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News

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"A THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR ARMED STRUGGLE"

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A THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR ARMED STRUGGLE

William A. Jones

Regardless of locale and whether or not the people are Black American, Caribbean, Latin American, Asian, or African, they are all drawn together by a common affliction. Their hopes and aims are essentially one: to challenge a common enemy and rid themselves of the yoke of human tyranny.

In the year 1900, at the first Pan-African Congress, meeting in London, W. E. B. DuBois stated in prophetic terms:

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, - the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.

DuBois lived to see the painful fulfillment of this prophecy and the division of the planet earth into three distinguishable segments: The Capitalist Nations, The Socialist States, and The Third World. The latter constitutes The Larger Ghetto.

The resultant situation is that of political servitude and economic subjection. High above the stark realities of poverty and hunger in The Third World, a battle takes place which upon close examination is purely mythological. Popular thought views the great struggle in the world as one of ideological conflict between Democracy and Communism or between Capitalism and Socialism, with the underdeveloped countries caught in the middle, and expected to choose between the two warring powers. However, the actual battle is between Imperialism and The Third World, between the Haves and the Have-nots. International cartels, supported by cooperating governments, have a noose tightly

drawn about the necks of poor people in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States of America. Huge American corporations reap astronomical profits as a result of foreign-based installations that pay pitifully low wages to native personnel. Decolonization has occurred only in the political area. Those nations in Africa and the Caribbean which have been granted independence from colonial rule are yet under the economic rule of the former colonial powers. Economic colonization remains a poignant reality.

What is the chief criterion for membership in The Third World? Is it that of political ideology? Is it that of social philosophy? Does it have to do with economic stance? No, it is none of these. Just a casual, airplane view of The Third World landscape reveals that the masses of poor, uneducated, exploited people are Black, Brown, and Yellow. They are the non-White peoples of the planet earth. Color is the chief criterion in defining that almost numberless mass called The Third World. Though separated by oceans, languages, and cultural differences, they are bound together by three significant factors: 1) Their non-Whiteness; 2) A common affliction imposed by a common enemy; and 3) Their determination to be free. Dudley Thompson, Minister of State in the Jamaican government, in an address at Black Expo in New York City on October 7, 1972 declared, "The blood that unites us is thicker than the water that divides us." Citizenship in The Third World is predicated almost exclusively on color.

The Larger Ghetto is dominated and controlled by a ruling triumvirate which Colin Morris euphonically describes as "Unyoung, Uncolored, Unpoor." Their power is tremendously disproportionate to their numbers and it is awesome. They control the means of production and manipulate

world politics. Says Morris -

As the Prayer Book never said, they are all the same sort and condition of men - white, well-nourished, and vastly experienced. To protect their interests, wars are engineered, dictators made and broken, governments bought and sold, currencies adjusted, and markets rigged. They preside over a vast Aladdin's cave into which a ragged world brings its treasure and where fewer and fewer get more and more. They are unbeatable because they make the rules. Even your cry of outrage is rendered meaningless because they own the very language you use. As they leave your mouth, your words are twisted and remolded so that your abuse rings out like a hallelujah to their benevolence. Freedom is what they mean by freedom, democracy is what they mean by democracy, and they have the power to make their definitions stick.

The scenario is replete with dismay and despair. Is there hope for the inhabitants of The Larger Ghetto? Can they possibly overcome long-standing injustices that have rendered them powerless in a world where almost absolute power is vested in the hands of a privileged few? Four hopeful signs appear:

- 1) Protestation on the part of youths the world around. There is developing across the world on the part of young people a profound distaste for synthetic values, degenerate democracy, fallacious freedom and adult hypocrisy.
- 2) The movements of Pan-Africanism and Negritude. Implicit in both of these is a deep racial consciousness which serves as the motivating force for political and economic self-determination.
- 3) The dependence of Imperialists on The Third World for vital energy resources. The underdeveloped nations are rich in raw materials essential to heavy industries. The world energy crisis is a clear indication that for the first time in modern history, Third World people have the upper hand in a matter essential to human existence.
- 4) Imperialists are the least prepared people for the continuing conflict and struggle. Third World people are on the bottom. Consequently, their pain quotient is significantly higher. They have practically nothing to lose. They are free not only to live, but free to die in the pursuit of justice.

The ruling triumvirate is obviously oblivious to one historical reality,

namely, that tides change and tables turn. The present arrangement does not bear the stamp of eternality.

