VOL. 207 NO. 5 | MAY 2025 | TEN USD

INSIDE

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Leading faithful conversations in the church and beyond

NONVIOLENCE

Faith-based strategies for justice and peace


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THE PRESBYTERIAN OUTLOOK

VOL. 207 NO. 05 | MAY 2025

AT A GLANCE

IN FOCUS

INSIGHTS

READER'S OUTLOOK

RE: Cultivating curiosity: Lessons from Samwise Gamgee, the Constant Gardener

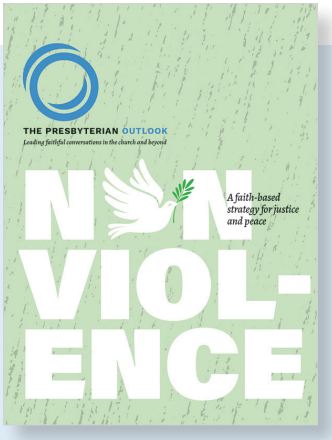
By Whitney Wilkinson Arreche, *Presbyterian Outlook*, March 2025

Scan this QR code to read the full article.

As a decades-long appreciator of [J.R.R.] Tolkien's wisdom and the tales of the shire and beyond, I was so pleased to read her article, articulating the meld between fiction and faith. Kudos to the Outlook for allowing space for such a full understanding of this chronicle — and the ties to Lent were superb. I am saving it to be reread and maybe to spur me to read the books for the fifth time! Thank you!

— Rev. Steve Engelhardt, Berwick, Pennsylvania

ABOUT THIS ISSUE:



On the cross, Jesus did not counter violence with violence. Many might feel "nonviolent direct action" is passive rather than active, a backing away instead of full confrontation. Nonviolent direct action is, however, a powerful tool that Christians and others use in addressing the violence that can consume us and our lives. In this issue of the *Outlook*, we consider Christ's peace as resistance in a world of violence.

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EDITOR'S OUTLOOK

The power we hold to make peace

Teri McDowell Ott

In Africa, it is a curse to see the naked body of your mother, as we learn in "Pray the Devil Back to Hell", a documentary of the 2003 Liberian women's peace movement. Working together for the first time in Liberian history, Christian and Muslim women campaigned to end a civil war of sickening violence that had claimed more than 200,000 lives. Their nonviolent protests culminated in a sit-in, with hundreds of women dressed in white T-shirts reading "We Want Peace; No More War" — arms locked, sitting with their backs to the doors of the presidential palace in Ghana, where the men of Liberia were failing in their peace talks.

In the documentary, security guards arrive to arrest and remove the women. But their leader, Leymah Gbowee, stands in a rage. She says, "If you are going to arrest me, I'll make it very easy for you," and begins stripping off her clothes.

Christians should find Gbowee's unarmed but direct action familiar. In Matthew 5:38-42 (turn the other cheek, give your cloak, go the second mile), Jesus teaches the oppressed to reclaim their dignity and power. In his 1992 book *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, Walter Wink explained that stripping naked – literally – is the nonviolent strategy behind Matthew 5:40, which says, "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, give your coat as well." Wink tied this statement to Exodus 22:25-27, where creditors are warned to treat their debtors fairly and not to exact interest from the poor by stealing their only possession, their coat. But in this abusive situation, Jesus also advises the poor to hand over their coat, which can be translated as "undergarment."

"Nakedness was taboo in Judaism," Wink wrote, and as in Liberia, "shame fell less on the naked party than on the person viewing or causing the nakedness." Imagine the scene this would cause! An indebted peasant strips in open court and then marches out stark naked. "There stands the creditor," Wink said, "covered with shame, the poor debtor's outer garment in the one hand, his undergarment in the other. [The debtor] has said in effect, 'You want my robe? Here, take everything! Now you've got all I have except my body. Is that what you'll take next?'"

Jesus taught us to resist violence with nonviolence, but we often neglect the power of those strategies. In a world wracked with violence, we too quickly succumb to the belief that war is inevitable and that military power, guns or police brutality are the only viable ways to restore peace. But statistics and research reveal otherwise.

In their 2014 Foreign Affairs article, "Drop Your Weapons: When and Why Civil Resistance Works," political scientists Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan found that nonviolent resistance "increased the chances that the overthrow of a dictatorship would lead to peace and democratic rule." No nonviolent resistance campaign is the same. But according to Chenoweth and Stephan, the ones that work have three things in common: they enjoy mass participation from diverse peoples; they inspire regime defections, such as soldiers who refuse to shoot or who even leave their ranks to join the resistance; and they employ flexible tactics, shifting between protests, boycotts or strikes to make the movement challenging to pin down and defuse.

Chenoweth and Stephan's statistics revealed that between 1900 and 2006, nonviolent resistance against authoritarian regimes was "twice as likely to succeed as violent movements" — thereby achieving goals almost half the time, compared to only 20% of violent movements.

Peace often requires more of us than violence: more courage, more creativity, more strategic thinking, more faith. When Gbowee stood to disrobe, the security guards backed off. When the (male) delegates tried to escape the threat of nakedness, the women blocked the windows as well as the doors. And the nation's warring leaders, shamed and sobered, eventually signed a treaty. Gbowee – the 2011 Nobel Peace Laureate – reclaimed her maternal body from war on her own terms, and the women's movement helped create a democratic Liberian government that still endures.

It's hard to step up and disrupt without violence. Peaceful change takes longer, but it also lasts longer. We must use our vulnerability as power and a call to peace. ◆

Teri

NEWS IN BRIEF

Tracking the legal battles faith groups are fighting against the Trump administration

Since he was inaugurated in January, President Donald Trump has faced virtually constant pushback from faith groups, including in the courts.

WASHINGTON (RNS) — President Donald Trump remains locked in at least five major lawsuits filed by religious groups during the first two months of his new administration, showing tensions between the White House and the faith-based organizations challenging his agenda.

The latest chapter in the ongoing legal battles unfolded on Monday (March 17), when a legal report announced the federal government had paid Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Fort Worth more than $47 million for refugee resettlement work — funds frozen since Trump halted the federal refugee program in January.

The case highlights a sustained faith-based pushback to Trump's actions that began almost immediately after he took office. His efforts to reshape the federal government and dramatically alter immigration policy have been met with religious resistance almost every step of the way — including in the courts.

The payment in Texas was part of a broader outcry against Trump's decision to effectively freeze the refugee program and, in turn, abruptly halt funds — including for work done before Trump became president — for the groups that partner with the government to resettle refugees once they've arrived in the United States.

According to The Dallas Morning News, the millions paid to Fort Worth's Catholic Charities agency, which has overseen Texas' refugee resettlement services since Gov. Greg Abbott pulled the state from the federal program in 2016, was part of a suit filed in early March against the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which supplies some funds related to refugee resettlement.

In the lawsuit, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Fort Worth demanded it be paid millions in withheld funds it typically distributes to various partner organizations in the state, alleging Trump's funding freeze was unlawful and led to widespread layoffs.

The Texas result follows another legal victory for faith groups involved in a similar case, Pacito v. Trump, filed by national faith-based refugee resettlement agencies Church World Service and HIAS, alongside Lutheran Community Services Northwest and individual refugees and their families, against the Trump administration for suspending the refugee program. In late February, U.S. District Judge Jamal Whitehead, the federal judge overseeing the case in Seattle, blocked the president's executive order halting the suspension of the refugee program.

However, the day after the ruling, the government sent out "termination orders" regarding federal contracts, also known as cooperative agreements, to all 10 refugee resettlement groups working with the government. The administration then argued in court that the organizations, seven of which are faith-based, no longer had standing to sue. The move resulted in a tense court hearing March 4, in which Whitehead questioned the timing of the termination orders.

Resettlement groups also argued they had yet to see evidence of the refugee program restarting to comply with the judge's order, prompting Whitehead to order the government to produce a status report released last week. In it, federal authorities acknowledged a "significant deterioration of functions" of the refugee program.

In that same March 4 hearing, lawyers for the government suggested the abrupt contract cancellations were part of ongoing litigation in yet another case, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops v. U.S. Department of State, filed in Washington, D.C. Unlike Pacito v. Trump, the suit filed by the USCCB — which also partners with the federal government to resettle refugees — was narrower in scope: The bishops focused primarily on the government's contracts with the USCCB in the U.S., alleging the government had violated the Administrative Procedure Act.

The USCCB's request for a preliminary injunction was denied by a judge in early March, who argued the case should be resolved by the Court of Federal Claims. In response, the USCCB asked the D.C. Circuit appeals court to issue an emergency injunction — the only feasible way to recoup the withheld funds within a relevant timeline. The USCCB, like other resettlement agencies, offers refugees 90 days of assistance upon arrival into the U.S., but the Trump administration froze the program on Jan. 24, meaning the bishops have until April 23 to offer refugees still under their care any funds traditionally provided by the government.

> [Trump's] efforts to reshape the federal government and dramatically alter immigration policy have been met with religious resistance almost every step of the way — including in the courts.

The D.C. Circuit is expected to respond by the end of next week.

"The USCCB continues to advocate for refugees and we are doing what we can to ensure that the newly arrived refugees and their families, who were assigned to our care by the State Department, are not deprived of assistance promised to them by the United States," Chieko Noguchi, a USCCB spokesperson, told RNS in a statement.

Meanwhile, the federal government is also embroiled in two lawsuits centered on the Trump administration's decision to rescind a 2011 government rule that discouraged immigration raids at "sensitive locations," such as houses of worship.

Although the two cases differ slightly, they both allege the government's actions violated both their right to free association and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, arguing rescinding the rule reduced worship attendance and the use of services provided by the religious communities. The federal policy change has already resulted in at least one immigration arrest at a church and diminished worship attendance among immigrants, including those with legal status and U.S. citizens, RNS previously reported.

The first of the lawsuits, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends v. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, was initially filed on Jan. 27 by a slate of Quaker groups and later joined by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and a Sikh temple in Sacramento, California. They already won a narrow legal victory: In late February, the plaintiffs received a preliminary injunction restricting immigration raids at their houses of worship as the case proceeds, although it applies only to the groups involved with the case.

The second lawsuit, filed on Feb. 11, had a more expansive list of plaintiffs, with 27 religious groups, including entire denominations such as the Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Union for Reform Judaism and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, signing on. Those religious groups have also requested a preliminary injunction, but the case is ongoing.

Religious groups and faith leaders are also part of at least three other lawsuits against the Trump administration. HIAS — a Jewish organization that provides humanitarian aid and assistance to refugees — is among the plaintiffs in a suit focused on the administration's halt in global aid funding. The interfaith environmental justice organization Faith in Place recently joined a lawsuit regarding the freezing of Inflation Reduction Act grant funds, and a Lutheran minister is part of a filing challenging the administration's decision to gut the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

— Religion News Service

Read more at pres-outlook.org

BOOKMARK

REVIEWED BY THE REV. AMY PAGLIARELLA, the *Outlook's* book review editor and a PC(USA) pastor with Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago, Illinois.

Good Soil

The Education of an Accidental Farmhand

By Jeff Chu

Convergent Books, 336 pages • Published March 25, 2025

Reading *Good Soil* feels like how I imagine it would feel to pull up a chair at one of the agape meals Jeff Chu hosts for beloved friends. He fills a table with fragrant dishes, overflowing with home-grown beans and greens picked just for us. We listen as he reflects on the seasonal rhythms of growing veggies and raising chickens — all because, as Professor Kenda Dean says, "we expect love to grow here."

Chu, a New York City journalist turned seminarian, found his "just right" place in Princeton's Farminary, a working farm/classroom. He and his classmates learned to dig into their own pasts, cultivate community, and understand their rootedness — all metaphorical activities that corresponded with the literal experience of working the soil.

Seminarians joke that the Farminary's primary crop is sermon illustrations. They aren't entirely wrong. The reclaimed land and rocky soil offer insights into the parable of the sower and other stories from Jesus' agrarian world. And Chu's fascination with the compost pile pays off in a "robust theology of compost." He says our mistakes and the ways we hurt one another aren't the end of God's story but rather the stuff of "new life and new soil and new growth." That'll preach.

Chu shares most lessons with deep self-awareness and gentle humor, though others unfold with sighs too deep for words. The occasional loss of a fragile chick is understood as part of nature's life cycle, while the heart-breaking loss of Chu's dear friend and colleague, 37-year-old Rachel Held Evans, is inexplicable.

This and other parts of Chu's story are difficult to read, particularly his parents' rejection of his husband, Tristan. Chu has struggled and is buoyed by Tristan's "almost shocking grace" as he encourages Chu to stay in a relationship with his family. "My mom's example reminds me that I believe in a difficult love," Chu writes, and we believe him. When we expect love to grow, even in rocky soil, we create space for God to bring about new life. ◆

FROM THE *OUTLOOK* ARCHIVES

49 YEARS AGO, MARCH 15, 1976, VOL. 158-11

George MacLeod Sees Nuclear Holocaust Ahead

London (RNS) — Mankind is heading for a nuclear holocaust which only the Christian church, renewed by being committed to Christ's way of non-violence, can avert, according to Lord George Macleod, noted Scottish Presbyterian leader.

Lord Macleod, who founded the Iona Community off northwest Scotland and is a former moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, gave the warning when he addressed a meeting of the North East London Polytechnic.

Himself a pacifist, he said both the demand of Christian obedience and the present world political situation require the contemporary church to be a pacifist church. ...

