

Uncommon Decency

Richard Mouw

Forward

- a) **local displays of anger:**
 - i) "road rage" rudeness in the aisles, bullying, gossip, sites among people of faith, debates over sexuality.
- b) **Convicted Civility**
 - i) Civility - kindness, grace, patience, generosity, caring for others, not divisive spirit
 - ii) Convicted - there is absolute truth, standards of morality, we are galled to be salt In temple, Jesus used whip for animals only
 - iii) Psalms - anger at enemy
- c) **Can We Be Faithful & Polite Too?**
 - i) Common decency is on the wane.
 - ii) people refuse to back off.
 - iii) resent having to give others a little space.
 - iv) talk past each other
 - v) lose the public trust.
- d) **NOT CIVILITY ALONE**
 - i) There are times when it is appropriate to manifest some very uncivil feelings.
 - ii) "have let our standards of civility and truth waste dangerously away." [
 - iii) We need to cultivate a civility that does not play fast and loose with the truth.
 - iv) challenge is to come up with a convicted civility.
 - v) It isn't enough, though, to make an outward show of politeness. Being civil has an "inner" side as well.
 - vi) To be civil was to genuinely care about the larger society.
 - vii) was a willingness to promote the well - being of people who were very different,
- e) **FLOURISHING IN HUMANNESS**
 - i) Aristotle was convinced that we cannot become truly human until we can capably function as citizens of the city, behaving among strangers, to treat people with courtesy, simply because we see them as human beings like ourselves.
 - ii) John Calvin - public life provides us with the opportunity "to shape our manners in accordance with civil justice." [
- f) **THE STRUGGLE FOR CIVILITY**
 - i) Civility is important. And so is conviction.
 - ii) "pursue peace with everyone,"
 - iii) at the same time to cultivate that "holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12: 14).
- g) **PROMOTING THE CAUSE**
 - i) either we will have to help some civil people to become more convicted, or we will have to work at getting some convicted people to become more civil. Or both,

What Christian Civility Is Not

- a) **NOT RELATIVISM**
 - i. the most damaging charge one student can lodge against another is that the person is being "judgmental." and that's it. End of discussion.
 - ii. Christian civility does not commit us to a relativistic perspective - that we cannot criticize what goes on around us and to say that all beliefs and values deserve to be treated as if they were on par is to endorse relativism —
 - iii. telling someone else that she is being judgmental is a rather judgmental thing to do!
 - iv. Bible regularly tells us to exercise judgment about questions of truth and value:
 - 1. "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil" (Isaiah 5: 20 NIV) ;
 - 2. "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4: 1).
 - v. Paul calls us to cultivate kindness, patience and generosity, take a strong stand against such "works of the flesh" as sexual immorality, impurity and drunkenness (Galatians 5: 16 - 23).
 - vi. where Jesus is recorded as commanding us not to judge, he was warning against a certain kind of judgmental spirit. about hypocritical people who criticize others without paying attention to their own faults,
 - vii. When Jesus showed "acceptance" to prostitutes and tax collectors, he did not condone their sexual or economic behaviors.
 - viii. Jesus refused to define people in terms of their present sordid circumstances. He affirmed their potential for living as faithful and creative children of God.
- b) **NOT LIKING EVERYONE**
 - i. To be civil toward people does not mean that we have to like them.
- c) **NOT NATIONALISM**
 - i. public dimension of civility.
 - ii. to care about our common life.
 - iii. Nationalism and superpatriotism are forms of idolatry.
- d) **NOT AN EVANGELISTIC STRATEGY**
 - i. Christians need to be careful about seeing civility as a mere strategy for evangelism.
 - ii. Peter tells us that we should always be ready to give an account to anyone of the hope that lives in our hearts. But he immediately adds: "Yet do it with gentleness and reverence"

Defending Christian Civility

- a) Many Christians of the past were crusaders who had no use for civility.

