

ETERNAL LIFE AND GOSPEL NONVIOLENCE

During my forty-nine years of actively teaching and trying to fathom and to live the truth of Gospel Nonviolence I have found relatively few Catholics or Catholic groups, who subscribe to nonviolence, who have any manifest interest in explicating the relation between Gospel Nonviolence and Eternal Life. Yet, Eternal Life (or Everlasting Life) is a dominant theme of the New Testament. In fact Eternal Life is one of the unifying themes of the New Testament. “*What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his or her soul? What can anyone give in exchange for their soul?*” (Mk 8:36; Mt 16:26; Lk 9:25), are not just a couple of throwaway lines in all three synoptic Gospels. Nor is, “*For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life,*” (Jn 3:16). Nor are the dozens of other references to Eternal Life in the New Testament of secondary importance to Catholic Nonviolence. The Resurrection, of course, is the capstone communication of Eternal Life, underlining in red that salvation unto Eternal Life is the axial concern of Jesus, and hence necessarily of His Church. This is why the final canon of the Catholic Code of Canon Law reads, “*the salvation of souls, which must always be the supreme law in the Church, is to be kept before one’s eyes*” (Canon §1752). This canon applies to every ministry in the Church, including the ministry of calling Catholics and all Christians back to Jesus’ Way of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies.

It seems to me that eternal salvation is only a peripheral concern in Catholic ministries devoted to nonviolence and this suggests that Jesus’ teachings are operationally being viewed as a philosophy instead of what they are in the Gospels—the revealed will of God, the following of which, or not following of which, is explicitly said to intrinsically embody temporal and supra-temporal consequences. The Catholic Christian faith cannot be looked upon, even for an instant, as merely human wisdom, as just another pseudo-science of earthly well-being. “*Love your enemies,*” may or may not be an expression of human wisdom or a pragmatic tactic for my or for anyone’s earthly well-being in this or that particular time or place. But, it is always a revelatory statement of a means to the end for which the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus took place—namely, the eternal salvation of the individual human being, indeed of all humanity, from the quagmire and conundrum of evil and death in which humanity has entrapped itself. The deed of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies, as Jesus loved His friends and enemies, is not unrelated to the salvation of one and all, to one and all becoming God (“God became human so that human beings could become God,” CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH §460). Gospel Nonviolent Love of all under all circumstances is not merely a temporal tactic to usher in better times on earth. It is participation in the Life of God now and participation in the Way to Life in God forever for one and all. Parenthetically, what is logically inconsistent with Gospel Nonviolence is neither participation in the Life of God now nor participation in the Way to Life in God forever, whether it is called nonviolence or anything else. Absence of an on-going, explicit consciousness in Catholics—who espouse nonviolence—of the ultimate teleological purpose of Jesus’ teaching of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies is a major incarnational and evangelical problem of the nonviolent ministry among Catholics. Ideas that people never hear and/or ideas that are submerged below active consciousness are ideas that people have little to no possibility of accessing for giving direction to their lives. Gospel

Nonviolence and its relation to Eternal Life appear to be close to a non-thought in the world of Catholic Nonviolence—and in the world of nonviolence in general.

Gandhi may have done more to bring an awareness of the Nonviolent Jesus and His Way of Nonviolent Love to the world than any other person or group in the Twentieth Century. His thoughts and actions often seem to be explicitly or implicitly more operative in Christian peace and justice groups than those of Jesus. But in my experience of untold numbers of discussions of Gandhian thought and tactics, as well as of their implementation, have I ever heard a discussion of how a proposed action evolves out of or leads people to the content of the following paragraph from Gandhi's autobiography, AN EXPERIMENT IN TRUTH, even when question has been explicitly raised within a group:

What I want to achieve—what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years—is self-realization, to see God face to face. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing and all my ventures in the political field are directed to this same end.

It may be folly on a grand scale to ignore or downplay the universal longing to not cease to be, especially but not exclusively when a reasonably probable consequence of a nonviolent confrontation with violence could be the death of the nonviolent participant—a possible outcome that any rational person would instantly perceive upon hearing the word nonviolence. The Nonviolent Jesus of the Gospels, who steadfastly remained nonviolent in confrontation with the evil of lethal enmity gives the quintessential response to that fear-laden survival concern—resurrection unto Eternal Life in God. If Christ has not risen, faith in both Christian Nonviolence and the Nonviolent Jesus are in vain. Eternal Life is integral to Gospel nonviolence, theologically and practically. Chronically bracketing-out this momentous reality from the ordinary proclamation of the Nonviolent Jesus and His Nonviolent Way is untruthful and inefficacious. It makes Gospel Nonviolence appear effete, when in fact it is the power and wisdom of God to do not only the impossible but also the unimaginable. Soteriology occupies a crucial and irremovable place in the understanding, proclamation and incarnation of Gospel Nonviolence by word and/or by deed, personally or collectively.

“If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all.”

(1 COR 15:19)

“If for this life only we have hoped in [the Nonviolent] Christ [and His Way of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies], we are the most pitiable people of all.”

In Christ-God,

(REV.) EMMANUEL CHARLES MCCARTHY

www.centerforchristiannonviolence.org or www.emmanuelcharlesmccarthy.org