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VIOLENCE: NO RESORT OR LAST RESORT OR . . . ?

Willis E. Elliott

VIOLENCE: NO RESORT OR LAST RESORT OR . . . ?

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“NONVIOLENCE” needs demythologizing, and this paper is going to have a try at it. I am up to here with disgust and pain over the clash of rhetoric and reality in our American hypocritical dealings with violence. In a war that's getting hotter and in a world that's getting hungrier for bread and justice, are there no Christian clues that can point us beyond the confusion of the masses and the false clarities of mindless militarists and sentimental pacifists? beyond the rival claims of affluence and poverty? beyond doctrinaire violence ("The only thing Communists understand is force.") and doctrinaire nonviolence ("Love conquers all.")?

The immediate occasion for the paper is the current ironic convergence of two inappropriate American responses to violence—using it in Vietnam, where it is counter-productive; and eschewing it in American race relations, where it has been highly productive. In the latter case I refer especially to the long-predicted white backlash which hit hard last summer, when whitey chickened out and fled with his dollars at the sound of "black power." I am for less violence abroad and more threat of it at

home: that's the way I read the two situations. A fellow-clergyman is horrified at my distribution of violence, and I at his: he thinks we should napalm more Vietnamese babies—and of course he can put my more-violence-at-home suggestion in as bad a verbal light!

The rest of this paper is a series of probes toward a more realistic and more Christian understanding of and participation in (and refusal to participate in) violence:

1. . . . It's going to take a lot of cool listening among Christians even to hear the actual differences among us on violence, to say nothing of pooling our resources to project some theoretical possibilities for wider and deeper Christian ways of acting and reflecting in this field. Inherited responses are clouded with dementing self-righteousness: it will take a new humility to face, for the new age, the question of the responsible stewardship of energies, including the responsible use of violence. But that same humility will be needed on every human question if our faith is to prove flexible enough to produce a Christian style of life appropriate to the new age's old and new demands.

2. . . . No one need pretend that he does not believe in violence, at least in "the responsible use of violence." One may, however, play a verbal trick on oneself, calling the same act "violent" when someone else does it and something else when one does it, or accedes to the doing of it, oneself. Or one may try to opt out of situations which as others interpret them call for violence: an irresponsible withdrawal. Or one may use one's influence to reduce, in a situation, the actional options by one, viz. violence: an irresponsible prejudicial (pre-judging) reduction of means-potential. Or one may engage in violence with the fraudulent claim of unaccountability, passing the buck to someone else or to some institution.

All of these ploys are unethical (a) in that the person in each case is depriving the situation of his full presence (i.e., of the full potentiality of his energy-systems) and (b) in that the possibility of violence as the best means in the situation is called into question or denied. All these ploys also qualify, in an antibiblical manner, the doctrine of creation; and pretend, also unbiblically, that the *shalom* (peace) of non-injury has already arrived. The Christian is to be fully present, with all his powers, to the concrete situation, with all its potentialities: creation and redemption forbid his ruling out (1) himself, (2) any power of his (including his powers to coerce and injure), or (3) *a priori*, violence as possibly the best action in the situation. Bible, "situation theology," and "situation ethics" coincide in this insistence. (Ecumenical circles are discussing the "theology of revolution" [M. M. Thomas]: more basic is the theology of violence, of which revolution is an instance.)

3. . . . Theologically, Christians should avoid the docetic/antinomian tendency to split the polarity of *bios* (Greek "life"; Latin *vita*) and *bia* (Greek "force, violence"; Latin *vis*, which, in Vulgate of Luke 10: 27, refers to loving God "with all your energies"). "Energy" is indeed the root meaning here in both the Greek and the Latin, a meaning that branches out into the polarity of *life* and *limits* (and which appears else-

where as Eros/Thanatos). Our historic words here refer to the full range of energy-release — from releasing to constraining, from creating to destroying; and to the full range of energies—physical, mental, ratiocinative), psychic (imaginative), spiritual (ruling). The Christian religion commits all that we are and have, to release and constrain in "love" for God and neighbor. All our energies are "ransomed powers" to be used, creatively or destructively according to the situation, in adoring God, mating with the energies of the universe, and serving our neighbor.