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- b) Anti-civility sentiments: "We are in a battle for the soul of our nation!" "There can be no compromise with falsehood!" "Satan's favorite words are 'toleration' and 'pluralism'!"
- c) **PUBLIC CHRISTIANITY**
 - i. God cares about public righteousness.
 - ii. The gospel is good news for individuals, but it is also good news for societies — indeed, for the whole creation.
 - iii. Christians are called to be agents of God's righteousness.
 - iv. A righteous society is one that fosters character development and where peace and justice hold sway.
 - v. God wants a world filled with shalom.
 - vi. As agents of righteousness, we must try to bring God's standards to bear on public life.
 - vii. There is room for genuine disagreement among Christians about the details of public righteousness.
 - viii. Passionate arguments among Christians, when they are pursued in a non-ideological manner, can be a helpful way of working through the difficult questions.
- d) **IMITATING THE DIVINE CHARACTER**
 - i. God has a gentle and reverent concern for public righteousness.
 - ii. God is holy — but his holiness is revealed in his love for us.
 - iii. As agents of God's righteousness, we are called to imitate the divine character, traits that are associated with God's own kindness and gentleness.
 - iv. Our efforts at public righteousness must be modest ones - modesty about our place.
 - v. We are in a period of waiting. Not a passive waiting — act in the knowledge that the most we can hope for in this present time are signs or "first fruits" of the ultimate victory.
 - vi. formula to offer for attaining Christian modesty: each of us must attempt to be faithful in the situations where God has placed us and with the resources God has made available to us.
 - vii. The church is our primary context for learning public righteousness.
 - viii. To be a Christian is to belong to a community that is in the process of being "made right."
- e) **THE SCOPE OF CIVILITY**
 - i. In the Old Testament, Israel was called to be a very special kind of national community. This same call is applied in the New Testament to the Christian church: the followers of Jesus are to act like "a holy nation"
 - ii. how we relate to people who are not believers is a matter of our "foreign policy."
 - iii. The treatment of strangers, do no wrong to strangers ; treat them as if they were natives ; "for you were aliens in the land of Egypt;
 - iv. Christlike compassion. Jesus has paid quite a bit of attention to individuals. "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd"
 - v. Christians and "everyone."
 - vi. "If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Romans 12: 18).
 - vii. speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone" (Titus 3: 2).
 - viii. This is what civility is all about: honoring other people — even people whose beliefs and actions we dislike — in a manner that is gentle and reverent.

Speaking in God's Presence

- a) **THE LISTENING GOD**
 - i. Civil people watch their language. We live our lives in the divine presence.
- b) **NURTURING HABITS OF SPEECH**
 - i. People who are skilled at dinner - party etiquette do not nervously worry about every move they make. They have nurtured the appropriate sensitivities.
- c) **ANGRY RHETORIC**
 - i. "what I think I hear you saying" or how "I'm feeling threatened right now" could become the officially required language for international discussion,
- d) **CRUSADES**
 - i. Crusaders are people who think the cause they are fighting for is so important that they must use all means at their disposal to win.
 - ii. the basic question is: How is God glorified? Is God honored when we play fast and loose with the truth? Is God glorified by our unwillingness to understand other people's intentions before we attack them?
- e) **THE DIVINE GAZE**
 - i. Christians must work to view things — as far as possible for mere mortals — the way God does.
 - ii. Christian discipleship is permeated by the consciousness that we live coram Deo — before the face of God.
- f) **SEEING AS GOD SEES**
 - i. Having been aware of being seen by God, we can actively begin to see in a more truthful and civil manner.

Open Hearts

- a) **EMPATHY**
 - i. "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World."
 - ii. The joy and the hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. |
 - iii. concentrating on some of our commonalities.
- b) **CURIOSITY**
 - i. This is God's world, and we ought to want to understand it better.

