# REFLECTIONS ON IMPERIALISM, VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM

Ismael Garcia

The long and complicated process of Euro-American expansion and the creation of a new world economic order has taken place in two major stages: the epoch of imperialism and the present epoch of globalism. Both processes relied on the systematic and calculated use of violence to achieve their goals and have generated, at a global scale, the appeal and justification of violence both as a way for metropolitan nations to sustain their power and dominance, and for satellite or marginal nations to resist the domination and oppression imposed by the
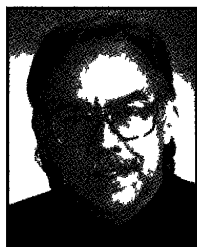
Ismael García is a member of the faculty of Austin Presbyterian Theologian Seminary, where he specializes in the intersection of Christian ethics and issues of social justice. He holds degrees from the University of Puerto Rico (B.A., Political Science), the University of Chicago (M.A., Sociology and Ethics), and the University of Chicago Divinity School (Ph.D.). His latest book is Introducción a la Ética Christiana (Abingdon, 2003). This article is adapted from material he presented to the Working Group on Violence, Religion and Terrorism, of which he was a member.

metropolitan centers. Moreover, state sponsored terrorism as a political option for resistance to liberation movements and as an expression of religious convictions is rooted in the culture of violence that dominates international relationships between the very strong, who aim at creating a new world order, and the very weak, who believe they are not included as part of the vision of the dominant groups.

Imperialism

The concept of imperialism was coined during the 16th century with the emergence of European nation states. It consolidated during the 18th century when some European nation states accumulated the economic and political power needed for them to organize with greater autonomy, not only their own internal social, cultural and political structure, but also the internal social, economic and political structure of recently "discovered" conquered nations.

The historical practice of imperialism is at the heart of the self-definition of modern European nations. It provides the context through which dominant European nations, and later the United States, formed and defined their identity and mission for the world. Dominant nations also defined the purpose and role of the nations under their dominance. Thus, a new world order was structured in which countries were divided into metropolitan centers and marginal peripheral nations.

Economic imperialism went hand in hand with a profound cultural imperialism. The hegemony of Euro-American imperial powers necessitated and depended upon the control of both the means of production and the means of cultural representation. The Enlightenment very much embodied and represented the creation of the ideology of the Eurocentric worldview in which European nations defined themselves as modern, history making, scientific societies compared to the prehistoric, traditional and superstitious societies of the nations that constituted the "new world," regardless of how developed or complex their cultural and economic structures. This ideology cemented the sense of European superiority (its right to exploit the world's resources and create a world in its own image) that became, and still remains, a central element of the justification of Euro-American dominance over other nations. Peripheral nations, thus, not only contributed to the economic development of Euro-America but also served the ideological purpose of giving credence to the notion of Euro-American superiority (in particular, racial superiority) and to the belief in its "civilizing" mission.

The military and economic violence that enabled the conquering nations to preserve and expand their empires did not exhaust the culture of violence implanted in the "new world." The metropolitan centers did not rule by military or physical force alone; the culture of violence also had a cultural dimension. The same ideologies that uplifted the creative self-image of the metropolis also proved effective in disabling the self-image of colonized nations. The colonized believe that they are subservient to the superior European. The colonized see themselves as having merely instrumental value, while the Euro-American is to be honored and respected. This sense of oneself and one's culture as inferior, and thus subservient to the superior ways of the metropolitan nations, has had a longstanding personal and collective traumatic impact. The psychological damage has been cemented through racist ideologies and practices and by the devaluation of those character-forming cultural differences that are part of one's innermost being.

Colonialism and imperialism have endured to a great measure because colonized peoples internalize the colonizer's worldview and values, which are understood to be part of the natural order. They come to see the imperial value system as the best – and the values of the colonized as "lacking" or "uncivilized" and thus in need of being rescued and brought to civilization.

Colonial nations and people thus became dependent both economically and in terms of their self-understanding. In these and other ways, the mindset of both the colonizer and the colonized was imbued with a sense that they were not equal and ought not to aspire to build a world together. The colonized did not believe themselves to be subjects capable of developing historical projects aimed at satisfying their fundamental needs and aspirations. Instead, they saw themselves as objects at the mercy of those who defined them as less worthy. Many studies affirm that such ideologies continue to have a lasting and negative effect on peoples of Latin American, African and Asian descent. This ideology is very much intrinsic to the practice of violence.

