

Beal Memorial Lecture and Study Guide

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Peacemaking in a Violent World:

A Christian Perspective

The 2012 Beal Memorial Lecture
Steven Bouma-Prediger, PhD.



This recorded lecture is divided into six sections. Each video section is displayed followed by the English version of the study guide. A Spanish translation of the study guide can be found by [Clicking Here](#)

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English transcription of the lecture: [Click Here](#)

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Dr. Steven Bouma-Prediger is a Professor of Religion, Director of Environmental Studies and Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning at Hope College. He has received numerous honors and awards, written and edited many articles and reviews and authored and co-authored several books. He can be reached at boumapred@hope.edu

“Steven Bouma-Prediger provides one of the clearest, fairest, and most instructive resources on Christian Peacemaking that I have ever heard or read. Take time to listen to this. Use it in your congregation. Let it mold your discipleship. In the end, Bouma-Prediger says that the call of Jesus and the Bible to active non-violence is compelling. Those “Just Wars” in most cases turn out to be, well, just wars. But agree with his conclusions or not, you’ll be edified and enriched by these words. They don’t just preach; they teach.”

Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
Vice-Chair of Sojourners Board of Directors
General Secretary Emeritus, Reformed Church in America

This Study Guide is intended for use with a DVD of the Philip Beal Memorial Lecture presented by Dr. Bouma-Prediger at First United Methodist Church of Holland, Michigan, on September 27, 2012. Sections of the video are included below.

I. Introduction: Violence in Our Time

Dr. Bouma-Prediger begins his lecture with several newspaper headlines and personal examples of violence in our world and in our lives.

Do you agree that we live in a violent world? Why or why not?

Has violence affected you personally? What happened? How did you respond?

II Voices from the Past: Three Saints

II. Voices from the Past: Three Saints

Dr. Bouma-Prediger gives three examples of Christian pacifism from history.

Martin of Tours, a 4th Century Roman Soldier, became a Christian and said, "It is not lawful for me to fight."

Do you agree with Martin of Tours? Why or why not?

Can you think of a passage from the Bible to support your view?

John Woolman, an 18th Century American Quaker, refused to provide housing for some American army officers, saying it was a violation of his conscience.

Do you agree with John Woolman? Why or why not?

Can you think of a passage from the Bible to support your view?

In 1963, **Martin Luther King, Jr.** warned against allowing "creative protest to degenerate into violence," and advocated "meeting physical force with soul force."

Do you think that this is possible for individuals, or for groups, or for nations? Why or why not?

III Knowing Our Past: The Four Traditions

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Dr. Bouma-Prediger reviews four traditions on war and the use of violence.

Blank Check: the decision about the legitimacy of war is made by the ruler, who is not accountable to anyone.

Do we ever give our President and/or Congress a blank check?

Is there any justification in the Bible for giving a ruler a blank check?

Holy War: war is sanctioned by religious authority to defeat the powers of evil.

Is there anything in the Bible that supports or opposes this view? What?

Do you think the Church can ever sanction a Holy War? Why or why not?

Just War: war is justified under certain circumstances. There are seven criteria that must be considered before going to war.

1. Legitimate Authority: War must be carried out by legitimate rulers or governments, not private parties or tyrants.
2. Just Cause: The purpose of war must be to protect innocent life, to ensure people can live decently, to secure justice and restore peace.
3. Right Intention: The motivation must not be enmity, vengefulness, or the desire for power or material gain, but rather care for the victims of aggression.
4. Comparative Justice: While it is not necessary that one side be wholly in the right, war must never be waged unless the injustices to be fought on the one side are sufficiently greater than the injustices on the other.
5. Proportionality: The good ends to be gained from war must be greater than the destructive means used to achieve those ends.
6. Probability of Success: There must be reasonable likelihood that the war will achieve success or be winnable.
7. Last Resort: All peaceful alternatives must have been exhausted.

Can you think of any Biblical support for any of these criteria? What are they?

How do you think Jesus would respond to each of these criteria?

Once the seven criteria are met, there are three criteria for actually waging war.

1. Right Intentions: Since the aim must be to achieve a just peace, battle tactics must avoid any acts or demands that would hinder reconciliation.
2. Proportionality: Tactics must not be employed unless the goods to be reasonably expected are greater than the damage inflicted.
3. Discrimination: The immunity of the innocent must be respected, so one must not directly attack noncombatants or use them as shields.

Can any modern military conflict meet these three criteria for waging war?

How should Christians react when they believe one or more of the ten criteria are being violated, either by their own nation or by some foreign power?

Pacifism: war and violence are never morally acceptable. Dr. Bouma-Prediger notes that there are three distinctions important to our discussion of pacifism.

Force is not the same as violence. Force is the power, strength, or capacity to act. Violence is destructive, violating, or lethal force

Resistance is not the same as violence. One can resist with a weapon (violently) or with arguments, non-violent demonstrations, boycotts, sanctions.

Pacifism is not passivism. "Jesus was a pacifist, but he was not passive. He actively resisted evil whenever he came across it, but without the use of violence."

