

Shalom!

A JOURNAL FOR THE PRACTICE OF RECONCILIATION

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Teaching Peace

FORTY YEARS AGO, in the Winter 1983 edition of *the Peace and Justice Newsletter* (*Shalom*'s predecessor), former Canadian bishop E. J. Swalm wrote a brief article, "Our Peace Witness, Whither Bound?" Reflecting from his many years of denominational service and his own experience as a conscientious objector during World War I, he assessed the status of our commitment to nonviolent peacemaking:

What do we mean by our peace witness? Briefly, it embraces the scriptural teaching of nonviolence and expressed love to the work of which we are a part. It is love in action.

The question, "What about tomorrow?" is raised frequently by concerned devotees to this cardinal truth. It is a valid question since many times the living do not listen to the dead. *No doctrine can survive more than one generation unless it is clearly taught in precept and practice* (italics mine for emphasis).

More than fifty years earlier in 1931, Bishop Swalm was on a committee that developed a little booklet for children: "Questions and Answers in Bible Instruction: Children's Edition." The preface states:

The church has a two-fold mission—evangelism, or soul-winning, and teaching or feeding the flock. It is our conviction that this ministry of teaching is vital to the spiritual life of the church. Especially is doctrinal teaching urgently necessary for our children.

This primer is designed for children from eight to twelve years of age; and it

brings the great scriptural truths before the young mind in a definite form to be lastingly impressed upon the memory. . . We recommend the following uses of this primer: 1) For instruction of the children in the home. 2) Taught to a class during the Sunday School lesson hour. 3) For week day or class instruction by ministers or Christian workers.

There are thirty-one lessons, alphabetically listed in a question-and-answer format for each doctrine, with answers usually giving a Bible verse. Under "Non-resistance," three of the questions are: 1) What is non-resistance? (Non-resistance is love in action). 2) Is it right to bear arms or take part in war? (No, the Bible says, "Thou shalt not kill"). 3) May we fight in self-defense? (No, it is not Christlike, neither is it necessary for "the angel of the Lord encampeth around about them that fear him and delivereth them.")

Do we have similar resources today for teaching peace to children (and youth and adults)? How do we clearly teach peace in "precept and practice"? That's the question at the heart of this edition of *Shalom!* The writers offer ideas for preaching about peace, core practices for teaching peace in the congregation, stories about teaching peace at home, personal reflection illustrating the power of storytelling about peace, and more.

Nonviolent peacemaking is hard, but the world desperately needs people who are committed to it in "precept and practice." Let's seek peace, pursue it—and teach it!

Harriet S. Bicksler, editor

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Preaching Peace

By Ryan Cagno

IN 1825, THE Quaker preacher and painter Edward Hicks sold the first of what would become a career-defining sequence of paintings entitled “The Peaceable Kingdom.” Inspired by Isaiah 11 (“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb... and a little child shall lead them.”), Hicks would go on to repeatedly revisit the scene over the course of his life, producing sixty-two known editions of *The Peaceable Kingdom*, far outnumbering his other works (see photo for one version).

Across this sequence of paintings there were constants: in the distance the signing of a treaty between William Penn and the Native inhabitants of Pennsylvania, in the foreground a child with olive branch and an ever-evolving menagerie of the animals the

prophet Isaiah described. But within this consistent framework, Hicks would experiment with variation. Occasionally George Washington would preside over the treaty proceedings. Lady Liberty would join the parade of animals, a dove alighting on her up-

iah’s parade of former predator and prey, the one on whose shoulders the government would rest, the one called Prince of Peace, born to a resounding “Peace on Earth!”

Every Good Friday we celebrate the peace dearly bought on the Cross. We remember Christ crucified, in whose blood God made peace with all things, whether on earth or in heaven—Christ crucified, in whose shattered flesh the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile was broken down so finally and wondrously that Paul can only marvel, “He himself is our peace.”

Every Easter Sunday we celebrate the risen Jesus, who repeatedly reassures the disciples, “Peace be with you.” A



raised hand. The branch-bearing child would be reimagined as Hicks’s youngest daughter, Sally. For Hicks, *The Peaceable Kingdom* became the centralizing theme of his life. The bones of the scene became a canvas on which he wrestled with religious pathos, personal loss, and his quest for peace among fractious Quaker sects, searching out with each brushstroke for an “affirmation of all that he hoped lay ahead.”¹

What if, in preaching our peace position among and for our churches, we modeled our approach after that of Hicks, for whom the *Peaceable Kingdom* was not one among a litany of subjects, but the dominating theme of his work? Is the peace position one among many beliefs—a minor theological quirk reserved for Peace Sunday or a series on the Core Values? Or is it at the very heart of discipleship and our common life, and inherent in the Gospel we seek to consistently proclaim?

Might the Gospel of the *Peaceable Kingdom* become the mastering motif of all our preaching? It would not, in reality, require much adjustment.

Every Christmas we celebrate an infant King, an echo of that little child leading Isa-

simple Hebrew greeting, to be sure, but words latent with import nonetheless, heavy with the glorious weight of shalom, of the new world that had dawned in the garden that morning.

The Gospel of the Kingdom that is enacted and inaugurated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is from start to finish a proclamation of peace. And if we widen the scope of our peace position to encompass valuing all human life and promoting forgiveness, understanding, reconciliation, and nonviolent resolution of conflict, when wouldn’t our biblical preaching and proclamation draw from and spotlight our peace position?

When we retell stories of healed lepers, women caught in adultery, children plucked from crowds and perched on Jesus’s knee, we are confronted with the undeniable value of all human life. Jesus dignifies human life in every word and act, and especially in his own incarnation.

When we break the bread and lift high the cup, we wrestle the abstractions of “forgiveness” and “reconciliation” to the ground and make of them something visceral and terribly practical, not mere concepts to study,

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but modes of being to embrace in our very bodies, as Jesus did. We are being retrained with every tiny cup and wafer to be forgivers and reconcilers to our very bones.