"Soon Britain will be spending ($10 billion) on armaments — the equivalent of half the (nation's) balance-of-payments deficit," he said. "(A)ny of [forty nations] could make nuclear bombs in six months ...

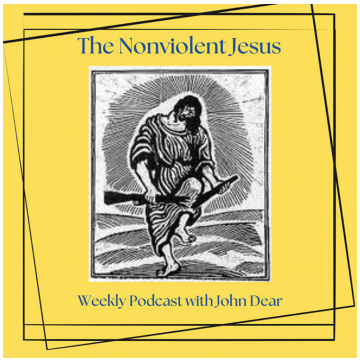
"The United States has enough nuclear bombs for a Hiroshima every day for the next 120 years, yet 20 bombs would be enough to destroy civilization. So what are all the other bombs for? Armaments profiteering." ...

Lord Macleod said he believed the churches' failure to be pacifist undermined their evangelistic credibility. "One of the reasons why young people don't come to church is that we in the church don't really believe in 'crowning the Lamb on the throne' — we prefer realism. Against all common sense we must face the necessity of applying the central doctrine of the Cross, the way of nonviolent love, to the world today."

PODCAST REVIEW

The Nonviolent Jesus

With Father John Dear



If you ever run into Father John Dear, ask him how many times he has been arrested. He'll happily – proudly, even – tell you it's more than 80. How many more, he's not sure, but they've all been for the sake of nonviolence.

The soft-voiced priest, a friend to Desmond Tutu and Mother Teresa, is known worldwide for his anti-violence advocacy. At the inaugural James Atwood Institute for Congregational Courage at Ghost Ranch, New Mexico, Dear explained violence as a complex intertwining of culture and existentialist threats – such as nuclear weapons, famine, gun violence, racism, environmental destruction and climate change – that surround humanity and collectively damage the entire world's spirit.

His weekly podcast, "The Nonviolent Jesus Podcast," expands Dear's witness as a peacemaking and nonviolence advocate, and he encourages listeners to focus on Jesus' nonviolence and work toward a more just and peaceful world. Guests have included author and priest Richard Rohr, Bryan Stevenson of the Equal Justice Initiative, activist Martin Sheen, and author and death-penalty opponent Sister Helen Prejean.

The episodes touch on social justice, authoritarianism, corporate greed, permanent warfare, nuclear weapons, environmental and climate gun violence, capital punishment and racism, among other things — all forms of violence that affect us daily in one form or another.

Father John Dear speaks at the James Atwood Institute for Congregational Courage, sponsored by the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, in 2024.

"Meanwhile ... we're called to follow the most radical nonviolent revolutionary in history — Jesus of Nazareth."

Guests have discussed peacemaking, community organizing, public action, democracy and authoritarianism, and Dear planned a future episode to discuss the way Jesus built a bottom-up, peaceful grassroots movement, pulling from the Book of Timothy. Dear emphasizes that Christians must remain nonviolent resistors as part of our faith, and each episode offers an entry point for listeners.

And as disciples of Jesus, Dear says, we are called to this work.

"Jesus did not sit back and do nothing," Dear says. "He got up and moved forward and took on the empire, and we have to do the same."

Each episode begins with a centering prayer, inviting listeners to enter into a time of reflection, remember the teachings of the nonviolent Jesus and invite the presence of a God of peace.

The website says the episodes are 30 minutes long, but they tend toward 40 minutes. The thoughtful and lively conversations are worth the extra few minutes. You'll want to rewind a few times to absorb the information and reflect more deeply on his guests' words and their myriad experiences. ◆

Scan to listen to the podcast.

REVIEWED BY:
DARTINIA HULL, managing editor of the *Outlook*.

The principles of Kingian Nonviolence

Teri McDowell Ott

Photo: Library of Congress

FIRST PRINCIPLE:
Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.

SECOND PRINCIPLE:
The beloved community is the framework for the future.

THIRD PRINCIPLE:
Attack forces of evil, not persons doing evil.

FOURTH PRINCIPLE:
For the sake of the cause and the goal, accept suffering without retaliation.

FIFTH PRINCIPLE:
Avoid internal violence of the spirit as well as external physical violence.

SIXTH PRINCIPLE:
The universe is on the side of justice.

There are many schools and strategies for nonviolent resistance. Someone can train you in nonviolent conflict resolution at the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center, or you can study Marshall B. Rosenberg's nonviolent communication. You can research the nonviolent social movements of history that have successfully toppled dictators and brought lasting peace. But I find myself increasingly drawn to Kingian Nonviolence, with its foundation in the Christian tradition and its vision of beloved community.

Martin Luther King Jr. did not become a civil rights leader overnight. He grew up in a family of resisters; his father, "Daddy King," resisted racial segregation and inequality. A close family friend, Howard Thurman, was deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, and brought the discussion of nonviolence into the King home. In college, Martin was introduced to and influenced by Henry David Thoreau's "Essay on Civil Disobedience." Coretta Scott King, Martin's partner in marriage and his thought partner, traveled with him to India in 1959 to learn more about the nonviolence Gandhi called *satyagraha*, which can be translated as "truth-force" or "love-force." Ultimately, though, the life and teaching of Jesus Christ grounded every step King took on the path of nonviolent resistance.

King's 1958 book, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, best articulates his nonviolent philosophy. After his death, his colleagues Bernard LaFayette Jr. and David C. Jehnsen reread everything King wrote and codified his philosophy. The six principles of Kingian Nonviolence are now taught worldwide and applied to social movements seeking nonviolent transformative change.

According to Lafayette and Jehnsen, Kingian Nonviolence was never meant as an academic study but as a catalyst for real-life application. It is a set of principles for people who want to be a part of helping the "moral arc of the universe" bend toward justice and who see beloved community as a realistic goal to work toward.

The following is a summary of the six principles with discussion questions to aid study and reflection. The sources I studied (listed at the end) phrase each principle differently, but the core meanings remain the same. The text I've primarily drawn from is Kazu Haga's *Healing Resistance: A Radically Different Response to Harm.* Haga is a senior trainer in Kingian Nonviolence, and his book is an excellent and accessible introduction.

FIRST PRINCIPLE:
Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.

Too often, people mistake nonviolence as weak and submissive or as backing down from conflict or violence. But nonviolence is an active, not passive, strategy — a means to resist evil, not acquiesce. It's the unarmed Chinese demonstrator remembered as "Tank Man" blocking a line of tanks with his body in Tienanmen Square. It's Ieshia Evans, the Black woman "Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge," as the iconic photo of her was titled, boldly opposing a line of heavily armed police officers in riot gear while wearing a beautiful, flowing sundress. It is Jesus willingly accepting the cross — neither passively submitting to it nor fighting its violence with more violence.

Nonviolent resistance requires more courage and personal, spiritual and moral strength than violence. It is easy to give into our human impulse to strike back when we have been struck. Nonviolence is a more challenging but effective path. It redefines "courage" as standing open and vulnerable before evil and the enemy rather than as closed, defiant and ready to strike. Nonviolence requires courage of the heart.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. How do you define courage?
2. In what ways, or in what people, have you seen nonviolent courage exemplified?
3. Why is the warrior oftentimes viewed as more courageous than the conscientious objector?
4. What changes would help society view nonviolent resistance as more courageous than violence?

SECOND PRINCIPLE:

The beloved community is the framework for the future.

In her 2017 memoir *My Life, My Love, My Legacy,* Coretta Scott King wrote, "The beloved community is a realistic vision of an achievable society, one in which problems and conflicts exist, but are resolved peacefully and without bitterness. The beloved community is a state of heart and mind, a spirit of hope and goodwill that transcends all boundaries and barriers and embraces all creation."

The term "beloved community" is often mistaken for a community of like-minded and likable friends, where everyone gets along and relationships are untroubled by tension or conflict. If such a place exists, this picture does not describe what Martin Luther King Jr. understood as beloved community.

Beloved community includes all people — even our enemies, those with whom we are to seek "friendship and understanding," according to King in *Stride Toward Freedom,* "opponents," who he said we are "not to humiliate." Beloved community is not about loving those who are easy for us to love. It's the challenge of loving those we despise, don't understand, disagree with, even hate. This is not our current reality, but understanding beloved community gives us a framework and a goal to work toward for our future.

While no human community is free of conflict, the beloved community dedicates itself to dealing with conflict nonviolently and working toward a future of lasting peace. King wrote, "The aftermath of nonviolence is beloved community, while the aftermath of violence is tragic bitterness."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. Recall a community conflict that ended well and a conflict that didn't. Examine the engagement of each. Did the conflict include violence (including verbal assaults or emotional or spiritual harm)? Was the conflict engaged with nonviolence — opponents who sought understanding and tried not to humiliate one another? Which methods of engagement strengthened the community? Which led to bitterness?
2. Envision a future conflict in your community. How do you imagine yourself working through the conflict in a way that builds beloved community? How can this framework be applied to conflicts in personal and family relationships? In national or global relationships?

THIRD PRINCIPLE:

Attack forces of evil, not persons doing evil.

In *Healing Resistance,* Haga writes, "People are not our enemy. Violence is our enemy. Injustice is our enemy. Any worldview that stands against life, love, and community is the enemy."

A faith that seeks understanding puts this principle into practice. What stories shape people's behavior? What hurt or trauma is behind the violence people perpetuate? What system, structure or institution turns its people into perpetrators of violence? In *Healing Resistance,* Haga highlights the 2003 Abu Ghraib prison scandal, during which U.S. military police and a private security firm were alleged to have tortured Iraqi prisoners, and instances of police brutality to reveal what research has shown: a person's context influences their logical ability to make choices. Violent contexts and cultures make violent people.

Thus, we cannot solve our problems by attacking individuals. "When people talk about 'holding someone accountable,'" Haga writes, "the key word should not be accountable, but holding. Does that person feel held, or do they feel attacked and judged? Are they feeling opened up, or are they getting defensive?" It's important to remind ourselves of our long-term goal. "If our goal is simply punishment," Haga writes, "then responding to harm with more harm is perfectly effective. But if our goal is accountability and the healing of relationships, we need to create space for people to be held."

A common mantra of nonviolent activists is, "Hurt people hurt people." The opposite is just as true; healed people heal people.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. What systems or contexts of violence can you identify in our society? What people or communities are shaped by these contexts?
2. Reflect on the mantra "Hurt people hurt people." When have you witnessed a person hurt someone else from their own hurt?
3. Now consider the opposite: Healed people heal people. Have you witnessed the healing of a conflict or a relationship from an individual or a community? What have you healed from that gave you the ability to help others in similar situations?

FOURTH PRINCIPLE:

For the sake of the cause and the goal, accept suffering without retaliation.

This is the trickiest principle, raising valid ethical questions about whether suffering people should be expected to suffer even more for good causes. Haga says this principle should not be reduced to "accept suffering," period. King taught that self-chosen sacrifice can be a transformative and redemptive force in conflict. Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:39 models the use of chosen sacrifice to transform conflict: "If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also."

According to Walter Wink's *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, too many Christians have misinterpreted the message of this passage, as if we shouldn't resist evil but accept suffering unopposed. Wink clarifies this teaching by highlighting that the "right cheek" is struck and the left is offered in response. In Jesus' ancient society, people used the left hand for unclean tasks. We can then assume that the strike to the right cheek was done with the back of the right hand. Jesus was not referring to a fistfight, but an insult. The intention was to humiliate, not to injure. To turn the other cheek – the left – denies the oppressor the power to humiliate, which effectively and publicly sends the message, "Try again. Your first blow failed."

According to this fourth principle of Kingian Nonviolence, accepting suffering in pursuit of a just goal places us in a different and empowered relationship with that suffering.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. Consider a just goal you are passionate about pursuing. How might the nonviolent pursuit of that goal require suffering or sacrifice?
2. Consider a conflict transformed by nonviolent sacrifice (a historical conflict or a conflict from your personal life). What thoughts or feelings arise when you witness people sacrificing and suffering for a just cause?
3. Consider these options: The person who opposes injustice with violent power, and the person who opposes injustice with nonviolent power. Which feels more powerful to you and why? If your instinct leads you to violent power, what cultural or media models have inspired that feeling?

FIFTH PRINCIPLE:

Avoid internal violence of the spirit as well as external physical violence.

The work of nonviolence takes place the world at large as well as within each heart and spirit. Internal violence cuts deep. Degrading, dispiriting or dehumanizing messages about yourself, your community or your culture are violently harmful. Such messages can take root and grow so powerful that we start believing them true.

In his book *Race Matters*, Cornel West writes about nihilism as the enemy of Black survival in America: "that is, loss of hope and absence of meaning." To live in a society that consistently sends messages (sometimes subtle, sometimes

overt) that Black life matters less than White life cuts deep internal wounds. "Sometimes," Haga writes, "the work of nonviolence is as simple as telling someone they are worthy."

Hate poisons the hater as much as those to whom the hate is directed, making it another form of internal violence. Hate makes us sick in spirit. This is why King said "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. When have you struggled with internal violence or messages that you weren't enough or weren't worthy? How did you cope with this internal violence? Have you found your way to healing? If so, how?
2. Recall a time when you witnessed someone's hate. What was the expression on the person's face? What did you see in their eyes? If you could conduct an autopsy of this person's spirit, what do you imagine you would find?
3. We tend to dislike in others what we dislike about ourselves. Consider someone with a trait you dislike or even despise. Can you forgive that trait in yourself? Can you forgive it in the other person?

SIXTH PRINCIPLE:
The universe is on the side of justice.

