

Speaking Peace in a Climate of Conflict

Marilyn McEntyre, Eerdmans, 2020

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Abortion. Black lives matter. Immigration. Climate change. Republicans. Democrats. Gender. If we ever needed a book like this, it would be for such a time as this. Marilyn McEntyre has succinctly written *Speaking Peace in a Climate of Conflict* as a guide for Christians to use words in ways to bring clarity and winsomeness to conversations and written communications.

If you are looking for ideas about what to say, you will not find them here. This book is more about how to say it. It is about getting away from the attacks, the sound bites, the accusations, and the battlefield. It is about getting to education, kindness, clarity, and courage in your communication. McEntyre believes this is done through careful and correct use of the English language and the proper choice of words. Her expertise is in the areas of language and faith, and she continues writing about these topics in her current book.

In each of twelve chapters McEntyre details a concept and how it can either positively or negatively impact written or verbal interactions. Examples of chapter content include defining terms, unmasking euphemisms, and the use of allusions and metaphors. Each chapter contains several examples of people who have used these techniques successfully in their writings. The author also refers to Biblical examples, such as the parables of Jesus.

The final chapters give some very specific and important practicalities for delivering arguments. I wish these topics had been expanded, deepened, and highlighted as the main message. At the very least, her thoughts here are provocative. Among other things, McEntyre claims that being semi-literate is more dangerous than being illiterate. For example, people tend to read the Bible selectively to prove their points. We must be able to read critically and contextualize appropriately. She argues that the use of oversimplification, such as discussing pros and cons, omits a large middle ground. In this section, the author declares that race is a social construct and not a biological category. Misusing the word “race” allows the vilification of entire people groups.

The best part of *Speaking Peace in a Climate of Conflict* is the last chapter, which speaks to our attitude in engaging others with different viewpoints. She exhorts us to quit trying to win. She points out that people across the political spectrum do, in fact, share many core values. Beginning with those things we have in common leads to a better chance to reconcile our differences. She points out that arguments to persuade the unpersuaded accomplish less than messages that address our hopes or needs, that open our hearts as well as our minds. She suggests we invite, explore, and challenge more than argue.

The book ends with a section of study questions for group discussion. Marilyn McEntyre has given many good lessons here, for all of us and for the groups around us, to help us use our words more for building bridges than for firing weapons.

Reviewed by Gloria Halverson, MD, Professor Emeritus, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Medical College of Wisconsin

Gloria Halverson, “Review of *Speaking Peace in a Climate of Conflict*, by Marilyn McEntyre,” *Ethics & Medicine* 39, no. 1 (2023): 64.