- ii. we ought to be very curious about the full range of human experience. We want to learn about people who are very different from ourselves.
- iii. If we believe that questions about salvation and eternal destiny are some of the most important questions we can talk about with others, should we not at least be curious about what those persons actually believe about the ultimate issues of life?

c) TEACHABILITY

- i. not learning about them, but learning from them.
- ii. Any encounter with an unbeliever may leave me with a better grasp of the truth.

d) LEARNING FROM UNBELIEF

- i. When we approach others in a civil manner, we must listen carefully to them.
- ii. be open to the possibility that they will help us discern the truth more clearly. Being a civil Christian means being open to God's surprises.

e) BLURRING THE LINES?

- i. issues are often complex and ambiguous. We have to be open to what our opponents have to tell us. We shouldn't be too quick to reject the other person's point of view.
- ii. We cannot consistently develop empathy and curiosity and teachability in our relationships without the reinforcing experiences of divine grace.

The Spiritual Underpinnings

a) A PART OF THE SOLUTION

- i. We have forgotten the lessons of the past —
- ii. What is needed reestablish what they call "communities of memory."
- iii. "there are still operating among us... traditions that tell us about the nature of the world, about the nature of society, and about who we are as a people." [

b) WHAT ABOUT ZEAL?

- i. having the right kind of zeal actually commits us to civility.
- ii. Jesus "gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for
- iii. good deeds" (Titus 2: 14).

c) SEEKING SHALOM

- i. "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jeremiah 29: 4 - 7).
- ii. The Hebrew word for "welfare" here is shalom,

d) FOCUSING ON THE SPIRITUAL

- i. We need to develop a genuine spirit of caring about the shalom of others, and that is what requires considerable spiritual effort.
- ii. I simply can't generate the appropriate empathy and teachability in this case? What do I do? This is where the spiritual work has to happen.
- iii. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. - One of the nuns managed to irritate me whatever she did or said. Every time I met her, I prayed for her and offered God all her virtues and her merits. I was sure this would greatly delight Jesus, for every artist likes to have his works praised

e) CULTIVATING "ART APPRECIATION"

- i. God created all human beings. Even the shattered and broken ones are still his original works of art.

f) MAKING ROOM

- i. Christian hospitality: Making Room.
- ii. create space for the needs of others.
- iii. Father Henri Nouwen, Prayer is the only real way to clean my heart and to create new space ... it is not I who pray but the Spirit of God who prays in me.

g) GOD'S CRITIQUE

- i. we never truly know ourselves unless we have "first looked upon God's face."
- ii. If we move through our days without contemplating the will of God, he says, we will be "quite content with our own righteousness."

h) A HEART FOR THE SUFFERING

- i. we must be aware of the fact that people like Elisabeth are also calling out to the Lord, even if their places of worship are windowless cubicles in houses of prostitution.

What's Good About Pluralism?

a) GOD AND DIVERSITY

- i. Some pluralities are pleasing to God, but others are not.
- ii. God does not take delight in the existence of many different kinds of diseases, or many forms of human
- iii. perversity.

b) THE PLURALISTIC CONSCIOUSNESS

- i. Today's range of choices is so great, though, that quantitative terms alone are not adequate to describe the change that has taken place. Choosing has become a way of life.

c) PLURALISM AND IDOLATRY

- i. God disapproves of the pluralism of idolatries.
- ii. The most effective way of opposing falsehood is witnessing to the power of truth.

- d) **CULTURAL DIVERSITY** God cares deeply about cultural diversity.

How to Be Civil About Sex

a) **CAN WE TALK?**

- i. Talking about civility among ourselves is not a bad place to start!

b) **THE IMPORTANCE OF SEX**

- i. We convicted Christians may be right to think that sexual values are important to the health of a society. But that does not mean we have done a good job of making our case.

c) **“NORMAL” SEXUALITY?**

- i. We are all broken and crooked people. Christians should not be embarrassed to admit this.

