

Comments by Walter Wink on the crisis in America

The attack on America has left us reeling. Nothing we can say can match the enormity of the situation. All we can do is try to orient ourselves in the tragedy so that we can go forward. I will just list some points of orientation that might help, though not much.

The first task is pastoral. Our nation suffers grief and loss. We cry, over and over, as we hear interviews of the relatives showing their photos of lost loved ones, or watch clips of the destruction of the Twin Towers the Pentagon on television. We need to talk, and talk, and talk. It is dangerous to go home and pull a sheet over our heads. Children, especially, need to talk.

The second is spiritual. Many of us feel a deep desire for revenge and violent retribution. We know how natural that is. We want to strike back at the perpetrators. And it is true: We do need to find and punish them. But we must not let that need be overwhelmed by sheer rage. We need to counter those who want to bomb indiscriminately, to "take them out" with missiles, or even (as Dr. Graham's son said after the memorial service in the National Cathedral) to use everything in our arsenal. That can only mean, Nuke them. We must call for restraint and patience, as so many of our political leaders have fortunately called on us to do. We must turn the other cheek, as Jesus taught, not in weakness, but in a nonviolent attempt to resolve this crisis. Our leaders would have been far wiser to treat this as a police action against criminals, in which the nations of the world attempt to apprehend, try, and incarcerate the perpetrators.

The third is prophetic. We must have the courage to confront the question, Why do so many people around the world hate the US? We speak of the bombers as terrorists. But we perpetrated the greatest act of terror in human history: the dropping of the A bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We may have lost over 5,000 casualties in the attack on America. The Japanese lost perhaps 160,000. And more children under five die every day around the world than died in the attack on America. What is the role of oil in this hostility? Couldn't we have treated Jews and Palestinians more even handedly? What is the role of the US in the world economy, and how is that

economy imposing starvation on the world's poor? Why isn't capitalism able to spread the wealth, rather than concentrating it in the hands of only about 360 superrich individuals? If we were the poor of the earth, with no food to put in the hands of our children, would we be content to watch them die? Would we become "terrorists"? Wouldn't we insist, rather, that we are "freedom fighters"?

The fourth is the matter of following Jesus. Can we together agree that retribution is not the way of Jesus? Can we faithfully love our enemies, as Jesus calls us to do? Can we remain steadfast in nonviolence, despite the skepticism of those who embrace violence as a way of fighting violence? Can we repudiate belief in redemptive violence? We Christians must behave as Christians no matter how much our society and its churches ridicule nonviolence as idealistic and ineffective. If we cannot be faithful in such a crisis as we presently face, when will we?

And finally, we must cling to God by blind faith in such a time as this. To the question, Where is God in all this, we can answer, Where God always is: nearer than breathing and closer than hands or feet. But just as the clouds of dust and smoke and falling debris blotted out the sun on September 11, so horror of this dimension blots out the light of God. In such a time, we cannot perhaps feel God's presence, but it is there, and we have to cling to it even as we scream at the silence of God.

Walter Wink is an internationally known lecturer and workshop leader whose areas of interest have included an exploration of the biblical theme of principalities and Jesus' teachings on nonviolence. He is a Professor of Biblical Interpretation, Auburn Theological Seminar.



224-HOPE

PeaceCENTER
1443 S. St. Mary's
San Antonio, TX 78210
www.salsa.net/peace