Here we must deal not only with polarity but also with balance: fear of *bios*—as, e.g. in the vitality myths of communism's rhetorical superiority and the Negro male's sexual superiority—motivates toward *bia* (anti-communist crusades, and "legal" lynchings). Ironically *the failure to deal realistically with violence leads straight towards its irruption beyond reason and control*. Those who do not *act* realistically in relation to violence must soon *react* to the outbreak of violence. The question as to whether it is not better to suffer violence than to be violent must be answered *in situ* (in each concrete situation): it cannot be answered *in abstracto*. Nor can we even have the comfort of knowing, ahead of time, that God will direct us to violence only as the last resort: in each here and now, *bios/bia* must be adjudicated *ad hoc*. (Of course for the peace of the social fabric we tend to hope, in most situations, that reason, planning, "justice"—the alternatives to muscle and muscle-extensions—will prevail. But we ought not to be so predisposed to "peaceful solutions" as to desensitize us to those aspects of the situation through which the word of violence may come to us—a classic modern instance of this insensitivity being Bonhoeffer's too-late decision for violence against Hitler.)

4. . . . I am not suggesting a new thing for Christians, that they should become violent! As humans go, while Christians are theoretically among the *least* violent, operationally they have been among the *most* violent. (On the subject of which end

of this hypocritical gaposis should yield, see below on Jesus.) I am trying to suggest to Christians that they be violent more intelligently, with integrity instead of hypocrisy, closing the credibility gap that now exists deep within the Christian himself.

5. . . . One way to reduce this hypocrisy is to increase violence in our theorizing while striving to reduce, strategically, the violence of mankind. Our present schizoid condition may be graphed as negative axis *relevance* and positive axis *violence*: the more a situation calls for violence or is violent, the more apolitical (irrelevant) Christian response tends to be, whether that response is violent or nonviolent. At present, the violence component in our theorizing is unrealistically small, with these results: we often avoid violence when the situation calls for it, and we often throw our warm bodies into violence ahead of our minds, doing wholeheartedly what we are prepared to do only halfmindedly. (On a retreat, a certain Austrian Christian confessed to me that he had stupidly done *both*: backing out of a four-man plot on Hitler's life in 1940 and persuading the others that it was against Christ's will, he then entered the Wehrmacht and killed Americans.) But *why is the violence component in Christian thinking too small*, lacking proportion (verisimilitude, correspondence with reality)?

(a) The chief reason is that Jesus irresponsibly *assigned violence to God*—with the minor exceptions (if we may trust the Gospels at these points) of two outbursts of rage (temple whip and fig-tree curse)—though of course in doing so he was acting responsibly within the apocalyptic frame which history did not validate. So another way to reduce the hypocritical gap between violent action and nonviolent theory is to make the necessary correction for Jesus' error.

Two thirds of a century ago a very nonviolent man, Albert Schweitzer, settled the hermeneutic question: yes, Jesus did goof in expecting God to become violent (i.e. "history" to end) before his disciples (1) finished preaching the kingdom of God throughout the circle of Palestinian towns

and (2) all died. Far from producing in the church a reevaluation of Jesus-and-violence, Schweitzer's bomb has produced hardly even a retinal afterimage! The churches continue to read the relevant passages with their fingers crossed, and the world continues to belabor nonpacifist Christians with accusations of hypocrisy.

(b) Another reason is that quietist disciples throughout Christian history have loyally repeated Jesus' mistake, reading the Gospels literally. Since the Bible is in the hands of the common man, who tends to *read everything woodenly*, Jesus' pacific behavior gets perpetual sanctioning among the Christian masses (though the current decline in Bible-reading may be reducing this liability). The so-called "common reader" cannot be expected to be aware of the ellipsis, the text's virtual leaving out of the datum that Jesus expected God to be violent soon—i.e. that Jesus was only operationally and personally, not ideologically and philosophically, nonviolent!

