

**I Won't Stand for This**  
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*Then the Council ordered the disciples not to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go. As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name. And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah.*

*Acts 5:17-42*

*It behooves us North American Christians to realize now what the German churches learned too late: It is not enough to resist with confession; we must confess with resistance.*  
*William Sloan Coffin*

When I was growing up with my two brothers in the little house across the street from the Grinnell College campus, my dad used to seek out diverse college students for our babysitters. One of our babysitters was a young woman from South America who taught us a few Spanish words. Another was a black kid from Denver by the name of George Moose. Now, "Moose" was my younger brother's nickname. So my brother took it upon himself, as we were out and about in town, to introduce our babysitter, "This is my REAL daddy, George Moose," which irked my grandmother to no end.

Over the years George Moose has had a remarkably distinguished career. He entered the foreign service after college and served as ambassador to Barbados, Vietnam, the U.N., Benin, and Senegal. He was Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs and speaks fluent French and Vietnamese. He has taught courses at Harvard and George Washington University. His current post, at 80 years of age, is Acting President of the United States Institute of Peace, working globally to prevent and resolve conflicts. Or it was, until President Trump fired him earlier this month.

There were also at least two University of Iowa alumnae employed there. One, a sorority sister of my sister-in-law, writes,

*Two weeks ago I was fired illegally. On Monday, I cleaned out my office, bringing home 11 years of my life and documents related to the support of peace and the people in conflict areas of Africa. The incredible plot twist is that we are not a Federal Agency. I am not a Federal Employee. USIP is an independent, non-profit institution chartered and funded by Congress -- ironically in 1984 during the Reagan administration. USIP is non-partisan and independent. Our building was built and maintained by private funds independently raised -- not one dime of taxpayer money was used. In spite of our mission, Elon Musk's DOGE troops broke into our building and evicted what few staff were inside, including our acting President, former Amb. George Moose. DOGE has since given our privately-funded building to the Government Services Administration, the landlord of all government buildings."*

This is the level of disruption that the last election has thrown us into. But it's not just disruption. It's certainly not "government efficiency." It's a systematic attack on everything that progressive Christians hold dear as followers of Christ. Here's a quick overview of the damage, just the tip of the iceberg:

*USAID funding has been halted, not only harming all those who are aided by food assistance and medical programs and infrastructure and disaster relief, but also pulling back on America's global projection of "soft power," which earns us friends and allies. America's sphere of influence and good will is shrinking. These are life-and-death programs for millions of people! Christians should be outraged at the human cost of this capricious, performative mean-spiritedness!*

*All evidence of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is being erased. Offices related to DEI at the University of Iowa have been closed. Classes cancelled. Foreign students' visas have been suddenly, inexplicably, revoked. In a monument to irony, a class in "Intellectual Freedom" is being imposed on U of Iowa students by MAGA legislators. A proscribed list of several dozen words have been censored in various MAGA settings, words like: racism, disability, bias, gender, fetus, multicultural, climate change, privilege, minority.*

*Our daughter submits public health grant proposals and has had to scrub her language to the point where her documents are no longer scientifically accurate. Actually, she just resigned last week because it wasn't possible to do her public health job under these conditions. Teachers are being fired for putting up posters related to inclusion and welcome, yet Iowa is proposing allowing uncertified "chaplains" into schools. They're banning books. The V.A., Social Security, AmeriCorps, Head Start, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Medicare, FEMA, Meals on Wheels, school lunches, and Medicaid budgets are being slashed. NOAA can no longer afford weather balloons so weather forecasting will suffer. Christians with compassion for "the least of these" should be screaming!*

*Immigrants are kidnapped and relocated to camps and prisons without due process. Kilmar Abrego Garcia remains in a Salvadoran concentration camp. Diana Butler Bass writes, "A corrupt, authoritarian government seizes an innocent man, tortures and jails him on trumped-up charges, that change during a manipulated "legal" process. The prisoner is left at the mercy of dehumanizing politicians and jailers to do with what they please. Holy Week then. America now."*

*Forced deportations in thumb-your-nose defiance of a unanimous Supreme Court ruling has crossed a line. Once you defy due process for the most vulnerable among us, no one is safe. Christians, who were once strangers and sojourners ourselves, simply cannot stand for this!*

Am I being overly alarmist? I don't think so. We are in the midst of a five-alarm dumpster fire of impending fascism. If the German people in the 1930s had had an inkling of what was bearing down on them, wouldn't they have resisted more aggressively to prevent 20 million European deaths? Few listened to the warnings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church. Why aren't we sounding the alarm now? While we still can.

What can we do? When court orders and subpoenas are ignored without consequence, when dictatorship is celebrated, when violent criminals are pardoned but peaceful protestors are

“disappeared,” when simple criticism of this regime is punished by lawsuit and economic retaliation, when sitting judges are being arrested, when politicians with any integrity are primaried by massive infusions of dark money, when venerable universities are threatened by a president who ran a fraudulent college, and racism is fashionable again? What do we do when all the legitimate levers of power (including the Supreme Court!) seem to be wholly disconnected from any actionable remedy?

Eight years ago we marched with our cute little pink knit hats with the kitten ears. Last week we marched with clever signs. But does any of that have any impact on the White House or its Fox News Cabinet of Clowns and Rascals? I’ve heard over and over again, “But he can’t DO that.” And I always respond, “He just did.”

So what are we going to do about it?

