

JESUS AND NONVIOLENCE

Self-Affirming, Nonviolent Resistance for Survival and Liberation

James H. Cone; God of the Oppressed—“When whites ask me, “Are you for violence?” my rejoinder is: “Whose violence?” “Richard Nixon or his victims?” “The Mississippi State Police or the students at Jackson State?” “The New York State Police or the inmates at Attica?” If we are going to raise the question of violence and Christian love, it ought to be placed in its proper theological perspective. Violence is not primarily a theoretical question but a practical question, and it should be viewed in the context of Christian ethics generally and the struggle of liberation in particular.” (p. 180)

Freire, Paulo. Pedagogy of the Oppressed—“Never in history has violence been initiated by the oppressed. How could they be the initiators, if they themselves are the result of violence? How could they be the sponsors of something whose objective inauguration called forth their existence as oppressed? There would be no oppressed had there been no prior situation of violence to establish their subjugation. Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons— not by those who are oppressed, exploited, and unrecognized.” (Kindle Locations 707-710). Bloomsbury Publishing. Kindle Edition.

el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz—“That Uncle Tom can’t see his enemy. He thinks his friend is his enemy and his enemy is his friend. And he usually ends up loving his enemy, turning his other cheek to his enemy.” Michigan State University; Twenty Million Black People in a Political, Economic, and Mental Prison; January 23, 1963,

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—“...I think America must see that riots do not develop out of thin air. Certain conditions continue to exist in our society which must be condemned as vigorously as we condemn riots. But in the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, equality, and humanity. And so in a real sense our nation's summers of riots are caused by our nation's winters of delay. And as long as America postpones justice, we stand in the position of having these recurrences of violence and riots over and over again. Social justice and progress are the absolute guarantors of riot prevention.” (1968; “The Other America”)

Thomas Merton—“A theology of love cannot afford to be sentimental. It cannot afford to preach edifying generalities about charity, while identifying ‘peace’ with mere established power and legalized violence against the oppressed. A theology of love cannot be allowed merely to serve the interests of the rich and powerful, justifying their wars, their violence and their bombs, while exhorting the poor and underprivileged to practice patience, meekness, longsuffering, and to solve their problems, if at all, nonviolently. A theology of love may also conceivably turn out to be a theology of revolution. In any case, it is a theology of resistance, a refusal of the evil that reduces a brother or sister to homicidal desperation . . . Instead of preaching the Cross for others and advising them to suffer patiently the violence which we sweetly impose on them, with the aid of armies and police, we might conceivably recognize the right of the less fortunate to use force, and study more seriously the practice of nonviolence and humane methods on our own part when, as it happens, we possess the most stupendous arsenal of power the world has ever known.” (Toward a Theology of Resistance)

<https://renewedheartministries.com/Esights/02-19-2016>

This kind of blow in the culture of 1st Century Palestine was a show of insult from a superior to an inferior: one would not strike an equal in this humiliating way because doing so carried a fine of up to 100 times the normal amount. Four zuz was the fine for a blow to a social peer with a fist, but 400 zuz was the fine for backhanding one's peer. To strike someone you viewed as socially inferior to yourself with a backhanded slap, was perfectly acceptable and no penalty was attached (see Mishnah Bava Kamma 8.6).

At Qumran, even gesturing to another person while speaking using one's left hand carried a penalty of exclusion from the community accompanied by ten days' penance. (See The Dead Sea Scrolls, I QS 7, "Whoever has drawn out his left hand to gesticulate with it shall do penance for ten days.")

The Torah allowed a creditor to take the himation (or outer garment) or chiton (inner garment).

Exodus 22.25-27—"If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not treat it like a business deal; charge no interest. If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset, because that cloak is the only covering your neighbor has. What else can they sleep in? When they cry out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

Deuteronomy 24.10-17—"When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, do not go into their house to get what is offered to you as a pledge. Stay outside and let the neighbor to whom you are making the loan bring the pledge out to you. If the neighbor is poor, do not go to sleep with their pledge in your possession. Return their cloak by sunset so that your neighbor may sleep in it. Then they will thank you, and it will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the LORD your God. Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge.

Matthew 5.38-41—"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles."

Walter Wink—"Once we determine that Jesus' Third Way is not a perfectionistic avoidance of violence but a creative struggle to restore the humanity of all parties in a dispute, the legalism that has surrounded this issue becomes unnecessary. We cannot sit in judgment over the responses of others to their oppression. Gandhi continually reiterated that if a person could not act nonviolently in a situation, violence was preferable to submission. "Where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence." But Gandhi believed that a third way can always be found, if one is deeply committed to nonviolence. Jesus' way...means voluntarily taking on the violence of the Powers That Be, and that will mean casualties. But they will be nowhere near the scale that would result from violent revolution." Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way (Facets)

Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker God So Loved The World?

—"It is not acceptance of suffering that gives life; it is commitment to life that gives life. The question, moreover, is not, Am I willing to suffer? but Do I desire fully to live? This distinction is subtle and, to some, specious, but in the end it makes a great difference in how people interpret and respond to suffering. If you believe that acceptance of suffering gives life, then your resources for confronting perpetrators of violence and abuse will be numbed." (Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse, pp. 1-30)

Barbara Deming; Revolution and Equilibrium—"With one hand we say to one who is angry, or to an oppressor, or to an unjust system, 'Stop what you are doing. I refuse to honor the role you are choosing to play. I refuse to obey you. I refuse to cooperate with your demands. I refuse to build the walls and the bombs. I refuse to pay for the guns. With this hand I will even interfere with the wrong you are doing. I want to disrupt the easy pattern of your life.' But then the advocate of nonviolence raises the other hand. It is raised out-stretched - maybe with love and sympathy, maybe not - but always outstretched . . . With this hand we say, 'I won't let go of you or cast you out of the human race. I have faith that you can make a better choice than you are making now, and I'll be here when you are ready. Like it or not, we are part of one another.'"

Herb Montgomery
Renewed Heart Ministries
PO Box 1211 | Lewisburg, WV 24901 | 304.520.0030
herb@renewedheartministries.com
www.renewedheartministries.com

