

AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN NONVIOLENCE

from: *The Spiritual Warfare of Jesus Christ*

Jesus and his followers were a handful of people surrounded by the overwhelming power of an evil empire. But that empire went down into the dust while the Christians built a new society in the ruins. How did they do it? If you study what Jesus did as well as what he said, if you study what Jesus did and did not do--what he refused to do--if you try to answer the question as to what **method** Jesus used, you would have to say that he used **NONVIOLENT DIRECT ACTION**.

He refused to use **military power** and he refused to accept **political power**. He refused to be the messiah king they wanted. He didn't try to get himself appointed high priest. He never sought access to the king or the governor. He didn't get invited to the White House. That is, he didn't get himself invited to the imperial palace or try to persuade the emperor to sponsor his new school of ethics in Jerusalem.

He did not establish His kingdom by war, John 18.33-36, but by spiritual warfare, John 12.31, 14.30, 16.11. He refused to lead an armed rebellion to establish the kingdom that everyone wanted. He refused to let the sword be used in his behalf. In his time, there were many patriotic rebels who stirred up the Jewish people to overthrow the godless Romans, but Jesus refused to encourage an armed rebellion.

He did not rely upon money. Imagine sending out a bunch of organizers without any money--actually insisting that they take no money with them! **NO MONEY?! The TV preachers can't even imagine that!** He did not teach his followers to pursue political power. He taught the opposite and set the example of doing the opposite. He sought nothing through conventional politics and everything through unconventional politics--the new politics of the Kingdom of God. He did not work through *the system*. Instead, he established His own system: turning the Holy Spirit loose to transform our lives.

DO IT YOURSELF

He did directly attack the evil he saw. He did rely upon courageous **DIRECT ACTION** and upon **PERSONAL WITNESS**. He did trust entirely in the power of God to see him through. And he did this as a man living among us and setting an example to other men--especially to those of us who claim to be his followers by calling ourselves *Christians*. Jesus shows us how to **DO IT YOURSELF**. He wants us to fight the battle as he fought it: **a. in person**, with **b. the weapons of the spirit**, and on behalf of **c. the kingdom of God**. What secular Christians substitute for this is a battle fought **a. vicariously**, with **b. the weapons of the flesh**, and on behalf of **c. the nation**. He asks us to **DO SOMETHING** not **SUPPORT** something. We cannot buy our way out of that obligation with a small donation or even a large one. We must do it ourselves the way he showed us. *As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you*, John 20.21.

Jesus triumphs by the power of love. Because of that love he refuses to kill, Luke 9.54-56. Because of that love he is willing to die, John 15.13. The willingness to die for something, not the willingness to kill for it decides who wins. The one who loves the most wins the final victory, not the one who hates the most. Love is the stronger passion.

Jesus shows us how to fight and win a spiritual war. It is the strangest lesson that the world has ever received--has ever refused to receive: you achieve victory by suffering defeat. You overcome the Evil One by letting evil men overcome you. You reject all the forms of worldly power: money, political

position, military power; and thereby arrive at the spiritual power which destroys evil. Jesus takes the miracle of Gideon's army the next logical step--I will win, without any soldiers at all, by the power of God alone.

Spiritual warfare demands the **courage** that goes with **love**. It is the belief in the power of Love, the belief in the power of the God who Is Love, that gives you the courage to face the enemy without fear and without hatred. It is easier said than done. How much can we take before **fear** gets hold of us? The other side of fear is **hatred**--they are two sides of one coin. Love and courage are two sides of another coin.

If you feel weak in relation to your enemy, you feel fear. When you feel powerful, when you outnumber them, when you are well-armed with guns or money or lawyers, then the coin flips, and the fear becomes hatred, a desire to destroy those who have made us so afraid. But Love casts out fear. So spiritual courage is one sure sign that Jesus is in my heart. And moral cowardice, that he isn't.

