

The Role of Jesus in Revolution & the Pursuit of Justice

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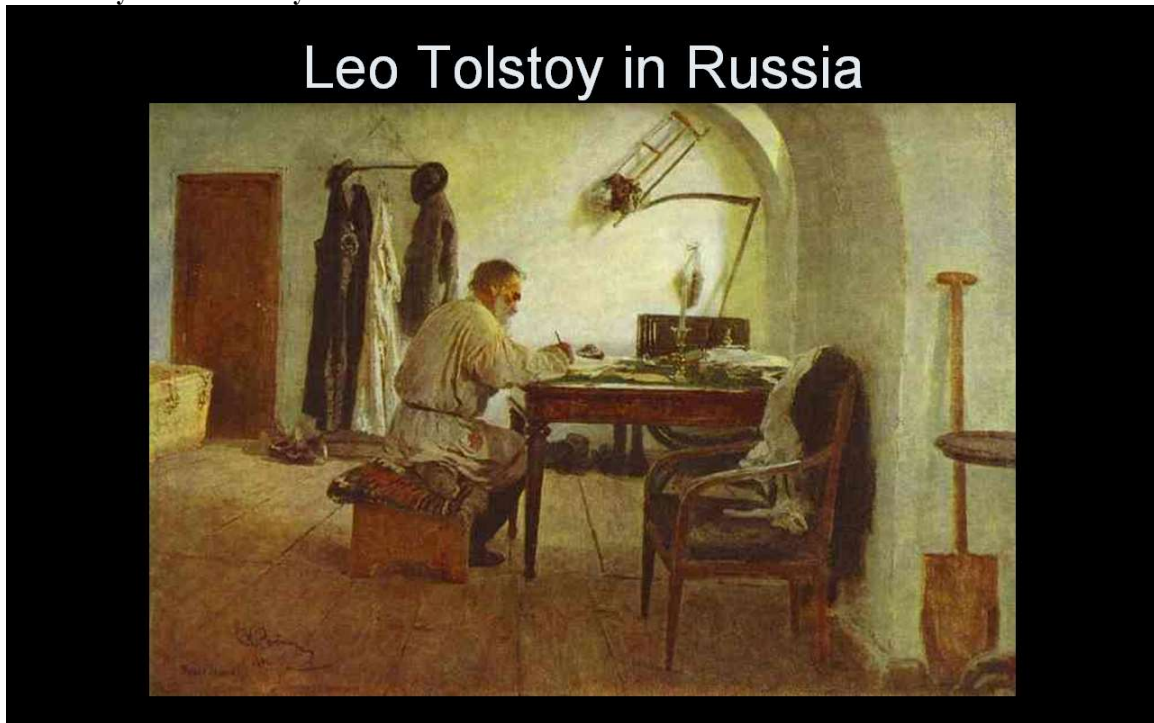
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Introduction

Tonight, I'm really honored to be with you to share about this topic: *The Role of Jesus in Revolution and the Pursuit of Justice*. You're here probably for a variety of reasons. Maybe a friend brought you and the topic sounded mildly interesting and different. Great, welcome! Maybe you think that Christianity has always been on the side of the oppressor, so this title caught your eye. Is Jesus on the side of justice? Perhaps you came out of a tradition that assumes Jesus is on the side of justice, so you wanted to hear more. Maybe there is even a personal element in it for you, as there is for me.

In my family, and in large parts of the Japanese American community, the response to the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II was to try to absorb it, to try to internalize the pain. Unfortunately, in my dad's life, I saw that worked out as suspicion, anger, and on one occasion, he punched a white neighbor. So that left me with questions about whether that was a good way to deal with injustice. On a personal level, like when someone or something treats us unfairly, I think we have different tendencies. We can retaliate verbally. We can get angry and then stop there. We can become violent. We can eventually back away and disengage if the injustice becomes too much. On a larger scale, when we are dealing with major social injustices, those responses become much more complex. What I'm going to do tonight is to share with you six vignettes about how Christians have responded on large scale issues of injustice. Then I'm going to interpret that and leave you with some thoughts.