"The moral arc of the universe is long," King said, "and it bends toward justice."

As a strategy, nonviolence requires patience and perseverance. It's easy to lose sight of the big picture and easy to give up. "We live in a shortsighted society," Haga writes. "Every time war breaks out, every time there's another mass shooting, every time a piece of legislation moves us away from beloved community, we lose perspective." Too often, we sanction and sanctify war, naming them "holy" crusades. We have made long-term investments in violence: war, military strength, prison systems, guns and weapons of mass destruction, economic policies that perpetuate poverty, and in environmental degradation. To reap the rewards of nonviolence, we must divest from violence and invest just as much or more in the work of peace. But war and violence bend the universe away from justice.

King taught, "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope." Persisting in nonviolence requires an unwavering faith that our God is a God of justice. We are responsible for our actions today and the world we build for tomorrow's generations. Prophetic visions of Scripture reveal our promised destiny: a peaceable kingdom (Isaiah 11:1-9), and a new earth where "mourning and crying and pain will be no more" (Revelation 21:4). Our perspective must be long, our eyes set not on the patch of grass at our feet but on the horizon.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. Martin Luther King Jr. had a vision for our future. What is your dream? What can you do today to work toward this future dream?
2. Consider the ways our communities and nation have invested in violence. How can we stop supporting harm? How can we invest more in peaceful strategies and peacemaking?
3. Our world situation makes it hard to trust in justice. What small, daily action helps you sustain hope? ◆

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RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY:

- *Healing Resistance: A Radically Different Response to Harm; My Life and Training in the Nonviolent Legacy of Dr. King,* Kazu Haga
- *Stride Toward Freedom; The Montgomery Story,* Martin Luther King Jr.
- *Nonviolence 365,* a virtual class offered by the King Center, thekingcenterinstitute.org

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Nonviolence, fear and hard questions

Laurie Lyter Bright

Conscientious Objectors' Memorial Plaque. © 2012 David Dixon

"Allowables," a brief poem by the great Nikki Giovanni, tells the simplest of stories: the speaker encounters a "papery" little spider, which scares her, though she knows it poses no danger. She smashes it in her moment of fear. She ends the poem by wondering whether one is permitted "To kill something / Because I am / Frightened."

The line between poet and prophet is thin, sometimes nonexistent. Giovanni reveals something shameful and difficult about the impulses of humanity: when we are afraid, we cause harm. For Christians, nonviolence takes to heart the refrain of Jesus Christ to "fear not!" To practice nonviolence is to overcome our inclination to harm in the face of threat. To practice nonviolence is to see fear for what it is and to disallow its rule over our beliefs and actions.

> Nonviolence is the belief that we should love our neighbors as ourselves and that our neighbors are everyone and everywhere.

> To practice nonviolence is to see fear for what it is and to disallow its rule over our beliefs and actions.

Fear is potent, and it means control. If you make a nation sufficiently afraid, you can send it to war. If you make people sufficiently afraid, you can imprison people by the hundreds of thousands, justify genocide, turn neighbor against neighbor and make everyone an enemy. Suppose we can overcome the power of fear. In that case, we suddenly become incredibly free. That freedom is profoundly threatening to oppressive powers everywhere and deeply hopeful in the liberation of others. None of this asserts that nonviolence is without pain, loss and death for the practitioners — it often is. Nonviolence simply means that pain, loss and death are not more powerful or more important than our refusal to contribute to the pain, loss or death of someone else.

Nonviolence is a foundation of conscientious objection. A shocking paucity of research has examined the nature of conscientious objection to war; a mere handful of stories and museum exhibits are scattered worldwide. One would think that conscientious objection is an obscure phenomenon, not a global movement with thousands participating across the historical record of wars, as it truly is. Although conscientious objection to harming others is a core value of several faiths, including Jainism and Buddhism, here I focus on the nature of conscientious objection in recent memory in the U.S., among Christians in particular.

Christian conscientious objectors in the U.S. come from a variety of traditions. Quakers and Mennonites are best known for their commitment to nonviolence, but the ethos crosses denominational lines. Nonviolence, for Presbyterians, essentially means that when God said, "Thou shalt not kill" and "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," God included all people and all places. Nonviolence is acting like God meant it. Nonviolence is the belief that we should love our neighbors as ourselves and that our neighbors are everyone and everywhere. Nonviolence means this commitment persists even when our neighbors do not love us back. Nonviolence stands firm even when our neighbors want us dead.

Nonviolence isn't a popular stance, and frequently it costs dearly. But it is also rooted in creativity, strategy and faith, which are inherently liberating qualities. In a 2013 interview with NPR's Michel Martin, Giovanni said, "Killing is a lack of creation. It's a lack of imagination. It's a lack of understanding who you are and your place in the world. Life is an interesting and a good idea." Nonviolence means actively choosing creation, and it lies at the heart of the preaching and practices of Jesus Christ. In the interview, Giovanni was responding to the 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech, where she taught for many years. The atrocity had been committed by a former student about whom she had expressed concern. Her words reflect the inherently uncreative response that defines violence in any form. Violence has one aim:

destruction, the antithesis of creation. Nonviolence insists that more options are available, always.

Violence is also a short route to an unsatisfactory conclusion. It does not heal, restore or enact justice. It cuts short the possibility of any of those things happening at all. In moments of pain, fear and hostility, we may follow our impulses toward violence — but if we choose to kill, we circumvent the possibility of repair or restoration. If you've harmed someone I love, I might want you to suffer, but to inflict or incite suffering means I give up both my humanity and yours. I reduce us both to the worst versions of ourselves, often at the worst moments of our lives. Reconciliation is not always possible, but retaliatory violence leaves no room for healing. Violence – quick or drawn out, systemic or personal – tends to seek the fastest way to blot out pain and obliterate our fears. It channels fear and anger in the least helpful way imaginable.

Violence ... tends to seek the fastest way to blot out pain and obliterate our fears. It channels fear and anger in the least helpful way imaginable.

On the individual level, this dearth of creativity might lead us to the default of interpersonal violence. As a culture, our lack of creativity and our wholehearted acceptance of violence show up in our cultural love affair with militarism. Militarism is a commitment to war as an inevitability, to battle as a site of glory, to the idea of the most significant value – in time, money and human lives – being found in constant preparation for and participation in the next cataclysmic moment of mass human destruction. It is a national cheer at having "the most lethal fighting force in the world," as if the capacity for causing mass death is something of which we should be proud.

Militarism is, of course, deeply embedded within our houses of worship. Flip through most hymnals and see how often we sing about battle and conquering. Failing to set aside worship time to honor military veterans on Veterans Day is one step away from heresy in most communities, where a celebration of conscientious objectors would be anathema. Our learned gratitude for those who served – and our understanding of the very real risk each of them has taken for a valued cause – is omnipresent in the U.S. The movement of conscientious objection and nonviolence is intended not to detract from the lives of veterans nor to demonize them — quite the opposite. Conscientious objection invites us to ask more deeply: Is war aligned with following Jesus Christ? And if it is not aligned with Christ, how can we ask anyone to participate on our behalf?

The importance of this dialogue now may seem peculiar at a moment when the U.S. does not have an active military draft. Worth noting, though, is how military recruiters continue to pop up in most high schools, particularly low-income high schools with a population primarily composed of students of color. Worth noting is that nearly all 50 states automatically register young men for the federal Selective Service System when these young people receive their driver's licenses and apply for financial aid for college. This registration, required by law, signifies their readiness to serve should a draft reemerge. This requirement is suspiciously uncommon knowledge among 16- to 18-year-olds and, I'd wager, many parents. The machinery of our military-industrial complex churns on successfully, based on storytelling, marketing, unimaginable amounts of funding and fear of the "other." The processes for becoming a conscientious objector are vague; they vary by denomination and receive remarkably little funding and support. It's almost as if our U.S. military does not want any attention paid to the humanity and consciousness of those who die to serve it.

Militarism is, of course, deeply embedded within our houses of worship.

As a denomination, we've long wrestled with these questions. As recently as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s 204th General Assembly in 1992, the denomination's Advisory Council on Social Witness Policy put forth a resolution, subsequently adopted by the assembly:

> Whereas, An estimated 2,500 military personnel sought conscientious objector status during the military conflict in the Persian Gulf and only 400 cases were finally adjudicated by the Department of Defense by May 1992, and over 150 service members have been or are now being prosecuted for incidents surrounding their conscientious objection to serving in the Persian Gulf War. Approximately fifty conscientious objectors have been imprisoned and subjected to harassment and abuse. …
>
> Be it Resolved, that the 204th General Assembly (1992):
>
> 1. Reaffirm its support for legislation that would establish in statute the right to selective conscientious objection (that is, the Military Conscientious Objector Act);
> 2. Reaffirm its support for other reforms of conscientious objector processing that would assure due process, access to information and assistance, implementation of international norms for the rights of conscientious objectors, and expedient relief;
> 3. Reaffirm its opposition to peacetime conscription and registration; and
> 4. Reaffirm its policy for the repeal of the Military Selective Service Act.

These steps, which seem tepid enough to appeal across political lines, focus on individuals' rights by positioning conscientious objection as a fully personal choice — which it is. It entails questioning one's internal alignment between faith and action.

At the same time, conscientious objection faces outward in invitation. By undertaking the role (and accompanying stigma and harm) of conscientious objection, individuals elevate a posture of radical rehumanization – of the soldier, of the "enemy" – and interrogation of our convictions. They offer an alternative way to engage with the very nature of humanity and war.

Conscientious objection invites us to ask more deeply: Is war aligned with following Jesus Christ?

A posture of gratitude toward active service members might also look like a posture of expressing how sorry we are that our country asked them to serve in the first place. The rates of post-traumatic stress disorder and veteran suicides say much about both the realities of war and the realities of how we treat service members upon their return. Surely better care is possible somewhere in the Department of Defense's $850 billion budget. The ways in which conscientious objection troubles the waters of our national militaristic identity are powerful, whether an active draft exists or not. I hesitate to use the phrase "in peacetime." When the U.S. actually experiences one of those, let's revisit the issue.

Beyond these points, the right moment to raise our particular and collective consciousness is always now. Consciousness – being aware of our internal lives, our minds and the world around us – is a gift of being human. Consciousness-raising circles have been effective worldwide in supporting individuals' learning in community, deepening self and shared knowledge, and building the depth of relationships that enable one to become many and, in turn, become sites of action and meaningful change. Consider Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's conscientization, second-wave feminism and justice movements centering on disability, Black Lives Matter, queer identity and more. Creating spaces to know ourselves and our communities deeply is a wise and powerful starting place for change.

Conscientious objection, then, is a movement not only for soldiers and not only for times of war. It offers the opportunity to ask hard questions and to know our answers firmly. Would my conscience allow me to work for or support U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement when I'm aware of how it harms my immigrant siblings and refugee neighbors? Would my conscience allow me to turn against a neighbor under any amount of political or militaristic authority? In the rise of fascism, mass destruction comprises millions of individual choices to say yes or no or nothing at all. To comply or to resist, to consent by silence or to speak out are choices that people everywhere face all the time.

Conscientious objection to violence embodies what we profess to believe. Jesus Christ, over and over again, refuses to categorize people by caste,

To comply or to resist, to consent by silence or to speak out are choices that people everywhere face all the time.

class or condition. He sees people as fully human and asks questions that provoke their consciousness. Jesus refuses to let his followers off the hook. In the face of suffering, we are required to care for one another, even and especially when that care costs us dearly. He invites us to look deeply within and then to live accordingly. We never do so alone.

Nonviolent resistance is nothing new. Theologian and scholar Walter Wink spoke of the surprising success of nonviolent movements across geography and history, and the millions of lives made better for it. Nonviolence encompasses a surprisingly broad community, one that includes Leo Tolstoy, Cesar Chavez and thousands whose names will never make the history books.

Choosing to listen and respond when your conscience objects to the world's violence will put you in good, challenging, world-changing company.

Jesus Christ was a nonviolent, radical leader who knew what happened to people who spoke against the violence of the Roman Empire. Across the centuries, many others have taken that same risk, knowing that they would likely meet a similar end. So why take the risk if death is all but inevitable?

Because Christ told us to follow him. Because risking nonviolence is the only way violence stops. ◆

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In response to the lion's rampage

The political, symbolic and actual strength of nonviolence

Alejandra Oliva

As a translator, I am fond of St. Jerome. The cranky early Christian desert monk created the Vulgate Bible and volumes of correspondence on everything from proper scriptural translation to the benefits of asceticism. A story about Jerome, likely apocryphal, sticks with me.

One afternoon, in the midst of prayers, a lion came roaring into the monastery. Some monks fled in fear, others prepared to fight the beast, but St. Jerome sat calmly until the beast came to him, and he pulled a thorn from its paw. The lion immediately relaxed and became a devoted companion to Jerome for the rest of his days.

I've been thinking a lot about this story lately — it's been a tremendously difficult few months, and I don't feel strong. One by one, I've seen communities that I care about, that I am part of, targeted for discrimination — trans folks, immigrants, the disabled, the ill, people of color, my friends and family and loved ones. The lion is rampaging — maybe out of a sense of its own woundedness, but the damage it does is no less real, for all that it feels that people are intent on not recognizing it. Equanimity and calm feel like a far cry from something I'm capable of. These days, I am inclined to scream and rage, not to gently or tenderly assist the thing that is harming the people I love. What good does it do against such pervasive harm to practice nonviolence?

