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A DIFFERENT DREAM—

Non-violence as Practical Politics

by

CHRISTOPHER SUGDEN

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NOTE ON 'JUST WAR' (bottom of page 9)

A *coup d'état* or rebellion as described on page 9, while justifiable in our 'illegitimacy theory' of the state, is ruled out by many just war theorists because it is revolt against the divinely ordained state, the governing powers who alone have the right to declare war.

The just war theory does not help us in deciding whether violence is right for Christians. It is a theory for deciding whether a decision to go to war can be justified by certain criteria: not for deciding whether violence is right or wrong. As a theory its own criteria are limited in scope. It declares that certain wars would be unjust, for example those fought in pursuit of some utopian dream rather than in response to real injury received. But those wars that would fall within its criteria are not thereby justified. Where the just war would give us a clear decision, for example in approving of a war where a tyrant was overthrown by the army with the minimum of bloodshed followed by ordered government, that war could be better justified on other grounds. Where other grounds leave us groping in the dark, a just war theory does as well. For example, would an invasion of Rhodesia be a just war? It might, but we might still think it would be wrong. So the theory is best likened to a boundary fence round a nation. Everyone outside is an exile, alien or outlaw. But not everyone inside is automatically a law-abiding citizen. For further discussion see Vernon C. Grounds *Revolution and the Christian Faith* (Philadelphia, 1971). and J. G. Davies *Christians, Politics and Violent Revolution* (S.C.M., 1976) pp. 165-84.

1. INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther King died on 6 April 1968. Some say he died in time, before the bankruptcy of his non-violent programme became evident. Others claim that history will show the wisdom of his choice. But is his response to injustice a norm for all Christians who now face his dilemma? Today Christians of many nations are faced with the question: 'Should we take up arms to alter the injustices that exist here, committed or condoned by our rulers?'

Much writing and discussion on Christians and violence has taken place over the past five years. In 1971, the Church of England Board of Social Responsibility produced the report *Civil Strife*. In 1973 the United Reformed Church published *Non-Violent Direct Action* (SCM). In August 1973 the World Council of Churches published their report *Violence, Non-Violence and the Struggle for Social Justice*. In 1975 the British Council of Churches produced *Combating Racism*, Bishop Sansbury's survey on the response of the British Churches to the WCC Programme to Combat Racism. Latin America has given birth to the 'Theology of Revolution'. This takes Marxism as the objective scientific analysis of the problems of society and uses its concepts of oppression and liberation for interpreting the bible.

A long Christian tradition has recognised the right to rebel against a persistently unjust government. But how shall we resist? The thesis of this booklet is that non-violent resistance is the normal expression of Christian political action in the context of resistance: and that self-defence, protecting innocent victims, and Christian membership of the police-force are all consistent with a policy of non-violence.

Advocates of non-violence have frequently been opposed to any form of political involvement, to any participation in police activity in society, and even to self-defence. Jacques Ellul and John Yoder believe it rules out any police service or self-defence for Christians.¹ On the other hand those who endorse police service and self-defence as Christian, argue that the use of violent force in these two areas rules out policies of non-violent resistance, and that non-violence involves an abdication of power and political responsibility in a sinful world.²

This booklet will try to demonstrate that Jesus' command to love our enemies is a practical political option for Christian social ethics, and to explore its practical expression in non-violent resistance. The spate of recent writing on the topic does not diminish the need for such a treatment. The most recent discussion, J. G. Davies' *Christians, Politics and Violent Revolution* (SCM, 1976), gives only ten pages to absolutist pacifism, and none to non-violent resistance. But the WCC report in August 1973 suggested that careful exploration of non-violent resistance is most important for the church:

'We are convinced that far too little attention has been given by the Church and by resistance movements to the methods and techniques of non-violence, in the struggle for a just society.'³

¹ J. Ellul *Violence* (SCM, 1970); J. Yoder *The Politics of Jesus* (Eerdmans, 1972).

² Reinhold Niebuhr *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (Scribners, 1960); Paul Ramsey *Basic Christian Ethics* (SCM, 1953); Jurgen Moltmann *Racism and the Right to Resist in Study Encounter* (W.C.C.) Vol 8, No. 1, 1972.

³ *Violence, Non-Violence and the Struggle for Social Justice*. (W.C.C., 1973), p.16.

2. WHAT IS VIOLENCE?

What is violence, what causes it and what does it do? A common-sense definition is 'a violent action is one which involves doing harm, injury or damage to a human being . . . or to property'.¹ There is expressive violence such as the violence of football hooligans. But we will exclude this, for it is political, or programmed, violence that is our subject.

Political violence will be defined as 'the expression or attempted expression of coercion in ways that involve physical harm to life or property for political ends.' This is not an agreed dictionary definition, but a working definition to enable us to be clear about what we are discussing.

It is difficult to arrive at a definition of violence, because what is classified as violence at any given time or place will depend on the concerns, interests, and world-views of a particular society or group of people. Anthony Arblaster bids us look no further than the road accident figures in our own country for proof of this. In Britain in 1972 there were 7,700 deaths caused by road accidents, seven times as many in one year as the total number of deaths caused by the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1974. Yet the 'violence' in Ireland causes more concern than the 'accidents' on the roads. But are not both cases of 'violence'?

A narrow definition of political violence is often heard, limiting it to describe the illegitimate activity of rebels. Nightly on the television we see horror scenes from Ulster. If we describe the IRA's tactics as 'violence' but call the army's response 'force' or 'security operations', we are using this narrower definition. We are restricting violence as a term to vilify the harmful actions of rebels. The result is to make this activity sound morally far worse than any activity by governing forces. But in America in 1970 the National Guard shot students at Kent State University; in South Africa police attacked black citizens in Sharpsville in 1960. The result also cloaks and conceals a proper understanding of much impersonal violence in the world today. Many deaths and much suffering in today's world are caused not by guerrillas and rebels, but by the economic and social policies of governments and business corporations. This narrower concept of violence hides from our eyes the fact that there is often as much violence in the system of control, as in those who take abnormal measures to subvert that system: it encourages us to think that nothing can be worse than rebel violence.

Both Marxists and the Biblical writers would encourage us to resist this narrow definition. Regis Debray writes: 'Each one has to decide which side he is on—on the side of military violence, or guerrilla violence, on the side of violence that represses or the violence that liberates.'² Lenin spoke of the state as 'organized violence'. Ezekiel wrote 'Your doom has come, injustice has blossomed, pride has budded. Violence has grown up into a rod of wickedness; none of them shall remain, nor their abundance, nor their wealth.' (7.10, 11). Miguez Bonino points out that 'the word "violence" is almost exclusively applied in the Scriptures to the actions of unjust authorities (kings, priests, rich) and the oppressors of the people.'

¹ Anthony Arblaster 'Violence will always be violence' in *The Times Higher Educational Supplement* 9 January 1976, p.13.

² Regis Debray in *Strategy for Revolution* Ed. R. Blackburn (Jonathan Cape, 1970) p.7.

³ Jose Miguez Bonino *Christians and Marxists* (Hodder, 1976) p.124.

Other groups have exploited the vagueness of 'violence' to reflect other concerns and interests, and given violence a wider definition. They have argued that anything that intrudes on an individual's freedom is violence. When a teacher tells children the history of their country from a 'capitalist', or 'colonialist' point of view; when an RE teacher includes 'communism' in the syllabus; when students sit-in in the college principal's study; all these could be branded 'violations of freedom', and so violence. For example the Principal of Southlands College described a recent occupation of the college in protest at poor employment prospects for teachers as "'violent" in a non-physical way'.¹

These attempts to narrow, or widen, the definition of violence usually contain an attempt to add emotive appeal, prejudicing the hearer against the activity described as 'violent'. For clarity therefore it will be best to restrict our understanding of violence to *all* activity, legal and illegal, that causes *physical harm* to persons or property for political ends. The heart of the question then becomes, when is violence ever legitimate?