Then there is nonviolence, which is sometimes preached to the exclusion of these other facets of peace, while at other times generalized away or relegated to some distant, plain-clothed past. Yet nonviolence, as with peace more generally, is endemic to the Gospel—indeed, to all of scripture. Jesus, of course, commends enemy love and the turning of the cheek. But even when we preach from Old Testament narratives of pogroms and pitched battles, conquerors and kings, we heed the subtle throughline of the subversion of militancy. The steady message of all of scripture, including stories of conquest, is that humans must not trust in our own might—not in our armies or censuses or the staves in our hands—but in the Lord God alone.

The prophets consistently condemn trust in military might, just as they decry defrauding the poor as a shattering of shalom, a marring of the beautiful vision of the Kingdom that God had set out to establish. It is that vision of the Kingdom that should likewise captivate us and color our preaching. Our every sermon, song, and prayer should be training our hearts toward the full and final establishment of that Peaceable Kingdom to come, where the wolf lays down with the lamb, where the people of God all like little children love their enemies, exult in their reigning Prince of Peace, and reject self-defense and violence and war in favor of trusting in him.

When we proclaim the Gospel, we proclaim this Peaceable Kingdom: peace with God, peace with one another—peace established over every inch of the cosmos. A Gospel without this proclamation of peace is not, in fact, the Gospel. So we cannot but

join Hicks in making peace our constant theme. It cannot be confined to sermons on war and soldiering, though it ought to include them; nor can it be spiritualized, relativized away until it lays no practical claim upon us but to have warm feelings toward our neighbor. Peace is our theme, our mastering motif, and as we obsessively return to it may our every sermon, every action, every word be increasingly captured by and caught up in the vision of the Peaceable Kingdom to which we belong.

Note:

¹Ford, Alice. *Edward Hicks: His Life and Art* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 242. Beyond what is directly cited, Ford's work served as the primary source for all reflections on Hicks and his work.

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Do Not Conform to This World: A Fourth of July Sermon

By John R. Yeatts

WHEN I ENTERED my first pastorate, Richard Nixon was President. I spoke against his vulgar and profane language on the Watergate tapes, but I do not remember anyone saying, “You must be a Democrat to attack our Republican President.” When President George H. W. Bush made the decision to invade Iraq, Messiah’s Biblical and Religious Studies Department, Democrats and Republicans, unanimously signed a letter opposing that invasion. Some years later, when I denounced the immorality and abuse of power in President Bill Clinton’s affair with an intern, nobody said, “You must be Republican.” Later, when I shared my distress concerning President Barack Obama’s use of drones to cause death for both targets and civilians, no one said: “You must be a Republican.” Yet, when I spoke about President Donald Trump’s divisive language and disregard for truth, the response was along party lines: Democrats agreed and Republicans defended the President. Because political discussion today is dominated by polarities, many hesitate to call out the sins of our leaders. So Jesus’s prophetic message of truth,

peace, and justice is muted.

Jesus proclaimed many principles with political implications: “do not kill,” “love your enemies,” “do not resist the evil one,” “turn the other cheek,” “swear not at all,” “let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ be ‘no,’” and “do not worry about anything.” Is it reasonable or even possible to follow Jesus’s teachings in our world today? In his letter to the Romans, Paul addresses that question: How can we follow Jesus in our world? His answer is: “Do not be conformed to this world.” Paul urges us to “renew our minds” to a radically new way of thinking based on God’s “good, pleasing, and perfect will.”

In our flower garden last summer, milkweed was covered with scores of disgusting, squirmy, worm-like larvae. I was going to destroy them, but my biologist daughter told me they would soon become beautiful monarch butterflies. We also have several large butterfly bushes only a few yards away from the milkweed. Later in the summer, I liked to think the butterflies on that bush were once larvae on the milkweed. Like those caterpillar/butterflies, if we allow Jesus

to renew our twisted caterpillar minds, something beautiful like those monarch butterflies is born.

Worldly thinking creates selfish conflict; Jesus’s new way of thinking controls ambition contributing to the common good. Paul lists specific ways we can conform to the will of God. The most comprehensive is: Love God and others. Paul says: “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.”

Jesus’s love rejects injustice and bigotry, but clings to the good, like taking care of the weak and oppressed. Paul says that we should be zealous to give joyful hope to those in despair, to be patient with the afflicted, to share with the needy, to invite strangers into our homes, and to faithfully pray with those who have physical and emotional afflictions. This is the opposite of the pattern of this world that says, in tough times, take care of yourself.

Other teachings of Jesus quoted by Paul in Romans 12 do not conform to the pattern of this world: “Live in harmony with one an-

other.” “Do not be conceited.” “[L]ive at peace with everyone.” “Do not take revenge.” “Feed [your enemies].” “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Jesus proclaims a new way of thinking and acting. President Dwight Eisenhower, who attended the Brethren in Christ Sunday School in Abilene, Kansas, understood the importance of Jesus’s new way of relating to the world. When he was president of Columbia University, Eisenhower was asked to “Witness for Christ” in the prestigious Riverside Church in New York City. Eisenhower read Romans 12 from his King James Version:

...[E]very man that is among you, [is] not to think of himself more highly than [he] ought to think. . . . Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another. . . . If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Shortly after World War 2, the supreme com-

mander of allied troops in Europe addressed that auspicious audience with Jesus’s words of justice and peace.

In our politically polarized society, how do we live at peace with everyone? Two of my relatives are polar opposites politically. After one of them expressed a partisan opinion, the other drew on an image taken from Jim Jones’s Peoples Temple, where 909 members died from a powdered drink laced with cyanide. My relative said: “Well, you have been drinking the Kool Aid.” He was right. Most of us drink either the red Republican Kool Aid or the blue Democratic Kool Aid.

Rather than being deceived into drinking the Kool Aid of the donkey Democrats or elephant Republicans, followers of Jesus are nourished by living water from the Lamb Jesus Christ. We avoid polarities on divisive political issues. We are not prolife in the narrow way limited to life before birth. We are also prolife when it relates to gun use, capital punishment, the environment, programs for the poor, and educational policy. Our prolife

stance is not limited to abortion. Nevertheless, we are not pro-choice, when that means our concern relates only to rights of the mother and does not consider the unborn. On such issues, we do not conform to Democratic or Republican policy. We follow Jesus.

