The Mourners Photo: Anna Graves

A Dialogue on Nonviolent Resistance and Liberation Theology

by Terry Messman – May 11th, 2009

Editor, Street Spirit, Oakland, CA
American Friends Service Committee
TMessman@afsc.org

The following essay by Terry Messman puts nonviolent resistance in dialogue with liberation theology. It presents a "conversation" between Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Archbishop Oscar Romero, Gustavo Gutierrez, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Father Daniel Berrigan, Dorothee Sölle, Mohandas Gandhi, Adolfo Perez Esquivel, Lynne Shivers, Gene Sharp, Thomas Merton, Fernando Cardenal, Miguel D'Escoto, members of a base community in Brazil, and Sister Ita Ford, who was assassinated in El Salvador in December, 1980.

This dialogue was originally published in Basta! No Mandate for War: A Pledge of Resistance Handbook (New Society Publishers, 1985), edited by Ken Butigan, Marie Pastrick, and Terry Messman. At the time, this action manual was a resource for the US Central America movement that was mobilizing to end the United States government's overt and covert wars in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua.

Nearly a quarter of a century later, author Terry Messman has found that the dialogue he facilitated, though situated in the context of US wars in Latin America, is as apt today as it was then.

Messman has written an introduction that underscores how nonviolent resistance is at its most authentic when it takes the true measure of the violence that economic domination and repressive violence wreak and when, in turn, it unleashes the relentless power of love: creative, determined, audacious, unmitigated.

Then Messman's preface gives way to an urgent, ungagged conversation and chorus of embodied, bloodied voices brooding on the life-and-death choices both Latin Americans and North Americans faced two decades ago — and that we face today.

INTRODUCTION

At the deepest level, a commitment to nonviolence arises out of a vision that life is sacred and must be treasured and protected and preserved. Nonviolent movements come into being when people of conscience act out of the depths of their souls and find nonviolent methods to defend the lives and human rights of their brothers and sisters from persecution, oppression, torture, warfare, and genocide.

Down through the centuries, nonviolent movements have spread like a chain reaction of conscience, traveling with the speed of inspiration. The torch of resistance was passed in a flash of inspiration from Henry David Thoreau's solitary vigil in a lonely jail cell in America, as his influential essay on civil disobedience sparked Leo Tolstoy's commitment to pacifism and social justice in Czarist Russia, then traveled onward to breathe life into Mohandas Gandhi's campaigns of nonviolent "soul force" in India, the Danish resistance to Nazism, and Martin Luther King's courageous civil rights marches in America.

Rather than being limited to acts of "passive resistance," nonviolent movements are most effective when they are most audacious, imaginative and militant. In Gandhi's vision, nonviolence was never a weak or passive force. Rather, it was the power of the human conscience unleashed – a power that could empower "a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire." During the nonviolent resistance to the economic monopoly of the British in India, hundreds of satyagrahis mounted a "nonviolent raid" on the Dharasana Salt Works, and used ropes to try to pull down its barbed wire fences. They marched relentlessly in a fearless attempt to invade, take over and shut down the salt works — even as hundreds of resisters were clubbed down by troops under British command.

Martin Luther King, Jr., spent the last months of his life organizing what he called a "nonviolent insurrection" that was aimed at disrupting and literally shutting down

the functions of the federal government until the nation acted to lift the load of poverty off the backs of the poor. The White House, FBI and U.S. military officials were worried that King's Poor People's Campaign would become an uncontrollable uprising – precisely because King himself described it as a "nonviolent revolution" aimed at paralyzing the institutions of the federal government.

Because adherents of nonviolent resistance believe that life is sacred, they build nonviolent movements that attempt to defend the lives and rights of the oppressed, yet also attempt to preserve the lives even of the oppressors.