Colonialism and Imperialism

Colonialism and imperialism do not describe the same reality. Imperialism describes the practices, theory and attitudes of a metropolitan center that takes upon itself the right of ruling another nation. It consists of the ideological justification or legitimation of the practice of one nation exercising political, economic and military control over

another nation. It provides justification of the violence needed to rule and restructure another cultural entity.

Colonialism is one particular manifestation of imperialism. It points to the creation of *settlements* by members of the metropolitan nations in the newly "discovered" or conquered land. It is important that we recognize the significance of language such as "conquered land" as it testifies to the imposition of the culture of violence. It is language that makes the "original" or Native Peoples invisible and inconsequential. The land is seen as virgin, with no one having legitimate claims over it. To "conquer" the land entails the conquest, manipulation and naming of those who inhabit the land, who are seen (at best) as having a mere semblance of humanity and thus lacking dignity or intrinsic value. From a religious point of view, the case was made that the Native Peoples had no connection with the divine. The violent domestication of the land allowed for the violent domestication of the people since, in the end, both nature and Native Peoples were reduced to objects to please and serve the goals and dreams of the conquering subjects.

Conquering nation-states and their governments provided the material resources and the military security needed for the establishment of colonies. However, settlers were the ones who really defined and gave direction to the process of Europeanization of the new world through the massive *diaspora* of ordinary people, merchants, explorers, adventurers and fortune hunters, missionaries and soldiers. They exploited and developed the available material and human resources, which resulted in uneven growth and social inequality between the metropolis and the satellite nation. They also undertook the recreation of political, social and cultural institutions, which led to uneven power relationships among members of the ruling metropolitan centers and native inhabitants.

While colonialism necessitates the settlement of a group of people in a new location, imperialism is not strictly concerned with the issue of settlement. Imperialistic practices can and have survived even when colonial relations have been eliminated. The extension and expansion of imperialistic patterns of trade and commerce, under the protection of foreign political, legal and military controls, does not require settlement. Imperialism can continue if, within the satellite nation, there exists a class of local collaborators whose economic interests, well being and positions of privilege are sustained through loyalty to the metropolitan center. Though colonialism has formally ended, imperialism continues as Western nations (particularly the U.S. through its international finance capitalism) engage in imperial acts of securing wealth

and power through the continuing economic exploitation and political domination of other nations.

Few question that the desire for profitable trade and enrichment provided the impetus for the establishment of the imperial structure. As European nations enhanced their productive capacity through the invention of machines, the rationalization of the productive process and the perfecting of applied science or technology, it became more difficult for manufacturers, merchants and financiers to profitably dispose of their products. Owners of the means of production prevailed upon their government to acquire colonies in order to provide markets.

The seizing of foreign lands for government and/or settlements was seen as an effective way of securing both natural resources and labor-power (the globalization of slavery finds its beginning here) at the lowest possible cost and of creating and controlling secure markets abroad for their goods. Industrialization entailed a sudden expansion of productive capacity possible only in a country that had a key position of power and privilege in the world economy. The Industrial Revolution could not have occurred in Britain had it not been for the possession of a colonial empire that provided productive resources and outlets far in excess of anything the home markets could offer.

The acquisition of colonies was important and beneficial not only for economic gain but also because it deprived rival nations of potential wealth. This is another indication that the threat and exercise of violence was intrinsic to the imperial project itself. To secure their advantage, imperial European nation-states were quite willing to exercise violence not just against their colonial dominions but also against each other. As capital became stagnant, more and more governments moved toward the creation of a protective tariff wall around the empire. Some argue that this practice was a significant factor that led to World War I.

Though colonies engaged in struggles for national independence, they could never fully break ties with the metropolis. Political independence and national liberation did not translate into economic independence from the metropolis. Struggles of national liberation, while preferable to crude colonial rule, remained a disappointment to those who dreamed that political independence would actually lead to greater social justice for most of their population. Many have argued that struggles of national liberation merely substituted the domination of an external metropolitan power with domination by an internal nationalistic class, composed largely of the direct inheritors of former

European colonial rulers. While the masters changed, the day-to-day conditions of the average citizen remained the same. What is worse, the newly erected nation-states proved to be even more repressive and violent than their colonial predecessors.

Imperialism led to the establishment of structures of dependence. Former colonies became not only consumers of the goods produced by the "factory of the world" but, more significantly, dependent for the goods and know-how necessary to sustain their own industrialization. In this way, Euro-Americans were able to continue their dominance. Given that they had the capacity to outproduce and undersell all competitors, it made perfect sense that they also proclaimed the gospel of free trade. The newly independent nations fell into a new neocolonial role and continued to play an essential, though subservient, part in the industrial transformation of dominant Western nations and the development and growth of global capitalism.