What causes violence in men? Why has modern man killed one hundred million of his own species in the twentieth century? Is violence part of man's natural animal nature? Some would say 'How like animals we are, violence is part of our animal nature: it cannot be eradicated.' Or is violence not part of being human at all? Is it a learned response, a reaction to a bad environment or bad companions? If so, perhaps it can be eradicated. Education or religion will convince men of its futility.

Some secular writers would urge that violence is not a purely animal or beastlike aspect of human behaviour; it is not part of our animal nature. It depends on our human characteristics of inventiveness or moral sense. Konrad Lorenz² differentiated between aggression in animals which has limits, and violence in men which breaks the limits of aggression. Animals are protected by their vulnerability to one another, so their aggression has bounds. Man's tragedy is that he invented weapons, so has no natural limits to aggression. Hannah Arendt³ points out that violence in men is not an instinctive but a reasoned response. It can spring from rage at injustice or fury at hypocrisy. These responses depend on the ability to be moved by wrong, which is part of being human.

The world-view of Jesus and the Jews was that violence was natural to man, but not an acceptable norm for his behaviour. The doctrine of original sin, of evil coming from the heart of man, and of man being fundamentally bent, means that man contains an irreducible minimum of rebellion against God and his order. This minimum can neither be explained, nor eradicated in full. Therefore oppressor and oppressed are tarred with the same brush, they are in some fundamental way the same. Violence is double-edged, none of us will be free from being tainted by its misuse. So we must hesitate to use it as a pure weapon in a crusade against evil men. And since all are rebels, it is not possible to load all the blame for injustice on one group alone, and argue that liquidation of that group would spell the disappearance of injustice.

¹ *Methodist Recorder* 3 June 1976, p.16.

² Konrad Lorenz *On Aggression* (Methuen, 1966).

³ Hannah Arendt 'On violence' in *Crises of the Republic* (Penguin, 1973) pp.124-30.

But while violence is natural, it is not normative. It is like sickness in a fallen world, it is like all man's wickedness. Though sickness and moral wrong exist, Christ took action against them, to rid people of them. In the pictures of the redeemed world (Is. 11.1-9, Mic. 4-1-4, Rev. 21.1-7) violence is no more. Because that kingdom of God that will bring final peace has already arrived in part, Christians should work to limit violence as much as possible, to express that kingdom of peace. But they will not delude themselves that they will be able to eliminate violence while this world stands.

The bible evaluates violence as one of the chaotic forces in nature. In the Genesis creation story, God places order on chaos. 'Without form and void' (Gen. 1.2) describes the world as 'not habitable'. The theme of Genesis 1-2 is that creation was for the purpose of habitation, and the stages of creation are from chaos to order. So God separated the light from the darkness, the water from the dry land, and separated the day from the night. Man was then placed as God's vice-regent in control of the world, but subject to God's moral order.

The fall is expressed as man's rebellion against God's moral order. But when man assents to moral chaos, physical chaos invades the world afresh. After Adam's rebellion, the earth becomes harder to till, and man's work and woman's childbearing more of a struggle. One of the characteristics of fallenness is violence. Cain's envy of his brother leads to murder, and God's reaction is horror. 'The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.' (Gen. 4.10). Before the flood the earth is described as 'corrupt in God's sight and . . . filled with violence'. (Gen. 6.11). After the flood violence is regarded as part of the natural order. 'Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.' (Gen. 9.6).¹

God's judgment is shown as the physical chaos returns to overwhelm the areas of habitation. In Isaiah 24 and 34 the desert returns to overwhelm the centres of civilization. 'The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed the laws, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth . . . desolation is left in the city, the gates are battered into ruins.' (Is. 24.5-13). God means his judgments to bring men to repentance (Rev. 16.11). So 'while violence breeds further violence, the result is not "sound and fury signifying nothing", but a situation pregnant with lessons for the watcher.'²

Violence is natural for a fallen world, but not normative for man. But God can still use it even though it expresses rebellion against him. However it is still an open question whether men, and in particular God's people, should use this tool of violence to execute divine or human judgment.

What does violence do? Is it possible to use it with cold surgical skill to cut out the cancer of injustice, as Camilo Torres believed? 'The ethic is to be violent once and for all in order to destroy the violence which the economic minorities exercise against the people.'³ Or is Helder Camara nearer the truth in entitling a book 'The Spiral of Violence'?⁴

¹ For full exposition of these ideas see D. J. A. Clines 'Noah's Flood 1: The Theology of the Flood Narrative' *Faith and Thought* 100/2 1972 p.133.

² Os Guinness 'Violence—Crisis or Catharsis' in *Dust of Death* (I.V.P., 1973) Ch. 5 p.181.

³ John Gerassi *Revolutionary Priest* (Cape, 1971) p.27.

⁴ Sheed and Ward, 1971.

Here I examine mass violence, when violence is introduced into the life of a society as a means for righting its wrongs. I am not including the controlled limited situation of, for example, the plot to overthrow Hitler.

Violence is continuous. Revolutions are 'born in violence and establish the reign of violence for a generation or two.'¹ 'A ruler who has not scrupled to to wade through slaughter to a throne will find that if he tries to maintain his power thereafter without recourse to the grim arts that have gained it, sooner or later he will be confronted with the choice between letting power slip through his fingers or else renewing his lease of it by means of another bout of violence.'² So the French Revolution gave birth to Napoleon, and the Russian Revolution to Stalin.

Violence is reciprocal. 'All who take the sword will perish by the sword' (Matthew 26.52). Violent means produce violent ends. Violence may change the world, observes Hannah Arendt³, but the most likely result is a more violent world. Nicolas Berdyaev lived through the Russian Revolution and observed: 'The future in which the exalted end was to be realised never comes. In it there will always be the same repulsive means.'⁴

Violence and hate go together. Martin Luther King wrote 'Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact violence merely increases hate.'⁵ Che Guevara saw hatred as an essential factor in the revolutionary struggle: 'Hate is a factor in the struggle, intransigent hate for the enemy, which takes one beyond the natural limitations of a human being and converts him into an effective, violent, single-minded and cold killing-machine. That is how our soldiers must be; a people without hatred cannot win over a brutal enemy.'⁶ So violence communicates hate better than it communicates love.

And violence treats people as things. It has to dehumanize its victims as 'oppressors': were there a moment's reflection on the enemy's being a husband, lover, child, father, someone with hopes and fears, doubts and insecurities, even someone who might change his mind, the acts of violence would be harder. Violence dehumanizes both victim and victor. Jose Miguez Bonino, himself not arguing a pacifist position, makes this assessment of violence: 'Insofar as non-violent action respects the human person, makes room for an internalization of the project of liberation in the masses and fosters the sense of solidarity in the construction of a new society, it is the means most coherent with the revolutionary purpose. Moreover, when efficacy . . . does require the use of violence for overturning an oppressive system, it creates a number of serious problems: the exacerbation of hate, resentment, and rivalries, the imposition of changes from a structure of power without a corresponding development of conscience, the acceptance of "the rules of the game" of the present oppressive system. Victorious revolutionary violence runs the risk of simply substituting one form of oppression for another and thus becoming really counter-revolutionary.'⁷

¹ Jacques Ellul *Violence* (S.C.M., 1972) p.94.