In the 1980s and 1990s, many North American peace activists helped to organize a mass movement to nonviolently resist U.S. intervention in Latin America, and created such inspiring organizations as the Pledge of Resistance and Witness for Peace. In the course of that struggle, peace activists who deeply believed in the principles of nonviolence found themselves in dialogue with the principles of liberation theology as developed by priests, nuns, bishops and lay people in Central and South America.

Many religious people in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, Brazil and Argentina had taken part in rebellious insurrections aimed at overcoming the poverty and death squads that mercilessly destroyed the lives of the poorest of the poor. Many peace activists found themselves confronted with highly charged questions about the meaning of nonviolent resistance in countries suffering devastating warfare, military slaughter, torture, and the disappearances of thousands of people who resisted these abuses.

The following dialogue between the principles of nonviolent resistance and the principles of liberation theology was created to shed light on these life-and-death issues. Although this dialogue began as a reflection on the movement that opposed U.S. intervention in Central America, the issues and truths expressed here are timeless and are still confronting nonviolent activists to this day.

In building nonviolent movements, we stand on the shoulders of prophets and visionaries — and martyrs. Many people of conscience have searched their souls on the meaning of nonviolence, solidarity, liberation and resistance. By listening to them in dialogue with one another, we may find it will deepen our own reflections on the meaning and value of nonviolent resistance.

THE DIALOGUE

What do nonviolent activists mean when they say that human life is sacred, and that it gives our life deep inspiration and meaning when we act to defend the lives of others?

Sister Ita Ford: "Yesterday I was looking down on a 16-year-old who had just been killed a few hours before. I know of a lot of children, some younger than this one, who are dead. This is a horrible time for young people in El Salvador. So much idealism and commitment is being destroyed. The reasons for why so many people have been killed are somewhat complicated, but there are a few clear and simple ones. One is that many people have found meaning in their lives — they make sacrifices, fight, even die. And whether they live to be 16 or 60 or 90, they know what they are living for. In many ways they're lucky.

"Brooklyn is not El Salvador. But a few things remain true wherever you are. What I want to say is that I hope you'll succeed in finding what will give life a deep meaning for you. Something that's worth living for, perhaps even worth dying for, something that gives you strength and inspires you and makes you able to go on."

— Ita Ford, Maryknoll nun murdered by Salvadoran security forces, passage from a letter written to her 16-year-old niece.

How can we feel any hope that the unarmed activism of common people can ever be powerful enough to end the bloodshed and genocidal violence of powerful regimes armed with advanced weapons and massive armies?

Archbishop Oscar Romero: "As a pastor and as a Salvadoran citizen, I am deeply grieved that the organized sector of our people continues to be massacred merely for taking to the street in orderly fashion to petition for justice and liberty. I am sure that so much blood and so much pain caused to the families of so many victims will not be in vain. It is blood and pain that will water and make fertile new and continually more numerous seeds — Salvadorans who will awaken to the responsibility they have to build a more just and human society — and that will bear fruit in the accomplishment of the daring, urgent, and radical structural reforms that our nation needs. The cry for liberation of this people is a shout that rises up to God and that nothing and no one can now stop."

— Archbishop Oscar Romero, martyred in the struggle against military repression in El Salvador, quoted by James Brockman in The Word Remains: A Life of Oscar Romero, Orbis Books, 1982.

As people of conscience, what kind of commitment are we called upon to make when we learn of the persecution of our brothers and sisters?

Gustavo Gutierrez: "Present events form part of our own universe and demand of the individual a personal decision, a rejection of every kind of complicity with executioners, a straightforward solidarity, an uncompromising denunciation of evil, a prayer of commitment."

— Gustavo Gutierrez, liberation theologian from Lima, Peru, We Drink From Our Own Wells, Orbis/Dove, 1984.

In human terms, what does it mean to call for solidarity with the poor? How is solidarity related to love, and to the works of mercy?

Gustavo Gutierrez: "It used to be called mercy, then charity, then commitment; today it is called solidarity. To give food to the hungry… drink to the thirsty… clothing to the naked… shelter to the homeless… and to welcome the stranger are actions so basic that at the end of time we shall have to render an account of them.