Case Study 1: Leo Tolstoy in Russia



Our story begins in the late 1800's with a famous Russian novelist poring over the Gospel of Matthew. His name: Leo Tolstoy. He had been trying to improve the condition of the poor Russian peasants over against the exploitative Russian landowners, of which he had once been one. But he reflected long and hard on Jesus' teaching: Love your enemy. Go the extra mile. Give to those who ask of you. And yet not in a passive, doormat kind of way, but in the framework of the kingdom of God, as part of a reconciling community of peace where you are presenting to others God's way of dealing with evil, all centered around Jesus. In the late 1890's, Tolstoy's reflections on Jesus' teachings, civil disobedience and nonviolent resistance began to circulate around the world.

Case Study #2: The British Occupation of India and Gandhi's Movement

In the early 1900's, a brilliant young lawyer sat in South Africa, looking out over the racial injustices of that country under the Dutch and the British. His name was Mohandas K. Gandhi. He was a Hindu. But he had a problem. He wanted to meaningfully address the situation of injustice. But he could not go to the Bhagavad-Gita, because he perceived, correctly I think, that the Hindu caste system legitimates war. The warriors had their own caste; they were second under the priestly Brahmins. Gandhi had two problems with that. The first problem was pragmatic: He couldn't beat the British using violence. He would just get slaughtered. The second problem was moral: He did not want to use violence. So, as he read Leo Tolstoy and the teaching of Jesus, he found himself persuaded. Gandhi launched a nonviolent resistance movement in South Africa based on the teaching of Jesus. As he rode from train stop to train stop rallying people, he did not quote from the Bhagavad-Gita; he did not quote from the Hindu writings; he quoted from Jesus. 'Love your enemy!' In 1910, Tolstoy wrote a letter to Gandhi in the Transvaal. Tolstoy said that the nonviolent resistance campaign in South Africa 'is the most important activity the world can at present take part in, and in which not Christendom alone but all the peoples of the earth will participate.'¹

Gandhi in South Africa & India



In 1919, Gandhi went to his native India and led the struggle for Indian independence. As you know, Gandhi succeeded in gaining India's independence from the British. How did he do it? By the teachings of Jesus. It saddens me that Gandhi never became a Christian to anyone's knowledge, and that later showed in his persecution of Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims², but his admiration of Jesus at this time in his life and his use of Jesus' teaching is notable. For our purposes tonight, it is very significant, because it speaks very highly of Jesus.

¹ Mary Benson, *South Africa: The Struggle for a Birthright* (Middlesex: Penguin Book, 1966), p.118. Gene Sharp of Harvard University, in his book *Gandhi as a Political Strategist*, shows that Gandhi and his Indian colleagues in South Africa were well aware, in 1906, of mass nonviolent actions in India, China, Russia and among blacks in South Africa itself.

² Susan Billington Harper, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma: Bishop V.S. Azariah and the Travails of Christianity in British India* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000)

Case Study 3: The Korean Independence Movement Under Imperial Japan

Ahn Chang-Ho in Korea



In the late 1800's and early 1900's, Korea was in the grip of Imperial Japan, which was racing to acquire colonies like the Western powers. One of the leaders of the Korean Independence Movement, Ahn Chang-Ho, was born in 1876 in Pyongyang, Korea. He was a farmer's son but became one of the leading statesmen and spokespersons for Korea. While he studied for two years at a school operated by the Salvation Army, he committed his life to Jesus. For this reason, he said he could not hate the Japanese; instead he used non-violent resistance and political advocacy. At the same time, he and many other Christians believed that Korea's independence was essential because peace must be the fruit of justice.

Ahn established the Chomjin School, the first private modern school established in Korea. This put him on a collision course with Japan. In 1911, the Japanese began an imperial policy to annihilate Korean culture through the destruction of religion, literature, historical records, and most of all schools. By 1914, virtually all Korean schools had been shut down.

