Committee. The National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee was 10 years old. Marian Franz had been out there leading the way for 10 years, but this was all new to me. And I thought it was the most amazing practical application of faith I had ever seen. Here was a group who knew their identity so well that they didn't wait for a law to give them permission to do what they knew in their collective consciences to be right.

I thought back to Susan Anthony who even though voting was illegal for women, voted anyway, and years later the world caught up to her audacity and courage. And then I thought of blacks and whites who rode buses together and ate at lunch counters together, even though it was illegal to do so.... and eventually the law caught up with their audacity and courage. So I began looking at these people like Randy Kehler and Betsy Corner, Wally and Juanita Nelson, David and Miyoko Bassett, Bill Ramsey, Don Kaufmann, and countless others who were sacrificing wages, bank accounts, cars, and even homes just because they asserted their natural right of conscience to be free from any participation in the intentional taking of life, and I thought, "my God—this is the next civil rights movement taking shape!" I was hooked.

In most struggles for liberation, there seem to be a few key elements:

1. A sense of being oppressed. We instinctively know we will not be fully human until some burden is lifted or a chain is broken. Taxes seem to function with a challenging veil, which most fellow citizens find difficult to see or break through. We may suspect a connection – that the disaster of hurricane Katrina in the Gulf, or the early summer floods this year in southeast Kansas, or the recent wildfires in California—none of these needed to be so devastating as they were, but for that one thing they all had in common. Half of each state's National Guard and heavy equipment was preoccupied in the costly occupation of another country.

We need to find the language and symbols that clearly express the external and internal oppression which really occurs when nation states coerce citizens into unwilling financial participation in the intentional extinguishing of human life. We also need to call things by their real names. Marian Franz and those who have been involved in this movement of conscience for some time realized that our energies shouldn't be directed against soldiers, veterans, and other people serving in the military. We're up against something much bigger here, something Biblical writers called principalities, powers and my favorite: idolatry. Militarism is one of our culture's most insidious and pervasive idols, demanding allegiance, promising security yet producing a cornucopia of rotten fruit. I've heard one of the previous KIPCOR speakers, Jim Wallis of Sojourners, say the biblical understanding of freedom was always understood in the context of being liberated from bondage. One of the gifts the War Tax Resistance movement has given me is the freedom from unquestioning obedience to powerful forces. When I chose to fear God more than the IRS, I learned to respect their rightful authority and act out of greater love and compassion rather than anger.

2. A second element of many social movements is an energized youth, and I am very encouraged NWTRCC and to a growing degree the Peace Tax Fund is recognizing this and developing materials geared to the vision and activism of young people.
3. A third element is persistence, and the War Tax Resistance and Peace Tax Campaigns have in part proven that these questions and our consciences will not just go away, simply by still being here for 25 and 35 years. I've heard some people say it's rather unique for a bill to be reintroduced more than a couple times without successful passage. The current Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund bill HR 1921 was introduced for the 19th consecutive time this past April. In human development terms, an extra strong foundation has been laid, and it's time we struggle out of our adolescence into real maturity.
4. Social movements are also often infused with singing, and I am admittedly somewhat ashamed to have not provided stronger leadership in this area. I know we'll sing some at NWTRCC's party tomorrow night – for now, how about if I serve as an advance scout for folk master musician John McCutcheon who will be here in February by sharing with you in the singing of his favorite song.

The words come from a preamble to an early constitution of the United Mine Workers 150 yrs ago (about the time of the first Kansas state constitution).

*“Step by step the longest march can be won, can be won.
Many stones can form an arch, singly none, singly none.
And by union what we will, can be accomplished still.
Drops of water turn a mill, singly none, singly none.”*

5. Finally, lasting positive change comes when people nonviolently sacrifice their own comfort for the cause of something bigger than themselves. We don't seek to impose our will on others, but are willing to risk being out-of-step with expected conformity. That's one of the reasons I am anticipating the 2008 War Tax Boycott. It's well organized, focused, and enables us to, in the words of Bob Marley “emancipate ourselves from the mental slavery.” I hope each of you will deeply consider participating in this event. Until we do, and become a dilemma not just within ourselves but also to society, our elected leaders will not really understand our beliefs are real.

I said earlier I would more specifically address the title of the lecture “Peace: More Than an End to War”. I will do so now for the last few minutes in light of my spiritual journey. I was raised in a unified Presbyterian and United Church of Christ congregation, with the grace and responsibility of being a follower of Jesus Christ becoming especially strong in late high school and college. I was an active leader with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in college, interned with Bread for the World and trained as a Methodist local preacher after being in the Peace Corps.

I was led to an unexpected acceptance of the Baha'i Faith ten years ago, and I'll be coming from that perspective. I do need to make it clear that my work as the Executive Director of the Peace Tax Campaign is not currently supported by the Baha'i teachings, and I am in no way an official spokesperson for the Baha'i Faith (who, like Quakers, don't have any clergy). In this Faith, I've found both incredible hope and also very difficult challenges to my spiritual and political assumptions. Here are the first two paragraphs of an October 1985 Statement by the Universal House of Justice, the supreme administrative body of the Faith located in Haifa Israel. This 20-page Framework is called “The Promise of World Peace.”