"It is a work of concrete, authentic love for the poor that is not possible apart from a certain integration into their world and apart from bonds of real friendship with those who suffer despoliation and injustice. The solidarity is not with 'the poor' in the abstract but with human beings of flesh and bone. Without love and affection, without — why not say it? — tenderness, there can be no true gesture of solidarity."

— Gutierrez, We Drink From Our Own Wells.

When liberation theologians say that "God has made a preferential option for the poor," do they mean that we, too, should be especially dedicated to being of service to the poor?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "There remains an experience of incomparable value… to see the great events of world history from below; from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled — in short, from the perspective of those who suffer."

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German Lutheran pastor and theologian who was martyred in the struggle against Nazism, in Letters and Papers from Prison.

What are the full human costs of this solidarity with the poor?

Archbishop Romero: "Christ asks us not to fear persecution, because — believe me, brothers and sisters — whoever has cast his or her lot with the poor will have to endure the same fate as the poor, and in El Salvador we know what the fate of the poor is: to disappear, to be tortured, to be a prisoner, to be found dead."

— Archbishop Romero, The Word Remains.

That sounds exactly like the Beatitudes: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of justice." What is the cost of peacemaking for nonviolent activists in North America?

Father Daniel Berrigan: "For my brother and myself the choice is already made. We have chosen to be powerless criminals in a time of criminal power. We have chosen to be branded as peace criminals by war criminals…. There are a hundred nonviolent means of resisting those who would inflict death as the ordinary way of life. There are a hundred ways of nonviolent resistance up to now untried, or half-tried, or badly tried. But the peace will not be won without such serious and constant and sacrificial and courageous actions on the part of large numbers of good men and women. The peace will not be won without the moral equivalent of the loss and suffering and separation that the war itself is exacting."

— Daniel Berrigan, Jesuit priest, draft resister, convicted peace felon, in "Sermon from the Underground."

What if we might be at risk for speaking out? Isn't it easier and safer to sometimes keep silent when we witness an injustice?

Gutierrez: "We regard ourselves as guilty for keeping silence in the face of the events agitating our country. In the face of repression, detentions, the economic crisis, the loss of jobs by so many workers, murders and tortures, we have kept silent as though we did not belong to that world. The cowardice that keeps silent in the face of the sufferings of the poor and that offers any number of adroit justifications represents an especially serious failure."

— Gutierrez, We Drink From Our Own Wells.

How can we support one another when we face hardships in the struggle for justice? Where do we find the courage and inspiration to carry on even when we face persecution?

Base Christian community in Brazil: "The faith and courage of the members of our communities in the face of threats, misunderstandings, and persecution for justice' sake are sustained and strengthened by the support each individual gives the others, by the support each community gives the others, by our very struggle and activity, by meditation on the word of God, and by the recollection of the witness given by those who have struggled for justice."

— quoted by Gutierrez, We Drink From Our Own Wells.

Why do nonviolence trainings emphasize studying the strategies and history of nonviolent movements as a preparation for committing civil disobedience?

Dorothee Sölle: "This is intended as a call to resistance so that we can learn deliberate violation of the rules, nonviolent illegality, and civil disobedience together. It is possible to violate laws and regulations governing property without committing violence against human beings. Our imaginations in this area are underdeveloped. If we want to take part in liberation movements, then the militarism that dominates us is our main enemy."

— Dorothee Sölle, West German theologian and peace activist, Of War and Love, Orbis Books, 1983.

Do nonviolent movements have any realistic hope of building enough international strength to overcome the enormous power of globe-spanning corporations, military regimes and dictatorships that massacre their own people?