I don't want to have to let the lion approach me to stop the damage it does. I don't want to trust that the force of my will is enough to tame the lion when I feel its hot breath on me, and I don't want to cater to the version of the world its teeth and claws have created. And yet, there is so much political, symbolic, *actual* strength in that kind of nonviolence. In the introduction to *Let the Record Show*, an encyclopedic recounting of the work of ACT UP New York, Sarah Schulman draws a line between the actions of the students who sat at the lunch counter of a local Woolworths in Greensboro, North Carolina, and the AIDS activists who disrupted mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral.

"For one moment," Schulman writes of the lunch counter protesters, "before being beaten, being threatened with death, facing real violence, and enduring the humiliation of food spilled onto their heads and clothes while being called racial epithets, before being punched and then arrested, these young people created an image that has survived the decades and become emblematic of protest: they created the world that they wanted to see."

These students at the lunch counter made the violence of segregation visible by putting on display the consequences of their dreams in our real, flawed world. Surely sitting down to eat lunch is not worthy of a death threat? We see the same thing over and over again — people using the violence of the oppressor and their own nonviolence to show the injustices of the world. His own government assassinated St. Oscar Romero for doing his sacred duty of naming the dead and pleading for peace. The AIDS activists Schulman memorializes in the pages of her book created a disruption to everyday life to demonstrate the lack of one in the face of immense, senseless deaths, and they were beaten and arrested for their trouble. Nonviolent direct action casts light on the gap between our world and the world to come.

And yet, I can't help but think that this form of resistance asks a punishingly high toll from those who practice it. True strength means leaning down even when you're uncertain of the outcome, when the teeth hold real threat. And the cost of doing this work, of repeatedly putting your self, your body and your humanity on the line, is high. It demands a constant confrontation with all that is dehumanizing and violent, with all the elements of society that wish you dead or disappeared or silent, and it is no wonder so many people come out on the other side of that work feeling less human, silenced and estranged from the world around them. There's a sense that this work, which we are still in the midst of, will not be completed until we make a world where people can rest and reconcile their experiences with this new place they have given so much to create. ◆

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Witnesses of the Lamb:

Revelation for active nonviolent resistance

Timothy Reardon

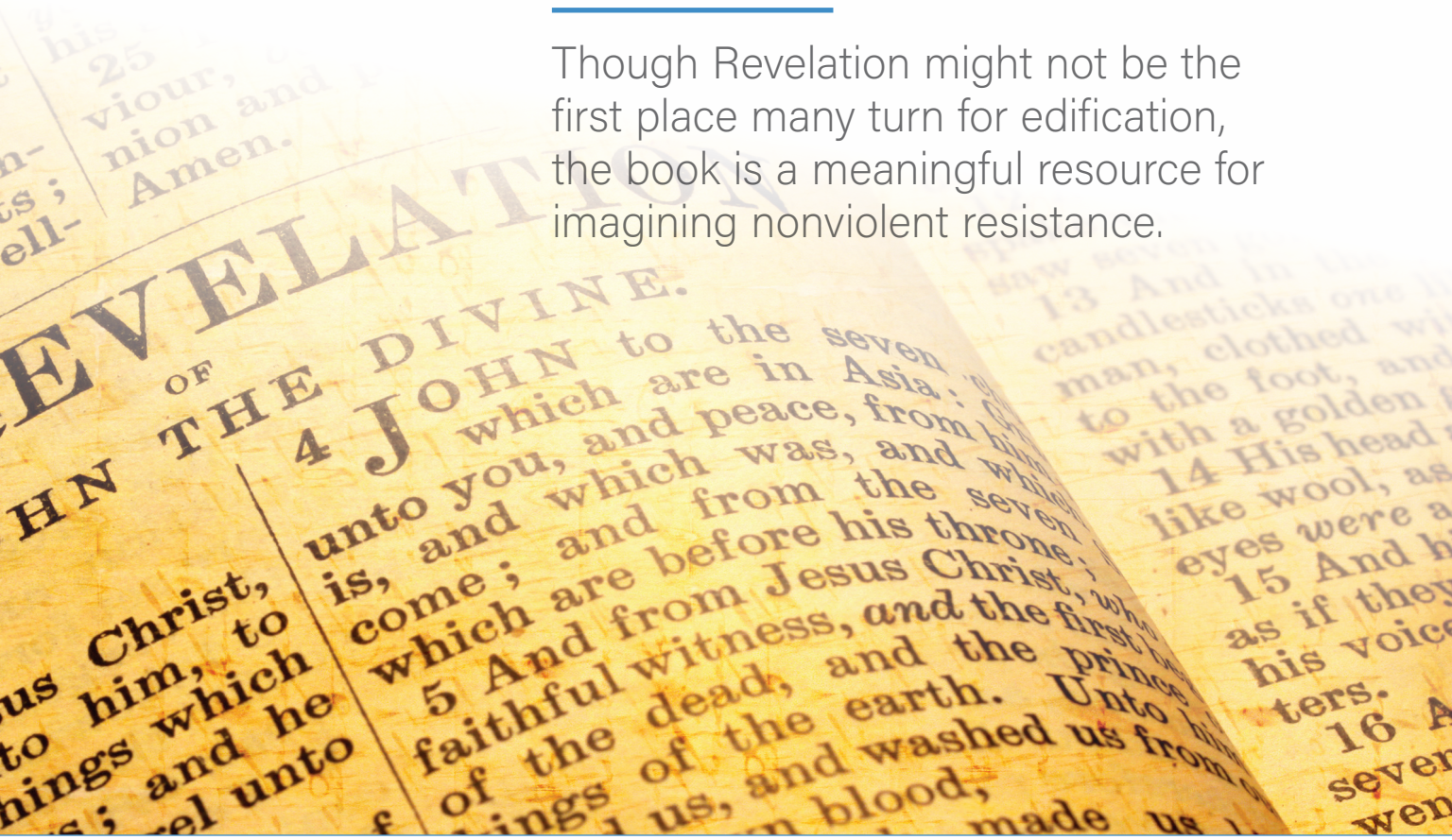
Considering Revelation as a resource for active witness to justice, life and the nonviolent resistance of the Lamb

The book of Revelation is undeniably violent. Much of its imagery is the stuff of nightmares, and the violence comes from all over. Yet, despite the pervasiveness of this violence, it is remarkable that none is perpetrated by or exhorted of the church. However, this doesn't mean Jesus' followers are just along for the ride, waiting out the suffering until the dragon's ferocity and God's avenging justice have run their course. As Brian K. Blount has argued, John's Apocalypse portrays and encourages active nonviolence, even *resistance*. It engages our social and political imaginations and inspires the church to consider what it means to be followers of Jesus amid times of political turmoil. Though Revelation might not be the first place many turn for edification, the book is a meaningful resource for imagining nonviolent resistance.

NARRATING VIOLENCE

One problem with many popular readings of Revelation is that they don't make those who should be uncomfortable uncomfortable. They don't call out collusion with exploitative powers or unmask economic violence. They justify environmental exploitation through escapist end-time speculation. But why should Revelation need to make us uncomfortable? I believe it is literature for those experiencing oppression and those tempted to give in. A good reading requires an understanding of context as we learn to demystify domination, unmask power, and testify to another world amid this violent one.

In the process, we should be careful with the rhetoric of "violence." Those with power highly police this term to define what can count as violence and how to distinguish "legitimate violence" and destabilizing "violent threats." The designation of a peaceful protest as violent, for example, can serve as political posturing to



> Though Revelation might not be the first place many turn for edification, the book is a meaningful resource for imagining nonviolent resistance.

justify reactionary and authoritarian violence as "peacekeeping." The purveyors of this rhetoric are interested in defining terms, narrating the story, and directing our social imaginations, and Rome was no different.

Rome understood itself as a purveyor of legitimate violence, though it marketed its violence as the foundation for its greatest marketable virtue, the *pax Romana* (the Roman peace). Rome plastered its legitimate violence in public spaces, images, and rhetoric around the empire. However, marginal voices sometimes break through the noise, such as Calgacus, a foreign general in Tacitus's *Agricola* who encourages resistance to Roman imperialism, stating, "Rome creates a desert and calls it peace." Roman "peace" requires continual war, violence and devastation.

Revelation portrays the *pax Romana* similarly. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the well-known four horsemen of Chapter 6 depict life under Roman domination. Thus, John paints an alternate picture that dismantles the official Roman script. There is no peace or economic well-being. There is war and economic exploitation, and the hope of creation is the divine salvation and wrath of the Lamb.

"WRATH" ISN'T A FOUR-LETTER WORD

For many, things get uncomfortable — perhaps rightly so, considering some of Revelation's rhetoric. For instance, John's gendered tropes for Babylon and their potential for legitimating gender-based violence should be named and rejected. Some language, however, that makes us uncomfortable may function precisely through this discomfort.

When I teach the Babylonian exile, I often read Psalm 137:

"By the rivers of Babylon — there we sat down, and there we wept when we remembered Zion" (v.1). Judah's captors torment and mock them, asking them to sing for them. And with this psalm, they do sing a dirge – a jeremiad – that ends with a pair of vicious beatitudes:

"Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock" (v. 8-9).

Seemingly by design, this is difficult to read and preach. Retaliatory child killing is not easy sermon fodder. Yet, this is not a treatise on the proper uses of infanticide. The psalm invites readers to feel the people's pain and hopelessness. The vicious terminology is not a directive but an attempt to describe the indescribable. For those experiencing oppression, the song is a vehicle to express unspeakable lament. For those outside, it gives some way to hear a modicum of that experience.

Seemingly by design [Revelation] is difficult to read and preach.

Similarly, the language of Revelation is not for polite company. Schüssler Fiorenza depicts Revelation as "written with a 'jail-house' perspective, asking for the realization of God's justice and power. It, therefore, can only be understood by those who 'hunger and thirst for justice.'" As John invokes holy war imagery and God as divine warrior, one might wonder, "Where is the enemy love?" Where is the belief that even our enemies have some good in them? John's world is dualistic. The battle is between good and evil, which means he doesn't fall prey to both-side-ism. John's God chooses a side and doesn't ask the mourning to speak words of appeasement to the powerful — or to remember that "there are good people on both sides." Instead, John offers hope by vividly dismantling the claims and myths of oppressive power, creating space to imagine life differently.

DOMINANT MYTHS AND UNMASKED POWERS

John is interested in judgment against cosmic, systemic, structural power and evil. The dragon (Satan), the beast (Rome) and the kings of the earth all represent oppressive powers. These, who oppress the just, are the primary focus of God's anger. Persons are culpable to the degree they tie themselves to these realities. Throughout, John depicts a colonized people captivated by Rome's seemingly unconquerable power, declaring in worship, "Who can fight against it?" (13:4). John's task is to free them from this captivation.

The beast stands always, already conquered. The dragon's power, through the beast, has already proven powerless, having been defeated at Jesus' bloody execution by victorious life that conquers the beast's death-dealing. Moreover, the beast, and thus Rome, is conquered by one whom "the state" deemed a killable, political threat to peace. This criminal, in John's imaging, has turned cosmic lord. For John's readers, the possibility now exists that the eternal, indomitable city and empire may not be invincible and perhaps is already defeated. Martin Luther King Jr. writes in *Why We Can't Wait*, "The old order ends … when the enslaved, within themselves, bury the psychology of servitude." In John's imagination, the ostensibly dominated one is revealed as lord of all, and the Lamb's witnesses share in this domination-system-dismantling vision.

Exposing myths that mask and maintain structures of servitude benefits nonviolent resistance, but this often requires an unsettling jolt. However, Walter Brueggemann argues that in appropriating these myths, dominant culture is grossly uncritical and, when confronted, can be reactive and unable to tolerate serious criticism.

Consider the current assault on any discussion of race, gender and sexuality, which has involved draconian restrictions and censorship of anything perceived to discuss diversity, equity, or inclusion (DEI) or so-called "race and gender ideologies." These actions demonstrate a dominant culture's attempt to regulate and maintain imbalances of power that it believes is its right. Similarly, national stories are carefully and reactively policed in history textbooks; the stories we tell and accept matter.

Alternately, elements of the dominant culture can appropriate the rhetoric of persecution where no persecution exists, claiming for itself the mantle of suffering to shield its own power and privileges. Think of, for example, the current administration's executive order, "Eradicating Anti-Christian Bias." How might this be seen through the lens of John's Apocalypse? My biased lens might consider Revelation 13:11, where a new beast rises from the earth, appearing somewhat like a lamb (5:6), a poor reflection of the Lamb,

yet sounding like a dragon. Without prescribing absolute readings, Revelation offers a way of reimagining events, actions and myths of power.

THE LAMB MAKES WAR

"Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and wages war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule[c] them with a scepter of iron; he will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty (Revelation 19:11–15).

John's Apocalypse holds a theme of war-making, but our nonviolent church has no part in perpetrating it. Instead, as far as that term is used, war is primarily executed by the powers, systems, and structures we noted above. War is made on earth by the dragon (Satan, 12:17), the beast (Rome, 11:7; 13:7), the kings of the earth (7:14; 16:14; 19:19), and even the locusts, which are an allegory for invading armies (9:6, 9; Joel 1–2). In heaven, the angels and dragon make war, but overall, war-making is the provenance of the powers of domination.

> … Revelation offers a lens for reimagining events, actions and myths of power according to an alternate imagination.