Hank Johnson, pastor of the Harrisburg Brethren in Christ Church, says this: “If you are a Republican, be a Republican with a difference—a Republican whose primary allegiance is to follow Jesus. If you are a Democrat, be a Democrat with a difference—a Democrat whose primary allegiance is to follow Jesus.” Our identity is guided by Jesus rather than partisan politics, and Jesus said: “Be not conformed to this world.”

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A Baker’s Dozen of Core Practices for Teaching Peace

By Harriet Sider Bicksler

1. **AT THE DENOMINATIONAL** level, commission the preparation of peace curriculum for children, youth, and adults that clearly articulates the Brethren in Christ view, and make it and other peacemaking resources available to all congregations. Update them regularly.
2. Include the goal of “pursuing peace” in some way in congregational mission and vision statements.
3. Create a congregational commission, committee, or task force whose primary task is to focus on peace and justice education in the congregation.
4. Intentionally integrate peace teaching into the regular programs of your church:
 - a. *Membership classes:* Make sure that incoming members know, understand, and commit to instruction in “pursuing peace” as a core value of the Brethren in Christ and that they know how your congregation tries to live that out.
 - b. *Christian education and discipleship programs:* Make sure that all children and youth growing up in the congregation have opportunities to learn what the Bible has to say about being peacemakers, to hear about peace heroes in the faith to counter all the war heroes they learn about in school and in society, and to develop their own skills in peacemaking with siblings and friends in their neighborhoods and schools. By the time they graduate from high school, all youth in our congregations should be familiar with the church’s convictions regarding peace and nonviolence, and hopefully internalize them as their own convictions as well.
5. Periodically preach on the five parts of the core value and the biblical basis for peacemaking, including analysis of the difficult passages that are used to justify war and violence in certain circumstances.
6. Regularly incorporate prayers for peace in our nation and the world in worship service liturgies—along with songs and responsive readings that affirm our desire to pursue peace.
7. Use national holidays like Martin Luther King Day, Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, Indigenous Peoples’ Day (Columbus Day), and Veterans’ Day to offer alternate perspectives to war and injustice in keeping with our commitment to pursuing peace.
8. Hold an annual Peace Sunday that highlights a specific theme, such as racial justice, peacemaking in a polarized world, how to resolve conflicts, telling the stories of peace, welcoming strangers, being consistently pro-life, the things that make for peace, and so on.
9. Keep the congregation informed about and support organizations like MCC

- that sponsor peace-building projects around the world and advocate for national policies that promote peace and offer alternatives to war and violence.
10. Stock your library and displays with resources for families and individuals on peacemaking, such as books, videos, podcasts, etc. Feature mini-reviews of these resources in your newsletter and/or on your website to draw attention to them.
 11. Create visual reminders in the church building that yours is a congregation that cares about peacemaking—e.g., posters, bulletin boards, displays.
 12. Invite individuals to share stories of how they have lived out their commitment to peacemaking. Offer workshops in conflict transformation and how to talk with others with whom we disagree.
 13. Approach the pursuit of peace holistically. There's more to peacemaking than being against war; on the other hand, there's more to peacemaking than getting

along with our neighbors. Both ends of the spectrum are important.

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From the Meadow to the Mess

by Ryan Cobb

HENRY MILLER, AN American Novelist, said, "To be silent the whole day, see no newspaper, hear no radio, listen to no gossip. . . . to be thoroughly and completely indifferent to the fate of the world is the finest medicine a [person] can give [themselves]." This is from Miller's 1941 travelogue and is perhaps more vividly captured in Andrew Wyeth's 1961 Distant Thunder artwork. In the painting by Wyeth, Miller's words are made visual. A person is lying peacefully in a wide-open field with a mug of coffee, a book, and the only living companion nearby is a yellow Labrador retriever. That painting is my scene when it comes to seeking peace. I love the coffee mug, the wide-open field, a book within reach, and the lab, my favorite dog.

Whatever our scene of peace might be, we all have one. There is some favorite location of solitude, a meditating spot at home, or a nature path where we seek peace. This kind of personal peace is something to seek and find. Besides Miller's indifference to the world, as noted above, we see Jesus model peace-seeking in the open and quiet spaces. "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed," reminds the historian and gospel writer. So be it then; we are invited to be peace-seekers!

But what happens when the gospels do what they always do and call us from comfortable places? "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God," says another gospel writer quoting Jesus. These two gospel verses tell a fuller story of

who Jesus is and what we are called to do as his followers. We are invited to seek peace. We are called to make it as well.

When we seek peace, we may look for the open meadow, the coffee mug, and the Labrador friend. When we make peace, we open our eyes to conflicts and enter them with a specific vision: non-hostile resolution. To be a peacemaker is to move from the meadow to the mess and trust God's grace to meet us there. Alan Kreider's encouragement is to pour our whole selves into building a culture of peace. As we form the right culture in our lives, homes, churches, and communities, this is a witness. It tells the world that God is a God of peace, Jesus is the prince of shalom, and the Spirit's fruit of peace can be realized.

In this critical work of peacemaking, we should not bypass the importance of perspective. Three perspectives help us as we attempt to create a culture of truer peace. These perspectives can apply to the home, workplace, family dynamics, friendships, neighborhood, or church. We could even see them applied globally and between nations in conflict. Thus, from interpersonal to international conflicts, these three perspectives help us become peacemakers in any context God leads us to and through:

Perspective 1: To be a peacemaker, we stop avoiding conflict. To make peace, we observe conflict, note it, and consider how it impacts others. With wisdom, we approach conflict, are willing to help with reconciliation, and remind people about healthy boundaries.

"But true unity should not need boundaries," some may say. Tell my wife and me to share a closet, and we will swiftly remind you that we need certain healthy boundaries to maintain truer unity. Joking aside, boundaries matter to those within a conflict. So, to be taken seriously, we should understand and affirm others as long as they support the vision of non-hostile resolution.

Perspective 2: Conflict is an opportunity for transformation because it will end with a non-hostile and nonviolent resolution. The peacemaker has a vision of non-hostile and nonviolent resolution. If peacemakers cannot enter a conflict with this vision in mind, I am convinced that no one else in the world can or will. The Christian believes that, because of the resurrected Christ, even conflict resolution will open redemptive and transformative paths for all involved. Our spiritual formation can flourish as we work within and for non-hostile resolution of conflict.