Martin Luther King, Jr.: "We in the West must bear in mind that the poor countries are poor primarily because we have exploited them through political or economic colonialism. Americans in particular must help their nation repent of her modern economic imperialism. But movements in our countries alone will not be enough. In Latin America, for example, national reform movements have almost despaired of nonviolent methods; many young men, even many priests, have joined guerrilla movements in the hills. So many of Latin America's problems have roots in the United States of America that we need to form a solid, united movement, nonviolently conceived and carried through, so that pressure can be brought to bear on the capital and government power structures concerned, from both sides of the problem at once. I think that may be the only hope for a nonviolent solution in Latin America today; and one of the most powerful expressions of nonviolence may come out of that international coalition of socially aware forces, operating outside government frameworks."

— Martin Luther King, Jr., The Trumpet of Conscience.

But isn't nonviolence a passive and symbolic form of protest that is simply too weak to seriously challenge a powerful military regime or authoritarian government?

Mohandas Gandhi: "Nonviolence does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means the pitting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Working under this law of our being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire."

Yet how can nonviolent protest ever actually defy an unjust empire? How does a force that seems based on passive resistance become strong enough to transform powerful systems of injustice?

Adolfo Perez Esquivel: "We struggle by rendering operative the force of love in the battle of liberation. Active nonviolence is a response, a step forward (whether the world realizes it or not) that is based on the gospel. Nonviolence is a way of answering evil and injustice with truth, and hate with love. For truth and love are the weapons of the spirit in the face of repression. Nonviolence is not passivity or conformism. It is a spirit and a method. It is a spirit of prophecy, for it denounces all sundering of a community of brothers and sisters and proclaims that this community can only be rebuilt through love. And it is a method — an organized set of ruptures in the civil order so as to disturb the system responsible for the injustices we see around us.

"Here we see the power of the dispossessed, the weapon of the poor. The struggle, then, will be the people's struggle. Here is participation indeed. Here is no elitist contest, no partisan struggle. The means will include boycotts, strikes, noncooperation, civil disobedience, hunger strikes, and many other actions."

— Adolfo Perez Esquivel, Argentinean nonviolent resister, 1980 Nobel Prize winner, from Christ in a Poncho.

What level of nonviolent resistance will it take to enable us to overturn economic injustice and abolish poverty in the United States?

Martin Luther King, Jr.: "I intended to show that nonviolence will be effective, but not until it has achieved the massive dimensions, the disciplined planning, and the intense commitment of a sustained, direct-action movement of civil disobedience on the national scale. The dispossessed of this nation — the poor, both white and black — live in a cruelly unjust society. They must organize a revolution against that injustice, not against the lives of the persons who are their fellow citizens, but against the structures through which the society is refusing to take means which have been called for, and which are at hand, to lift the load of poverty."

— Martin Luther King, Jr. The Trumpet of Conscience.

The necessary urgency seems to be lacking to overcome the growing crisis of poverty and economic injustice. How can a campaign of civil disobedience ever become forceful enough to take emergency action to confront poverty, hunger and homelessness?

Martin Luther King, Jr.: "There is nothing wrong with a traffic law which says you have to stop for a red light. But when a fire is raging, the fire truck goes right through that red light, and normal traffic had better get out of its way. Or, when a man is bleeding to death, the ambulance goes through those red lights at top speed…. Disinherited people all over the world are bleeding to death from deep social and economic wounds. They need brigades of ambulance drivers who will have to ignore the red lights of the present system until the emergency is solved. Massive civil disobedience is a strategy for social change which is at least as forceful as an ambulance with its siren on full."

— Martin Luther King, Jr. The Trumpet of Conscience

What are the principles that can inspire and unify people to join together in large enough numbers to build a massive resistance movement?