When Peter lost faith in Jesus he 1. grabbed a sword 2. ran away 3. denied Jesus. Fear made him lose confidence in Jesus and instead trust to the weapon of violence. When he recovered his faith and his courage at Pentecost, Acts 2.4, he went out fearlessly to bear witness, disarmed of the metal sword by Jesus, and now armed only with *THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT*, Ephesians 6.17. What erodes the Spirit is the loss of faith. Jesus warns the disciples that when they lose faith in Him, they will have to put their trust **in the purse** and **in the sword** like other men do, Luke 22:31-38. And so it happened. And that describes "Christians" who have no real faith in Jesus. Nonviolent direct action is war without weapons. Rather, it is a spiritual warfare that relies upon spiritual weapons. It is a serious and sustained effort to destroy the strongholds of the evil one, and it follows the example of Jesus Christ and it relies upon the power of his Spirit. In 2 Corinthians 10.3-4 Saint Paul emphasizes that we must fight a spiritual battle using spiritual weapons: *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.* In Ephesians 6.10-18 he describes the arms and the armor of the Christian Warrior.

TOLSTOY AND GANDHI REDISCOVER SPIRITUAL WARFARE

I was recruited for the Freedom Ride in May, 1961 by a tall black Christian from Louisiana, fresh out of jail, who gave an eloquent presentation of what was happening in the Civil Rights movement in the South. He testified to his belief in Jesus Christ and to his confidence in the method of **NONVIOLENT DIRECT ACTION** that Martin Luther King and other Christian ministers had copied from Gandhi--they learned it more directly from Christian radicals in the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Congress on Racial Equality.

In South Africa in the 1890's, and in India in the 1920's, Gandhi pioneered the method of social change through nonviolent direct action. But Gandhi considered himself to be a follower of the **RADICAL CHRISTIANITY** of Leo Tolstoy. Through Tolstoy and through his own study of the gospels, Gandhi arrived at an appreciation of the **SPIRITUAL WARFARE** of Jesus Christ that still eludes most so-called Christians. Gandhi didn't invent it. He learned it first from Tolstoy's book: *The Kingdom of God is Within You*. No more did Tolstoy invent it. No more did the American Abolitionists invent it--the Quakers or William Lloyd Garrison. They were some of those that Tolstoy learned from. They all got it from the same source: **THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS CHRIST AS IT IS FOUND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.**

Gandhi's *nonviolence* and Tolstoy's *nonresistance to evil* are taken from the **CENTRAL TEACHING** of Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount Matthew 5:38-5:48. *Resist not evil* Matthew 5:39 teaches us to overcome evil by the power of good instead of by resorting to a more powerful evil. Instead of baptizing violence, as so many Christians have done, Gandhi followed the teaching and the example of Jesus Christ in aiming a spiritual weapon at the evil which is in men, instead of a physical weapon at the men themselves. Instead of using a sword to end the life of an evil man, you use the power of the Holy Spirit to end the evil which is in him. *Love your enemies, do good to those that hate you; return good for evil; turn the other cheek.* These admonitions call us to a spiritual battle that can only be won by spiritual weapons. This is the origin of Gandhi's nonviolence, which rests upon the wisdom of Jesus that the battle against the evil one cannot be won by the weapons of this world--by money, by the sword, by hatred and political trickery, by soldiers, police, judges, lawyers and powerful politicians--but by the weapons of the spirit only.

NONVIOLENT DIRECT ACTION is a secularized translation--an inadequate verbal description--of Gandhi's central concept and belief which he expressed by a Hindu word *SATYAGRAHA*-- a word he invented to convey something that was missing from the religion of his homeland. It means **SOUL FORCE**--*the power which is born of truth and love.* It was his attempt to translate the central teaching of Jesus Christ into the language and beliefs of his countrymen. But we already have exact equivalents of Gandhi's concept, because he got it from the New Testament: **THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**, Acts 1:8. *The Spirit of Truth*, John 16:13. That indwelling **SPIRIT OF LOVE AND TRUTH AND COURAGE** is what gives Christians the power to do battle with the *world*, John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13, 17:6-20; and with *the prince of this world*, John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11. The followers of Jesus prevail *by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God*, 2 Corinthians 6:6-7. **NONVIOLENT** says: no armed rebellion. **DIRECT ACTION** says: don't work through *the system*. But the real essential is to rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ.

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