

Merton's Call to Non-Violence: A Spirituality for Life

Merton opposed war and violence and was one of the founders of what we would call the peace movement today. His opposition to violence included all kinds of violence – violence to oneself, violence in the name of spirituality and religion, political violence and institutional violence.

His early admiration for Gandhi stayed with him throughout his life. He believed that the Gospel and the early Church tradition commit us to non-violence. He did not accept Augustine's just-war theory and saw that modern warfare made it an irrelevance today anyway. He understood that a non-violent stance called for great spiritual maturity. Anthony Padovano sees Merton's approach to non-violence as a spirituality for life and suggests ten strategies:

- 1. Attend to People:**
- 2. Give Voice to your Human Experience:**
- 3. Reject Excessive Activity:**
- 4. Learn to Pray:**
- 5. Be at Ease with Silence:**
- 6. Resist Consumerism:**
- 7. Be Prepared to Lose and to Let Go:**
- 8. Read Scripture:**
- 9. Take the Long View:**
- 10. Believe in the Goodness of Humanity:**

Practicing Non-Violence

"Today I realize with urgency the absolute seriousness of my need to study and practice non-violence. Hitherto, I have 'liked' non-violence as an idea. I have 'approved' it, looked with benignity on it, have praised it, even earnestly.

But I have not practiced it fully. My thoughts and words retaliate. I condemn and resist adversaries when I think that I am unjustly treated. I revile them; even treat them with open (but *polite*) contempt to their face.

It is necessary to realize that I am a monk consecrated to God and this restricting non-retaliation merely to *physical* non-retaliation is not enough – on the contrary it is in some sense a greater evil.

At the same time, the energy wasted in contempt, criticism and resentment is thus diverted from its true function, insistence on truth. Hence, loss of clarity, loss of focus, confusion, and finally frustration. So that half the time 'I don't know what I am doing' (or thinking).

I need to set myself to the study of non-violence, with thoroughness. The complete, integral *practice* of it in community life. Eventually teaching it to others by word and example. Short of this, the monastic life will remain a mockery in my life." (Thomas Merton, August 21, 1962, IV238-239)