There are two telling exceptions. In 2:16 and 19:15, the Lamb makes war against the powers of domination, with a sword coming out of his mouth. Jesus is victorious in a *war of Word*. Jesus, of course, has already conquered the beast's best weapons, death and execution, with life in his own blood, where this blood represents Jesus' death-conquering life. This latter battle seems almost a formality, but now, the powerlessness of the dragon's weapons is on display when conquered by Jesus by fundamentally different means.

> Nonviolent resistance benefits from exposing powerful imaginaries that mask and maintain structures and systems of servitude.

If there were official reminders everywhere in the Roman world that peace, justice, and salvation come by Roman war-making, then this scene strikes a blow at this war-making pillar of their domination myth.

THE CONQUERING WITNESSES OF THE LAMB

"But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death" (Revelation 12:11).

Though the Lamb in Chapter 19 is the only one to make combat with his wordy sword (or sword-like words), the Lamb is not alone. An "army" accompanies him, most assuredly those witnesses vindicated in heaven and those said to "follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (14:4). Though these witnesses produce no swords, they are not passive, and 12:11 articulates their active witness. These are those who conquer (1) because of the Lamb's blood, (2) because of their testimony, and (3) as Craig Koester translates it, because "love for their lives did not make them shun death." These saints are active, and their activity is, above all, imitating Jesus.

Beginning with (3), it is easy to miss in translation, but this clause about life and death clearly invokes Jesus' well-known saying about the cost of discipleship and picking up one's cross:

"For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:35).

This saying is not about passive suffering or suffering's ability to accomplish anything. Nor is Jesus calling anyone to suffer for suffering's sake. Jesus is calling disciples to join him in confronting the powers in Jerusalem, even if it means death. There are two sets of parallel wants here. Whoever

wants "self" loses everything. However, even if one loses one's life (self), by joining Jesus' active resistance, one ultimately conquers death. Those who actively resist are called to embrace life, not death or suffering. At the cross, Jesus confronts the powers of domination and death with life, and life triumphs over the strategies of death. Here (1), we return to Revelation 12:11; the Lamb's blood (and bloody death) washes one clean. Because Jesus' death in faithful commitment represents a *life* in resistance to death, Jesus leads disciples out of the captivation of death and into life.

Those who actively resist are called to embrace life, not death or suffering.

This is why (2) John describes Jesus as the faithful witness-example (*martys*, 1:5; 2:13). John states that the Lamb's army of witnesses conquer because of their witness-example-testimony *(martyrion)*, which is the witness-example-testimony of Jesus, both about him and the testimony he gives and embodies. John structures this language carefully. To be a witness-example (or martyr, though death is not required) is an active reality, a witness to resistance. A witness testifies to a truth through word, action or embodied life. Jesus' status as the foundational witness is laid from the beginning; witnesses embodying the faithful witness are set free in their taking on Jesus' active discipleship resistance outlined above.

Finally, this imitation demonstrates an-*other* kingdom. As Rowan Williams writes in *Why Study the Past? The Question for the Historical Church*, "The martyr is the conduit of divine presence who vindicates the claim to another citizenship." In the early church, martyrs were those who publicly confessed Jesus as lord, which Romans received as rejecting Caesar's authority. They didn't see room for both Jesus and Caesar; they were as incompatible as God and Mammon. Christians were even condemned as "atheists" because confessing Jesus' lordship denied the cosmic ordering that structured Roman life — that is, it denied Rome's domination myth. In Revelation, all of this is predicated on witnesses becoming the imitators and embodiers of the Lamb.

CONCLUDING FOR AN ACTIVE NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE

Near the end of his life, Martin Luther King Jr. sought to draw more attention to what he called the triple evils of racism, poverty and militarism, and he became increasingly unpopular. Nevertheless, he pushed on, marching with labor, considering occupation of Chicago's highways and bringing government to a halt. Were these nonviolent protests? They were indeed active, confrontational and condemned by the state. J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, said of King openly in 1967, " … it is clear that [King] is an instrument in the hands of subversive forces seeking to undermine our nation." Soon, in April 1968, King himself would die a martyr.

Pursuing active nonviolence is often difficult, accompanied by vilification and rejection by the purveyors of power. Revelation aids resistance by deconstructing the dominant noise, exposing the false myths, providing a pattern of action and offering hope for a different world. There, the church learns language and lyrics for worship as resistance, forming identity and solidarity as a counter-kingdom. John's narrative calls the church to follow, embody and proclaim the subversive witness of Jesus, the Lamb who wages war with the sword from his mouth. Considering the centrality of imitation and the importance of embodying the quintessential witness-example in our active, faithful witness, it is a short leap to embodying Jesus' own "combat," a clear pattern for an active word and sharp witness for justice, peace and God's reign — a commitment to speak justice clearly as the foundation for peace and conciliation.

Revelation calls the church to a counter-kingdom and a scandalous witness, following the path of the Lamb in active nonviolence. May our eyes be open to these possibilities as we approach Revelation anew as a resource for a common hope and guidance to follow Jesus in the way of peace. ◆

THE REV. DR. TIMOTHY W. REARDON is an assistant professor of New Testament at Eastern Mennonite University and Seminary in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and an ordained minister in the Mennonite Church (USA). He is the author of *The Politics of Salvation: Lukan Soteriology, Atonement, and the Victory of Christ.*

FRESH OUTLOOK BIBLE STUDIES

FRIENDSHIP

WRITTEN BY KATY SHEVEL

Explore the key aspects of genuine friendship that transcend superficial connections to alleviate loneliness and foster a community where everyone feels seen, acknowledged and valued.

THE PRESBYTERIAN OUTLOOK

I am a witness

Dartinia Hull

Wade Burns holds a vault of personal insights gleaned from a lifetime of friendship with Civil Rights icons.

The intimate exhibit "I am a Witness" can be found on the second floor of Union Presbyterian Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina. Photo courtesy of Susie and Wade Burns.

Wade Burns, architect and mild-mannered civil rights activist, has a few gentle words for the person on the other end of the line.

He says, "I loved your [February] Civil Rights issue." The issue shows a photo of a group of men inside the Oval Office at the White House, and Burns points out that there is a name missing for a person peeking from behind another person. He's concerned about this name because he fears the history highlighted in the issue is slipping away, falling off the record as the people who participated in and experienced the events of the Civil Rights Movement die.

This history is why he and his wife, Sallie, have lent their personal collection of historical photos to Union Presbyterian Seminary. Visit the Charlotte campus and walk up the stairs in the Thomas W. Currie building. You'll find the hall lined with photographs – some of which were in the news outlets of the day, others more personal, some black-and-white, others in color – of heroes and events of the Civil Rights Movement. Many revered names – Martin Luther King Jr, John Lewis, Ralph Abernathy, for example – were his personal friends. He and Lewis shared an especially close friendship lasting from the 1960s to Lewis' death in 2021.

"To view the exhibit is to get lost in time," writes Rodney Sadler on the seminary's website.

The call to Burns on this day is an opportunity to ask about the exhibit at Union, his friendship with Lewis, who served 17 terms as the U.S. representative for Georgia's 5th district, and the congressman's practice of nonviolent direct action during the Civil Rights Movement.

Would Mr. Burns be willing to write about that?

Mr. Burns demurs. "I'm not a writer," he says. "I'm an architect and storyteller.

"You got a minute?"

ABOUT 60 DELIGHTFUL AND THOUGHTFUL MINUTES LATER …

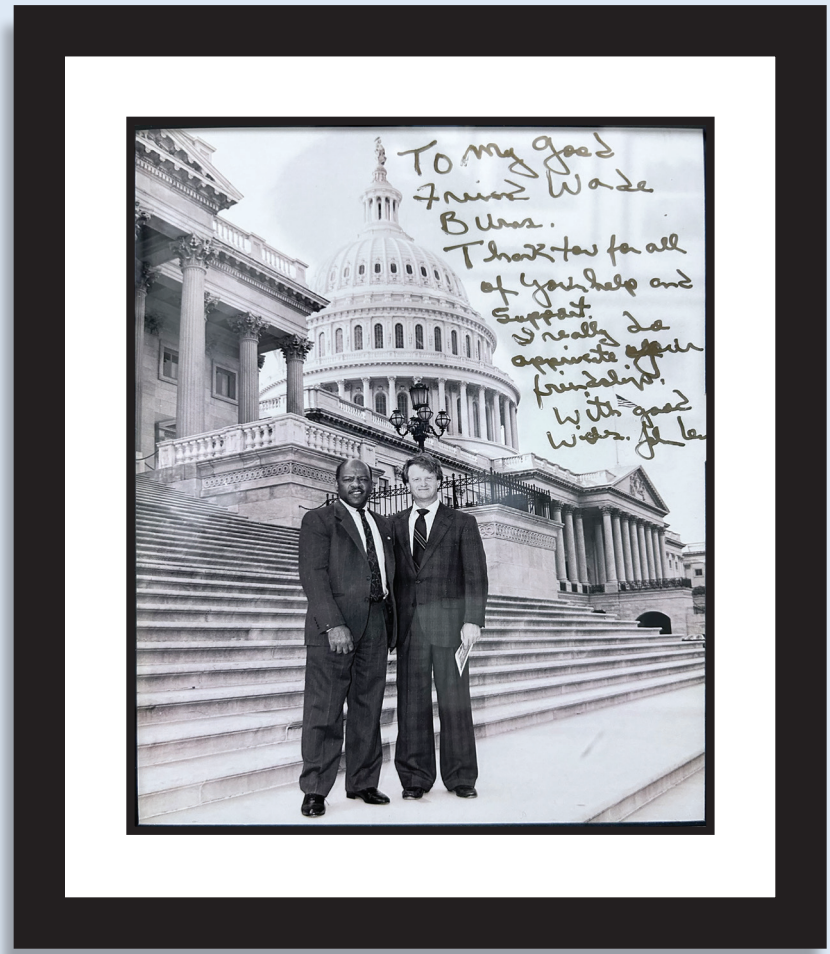
The story isn't what you think (is it ever?) and is more a lesson than a story. The kind voice on the other end of the line is attached to a vault of insights and memories from a person who witnessed the Civil Rights Movement, the personal lives of its major players and the years beyond with both macro and wide-angle lenses.

> The story isn't what you expect … and it's more a lesson than a story.

As a teenager, Burns spent several months in an integrated high school, which was just about the only interaction he'd had with anyone Black.

"I was a White boy who had only been integrated in public school for a few months of my senior year, never met one of the Black students at Virginia Tech when I was there that went on in the College of Architecture, where I never knew any African American person other than a domestic worker. And then I'm living in the Black community, and I was educated in one heck of a hurry."

He's getting ahead of himself. After graduating, Burns worked at



LEFT: *Wade Burns with John Lewis on Capitol Hill. Photo courtesy of Susie and Wade Burns.*

ABOVE: *John Lewis stood as best man at Wade Burns' wedding to Susie. Photo courtesy of Susie and Wade Burns.*

The Rev. Ralph Abernathy, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and John Lewis speak to the press in Montgomery, Alabama, in May 1961. The Freedom Riders' presence challenging segregation at bus stations across the South touched off riots during which the National Guard was deployed. Photo courtesy of Susie and Wade Burns.

(Left to right): Mathew Ahmann (National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice); Whitney Young (National Urban League); Martin Luther King Jr. (SCLC); John Lewis (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee); Rabbi Joachim Prinz (American Jewish Congress); Rev. Eugene Carson Blake (United Presbyterian Church); A. Philip Randolph; President John F. Kennedy; Walter Reuther (labor leader) with Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson partially visible behind him; and Roy Wilkins (NAACP). Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

an architect's office and was given the job of redesigning homes in the historic West End in Atlanta, Georgia. The West End was then a primarily Black neighborhood of modest but sturdy brick homes, houses with good bones that needed updating. The West End residents, concerned about gentrification, appealed the redesign plan to Atlanta officials.

Burns didn't plan to gentrify the neighborhood, but he did move into West End himself. After Atlanta's mayor, Maynard Jackson, allowed him to continue, he updated homes and worked to ensure that the original residents could remain in them. Some of those folks are famous today.

"By a wonderful piece of fate, all of the heroes were my neighbors," he says. "The closest was Ralph Abernathy, who succeeded King as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, who moved his church across the street from my house, and then [John] Lewis down the street and Mr. King eight blocks away.

"And I worked [in] that community, not understanding anything about race, but understanding what the Civil Rights Movement was about. It was about human dignity. It was about being (the other), being dismissed."

While working and living in this community, he also learned about the active nature of nonviolence, which James Lawson, a Fisk University professor, had introduced to his friend John Lewis.

"And he [also] introduced Lewis and others to the concept of 'unearned suffering,' and that unearned suffering was a path to grace," Burns said.

King had embraced this idea. "As my sufferings mounted, I soon realized that there were two ways that I could respond to my situation: either to react with bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force," he wrote in his article "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence.""

"I decided to follow the latter course," he wrote. "I have lived these last few years with the conviction that unearned suffering is redemptive … "

> " … I worked [in] that community, not understanding anything about race, but understanding what the Civil Rights Movement was about. It was about human dignity. It was about being another, being dismissed." — *Wade Burns*

Lewis also embraced this, Burns said. His friend suffered a fractured skull on what became known as "Bloody Sunday," the walk from Selma, Alabama, to Montgomery, Alabama, that was in protest to voting rights denied Black Americans. Lewis was also attacked while visiting Rock Hill, South Carolina, as he supported lunch counter sit-ins. He never fought back, never swung out, Burns said, still in awe and admiration after more than half a century.