Perspective 3: Boundaries. Respect. Repeat. A professor I had at Eastern Mennonite Seminary advocated for diverse congregations to unite. He believed a witness of peace in the world would be for two diverse churches to agree to come together under the vision of Galatians 3:28, which says that there are no longer divisions that define us. My professor believes these churches could be theologically, ethnically, or politically diverse and seek unity.

He asked me, "What would you do as a leader of those two diverse churches coming

together?” I said, “Open the doors, start worshipping together, preach the Scriptures, and build community through grace for one another.” He said, “Wrong.” After I sat humbly in silence, he said, “Ryan, those are all good things, but you missed the most important step: Boundaries.” He said I would not get one inch towards building unity among diverse folks without healthy boundaries that

are understood and respected. This is a compelling view if we truly want to enter real-time conflicts as peacemakers with a vision of actual, non-hostile resolution.

After considering new perspectives and sensing the leading of the Spirit, we will find ground for building a culture of peace. It will likely not be a wide-open field with only one dog and the silence mentioned at the open-

ing of this article. The ground may be amid a conflict, large or small. Keep looking for the ground on which to build a culture of peace,

Ryan Cobb is pastor of the Millersville (PA) Brethren in Christ Church.

The Unkillable Peace Witness

By Zach Spidel

TRUTH IS UNKILLABLE—so said Balthasar Hubmaier. The resurrection of Jesus Christ, truth incarnate, proves the aphorism. So too does the remarkable history of the church’s peace witness. Though often sidelined, minimized, or even attacked, Jesus’s summons to love our enemies and return good for evil—his summons to carry crosses and put away our swords—has never been without a witness. You just can’t kill the truth. In this small space I hope to sketch—all too quickly and without adequate attribution of sources—a few key moments (some familiar, some less so) in the remarkable and unbroken history of the peace witness. Those interested in my sources may reach out to me.

For the first three hundred years of the church’s existence, every major Christian teacher who mentions killing tells us clearly and emphatically that Christians are forbidden from the act in all cases. Why? Because, in the words of the fourth century Lactantius, “the human being is a sacred animal.” We must never kill one who bears the sacred image of God. Abortion is disallowed; instead Christians adopt abandoned babies. Capital punishment is disallowed; instead Christians forgive, knowing that we are all Barrabbas let off our own capital charges. Killing in war is disallowed, for how can Christians proclaim Christ who died for his enemies while we set out to kill ours?

But aren’t we called to fight evil? Yes, the early Christian teachers readily agreed. In fact, they often deployed the Old Testament’s martial language and stories to emphasize just this point. But crucially they maintained

that we wage war against the spiritual powers which are the real root of oppression, not against the humans in thrall to those powers. That’s why the third century Origen calls the church an “army of prayer” more effective than the emperor’s legions.

Speaking of emperors. . . . When the fourth century emperor Constantine converted, he refused to submit to the catechesis of the church and opted, instead, to push for a novel synthesis of Christian and imperial commitments. A revolution in Christian views was ignited and the peace witness was beset on all sides by the terrible embodied falsehood that is Christian violence. The church became more and more directly involved in committing and justifying killing in the centuries that followed.

In telling this familiar story, however, we must remember that Constantine’s sword was not so mighty that it could kill the truth. It did not. The peace witness lived on. Lactantius, for instance, lectured on the Christian faith directly to Constantine’s court and bore witness in those halls of power to the truth that the just person cannot go to war since war is injustice itself. Thus in the time of Constantine, when many people, for understandable reasons, quietly acquiesced to the falsehood of violence, others did speak up for the living and enduring truth of Jesus’s teaching.

That truth lived on in the centuries which followed Constantine. Long before the radical reformers discovered this truth for themselves, it could be found in the lives of humble people who would later be remembered as saints by the very church whose ar-



guments for violence their lives testified against (often the church canonized those who died refusing to kill). The truth lived on, too, in some of those intentional communities we know as monastic orders. Saint Francis laid down his life as a soldier and committed to a life of love like the Fathers and led a continent-spanning movement of others in the same direction.

And then, of course, the radical reformers appeared and the peace churches were founded and their witness endures among us. I believe we know their story fairly well. Rather than repeat it, I wish to close by tracing the remarkable cross-continental, cross-cultural, cross-racial, and cross-religious story of a set of modern people who discovered Jesus’s message for themselves and ended up changing the world.

Adin Ballou was a nineteenth century American pastor who came to his own profound conviction regarding the call of Jesus to nonresistance. He came to this conviction via his study of the New Testament. He wrote a book (among others) called *Practical Christianity* that tried to take Jesus’s teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere as practical and implementable instruction for how we really ought to live. That book included a “non-resistant catechism” which is a helpful document to this day, grounding the commitment to nonresistance squarely in Jesus’s own words.

Ballou's books and his own rediscovery of Jesus's nonviolence would have an immense effect on a far more famous writer, Leo Tolstoy. Influenced deeply by Ballou, Tolstoy wrote books like *The Kingdom of God is Within You* and *The Law of Violence and the Law of Love*, in which Jesus's teachings were the centerpiece and source of a holistic and nonviolent approach to social organization and transformation. Tolstoy is far better known today, but he gave credit to his American inspiration, naming Ballou one of the greatest and most important writers whom future generations would remember and thank.

Tolstoy's writings, in turn, made their way into the hands of Mahatma Gandhi who was then a lawyer in South Africa. Tolstoy's effect

on Gandhi was profound. He founded a commune in South Africa named after Tolstoy that worked at further developing the practice and theory of nonviolence that Tolstoy had found in Jesus with help from Ballou. Gandhi's nonviolence, tested in South Africa, was applied over decades in India by a growing movement of nonviolent truth-tellers who would lead that nation of hundreds of millions to independence from the United Kingdom apart from any war of independence.

Finally, it was to Gandhi that the great African American church leader Howard Thurman went with a delegation of other African American leaders to seek help in working through their own nonviolent approach to America's deep racial injustices.