The history of humankind, from Eden's flaming gate to the Iron Curtain, to the bloody battlefields of either side of the Bamboo Curtain, and on to the agonizing apartheid of Southern Africa is the catalogue listing the sins of humans against one another. Injustice is tragically akin to the human pilgrimage. It occurs regularly in private instances. There, personal injury results. But its most severe consequences are seen in collective instances where one group suffers abuse at the hand of another group. In such cases it almost always emerges from the desensitized consciences of people who deem themselves better than others. It is the Pharoah-ideology at work. Pharoah is the historic prototype of practitioners of the art of human control. The Israelite experience in Egypt has come to be a frame of reference for all peoples that suffer under the yoke of oppression. The Egyptian experiment has for its historical companions such examples as the slave situation in America and the Jewish holocaust in Nazi Germany. It was a program of massive persecution. The components included forced labor, hard taskmasters, and genocide as the ultimate solution. Such a scheme emanates from the master race ethos which has been rightly described as "the eternal joke played on conscious culture at the expense of unconscious biology."

The chief problem with the Pharoah-ideology is its mockery of the doctrine of creation. It presupposes a theology which begins with a Creator whose concern is limited. Over against the idea of the absolute sovereignty of God, the master-race concept always eventuates in a posture of rivalry with God. Man was made not to compete, but cooperate with God. In the Egyptian/Israelite situation, the doctrine of

ethical monotheism germinated and began to bloom. God placed His power on the side of the oppressed. In an hour of moral and ethical insanity, when the Nile became the watery grave of innocent Hebrew lads, God moved. The very river which Pharoah had chosen for death was selected by God for deliverance. He saved Moses' life and arranged for Moses to be reared in Pharoah's house with Jochebed, his mother, as his nurse. Though born of slave-parents in a mud-hut on the bank of the Nile, with the threat of death upon him, Moses was God's instrument to give birth to a nation. Raised and nurtured in the ways of the Egyptians, he did not forget that his basic affinity was with the captive community. When he came of age, he went out unto his brethren. Given the choice between a position of power in Egypt and life with a despised and persecuted people, he chose the latter. The Exodus was an experience of total emancipation, the movement of a nation within a nation out of bondage into a land promised and provided by God. The movement out of Egypt, through the wilderness and into Canaan was not without blood, sweat, tears--and even death. And so has it been across the total mileage of the human march. The Bible, the record of God's revelation and the human response to that revelation, and the primary source of the materials which constitute the content of Christian theology is not a document of placid pacifism. The Bible has been called "a bloody book." Within its pages are graphic accounts of some of the most violent happenings in history. Even our redemption was wrought in a violent encounter on a hill of horror. I do not lift up the bloody scenes in the Scriptures as ethical justification for militarism. Revelation is progressive. "Love your enemies" is an ethic significantly higher than "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." And yet, love places itself in a position which leads ineluctably to the Cross. One of the

interesting utterances by Jesús, usually ignored by commentators, is that contained in Luke 22. At the conclusion of the Last Supper, He tells His men of the difficulties that await them and advises them, "But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his wallet: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one." The disciples quickly responded, "Lord, behold, here are two swords. And He said unto them, It is enough." . It's obvious that Peter kept one of the swords, for he used one in Gethsemane.

The burning, recurring query is this: "Is it possible to change an unjust system without violence?" Is armed aggression ever compatible with Christian faith? Can one be revolutionary and Christian at the same time? Let us look at these questions.

About five centuries before Christ, Aristotle attempted in his Politics an explanation of the revolutionary posture in the human situation. "The universal and chief cause of this revolutionary feeling," according to Aristotle, is "the desire of equality, when men think that they are equal to others who have more than themselves." The revolutionary spirit is rooted in the desire to be free, to experience and to enjoy equity, and it is grounded in certain ineluctable urgings of the human spirit. Men bound by oppressive brethren cry out, "I want to be free. Something deep, down within me--that mysterious something called 'the soul'--prods and pushes me, and demands of me that I break out of any unjust confinement to which sinful mortals subject me. Something good and God-like in me rebels and revolts against any and all forms of tyranny." Regardless of any derogatory interpretation given to the revolutionary spirit by the up-people, a genuine thrust towards personhood and/or peoplehood should be regarded as sacred. Victims of

tyranny who refuse to acknowledge and actively work for the fulfillment of their God--intended destiny as real persons do violence to the sanctity of their own creation.