Do these distinctions help your understanding of pacifism?

Do you agree that Jesus was a pacifist? Can you think of passages from the Bible that support your view?

IV Who Would Jesus Kill?

IV. Who Would Jesus Kill? Looking Again at Scripture

The key questions to be explored are as follows. Is it appropriate for those who profess to be followers of Jesus to take up lethal weapons against enemies? Is it ever God's will for Christians to employ violence in the defense of justice?

A. The Sermon on the Mount

Read Matthew 5:38-48. Note that there are several objections people have made against using these verses to argue for Christian pacifism. They are listed below with counter-arguments.

This is a vision for a time when the Kingdom of God is fully realized and not for us today.	Jesus lived out this ethic and clearly intended for his followers to do so as well.
This was an interim ethic when people thought that the final judgment was near.	Matthew wrote his Gospel long enough after Jesus' death and resurrection to know that the Church must reckon with an extended period of time.
This ethic applies only to self-defense, not to fighting in the defense of an innocent third party.	Note Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, his rebuke of the disciple who drew a sword in the garden, and his persistent renunciation of violence.
This is an ethic only for "saints" and not for ordinary people.	In the very last verse of Matthew, Jesus says all Christians are to obey all of Jesus' teachings.
This ethic is impossible for us, so it helps to convict us of sin and our need for grace.	Read Matthew 7:21-27. Jesus expects Christians to act according to his words.
This ethic is limited to personal enemies in a traditional small village.	Read Matthew 5:43-48. Loving your enemies and praying for those who persecute you includes all enemies.

In conclusion, according to the Sermon on the Mount, the Christian church is to be the embodiment of non-violence. This is the church's indispensable witness to the gospel.

Do you agree with this conclusion? Why or why not?

Do you think that Jesus' teachings on non-violence are limited to personal relationships? Or do you think that the Christian community has a larger role? What might that role look like for your community of faith?

B. The Rest of the New Testament

Dr. Bouma-Prediger does not spend much time on the rest of the New Testament, except to state that the New Testament, as a whole, teaches pacifism.

Do you agree? Why or why not?

Are there verses in the New Testament that trouble you on this issue? What are they, and how do you understand them? (Note the texts in tension below.)

C. Texts in Tension

A few of the verses that have been troublesome for some Christians are listed below.

Matthew 10:34. Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Compare Luke 12:51. Jesus simply says he has come to bring division. Jesus’ use of the word sword seems to be a metaphor and not a warrant for violence.

Do you agree or disagree with this interpretation? Why?

Luke 22:36b. Jesus said, “The one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one.” On the night of his arrest, Jesus is using a metaphor to remind his followers that they must be prepared for rejection and persecution. They take him literally. “Lord, here are two swords.” Jesus rebukes them for their misunderstanding, saying, “Enough already!” Later, verse 51, Jesus rebukes the disciple who used a sword to defend him against arrest.

Do you agree or disagree with this interpretation? Why?

Matthew 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-19, Luke 19:45-48, John 2:13-17. Jesus’ overturning tables and otherwise disrupting the moneychangers and sellers certainly appears to be somewhat violent. However, some Biblical scholars refer to this as being in the Old Testament tradition of “prophetic acting out,” i.e., a public demonstration, and not a precedent for violence.

Do you agree or disagree with this interpretation? Why?

Soldiers in the New Testament. See Matthew 8:5-13, Mark 15:39, Luke 3:14-15, Acts 10:1-11:18. These texts and others seem to indicate that New Testament writers did not see participation in the army as sinful. Although somewhat in tension with the New Testament message of peacemaking, many Christians believe that being a Christian does not preclude serving in the military.

Do you agree or disagree with this interpretation? Why?

Old Testament. There are verses in the Old Testament that explicitly command the people of Israel to kill their enemies. Dr. Bouma-Prediger responds, “When texts from the two testaments collide, the New trumps the Old.”

Do you agree or disagree with this interpretation? Why?

D. Scripture and Tradition

Dr. Bouma-Prediger notes that, in addition to scripture, religious tradition is an important authority for many Christians. The Christian tradition for the first three centuries was decidedly pacifist. From the time of Emperor Constantine (AD 313) to the present, Christian tradition (with the exception of some pacifist churches) has endorsed or justified war under certain circumstances.

What does your religious tradition teach you about violence and war?

Do you believe that your religious tradition is consistent with the Bible in its teachings about violence and war? If not, how do you reconcile the difference?

V. The Way of the Cross: Peacemaking Today

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A. Just Peacemaking

Thoughtful Christians will never fully agree on when (if ever) war and military force are justified, but everyone can

benefit by asking together, “What practices of war prevention and peacemaking should we be supporting?”

Consider the following ten practices. Note that they fall into three broad categories: peacemaking initiatives (1-4), justice (5-6), and community (7-10).

#1. Support nonviolent direct action. Follow the examples of Ghandi and King, who used boycotts, strikes, marches, public disclosures, and civil disobedience to bring about a more just and peace-filled world.

