

A Response to “The Gospel or a Glock? Mennonites and the Police”

Allister Field

Introduction

As a serving police officer attending an Anabaptist congregation, I am thankful for the insightful article, “The Gospel or a Glock? Mennonites and the Police” (*CGR* Spring 2007). I welcome the discussion on the issues it raises, as “Peace Theology” is an area that I struggle with personally.

I came to my present congregation six years ago as a result of a family friend recommending to my family that we check out his church. Within a short period, the teaching and format of this church began to make significant changes in my life. I took communion for the first time and contemplated being baptized as a believer. Although I have always attended church, I found myself “saved” somewhere in this process. My wife and I joined a small group, and our children quickly became involved in a very meaningful way with the youth of the church.

Prior to baptism and becoming a member, I attended a seminar on the church and its Brethren in Christ roots. The seminar included everything from theology to significant historical events. When the subject of pacifism came up, I was taken aback; after all, I was a police officer of sixteen years experience serving in the Internal Affairs investigative section. I quietly listened to the conversation on pacifism and realized that my role contradicted the beliefs of my new church. Knowing my situation was probably unique, I held my questions and decided to have a more personal discussion with the pastor.

The discussion with the pastor was comforting and brought a feeling of peace and balance into the process. The conversation centered on Romans 12 and 13. Although the church was a peace church, I was informed that it respected other beliefs but made no apology for its own stance. I was assured there was a place for me in the church, and as brothers and sisters we would walk together through all the issues that life brings. My inclusion was reinforced during my membership interview.

Life in my family’s new church saw all four of us getting baptized and jumping into volunteer positions. At present, both my wife and I are small group leaders (elders), my wife is a small group leader for junior high school girls, both boys are on the youth leadership team, and my youngest plays in at least two or three very loud worship bands. One of the most important things that changed in our lives is that we fell into a series of priceless relationships with a group of wonderful Christ-followers. In this group we all support, care, look after, and hold each other accountable.

Law and Order

There are times when belonging to a Peace Church as a police officer is difficult. Although I have always felt generally accepted, the church’s pacifist views sometimes seem very final and confusing. One of these situations occurred when one of my pastors, Bruxy Cavey, during a sermon series entitled “Revolution,” talked about how the church had no problem calling the police to deal with an abusive situation but said he didn’t know how a Christ-follower could be a police officer.

When I encounter this type of belief, questions such as the following come to mind:

- Do I let an impaired driver get in the car and drive away?
- Do I let a pedophile grab a little child and take her away?
- What does the church feel should be done about domestic violence or child abuse?
- What do I do with the man pointing a gun at me? (A real life scenario from my experience.) What will he do if I don’t confront him and he leaves?
- What would society look like if there was no organized accountable public security? What do societies that exist right now look like in that situation?

I don’t think from the discussions I have had either at church or during this consultation that there is any question that some sort of law and order needs to exist. Romans 13 clearly indicates that submission to authorities is an

important part of church life. From the discussions we have shared and the teachings I have listened to, the only question seems to be, Should members of our faith be the ones in those positions of authority? The overall position of many is that it is not possible to be both a Christ-follower and a police officer.

I hold the ideal of peace very close to my heart. I love the idea that situations can be handled without coercion of any type, and I am encouraged by exercises of reconciliation between God's people. I celebrate when out-of-control situations within our communities are resolved with no injuries or loss of life. I hold people of peace in high regard and respect those who have decided that at all costs they will hold to their pacifist beliefs. I totally support people within our faith who feel they could not be police officers.

Policing and Faith

With reference to "The Gospel or the Glock?," whether you appoint a couple of students at a Mennonite seminary to look after the activities of an unwanted homeless person scamming money or have some elders deal with the community's safety concerns, you are still having someone fulfill a policing function.¹ It may not be a paid professional uniformed police officer doing the job, but the job is still being done.

Not being brought up in the Anabaptist faith, I have no historical reference points to assist me in my journey as a Christ-follower in a Peace Church. I have found some of the consultation discussions extremely helpful. However, I find Andy Alexis-Baker's characterization of policing generalized and overly academic. Policing is a real-life study of the interaction of people in situations ranging from routine administrative situations to those where lives are in the balance. Through my experience I have found that most of all the police community is made up of individuals who come from a wide variety of backgrounds and beliefs. A large majority of these officers are Christ-followers.

Yet Alexis-Baker uses phrases such as "the idolatrous character of the Police"² and "abundant evidence suggests these agencies unleash evil,"³ showing a large bias against policing. He doubts whether Mennonites have the necessary congregational life to deal with situations where the police may need to be called.⁴ He goes on to suggest that the occupation of policing

should be banned from the church.⁵ I find that these two ideas show a lack of faith on his part. I think that the community, as God’s people, deals with all sorts of issues, of which policing is only one. Through fellowship, discussion, and a whole lot of prayer, we as a group must deal with issues that confront us in an open and loving way, asking for God’s will to be done in all situations.

Sources of Guidance

As for our consultation, I have found that people writing articles about other people’s books or articles leads to more and more articles, based on other books or articles, way past the point of overload. In this process I was at my “best-before” date about four years ago! As I spin around and around, I find I need to distance myself from the process to gain my bearings. Even as that has occurred, Andy Alexis-Baker has sent out yet another article for comment.

Throughout my journey I have had to turn within myself and to those Christ-followers who are near and dear for guidance and accountability. When questioning a situation or idea, I go back to the life Jesus modelled for us. What did he do and model for us to do? These questions are the DNA of a Christ-follower. Consider the love, grace, acceptance, humility, kindness, and gentleness that Jesus bestowed on his people.

In dealing with the topic of policing and the church, I have taken all Jesus has said, in context with Romans 12 and 13, and then looked at one of my favorite verses: “If you really keep the royal law found in scripture, ‘love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right” (James 2:8 NIV). I then take a look at the situational questions I asked earlier in this paper and my questions are answered. In discussions about accountability with those close to me, we always come back to the intent and spirit of the actions taken. I ask them to pray for me in what I do.

When I stand before Jesus who died to save me, there will be no academic discussions of why I took the actions I took. I will throw myself at his feet like everyone else, and ask for forgiveness.

Notes

¹ Andy Alexis-Baker, "The Gospel or a Glock? Mennonites and the Police," *CGR* Spring 2007, 38.

² *Ibid.*, 36

³ *Ibid.*, 26

⁴ *Ibid.*, 40

⁵ *Ibid.*

At the time of writing, Allister Field was a Detective with the Toronto Police Service Fraud Squad, Corporate Section.