Globalization

Globalization is the natural successor of the imperial project. It pursues the same goals: the perpetuation of capitalist free trade, access to new markets, and the securing of cheap labor, energy and scarce material resources. Globalism can be seen as a direct legacy of the process of Euro-American ethnocentricity begun centuries ago.

Globalization points to those significant technological, economic, political and financial changes as well as developments within the communication and information industries that have, for the first time in history, created the possibility of establishing a world that functions like an organic community or, in the most literal sense, like an economic, political and cultural global village. It is not the creation of a "smaller world" that is unique in this historical process. Rather it is the possibility of creating an inclusive economic system as part of a unified world culture.[1]

In this new stage of the history of western imperialism, those who control the world of finance and technology have reached such domi-

---

[1] The process of globalism has brought a greater economic and cultural exchange and encounter among the nations of the world. Among the goods that top the list of exchanges are automobiles and automobile parts, clothing, shoes, tourism, entertainment and legal and commercial services. There is also a growing illegal industry of drugs, animals, arms and people, particularly women.

nance that they are able to override the power and limits of the nation-state, both their own and that of poor nations. The nation-states, in particular the United States, Europe and Japan (where most transnational corporations are based) continue to be major political players. However, the nation's capacity to control and regulate the flux of international capital has been diminished; it has lost its monopoly in determining the structure through which nations relate to each other. This role has been assumed by transnational corporations which, with their newly acquired financial and technological power, now have greater capacity to determine the possibilities of life both nationally and globally.

The Globalization Debate

The process of globalization, like all complex historical processes, is ambiguous and hard to evaluate. Some, among them conservative[2] Christians who support neoliberal economic and political ideology, claim that globalization is a creative, constructive and positive process that ought to be supported unconditionally.[3] They emphasize that it forwards unity and integration of all nations and peoples. They are optimistic about the capacity global capitalism has for continuing to generate wealth, bringing about greater well-being and opportunities for more people to have a meaningful life. They point out that since 1945 globalization has tripled the per capita income of the world population, eliminating many forms of extreme poverty.

They also point out that the immediate access to information that is possible via the new communications technologies is creating more occasions for consciousness raising. More and more people are more efficiently expressing and practicing solidarity with groups committed to preserving the environment, arms reduction and forwarding the rights of those who traditionally have been marginalized and oppressed.[4] These same technologies are a source for those groups (women, gay and lesbian groups, Native Peoples) who are victimized by the habits of their own traditions and by the prejudices and the

---

[2] It is important to emphasize that advocating a conservative theological point of view does not entail being socially conservative. It is also true that people who have liberal theological convictions can be political and economic conservatives.

[3] See Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1999.

[4] The Mexican Zapatista Revolutionary Movement is an example of resistance to global corporate interests and the discrimination that native Mexican people face. They use the internet as part of their struggle and their strategy to enhance solidarity with people of good will in other nations.

provincial attitudes of their own communities. These groups can now find a larger source of support for their causes.

From a theological point of view the argument is made that the creation of a more integrated world, both nationally and globally, fits the Christian vision and mission for the world as well as humanitarian political goals. It also fits the Christian notion of striving to create conditions where all can enjoy life in abundance. However, one also has to be realistic and confront the fact that historical processes of fundamental change bring dislocation, pain and suffering for some. Still there is consolation in the hope that when all is said and done the benefits derived from globalization will outweigh the human cost and suffering that is inevitably part of it.

Others, including Christians, resist neoliberal globalization because it represents the culmination of the inhumane and cruel process of imperialism that began with the conquest and colonization of Spain and Portugal over Latin America and the Caribbean, continued with the expansion of Britain and France over Africa and Asia, and continues today with the dominance of the United States.

While it is true that neoliberal globalization has lifted the standard of life for some, it is equally true that it has created new forms of chronic poverty.[5] It has aggravated the gap that already existed between the poor and wealthy nations of the world, keeping significant sectors of the world marginal to the process of production and consumption, and afflicting those sectors with chronic social dislocation.

In this critical perspective, powerful transnational corporations, with the assistance of local collaborators, have the capacity to influence local governments (many of which are poor in comparison) to disregard local democratic controls and weaken demands for corporate social responsibility.[6] Transnational corporations which provide work for a significant number of the community can, for example, threaten to leave a given nation or region unless the state guarantees to keep salaries low, control labor unions, provide generous tax exemptions and disregard environmental restraints and regulations. Corporations dominate economically rather than militarily, yet the social inequality and unrest that emerge from the repression of workers have contributed sig-

---

[5] See the United Nations' 1998 report. The poor of the world can ill afford to buy the agricultural products they produce, which are placed in the world market to obtain dollars, most of which go to pay the national debt.