² James Douglass *The Non-Violent Cross* (Chapman, 1968) p.285.

³ Reference unknown.

⁴ Nicholas Berdyaev *Slavery and Freedom* (Bles, 1943) reference unknown.

⁵ Martin Luther King *Chaos or Community* (Hodder, 1968) p.62.

⁶ G. Lavan ed. *Che Guevara Speaks* (New York, 1967) p.156.

⁷ Jose Miguez Bonino *Revolutionary Theology Comes of Age* (S.P.C.K., 1975) p.127.

3. VIOLENCE AND LEGITIMACY

Is violence ever legitimate? Violent action would seem to be compatible with Christian love in three areas: self-defence, defence of the innocent, and the use of governmental force.

Christian love in Jesus' teaching is not in essence self-sacrifice, though self-sacrifice may express it best on many occasions. Love derives its character from the love of God, which is grace.¹ God's undeserved love values each one as equal, and confers on each one a value prior to and independent of any intrinsic worth. The ultimate foundation of the equality of men is not any inherent quality, but the external factor of the grace of God. God's love, independent of a person's worth, confers on him a value he can never be deprived of. Love, derived from grace, is equal regard. If God loves each man equally, independently of his personal worth, men ought to love one another with equal regard.

Where is this understanding of love in the Bible? The essence of God's relationship with man in Old Testament and New is grace. The basis of Christian salvation is the initiative of God in undeserved grace. Forgiveness is through grace. Jesus expressed this in his ministry in welcoming the poorest, the outcast and the enemy to God's kingdom; in welcoming the outcasts to table fellowship; and in vigorously refuting the Jewish version of salvation by works.

Love as equal regard gives good reasons for making a distinction between attending to the needs of others and allowing them to exploit you. We may distinguish between what is good for a man, and providing him with what he may (mistakenly) want. Out of regard for him, it would be right to take steps against his wickedness. It is best for a rapist that he be prevented from continuing his activities. So it would be right, out of love, to resist him.

Equal regard allows a proper degree of self-love and provides a basis for legitimate self-defence. To give equal regard to yourself and to an opponent exploiting you would mean that you could not omit counting yourself as someone whose interests should be considered in the situation. Because God values you, you should have a proper sense of your own worth.

Equal regard looks to the needs of others. Gandhi himself said 'God would not excuse me if, on the Judgment Day, I were to plead before him that I could not prevent these things (murder and rape) from happening because I was held back by my creed of non-violence.'²

How should we evaluate the work of the state? Can Christians take part in the exercise of governmental force? We must first examine the reasons why the state is allowed the prerogative of force. It is, according to Paul in Romans 13, to reward good, punish evil and visit God's wrath on the wrongdoer. It is, according to Miss G. E. M. Anscombe³, to protect the innocent. It is in this respect that the state differs from a band of gangsters. J. R. Lucas adds a further point.⁴ The state is not just an economic unit for feeding its members and protecting them from harm. It is not there solely

to restrain sin. It is a community of shared values. Any state must enshrine in its laws certain values with reference to relations between the sexes, the distribution of wealth, family life and immigration. These values will be based on and give expression to a vision of 'the good life'. Because the laws of the state that enshrine these values would have no effect if they could be ignored with impunity, the state must apply the sanction of coercion: if some members will not believe in the values, their behaviour must still be made to conform to them willy-nilly. What level of force is allowed to ensure this compliance? Enough as is necessary. Paul only cites the use of *machaira* for the magistrates; the *machaira* was the Roman symbol of judicial authority, not of war, nor of capital punishment.¹

Can Christians take part in the exercise of such force? Paul sets the work of the state within the context of the activity of God in the new creation. In Romans 12.2 Paul appeals to Christians not to be conformed to this world; they are to show Christian love (12.9-13.10) and to conduct themselves as in the day (13.13). They are to love their neighbours (13.10) and to pay everyone his due (13.7-8). Within this context Paul argues that the state forwards what is good and punishes what is evil on behalf of God. Within its sphere of competence it expresses the command to love the neighbour. There is no *a priori* reason why Christians should not express this important aspect of neighbour-love in the police force.

But there is no reason to subscribe to the view that whatever the state commands is good. Clearly there is an external criterion for deciding what is good: Paul supplies this by placing his words within the framework of applying the law of love to various situations in the Christian life. The Christian law of love is therefore a limit on the power of the state, and a criterion for deciding if it is rewarding the good. Both church and state are ideally working for the same end, the doing of the will of God on earth. Barth² argues that the state does not of itself know what the will of God is—and so the church has a function in witnessing to the state the true content of 'the good'. But the church does not have the state's prerogative for enforcing the good, not because it has no business with social ethics or the morals of society, but because the church does not have the responsibility for exercising God's judgment on evil in society.

If the conclusion from this argument is that there are justifications for the work of the state if it rewards God's good in society: that in doing this it must use some force; and that Christians may properly take part in its work; then, by parallel argument, the case could arise where a state does not meet the required justification for its use of force, but degenerates into the behaviour of a band of gangsters. When would this point be reached, and would Christians be right in the name of good government to overthrow such a tyranny? If a government systematically and continually attacked the innocent and violated fundamental human rights: if it continually rewarded evil and punished good: if a better alternative government were able to fulfil the role of government more adequately, then there would be a *prima facie* case for a legitimate overthrow.³

¹ John Yoder *op. cit.* pp.205ff.

² Karl Barth 'The Christian Community and the Civil Community' in *Community State and Church* ed. Will Herberg (Peter Smith, Mass.) p.149.

³ The 'just war' theory will not help here—see note at bottom of p.2.

¹ See for full discussion Gene Outka *Agape* (Yale, 1972), especially pp.154-69.

² Quoted in Harvey Seifert *Conquest by Suffering* (Philadelphia, 1965) p.31.

³ At a conference on Christians and Revolution, Oxford, 1973.

⁴ J. R. Lucas *Principles of Politics* (O.U.P. 1966) Sections 15, 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 14

This does not mean that Christians can overthrow the state because it does not apply the total morality of the kingdom of God; they must be able to supply a credible alternative, and the present government must be demonstrably violating human rights. But Christians can continually seek to raise the public level of morality, the definition of 'the good' that the laws of the state enshrine. For while laws cannot make men good, they must enshrine some arrangements for human life, and some vision of what a valuable life for society would look like. So factory legislation, the welfare state, and adequate social security payments to working unmarried mothers when pregnant, are all issues on which Christians have been and ought to be involved in holding up 'the good' before the state.

The question of violence is the question of the legitimacy of violence. In some circumstances the exercise of equal regard will involve legitimate violence. But legitimacy in using violence is something that only one side in a conflict can possess at any one time. If I can legitimately use violence to protect myself, it is because my assailant is using it illegitimately. If I defend an old lady from attack, her attacker is using violence illegitimately. If a group of Christians use violence to overthrow a tyrannical government it will be because it has forfeited its claim to the legitimate use of violence. The question of whether to use violence in these cases is not as an alternative to non-violence on our part, but as an alternative to illegitimate violence on our part. Non-violent action is not offered as an alternative in these areas where violence is legitimate, and subject to control. It is offered in areas where violence would be properly illegitimate—without the prerogative of limited self-defence or police action. So if a government is still legitimately carrying out its functions, save for one or two blind spots, it cannot be argued to have forfeited its legitimate use of violence. In these cases non-violent resistance is the appropriate response. Indeed it may happen that a programme of resistance begins with non-violent action until the resisters are in a position to assume total responsibility for law and order, and the government in being has shown itself totally to have forfeited its right to the exercise of force on behalf of rewarding the good. At that point a degree of violence may be right for the resisters, as they assume governmental responsibility.