In the present world order freedom is so rare and oppression so common that revolution is commonplace. Deep rumblings and uprooting social convulsions are the order of the day. From nearly every quarter there comes the word of uprisings against human powers that have become demonic. In our world, right and righteousness constitute a revolutionary posture. Wrong is so prominent and pervasive that it appears right to be wrong. Those who deem it their duty to challenge the emissaries of evil are relegated to the status of renegades, and the most bitter scorn is reserved for those who seek justice. The most vicious attacks are leveled at persons who strive to be actively Christian.

Against the backdrop of structured sin and institutionalized iniquity, righteousness is thus inherently revolutionary. If one is faithful to the Gospel, one is revolutionary by definition. Arnold Schuchter states the case well:

For the revolutionary Christian, the message is that the future is his prime responsibility--to subject the earth and its institutions to human welfare, to build truly human communities of men as the physical and social context of that welfare, and to develop the potential of individuals within those communities to their fullest fruition. Obstacles that stand in the way of carrying out this responsibility are sins which should be removed. This is a vision of redress that has the kind of catalytic power requisite to revolutionary movements. It is a vision of the good society where the many will be favored over the few or the few will not be exploited or oppressed by the many.

The things that belong to God are in such radical opposition to the human order as presently structured that God can be called without apology, "God the Revolutionary."

The paramount question, historically and presently, centers on the methodology for dealing with the demonic. The writers of the Declaration of Independence recognized clearly the sanctity of revolution and declared forthrightly:

...that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its power in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness....But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.

But how does an afflicted minority, or for that matter, an afflicted majority exercise this right and this duty? Acceptance of its rightness does not necessarily prescribe the method. Morris describes the great need of revolution and the point at which most churchmen put on the brakes:

Nothing short of revolution will cauterize the stinking sores of the West. A fair slice of the Christian world is agreed about that--the Vatican, the World Council of Churches, bishops, theologians, and parish pump preachers. By revolution they mean many things, all important; drastic reform of the Church, more dynamic Christian witness, a new spirit in men's hearts--but they do not mean blood, bombs, and barricades.

The question of method is basically the question of the moral status of violence versus non-violence. Christians can be observed operating on both sides of the spectrum, with each side affirming its faithfulness to the Gospel. Some embrace an ethic of violent revolution. Others preach a gospel of non-violent revolution. The latter position is sometimes charged with being a middle-class phenomenon, embraced for security reasons by those who have something to lose. The foremost modern proponent of the non-violent ethic was the late Martin Luther King, Jr., and yet it is difficult to place upon him the label of abso-

lute pacifism. He said often that Hitler should have been fought because of the demonic nature of his deeds. And, of course, King did not refuse armed protection of himself by others. Emil Brunner's dictum is valid: "He who affirms the State, affirms violence." This means, in a word, that those who refuse to take up arms may have to be defended by others who will.

In so-called Christian America, the national posture has been consistently contradictory in character. America has presented itself to the world as a peace-loving nation, but is simultaneously regarded by the outside world as a war-monger. The nation has never sought the non-violent distinction in its foreign involvements, but has always urged non-violence as the only proper course for aggrieved and afflicted citizens. A hybrid mentality exists, which perhaps explains the preponderance of hypocritical double-talk. Great concern has been voiced in recent years about an emerging ethic of violence. Much of this talk is tied to the Black thrust for power. But to treat violence as a new thing is absurd, when just a scant trace of history reveals that violence is closely akin to Americanism. The roots of violence sink deeply in Western culture. America's beginning was on a bloody basis. The land was taken from the Indians by violence; independence was secured by violence; Blacks were enslaved by violence; and radical but necessary change has often been prevented by violence. There is little wonder then, that the victimized masses, here and elsewhere, have adopted as their motto: "By any means necessary!"

How does one deal with the demonic? Methodologically speaking, to choose absolutely between violence and non-violence is too simplistic. To embrace either ethic absolutely is to deny or to ignore the rela-

tivities of the life situation. Both violence and non-violence are relative strategies in that both are morally ambiguous. The choice of either is necessitated by the absence of love which is the only absolute ethic. The absence of love makes for the denial of justice which insures the presence of injustice. Jose Bonino, President of Union Theological Seminary, Buenos Aires, sees the question of violence as "a subordinate and relative question." He explains:

It is subordinate because it has to do with the "cost" of the desired change--the question of the legitimacy of revolution is not decided on the basis of the legitimacy of violence and vice versa. "Violence" is a cost that must be estimated and pondered in relation to a particular revolutionary situation. It is "relative" because in most revolutionary situations...violence is already a fact constitutive of the situation: injustice, slave labor, hunger, and exploitation are forms of violence which must be weighed against the cost of revolutionary violence.