(c) Again, Jesus' pacific behavior naturally tends to get ideologized into a Christian pacifism (or, worse, a *doctrinaire non-violence*): (1) those who on other grounds have an outsize antiwar sentiment use Jesus to buttress their position whether or not they call him Lord; (2) even those who call him Lord tend to mine from him absolutes for thinking and acting, with all the seeming securities pertaining thereto; (3) some of those who call him Lord have (as biblical science now sees it) misread Jesus, and they view their pacifism as a loyal repetition of his; (4) many who call him Lord and who understand Jesus' behavior as parallel with many other lines of argument for pacifism, believe that their pacifism is a form of obedience to his lordship; and (5) Christian *nonpacifists*, on exposure to the Gospels, tend to have a bad conscience about being nonpacifists.

(d) Yet another reason why the violence component in Christian thinking is too small is the gospel's insight that the highest goods are realized only through *persuasion*—as Gregory Nazianzen (3rd century) put it, "God did not wish us to be coerced but

persuaded; for what is not voluntary is not enduring." Love, trust, faith, growth, truth are uncoercible. This conviction of the priority of persuasion is easy to overread as a condemnation of violence.

(e) A one-sided understanding of the Christian doctrine of *reconciliation* is another factor. Our Lord came breaching and reconciling through his preaching and living. The effect was ambiguous, at least to outer appearance; and the sword-peace statement—"I have not come to bring peace but a sword" (Matthew 10: 34)—must be set in tension with "Blessed are the peace-makers" (Matthew 5: 9). The gospel reconciles, but it also occasions the need for reconciliations; and we can be unfaithful to this gospel (1) by failing so to act as to occasion strife, (2) by effecting premature reconciliations (conflict resolutions), and (3) by failing to be peace-makers.

(f) Again: Christians, in addition to all the general human reasons for loathing violence, have a special Christological *suspicion of violence*: our Lord was violently done to death, the death of the Holy in the name of the sacred at the demand of the pious on the nails of the secular; and thousands of our fellow-believers through the centuries and in our day have suffered violence for his Name's sake. The violent might presentmindedly or absentmindedly become *theomachoi* ("God-killers").

(g) *Two-realm thinking* in Christian history has ontologized "sacred" (the soul, belonging to the church) and "secular" (the body, belonging to the state), assigning violence to the secular and freeing the clergy, who up till now have shaped the theologies, from responsible intellectual dealing with violence—as effectively as Jesus' error of historical perception freed him.

(h) And finally, Christians shy away from much theorizing about violence for an ironic reason: *the churches do not have a good record* as custodians of violence.

6. . . . But can't we use a less violent, less loaded, less emotional word than "violence" for what we are discussing? No, for it is this emotional loading of the word that we want to deal with because it is just this

that impedes a more intelligent, more Christian dealing with situations in which *destruction* is in process or is called for. But can't destruction be achieved nonviolently? Sometimes, sometimes not. "The Lord of Hosts (i.e. Armies)" destroyed Pharaoh's "host" violently in an action which in Judaism parallels for Christians the resurrection of Jesus—occasioning the rejoicing of Exodus 15:2: "The Lord is my strength and might (or song); he has become my salvation." Jesus closely connects the inbreaking kingdom and violence: "the kingdom of heaven has been coming violently" (Matthew 11: 12 RSV-mg), and the temple will have "not one stone upon another" (24: 2). God is rough on bodies and buildings.