These three possible uses of violence, in self-defence, protection of the innocent and the use of governmental force are not incompatible with a normal stance of non-violent resistance. Just as telling a lie to save a life is not incompatible with the rule of honesty: in this case the principle of love which is normally enshrined in the rule 'Don't tell lies', is best kept, not by telling the truth in this situation, but in deferring to the higher priority, saving a life. So, the normal Christian stance, we will argue, is non-violence. The love this enshrines is best kept, sometimes, by limited violence.

But it is not possible to extrapolate from an argument for self-defence, the protection of the innocent or governmental force, to civil or international war. If the Good Samaritan had come earlier, he might have had to fight the muggers! But this is no argument for civil war, for individual cases of defence and protection are limited in their scope, and are now subject to higher review by the police and state. There is little danger of a forest fire of violence spreading. But violence on a wider scale cannot be controlled.

Nor is it possible to argue from the legitimate use of police force to a wider justification of violence. For the police apply force against those offending the known laws of the state. Their action is subject to higher review—there are safeguards to prevent this violence being applied to the innocent, and the force which the police apply is normally greater than that which any potential offender can mount.

In other words, because the argument is correctly about the legitimacy of violence, it is not possible to argue that, because violence is legitimate in some cases, violence is always a possibility for Christians in other cases. The argument is wrongly stated if it is set up in terms of pacifism or violence as mutually exclusive possibilities for all possible cases, and that a commitment to violence in three limited cases means a commitment to violence in general. To see sex as good does not entail promiscuity.

Nor is it possible to argue from a justification of coercion, as given above, to the conclusion that all political action is based on coercion or the threat of force. Some theologians argue that all power is clothed or naked force. So Jurgen Moltmann defined power as 'the means whereby we get something by force.'¹ The conclusion of such an argument is that non-violent action is incompatible with true participation in political action. Two threads get entangled in the argument that all politics is coercion. One is to argue that all politics is conflict and that action in conflict depends on being able to bring superior force to bear. But we shall argue in the next chapter that action is political conflict does not entail having the superior force. The second thread is to argue that power in politics depends on having the superior force. But power does not depend on superior force but on consent. According to Hannah Arendt² power in politics is the ability of a group of people to act together; that ability may be focused on an individual or a group empowered to act on behalf of others. It is conferred by consent. The Labour government has power in Britain not because it can bring overwhelming force to bear, but because it is judged to have the formally expressed consent of the majority of the British people. Power depends on consent. When a ruler loses consent he turns to weapons, which give him superior force. Thus did de Gaulle once in France—thus the Russians in Dubcek's Czechoslovakia.

It is true that laws and government decisions do have the threat of force behind them. But those decisions and those laws are arrived at not through the exercise of force, but through custom, democratic processes, and referenda. Those who would demur at the results must be coerced. But the coercing body, the police, do not coerce the public to accept laws, only to obey laws that have been accepted.

So to say that peace in society is only maintained through the threat of overwhelming force, or that all politics depends on the threat of force, is to use a very misleading shorthand. It is this shorthand argument that leads some to believe that a commitment to non-violence leads to non-involvement in politics. It does not, and the next chapter will endeavour to expand on the way non-violence works in the political arena.

¹ Jurgen Moltmann 'Racism and the Right to Resist' in *Study Encounter* (W.C.C., 1972) Vol. 8 No. 1, p.5.

² Hannah Arendt *On Revolution* (Penguin, 1973) *passim* and 'On Violence' in *Crises of the Republic* (Penguin, 1973) pp.107ff.

4. WHAT IS NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE?

Too often Christians spend time discussing at what point in a struggle it would be right to resort to violence. They betray an attitude of mind which sees resistance only in terms of violence. But if we resisted a lot earlier in many situations, the agonising choice of violence or non-violence may be properly avoided.

Non-violent resistance acknowledges that conflict is involved in any social change. The start of conflict is not when the bullets begin to fly. Many situations of outward peace, law and order, conceal many inequalities and injustices. For example, British-owned companies in South Africa report good business and stable industrial relations. Few strikes are known in them. But only one of the 500 firms called on by the House of Commons select committee to report on its wages to black labour, has so far reported paying the suggested level of 50 per cent above the poverty datum line.¹ If progress is to be made, power and privilege will have to change hands, or be shared more widely. But groups and individuals who have vested interests in keeping their present positions will not surrender their privileges easily. To take another example: in a situation of prosperity and full employment, the fact that the black population in some western countries has the worst jobs may go unchallenged. The black population enjoys enough prosperity to quell extreme reactions to this injustice, and black people do not compete for the jobs of any white men. But real tension still exists; and once mass unemployment arrives with declining standards of prosperity, the true situation is revealed. Black men start competing directly with white men for the same jobs. They will no longer be pacified by high living standards. When whites begin to exclude them from jobs, the ignored injustice and dormant tension is exposed. The conflict does not begin when the black population start fighting for jobs: it has existed all the time, with the same side always losing.

In a situation of conflict non-violent resistance is open, peaceful, unconventional conduct that the resister considers socially desirable.² If a group of housewives wants a pedestrian crossing opposite a busy shopping area, and the council disagrees, a continuous procession of prams across the roadway at that point would be a non-violent resistance.

Such unconventional conduct may be active non-co-operation with authorities in order to create a definite nuisance. A famous example occurred in 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama. Though seventy per cent of the passengers in the City Bus Lines were black, whites had priority over blacks, even black women, for the use of the seats. After one black woman was arrested for refusing to give up her seat, the blacks boycotted the busses for over a year.³ Blacks walked to work, organised rival transport services, and in the evenings attended the Christian churches to pray for their campaign. The issue of seating on buses brought to light the injustice,

¹ Editorial *The Sunday Times* 23 May 1976.

² Harvey Seifert *op. cit.* p.18.

³ From Coretta Scott King *My Life with Martin Luther King* (Hodder, 1969) pp.125-162.

conflict and tension in the Southern States. By actively refusing to co-operate with the city transport system, the blacks eventually won. A Supreme Court order was made declaring segregation on the buses unconstitutional.¹

Unpleasant consequences may arise from non-violent resistance; in Montgomery the blacks were harassed and beaten, their car pools were attacked, Martin Luther King's home was bombed, and every day they had to walk to work. But this suffering is borne willingly. The protesters touch a raw nerve and expect these sanctions, although they do not court them. They expect inconvenience and suffering to arise from the conflict. But they are prepared for this suffering to come on themselves as they dramatize the injustice at issue. Of course suffering and violence may arise from their protests. But the protesters are no more *responsible* for this violence than, say, Jesus was responsible for the slaughter of the innocents. The protesters bring an already existing conflict into the open: their opponents may then choose to fight.² It is no argument against non-violent resistance to say that it can cause violence. Amongst those responsible for such violence are those responsible for the injustice, who are also in turn responsible for their own reactions to the protests raised.

Non-violent resistance aims to use power. It seeks to detach the consent of third parties from the other side in the conflict. Three parties take part in any dispute. The immediate protagonists are obvious: the housewives against the council, or the blacks against the bus company. The all important third parties are the press, the public and perhaps the national government. The resisters' goal is to rouse the sympathy of public opinion so that the prosecuting authorities lose support for their action against those who are suffering undeservedly. The resisters try to deprive the authorities of the consent of third parties on which their power depends. The prosecuting authorities are then forced to choose: either to maintain their action against the resisters and lose public support both for their particular action on the matter in question, and even for their more general activities; or to give way to the demands because they value staying in power more than winning the struggle on the issue in dispute. The resisters seek to highlight the injustice of the prosecuting authorities, or of the law they are enforcing. Their non-co-operation says 'What sort of government is this that will put men and women in jail because they want a pedestrian crossing in front of their school; because they want freedom for racial integration; because they want freedom of religion; because they want the right to work?'