In other words, the methodology for dealing with injustice must be determined by the particular social situation and the degree of demonism therein.

In the course of history there have been instances where violence was redemptive. Prayer and fasting did little to stop Hitler and the Nazi juggernaut. Non-violence has been, at least to date, the most rational and redemptive strategy for Blacks in racist America. But non-violence appears utterly untenable as a means of dealing a deathblow to the apartheid of Southern Africa. The proper response to demonic power at the planetary level has to be determined situationally. The choice is not between purity and impurity. The choice is between differing degrees of sin. There is no social ethic that does not have to consider the sins of man and the relativities of human history. Every social policy is tainted by sin. Perfection is not possible within history.

There is another dimension to the debate over violence and non-violence. Without the threat of violence (overt or covert; open or veiled), non-violence is politically impotent. Martin Luther King, Jr., operated at one end of the continuum; Malcolm X and others operated at the opposite end. The almost total rejection of Malcolm facilitated a certain acceptance of King. The few social gains that have been made by Blacks in America were accompanied by violence. It was the violence perpetrated by Whites against King's movement that led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It was the violence of the racial flare-ups in the 1960's that led to Lyndon Johnson's Great Society Program. Violence is a given. The hallmark of non-violence is its view of redemptive suffering, its activist affliction endured in pursuit of truth and justice. This brand of behavior is noteworthy in its declaration that there exists a profound relationship between the victim and the victimizer. Jacques Ellul argues that:

Only in the light of Jesus Christ's sacrifice of himself can man be compelled to live as man. In following the path appointed by Christ we show the other himself. Camus understood this; he showed that there is a link between the victim and the executioner, showed how the victim can compel the executioner to become a man by recognizing his victim. Seeing the crucified Christ the Roman centurion said, "Certainly this man was innocent." Seeing Joan of Arc burned at the stake the English captain said, "We have burned a saint." At that moment they became men.

Although there does seem to exist a profound relationship between the victim and the victimizer, conversion from brute to man seems to be the rare exception rather than the general rule. Most butchers remain butchers. Case studies in the Black/White experience where butchers have been changed to brothers have yet to be released. It must also be acknowledged that most victims of the racist ethos and its attending tyranny see the attainment of their freedom as primary, and conversion of the victimizers as secondary or unimportant. The basic issue is life itself.

The question in South Africa is essentially one of self-defense against a systemic violence that is pervasive and unceasing. Genocide, on a massive scale, is being practiced in South Africa. To be non-violent in the context of genocide is to affirm violence and is tantamount to alliance with the adversary. To resist, by whatever means necessary, is the only sane and spiritual response of one who calls himself a Christian. Non-cooperation with evil is righteous and redemptive. The task of darker peoples the world around is to tune in to God's judgment already in process against that wicked and nefarious system.

Finally, let us remember that free men are not fearful. Those who refuse to eat the King's meat know that authentic power derives from freedom. Free men are not fearful. They know that history is punctuated by periods when even "the stars in their courses do battle." Free men are not fearful. They know that God has a levelling process. He exalts the humble. He abases the proud. God has a levelling process. "Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low." Free men are not fearful. They understand the revolutionary nature of the Eternal. When in the wisdom of His own economy, God chose to create a world, He did not summon angels for a solemn ceremony. He disturbed nothingness and shook up chaos until the morning stars began to sing and the sons of God started to shout. And He Himself declared, "It is good." When He liberated Israel, He did not transport them on wings of ease to the Promised Land. He carried them on a rough journey, on a rocky road, in a round about way. And when He was ready to redeem an alien humanity, He did not dispatch angels; He did not put the stars on parade; he did not send the dead of ages past. Rather, He entered the alley-way of our agony, participated in our pain, carried our cross, and died our death.

At the center of our faith there is a cross, rough-hewn and blood-soaked. And that cross spells creative conflict with the hosts of hell and the emissaries of evil. Free men are not fearful. For they know that Festival follows Funeral; Joy is beyond Jordan; Hallelujah is on the other side of Hardship; and Sunday morning gives answer to Friday's questions.