But in 1919, when the Joseon Dynasty was forcefully absorbed into the Japanese Empire, Ahn Chang-Ho started underground activities that focused on regaining Korean independence. As chairman of the Korean National People's Association, he went before the United Nations and President Woodrow Wilson and asked for aid at the Treaty of Versailles. Meanwhile the Christians of Korea marched in the forefront of March First Independence Movement of 1919. They helped draft the Korean Declaration of Independence; 50% of signers were Christians, even though only 1% of the population of Korea was Christian at the time. On March 1, 1919, the provisional government declared its independence from Japan, named Ahn Chang-Ho as provisional president, and called the Korean population to general resistance. Thousands were killed in peaceful demonstrations. Yet many, many Christians stood their ground and helped rally Korea. This explains the explosion of Christian growth in Korea: in one of Korea's darkest hours, Jesus was there.³

³ The role of Christians after the Korean Independence Movement should be noted. After World War II, Syngman Rhee, who professed Christian faith as a young man, rose to power. To my knowledge, he did not maintain contact with Christian ethical reflection. Instead, he became an authoritarian and corrupt strongman, ostensibly to court American anti-communist assistance. On the one hand, it is important to note that Paul Chang, *Protest Dialectics: State Repression and South Korea's Democracy Movement, 1970 – 1979* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), chs.4 and 6 describes the re-emergence of Christian churches as a political democratizing force in the 1970's. On the other hand, I'm making a much more constrained argument, that there are historical moments in which certain values come to the fore, like in the non-violent revolutions. After a particular regime or government is put in place and subjected to other geo-political values and pressures, the people in question are put under other constraints. Per the example of the Philippines, below, it is also true that Aquino inherited massive national debt from Marcos, and

Case Study 4: The Black Church and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement

The Black Church in the U.S.



From here we go to the Black community in the U.S. During the 40's and 50's, a lot of African peoples were gaining their independence from the colonial powers and becoming self-governing nations. The Black community in the U.S. watched this with great interest. Everyone was shocked, though, at how much bloodshed there was in Africa. The Black community looked at India as the exception to all this, because of Gandhi. An African American student from Vanderbilt Theological Seminary named James Lawson went to study with Gandhi. Lawson was a minister and an activist. When he came back to the States, he met Martin Luther King Jr. in 1957 and formed a deep friendship. King was already working out his strategy of nonviolent resistance based on Jesus' teaching. In fact, in order to join the Civil Rights Movement, you had to agree to study the life and teaching of Jesus every day. King urged Lawson to go to the South and teach Jesus and nonviolence on a broader scale. This was good timing.

Lawson began meeting with college students just like yourselves to do non-violent resistance training. Shortly afterwards, on February 1st, 1960 four black college students sat down at a segregated lunch counter in downtown Greensboro, North Carolina. To their surprise, they were not arrested. Returning to campus, the four immediately got their friends. They recruited more students to go back with them. The following morning about two dozen students returned to the store and sat at the lunch counter. A national news service covered the story of the 'well-dressed' black college students who ended their sit-in with...a prayer. Five months later, the students faced bomb threats from segregationists. But they launched an effective boycott of stores with segregated lunch counters. Local white officials agreed to negotiate changes in store policies if demonstrations and boycotts ended. By the end of February's second week, the sit-in movement had spread from North Carolina to Virginia. By the end of the month, sit-ins had taken place at more than 30 locations in seven states.

Why did this happen so quickly? Partly because they were well organized, since James Lawson led workshops on nonviolence that attracted students from black colleges in the South. But partly because of their faith. Lawson helped form the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in April of 1960. Lawson drafted SNCC's 'Statement of Purpose': 'We affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of

decided to honor it – so I can understand the argument that she was too amenable to the neo-liberals, but one has to consider what the alternative was. She also appeared to allow her family to interfere with her land and economic reforms. But at the same time, she maintained contact with Catholic advisors and implemented the Catholic social teaching principle of subsidiarity. These details can certainly be the subject of a much longer analysis. But the argument I am putting forward here can stand on its own.

nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our [Christian] faith, and the manner of our action.' That is one way Jesus was active in the Civil Rights Movement.