The support of third parties depends on publicity, a degree of public conscience, or at least the ability to be moved by the pathos of suffering. And in seeking the support of third parties in this way, resisters are using coercion. They are threatening the interests of their opponents, in this case their

¹ Further examples can be found in Gene Sharp *The Politics of Non-Violent Action* (Porter Sargent, 1973).

² To follow out the parallel, we can say that Jesus' birth brought Herod's hostility to God out into the open. But it was Herod who chose to slaughter the children.

opponents' interests of continuing to have public support for their actions. Resisters use coercion by threatening interests that are more important to their opponents than maintaining their position on the central cause of conflict. These interests may be financial. In Chicago stores, businesses and apartment blocks in the black quarter used to be run by non-resident whites. They gladly took the black people's business and trade, but would not employ black labour on an equal footing nor promote them in their businesses. Operation Breadbasket¹ surveyed the trade that black people brought to a business and asked the owners to employ a proportionate number of black workers. If they refused, their businesses were boycotted. A shop with eighty per cent black trade that refused to employ eighty per cent black labour soon found it had only twenty per cent of its trade left. Owners were forced to choose between continuing in business with increased black labour, or employing whites only and being forced to close.

Non-violent resistance uses power and coercion. It can threaten opponents with a loss of the consent of third parties, or a loss of profits. Such threats are also present in strikes, picketing, sitting-in, working-in, blacking and other weapons of industrial conflict. Of course many of the disputes in which non-violent resistance can be applied are far more bitter than employment in supermarkets or provisions of road crossings. My aim in the exposition of how it works has been clarity, and not to claim that non-violence is the wonder drug to cure all society's conflicts.

Indeed non-violent resistance has many limitations. Where publicity is limited, and where there exists no public conscience, it can achieve little. Gandhi would have remained unknown if Hitler had ruled India, and the Nazis had no obvious pangs at the suffering of those who endured their programme of a final solution. Non-violent resistance depends on both the resisters and third parties sharing the same moral presuppositions. But while that argument suggests that non-violent resistance would achieve little under a military dictatorship, the question must be asked whether violent resistance would achieve any more? For when resisters use violence, the governing powers are presented with an ideal propaganda ploy. They can rightly argue that the resisters are threatening the lives, families and homes of the whole society. However just their cause, the issue gets submerged in cries of 'Stop the bombers'.

Non-violent resistance does not derive any value from guaranteeing success. It can't guarantee success nor can it provide an escape route from the tragedies and ambiguities of life. Some social situations, like Hitler's Germany or Vorster's South Africa are so deteriorated that any action against evil is going to have limitations. Sin has long tentacles in spreading disorder. It can grip a society's life so tightly that any action to remove it will cause distress. Conflict and suffering will ensue whatever is done, and if nothing is done. The question is not how to avoid strife and buy a cheap peace, but how in a situation of conflict and injustice Christians should witness politically.

¹ Coretta Scott King *op. cit.* pp.301-2, 313.

My thesis is that non-violent resistance is an appropriate expression of Christian social ethics; of Jesus' command to love the enemy. In the remainder of this chapter I want to demonstrate that from the nature of non-violent resistance, in the next from the nature of Christian social ethics. It does not seem to me that the argument can be made solely to depend on the interpretation of separate texts in the gospel tradition. Jesus' saying about taking swords for the journey (Luke 22.36), or his action in driving the merchants from the temple (Mark 11.15-17), could be compatible with violence or non-violence and do not prove the case either way.¹ And those who dismiss Jesus' own 'pacifism' as due to his unique mission or his historical setting², must also deny to themselves any arguments based on his 'violent' activity. The theological evidence seems to be much more comprehensive than discussion of endlessly disputed texts.

First of all, non-violent resistance expresses the Christian understanding of evil. It makes evil distinct from the evil-doer. It gives an opportunity to show opponents that they are loved and respected even if their activities are resisted. If the alternatives for the opponent are to change his behaviour, or be subjected to violent attack resulting in his possible death, then his behaviour and his personal survival are closely linked. He has his back forced to the wall. When you are saying 'Change, or I might kill you', it is hard for your opponent to feel that you love him. Such a stark alternative does not allow for the fact that men can freely repent. They might not want to commit themselves so rigidly to apartheid, or oppression, but when the alternative is death, men are driven to extreme positions, and those in the middle ground are often driven with them. Violence has to typecast men as irreformable oppressors in order to justify their extinction. Non-violence recognises that men can repent.

Non-violent resistance recognises the communal aspect of evil. It acknowledges that all the right is not on one side. The resister himself is part of the problem, he has contributed in part to the evil now prevailing. He is in no position to arrogate to himself the position of the final judge of right and wrong by exercising the irrevocable judgment of death. He knows he may have made a mistaken diagnosis of the situation; he knows his motives may be wrong; he knows that but for the grace of God, or circumstances, he could be the oppressor. He knows that if he were to use violence, he might be corrupted by it and set in process the spiral of violence. Non-violent resisters recognise that they may be mistaken men.

Non-violent resistance recognises that evil is self-defeating. It recognises that violence has some unavoidable characteristics that constitute the spiral of violence. Evil cannot drive out evil, it needs restraining by pressure maintained in a framework of love. Just as parents discipline their children in a framework of love, non-violent resistance seek to assure the opponent he is loved, while bringing power to bear on the point at issue.

¹ For while they may describe the use of very limited violence in certain very restricted circumstances, they cannot be taken as an *a priori* sanction of the possibility of violence in any case, because the question is when is violence legitimate. These texts might be relevant in discussing an absolute pacifism, but not as arguments on either side of the case for non-violent resistance, as the normal expression of Christian social ethics.

² See for example J. G. Davies *op. cit.* pp.25, 152.

Secondly, non-violent resistance expresses the Christian understanding of man. It seeks to include the opponent in a future society. If your opponent is dead, there is no need to include him. So one way of reforming society is to liquidate all regressive elements. But that view supposes that all the right is on one side, and that men cannot truly repent. However the acid test of faith in the power of truth is whether you believe that truth can include your opponent. Martin Luther King showed how practical this feature was when he said: 'The American negro will be living tomorrow with the very people against whom he is struggling today.'¹

Non-violent resistance presupposes that you and your opponent share a relationship that can be restored. By suffering non-violently it tries to persuade the oppressors to recognise that relationship, to recognise that they are not attacking or victimizing things, but human beings like themselves. For men commit acts of violence to the extent that they do not regard their opponents as fully human. The restoration of broken relationships between men is at the heart of the Christian gospel.

Thirdly, in the actual activity of conflict non-violent resistance denies to the opponents the propaganda ploy that the resisters are threatening the homes, families, lives and very fabric of the community. If the government can brand resisters as men of violence who will stop at nothing to enforce their demands, they have won the support of third parties at a stroke. Most men want peace and security, no matter how great the injustices that obtain. And the government has a God-given duty to maintain the safety of the lives of the community it rules. The men of the bomb on the other hand find all society ranged against them because they threaten the lives of everyone, however right their main objectives may be. Non-violence benefits from having limited objectives.