[6] One way transnational corporations raise their profits is to avoid paying taxes by increasingly channeling exchanges within their own organizations.

nificantly to the increase of repressive police institutions, militarization, and the undermining of democratic practices and procedures.

Neoliberalism assumes the possibility of infinite or unlimited growth. Its vision of never-ending growth disregards environmental limits and assumes a triumphal and overly optimistic sense of its capacity to provide a technological fix to whatever social or natural problem might emerge. Thus global capitalism contributes to ecological degradation and the depletion of resources such as fossil fuels, forestry, air quality and water.

Transnational globalization is also rejected because it distorts essential cultural and moral values. Matters of love, justice and service to others take a second seat to materialistic consumption and the immediate gratification and satisfaction of our base desires and pleasures. The traditional understanding that one must *have* and *consume* in order to realize meaning and purpose in one's life is turned into an ideology that the *purpose* of being is found in continual consumption.

Finally, the quest, otherwise positive, for the creation of an integrated world community is impoverished and distorted by the imposition of a homogeneous global culture centered on the mass consumption lifestyle and individualistic values of Western nations. From this perspective, transnational globalization is perceived as a serious threat to and devaluation of the plurality of values and meanings that define the sense of truth, beauty and goodness that gives meaning to the lives of diverse cultures and peoples.

Thus neoliberal globalization – centered on private property, increased deregulation of the market, the promotion of competition, maximization of profit, increased privatization of public services guided more by efficiency than the satisfaction of basic needs, the reduction of the economic influence of the state, and the maximization of the state in matters pertaining to national security – is ultimately seen as generating instability and the kind of social dislocation that will increase the use of violence to sustain the present social order and/or to change it.

Globalization and Violence

The central problem brought about by transnational globalism is the exclusion and marginalization of a significant portion of the human family who are deprived of the material goods and services it produces. More significantly, a large sector of humanity is kept from being active historical subjects and citizens within the new global village, with

access to local and global decision making centers that can significantly affect their life possibilities. Thus a large portion of humanity is not only condemned to poverty but also made powerless and deprived of their cultural integrity.

The transnational global process has brought about a number of crises that generate the kind of social dislocation that intensifies the use of violence.

1. National Debt

The national debt that burdens most poor nations is the result of loans arranged by the powerful social classes within poor nations and transnational financial institutions. The conditions of renewing these loans demand that the state enact social policies that are punitive to working people and the poor.[7] The social unrest and dislocation that result both encourage the development of illegal forms of trade, like the production and distribution of drugs, and breed social resentment and violent behavior. International peacemaking organizations have advocated that these loans be renegotiated or forgiven. Within the Christian community many have advocated the practice of Jubilee justice, which recognizes that the possibility of sustaining nurturing communities relies to a great extent on the practice of pardoning debts and forgiveness. A just community is defined by practices such as freeing people from the burdens of social dislocation and redistributing social goods and services, providing the poor the possibility of starting again.

2. Economic Inequalities

National and global economic inequalities that have emerged from the dynamics of global capitalism have critically increased the population of migrants and refugees. This forced *diaspora* is the result of a number of factors such as economic need, local military conflicts, repressive political regimes, religious and political conflicts and persecution, and environmental degradation.[8]

---

[7] Among the most influential global organizations are the World Bank, The International Monetary Fund, and the Global Exchange. Argentina, once the poster child of international global policies of development is now the poster child for the political, social and economic chaos that such policies can bring.

[8] It is important to notice the indispensable economic role that migrants play in sustaining the economy of their country of origin. It is estimated that the third largest source of income in Mexico, after tourism and petroleum, is the money migrants send their families. The same is true for El Salvador, Nicaragua and Cuba. This raises the question of what incentive these nations have to control the outmigration of workers from their nation.

It is imperative that international organizations have the power, authority and resources needed to diminish the root cause of this massive *diaspora*. They must also have the ability to regulate and help relocate, in a humane manner, those migrants and refugees who are deprived of membership within their own nation or who, for reason of survival, need to abandon their nation. No one should exist in a political vacuum deprived of the security and welfare provided by their nation-state. It is urgent that the regulation of national borders be reconceived to correspond to the reality of the global village. Capital and technology are not regulated and can move freely across borders; workers must also be allowed free movement across national borders and the freedom to make decisions as to where and with whom they will share life.