7. . . . *Kinds* of violence? The theodic violence to which the Jews (especially the apocalyptists, including Jesus and Paul) pointed, the explosive violence of the Greeks (e.g. in the Peloponnesian War), the controlled violence of the Romans (carried out unimaginatively and singlemindedly and suicidally). But what about "peaceful demonstrations": are they violent? Yes, for they intend the *destruction* of unjust laws and/or unjust customs. Whether one holds them to be nonviolently violent or violently non-violent, their success encourages the forces that want change—so the success of anti-racism demonstrations motivates antipov-erty, antiwar, anticensorship demonstrations. Those with vested interest in what demonstrations aim to destroy correctly fear (a) that the demonstrations will succeed and (b) that the demonstrations will pass over from psychosocial to muscular-mechanical violence (as happened in the heroic case of Father Camilo Torres of Colombia).

8. . . . *Resources* for theorizing about violence? Rich! Biologists (e.g. Lorenz on aggressiveness and Ardrey on territorial rights), social engineers (e.g. Alinsky's engineering of rage), design scientists (e.g. Buckminster Fuller and Constantinos Doxiadis), anthropologists (e.g. Gorer), and specialists in other fields have been probing man's creative-destructive energies and potentialities. None of these is captive to the simpleminded notion that violence is evil.

Social psychologists and political scientists, of course, are quick to point out that to those in power, violence *looks* evil, for violence threatens to shift power. In general, the members of American churches are doing well, so they are apt to raise questions of doing good only within the limits of their doing well (i.e. prospering in the present mix of power, justice, and outrage).

There is a plain, down-to-earth reason why Jesus gets used in American churches to sanction nonviolence and to censure violence: clergy and laity alike have more to lose "of this world's goods" than to gain if violence breaks out. Since "violence" does not occur in their listings of possible courses of action in problem-situations, is it any wonder that they are underdeveloped in their theorizing about violent means of achieving goals and overdeveloped in rationalizing their non-listing of violence as a possible means? Unlike a significant sector of their forebears, American Christians today are predisposed *against* violence and revolution and *toward* the use of America's resources—including violence!—in suppressing violence and revolutionary change abroad.

One of the thrusts of this paper is to point to this mindless, chauvinistic irresponsibility which is not correctable without a mature theology of violence. For violence is not optional. It is old and established or new and obstreperous. It is organized ("civilization"), parasitic (crime), antiorganizational (anarchy), active (military; revolutionary) or reactive (police and militia). And its use or nonuse in general or in a situation cannot be determined by pointing scribally to religious or civil or legal prooftexts.

9. . . . *Impediments* to theorizing about violence? In the churches, the tandem collusion of *individualism and voluntarism* distorts our understanding of every important public issue of our day: civil rights (the struggle for civil and human rights), global war-control (the quest for justice and peace in international affairs), the trusteeship of nature (the effort of harness and control responsibly the vast but not unlimited resources of nature), the trustee-

ship of history (e.g., pluralism), structural collectivity (the search for more humane patterns of community life and social organization). We are struck with and proud of our religious voluntarism, but we need to make corrective allowance for it as we face public issues that call for coercion.

As for individualism, it is a perverse ideology as distortive of the person as is its diametrical, collectivism—but both represent personal values that certain formulas try to guard—such as "the dignity of each and the welfare of all." As man the person is not an individual or a collective but has individual and collective aspects, the question of individual or collective action toward change is, in each situation, *open* (the ideal Christian not having an ideological predilection for individual or collective solutions any more than he has a prejudice against violent solutions). Two illustrations: population control will require (I believe) a collective-violent solution (one plan being the automatic sterilization of women at the third birth), and war control will require a collective-nonviolent solution through (among other things) the global engineering of the threat of violence (synergism of politics, systems analysis, managerial skills, technology, and war-control games).

10. . . . In all this, "What would Jesus do?" is as non-profit a question as "What would we have done had we been Jesus?" For us Christians, the question is, What does the Lord Jesus want us to do here and now? His historical conditioning and ours are factors in our perception and definition of the situations in which we must act, but these situations are radically open when we experience them with trust and humility and with historical sophistication. As Bonhoeffer faced Hitler, should he have behaved as did Jesus when he faced Pilate? or as Theudas the Egyptian and Judas the Galilean (Acts 5: 36f), who tried to destroy Pilate? That was for Bonhoeffer to decide, and he decided it first the one way and then the other.