Fourthly, in the process of conflict, non-violence gives the powerless a means of effecting political change. They may not be able to afford weapons, they have no economic muscle, they may not even have a vote, but they have their bodies. They can march, they can sit-in, they can disrupt, and they can suffer. Non-violence gives a voice to the voiceless, as even Reinhold Niebuhr conceded: 'Non-violence is peculiarly adapted to the needs and limitations of a group with more power arrayed against it than it is able to command.'²

I have not tried in this chapter to prove the case for non-violence by reference to biblical texts, but to demonstrate how non-violence expresses Christian teaching and living in concrete political witness by refusing to threaten the opponent physically. It expresses the Christian understanding of evil, of shared original sin, of the shared humanity of the creatures of one creator, of God's being the arbiter of final judgment, of the possibility that men can repent, of the need to respect those entrusted with maintaining peace and ordered existence, and of the need to give a voice to the voiceless.

¹ Martin Luther King *op. cit.* p.62.

² Reinhold Niebuhr *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (Scribners, 1960).

5. NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Much argument of a 'pacifist' nature is merely sloppy sentimentality, playing on our horror of war. Anyone who has sat through *All Quiet on the Western Front* or *The War Game* cannot help thinking seriously about the pacifist position. These thoughts are often dispelled by the cooling blasts of reality or even theology. But there is solid theological argument for a 'chastened pacifism', drawn from Jesus' teaching on evil, his political option, the cross as redemption, and the power of the Spirit in the Kingdom of God.

Non-violent resistance is not non-resistance. It is not to be a welcome-mat for friend and foe, good and evil to trample on. Jesus said 'Do not resist one who is evil' (Mt. 5.39). What did he mean? Traditional interpretation is given by Paul Ramsey:

'Jesus deals only with the simplest moral situation in which blows may be struck, the case of one person in relation to but one other. He does not here undertake to say how men, who themselves ought not to resist at all or by any means whatever whenever they themselves receive the blows, ought to act in more complex cases when non-resistance would in practice mean turning another person's face to the blows of an oppressor.'¹

Ramsey divides ethics into personal ethics, in which non-resistance is the norm, and social ethics, where one ought to resist on another's behalf. Respectable theological tradition, stemming from Luther's Two Kingdoms' theory, has understood the sermon on the mount in this way.² Luther grappled with the complex task of applying self-sacrificial love in social ethics. He decided that such love could only be expressed within the church, for person-to-person relations between Christians. In the world, God ruled through the orders of society, which use force. Others have expressed this by saying in society we are still at the level of Old Testament law, and cannot apply the ethics of grace.

But there are serious difficulties in the way of espousing Luther's solution. First, he seems to give far more weight to the orders of society than the biblical evidence will allow. For Luther the orders of society (the king, the state) convey the demands of the ten commandments to society: they are a sort of natural law from society, on which the church can build its own 'extra' morality. The ten commandments are viewed as being obvious, built into the framework of existence, and the king and state will naturally express them. Luther's view is highly dependent on an Aristotelian understanding of the world, where the world and its institutions are orderly and stable, and where the government is part of the stable order that God uses to bring men to their full development. But in the biblical evidence, the present order is highly precarious, and the governing powers are by no means in line with the will of God at all points.³

¹ Paul Ramsey *Basic Christian Ethics* (S.C.M., 1953).

² For a modern restatement see Helmut Thielicke *Theological Ethics*, Vol. 2. (ET, Black, 1969).

³ See R. A. Markus *Saeculum—History and Theology in the Theology of St Augustine* (C.U.P., 1970), pp.174-8.

Secondly, Luther's view gives the commands of the state validity as God's will in their own sphere, while the biblical commands of God apply only in the realm of the church. The tragic consequences of this view were reaped in the second world war, as Hitler rose to power unchecked by large sections of the German church. In the biblical understanding, it is not the case that the world and the kingdom of God exist side by side, each making separate claims in different departments of man's life. The kingdom has invaded the world, and its ethics apply to the whole of man's existence.¹

Thirdly, the ten commandments are not a sort of natural law, obvious to everyone, on which one builds an extra 'Christian' morality. The ten commandments are themselves revealed, they are themselves the ethics of grace, given to a people who were freed from slavery to be God's people. A society is indeed fortunate if its general morality is in line with the ten commandments, but it should not assume that those commandments can be taken for granted in all societies.

Fourthly, Luther's solution introduces a division in ethics which is foreign to the biblical understanding of man. In the bible a man is not separated from his social existence. Both in the Old and New Testaments the preunderstanding of most ethics is that the subject is a member of God's redeemed people; the ten commandments are not laws for personal virtue, but the constitution of a social group; Paul's ethics are not guides for personal holiness, but commands for care and love in the Christian community, and Jesus' ethics are ethics for the life of a new people of God. Biblical ethics do not make a division between personal ethics and social ethics, one expresses and arises from the other. So modern views on abortion, euthanasia, marriage and sex arise from secularist views on the nature of man. Christians do not do well just to focus on one issue for debate—what is at stake is a whole world-view, a total assessment of man. Moreover it is difficult to see how a purely personal ethic can be made to stand up to scrutiny. For example, if I must protect my children as their father, because of my social responsibility, must I not also defend myself if attacked on my own, for their well-being depends on my safety? Taken to its conclusion, Luther's division would mean that I am not allowed to defend myself, but others may defend me. If an individual should not defend himself, ought another to defend him?

Fifthly, Luther's solution makes Jesus the source of much teaching on personal ethics, and none on social ethics. Jesus becomes irrelevant to large areas of our ethical behaviour and has no guidance to give on many crucial decisions. We are left with a highly individualist Christology: Jesus as the saviour and example for the individual alone.

Sixthly, it is not necessary to suppose that Jesus made love and self-sacrifice one and the same thing. Self-sacrifice may be a correct expression of love in some circumstances, but a happier definition of love is equal regard. Love is grace, God's unmerited love for each person, giving them equal regard.

¹ See the author's *Social Gospel or No Gospel?* (Grove Booklet on Ethics no. 4, 1975) pp.7-8.

It is therefore not possible to confine Jesus' teaching in the sermon on the mount to 'church and personal ethics', as Luther and many others have tried to do. We must release the ethics of Jesus from an individualist strait-jacket into the life of society.

How should we understand his command not to resist one who is evil (Mt. 5.49)? He is forbidding retaliation in like kind. The opposite of not resisting is retaliation, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. Blows on the cheek and seizures of one's cloak must not be repaid in kind, in particular by process of law.¹ Paul expands Jesus' command in Romans 12-13. Christians are not to repay evil for evil not to avenge themselves, but are to leave vengeance to God. They should not 'be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good'. Paul gives an example: feed and care for an enemy. In other words, resist by kindness.

In Jesus' own ministry we see that he hardly acted as a doormat. He resisted evil in the form of temptation, illness, demon possession; at his own trial he was struck on the cheek and resisted this injustice with strong words, 'if I have spoken wrongly bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?' (John 18.23). Jesus also resisted injustice, but to make this case we must examine his politics. Jesus' teaching was not non-resistance, but non-retaliation to evil in like kind: not to use its weapons.

What was the political situation in Jesus' time? Two states co-existed in Palestine, the occupying power of Rome and the political state of Israel. Jesus staged no protests outside Pilate's official residence, but that does not mean he stayed out of the political arena. No separation was made at that time between religion and politics. The Romans encouraged their eastern subjects to honour the emperor as divine; the Jews refused that worship, the zealots even objected to paying Roman taxes because they went to build temples to Caesar; and Jesus clearly directed his message to 'this generation' of the nation of Israel (Matt. 12.41-2). The Jews understood him as a threat to the nation, and when they rejected his message, their temple was destroyed and their separate existence as a nation ended.