Is there an issue in your community or in the larger world that might be addressed with this practice? How might you begin to address the issue?

#2. Take independent initiatives to reduce threat. Follow the example of Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, who initiated and then completed the 1963 Atmospheric Test Ban Treaty, which halted above-ground testing of nuclear weapons and led to a thaw in the Cold War.

Is there an issue in your community or in the larger world that might be addressed with this practice? How might you begin to address the issue?

#3. Use cooperative conflict resolution. Follow the examples of Caesar Chavez, Dorothy Day, and the Polish Solidarity Movement in seeking to resolve conflict by means of this process of reconciliation.

Is there an issue in your community or in the larger world that might be addressed with this practice? How might you begin to address the issue?

#4. Acknowledge responsibility for conflict and seek forgiveness. Follow the example of German pastor Dietrich Bohnhoeffer, who in 1945 acknowledged the guilt of the churches in Germany, and of Richard von Weizaecker, the President of West Germany who in 1985 offered a public apology on behalf of Germany for Nazi crimes in WWII.

Is there an issue in your community or in the larger world that might be addressed with this practice? How might you begin to address the issue?

#5. Advance democracy, human rights and interdependence. Follow the example of those who drafted and supported the UN General Assembly's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Is there an issue in your community or in the larger world that might be addressed with this practice? How might you begin to address the issue?

#6. Foster just and sustainable economic development. Follow the examples of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which focuses on micro-lending, and of those who supported the Montreal Protocol, the legislation passed by the UN in 1987 that phased out the use of ozone-destroying chemicals.

Is there an issue in your community or in the larger world that might be addressed with this practice? How might you begin to address the issue?

#7. Work with emerging cooperative forces in the international system. Follow the example of President Carter who, during the Clinton administration, worked with other international leaders to oust the unjust military regime in Haiti.

Is there an issue in your community or in the larger world that might be addressed with this practice? How might you begin to address the issue?

#8. Strengthen the United Nations and international efforts for cooperation and human rights. Follow the example of those who supported the UN declaration that apartheid in South Africa was a threat to peace.

Is there an issue in your community or in the larger world that might be addressed with this practice? How might you begin to address the issue?

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#9. Reduce offensive weapons and weapons trade. Follow the example of those who contacted their members of Congress when President George W. Bush pushed for building a new nuclear bomb, the bunker buster, and wiser heads in Congress, from both parties, prevailed and voted it down.

Is there an issue in your community or in the larger world that might be addressed with this practice? How might you begin to address the issue?

#10. Encourage grassroots peacemaking groups and voluntary associations. Follow the example of those who have joined local peacemaking organizations: Lakeshore Women for Peace, Holland Friends Meeting, Hope United for Justice, and others.

Is there an issue in your community or in the larger world that might be addressed with this practice? How might you begin to address the issue?

B. Christian Pacifism

Dr. Bouma-Prediger shares an example of an Old Order Amish Community in Belize. A store in the community was robbed. Upon learning that the robber was homeless, the people of the community built him a house. Then they printed their own currency for use within the community in order to remove any incentive for future robbers.

Is there an issue in your community or in the larger world that might be addressed in a similarly creative way? How might you begin to address the issue?

VI. Conclusion: A Prophetic Voice

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In a closing quotation from Wendell Berry's book, *Citizenship Papers*, there is a warning that, as industrial warfare develops increasingly catastrophic weapons, the need for peace making has become a practical necessity. At the same time, we have not yet learned to think of peace apart from war. Instead, we seem to have a need for war and an obsession with the evil of other people.

(Note: consider the three questions below both from the perspective of our nation and from the perspective of humanity as a whole.)

Is this a fair statement of the human condition?

Can we think of peace apart from war? Or do we humans have need for war?

Are we obsessed with the evil of other people? Or can we find ways to end long-standing animosities?

Final Questions for Reflection of the Study as a Whole

"If we are serious about peace, then we must work for it as ardently, seriously, continuously, carefully, and bravely as we have ever prepared for war."

– Wendell Berry

What have you learned from this study that will help you to be a peacemaker?

What can you do right now that will make a difference in your community?

What spiritual resources can you draw upon to guide and strengthen you that have not been mentioned during this study?

Closing Music

Dwight Beal: Piano and Vocals

Emily VanDeWalker: Piano

Rebecca VanDeWalker: Flute

Sue DeVisser: Vocals

Philip Emerson Beal was a member of Holland First United Methodist Church. After a long career as a college administrator, Phil and his wife Kathy served as missionaries in Singapore, in South Korea, and in the United States as Peace with Justice Educators. Phil was a Volunteer in Mission and a Member of the West Michigan Annual Conference Haiti Task Force. He was recognized by the West Michigan Annual Conference as Peacemaker of the Year, wrote many letters and articles concerning peace with justice, and dreamed of having speakers in the church where the community could share about peacemaking issues. The dream continues with this, the second Philip Beal Memorial Lecture.



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