d) **GUIDELINES FOR SEXUAL CIVILITY**

- i. Be sexually self-critical. Most of us have no right to set ourselves up as models of sexual “normalcy.”
- ii. Avoid oversimplifications.
- iii. Little is to be gained by couching this profound teaching in taunting language.
- iv. Remember our own collective sexual sins.
- v. Christians should approach discussions of such topics as homosexuality and feminism in a spirit of sorrow and repentance over our past behaviors and attitudes.
- vi. Curtail irrational fears.
- vii. Minimizing the degree to which our genuine disagreements with other people get entangled with an irrational fear of “otherness.”
- viii. Cultivate sexual empathy.
- ix. I was surrounded by fellow human beings who are fashioned in the divine image, and who have experienced heart-rending sorrow in the deep places of their lives.

e) **SEXUALITY IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE**

- i. In what ways should Christians try to influence the sexual attitudes of those who are not Christian?
- ii. When people fail to sustain sexual fidelity, the society will have serious problems with commitment and trust.
- iii. We must also attempt to provide a corrective —through scholarship, preaching and evangelism. Exposing the assumptions and implications of sexual anarchy, laws designed to make non-Christians conform grudgingly to Christian rules are not very satisfactory.
- iv. Scriptures call human beings to offer God their free obedience.
- v. It is a dangerous thing for Christians to exercise coercion where even God has refused to force people to do the right thing.
- vi. We have no automatic right to keep other people from sinning — but neither are we obligated to make it easy for them to pursue their warped designs.
- vii. Present healthy alternatives to the rebellious idolatries and confusions of contemporary society.

f) **THE PASTORAL FOCUS**

- i. church community that is failing to give
- ii. the kind of pastoral understanding and community support that they desperately need.

g) **PROMOTING SEXUAL HONESTY**

- i. The Bible recognizes that our capacity for exploiting, and for being exploited, is a very deep and subtle thing — too deep to be captured by simple-minded formulas about what is agreeable to “consenting adults.”
- ii. We need boundaries and reference points to help us to make our way through the most intimate human relationships.

h) **THE TRUST FACTOR**

- i. capacity for trust. This is why the Bible places such a strong emphasis on covenant. To enter into a covenant is to form a commitment based on trust.
- ii. When we don't have a healthy trust in God, it's hard to trust anyone else. God's revealed guidelines for sexuality are meant to create new possibilities for a trusting intimacy.

i) **GRACE FOR THE JOURNEY**

- i. we are on a journey toward wholeness. We need to admit our own vulnerability and be honest about our desperate need for God's grace.
- ii. woman
- iii. with strong lesbian inclinations.
- iv. I have sometimes thought that when I get to heaven, I would like to be held in the Lord's arms for a long time to make up for what I have been denied. A lifetime is a long time to wait for something we crave as much as love.

The Challenge of Other Religions

a) **“KNOWING” A RELIGION**

- i. exposure to other religions can deepen my understanding of my own faith commitment.
- ii. **Note - Page 111** • Understanding other languages can help you understand English better. When things are ingrained in your environment, you may not be totally aware of the affects those things have. If you have only experienced a violent environment, you might not be able to parse out all the affects the violence has had on you. "What Christians in the US Can Learn from Immigrant Pastors" CTPastors, Marshall Shelly
- iii. You can only learn love in a community

b) **POLARIZED APPROACHES**

- i. There is much to be gained from holding firmly to Christian truth claims while genuinely engaging other people in serious discussion.
- ii. **Note - Page 113** • Having truth claims is not exclusive to having respectful dialogue.