Nonretaliation and nonreaction to violence can be difficult to grasp, Burns said, and he points the metaphorical finger back to himself.

"White folks don't have the measuring sticks to know what it is because we didn't experience it and don't experience it and don't know how powerful it is and how malignant it is." "It" being all the things that Black people in America have experienced: violence, racism, hatred.

NONVIOLENT DIRECT ACTION

To remove injustices, nonviolent direct action strategy "absorbs hatred into a greater love, knowing the hater is more than their hatred and may even be converted to our side," according to the Nonviolence Toolkit at the Center for Applied Nonviolence. "The cycle of hatred and violence ends with us."

Burns points to the immediate forgiveness given to Dylann Roof, a White supremacist who murdered nine Black people in Charleston, South Carolina's, "Mother" Emanuel AME Church in 2015. Roof had hoped to start a race war, he later said — which could have happened if family members of victims, and survivors, hadn't called for peace.

In this month's benedictory, Rodney Sadler writes that nonviolent direct action is often confused – mistakenly – with passivity. Still, it is one of the most potent responses a person can have when confronted with violence, he writes.

And Burns believes nonviolent direct action in the U.S. is directly borne out of the teachings of the Black church, and he compares the 5,000 lynchings in the post-Reconstruction and Jim Crow South to Christ's suffering on the cross.

"They were so parallel," he says. "[There was] extraordinarily painful death sanctioned by the state, public humiliation of people considered so worthless they deserved to be tortured to death.

"All of that took place in Jim Crow. Jim Crow was, in many ways, just as bad [as slavery]. You weren't enslaved, but your wife and your daughter could be taken from you. There's no paperwork. You could be abused in any way. There was no prosecution.

"And the nonviolence movement was based on suffering and grace. You could be nonviolent, even though you had unrepentant offenders," he says. "And all that ties into the last words of Jesus, 'They know not what they do.'"

What those who were enslaved, and eventually, those living under Jim Crow rules but attending Southern Black churches, came to understand was Jesus gave us a gift of grace. "You could forgive the person who had done the worst, though they were not repentant. But you could forgive them … so you did not have to carry the burden of bitterness and hate toward them, but only the burden of healing from what they had done to you.

"That was an incredible message."

Lewis, King, and other leaders in the Civil Rights Movement leaned into the message of uncompromising peace that had formed despite their bondage in the U.S.

"All the folks who had been in all these churches for a few hundred years understood: these [White] folks weren't going to repent. But hate wasn't going to get you anywhere, and you could only do that by forgiving them as best you could … and trusting it would be dealt with elsewhere by the Lord."

'EDUCATED BY THE BEST'

The photos lining the walls at Union Seminary are a historian's gold. There are glossy, black-and-white photos with hand-written notes, color pictures of Burns' children and family sitting with Abernathy, Lewis, and Bond, and a shot of Lewis and Burns suited up in tuxedos; Lewis looks both serious and proud, the best man at Burns' wedding. The collection also includes a quietly eloquent shot of Lewis standing beside still waters and remembering Julian Bond, snapped by photojournalist Steve Schapiro at the exact moment that Bond's ashes were being scattered in the Gulf of Mexico and gifted by Schapiro to Wade and Susie.

The deep friendship that Lewis, Bond, Abernathy and Burns shared is apparent in the comments that accompany the pictures. You feel the joy of sitting on a porch with friends, the energy of children scampering through the house and past these civil rights giants, the pride the children – now grown – exude when photographed later at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. Some photos are signed by the subjects; others, by the photographer who froze time.

The photo from the Oval Office is also in the collection. The man with the missing name? John Lewis.

In the intimacy of these friendships, Burns learned about the lack of nutrition for poor people and the demand for labels to be added to foods. Because of Dick Gregory's insistence for nutrition labels, when Burns' oldest son was discovered to be sensitive to gluten, Burns was able to more easily modify his son's diet.

"I felt like I was privileged," Burns said. "I got mentored over the course of decades by Andy (Andrew) Young, the King family, John Lewis, Ralph Abernathy … I was taken in by all of those folks, because I lived and slept in the community, which is a whole different thing than working in the community."

He hopes that the message of nonviolence and the history behind the faces pictured in "I Am a Witness" will be the Union exhibit's primary focus, and that the faith he witnessed in these men and women will be apparent.

"They demonstrated the difference between believing in Jesus – *we won a prize, we get to go to heaven, and you don't* – versus *believing* Jesus, which is a lifetime of hard work until it isn't; until your faith is strong enough that you do not respond with anger to horrific mistreatment.

He pauses.

"I wish I was a writer," he says. He's concerned about the story being lost. "The survivors, the witnesses — are almost all gone." ◆

> "Jesus gave us a gift of grace that we could forgive the person who had done the worst, though they were not repentant. But you could forgive them …" — *Wade Burns*

SUGGESTED READINGS:
The Cross and the Lynching Tree, James Cone
Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story, Martin Luther King Jr.

SUGGESTED VIEWING: *"Selma"*

DARTINIA HULL is managing editor of the *Outlook*.

FAITHFUL CONVERSATIONS

Violence, nonviolence and faith

Convener: Laurie Lyter Bright | Conversation partners: Jermaine Ross-Allam and Robyn Ashworth-Steen

Is violence ever excusable? Is it forgivable, inevitable? How do we heal the violence committed by our respective faith traditions? Robyn Ashworth-Steen, Jermaine Ross-Allam and Laurie Lyter Bright consider the weight of violence among people of faith.

LAURIE: You're both faith leaders engaged as scholar-practitioners where faith and political praxis intersect. You're also two of my favorite people to talk to about meaningful ideas, as we share an interest in violence, nonviolence and peacemaking. How do you see your traditions engaging with the nature of violence?

ROBYN: I am writing this response on Holocaust Memorial Day, one of our darkest days of the calendar. But the trauma of this time lives on in my body and individual and collective consciousness. I am aware of how much this trauma and the violence [that was] enacted on Jewish (and many other) bodies lives on for generations. I learn these lessons, too, through the study of sacred, violent texts where brothers kill each other and women are brutally raped.

I am part of a progressive stream of Judaism, with the first female rabbi being ordained privately in 1935. She was later killed in a concentration camp. My progressive tradition fought for equal marriage, gender equality and much more. It progresses and sometimes regresses. I attempt through my teaching, community work and academic scholarship to address systems of harm within biblical texts so that we are critical, responsible, activist readers of those texts and, crucially, of the worlds that are built in their name.

LAURIE: Likewise, Christianity leaves a long legacy of violence — both caused and endured by Christians.

JERMAINE: From its birth in the 16th century, the Reformed tradition has maintained its identity as part of the magisterial tradition of global Christianities. Magisterial, in this case, involves the intention to sustain multiple relations to the military, economic and social orders through which forms of inequality have almost eclipsed egalitarian community.

Presbyterians (among others) have used violence through the institution of chattel slavery, justifying its indulgence based on Christian religion. Other Presbyterians in the same period sought to create an environment in the United States where a civil war would save White individuals, families and institutions from the economic power of slaveholders to curtail their civil liberties, and [where such a war would] restrict the economic dominance of Northern industrial capitalists.

The *Book of Common Worship* includes prayers imploring the "Righteous God" understood to "rule the nations" to "guard brave men and women … in battle for their country." Though the prayer presumes that they "*must* be at war" (emphasis mine), it asks the "Righteous God" to "let them live for peace." The relation of living for peace to the presumption of war as a necessity raises questions about the sovereignty of God that the Reformed tradition must continue to resolve.

ROBYN: I see how deeply the poisonous vein of misogyny runs in our tradition and throughout time and space more generally. I am angered by spaces that refuse to change when met with new ideas or new people. I am heartbroken, devastated and unable to find the words to speak about the violence in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank. The violence, the inability to talk, the inherited trauma, the exclusion, the fear, the racism, the extremism — all of it is overwhelming. And yet I know I am not free to desist from the work of turning towards the pain and taking action in any way I can. One of my beloved teachers, Rabbi Sheila Shulman, may her memory be a blessing, wrote, "In short, what I am so angry about is the betrayal, again and again. Of what I love."

LAURIE: Do you believe violence is inevitable? Excusable? Forgivable? Have we always been like this, and will we always be?

JERMAINE: In light of the Haitian revolution and other violent decolonial struggles around the world from the 17th to the 21st century, I concur with Calvin – to a point – that under certain conditions, the capacity to employ force "to avenge the afflictions of the pious, at the command of God, … I [should neither] afflict nor hurt." Even if violence is necessary and excusable, it damages both the doer and receiver until a new balance is negotiated and implemented and [until] rituals of healing, reparations and atonement are performed along with what the United Nations refers to as guarantees of nonrepetition.

ROBYN: I have been trained to read my sacred texts closely and critically as early as my Bat Mitzvah at 13 years old. A Jewish hermeneutic means bringing attention to each stroke of the quill, understanding that every breath of a word has significance and that a text is multilayered. I see, more and more, the violence within the texts, showcasing the very worst of human nature.

The power of Jewish theology underscores this concept. We are created in the image of God and are good, very good, in fact. We have the *yetzer hara* — the evil inclination. We also have the *yetzer tov* – the good inclination – and both must be balanced. But often, the yetzer hara can overpower the good. We all have the potential for evil, for extreme violence. Recognizing this [potential] mitigates the risk of us dehumanizing others and encourages compassion and curiosity in the face of complexity or fear.

LAURIE: Do you see violence as an inevitability under the conditions of the world as it looks today or as a part of the human condition? Do you imagine a different world?

JERMAINE: Violence is not an inevitability. It is, however, a necessary evil until the Holy Spirit unleashes power sufficient to inspire the leaders and benefactors of unequal societies to renegotiate the social contract. Such a renegotiation should focus on establishing circumstances where all beings experience more opportunities to offer themselves fully in service to their Creator — without arbitrary interference and suppression from cultures and institutions that deny the historical debt of reparations, [that] pillage nature [and that] subject Indigenous peoples to settler colonialism, apartheid, genocide and land theft.

ROBYN: One ancient Mishnah (or teaching from around 200 CE) is now well known to any Jewish child who attends Jewish summer camps: "[Rabbi Tarfon] used to say: It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it." From a young age, [you hear] the teaching . . . that you are responsible even if you cannot fix it. The entirety of the Tanakh lives out the tension implicit in this Mishnah: there is the World As It Is and the World As It Could Be.

I struggle to go as far as saying violence is an inevitability of the human condition because

[then] I would have to forgo that core teaching that people are ultimately good. And I struggle to say that violence is in any way necessary. Perhaps a way to respond to the question is with a story, a deeply Jewish response I know [here retold and regendered from *Avot D'Rabbi Natan 31b]:*

A woman is planting a tender, young sapling tree, and suddenly, there is a commotion on the street outside the house. People are running everywhere. "What's happening?" she asks someone as they run past.

Breathlessly, the person shouts back – "Haven't you heard? The Messiah is here!"

The Messiah! The gardener throws her tools down.

"Stop," a voice shouts. It's the local rabbi. "You must stay and complete the planting. Only then can you go and greet the Messiah. For Messiahs will come and go, but planting must continue."

If I were to see violence as inevitable, I would throw down my gardening tools, and I am not prepared to do that.

LAURIE: If violence is us waiting on both the Divine and each other to learn a new way of being, how do you understand violence as it relates to the idea of sin?

JERMAINE: "Violence" refers to the sin by which individuals, groups and institutions create, deploy, collaborate with or cower before that which is meant to reduce human beings to a condition "as much like brutes as possible." The goal is "blind[ing] the eyes of your mind," "embitter[ing] the sweet waters of life" and "shutt[ing] out the light which shines from the word of God" until "American slavery [has] done its perfect work."

Those words from Henry Highland Garnet [and his 1843 address "to the slaves of the U.S."], who was a 19th-century Presbyterian minister and statesman, should remind us that early American chattel slavery and contemporary wage slavery are interrelated forms of full-spectrum violence.

Violence is the sin of those whose spiritual and economic integration into the political economy of this age – to paraphrase Romans 12:1-2 – explains their choice to offer other people's bodies as living sacrifices, thereby refusing to worship God through the renewal of our collective mind.

ROBYN: I am moved by the construction of violence as sin and, as you have said, a sin of choice. Hannah Arendt's theology taught that every moment is imbued with natality, the chance for something to be born, for life or death, and we can choose. To deny such is to deny our responsibility and agency. Using my Jewish/religious lens, I may use the words of idolatry. To sin is to commit idolatry: forgetting our oneness and instead creating hierarchies and violent separations.

According to the Talmudic rabbis, there are times when violence is allowed. Yet they make important rulings that seem to stand the test of time. You cannot kill another if you are in the strange and terrible position of being made to kill them to save your own life *(b.Sanhedrin 74a).* The rabbis instituted the principle of *pikuach nefesh* — preserving life, as embedded in the Torah. You shall "live by them," [says] the Torah (Leviticus 18:5) — not die by them. Jewish teachings recognize the primacy of life: "Whoever destroys one soul, it is as though they had destroyed the entire world. And whosoever saves a life, it is as though they had saved the entire world: *(y.Sanhedrin 4:9).*

LAURIE: So if the root of our respective traditions lies in protecting and uplifting life, how do we heal the violence done in the name of our faith traditions?

