

Transforming our *Us versus Them* Way of Thinking

Violence is any attitude or action that diminishes, dominates, dehumanises or destroys ourselves or others. It is rooted in and reinforced by the tendency to divide human beings into competing and antagonistic groups: Our Group and the Other Group.

'We' are the good people. 'They' are the bad people. The 'bad' people threaten us, but they do more than this: they endanger the very order of the universe. 'We' are justified in using whatever means necessary, including violence, to stop this threat and to restore order. This therefore becomes a sacred duty – to use violence to end violence, to use violence to re-establish order in the world, and even to use violence to 'save' and 'redeem' even 'Them', something they obviously can't do themselves. Violence therefore promises not only to end the immediate violence, it promises to establish peace once and for all.

We are continually creating this pattern of the 'in group' and the 'out-group'. And we do so for the best of intentions. We know that our group has the truth. We also know that the threat is 'out there', and we want to strengthen and protect the 'good and truthful' community to which we belong.

Our contemporary incessant cycle of violence is our inheritance from the ancient practice of 'scapegoating'.

The Scapegoat

Scapegoating developed as a way for a group, a community, or a society to solve the problem of evil or violence it faced. A particular individual or group was deemed the source and cause of the evil or violence and would then be demonised, excluded, or killed. After this 'sacrifice', the community would feel a new sense of oneness and unity, because the evil had been purged and the community had joined together in doing this. Rather than seeing this for what it was – the majority projecting its own evil and violence on the minority, blaming it for the crisis at hand, and victimizing the less powerful – the community named what it did as *sacred*. This was holy work – ridding the community of evil. This becomes "sacred violence" and what Walter Wink calls 'the myth of redemptive violence'.

The heart of violence is this scapegoating 'Us versus Them' thought and action. Violence is designed to defeat and dominate others. Fear, hostility, greed, or the desire for justice for past violence (perpetrators of violence often see themselves as victims of prior violence). And this rests on a fundamental distinction and division between Us and Them that:

- Sees *them* as less than *us* (they are inferior); as less than human (they are animals or things); or as the opposite of being human (evil incarnate);
- Exercises power over *them* by threat, retaliation and other forms of domination;
- Seeks to preserve or enhance *us* at the expense of *them*;
- Establishes order, revitalises community (Our group), restores stability, rescues us, and saves the world through sacred violence; and
- Upholds a 'violence belief system': a set of belief that the universe itself is ultimately an 'Us versus Them' universe.

The Heart of Creative Nonviolence: Transforming 'Us versus Them'

Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, the Nobel Laureate for Literature, once wrote:

'If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his [or her] own heart?'

In this spirit, creative nonviolence is a process of recognizing that each of us is wounded and sacred, that each of us has a piece of the truth and the un-truth, and that our ability to achieve peace, fairness, dignity and survival depends on seeing this. In other words, projecting our own violence on others and demonising them (and angelising ourselves) will only interfere with the ability to solve the enormous problems we all face and to construct the future together.

Creative nonviolence is a constructive force rooted in the unity of life and the pursuit of truth, not the assumption that WE have all the truth. Creative nonviolence is the power of love in action. Its strength lies in the fact that it is a different kind of power: power that unifies rather than threatens; that integrates rather than fragments and destroys; and that is rooted in the human capacity for cooperation, connection, and compassion.

In contrast to the Power of Violence, Creative Nonviolence actively resists dividing the world, or our families or our communities or our societies into *Us versus Them*. It seeks to create an ever-expanding circle that excludes no one. And it does, not through scapegoating and the myth of redemptive violence but through the journey, with all of its cost and creativity, toward the well being of *all*.