c) **TRANSCENDING THE POLARIZATION**

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- i. it's important to share my faith in Jesus Christ with non - Christians,
- ii. But I also think it's wrong, I told him, to treat Jews as nothing more than evangelistic prospects.
- iii. I believe in evangelism but I also feel a strong need to listen
- iv. people have much to teach me - They are also helpful allies in many aspects of the struggle for public righteousness.
- d) **THE VALUE OF COMPLEMENTARITY**
 - i. it's important that all dialogue with persons of other religious groups not be merely a strategy for evangelism.
 - ii. "co - belligerency."
 - iii. cooperating with people of other faith perspectives in working for the common good.
- e) **THE ISLAMIC CHALLENGE**
 - i. as a person who worries much about what is happening in our secularized culture, I have even been able to express some admiration for the ways Muslims in the United States have resisted many of the things in that culture that I also want to resist.
 - ii. What had previously been a conversation that focused on the nature of God and the way to salvation now had to take on a focus on violence, peacemaking and citizenship.
 - iii. a strong statement issued by thirty - eight Muslim scholars from around the world, in the form of a document addressed, on October 13, 2006, to Christians: "A Common Word Between Us and You."
 - iv. Islam and Christianity are obviously different religions —
 - v. Two Greatest Commandments are an area of common ground
 - vi. Let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill. [
- f) **TALKING ABOUT RELIGION PROPER**
 - i. Jesus is the Truth. We do not have to be afraid, then, to enter into dialogue with people from other religious traditions. If we find truth in what they say,
 - ii. **We have not been where Jesus has not been before**
 - iii. The Son of God also holds the "all things" of other religions together. His Spirit is everywhere at work.
 - iv. [T] he better we know [other] faiths from the inside, the better we will sense where in a deep sense we can affirm them and where in our dialogue we must speak critically, as we are willing to listen.
- g) **ASKING QUESTIONS**
 - i. Bishop Stephen Neill The Christian task is to live out the life of Jesus Christ before the eyes of others, They will not see him, unless they can see him in the lives of his followers.

Christian Leadership in a Pluralistic World

There really are no thoroughly "secular" areas of life. "The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it" (Psalm 24: 1)

- a) **TRANSFORMING LEADERSHIP**
 - i. The most common pattern of leadership is what Burns calls transactional.
 - ii. the relationship between a leader and followers is based on some sort of trade - off.
 - iii. The best leadership is what Burns labels the transforming kind.
 - iv. when both leaders and followers are willing to be changed by their relationship —
- b) **RECEPTIVITY**
 - i. Transforming leaders are receptive to others.
 - ii. We cannot hope to bring about effective change unless we are willing to be changed.
 - iii. As transforming leaders, we will want to see our interactions with others as opportunities for expansion.
 - iv. Civility means a willingness to be changed by our efforts at leadership.
 - v. Convicted Christians have often entered the public square as prophets.
 - vi. Until people have been sure that we have heard and understood their concerns, they probably will not listen to our prophetic messages or anything else.
 - vii. There are boundaries around Christians' openness to being changed by others.
 - viii. Our priestly efforts in the public square must also be "for the sake of the gospel." We must never forget the divine standards that require human beings to repent of their sins.
- c) **FINDING A MIDDLE RANGE**
 - i. we are not merely trying to be changed — we are also trying to change what goes on in the public arena.
 - ii. George Will - that "compulsion and indifference" are not our only alternatives in the public square. Between these two alternatives, he says, lies a "broad area of persuasion, incentives and other non - coercive encouragements to better living." not everything falls into these two categories. NOTE: compare love vs. indifference
 - iii. James MacGregor Burns - "elevating, mobilizing, inspiring, exalting, uplifting, preaching, exhorting, evangelizing." can bring about positive change when "it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both." Leading and educating, he says, go hand in hand.
- d) **PUBLIC TEACHING AS INTERPRETATION**
 - i. By our "pointing" actions. We must not underestimate the power of nonverbal behavior for helping people to interpret reality.
 - ii. pray in restaurants,
 - iii. noncoercive way of showing others that my faith is still very much a public matter,
 - iv. By being willing and able to state reasons for doing and saying what we do.
 - v. Carter's acceptance speech had not been overtly "Christian." But he was willing to explain to anyone how the views he had expressed were actually grounded in his faith commitment.
 - vi. By appealing to agreed - upon standards.
 - vii. promoting justice, righteousness and peace. These concerns have not been banned from the public square.
- e) **LEADING IN THE ASYLUM**
 - i. be a teacher, a transforming leader

- ii. teaching ministry by “pointing actions,”
- iii. welcome any opportunities to articulate the biblical view of reality.