JERMAINE: I agree with historian William Yoo's assessment [in his 2025 book, *Reckoning with History: Settler Colonialism, Slavery, and the Making of American Christianity* that "settler colonialism and slavery shaped American Christianity

in deep, haunting, distinctive, and enduring ways." I believe this inheritance makes both [the] colonizing and [the] colonized U.S. American Christians into dangerous sources of ideological and physical violence against human and nonhuman beings in the United States and beyond.

Christians perpetuate violence when we ignore and deny our heritage and its legacies and when we indulge in counterproductive games that revel in displays of shaming and blaming that reduce the number of people willing to complete work on tough problems.

To repair damages inflicted through colonial legacies, neoliberal economic policies and social engineering techniques, liberal and progressive Christians, in particular, must decide to end cycles of racist and colonial violence and the social performances that inspire the public to believe nothing essential will ever change. And we must expect to encounter physical and ideological violence in the process while making advance determinations about what can and must be done right now to reduce … violence in [the] pursuit of interdependent and mutually beneficial forms of existence.

ROBYN: I think of the 10 plagues that led to the Exodus from Egypt, a time of redemption that inspired many in their fight for liberation. Yet I cry each Pesach/Passover when I come face to face with the plague of the firstborn. At whose price is this freedom [won]?

I have no simple answers, but [I] commit to always being in the struggle, asking the questions, practicing nonviolence in my communication, thoughts and actions, and working towards the World As It Should Be whilst living in the World As It Is.

JERMAINE: All human projects should include nonviolence as an intention and objective. Nonviolence, however, should never prevent individuals or groups from protecting the pious (as defined by [John] Calvin, Garnet, and [James] Cone) from arbitrary oppression and [from] guaranteeing [that] systemic and historic harms are not repeated. I believe that the most underused method of nonviolence is the cultivated, strategic, collective and enduring choice to "labor for the peace of the human race, and remember that you are … millions!" [in the words of Garnet's address to the slaves of the U.S.].

THE REV. DR. LAURIE LYTER BRIGHT is a teaching elder, educator, mom, wife and author, and she serves as the executive director of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. Her Ph.D. is in education, and her current research is on the nature of prophetic action in the Me Too and Black Lives Matter movements.

THE REV. JERMAINE ROSS-ALLAM is the inaugural director of the Center for the Repair of Historical Harms for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at the Interim Unified Agency and a Ph.D. candidate in social ethics at Union Theological Seminary in Manhattan.

RABBI ROBYN ASHWORTH-STEEN is a former human rights lawyer and the first female rabbi of Manchester, U.K. She is studying for a Ph.D. in rabbinic leadership and biblical studies at the University of Leeds under an Arts and Humanities Research Council scholarship funded through the White Rose College of the Arts and Humanities.

POETRY

Just War Theory

Arlin Buyert

ARLIN BUYERT attended Macalester College and The University of Minnesota and worked as an admissions officer at Macalester before entering the Navy in 1966. He was a Naval aviator, corporate executive, cattle rancher and is now retired and lives in Leawood, Kansas.

OUTLOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

The power we hold to make peace (p.5)

Teri McDowell Ott

QUESTIONS:

1. What do you think of Walter Wink's interpretation of Matthew 5:40 where Jesus speaks of giving shirt and cloak?
2. The Liberian women's nonviolent resistance brought peace after years of civil war. How might their nonviolent resistance be relevant to situations in our nation today where injustices need to be addressed?
3. What can you do to learn more about Leymah Gbowee, the 2011 Nobel Peace Laureate, and the Liberian women's peace movement?

The principles of Kingian Nonviolence (p.10)

Teri McDowell Ott

QUESTIONS:

1. What are your memories of the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.?
2. How were you and/or your church impacted by or involved in the Civil Rights Movement?
3. The article included six principles of nonviolence, with questions related to each. In your group, select one or more questions to discuss.
4. How can your church communicate the six principles and help the congregants to adopt and practice them?

Nonviolence, fear and hard questions (p.16)

Laurie Lyter Bright

QUESTIONS:

1. The opening three paragraphs state that one of the reasons people act with violence toward others is because of their fears. To what extent do you agree or disagree with that assertion?
2. The article focuses on conscientious objection. What are some of your affirmations of, disagreements with or questions about the author's analysis of that subject?
3. A resolution approved by the PC(USA)'s 1992 General Assembly regarding conscientious objection is quoted. If you had been a commissioner to that General Assembly, would you have voted to approve it? Why or why not?
4. The author's closing words are, "Risking nonviolence is the only way violence stops." What is your response to that statement?

In response to the lion's rampage (p.21)

Alejandra Oliva

QUESTIONS:

1. In the third paragraph, the author writes of her angst when communities and friends she cares about are "targeted for discrimination." In what ways do you identify with her observations and concerns?
2. The article references nonviolent actions by African Americans at a Woolworth's lunch counter, by AIDS activists disrupting Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral, and by Oscar Romero. What do you remember of those events?
3. What do you think are the motivations of persons who put themselves "on the line" by nonviolently advocating against oppression and discrimination?
4. What are the necessary characteristics or qualities of those who commit themselves to nonviolent resistance against suppression of their human rights?

Revelation for active nonviolent resistance (p.22)

Timothy Reardon

QUESTIONS:

1. What was your first thought when you read the title of this article, suggesting that the book of Revelation might be a good resource for imagining nonviolent principles and actions?
2. What subject would you like the author to explain further or expand upon? What is one question you would like to ask?
3. The author quotes Martin Luther King Jr., "The old order ends … when the enslaved, within themselves, bury the psychology of servitude" and relates that quote to John's affirmation that the "dominated one is revealed as the Lord of all." How does that help to understand the Lamb's nonviolent resistance?
4. Reread the paragraph that begins, "Pursuing nonviolence is often difficult, accompanied by vilification and rejection by the purveyors of power." What comes to your mind after this reading?

I am a witness (p.28)

Dartinia Hull

QUESTIONS:

1. Have you ever knowingly used "nonviolent direct action" to attempt to defuse a situation? What was the outcome of that event?
2. The photos on the walls at Union Theological Seminary tell a story that Wade Burns fears will be lost. What stories do you have that should be passed along?
3. The families of those attacked and murdered at Mother Emanuel immediately forgave the gunman and pleaded for peace. What feelings arise as you consider this nonviolent response?

THE REV. DR. DONALD L. GRIGGS, a PC(USA) pastor, has served as associate minister for several congregations and is a former professor at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. He has written many books featuring Christian education and Bible studies. His latest book is *Growing in Faith and Practice,* his memoirs of 65 years of educational ministry.

You can purchase the PW/Horizons Bible study book through the PC(USA) Church Store.

2025-2026 PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN

Horizons Bible Study

Finding resilience, joy and our identity in Christ

OVERVIEW

Turbulent, chaotic, and changing are words we might use to describe our culture today. Depressed economic forecasts and rapid government restructuring loom in the news as I write this 2025-26 Horizons Bible Study overview. Where do we find resilience, joy and identity in tempestuous times? The Rev. Dr. Rhashell D. Hunter, author of *Finding Resilience, Joy and Our Identity in Jesus Christ*, takes us through Biblical stories and texts to map out the signposts where we can see resilience, joy and identity. Hunter believes that even in times of crisis, trauma and economic troubles, we can experience our lives centered in Christ, our true North, in finding our way.

RESILIENCE

Hunter defines resilience as "the ability to spring back into shape and adapt well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, or stress." To illustrate resilience, she examines several stories, including Mary Magdalene and Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

In the first century, people were known by their town or as the son or daughter of a person. Jesus was called "Jesus of Nazareth" because he came from that city. In looking at Mary Magdalene, we find no corresponding town of Magdala in the first century. Therefore, "Magdalene" must be a title or a nickname. Magdalene can be translated as "tower," so Mary was probably known as "Mary the Tower." Jesus cured Mary's severe mental illness, after which she followed Jesus on the road and was one of the women who provided for Jesus out of her own means. Jesus appeared to her at the empty tomb, and she became the first person to receive the apostolic commission to go and tell others that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Mary is a towering example of a person indebted and devoted to Jesus who shares her knowledge of him. As one who has come from profound illness to her true self, Mary is an example of resilience because of her relationship with Jesus.

After his baptism, the Holy Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness to be tested by evil. His temptation is to forget that he is the beloved Son who is to do God's will. Tests that tempt us to forget who and whose we are can show us the depth of our commitment to God and resilience as God strengthens us. For Jesus, his 40 days of fasting in the wilderness forced him to dig deep into his core identity and rely on God alone.

JOY

During the Christmas shopping season, commercials tell us that the gifts we receive and give bring joy. It may be a momentary joy. But Christian joy is something different. Joy, Hunter says, "is sometimes confused with happiness. Christian joy can occur amid difficult situations." Hunter tells several stories where Christian joy is present in stressful or grief-filled times. When Hunter was a pastor, she visited with a family in the hospital as their loved one was dying. Hunter encouraged each person to say goodbye, and afterward, Hunter wondered if they would be willing to sing any hymns important to their loved one. As they sang, the atmosphere in the room became lighter, with joy mixed with their pain.

Joy comes when a prodigal child comes home, restored to her family. She who was dead to her family is now alive as a beloved daughter. Joy comes from a profound trust in God when someone gives out of poverty, as in the story of the widow with the two coins. Christian joy is rooted in the deep belief that God is good and trustworthy and cares for us throughout our lives.

IDENTITY

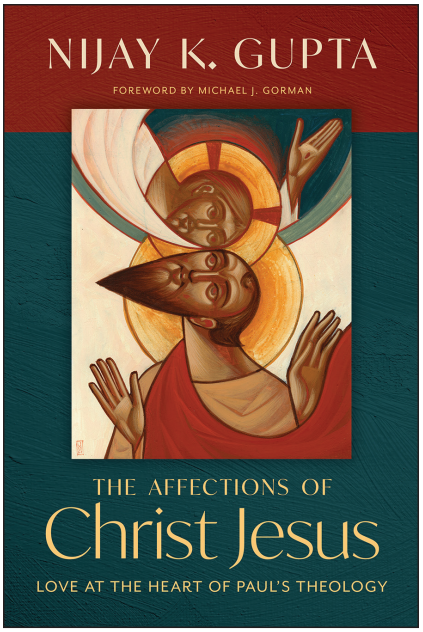
Hunter writes that "identity at its core points to our humanity. Our core identity is not found in our titles, in our positions, our spouses, our partners or our possessions. For Christians our identity is found in Jesus Christ."

We spend much of our early life learning who others think we are and who we should be. We learn what is important to our parents, extended family, teachers, coaches and friends at church. Yet, what people tell us about ourselves may or may not point us to our core being. When John the Baptist preaches repentance, he asks people to turn away from evil and towards their essential identity in God.

At Jesus' baptism, God says, "You are my son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22 and Mark 1:11). In baptism, we proclaim that we are God's children, that we belong to a larger family of people seeking to follow Christ and that, as God's children, we can become like Jesus. It is a bold claim in a world clamoring to tell us that we are what we produce, own or achieve. Baptism is a radical act that separates us from the voices that tell us lies. Baptism gives us the truth: we are God's beloved people. It is a truth that is not always apparent but one into which we can grow.

As God's people, we find our identity in Christ and can live as Christ lived. In gratitude and sustained by the Holy Spirit, we can pursue justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God. ◆

THE REV. ROSALIND BANBURY has served in small, medium and large congregations, and she has a heart for faith formation. She is now retired.



The Affections of Christ Jesus

Love at the Heart of Paul's Theology

By Nijay K. Gupta
Eerdmans, 272 pages
Published February 20, 2025

Paul writes about virtues that can be cultivated and embodied. Love, therefore, is no mere sentiment nor a burden of duty but something that can be incorporated into our minds, emotions, and behaviors.

BOOK IN REVIEW

Paul can feel like a worn-out figure within American Christianity. Featured prominently in church controversies, such as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s heated debates regarding human sexuality, he is neither to be apologized for nor wholeheartedly embraced. A mentor once handed me a book that conveniently suggested the likable portions of Paul were authentic, while portions that make us squirm were the product of a later author. Within this context of Paul's fatigue, I rejoice in discovering *The Affections of Christ Jesus.*

New Testament professor Nijay Gupta argues that Paul's theology centers on one virtue: love. Gupta nods to significant debates within Pauline studies without falling down the rabbit hole. He reintroduces Paul to a broad audience in this accessible work, equally at home in a seminary curriculum or as a valuable volume in a pastor's or studious reader's library.

Even those unconvinced that love lies at the center of Paul's thought will feel the force of Gupta's observations; by freeing Paul from the debates, Gupta invites us to read him more comprehensively. For example, Gupta describes how love informs the doctrinally loaded and familiar Romans 5-8, noting that Paul sees God's love for humanity as essential to the saving and loving work of Christ's death. Consequently, Gupta notes that Paul identifies human love as the appropriate response to this divine love. Gupta simply asks us to look again, and this simplicity reveals more profound truths.

This does not mean Gupta avoids complexity. Christian interpretation of New Testament teachings on love often comes with either an implicit or explicit condemnation of first-century Judaism. Gupta describes the significant ways that Judaism, in the time of Jesus and Paul, was informed by love, acknowledging that Christians have historically distorted Judaism in order to present Christianity as a uniquely loving religion.