3. Cultural Homogenization

Globalization is an irreversible process; we cannot go back to a pre-globalized reality. What we can do is attempt to give moral direction and content to the process. We need to promote globalization as an encounter among people, not just as business transactions and goals. Globalization must create space for multiculturalism. It is in this context that we must strive for community and greater understanding among nations, local communities and history-bearing social groups. As we shall see shortly, terrorism has as one of its aims the violent substitution of one form of consciousness for another. Many see the imposition of a culture of consumption as an act of fundamental violence. Many believe that they need to resist, even in a violent way, the creation of a Euro-global culture and struggle for the maintenance of a pluralistic global culture where different national and cultural groups can actively participate.

4. Religious Dimensions

Some religious communities find their faith being threatened by the process of globalization. They claim that globalization radicalizes the process of secularization initiated by the Enlightenment.

The emergence of the dominance of the rational coincides with the dominance of Europe over the rest of the world. Religiously speaking, divine providence is being increasingly replaced by human autonomy, that is, by a socially and culturally situated human will, the European subject, who becomes (explicitly or implicitly) the agent of providence. The passion to reestablish the centrality of religion has given many a

justification for the use of terrorist attacks against the centers that control global processes. In their view, the infidelity and might of the agents of the Enlightenment justify defeating them by all means possible.

From a more positive perspective, the encounter between the major religions of the world, once reserved for those engaged in the mission field, is now accessible to a wider public. The encounter between world religions has made the boundaries of denominational and religious identity significantly more fluid. Most of us have been influenced by some element of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, African religiosity and Native religiosity. In turn, Christianity has influenced these religious communities.

It is imperative that we continue the interreligious dialogue, particularly among lay people, and be intentional about not making absolutist, dogmatic claims that could lead to conflict, antagonism and violence among religious communities. Most world religions have been accomplices in inhumane forms of violence, which is a negation of their reason for being: the creation of inclusive communities committed to mutual aid that witness to the peace and love of God. An intentional and structured encounter between the religions might create more occasions for encounters and dialogue that could mitigate the fundamentalism that supports aggressive attitudes toward other religious communities.

Potentially, the church, itself a transnational global institution, can make a contribution to a popular style of globalization that is just, inclusive and affirming of the dignity of all people. It can both resist the hegemony of Eurocentric ideologies and advocate for the creation of a multicultural, politically just world (Lk 10:25-37) that sees in those who are different an occasion through which God reveals God's purpose (Mt 20:1-16) and finds meaning and purpose in the process of struggling for the creation of a more humane world. From the perspective of our faith, the good life is one of service and solidarity with the poor in the struggle to create integrated communities and global institutions (Mt 25:31-46).

As church, we are called not only to resist death, but to struggle for the enhancement of abundant life among all people. We must carry out these struggles within local communities; however, all struggles must be seen as global in nature. Whatever justice we achieve locally must have implications beyond our narrow self-interest. We are a people who

live by God' s grace and providence and, thus, we know that no matter how difficult the task before us, we need not resign ourselves nor become cynical. Our God will provide and, on the basis of that faith, we are free to commit ourselves more fully than if we had only our own wits and powers to help us.

Religion, Violence and Terrorism

Normally, terrorism finds fertile ground in the kind of socio-economic and political context created within colonial and neocolonial settings where significant numbers of people are culturally, socially and politically alienated and see themselves as powerless to influence the affairs of their world. When one lives with a sense that all possibilities have been lost, there is an inclination to give one's life for something that is seen as being valuable. Terrorist practices provide them with a sense of historical meaning and purpose. Religious terrorism connects the will to kill (and *be* killed) with a transcendent purpose that is perceived to be connected with God' s will and purpose.

Religion and violence are no strangers to each other. Any religious vision that proclaims that the faithful are called to engage in historical political transformation in order to contribute to the creation of a new order that will result from a decisive battle of the children of light against the forces of evil (as found in Christianity, Islam and Judaism) is likely not only to engage in violence but also to justify terrorism. Terrorism becomes a viable political option because it is part and parcel of the political imperative of winning "the minds and hearts of the people." The creation of a "new way of being human" or the restoration of "true humanity," based on the radical conversion from one form of ideology to another, provides a justification of terrorist practices.

