

THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY AND CORE PRINCIPLES OF NONVIOLENCE

Familiarity with the core principles and philosophy/ theology of nonviolence can offer us:

- Challenge and fuel for our own ideas about what we do and why;
- Sources of energy, inspiration, perspective, steadiness;
- Points of reference for the development of our own ethic, strategy, and targets. Help in coming clear about our own boundaries - what is and is not possible or acceptable for us in taking action for social change;
- Help in identifying what common ground we have with whom;
- A wider understanding of what nonviolence offers, and of its full implications.
- Does there also need to be some understanding of violence (including structural violence)?

Not only do we believe that this knowledge is useful for our own thinking and action, but also that it will enable us to enhance the thinking and action of the groups we work with in the same ways. We hope to offer a wide enough 'reference pool' to draw on to suit different groups of activists.

The following aspects of the theology/ philosophy of nonviolence could be useful in training/ working effectively alongside social change activists:

1. To meet and be inspired and challenged by the aims and visions of a number of different activists and thinkers in choosing nonviolence;
2. To encounter some of the dilemmas, opportunities, and limitations of nonviolence theory;
3. To become familiar with some answers that have been or are currently being given to the question "what is nonviolence" - and to have begun to work out our own answer to that question. (This is about principles and boundaries - not only what is nonviolence, but also what isn't.);
4. To have some understanding of violence, its nature and dynamics;
5. To be aware of and able to describe the rationale for choosing or using nonviolence from more than one theological/ philosophical perspective (eg Christian, Buddhist, humanist/ secular, feminist);
6. To have, or have begun to develop, one's own rationale for using nonviolence, in dialogue with others.

Given that Turning the Tide is a Quaker programme, it is also useful for Turning the Tide Resource People to be aware of – and be able to describe – the rationale for choosing or using nonviolence from the perspective of Quaker theological understanding (i.e. the relationship of nonviolence to Quaker peace testimony: Friends' witness for peace and against violence for

more than three centuries). This awareness will probably come best from conversation/ discussion with Quakers among the Turning the Tide Resource People and staff, rather than from any specific reading material.

Key resources:

Nonviolence for a Change (video) produced by JustUs Productions for the Turning the Tide Programme, 2001. A 25-minute video of clips and interviews to stimulate debate and help people to wrestle with definitions of nonviolence and to work out where they stand on some issues it raises.

The Powers that Be, by Walter Wink, Galilee Publishers, 1998. Chapter 5 (pp 99 – 111). Gives a radical interpretation of Christian witness in terms of engaging with the powers; includes Jesus' exhortation to "turn the other cheek", arguing that this is a positive and powerful strategy that offers a 'third way' of responding to injustice or oppression which is neither passively accepting the status quo nor fighting back violently.

Coming Back to Life by Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown, New Society Publishers, 1998: Chapters 1 – 4 (pp. 15 – 62). Written by two long term activists, this looks at nonviolence from the perspective of Buddhist teaching, systems theory (the Tao of Physics, etc) and deep ecology. An inspiring introduction to "the work that reconnects".

To Tame the Hydra: Undermining the Culture of Violence by Adam Curle, Jon Carpenter, 1999. Adam Curle has worked for a lifetime in both international mediation and grass-roots peacebuilding. This book addresses the current state of violence in our world, and its roots, trying to get a story that can enable our understanding, empowerment and responses to catch up with the uncontrollable, interconnected nature of what is happening. Learning from psychology, philosophy, political observation and Curle's own life experiences are brought into service here in a straightforward and heart-ful way to open up our capacity and resources to confront and transform violence.

Additional Resources:

Rules for Radicals by Saul Alinsky, summarised in *Manual for Action* (p. 65 – 68) by Martin Jelfs. Taken from the writings of a US American community and industrial organiser, these are pragmatic and hard-hitting tactical guidelines – not all of them necessarily nonviolent! Good for testing boundaries.