Thurman became a key mentor and spiritual guide for Martin Luther King Jr. and other key leaders in the civil rights movement. Thus, Jesus's teachings on nonviolence passed from a white American pastor, to a Russian novelist, to an Indian lawyer, to an African American pastor and, along the way, freed one nation from colonial rule and ended legal racial segregation in another.

See how truth, like light, bounces off surfaces, flows with speed from one place or person to the next, illuminating and changing things as it goes, making people far distant visible to one another, and remaining forever uncapturable, untamable, unkillable.

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Telling Different Stories: Nonviolence and the Media

By Matthew R. Peterson

OUR HOUSEHOLD IS what some might call a "Star Wars" home. Pretend play for our kids revolves around adventures, lightsabers, and spaceships. The family smart speaker is frequently tuned in to the thrilling John Williams score. And just a few weeks ago our three-year-old chose to wear his Darth Vader costume to a church gathering. This sort of play is unsurprising. Our kids' imaginations have been shaped by the Star Wars films, and so the possibilities of what they imagine "play" to be often revolve around those stories.

Despite some recent forays in other directions, Star Wars is hardly a series that I would describe as morally complex. In the end, unambiguous good always triumphs over blatant evil, usually at the point of a lightsaber or with the blast of a laser. And when our kids run around reenacting plots from the films, I sometimes wonder how to square such a cavalier attitude towards violence with our family's commitment to the nonviolent teachings of Jesus.

In this age of blockbuster spectacles, public imagination is substantially shaped by what theologian Walter Wink once referred to as the "myth of redemptive violence"—a deeply rooted and long-lived story structure

centered around "the victory of order over chaos by means of violence."¹ By my count, only five of the top fifty highest grossing films in history embrace narratives other than this story of heroes overcoming external foes through violence. Outside of the theater, our airwaves are filled with police procedurals, military dramas, superhero series, and horror anthologies. Each day millions of US households tune in to prime-time cable news programs oriented around "us vs. them" conflicts, while others get their news from social media websites that exploit social strife through their engagement algorithms.

The constant reinforcement of this message of redemptive violence can unfortunately limit our ability to imagine alternate solutions to the problems of our lives and our world. As Wink writes, the culturally dominant view prompts us to project evil onto the world around us rather than engage in introspection about our own violence.² It encourages us to baptize our violence (physical and rhetorical) as noble pursuits of the good, despite Jesus's command to love our enemies and his warning that "all who take the sword shall die by the sword" (Matt. 26:52).

What can be done in the face of a multi-media culture with the potential to stunt our

ethical imagination? Some might argue that followers of Jesus ought to abstain from films that promote the "peace through violence" message. Although the cavalier attitude towards violence in most media is problematic, I think the solution might lie in intentionally diversifying and reflecting on the types of narratives that we consume. As the people of a peace-making God in a war-making world, we are in continual need of a reinvigoration of our ethical imagination. So, I would suggest that we should regularly incorporate into our media consumption stories that offer alternatives to the myth of redemptive violence. Such stories may not even be completely free of violence but ultimately reject violence as an appropriate response to the problem of evil. It might also be helpful to creatively interrogate how violence is used in other films and discuss alternatives that the characters could have taken. Through these tactics we can engage our imaginations with the message of biblical nonviolence, and so expand the range of possibilities that we see available in our own lives.

Over the past year I have developed a small list of stories that challenge the myth of redemptive violence. Here are a few that might favorably be used to expand our ethi-

cal imagination:

Books: *Foundation* (Isaac Asimov), *The Hobbit* (J. R. R. Tolkien), *The Iron Giant* (Ted Hughes), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Harper Lee), *The Story of Ferdinand* (Munro Leaf).

Movies: *A Hidden Life*, *Big Hero 6*, *Hacksaw Ridge*, *Hotel Rwanda*, *How to Train Your Dragon* (series), *The Iron Giant*, *The Mission*, *Of Gods and Men*, *Romero*, *Schindler's List*, *Selma*.

Shows and documentaries: *American Experience: Freedom Riders*; *Avatar: The Last Airbender*; *Bringing Down a Dictator*; *Good Will to Men*; *Independent Lens: The Armor of Light*.

Books on nonviolence: *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Stanley Hauerwas), *A Peace Reader* (E. Morris Sider & Luke Keefer Jr.), *Speak Your Peace: What the Bible Says about Loving Our Enemies* (Ronald J. Sider), *Christian Pacifism: The Fruit of the Narrow Way* (Michael Snow), *Jesus and the Nonviolent Revolution* (André Trocmé)

I would also stress that we need to develop a fuller “cultural memory” of fellow Jesus followers who practiced biblical nonviolence—folks like Adin Ballou, Petr Chelčický, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Jr., Michael Sattler, Ronald J. Sider, Menno Simons, Leo Tolstoy, André Trocmé, and Dirk Willems. Works by and about these figures are easily accessible online. On my personal radar is the forthcoming *By Water: The Felix Manz Story*, a young-adult novel by Jason Landsel about an early Anabaptist leader. Such a “cloud of witnesses” testifies that it is indeed possible and even practical to live out the Lord’s call to nonviolently address evil.

Jürgen Moltmann once said that “Christian hope draws the promised future of God into the present day, and prepares the present day for this future.”³ Included in this wonderful vision is Christ’s call to nonviolence. Embracing Christ’s hope for the world involves a bit of creative imagination on our part, as we partner with his Spirit to make possible what this world deems to be impossible. If

we free our imaginations to recognize that “peace through strength” is not inevitable, we may be better equipped in every moment to realize the message of the cross that peace comes through loving surrender.

Notes:

¹Walter Wink, “The Myth of Redemptive Violence,” *The Bible in Transmission*, Spring 1999, 8.

²Wink, 9.

³Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Hope: Theology for a World in Peril* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press), 8.

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Modeling a Peacemaking Inheritance

By Ben White

NO! I WILL not forgive him! He always does this to me!” My son, Theo, was dug-in to a perennial battle with his brother over another meaningless conflict.

“Well, if that’s the future you want to live in, so be it.” I answered with little compassion for his practiced frustration.

A grumpy silence followed.

