

NONVIOLENCE WITH AN ACE IN A HOLE

Today, "nonviolence" is a wide-open word. It is subject to an indefinite number of definitions. When a person is honored for being "nonviolent" who "necklaced" his enemies (burned them to death in a stack of old rubber tires), it is fair to surmise that the word, "nonviolence" in itself is devoid of any universally discernible meaning. However, when an adjective or prepositional phrase is added to the word "nonviolence" it usually takes on some defined limits. For example, when people speak of the nonviolence of George Fox, or the nonviolence of Gene Sharp, or the nonviolence of Bertrand Russell, or the nonviolence of Mohandas Gandhi, or the nonviolence of Mario Rodriguez Cobos, there is then a minimal core content to the word that can be located in the words and deeds of the particular person whose name modifies the word "nonviolence."

Whatever else may mean e.g., more openness and tolerance towards what others say or believe, better communication structures, etc., when we speak of the Nonviolence of Jesus in the Gospels, it absolutely must include as a non-removable, essential element *the rejection of homicidal violence against a human being for any reason*, e.g., war, self defense, capital punishment, abortion, revenge, retaliation, etc. It takes no theological sophistication and little literary skill to be unambiguously clear about this. Anything that calls itself Gospel Nonviolence or considers itself a program or practice consistent with Gospel Nonviolence that omits this, or that presents it only as an option, or that leaves its indispensableness nebulous is not Gospel Nonviolence. It may be some one's idea or program or practice of nonviolence, but it is not the idea, program or practice of the Nonviolence of Jesus in the Gospels.

There are philosophies and theologies of nonviolence that morally reserve the possibility of employing violence if their nonviolent methods do not get the result they want or if they totally fail. These are the, "I am nonviolent, but" philosophies and theologies. An example I have employed elsewhere to describe this type of philosophical or religious nonviolence is an actual event related to me by a first-hand participant in it. A mother returned home, after attending a week-long retreat I directed on Gospel Nonviolence and announced to her children, "*I am now nonviolent—but don't push me too far!*" People can name what they are doing whatever they wish to name it. That is their business. But, if people present in theory or in practice an understanding of the Nonviolence of Jesus that is "nonviolence with a but," then it is every Christian's business to correct that error because there are no "buts" in Jesus' teaching in the Gospels of

Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies.

In Jesus' teaching when Nonviolent Love fails or when the pragmatic strategies and tactics developed in conformity with Nonviolent Christlike Love fail, violence is not a moral alternative in which a Christian can engage as his or her so-called "last resort." How do I know? Because, Jesus told me so—in Gethsemane and on Golgotha. Dying loving one's enemies as Jesus died loving His enemies *is* the "last resort" for the Christian. Any utilitarian form of nonviolence with its various practices and programs that morally allows homicidal violence as its "last resort" is not the Nonviolence of Jesus by the very fact it chooses to kill other human beings, even if only as a "last resort." Even if a "nonviolence-but" theology or philosophy can move mountains or bring down governments from the perspective of the Nonviolent Jesus it is impotent because the omnipotent Spirit of God, "*who is love*," never infuses homicidal violence (1 Cor 13 ff)—even as a so-called "last resort."

It should go without saying that in human relationships between individual and/or group, if a party in a conflict is willing to resort to violence if a conflict is not resolved to his or her or their satisfaction, this consciousness is in another psychological, emotional, cognitive, moral, spiritual and relational universe from the consciousness that includes the total and perpetual rejection of violence. Trying to resolve a conflict with a Christian(s) or any person, who will never harm you is not the same human relational dynamic and situation-in-life as trying to resolve a conflict with a Christian(s) or any person who overtly or covertly keeps the violence-card up his sleeve as his trump card, which he will play as the "last resort" to achieve an end or settle a difficulty. "Nonviolence, but" is the retention of violence as one's ace-in-the-hole. As long as violence-card is retained as an option in a conflict resolution process fear abides in that process, corrupting the logic, dialogue, imagination, creativity, vision, empathy and values of the parties willing to employ it as a so-called "last resort."

For a Christian to keep the violence-card up his or her sleeve also means that he or she distrusts Jesus, which is all but inseparable from not believing Jesus is God "made flesh." God is either trustworthy or what is being named God is not God. "*Jesus I do not trust in you*," is the belief of the Christians who morally justify keeping violence as their ace-in-the-hole, regardless of whether they name what they are doing nonviolence, just war, just peace, just revolution, or just self defense.

-Emmanuel Charles McCarthy