One would like to assume, since religion always entails a commitment to a structured life or a life bound by rules and conventions that the community identifies as morally good, that religious life would in principle exclude an option for terrorist practices. From a religious point of view, terrorism is morally indefensible precisely because it is intrinsically agnostic. The terrorist mindset is one that refuses to comply and be bound by conventional rules, such as the ones provided by the just war tradition. It refuses to accept claims of there being a natural order because both of these are perceived as an obstacle to the achievement of their higher or transcendent goal. Prophetic religions in particular embody an anti-law and anti-convention dimension. Theological claims are given priority over moral conventions, regula-

tions and procedures. At times, being faithful entails overriding moral and legal restrictions. Messianic, millenarian, and apocalyptic religious visions can provide, if not a moral, at least a theological justification to engage in terrorist practices.

This conviction is supplemented with other theological beliefs and interpretations such as:

- The world continues to move away from God's will; culture is becoming more materialistic and increasingly desecrates God's name and violates God's natural order and purpose for humanity. In analyzing the social world, only the seamy side of society is emphasized. What is corrupt and decadent in culture and society defines the nature of the whole of society. This world is absolutely evil and beyond redemption, and thus we need and expect the creation of a new world and a new way of being human
.
- Natural catastrophe and/or social chaos and dislocation are the consequences of personal and cultural evil in the world; these earth-shattering and destructive events represent God's judgment.

- History has direction and purpose; it moves toward a more perfect state. This perfectionism is incarnated exclusively in a faithful remnant; they alone are capable of discerning and behaving according to God's will. These remnant people are not the ones who will bring the resolution of the cosmic struggle of good against evil; rather they represent, here and now, the world that is to come. They claim to be in possession of special knowledge and truthful insight into the nature of this world, who the messiah is, and what he/she wants or expects from us.

- Immortality is the reward of those who resist the culture of desecration and push forward the will of God. Though part of this corrupt world and culture, the faithful are to remain untouched and uncorrupted by it; unaffected by the world, they are called/elected to bring about goodness and justice through the creation of a new order.

- The expected Messiah/new messianic order can annul, in God's name, the conventional legal or moral restraints that exist in society in order to fulfill the meaning of history or God's intention for humanity.

In short: When political historical options are interwoven with the "End of Time," the faithful remnant must show enough faith and commitment to help this happen, even if it entails turning to terrorism. The faithful are not accountable to any earthly authority and thus are not concerned with questions of moral or legal limits; their accountability is only to God. The fearless, spectacular and faithful behavior of the remnant could motivate God to act.

Violence and Terrorism as Rebellion

For communities with a history of political domination and economic oppression, who have also been subjected to the vicissitudes of social dislocation, rebellion is part of the struggle of resistance and self-affirmation.

Political resistance many times becomes violent. To a great extent, this is the result of intransigent resistance to change on the part of those who hold power. The degree of violence practiced by the oppressed has always been dependent on issues such as the development of their political consciousness and organizations, their ideological commitments, calculations about the viability of achieving their goals, how long will it take, and how certain they are about achieving their political goals.

Two primary types of political resistance/rebellion are commonly identified. In the first, political and social rebellion is justified on the grounds that it is a last, but legitimate, way of helping those who suffer. Violence is to be directed against the social structure and the established authority, and its goal is to empower those in need and give them the opportunity for a better life. The personal virtue and commitment of the rebels seems, in part, to justify their rebellion. Rebels are seen as people willing to sacrifice themselves in order to enhance the well-being of their community. They are people who incarnate the will of the people, the ones who best articulate that new order of truth, justice and goodness that represents the hopes and dreams of the community. They are the ones who, as legitimate representatives of the community, seek not to impose their will nor manipulate those they serve. They are also the ones who carry the responsibility of having a clear sense of the moral limits of the struggle, particularly when they call people to commit themselves to political violence.

In the second type, persons rebel out of vengeance and resentment because they have not been recognized and affirmed for who they are. They see themselves as victims of impersonal forces or of a totally corrupt order or unaccountable powers. Their first concern is not the needs or interests of the dominated and oppressed but their overriding sense of personal shame at the desecration of something they consider to be of ultimate importance. Only in a secondary sense do they tie their struggle to the interests of a particular history-bearing group.

They see the world and the cosmos divided into opposing forces. In their cosmic struggle, the vision of one party cannot include the "other"; it is a struggle in which only one will win – and the winner takes all. They define good and evil in absolute terms, minimizing the spaces and occasions for accommodation and compromise. Their goal is not only to enhance good and eliminate evil in history but to create a new way of being human, a radically new communal and personal identity, and a new way of living. There being no redeeming value in the present social order, everything within it must be destroyed. All those who adapt to the corrupt social order, leaders and followers alike, are not really human and can be eliminated.