“Well, that’s not the future I want. We might as well start a war. When you’re ready to accept his apology, you can come out of your room.” My feigned acquiescence to his liberty evaporating in this decree, I left the room and went to lecture my other son, Oliver, on the nuances of an actual apology. “We make peace.” The common refrain from my fatherly authority.

I imagine there are gentler ways to illicit real love from this fierce fraternal duo. At times, I can be less dictatorial, but I insist we must be peacemakers. Am I overdramatic when I liken hard-hearted children to war

making soldiers? I don’t think so. Whatever the reason, war comes down to killing, and Jesus taught us that killing begins when we call our brother an idiot. At the risk of sounding ridiculous, I confess I say this to my children often as well.

If we would be Christians, if we would endeavor to put into practice any of what the man who pioneered and perfected our faith said and did, if we would be disciples of Jesus, WE MUST MAKE PEACE! Whether or not my boys grow up to follow Jesus (and this I want more than anything), they will grow up to know how much peacemaking is a part of following Jesus. I believe one of the best ways to raise my children in the knowledge of the Lord is to teach them holistic peacemaking.

Holistic—from bedroom squabbles, to ballistic missiles, to unsafe city streets, and beyond—peace in all things. Pursuing peace makes us peacemakers, and peacemakers are

children of God. This is my ambition, and my greatest pride for my children.

Hopefully (and probably), we will not all become martyrs, but it is the fear of death, the most basic human fear, that we overcome as people committed to peace. We demonstrate Christ’s defeat of death when we live as if death has no grip on us. When we make plans not to kill and persist in our prophecy against the war-mongering governments of our era, we run real risk. Making peace in a world devoted to violence thus requires real faith. One of the best ways to get such faith is the task of peacemaking itself. That is why many have said, “There is no way to peace, peace is the way.” Peace makes us as we make peace. It worked in my life and I am working at making it work again in the life of my children.

My dissident, peacemaking parents, who received their own inspiration from many ancestors in the faith, brought me up in the

international peacemaking movement. Joining with all kinds of peacemakers, they thought that working to end all war was a big enough task for the faith Jesus had planted in them. They had read the Sermon on the Mount and did not shy away from its demands. They gathered a church around living it out in real time and included me in it. At home, they always talked back to the television news with cries of peace and justice for the poor. Outside of the home, they often brought my brothers and me along to marches and rallies.

But I remember when I was three or four, feeling left out. I was too young to go along with my parents and older brothers to what was then an annual trip to trespass on the Nevada Test Site north of Las Vegas in symbolic protest of the United States government's insistence on building its nuclear arsenal. I remember my sadness when I saw pictures of my parents in plastic handcuffs and my brothers waiting in the jail lobby with a friend from church. Why didn't I get to go?

When I was twenty, I was not left out.

After the United States government decided to "shock-and-awe" the city of Baghdad into submission, the Brandywine Peace Community and their allies organized me and a few hundred others to stop "business as usual" on March 20, 2003 at the US federal building at 6th and Market Streets in Philadelphia. We surrounded the entire building blocking all the entrances and refusing to move when ordered. As the police officers picked me up off the ground, my watching mother shouted, "I am so proud of you!"

We have a great picture of my eldest son and his cousin sitting on a stoop on Torresdale Ave. next to Delia's Gun Shop. They are about two and three. Little Oliver is holding a sign that says "Illegal Guns Kill." In 2008, Heeding God's Call had mounted a campaign at Colosimo's Gun Store on Spring Garden Street in Philadelphia. The idea was to get individual business owners to sign a code of conduct for firearms retailers to prevent straw purchasers. Straw purchasers buy guns to re-sell them to people who cannot legally buy guns, usually because of prior convictions. Since legislative change in Penn-

sylvania was and often still is unlikely, we were pressuring gun shop owners directly. In 2009, a couple years before the cousins sat on the stoop in the picture, the attention that this campaign brought to Mr. Colosimo resulted in the permanent shuttering of his notorious business.

I think that picture on the stoop was taken in 2012, more than ten years ago. Oliver and his cousin are now in middle school. They are coming of age in a world still devoted to war, and in a metropolitan area still plagued with gun violence. May they find Jesus's way of peace! Oh, how they need that alternative! I pray that the seeds of faith planted early in their lives and nurtured by regular prophecy will sprout in ever increasing faith. May my parenting continue to model to them in word and deed the peacemaking inheritance that God's children enjoy.

Ben White is a former Brethren in Christ pastor in Pennsylvania and New Jersey and now uses his ministerial credentials as a chaplain in a children's hospital.

Changing Systems as Peacemaking Work

By Charles Kwuelum

AS WE SEE the devastating effects of violence arising from unresolved grievances, incompatible goals, and contests of power, we struggle with how our violent world could possibly reflect God's beautiful handiwork (Gen. 1:31).

Currently, more than one hundred million persons are living outside their home communities because they have been forcefully displaced, and 828 million are facing catastrophic hunger. The immense scale of human suffering and the abuse of God's creation is painful to consider. But in order to transform the structures that lead to suffering, we often must step outside our comfort zones. In order to work for greater peace and wellbeing, we must consider our roles in this interlocking web of systems that birth catastrophic violence.

We have a responsibility—individually and collectively—to build right relationships

with one another, God and creation. Our ultimate goal should be to attain harmony, happiness, and wellbeing for all. The beauty of God's creation is the joy of right relationships among creatures of God.

The pursuit of peace and wellbeing (physical, psychological, spiritual, social, and economic) involves harmonious relationships. As we are each part of a web of systems and subsystems, what affects others, affect us. So, we must not neglect broader systemic issues. We can aspire to attain shalom, and "a peace the world cannot give" (John 14: 27; 16: 33, Psalm 122: 6) by advocating for justice, praying for policymakers, and supporting nonviolent peace work.

Advocate for justice. Peacemaking involves personal transformation. To be a true agent of social change requires self-examination and self-reflection. It is a journey of self-discovery. Thus, we adopt a new peacemaking

identity and worldview (Matt. 5:9). According to Marc Gopin, through this transformational experience, we "engage in profound and extensive internal conversations in which we evaluate the good, the bad, what could be better, where we are going ethically and spiritually, where we long to go."