What we do, as Christians, is start from the foundation of our faith. We are followers of Jesus Christ, who sought out lost sheep and healed lepers and welcomed children and sat by a well openly conversing with a single woman. Although we may get pushback from our evangelical white nationalist brothers and sisters, we do not apologize for our progressive theology, which is based on solid biblical scholarship and historical criticism, and emphasizes mercy, compassion, generosity, honesty, love, humility, peace, justice, respect, and extravagant welcome. You know, WOKE. Like Jesus!

Chris Hedges, a colleague of mine from Harvard Divinity School and a Pulitzer Prize-winning war correspondent, writes,

*Jesus didn’t come to make us rich. And he certainly didn’t come to make Pat Robertson and Joel Osteen rich. What they have done is acculturate the worst aspects of American imperialism, capitalism, chauvinism, violence, and bigotry into the Christian religion.*

The worst thing that ever happened to Christianity was when Constantine established it as the religion of the empire in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. We have been struggling to return to our counter-cultural Jesus roots ever since. The aims of imperialism are diametrically opposed to the true values of the Reign of God. We need to reclaim those values.

From that solid foundation, I think we can do three things: Resist, Ridicule, and *Respaldar*.

**Respaldar** is a Spanish word meaning “to support.” (I couldn’t think of an English word starting with ‘R’ for “support,” so, for the sake of alliteration, I’m borrowing from the Spanish. I learned it from my babysitter.) What can we do to support those who are being hurt by these policies? Ann has made up some little cards that explain the rights of immigrants if apprehended, and she hands those out to any non-native English-speakers we know. I listen to the fears of my lawn care guy, Rosendo. We give to causes like the ACLU. We can amplify the personal testimonies of abuse and overreach that we’re aware of, like I’m doing with the unjust firing of George Moose. A church Ann used to serve in St. Louis provided sanctuary for two years to a Guatemalan immigrant. Churches know how to do these things. We exist to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless, welcome the immigrant, release the captive, and comfort the afflicted. It’s biblical!

Another thing we can do is **Resist**. Kudos to Harvard for standing up and saying NO to this nonsense, even at the threat of losing \$2b in funding and loss of tax-exempt status. The Big Ten universities are cooperating on a common strategy of resistance. With the exception of Iowa, which is under the thumb of a GOP Board of Regents. The Senator from MD flew down to El Salvador to meet with Kilmar Abrego Garcia. Even some Republican legislators are beginning to speak out against the growing atrocities – at least the ones who don’t plan to run for office again. The rest of them seem paralyzed by money, ambition, and fear. A National Labor Relations Board whistleblower spoke out about a DOGE data breach. Ambassador George Moose has launched a lawsuit against the administration. The first hearing is Thursday, May Day. The governor of Maine said, “See you in court,” at great risk to her state. The most effective resistance, of course, is to vote these bigots out of office, and to drag to the polls anyone in our social sphere who might not otherwise vote. Double your impact by taking a friend to the polls. Resistance to Roman imperialism cost Jesus his life, and he told us to take up our own crosses. What will it require from us?

And finally, my favorite way to react to dictators and bullies is through **Ridicule**. Don’t take these clowns seriously. Charlie Chaplin and the Three Stooges made movies parodying *der Fuehrer*. Victor Borge made fun of him from Denmark as long as he could. Some hackers posted an AI copy of Elon Musk’s voice on “walk” signs in California. A sign from the April 5<sup>th</sup> protests in Des Moines made the national news. It was a parody of “Supercalifragilisticexpalidocious.” Did you hear Rachel Maddow try to sing it? That sign was created by a United Church of Christ member of our Urbandale church. I was once her pastor! I’m so proud! I’d like to say I taught her everything she knows, but she taught me more than I taught her! Dictators don’t like people making fun of them, popping their fragile little narcissistic ego balloons. Creative non-compliance in song or poem or theater or art is always an effective – if risky – revolutionary strategy.

The disciples preached and told stories, and look where it got them! After Jesus’ execution, they faced their fears, screwed up their courage, and went out to tell the stories of Jesus’ compassion for the vulnerable. They were arrested on trumped-up charges – forget due process! There was no due process in Imperial Rome! – for sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. Then, when the senator flew down from Maryland – I mean when the angel appeared from heaven – and released them from their concentration camp, they went right back to testifying about this new way to live in Christ. They were arrested again. When they were freed again, they immediately violated the judge’s order yet again, and went right back to defying the authorities and promoting Jesus’ alternative realm of justice. Bless their hearts!

Of course, in the end the disciples were mostly martyred for their faithful witness. But, as the song goes, “We love to tell the story, of Jesus and his love,” and this story lives on, and still gives us hope. And perhaps the courage to hold forth with our own witness, and “Bend this moral arc of the universe toward justice!” Amen!

We’re going to close our service by singing together, “O For A World.” A brief note about this hymn: If you are an elementary school teacher in Iowa, you could be fired for posting the words to this hymn on your classroom wall. But proposed legislation would allow an untrained, uncertified, unvetted, so-called “chaplain” into your classroom to indoctrinate your kids into

whatever racist, self-serving ideology they might choose. These are crazy times! Let's keep the focus on faith. And sing this hymn loud enough for them to hear us in Des Moines!

*O for a world where everyone Respects each other's ways,  
Where love is lived and all is done With justice and with praise.*

*O for a world where goods are shared And misery relieved.  
Where truth is spoken, children spared, Equality achieved.*