They have minimal (or no) sense of guilt and no sense of limits regarding the practice of violence. They seek the power to control and impose their vision of the new culture and lifestyle simply because it is absolutely true, good and beautiful, a goal that entitles them to do whatever is necessary to obtain their absolutely virtuous end.

While the former type of rebellion finds a justification for violence, the latter type easily moves beyond the practice of violence into the qualitatively different practice of terrorism.

The Moral Ethos of Terrorists

Augustine believed that bandits entertain moral habits and systems of rules; the same is true of terrorists. Terrorists claim that what they do is always for a moral cause (e.g., to free the victims of domination and exploitation) and for the realization of authentic moral causes. Terrorists see themselves as self-sacrificial. Many opt for a lifestyle far below the standards available to them. They are highly disciplined people, fully dedicated to their cause. They give up their personal autonomy and submit themselves to the dictates of the revolutionary leader-

ship and their political and religious organizations. Single-minded commitment and cooperation takes the place of independent action and thought. They also recognize and accept that they can be killed at any moment.

Since terrorists see themselves as confronting an international enemy, they organize themselves as an international fraternity/sorority. Class, gender and cultural barriers many times are overcome for the sake of the cause. They find joy in being members of and living in the company of an exclusive group of dedicated people whose purpose is tied to a cosmic struggle against evil as they understand it. They also experience the joy of being unique or elected historical actors and the joy that comes from a sense of relevance and purpose. To dwell among those they consider the most dedicated and best people, and to be worthy of their love, is for the terrorist a tremendous sense of moral pride and joy.

The Justification of Terrorism

Many terrorists define themselves as freedom fighters. They justify terrorism as a political strategy on the grounds of both "crusade" and just war criteria. Following the just war tradition, they affirm that they are peace-loving people who have had to engage in violence due to an inhumane, shameful state of affairs; they would rather not have to engage in violence, much less terrorism. They also argue that their struggle is carried out with the blessing of both the legitimate political leaders of the revolution and the religious leaders of the people. They also claim that they have just cause. In their view, terrorism is the natural response of persons who are denied self-determination and kept economically oppressed, culturally marginalized and politically dominated. Years of political colonialism and neocolonialism have led to the social dislocation of many people and nations who have been denied recognition, respect and dignity. Terrorism is part of the struggle to liberate oppressed nations from the grasp of the world powers.

They make a moral distinction between the violence of political terrorism, done for the sake of emancipating a people from the oppression and domination of an alien power, and personal terrorism that is done for the sake of personal gain and self-promotion. Morally speaking, they affirm that the *motive* of the terrorist is more morally significant than their *acts*.

Traditional terrorism has a clear sense of moral limits: one ought not do more violence than necessary to achieve one's ends. Public figures

who were recognized as living symbols of the oppressive status quo are targeted for assassination. Only persons deemed worthy of attack should be attacked; such individuals are targeted as a way to inspire hope in the masses that insurrection is possible. They engage in violence because they have been oppressed by violence. Still, there are limits to violence because violence denies humanity and must be limited so that it does not degenerate into sheer criminal activity.

Terrorists abandon just war arguments and enter the domain of crusade mentality when they claim that they are engaged in a war in which they are the only right and just people and that their enemies are absolutely perverse.

Traditional terrorists believe, given that their attacks would occasionally harm the innocent, that they must pay the moral price for doing what is wrong, even though they believe an unjust system imposed it upon them. Precisely because innocent people were harmed, they accept the premise that if they themselves are captured, they too should be killed. This moral posture is seen as part of the process of provoking moral sympathy from others for their cause.

However, terrorists abandon just war arguments and enter the domain of crusade mentality when they claim that they are engaged in a war in which they are the only right and just people and that their enemies are absolutely perverse. They connect their struggles with a divine purpose and do not recognize the dignity of their enemies. They give themselves permission to disregard the criteria of proportionality and the protection of the innocent/defenseless that are central to the just war tradition.

They also justify terrorism on pragmatic grounds. Given that the superpowers amass whatever weapons of mass destruction they believe will give them a military advantage, and given how the superpowers, with the assistance of local collaborators, feel free to establish military bases wherever they need a strategic advantage, and given the superpower's economic dominance that enables them to penetrate poor nations and distort their internal politics and culture, it is impossible to

abide by the conventional rules of war. To do so would give their enemy added advantages. Besides, Western nations have willingly engaged in acts of terror against civilian populations when it has served their purposes, usually justified in the name of national security. The liberation of subjected nations is a more reasonable justification for terrorism than the superpower's quest for profit and power. When convenient to their interests, the powerful engage in state terrorism and there is no way to limit it. It is hypocritical to expect national liberation movements to give up counter-terror activities.