“To the Peoples of the World: The Great Peace toward which people of goodwill throughout the centuries have inclined their hearts, of which seers and poets for countless generations have expressed their vision, and for which from age to age the sacred scriptures of humanity have constantly held the promise, is now at long last within the reach of the nations. For the first time in history it is possible for everyone to view the entire planet, with all its myriad diversified peoples, in one perspective. World peace is not only possible but inevitable. It is the next stage in the evolution of this planet—in the words of one great thinker, “the planetization of humanity”.

Whether peace is to be reached only after unimaginable horrors precipitated by humanity's stubborn clinging to old patterns of behavior, or is to be embraced now by an act of consultative will, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth. At this critical juncture when the intractable problems confronting nations have been fused into one common concern for the whole world, failure to stem the tide of conflict and disorder would be unconscionably irresponsible.”

It's a pretty amazing Statement, and you may wish to read it someday.

Aggression and conflict have so characterized our social, economic and religious systems that many have succumbed to the view that such behavior is intrinsic to human nature and unchangeable. This entrenched view leads to a paralyzing contradiction of human affairs. On the one hand, people of all nations proclaim not only their readiness but their longing for peace and harmony, for an end to the harrowing fears which torment their daily lives. On the other, it seems uncritically assumed humans are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive and thus incapable of erecting a social system at once progressive and peaceful, dynamic and harmonious, a system giving free play to individual creativity and initiative but based on cooperation and reciprocity.

By reexamining our basic assumptions we do not deny our past, but are enabled to understand it. I see the current world confusion in human affairs as a natural phase in an organic process leading ultimately and irresistibly to the unification of the human race in a single social order whose boundaries are those of the planet. The human race, as a distinct, organic unit, has passed through evolutionary stages analogous to the stages of infancy and childhood, and is now in the culminating period of its turbulent adolescence approaching its long-awaited coming of age.

If lasting peace is truly more than an end to war, what are some other aspects involved in bringing about genuine unity? We each need to detach from prejudice, whether it be racial, religious, gender, or class. Make a conscious effort to connect with those who are different than you. We work for universal education and the adoption of an international auxiliary language.

Unbridled nationalism is giving way to a wider loyalty, to the love of humanity as a whole. It's time to move beyond our own borders, and embrace the concept of world citizenship. As an aside, every two years since 1986, the various war tax resistance and peace tax campaigns from around the world have held a joint conference. I have wonder-filled memories of the storytelling and folksinging in Germany last October. It nurtured an amazing amount of mutual affection and solidarity and an event which always inspired Marian. I hope some of you here can join us in England next September. If you'd like to learn more about or become a friend of Conscience and Peace Tax International, there are some brochures on the table outside.

Finally, we must eliminate religious strife. God sends religions to unify peoples, and leaders often manipulate them to be the cause of innumerable divisions and wars. Religious leaders must be

challenged to contemplate, with hearts filled with the spirit of compassion and a desire for truth, the plight of humanity, and ask themselves whether they cannot, in humility before their Almighty Creator, submerge their theological differences in a great spirit of mutual forbearance that will enable them to work together for the advancement of human understanding and peace.

Leo Tolstoy once wrote that the heart of the gospel is the challenge to reach beyond our own borders and love our enemies. Without identifiers, listen to the Spirit speaking in these passages taken from several major religions.

“Hatreds never cease through hatred in this world; through love alone they cease. This is an eternal law.”

“Repel the evil deed with one which is better, then lo!, he between whom and you there was enmity shall become as though he were a bosom friend.”

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

“If others hurl their darts against you, offer them milk and honey in return; if they poison your lives, sweeten their souls; if they injure you, teach them how to be comforted; if they inflict a wound upon you, be a balm to their sores; if they sting you, hold to their lips a refreshing cup.”

“God said, “Resemble Me; just as I repay good for evil so do you also repay good for evil.”

“A superior being does not render evil for evil; this is a maxim one should observe....”

“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you....”

“Think ye at all times of rendering some service to every member of the human race. Pay ye no heed to aversion and rejection, to disdain, hostility, injustice; act ye in the opposite way. Be ye sincerely kind, not in appearance only. Let each one of God's loved ones center his attention on this: to be the Lord's mercy to man; to be the Lord's grace. Let him do some good to every person whose path he crosseth, and be of some benefit to him.”

Today, our Catholic brothers and sisters celebrate “All Souls Day” and this evening every cemetery in the Eastern Caribbean is filled with lighted candles and stories of ancestors. Let us, in this place, honor the lives of our ancestors on whose shoulders we stand, who sacrificed so much so that we might know the difference between an opinion and a belief. In their honor, let us commit ourselves anew to practice the dignified human virtues of trustworthiness, respect, mercy, compassion and loving kindness towards all peoples.

Hope truly is believing in spite of the evidence, and persistently working to make the evidence change. And we hope in the light of the emphatic promise that “these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come.” Thank you for the honor of attentive listening.