The Nonviolent Coming of God, by James Douglass, Orbis, 1992. Written by a Catholic theologian and life-long activist, this is one for the real theology nuts - but the difficult Bible study bits are interspersed with exciting and illuminating stories from the author's campaigning experience.

Strength to Love by Martin Luther King, Hodder and Stoughton, 1964. Old, but a classic – a collection of sermons and essays, including *Loving your Enemies* and *Pilgrimage to Nonviolence*.

Introducing Liberation Theology by Leonard and Clodovis Boff (transl Paul Burns), Orbis, 1987 – There are many possible books and articles about this revolutionary way of ‘doing theology’ – reading and acting on the Gospels – rooted in the experience and struggle of poor communities in Latin America; but this has been recommended to us as a good place to start...

Conquest of Violence: the Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict by Joan V. Bondurant, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1971. A statement of Gandhi’s political thought and the challenge of ‘satyagraha’ (truth-force) to Western philosophy.

The Compassionate Revolution: Radical Politics and Buddhism by David Edwards, Green Books, 1998. Global analysis and the argument for a nonviolent response from a Buddhist perspective. It includes an interesting section on the role of the media in distorting our clear perception, and therefore our understanding, of reality.

Peace is Every Step by Thich Naht Hahn: Talks by exiled Vietnamese activist and Buddhist teacher who created many peace projects in Vietnam and abroad. Clear, insightful, practical and wise in conveying the message of interconnectedness and suggesting means to end cycles of violence.

Reweaving the Web of Life Women, edited by Pam McCallister, New Society Publishers, 1982. Short pieces from a radical feminist perspective, includes: *Peace and Power* by Jo Vellacott; *I am a Dangerous Woman* (poem) by Joan Cavanagh and *Feminist Spirituality and Nonviolence* by Margaret Bishop.

Heart Politics by Fran Peavey, New Society Publishers, 1986. A very personal account of one woman’s experience that nonviolence as a means to change the world corresponds to something which satisfies the heart. It explores ways in which our sense of what is right and what we love can be embodied in political action.

On Anger (from *We Are All Part of One Another*) by Barbara Deming, (an anthology of her writings published by New Society Publishers in 1984; p 207 ff.) This is a feminist classic, in which an experienced activist looks at the role, energy, and usefulness of anger in nonviolent struggle.

In the Tigers Mouth by Katrina Shields, Millennium Books, 1991, Section I: *Inner Resources for Social Change*, and especially the chapter on *Insight as a Resource*. A very clear, open, simple section exploring the inner resources, motivations and obstacles we may have in relation to wanting change in the status quo. Includes short and longer exercises for individual or group work.

Thinking Like a Mountain by Arne Ness, John Seed, et al. The deep ecology insight is a doorway for humans to learn and listen to the imperatives and instructions for nonviolent action from the earth and all lifeforms on it. It offers us a longer timespan/ perspective from which to see what could be wise and effective action. A short book from four activist/ philosopher/ ecologists, it

includes both theory and exercises.

Peace is the Way, edited by Walter Wink, Orbis Books, 2000. An anthology of essays on theology, philosophy, theory and analysis of nonviolence from the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Includes sections on The Vision of Peace, Witness for Peace, Spirit of Peace, Interracial Justice, Nonviolence in Action, and The Path of Reconciliation, with articles by all the “big names” and some of the everyday ‘coal face’ workers as well.

La Lingua de las Mariposas (Butterfly Tongue), a video by Jose Lewis Querda about nonviolence in Central America, made in 2000.

Websites:

The Council for World Mission, a mainline Protestant organisation, has just launched its new website, which includes a discussion forum on pacifism and Christianity:

<http://www.cwmission.org.uk>

Turning Wheel - Buddhist Peace Fellowship's journal - analysis and reports and inquiry into all forms of socially engaged nonviolent action – great, lively, inspiring, thoughtful publication also website - www.bpf.org