

We Are All Hostages Now

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Bound

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We are all hostages now. In one form or another, we are in the grip of some form of religious fundamentalism. This fundamentalism will not let us go. It is hard to tell if we are alive or dead. We exist in limbo while disaffiliation agreements are negotiated and ratified. We are hostage to a process. It is hard to imagine that paper ballots, votes taken via Zoom, and the fait accompli of actions taken at church and annual conferences have the same power as a person with a gun or knife, but they do force unwilling participants to acquiesce to certain realities they might not usually accept because they are in untenable and situations where the outcome is predetermined. Sometimes, hostages make moral compromises to stay alive and sane.

Some of us have been forgotten, left behind, and no longer believed to be worth bargaining for. Others remain hopeful that someone is coming to rescue them from the fundamentalist and proto-fascist nightmare they've lived for the past years. So, we are hostages. Hostages to an inserted paragraph in a seven-year-old Book of Discipline. Hostages to congregations who choose which Old Testament laws they will or will not follow. Hostages to a system of itineracy that worked well for early pre-industrial age 19th century America but is woefully outdated for post-COVID 21st century America. Hostages to those who would rather forget the past and move on without remembering the trauma the hostages represent. Hostages for no other reason than being at the wrong time at the wrong place because a pulpit was open, and someone thought sending someone there was a good idea.

Many of our worship communities have fallen prey to their respective religious traditions' worst and most intolerant elements. As such, United Methodism is not alone. Who are these elements? Cultists who follow literal interpretations of scripture and shut down any conversation with moderate elements within their communities. Those who marginalize the disenfranchised and threaten others with death in eternity and isolation from society and friends in the present. Hostage-taking becomes inevitable for anyone who disagrees with the cultist's narrow view of religion. First, they took the churches, then they came for the messengers within the churches. We are all hostages now.



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Hostage takers believe in death more than they embrace life. Religious hostage takers are a death cult. The idea of death is more important than life. They are obsessed with death for those whose sin is declared irredeemable and a good death for themselves at having jumped through God's prescribed hoops by persecuting the right sinners. Whether it is

death in the present, such as martyrdom, or death that leads to an eternal life with God in some ill-defined concept of “Heaven,” their emphasis remains on death, getting to the end of life, and what happens after we die. We are all hostages to a death cult.

Jesus was about the here and now, the present, relieving the suffering of the living, and the kingdom of God in the present. Jesus came to free the captives and the hostages. Sadly, it seems that some forms of Methodism are in the process of making hostage-taking and captive-making its new mission statement. Christianity was not intended to be a death cult. Christianity is a way of life. Over the past two years, the quickest way to be taken hostage was to proclaim a message of life versus words of punishment and death. Until now, hostages preached life, not life eternal, simply life and life itself. Jesus works out eternal life. The hostage-takers are obsessed with death. Those whose message was life are hostages. We will all be hostages now.

I will try and free myself. That is a risk I am willing to take. I will not let my hostage-takers have the last word. I may be a hostage now; however, now is not forever. I pray that all the hostages and human shields will be freed, wherever they are, by whomever they are held.

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