When There Is No “On the Other Hand” The Limits of Civility

- i. Tevye - “How can I turn my back on my faith, my people?” he asks himself. “If I try and bend that far, I’ll break!” No! There is no other hand!”
- a) **ORGANIZATIONAL ETHICS**
 - i. We need help in deciding how to handle those situations in our churches where we are pushed to the limits of civility.
- b) **CHURCH FIGHTS**
 - i. Some of the most acrimonious back - and - forth these days takes place within church communities.
 - ii. Fuller Seminary
 - iii. renewal of the more liberal denominations.
 - iv. stand firm for historic orthodoxy
 - v. they are often appreciated for their leadership by folks whose theology is on the liberal side of the spectrum.
- c) **PROBLEMS ON BOTH SIDES**
 - i. One of the biggest temptations that those of us with conservative views often face is the mistreatment of our opponents.

LOOKING FOR HELP

- i. No simple - minded solutions
- ii. will provide solutions when the disagreements run deep.
- iii. We too must be ready and willing to say no when the occasion arises.
- b) **BORROWING FROM “JUST WAR”**
 - i. Is my cause a just one?
 - ii. Am I sustained in my commitments by the wisdom of competent authorities?
 - iii. Are my motives proper?
 - iv. Is my move beyond mere civility a choice of last resort?
 - v. Is success likely?
 - vi. Are the means I am employing proportionate to the good goals I want to promote?
- c) **KINDNESS IN WARFARE** There is a real threat, in punishing evil doers we will succeed in conquering our external enemies, only to be destroyed by “the enemy within” — we have to develop “those kindly feelings which keep us from returning evil for evil.” Christians never have a right simply to cast aside kindness and gentleness.

Is Hell Uncivil?

- a) **THE TRADITIONAL TEACHING**
 - i. The alternative to the belief that some people will be consigned to hell is the teaching called universalism:
 - ii. John 3: 36, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life ; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God’s wrath.”
 - iii. our failure to think and speak about divine judgment is closely related to our refusal to face the reality of human evil.
 - iv. it may have something to do with how much we actually feel the reality of human evil.
- b) **UNDERSTANDING HELL**
 - i. that we must exercise great care in speaking about hell.

THE MINIMUM DETAIL

- ii. The reality of hell underscores the seriousness of sin.
- iii. Hell reinforces the importance of human freedom.
- iv. hell as a freely chosen state of being.
- v. Hell is the ultimate and inevitable consequence of a persistent refusal of divine grace.
- vi. Psalm 7 - the wicked themselves are digging the hole into which they will fall
- vii. Romans 1 emphasizes how God gives people over to the wicked designs they have chosen.
- viii. Hell means that the final settling of accounts is in the hands of God.
- ix. The final accounting is not up to us.
- x. Our obligation is to act in the light of what we know we are to do:
- c) **LESSONS FOR CIVILITY**
 - i. Human wickedness is real. God respects human freedom. And God alone will decide our final destiny in the light of what he knows about the life plans we’ve chosen.
 - ii. Christian civility takes human freedom seriously. I may want people to believe as I do about some basic matters — but what I want is for them to choose to see things that way.
- d) **THE IMPERATIVE**
 - i. We are not to understand the hereafter by speculating about the demographics or geography of heaven and hell. The appropriate mode of understanding is to obey the will of God and to invite others to do so also. [

Abraham Kuyper, Meet Mother Teresa The Problem of Triumphalism

- ii. Both revelation and experience make it clear, however, that God has chosen not to rush to judgment. The certainty that God will triumph does not give us license to act as if we had already purchased the victory over evil.
- a) **THE REIGN OF JESUS**
 - i. Kuyper insisted that God wants Christians to be active in showing forth the divine rule, we must try to be obedient to the reign of Jesus in all areas of our lives: In whatever we do, we must seek to glorify God.
- b) **MINE!**
 - i. “There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, ‘ This is mine! This belongs to me!’ ”