Politically, the Jews believed that if all the people of God kept all the law of God for one day, the kingdom of God would come on earth: Israel would be top nation, and the gentile boot of the Roman soldier would be driven from her holy land. So, who were the people of God and what was the law of God?

The Pharisees opposed the power of Rome, and sought to keep Israel's identity separate. The people of God, they thought, were those who kept all the ritual observances of the law. The Essenes took the Pharisees' position to an extreme; their zeal for the law included willingness to kill lawbreakers to keep Israel pure. They also demanded purity and separation from all defilement, so withdrew to the desert. The Sadducees were in control of the temple and the treasury, and preferred a policy of compromise in order to ensure a degree of religious liberty. The 'zealots', whether or not they existed under that name in Jesus' time, took more overt steps at ridding Israel of the defiling Romans; in 6 AD there was a revolt against the

¹ According to David Hill *Matthew* (Olivants, 1972) pp.127-8.

Roman tax enrolment. All four groups excluded and despised the 'people of the land'; 'this crowd who do not know the law are accursed' (John 7.49). These were the common people who had to earn their living so had no time to keep all the ritual observances: they could not withdraw to the desert: and they were not part of the Sadducean aristocracy.¹

The great concern for precise law-keeping was part of Israel's concern for self-identity. In the Maccabean wars they had been prepared to die rather than fight on the sabbath, and under Roman rule had fiercely resisted attempts to desecrate Jerusalem and the temple.

The Gospels show the results of this concern in Jewish society: no one could be healed on the sabbath; lepers could not be touched; suffering and dying victims on treacherous roads had to be avoided for fear of contamination; tax-collectors and other 'quislings' were treated as outcasts; and the ordinary people of the land were despised by their rulers.

Jesus took the initiative in resisting these political stances and their results. He resisted the social, legal and political customs that prevented men from enjoying God's gift of life: he welcomed tax-collectors to his table, and showed they had a part in the fellowship of God's people; he healed the son of a Roman centurion, he opposed the zealot position on giving taxes, he refused to countenance hatred for the enemy; he broke the ritual laws of the Pharisees and berated them for excluding God's people from his blessings; he held up as an example to them of a good Jew a good Samaritan; he talked with Samaritans and touched lepers; he drove the moneychangers out of the temple and had harsh words to say about the rich supporters of the temple treasury, giving from their abundance. He prophesied that the temple itself would be destroyed. Zealots, Pharisees and Sadducees all found themselves opposed to his teaching. But the common people heard him gladly, and would have made him king. All this activity had political implications, and provoked political resistance. Jews tried to stone him at Nazareth and finally put him on a political activist's cross. In unpublished lectures G. B. Caird wryly commented 'You don't do that sort of thing to people who tell harmless Sunday School stories about a purely spiritual kingdom.'

It will not do to say that Jesus did not take part in politics because he was not living in a democracy, nor use force because he would have met overwhelming defeat. There were enough people around who would have supported the use of force, and the Jews felt strong enough in 66 to take on the might of Rome.² Jesus' stance against the violence of the zealots was not because he was non-political, but because he renounced the politics of violence. He had a different understanding of what it meant to be the people of God. He did not renounce violence because he had a unique role as saviour of men³: he proclaimed that in his ministry God was calling the people of Israel to fulfil her calling as the people of God, and be his loyal servant as Jesus was. He was consciously a pattern for this renewed Israel.

¹ See Alan Richardson *The Political Christ* (S.C.M., 1972) and Martin Hengel *Victory over Violence* (S.P.C.K., 1975).

² See Martin Hengel *Was Jesus a Revolutionist?* (Fortress Press, 1971).

³ *Contra* J. G. Davies *op. cit.* p.152.

Membership of the people of God depended for Jesus on repentance and faith, on complete loyalty to himself, trust that he was God's agent, and obedience from the heart to the spirit of God's law. A gentile woman, a Samaritan, a Roman centurion, tax-collectors and prostitutes could all show this trust, faith and obedience.

And Jesus formed a nucleus of a new people of God in calling together twelve disciples, the twelve heads of a new nation. This group of twelve included a tax-collector; they were encouraged to pay taxes to Caesar: and they were told to love their enemies. This was a political statement. In Luke 19.44 further definition is given to 'enemies'; they are those who would besiege Jerusalem. In Matt. 5.41 they are those who could force you to carry baggage for them—the Roman army. And the Essenes had as part of their creed the requirement to 'hate all the sons of darkness'.¹ Jesus was opposing a current political option.

And he himself refused the temptation to use force and avoid suffering (Mark 8.44); to be acclaimed king (John 6.15) and to use the sword in Gethsemane (Matt. 26.52-4). He urged his disciples not to resort to leadership by domination, but to take the path of self-giving service. (Mark 10.45-45). He taught them to be peacemakers: not those who keep the peace at any price, but those who take the initiative in making peace, taking the steps to go through conflict to reconciliation. His theological basis for saying this was the same as his theological basis for requiring Christians to forgive others; they had been forgiven a great debt by a forgiving God who was their father. Similarly, as Paul elaborates in Romans 5.10, God has made us his friends by loving us when we were his enemies; we must repeat our father's pattern. Jesus' followers are followers of the servant of the Lord who absorbed rather than gave out violence. At the heart of Jesus' politics is the cross. The use of the 'servant' language of Isaiah shows how decisively the 'war' imagery of the Old Testament, used in Judaism, was rejected by Jesus. Isaiah saw the great deliverance of the Jews from Babylon come through Cyrus; but he saw a greater deliverance that would solve the root problem of the continuing disobedience of Israel. That deliverance would not be by military might, but by a suffering servant.²

The question of violence invites us to examine the question of how evil is overcome. Evangelical Christians have long claimed that the evil of personal wrongdoing, and of satanic rebellion, was overcome in the cross. But is the cross only a means of personal forgiveness? Is it also a clue to the heart of God and the pattern of God's action in the world in overcoming all forms of evil? Is redemptive suffering a principle of action? If so, how?

We must examine the biblical understanding of the defeat of evil if we are to discover how to take effective action against it. Camilo Torres has not been the only one to use this disarmingly simple argument about the defeat of evil.³ 'For love to be genuine, it must seek to be effective. If . . . "charity"

¹ From 1 QS 1.9 quoted by O. J. F. Seitz *New Testament Studies* 16 (1969-70) p.49 'Love your enemies'.

² See John Goldingay 'The Man of War and The Suffering Servant' (Tyndale O.T. Lecture, 1976).

³ Camilo Torres 'Message to Christians' in Alistair Kee (ed.) *A Reader in Political Theology* (S.C.M., 1974) pp.145-6.

... does not succeed in feeding the hungry majority ... we must seek effective means to achieve the well-being of these majorities ... Revolution is ... obligatory for those Christians who see it as the only effective and far-reaching way to make love of all people a reality.' And, if violence is needed to make that love effective, then violence is allowed. But, will evil give way before violence? And what is effectiveness?

Evil is very deep-seated. It is more than selfish human wills and individual wrong-doing. It is a power, expressed in the biblical doctrine of the 'powers-that-be'. These can act for man's good or for his destruction. Systems, structures, philosophies, sex, economics and justice are all necessary if human life is to continue. But they can become perverted. Justice can become oppression, economics can become greed, sex can become lust. Paul sees these as powers to which men are subject¹: racial separation, (Eph. 4.6, 9-10), and Jewish law (Gal. 4.8-10). So it is futile to expect that evil will go away through good men beating bad men in war. For good men can be infected by the methods of bad men, and violence breeds further violence. Revolutions have a habit of devouring their children. Men still remain subject to the powers.