Dorothee Sölle: "To question and rebel means to organize resistance. What we need now and what we will need in the coming years is a broad, comprehensive resistance movement against militarism, a movement that includes members of every political grouping from the center to the left. We have to take up the cause of peace, take sides with life, interfere nonviolently and illegally. I think we can learn the most for our purposes from the liberation struggles in the Third World. I have been given a leaflet from the resistance movement in Chile, a leaflet that can be distributed there only at the risk of one's life. These Chileans are reflecting on their situation, on what it means to live under a dictatorship and what is happening to them as a result. I think we can adopt a great deal of what they say, for they say: 'Rebel! Don't cooperate with death! Choose life!' They also say: 'Don't let them steal away your soul! Amen!' "

— Dorothee Sölle, Of War and Love

Has a massive campaign of civil disobedience ever been organized in America that was able to persevere in the face of brutal repression and overcome powerful systems of injustice?

Martin Luther King, Jr.: "The higher level is mass civil disobedience. There must be more than a statement to the larger society; there must be a force that interrupts its functioning at some key point. That interruption must not, however, be clandestine or surreptitious. It is not necessary to invest it with guerrilla romanticism. It must be open and, above all, conducted by large masses without violence. If the jails are filled to thwart it, its meaning will become even clearer.

"Boycotting buses in Montgomery, demonstrating in Birmingham, the citadel of segregation, and defying guns, dogs, and clubs in Selma, while maintaining disciplined nonviolence, totally confused the rulers of the South. If they let us march, they admitted their lie that the black man was content. If they shot us down, they told the world they were inhuman brutes. They tried to stop us by threats and fear, the tactic that had long worked so effectively. But nonviolence had muzzled their guns and Negro defiance had shaken their confidence. When they finally reached for clubs, dogs, and guns, they found the world was watching, and then the power of nonviolent protest became manifest.

"It dramatized the essential meaning of the conflict and in magnified strokes made clear who was the evildoer and who was the undeserving victim. The nation and the world were sickened and through national legislation wiped out a thousand Southern laws, ripping gaping holes in the edifice of segregation."

— Martin Luther King, Jr., The Trumpet of Conscience

What does the feminist movement have to teach the peace movement about the necessity of finding alternatives to patriarchal systems of power, abuse and violence?

Dorothee Sölle: "The women's movement displays its real strength when it presents a vision of life that differs

from the prevailing one. Women will become strong when they stop worshiping the golden calves that men worship: unlimited economic growth, national security, the balance of terror…

"We shall become free only when we beat our swords into plowshares, as Isaiah says, and when we learn to operate irrigation systems, not tanks. We shall be free and we shall be women only when we join forces with life against production for death and the ongoing preparation for murder. We shall not become free by retiring into the private sphere and saying, 'Count me out,' nor shall we become free by conforming to a society that holds its generals and millionaires in particularly high regard. We shall become free when we learn to work for peace actively, deliberately, and militantly."

— Dorothee Sölle, Of War and Love

Why does the feminist movement have an important role in the development of nonviolence trainings, consensus decision-making and the transformation of old patterns of dominance?

Lynne Shivers: "Nonviolence training is important because it empowers us and forces us to consider means and ends, and because it decentralizes power. Most important, however, it strengthens the movement for social change. Feminism remains as important as nonviolence in my thinking. It is my concern to work out any apparent contradictions since I think that one without the other would be unsuccessful."

— Lynne Shivers, quoted in Reweaving the Web of Life, New Society Publishers, 1983.

Can pacifists and activists who are committed to nonviolence still act in solidarity with liberation movements that do not adhere to nonviolence?

Gene Sharp: "Gandhi was not blind to the realities of conflict often involved in wars, and to the fact that one side might well have much more right on its side than the other. In such cases, 'neutrality' or 'impartiality' played no role in Gandhi's thinking. Gandhi wrote, 'Whilst all violence is bad and must be condemned in the abstract, it is permissible for, it is even the duty of, a believer in *ahimsa* (nonviolence) to distinguish between the aggressor and the defender. Having done so, he will side with the defender in a nonviolent manner, i.e., give his life in saving him.' Even if the defender continued to struggle by violent means in such an instance, Gandhi believed that such nonviolent intervention and assistance would contribute to a quicker and less vindictive peace."