While liberation arguments seem persuasive to some, it is important to notice that there is still a significant moral difference between the violence committed against military invaders and violence committed against the general population. The latter is not justifiable by any moral standards.

Terrorism as such implies disregarding the importance of preserving limits on the practice of violence. Pragmatic expediency compromises moral considerations. From a moral point of view, violence in the name of the struggles of national liberation must not be granted immunity from the normal restraints of humanitarian laws as stated, among others, by the just war tradition. If terrorist acts committed against the innocent are seen as morally legitimate because they are done by members of a liberation movement, human rights will suffer a serious setback.

Superpowers have refused to abide by the moral principle that those who have more power carry greater moral responsibility. They have created weapons of mass destruction and have helped (or created incentives for) other nations to obtain them. It lacks credibility to argue that some must disarm while others are still creating new weapons.

Final Considerations

In itself, terrorism is immoral, but it also seems to elicit and command moral sympathy. At present, we suffer from intellectual, moral and psychological confusion to the point that we can no longer distinguish between terrorism and the legitimate exercise of coercion and violence. Part of our confusion is that we harbor deep-rooted guilt based on the knowledge that our world and society could be made better and that those in power resist doing so. We tend to feel guilt for what outrages the terrorist, the reality of domination and exploitation at a world scale, and the superpower's inevitable quest for world hegemony. We

understand and sympathize with – even if we do not approve of – what makes terrorists act. This guilt can paralyze our judgment, giving rise to timid or outrageous responses that lead, in the end, to new terrorist acts.

Rights of Terrorists

One way we create the conditions for further terrorist passion is by violating the rights of terrorists when they are captured. To deny them due process when they are imprisoned or, in the name of military expediency, to allow their torture, can feed the sense that the terrorists are the ones being victimized. Terrorism is an international phenomenon; thus it is important that terrorists be treated according to international laws and international definitions of human rights. It is interesting to note that the U.S. appealed to the international community to justify its intervention in Afghanistan; however, international intervention when it came to the treatment of prisoners has been resisted. This is a basic mistake that contradicts our goal of winning world support for this global agenda.

Terrorists gain followers precisely by showing their capacity to undermine those in authority, either by making them grant generous concessions or by making them overreact and violate the moral and political principles they claim make them different. It is not clear what will end all forms of terrorism. What seems to be promising, however, is that the elimination of the political powerlessness, the economic exploitation and the cultural imperialism imposed on former colonial and now neocolonial nations could eliminate the pool of people who see themselves with no meaningful future or alternatives for their life and who thus become candidates for the practice of indiscriminate and atrocious forms of violence. It is important that the world powers continue the process of disarming themselves and finding ways of respecting national boundaries and diversity. Suggestions of peaceful justice making, put forward by many of our churches, seem a much more viable way of initiating international relationships of mutual support than seeking greater dominance and concentration of power under concealed visions of world dominance and cultural hegemony.

Military responses to terrorism perpetuate the use and abuse of violence. There are short-term victories, but the memory of shame and vengeance mutates into new faces and recruits, giving credence to the pacifist claim that violence perpetuates a spiral process that is never-

ending and increasingly mean and inhumane. It also seems to make the case that terrorists, particularly religious terrorists, have made, namely that Western secularism aims to conquer the world. This theme is used to recruit more followers. Military solutions inevitably involve violations of human rights and disregard for the limits of violence, a clear violation of what we claim we stand for as a country.

It is not clear what incentives terrorists possess that could serve to stop the violence they see as an intrinsic part of their struggle. It is not clear how one moves from violent confrontation to compromise and negotiation when one party sees the struggle in zero sum terms.

For our part, however, it seems that religious communities, Christians in particular, need to rediscover their commitment to peace and peaceful ways of dealing with conflict. The image of Jubilee and other images that are part of our prophetic tradition could make a contribution to uphold the moral dimension of social conflict, keeping it within limits. Images of forgiveness, loving enemies, and advocacy for justice have to be reconsidered in the context of dealing with those we have defined as enemies. Religious communities might have the theological and moral resources to help us all reestablish the sense of mutual recognition, respect and dignified treatment due all people as children of God. Only thus will we be able to establish structures of trust and hope that can push us beyond the spiral of violence.