See the complexity: when he did what Jesus didn't do, he was convinced he was

doing what Jesus wanted him to do. Freedom *from* slavish adherence to the letter of the Gospels became freedom *for* obedience to Jesus! And within this was freedom to perceive violence as neutral, not in itself dirty or naughty or illegitimate. For Bonhoeffer, Jesus was a daily Presence. What gets our attention gets us and is our lord: Jesus got Bonhoeffer's daily attention and was his Lord. To imitate this Lord in the details of his earthly life is not to follow him but rather to make following him impossible—for "following" is obeying, not mimicking.

11. . . . An adequate Christian theology of violence cannot come into being until we view violence as a Gestalt within the whole Christ-Event, and free ourselves from peering with tunnel vision at Jesus' reported verbal and actional responses on violence. This freedom, however, comes hard, for it requires that the believer violate a numinous taboo, viz. that the devotee never disagrees with the god, for the god is both errorless (by definition) and punitive (in action). Here, then, is the issue: was Jesus wrong in believing that the Judge of all the earth would vindicate Jesus' words and deeds in the very near future? Surely he believed this—Matthew 10: 23 is like a bone in the throat of Matthew's purpose—and the immediate postresurrection church believed it. (It is now two-thirds of a century since Albert Schweitzer courageously said Jesus was wrong on this matter, and used this conclusion christologically on the side of our Lord's humanity.) Jesus gave only signs of the coming *divine* violence in nature (cursing the fig tree) and society (the temple whip): otherwise, he submitted to the violence of man and awaited the violence of God, and so did his disciples (e.g. Romans 12: 19).

For myself, I consider Schweitzer's conclusion inescapable, and I structure as follows: (a) Jesus associated the "kingdom" (dominion) of God with violence; (b) this kingdom - connected - violence had two sources, God the King and the rebellious world (under Satan) resisting the divine suzerainty; (c) Jesus and his disciples would

suffer violence from this second source, but such suffering would end with the first Source overwhelming the second source within the lifetime of some of his first disciples (Mark 9: 1; Matthew 16: 28; Luke 9: 27); (d) the first Christian generation took some responsibility for *wealth* (Acts: communalizing it, distributing it, punishing cheaters among them) but none for *power*—both responses being in line with their Lord; (3) the Eschaton (denouncement) of power-violence did not occur in the first generation or in any other, and Christians had to adjust to this fact without any logia to give them dominical guidance; (4) situationally, Christian leaders developed a casuistic on violence first within the church and then within the state; (5) this was only a casuistic, not a theology; for until our time biblical science did not free Christians from the quietistic accidents of their books of remembrance of their Lord; (6) what is now required is this: to construct operational responses to the question, *What responsibility for power-violence would Jesus have taken had he not anticipated an immediate end to history?* (such a projective question is in direct line with the postresurrection questions we see the four Evangelists struggling with); and (7) one line of developing responses to this question would be to study Jesus' relation to wealth, which lay all around him as something toward which he and his disciples had to take a stand and in which they had some stake.

12. . . . While Jesus' attitude toward violence stems from interim ethics, his attitude toward wealth is shaped largely from timeless ethical considerations. Possessions and power are, under the doctrine of creation, divine trusts; but Jesus is suspicious of both because demonic flies buzz around them: both subtend enormous temptations imperiling one's inner life, one's relationships, and society in general. There is a saying of Jesus relating possessions and power, wealth and violence: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures . . . where thieves break in and steal" (Matthew 10: 19; see also Luke 10: 30 [in the Good Samaritan]). It's prudent to invest in invisibles, for visibles attract

violence; furthermore, "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (vs. 21 of the Matthew passage).