— Gene Sharp, author and theoretician of nonviolent resistance, in Gandhi As A Political Strategist, Porter Sargent Publishers, 1979.

Doesn't our belief in nonviolence require us to insist that oppressed peoples in Third World countries adopt nonviolence as their only means of struggle?

Thomas Merton: "A theology of love cannot afford to be sentimental. It cannot afford to preach edifying generalities about charity, while identifying 'peace' with mere established power and legalized violence against the oppressed. A theology of love cannot be allowed merely to serve the interests of the rich and powerful, justifying their wars, their violence and their bombs, while exhorting the poor and underprivileged to practice patience, meekness, longsuffering, and to solve their problems, if at all, nonviolently.

"A theology of love may also conceivably turn out to be a theology of revolution. In any case, it is a theology of *resistance*, a refusal of the evil that reduces a brother or sister to homicidal desperation….

" Instead of preaching the Cross for others and advising them to suffer patiently the violence which we sweetly impose on them, with the aid of armies and police, we might conceivably recognize the right of the less fortunate to use force, and study more seriously the practice of nonviolence and humane methods on our own part when, as it happens, we possess the most stupendous arsenal of power the world has ever known."

— Thomas Merton, Catholic monk, theologian and author, from "Toward a Theology of Resistance," in The Nonviolent Alternative.

Why did people in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua — including many priests, nuns and people of faith — resort to armed insurrection?

Fernando Cardenal: "I came here to a country that's been governed for nearly half a century by an unjust, murderous, bloody dictatorship, one that eradicated whole families. I read to the U.S. Congress whole lists of families — father, mother, grandparents, teenagers, and younger children — murdered in the mountains. In the final 52 days of the offensive alone, 50,000 persons died in Nicaragua. Here, then, taking sides with the people by joining with those who are struggling and offering their lives to defend the people — supporting them and

becoming one of them, in the people's defense… We're taking sides, yes — with the good Samaritan. Here you have to take sides, you have to be a partisan. Either you're with the slaughtered or you're with the slaughterers. From a gospel point of view, I don't think there was any other legitimate option we could have made."

— Fernando Cardenal, Jesuit priest and former Minister of Education in Nicaragua, interviewed by Teofilo Cabrestrero in Ministers of God, Ministers of the People, Orbis Books, 1983.

Don't any of the people who take part in resistance movements in Central America understand the deep value of nonviolence?

Miguel D'Escoto: "To be very frank with you, I don't think that violence is Christian. Some may say that this is a reactionary position. But I think that the very essence of Christianity is the cross. It is through the cross that we will change. I have come to believe that creative nonviolence has to be a constitutive element of evangelization and of the proclamation of the gospel. But in Nicaragua nonviolence was never included in the process of evangelization. The cancer of oppression and injustice and crime and exploitation was allowed to grow and finally the people had to fight with the means available to them, the only means that people have found from of old: armed struggle. Then (some) arrogantly said violence was bad, nonviolence was the correct way…. But that spirituality and prayer and work with people's consciences has never been done. We have no right to hope to harvest what we have not sown."

— Miguel D'Escoto, Maryknoll priest, former Nicaraguan Minister for Foreign Affairs, and currently, President of the 63rd session of the United Nations General Assembly, in "An Unfinished Canvas: Building a New Nicaragua," in Sojourners magazine, March, 1983.

Haven't those involved in life-and-death liberation struggles in the Third World lost all respect for nonviolent resistance, or for advocates of nonviolence, such as Dr. King?

Miguel D'Escoto: "Here I should say that the person who had the most impact on my life at that time, by his way of living his Christianity, was Martin Luther King, Jr. I carried a little picture of him with me. There were photos of him on the walls of my room. I looked at Martin Luther King as a very special human being — someone very consistent. I'd taken steps to get him to visit Chile before I came back to the United States, and he'd accepted, but he didn't make it. He was killed. I always thought of Martin Luther King as a kind of reproach to myself, because I was so afraid to follow in his footsteps. I looked on him as a guide, as a standard."