God's action against evil was through the cross. There Jesus defeated evil. 'And on that cross Christ freed himself from the power of the spiritual rulers and authorities; he made a public spectacle of them by leading them as captives in his victory procession'. (Col. 2.15). The powers in Jesus' time, Roman law and Jewish religion, claimed to be God's best for men. Jesus refused to obey their all powerful claims, and took their sanction—death. He seemed to lose the fight, but the resurrection showed otherwise. Even though the powers deprive men of life, they will not finally win. And because in Christ men can rise to new life on earth, they can be freed from the powers that hold them captive—sin, slavery, death, the lust of greed and of sex and racial intolerance.

The pattern of victory through suffering is repeated in the book of Revelation. 'Our brothers won the victory over him (the accuser) by the blood of the Lamb, and by the truth which they proclaimed; and they were willing to give up their lives and die.' (Rev. 12.11).

Jesus saw himself as the innocent servant who would die for the sins of many (Is. 54.7-9, 1 Pet. 18-24). He absorbed the violence caused by the conflict between the love and justice of God, and the rebellion of men. G. B. Caird likens violence to a bad coin.² Men will continue to lose by it, passing it on to one another, until someone keeps it and absorbs the loss himself in order to put it out of circulation. The nature of God is to love his enemies, to take the cost of making the reconciliation with men on himself.

As children of this God, how can we reproduce this pattern of activity in political life? We dare not leave this self-giving of God to characterize our religious life alone, or worse still regard it purely as a contractual necessity in God's task of saving man from sin. The character of the spirit within the people of God is the character of a God who loves his enemies.

¹ See John Yoder *op. cit.* pp.135-62; G. B. Caird *Principalities and Powers* (O.U.P., 1956); C. M. N. Sugden *op. cit.* p.10.

² G. B. Caird *op. cit.*

This pattern emphasises that suffering is redemptive; that defeat is not the end: that victory is not necessarily with the biggest battalions.

Jesus put this pattern into practice in his political activity in Palestine. He created a group of people who were freed from the powers of the rebellious age. Because they were freed from the lust of sex, he could ask for no divorce among them. Because they were freed from the desire to oppress he could ask for self-giving service. Because they were freed from the greed of wealth, the early disciples could practice a sharing of their goods. Because they were freed from the racial split of Jews and Gentiles they could demonstrate to the powers of God's mystery, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs with Jews, members of one household (Eph. 4.6, 10). It was this group of people who were able to mount an effective attack on evil through God's armour (Eph. 6).

Effective action against evil comes not through stamping it out with its own weapons, but through establishing communities who by their lives and their life-style wield God's weapons against evil. In their corporate life the Spirit reproduces the love of God who made his enemies his friends. If this love takes action against injustice it will expose the deep underlying tension and conflict in any situation of injustice. Suffering will follow, and non-violent resisters will not expect to avoid it. Rather they will seek to use it, as set out in chapter 4, to raise the question 'Should men have to endure suffering and punishment, because they will not agree to this injustice?' Suffering is endured to rouse the conscience of third parties and opponents. Many have argued that non-violence is too idealistic. It is alright as an 'extra' but for most people it sets too high a standard to be realistic. The report *Violence in Southern Africa* reflects this view,

'For Christians the way of the cross, the way of redemptive suffering, the determination to love at all costs remains the pattern of true discipleship. We believe that this is the road to victory for those who believe in it ... But ... for most men (inside as well as outside the church), the law rather than the gospel is the highest to which they have aspired.'¹

This raises the question again of whether the sermon on the mount is practical ethics. Reinhold Niebuhr denied it was. But in his reply G. H. C. Macgregor stressed that the good news for men from Jesus Christ is that the kingdom of God is a present reality.² Its powers are at hand to transform men. We are not left in a violent world to obey the commands of justice according to our meagre resources. In Christ we are citizens of the kingdom of heaven, and new spiritual resources are available to us. Niebuhr was pessimistic about what could be achieved in this fallen world, because he had a limited view of biblical eschatology. Sinful men will still be sinful, but men who put themselves under the kingdom's power have new resources.

The teaching in the gospels leaves the clear impression that Jesus expected his disciples to live in ways that went beyond normal human behaviour. Domination was out, love restricted only to one's peers was out, hatred for the enemy was out, divorce was to be much harder. These were not

¹ British Council of Churches *Violence in Southern Africa* (S.C.M., 1970) pp.69-72.

² G. H. C. Macgregor *The Relevance of an Impossible Ideal* (Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1941).

counsels of perfection. At the end of the sermon on the mount, Jesus made it very clear he expected his disciples to live by what they heard.

Ultimately the witness of non-violence is the witness of the newness of the power and life of the kingdom. In the kingdom of God that the Jews expected at the end of the age, and that Jesus proclaimed had entered history through his ministry, it was expected that peace would prevail. The wolf would lie down with the lamb, and men would beat their swords into ploughshares.¹ There would be peace. The thrust of Christian ethics in the New Testament is to live the life of the kingdom now on earth. Paul introduces his ethical counsels in Colossians with these words: 'If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above . . . put to death what is earthly in you . . . you have put off the old nature . . . you have put on the new nature.' (Col. 3.1-10). We have already risen with Jesus to the life of the age to come. Therefore we are to live the life of the age to come now. This is the challenge of New Testament ethics. In expressing the life of the kingdom of God for justice and mercy, our methods should be methods that would be acceptable in the final kingdom of God. 'I hold the belief', says a priest in France quoted by David Sheppard², 'that the world will change radically through Christ, and Christ tells us that if we want a new world, we had better behave today as citizens of the world we would like. That is why I think we should not pinch those steel brushes we so desperately need.'

There is no way to peace: peace is the way. This argument places great weight on the means Christians use: the means determine the ends. Max Weber argued that Christian ethics are an ethic of ends: that we are responsible for the ends of our actions and so must determine our means accordingly.³ Others argue that Christian ethics are an ethics of means: certain actions are never right, whatever good ends they might promote. But, in short, the ethics of ends, on its own, becomes pure 'situation ethics': it assumes that we can always calculate the true end of our actions and have no need of rules. The ethics of means on its own becomes pure legalism, refusing to tell a lie, even if it means jeopardizing someone's life. Christian ethics includes weighing means and ends: to keep a principle (the end) it is sometimes necessary to break a rule (the means). But that does not mean rules are no use.

The principle of Christian love is best expressed in most cases in the rule of non-violence. The way to any goal we seek must conform to the means God has chosen to use in redeeming the world. So we need give no reasons for adhering to the rule of non-violence: that is the norm. In three restricted cases we have suggested there might be sufficient reasons for not adhering to the rule. There remains much to be said on both sides of the case for non-violent resistance. But the crucial issues above must be considered.

¹ See Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* IV.34 and Justin Martyr *Dialogue with Trypho* CX for seeing Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 as fulfilled in the Christian community. Some claim that non-violence was the general position up till the end of the 4th century.

² David Sheppard *Built as a City* (Hodder, 1974) p.355.

³ See Max Weber 'Politics as a Vocation' in *On Being Responsible* ed. J. M. Gustafson and J. T. Laney (S.C.M., 1969) pp.293-310. For full discussion see C. M. N. Sugden *A Christian Approach to Violence and Revolution* (M. Phil thesis presented to Nottingham University, 1974) Chapter 6.

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Different Dream—

Non-violence as Practical Politics

by

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'Non-violent action is not only most appropriate to the Christian conscience but also to the revolutionary purpose.'

Jose Migrez Bonino

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