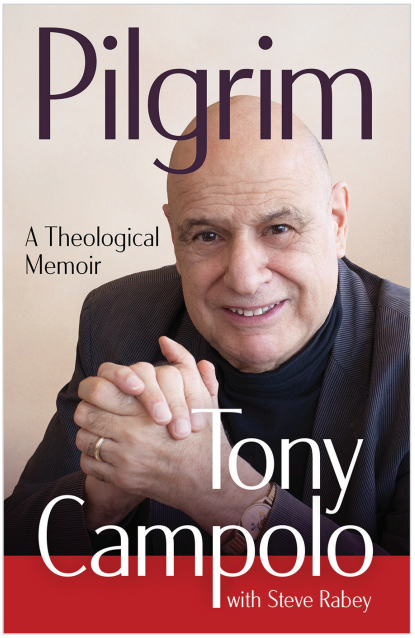
Furthermore, Gupta tackles the larger question of what we mean by the very word "love." He considers psychological and cultural understandings that describe the range of emotions encompassed by the word, moving from a sense of duty-bound obligation to emotional passion, helping us understand how ancient writers articulated these varying senses of love through language.

Diving into other disciplines means that Gupta offers richer insights that make Paul's letter feel alive. Paul writes about virtues that can be cultivated and embodied. Love, therefore, is no mere sentiment nor a burden of duty but something that can be incorporated into our minds, emotions and behaviors.

The Affections of Christ Jesus re-introduces Paul. Even those who think they know him might experience, as I did, the sensation of leaving behind heated debates for a more relaxing discussion, bringing greater insight and clarity. I have been leading a Bible study on Paul's letters, and reading Gupta's book rejuvenated my preparation and offered fruitful insights into the love that underlies Paul's letters. I can only conclude by echoing Michael Gorman's sentiments in the foreword: now that Gupta has written on faith and love in Paul's letters, we can only pray that he next turns his attention to hope. ◆

REVIEWED BY:
THE REV. SAMUEL McCANN, who received his M.Div. from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 2019 and currently works as a library associate in Oklahoma.

BOOK IN REVIEW



Pilgrim
A Theological Memoir
By Tony Campolo

Eerdmans, 272 pages
Published February 25, 2025

Tony Campolo was a rock star in the evangelical world until, that is, his colleagues publicly tried him for heresy. In *Pilgrim: A Theological Memoir,* pastor and educator Campolo shares this fascinating theological journey from fundamentalist to social progressive … and possible apostate.

Campolo responded to altar calls in his family's home Baptist Church, receiving Jesus into his heart and passionately participating in an evangelical para-church ministry. It all worked until he began to ask questions: were his Jewish friends from the basketball team really condemned to Hell? Did he have to reject the role of science in the evolution debate? Campolo emerged "with my very own theological conviction that God wants his children to cherish and use the amazing brain (God) gave us."

This was just the beginning. Campolo rejected the racism of his family's home church, and he discarded the evangelical world-denying eschatology in favor of an activism that embodied God's kingdom in this world. He cast off a hardline anti-abortion stance in favor of a modified pro-choice position. He protested against the Vietnam War, welcomed women into ministry, and he followed the lead of his wife, Peggy, in advocating for the equal rights of LGBTQ people.

A renowned professor, Baptist preacher and author of 50 books, Campolo became a celebrity in scholarly and church circles. He was most well known, however, as a captivating and compelling orator. Because of his celebrity, Campolo's socially progressive positions got him into trouble with evangelical colleagues. In 1985, prominent evangelical leaders charged Campolo with universalism, organizing a public trial for heresy. A three-judge panel (unaffiliated with any denomination or institution) concluded that he was not a heretic but insisted he clarify his positions in writing. The damage was done; several organizations dropped his speaking engagements and distanced themselves from him. Campolo was canceled. He continued in active ministry into his 80s, however, suffering a stroke in 2020 and completing this book just before he died in 2024 at age 89.

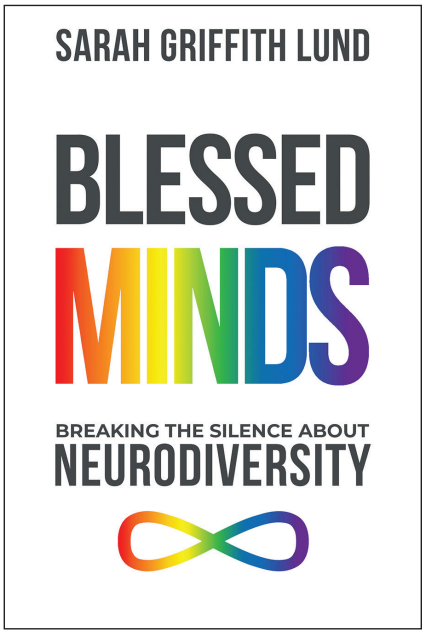
Campolo's pilgrimage is fascinating, but *Pilgrim* is significantly wanting. Despite the subtitle, it lacks sustained theological reflection. Campolo reports his theological conclusions without fully explaining how he arrived at them. What was his process? What were his criteria for making judgments and drawing conclusions? What other voices did he listen to? How did God lead Campolo to take certain positions? At one point or another, did he resist God's leading? Did he consider the costs of stepping outside the evangelical plausibility structure of his youth and career? We do not see in this book the struggle and suffering inherent in changing heart and mind. In this time of political upheaval and theological division, many people of faith are on similar journeys. A fuller explanation for Campolo's move from fundamentalist to social progressive is needed.

Yet, there is much to be grateful for in Tony Campolo's life. Dr. Campolo, thank you for sharing your pilgrimage. Thank you for the courageous changes of heart and mind in your life. Most importantly, thank you for your passionate and purposeful witness to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Master." ◆

In this time of political upheaval and theological division, many people of faith are on similar journeys. A fuller explanation for Campolo's move from fundamentalist to social progressive is needed.

REVIEWED BY:

THE REV. DR. PHILIP J. REED, retired member of the Presbytery of Detroit. He and his spouse, Marguerite, split their time between Florida and Michigan. They enjoy sailing, traveling, and, most importantly, the community of family and friends.



Blessed Minds
Breaking the Silence about Neurodiversity

By Sarah Griffith Lund
Chalice Press, 144 Pages
Published March 24, 2025

Lund's theology of neurodiversity is that neurodiverse individuals are whole and loved in their neurodiverse experience, not a problem to be solved.

BOOK IN REVIEW

What does it look like to embrace neurodiversity in theology and ministry? Pastor and parent Sarah Griffith Lund knows. Her family is part of the neurodiverse community, and she works to create positive worship and church experiences for those whose brains are differently wired. With poetry, story illustrations, parables, keywords and guiding questions, this short book lends itself to myriad uses in individual or group study.

Blessed Minds: Breaking the Silence about Neurodiversity first provides a basic introduction to neurodiversity, offering all readers equal footing, as neurodiversity has been used in academic circles for longer than in the church world. Lund's theology of neurodiversity is that neurodiverse individuals are whole and loved in their neurodiverse experience, not a problem to be solved. As she expands on neurodiversity in ministry, I appreciated examples of churches offering support for neurodiverse folks in worship and reframing neurodiverse ministry leaders.

Practical examples of neuro inclusive church services illustrate that large and small ministries can apply accessible changes for little to no cost. Lund says, "Simple changes to the worship itself can be more neuro inclusive, such as offering multiple ways to pray and different ways to engage in faith formation." Advocating for inclusive worship and education allows a more enjoyable experience for neurodiverse individuals of all ages and their families. Lund challenges some of the more traditional ideals — that worship is a quiet place of sitting still, where fidget items (commonly used to assist those with autism, anxiety or sensory issues) are unwelcome. Additionally, I appreciated the examples of churches that failed in attempts to be neuro inclusive, reminding readers to leave room for grace as we explore what it means to be inclusive.

Lund concludes with a theology of compassionate care for neurodiverse ministers, recognizing that we live in a world where neurodiversity is more publicly acknowledged but often stigmatized in Christian leadership. By offering examples of successful ministry leaders who experience ADHD, autism and other neurodiverse diagnoses, Lund offers a note of encouragement for those called to ministry who fall under the neurodiverse umbrella. Neurodiverse ministry leaders are encouraged not to hide their uniqueness but to utilize their particular experiences as a gift to the larger church. By ending with this call to compassion, Lund asks how congregations and ministry colleagues can provide helpful and healthy environments to allow all types of leaders to thrive.

Her perspective of neurodiversity embraces and enthusiastically welcomes the whole individual. It was a delight to see my own experiences with neurodiversity and building neuro-inclusive worship spaces reflected in Lund's work. Through expansive interviews with people with all different types of neurodiversity, neurodiverse individuals and families can see their experiences thoughtfully represented. Although *Blessed Minds* should not be the only resource for communities to enhance their neurodiverse ministries, it is an excellent introduction to reframing traditional mindsets and how to begin to support all people. I'm excited to see how this book can equip churches eager to reach all those who worship with them and those called to ministry. ◆

REVIEWED BY:
THE REV. JO WIERSEMA, pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Oregon, Wisconsin. They are a parent and coffee enthusiast who spends too much time at the local public library.

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ALSO JOIN US FOR:

Atwood Institute for Congregational Courage

WHEN: Sept. 24-27

WHERE: Massanetta Springs Camp and Conference Center, Harrisonburg, Virginia

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: **The Rev. Sharon Risher:** 2025 marks 10 years since her mother and other relatives were killed at the Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church shooting in Charleston, South Carolina. A graduate of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Risher helps guide the Everytown Survivor Network and is the author of *For Such a Time as This: Hope and Forgiveness after the Charleston Massacre.*

PREACHER: **The Rev. Jimmie Hawkins** oversees the PC(USA) Advocacy Offices. His community ministry includes being a leader for the Moral Monday Movement since its onset in 2013. He is the author of *Unbroken and Unbowed: A History of Black Protest in America.*

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THE PRESBYTERIAN OUTLOOK

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SENIOR PASTOR

New Hope Church (NHC) of Michigan is a multi-generational, PC(USA)-affiliated church located in Novi, Michigan. NHC members are largely Korean-American, but our congregation is English-speaking and becoming increasingly diverse. We are searching for a **Senior Pastor** who, along with the staff (Associate Pastor of Education and Praise Leader), will lead NHC in contemporary worship, spiritual formation and intergenerational ministry for our members and the surrounding community. Please visit our website at t**henewhopechurch.com** and email **jyang50@hotmail.com** if you would like more information.

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BENEDICTORY

The power of nonviolent direct action

Rodney Sadler Jr.

For many years, I have been a proponent of nonviolent direct action. I say this as someone who might be called a pacifist but not one who is passive — two concepts that are often confused.

Nonviolent direct action is founded in the firm conviction that human life is too precious to be taken to achieve a political end. We are all created in God's image and are valuable to God; hence, we should be valuable to each other. The sanctity of life is the key foundation for nonviolent strategies.

It continues with a moral commitment to act only by doing good. The means must cohere with the desired end to achieve a moral good. When we achieve a goal through moral compromise, we undermine our own morality. In this regard, I am captivated by Paul's instruction in Romans 12:21: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." This is the way of nonviolence: collaborating with good to foster a just outcome.

A deep and sustained courage frames and feeds a willingness to violate unjust laws to show that injustices should not stand. The courage is not only in breaking a law, violating a policy or putting oneself at odds with state-sanctioned authority.

Nonviolent direct action is one of the most proactive choices a person can make when confronted by oppression, systemic immorality and injustice. Far from espousing passivity or peace as quiet acquiescence, nonviolence is a choice to lay down arms, refuse to resist physically, accept violation (and perhaps even violence), and then bear the consequences of one's actions willingly — all to bear witness to God's call for justice to "roll down like waters and righteousness as an ever flowing stream" (Amos 5:24).

I learned in my Quaker high school that simply claiming opposition to human rights violations or injustice is hollow unless one takes action. Without resistance, passivity makes us complicit. As Elie Wiesel, Martin Luther King Jr. and others have said, neutrality supports the status quo. Nonviolent direct action allows us to act morally, in line with our beliefs.

The Christian community will need firm conviction, moral commitment and courage for nonviolent direct action in the coming months and years. Dangerous policies from the White House, Congress and the Supreme Court pose threats to immigrant rights that have been imperative for non-native-born neighbors; to the diversity, equity and inclusion won during the Civil Rights Movement; to LGBTQIA+ individuals vulnerable to identity-based discrimination; to Muslims and those of non-Abrahamic faiths; to the poor who struggle to gain access to medical treatment, and to others vulnerable in our current political climate.

The church must bear witness against such practices and remember God's call to love and care for those who are poor, the widows (whom we call single mothers), the orphans (whom we call fatherless children), the sick (whom we have historically left to languish without access to the fundamental human right of healthcare), the aliens (whom God welcomes regardless of immigration status), and the incarcerated (who are far too often Black and brown people warehoused in for-profit penitentiaries for non-violent drug offenses for which their White counterparts are routinely excused).

May we learn nonviolent direct action as a Christian spiritual discipline and use it to help community members at greater risk. By doing so, we regain the agency many fear we've lost.

Nonviolent direct action reminds us we're not powerless. When we organize, pray, sing, shoulder to shoulder, and raise our voices together, we remind leaders they work for us and must pursue justice, recognizing God is watching. We have the power to promote change and align our actions with God's preference for the poor and marginalized, fulfilling our nation's ideal of equality and inalienable rights.

We have the power to change. May we use this to bear witness to the kind of world that justice, Jesus and God demand! ◆

THE REV. DR. RODNEY SADLER JR. is an associate professor of Bible studies and director of the Center for Social Justice and Reconciliation at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina.

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>
> – Tim Jones and Jacqui deVries, Members, Westminster Presbyterian, Minneapolis

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