

**THE PHILOSOPHY OF NONVIOLENCE AND THE TACTIC OF
NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE**

**SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN
LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE**

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Nonviolence is a way of life as old and permanent as Jesus of Nazareth, as new and growing as Mohandas K. Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. It is based upon a belief in the oneness of humankind, a belief that man can and must be reconciled within the universal community. Nonviolent resistance, a form of civil disobedience, is the natural offspring or manifestation of the nonviolent philosophy. As such, it could be viewed merely as a tactic, a means to an end. It is more than this, however, more than a single alternative of protest amongst many, for it is integrally related to a philosophy of life. During the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-56, massive nonviolent resistance was tactically utilized for the first time to obtain civil rights for the Negro minority in America. The boycott led to desegregation of the city's buses and to the emergence of the movement's most influential leader, Dr. King. Understanding of Dr. King's use of the boycott in Montgomery necessitates an understanding of the Nonviolent philosophy.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF NONVIOLENCE:

Nonviolence, it must first be clarified, is not passivism or cowardice. It is an active way of living: it resists. It resists that which is opposed to LOVE. Love, here, means not personal affection, but universal understanding and redemptive good will. It is based upon the belief that all men are basically good and that the universe, guided by what some choose to call a "divine principle," is also good and just. There is no desire, in nonviolence, to defeat the enemy in the physical sense. Rather nonviolence seeks to triumph in terms of winning the understanding and friendship of the opponent. Also important is the fact that the underlying forces of evil are attacked rather than the people who are actually performing evil. The evildoer, in the eyes of the nonviolent

resister, is the victim of evil just as the suppressed person is the victim of evil action. According to Dr. King, the tension in Montgomery was not between black and white men, but between the forces of light and darkness.

Perhaps the most important tactical aspect of nonviolence is that the resister is willing to accept violence, but will never himself inflict it. Although this seems to be against man's basic nature, his instinct for survival, many men have and still do believe that the acceptance of undeserved suffering for a good purpose is, in the long run, man's only possible survival tactic. Unjustified suffering, the crucifixion of Jesus, the killing of thousands of Indians by colonial rulers, the beating, murdering, and jailing of Negroes, has redemptive qualities, in that it can result in creative education, transformation and a better society. As Gandhi said, "suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears which are otherwise shut to the voice of reason." This avoidance of violence on the part of the nonviolent resister must be internal as well as external. The truly nonviolent person quite simply refuses to hate, because of the realization that hatred is useless in terms of reunifying the now broken community of man. The chain of hatred, if not actively cut off at some point by courageous men, grows stronger and more difficult to treat. The love of the nonviolent person is the recognition that all life is interrelated, all humanity involved in a single process. Faith in the nonviolent way of life is faith in the "cosmic companionship" that each man has and needs only recognize.

THREE NONVIOLENT RESISTERS: JESUS, GANDHI, MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Jesus Christ, born nearly twenty centuries ago, is hailed as the Prince of Peace. He sought to reveal the love of God to all men. He often spoke of loving one's enemies, turning the other cheek. He allowed himself to be crucified and to suffer, in order to illustrate God's illimitable love for mankind, and the necessity for love amongst men.

Mohandas K. Gandhi, perhaps the greatest 20th century follower of the words of Jesus, was an Indian who, upon reading the writings of Buddhism, Thoreau's ideas on civil disobedience, the New Testament, and scriptures of all major faiths, felt compelled to throw off the yoke of Colonial suppression from the peoples of India. He used what he called the "Satyagraha" or the "soul force," the innate love in man's soul, and instead of inciting bloody revolution, lead a revolt through nonviolent civil disobedience. India was freed from colonial control, and although many innocent Indians died, the world learned something, gained new insight.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., employing the same methods of nonviolence in civil disobedience, led a boycott against segregated seating on the bus system of Montgomery, Alabama starting in December, 1955. Negro citizens refused to ride buses for more than one year. Dr. King, by combining the teachings of Jesus with the philosophy of Gandhi, started a movement which today is the prime means by which racial injustice is fought in America. In this case, civil disobedience is not lawlessness, for universal laws are adhered to. The Negro people of Montgomery protested, rather, unjust man-made laws. Since Montgomery, nonviolent resistance has taken a great variety of forms including the withdrawal of patronage from businesses, picketing, marching, the organization of political power through voter registration programs, sitting-in at segregated lunch counters, and adult education. Nonviolence, since 1955, has marched through Mississippi to dispel fear, and has lead to massive jailings in Birmingham, showing Bull Connor that his brutality solved nothing. As a direct result of the 1963 demonstrations in Birmingham, the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964. The Selma to Montgomery March compelled passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Nonviolence has worked in the past and will continue to do so through the efforts of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and other organizations and individuals throughout this country who believe that the evils of racial injustice must be fought by the powers of love and

mutual understanding in the form of nonviolent protest action.

THE NONVIOLENT TACTIC:

A. Investigation:

1. What are the facts surrounding an injustice?
2. What are the underlying economic and social forces?
3. What can be done to correct the injustice?

B. Negotiation:

On the basis of what has been found in the investigation, negotiate with policy makers. Negotiation may pave the way to changes in policy.

C. Education of the Public:

If negotiation fails, educate the public, help them to understand the problem. Educate community organizations to work for peaceful change of the situation.

D. Spiritual Preparation:

If negotiation and education fails, moral and spiritual resources must be developed before beginning a nonviolent campaign. Workshops on nonviolence are to be held. The conscience must be awakened in order to bring the spiritual dimension into the conflict.

E. Direct Action:

If persuasion and negotiation fail, direct action is then initiated. There may be demonstrations, boycotting, picketing, marches or sit-ins. The effect is designed to overcome the injustice and reconcile the opposing forces.

Nonviolence is the way of love. If effectively used, we shall certainly overcome.

Dr. King, writing his fellow white clergymen from the Birmingham jail in 1963, eloquently stated the purpose of nonviolent action in saying:

Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks to so dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. I just referred to the creation of tension as a part of the work of the nonviolent resister. This may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word tension. I have earnestly worked and preached against violent tension, but there is a type of constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, we must see the need of having nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men to rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.