13. . . . This *violence-attracting power of affluence* involves both the haves and the have-nots in violence—the haves in *old* violence now built into what is had, the have-nots in *new* violence. Possession claims and "territorial rights" require conservation, so the haves tend to be "conservative" of their powers and privileges and paranoid about threats thereto. Defense of their affluence tends to blind them (a) to rival claims (b) to the human values at stake, (c) to persons whom they see as threats to their affluence, and (d) to vistas opening out on other possible distributions and structures of wealth (so, as Jesus says, the unprivileged and underprivileged enter the kingdom of God before persons of privilege, possessions, power; for the former have little or nothing at stake in the present social arrangements).

14. . . . An affluent nation, accordingly, will be a conservative, perhaps reactionary, antirevolutionary, and *wealth-blinded nation*, using its psychic (imaginative) and intellectual energies to create intricate propaganda rationalizations of its powers and privileges—including even the self-congratulatory image of the patron people. (LBJ says we are in Vietnam to prove that might does not make right!)

15. . . . Without falling victim to an ideology of economic determinism, Christians in an affluent nation will share their Lord's suspicion of wealth's idolatrizing and blinding power as well as their Lord's understanding of wealth as a God-assigned trusteeship. As for the latter, they will press for the use of the nation's wealth *for truly human ends* at home and abroad, working in this with all, at home and abroad, who will work with them, without ideological distinctions. As for the former, they will oppose whatever they hold to be antihuman policies in the use and protection and projection of the nation's wealth, no matter how powerful and subtle the propaganda the nation uses for self-justification of such policies and no matter how their opposition may isolate them from the generality of the

citizenry. (E.g., just now, increasing numbers of Christian and non-Christian Americans are concluding that our Vietnam enterprise is, humanly, unjustifiable. Such a conclusion should lead to nonparticipation in that violence and to some use of one's violence-potential against the policy.)

16. . . . Another reason I have been using the word "violence" is that it is a word spoken from the *negative*, destructive pole of the full semene of power. Nice people like us tend to think of "violence" as naughty (a) because physical and (b) because negative. More than most of the populace, we have nonphysical skills of violence and opportunities for violence; and more than most of the populace, we profit from positive thinking. The implicit docetism and romanticism in all this is not exposed till we ourselves personally feel threatened with physical, negative "violence." For example, Martin Luther King could use Mr. Affluent White Liberal: Stokeley Carmichael cannot, for Mr. A. W. L. goes awol when he hears "Black Power." Realistic estimate of the Negro's plight will conclude that his threat of violence against white power must escalate, for the threat of "violence in the streets" is his children's only hope of bursting out of the ghetto or getting the ghetto deghettoized (he isn't thinking of his grandchildren: it will be his children's job to think of them).

Furthermore, the *threat* of violence remains only briefly believable without actual outbursts of violence on one or both sides; King's nonviolence is workable only insofar as he himself symbolizes impending violence, and he has been masterful in getting himself victimized by the violence of others (which in itself is reflex violence or judo violence: Bull Connor didn't figure out what hit him until too late). Furthermore, King's nonviolence is a violent grab at the white conscience in guilt and the black conscience in idealism—but both are now severely overcast, the first with the white backlash and the second with Negro impatience. King is, accordingly, overextended philosophically: he needs help toward a theology of violence,

and the chief point of my paper is that *all* of us Christians do.

17. . . . To get specific: I have worked hard in several cities for open housing, and I conclude (let us say) that physical violence will be a necessary component in achieving this goal in a particular community within reasonable time ("reasonable" as defined by the collective I am working with for change). What physical violence might be appropriate? Certainly not first against persons, just as it was certainly not first physical violence! (*Physical* violence against *persons* is the last resort, isn't it?)