— Miguel D'Escoto, quoted by Cabrestrero, Ministers of God, Ministers of the People.

Do any members of the U.S. nonviolent movements understand how oppressed people in poor countries have been victimized by the economic exploitation and militarism of the U.S. government?

Martin Luther King, Jr.: "In 1957 a sensitive American official overseas said that it seemed to him that our nation was on the wrong side of a world revolution. I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast between poverty and wealth. With righteous indignation, it will look across the seas and see individual capitalists of the West investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa, and South America only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of these countries, and say, 'This is not just.' It will look at our alliance with the landed gentry of Latin America and say, 'This is not just.' A true revolution of values will lay hands on the world order and say of war, 'This way of settling differences is not just.' This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of people normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice and love. A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom."

— Martin Luther King, Jr., The Trumpet of Conscience

What kind of reform or conversion is the United States compelled to undergo in order to become a nation that stands for justice once again?

Martin Luther King, Jr.: "These are revolutionary times; all over the globe people are revolting against old systems of exploitation and oppression. The shirtless and barefoot people of the land are rising up as never before. 'The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.' We in the West must support these revolutions. It is

a sad fact that because of comfort, complacency, a morbid fear of communism, and our proneness to adjust to injustice, the Western nations that initiated so much of the revolutionary spirit of the modern world have now become the arch-antirevolutionaries."

— Martin Luther King, Jr., The Trumpet of Conscience

What must the United States give up in order to end our nation's history of military violence and exploitation of the poor nations of the world?

Mohandas Gandhi: "If the great nations can shed the fear of destruction, if they disarm themselves, they will automatically help the rest to regain their sanity. But then these great powers will have to give up their imperialistic ambitions and their exploitation of the so-called uncivilized or semi-civilized nations of the earth and revise their mode of life. It means a complete revolution."

— Mohandas Gandhi, Gandhi on Nonviolence, edited by Thomas Merton, New Directions, 1965.

What can nonviolent activists do in the United States to help bring an end to the economic suffering and human rights violations our nation has inflicted on the impoverished peoples of the world?

Archbishop Oscar Romero: "If you really wish to defend human rights… guarantee that your government will not intervene directly or indirectly, by military, economic, diplomatic, or other pressures, in determining the destiny of the Salvadoran people. It would be unjust and deplorable for foreign powers to intervene and frustrate the Salvadoran people, to repress them and keep them from deciding autonomously the economic and political course that our nation should follow."

— Archbishop Romero, quoted by Brockman in The Word Remains: A Life of Oscar Romero.

What does it mean to speak out as a prophet and to be persecuted as a peacemaker? When Archbishop Oscar Romero courageously told members of the military and police to refuse to obey immoral orders to kill their brothers and sisters, he paid the full cost of being a prophet. Romero was assassinated shortly after he told the military, "I beg you, I ask you, I order you in the name of God: stop the repression!" But if his prophetic words cut his life short, they also made him an immortal and unforgettable part of the history of nonviolent resistance.

Archbishop Oscar Romero: "I would like to make an appeal in a special way to the men of the army, and in particular to the ranks of the National Guard, of the police, to those in the barracks. Brothers, you are part of our own people. You kill your own *campesino* brothers and sisters. And before an order to kill that a man may give, the law of God must prevail that says: Thou shalt not kill! No soldier is obliged to obey an order against the law of God. No one has to fulfill an immoral law. It is time to recover your consciences and to obey your consciences rather than the orders of sin. The church, defender of the rights of God, of the law of God, of human dignity, the dignity of the person, cannot remain silent before such abomination. We want the government to take seriously that reforms are worth nothing when they come about stained with so much blood.

"In the name of God, and in the name of this suffering people whose laments rise to heaven each day more tumultuous, I beg you, I ask you, I order you in the name of God: stop the repression!"

— Archbishop Romero, in The Word Remains: A Life of Oscar Romero.