Inspired by the Beatitudes (Matt. 5: 3-12) to obstruct the social and economic status quo of our world, Christian peacemakers work to nonviolently transform systems and conflict generating agents in the face of polarization, hatred and violence. We become ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor. 5:20) in the ministry of reconciliation, sharing our transformed spirits through acts of love and compassion.

Mennonite Central Committee advocacy staff in Washington, DC walk with



partners in Nigeria, for example, by facilitating spaces to share stories and information with policymakers, such as with staffers of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations regarding Nigeria's national elections. To deter election-related violence, MCC partners recommended US visa restrictions on Nigerian politicians convicted of perpetrating violence at previous elections. The recommendation was affirmed, and the visa restrictions are now in place. This initiative, along with others, will encourage free and fair elections, paving the way for economic growth, strengthened civic spaces, and opportunities for peacemaking and reconciliation.

Our Anabaptist values compel us to eradicate all forms of harm inflicted on others. Often this means finding and addressing root causes in order to overcome profound immoral woundedness and confront injustice. An important place to begin in this work is by acknowledging our country's global leadership and power, and how its policies (immigration, trade, development, diplomacy, etc.) have tremendous effects on the rest of the global community.

Sometimes, harmful policies formulated

in the US have a direct negative impact on the lives of vulnerable populations in other parts of the world. On the other hand, the US diplomatic pressure on the leaders of other nations can sometimes have a positive impact on human rights and conflict reduction.

Pray for policymakers. In the Scriptures, Paul declares that governing authorities are instituted by God for the purpose of bringing order (Rom. 13: 1-7) and encourages us to pray for elected officials (1 Tim. 2: 1-2). However, rulers and powers are subject to God (Col.1: 15-17). As citizens of God's kingdom, we have a spiritual and moral obligation to hold policymakers accountable to act with wisdom, love and compassion for the common good. MCC seeks to enable Anabaptist churches to reflect and engage on policy issues as they affect the human family and to pray for compassionate hearts toward policymaking (npjm.mcc.org).

Support nonviolent peace work. An important part of peacemaking is supporting organizations working for social and economic justice with your time, talent or treasure. Today, an unprecedented global hunger crisis continues unabated, with millions of families

facing extreme food shortages, especially in vulnerable countries where MCC is present.

Constant news filled with images and stories of violent conflict, climate change, and gross human rights abuses tend to dim our hope of God's reign over the beauty of creation. As peacemakers, we are called to embody a foretaste of a restored creation and a reconciled humanity, amidst human brokenness (Gen.1; 2 Cor. 5:16-21).

Mennonite Central Committee invites you to join our peacemaking and peacebuilding practice to share God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for systemic change. Each of us must courageously work to improve relationships, break cycles of violence, and address root causes of conflict in order to attain harmony, happiness, and wellbeing for all.

Charles Kweulum is senior peace education and advocacy associate (international) for Mennonite Central Committee US's National Peace and Justice Ministries. Learn more at npjm.mcc.org.

The Power of Story

By Ann Bodling

SOME YEARS AGO, as I read Wendell Berry's book, *Jayber Crow*, I was intrigued to find a kindred spirit in Jayber, in that so many of his questions about living out one's faith mirrored, exactly, my own. In the story, Jayber comes to a moment of crisis as he tries, unsuccessfully, to reconcile Jesus's words with what he, himself, had experienced in the various "Christian" settings of his youth and young adulthood:

Questions all of a sudden were clanging in my mind like Edgar Allan Poe's brazen alarm bells. I still believed in the divinity and the teachings of Jesus and was determined to follow my purpose of preaching the Gospel—when I preached, I thought, I would just not mention the parts that gave me trouble—but it got so I couldn't open a Bible without setting off a great

jangling and wrangling of questions that almost deafened me. If we are to understand the Bible as literally true, why are we permitted to hate our enemies? If Jesus meant what he said when he said we should love our enemies, how can Christians go to war?

How, indeed?

Over the course of this past fall and early winter, the Discipleship Learning Community at the Grantham Church studied various Christians' positions towards war along with the Brethren in Christ position in particular. Towards the end of our time together, the class leader asked us to consider our own personal stories and the influences that have shaped our convictions, whatever those convictions might be.

I thought I knew my story. I thought it

began when I was twenty, a couple of years after becoming a Christian, when I met a handful of young people my age who were studying the Sermon on the Mount and Clarence Jordan's life and writings. But I was wrong. As powerful as Jesus's words were, and as poignant as Clarence's example was, as I explored my story I realized that its roots went way back to early childhood, even to who I was from birth.

A long-forgotten memory surfaced of my fourth birthday and the lovingly conceived and crafted birthday cake my mother had made for me, closely resembling, in size and shape, a real bunny. I was enchanted with my cake up until the moment she wanted to cut and serve it, and my delight turned to horror and despair. Taking the life of this imaginary bunny was not something in which my little

self was prepared to participate and, though I didn't know it at the time, that same tender, yet fierce, conviction shaped the rest of my life and my practice of faith, and informed my instinctive acceptance of Jesus's words about peacemaking.

I grew up in an Air Force family, with no sense of rootedness to place or people, no sense of community other than that formed by a military culture of the expected "shoulds" of behavior. Though I don't think I could have articulated why, military people made me nervous and, even as a child, I recognized the danger of pledging allegiance to a system that took away a good amount of freedom in one's life and in family's life.

Time went on and I, as did many people reading this, lived through the years of the Vietnam War—the senselessness and futility and the waste of it. It was our generation's taste of how war, and those who commanded it, not only took the lives of those who died but irrevocably twisted the lives of those who lived. Coming home from college on a five-hour flight from California to Washington, DC, I sat next to a vacant-eyed young man just returning home from his tour of combat, dressed in his fatigues and seemingly the shell of who he had been before. A year later, I met a young Vietnam vet who had been in a helicopter unit during the war and who laughingly described strapping explosives to captured rats and dropping them out of the helicopter. I was appalled.