- ii. "This is mine!" expresses a love so deep that he was willing to suffer and die in order to rescue his creation from sin.
- c) **EMPIRE DISCIPLESHIP**
 - i. tendency to follow this line of reasoning: since Christ owns all those square inches of the creation, our mandate as Christians is to go forth and conquer them in his name!
 - ii. What bothers me specifically is the spirit of Christian triumphalism.
- d) **KNOWING ABOUT THE TRIUMPH**
 - i. Christ has indeed been victorious over sin.
 - ii. Christ's followers are beneficiaries of his cosmic victory.
 - iii. we may seem now to be surrounded by the forces of evil — disease, injustice, oppression, death. But the enemy has actually been defeated at Calvary.
 - iv. our lives must give evidence of our confidence in Christ's victory.
 - v. active obedience. We cannot be "more than conquerors" without somehow showing it in our words and deeds.
- e) **WHY NOT TRIUMPHALISM?**
 - i. triumphalist spirit - to give evidence of their confidence in Christ's victory is to claim the victors' spoils.
 - ii. Triumphalist Christians focus on the fruits of the triumph — they want to claim these fruits.
 - iii. the alternative? claiming the spoils of Christ's victory is not the appropriate means of displaying our confidence in that victory.
- f) **CHRIST'S "DISTRESSING DISGUISE"**
 - i. Mother Teresa insisted that her community of sisters was not founded primarily to be "activist." The members spend much time each day in private prayer and collective worship.
 - ii. "You saw the priest during Mass: with what love, with what delicate care he touched the body of Christ! Make sure you do the same thing when you go to the Home, for Jesus is there in the distressing disguise."
- g) **OCCUPYING THE SQUARE INCHES**
 - i. But Mother Teresa did not see the square inches Jesus has redeemed as territory that we must now triumphantly claim as our prize. She knew that many of those square inches are presently occupied by people with stinking, rotting flesh, by grieving parents, by frightened children—the abused, the abandoned, the persecuted and the desperately poor.

Serving a Slow God Civility and the End of Time

- a) **THE DIVINE PACE**
 - i. "Don't these people realize that God likes to do things slowly?"
- b) **THE PATIENT GOD**
 - i. That God sometimes works fast is a "given" in my theology.
 - ii. The fact that God doesn't offer "quick - fix" solutions to the injustice and oppression that plague the creation is no reason to posit an attitude of divine indifference.
 - iii. Mennonites - that we are living "in the time of God's patience."
- c) **SERVING A SLOW GOD**
 - i. These slower - God perspectives share a strong sense of the importance of God's providence.
 - ii. **Flexibility.** Ad hoc adjustments are necessary for all of us. We are on a pilgrimage, and our favorite formulas are often nothing more than helpful summaries of what we have seen thus far. We have to be open to new challenges as we continue in our journey.
 - iii. **Tentativeness** John Stott has often urged Christians to be "conservative radicals." We have to be conservative about only one thing — our commitment to the gospel. we need to subject everything else to "radical" critique.
 - iv. **Humility.** Arrogant self - righteousness must have no place in our hearts, cast off the triumphalist spirit, The triumph we await is not our triumph, but the victory of the Lamb
 - v. **Awe** To worship the God of the Scriptures is to bow in the presence of unsurpassed mystery. We also learn how to be, in the time of the divine patience, gentle and reverent agents of the gospel in the larger world.
 - vi. **Modesty** every Christian is called to engage in radical obedience to God's program of justice, righteousness and peace. God calls us to deal with the challenges before us, often our most "radical" challenges are very "little" ones. we're not asked to duplicate the epic work of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.
 - vii. civility comes to, finally: an openness to God's surprises.

Afterword: A Civil Hug

- a) **civility takes work.**
 - i. It takes spiritual work. Sometimes the Lord makes that point for us by sending someone to give us a hug!
- b) **Common Grace**
 - ii. allows us to affirm diversity, pluralistic society, to learn from others, co-belligerence, sin creates limits