What then? To make the crime fit the punishment, how about the strategic burning of one or more homes in the target area? (Am I recommending selective terrorism as a general principle? Of course not. But we are the heirs of the Boston Tea Party. The community would know instantly that Negroes are prepared to *buy or burn homes*. But I propose this as a war game in the race revolution. Only when you imagine a concrete situation such as this home-burning are you able to focus all your energies on solving the social problem you are addressing. But what happens as things now are? Not *all* the energies are focused on the strategic violent act, but (let us say) only physical rage (as in the Watts rioting, which was indiscriminate rather than strategic burning).

But it is improbable that "Christian" Negroes will take the lead in this next stage of the Negro revolution: they are too nice, too positive, and too antiphysical (docetic). And the white Christians? They cleared out long before the war games began. (Note some of these overtones of "violence" in the new Random House Dictionary: "swift and intense force; rough or injurious physical force, action, or treatment; an unjust or unwarranted exertion of force or power; . . . rough or immoderate vehemence, as of feeling or language; injury, as from distortion of meaning or fact.")

18. . . . The peril of modernizing Jesus parallels the perils of failing to translate him into our situation. In his time he took, within the limits of his situation, responsi-

bility for the use and criticism of *wealth*: in ours, does he not call us to responsibility for the use and criticism of power, of all individual and collective energies as they do and can come into play creatively and destructively—energies (to list them from Jeremiah's call: 1: 10) "to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant"? Our Lord was killed because the authorities considered him too great a threat: how much greater a threat he might well have been—I believe, he would have been—had he understood that God's "vengeance"—violence was to come *through* him rather than *from beyond* him! (The parousia—"Second Coming"—makes the correction: Jesus Returned will be violent—"the fire next time.")

19. . . . Of course *technologically* there remains no excuse for the haves/have-nots separation: for the first time in history all can have anything, or at least access to anything, and opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills to acquire power and possessions. But *practically*, while technology is winning victories almost everywhere ideological rigors are softening, the North-South gap on the globe is widening, maldistribution of goods and services is *increasing*. But the maldistribution of violence-potential is *decreasing*, thanks to Gaullism in Europe and Red Chinese nuclear successes in Asia. As we enter here a new ball game, I am suggesting that Christians everywhere should be asking themselves and each other, HOW CAN WE BEST USE OUR VIOLENCE-POTENTIAL? This is a shift from passive to active: traditionally, Christians have asked, What are we to do now that violence has broken out, victimizing us and/or others?

20. . . . Implicit in the above is the assumption that the process of social change normally has both promise and threat as components. Perhaps it is not in our fantasy life and will not be so in the transhistorical future, but in history as we know it, violence and the threat of violence are normal. But Christians have undertheologized this fact, with the result that their violent responses have been sub-Christian

and unintelligent. As Christians with a low or virtually no doctrine of the church tend, in their ecclesial institutions, merely to mirror the world, so *Christians without a doctrine of violence have tended merely to react to the world's violent initiatives*. Here, then, are at least three possibilities, only the third of which I consider fully Christian and operational: (a) *absolute pacifism* (i.e. absolute nonviolence); (b) *modified pacifism* (i.e. reactive violence); and (c) *active violence* (i.e. Christians taking the initiative in the use of all their energies toward truly human ends to the glory of God within the vision of what it means to be human face to face with Jesus Christ).

21. . . . For reasons which should be clear from much of the above, Christians in an affluent society are in a more ambiguous and complex decision-situation than Christians living in pockets of poverty at home

and in nations of poverty abroad. Needed: maximum dialogue with and among all experts who intend the resources of our society for the good of mankind and for the emergence of global man. If we learn to use the energies available to us for truly human ends, we shall be providing deeds which can make intelligible and credible the words of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This paper has been a high-speed, wide-angle, low-definition series of grab-shots of the terrain of "a theology of violence." Those readers will best profit from it who share with me a keen need to explore this issue in relation to the four agonizing issues of our time—peace, poverty, population, and race. Those who consider it chaotic are correct: it mirrors the chaos it addresses. But it is a painful and prayerful try at demythologizing violence so that it may be brought into captivity to Christ.

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