When I first encountered Jesus's words about loving enemies, praying for those who mistreat you, doing good to those who hate you, I assumed that Jesus meant what he said. And I wondered the same questions Jayber wondered. At the time, I simply thought that Jesus was calling us not to sink to the level of those who do, or want to do, us harm. Not until later, as I considered the damage done to these two men, and to others I had known, as a result of the trauma of combat and of killing, did I realize that Jesus knew and cared deeply about what engaging in the dehumanizing acts of wounding and killing others does to the soul.

The reality, however, is that I find it hard sometimes to live as Jesus calls us to live. It is hard to, physically or metaphorically, turn the other cheek. It is hard to embody, in Clarence Jordan's words, "active goodwill"

towards someone who injures myself or others. And in our American, individualized, privileged society, it can be hard to let go of what I think of as my "rights," in the service of my neighbors or the greater good.

It is at just this point, the point of recognizing my difficulties in living out Jesus's call to peacemaking, that stories become a powerful ally:

- stories like Jayber Crow who struggled to make sense of the discrepancy between Jesus's words and Christians' behavior;
- stories from the distant past like the one of Mennonite Dirk Willems in the 1500s who rescued his jailer from drowning, thwarting Dirk's escape and leading to his death;
- stories of Corrie ten Boom who suffered and watched her sister die in a WW II German concentration camp, and who, in the end, was one day able to forgive her captor when she met him face to face;
- stories from the nearer past, like the MCC colleague who had served on one of the Navy boats during the bombing of Saigon and was so sickened by what he saw that abruptly left the military and embraced a life of nonresistance;
- stories like those heard in our Grantham Learning Community of men who grew up in a military family, later wrestling with Jesus's words and ultimately choosing conscientious objector status.

What about your own story? Are there pieces you have yet to explore? How might your story encourage others? How might theirs encourage you? And how might the collective stories of your community deepen its conviction of and commitment to peacemaking, to living as Jesus calls us to live?

Ann Bodling is an spiritual director and attends the Grantham (PA) Brethren in Christ Church. She and her husband live and tend their garden of native plants in Dillsburg, PA.

Editor's Notes

Subscription renewals: The 2023 subscription renewal letter is on its way. The price for a one-year subscription is still \$20, with additional contributions welcome to cover the additional cost of mailing overseas and to each Brethren in Christ student enrolled at Messiah University. Checks should be payable to Brethren in Christ US and mailed to the editor (address on page 2). You can also renew online at bicus.org/resources/publications/shalom/.

The rest of 2023: While final decisions have not been made, you can likely look forward to the following topics: stories of books that have been personally influential; responding to the rise of Christian nationalism; and our identity as Brethren in Christ (taking off from Project 250's first goal of reaffirming our identity as a community of Christ-followers. Please contact me with your ideas for topics or if you would like to write for *Shalom!* (contact info on page 2).

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nonviolence and help clarify what actions one's conscience and discipleship allow. Not everyone will or needs to come to the same conclusions, which is the obvious beginning and ending of the book's thesis. What we are called to do is submit ourselves to the study of scripture and the leading of the Spirit and the Lordship of Jesus and live out our call as best we can to be peacemakers in a chaotic world.

*Note: The authors include John Howard Yoder as his writings were influential, but they recognize and denounce his violence towards women and view his writings through this lens. The last chapter "Christian Antiviolence" focuses on gender-based violence specifically.

Lois Saylor is an editorial advisor for Shalom! and attends the Harrisburg (PA) Brethren in Christ Church.

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BOOK REVIEW

A Field Guide to Christian Nonviolence

By Lois A. Saylor

“CHRISTIAN NONVIOLENCE HAS never been monolithic but has always included merging and diverging streams; it is therefore best understood as a dynamic and contested tradition rather than a unified and settled position.”

This quote is the stated thesis of authors David C. Cramer and Myles Wertz in the introduction to their book, *A Field Guide to Christian Nonviolence: Key Thinkers, Activists, and Movements for the Gospel of Peace*. They further explain that the Schleithem Confession of the sixteenth century Anabaptists does not represent all contemporary Anabaptist views let alone all adherents of a Christian ethic or theology of nonviolence. There are mentions throughout the book which will be familiar to the Brethren in Christ reader including the Radical Reformers, Mennonite thinkers,* Mennonite Central Committee, with whom we partner, and Ron Sider.

The authors chronicle eight streams or forms of nonviolence thought. They believe each form developed from a “spirit-led discernment” as persons of faith sought “that which is ‘good and acceptable and perfect’ in God’s world” (Rom. 12:2). They contend that each stream “is concerned with bringing

the peace of God to a broken world, and each enters into complex forms of conflict [in the world] in order to do so.” These streams range from a personal nonviolence arising from Christian discipleship to acts of entering into the suffering of others to political activism to working against structural violence. They explore the reasons, both scriptural and experiential, that shaped the thinkers and the forms of the eight streams. They group the first four streams as the “faithfulness camp” (being faithful regardless of outcome) and the second four streams as the “effectiveness camp” (regarding the outcomes as important). Even in this divide they warn that nuances break down any clear division.

The authors also write that their orientation was linked to the figures of the various movements, and they did not run “each stream through a grid of systematic theology.” Many names will be known to a wider audience while others are less generally known. Most readers will know modern-day names such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Dorothy Day, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Henri Nouwen, Oscar Romero, and Thomas Merton or historical figures like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. But many names are less familiar and in this way the book may be a

Field Guide, but it may not be a beginner’s guide. At points it seemed the authors expected the reader to have a base knowledge or even an academic background in nonviolent thought. But it can point the beginner to many authors and movements for further exploration, and at least the beginner would understand from the start that there are different streams of nonviolent thought which can be at odds with each other. For example, some streams reject all forms of violence and others allow violence of property and still others allow limited violence against people..

The book can prompt the reader to wrestle with the definition of violence itself and to think through issues on the spectrum of when and how violence is used. Would burning draft cards and hammering missiles and spilling animal blood in protest of war be violence? Some streams think limited violence may be used when all other strategies have failed and the few are still doing violence to the many. Is there a difference between non-lethal violence and lethal violence? Might it be acceptable to use non-lethal force to stop a lethal violent threat?

Studying the various streams of nonviolence that the authors identify can help the reader identify their own understanding of