The Civil Rights Movement won for the first time legally sanctioned equal rights for African-Americans. Perhaps the most significant thing is that the Civil Rights Movement did not shed anyone's blood, except for blood willingly shed by the demonstrators. That's a sad thing, but it stands in huge contrast to other places in the world shaking free from the grip of European racist and imperialist control. Was that Jesus showing mercy to the United States through the Black church and the few White Christians and others who joined them?

Case Study 5: People Power in the Philippines



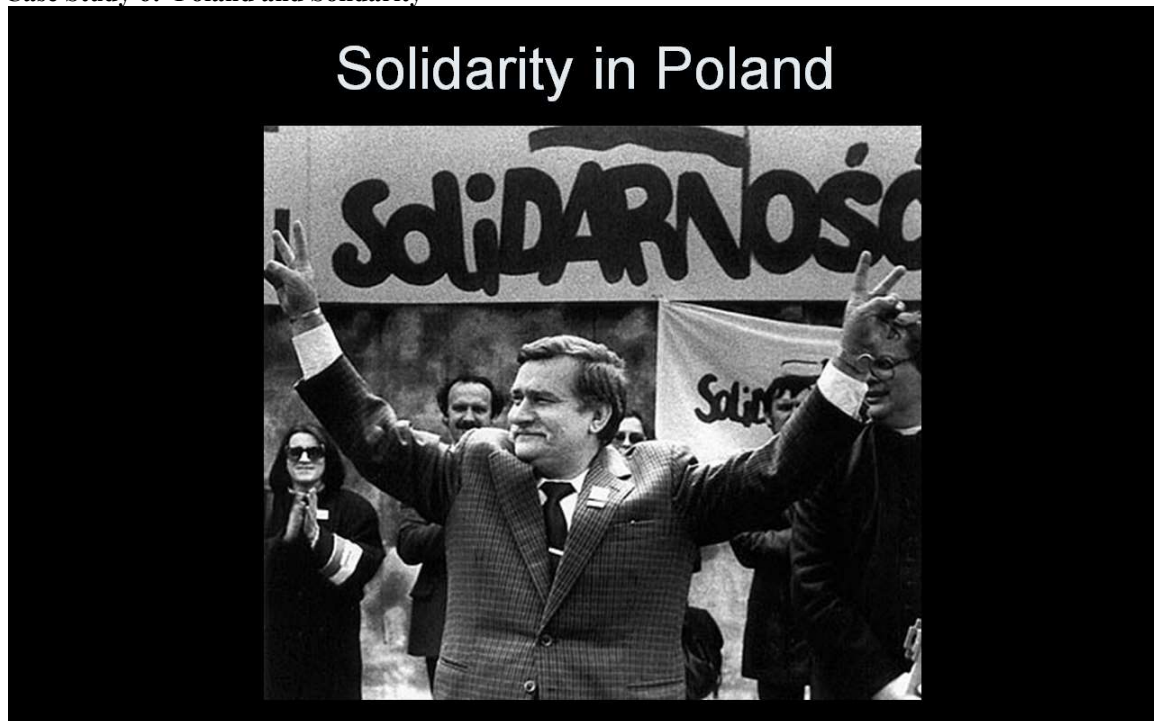
The Philippines were colonized by the Spanish and then by the United States. The U.S. installed and backed Ferdinand Marcos, a dictator, and his wife Imelda Marcos, a woman with a taste for expensive shoes. Marcos had accumulated billions of dollars and 3,500 pairs of shoes while half the country was unemployed and in poverty. Marcos' chief political opponent was Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino, a Senator whose father was also a statesman. But in 1973, Marcos wanted to stay in office beyond his two-term limit, so he declared martial law and trumped up charges against Aquino. He threw Aquino into prison for 8 years. While in prison, Aquino, depressed and bitter, got a book from his mom. It was a book called *Born Again* by Chuck Colson about his conversion to Christ after Watergate. Aquino also read a Christian classic called *The Imitation of Christ*. He was very impacted. He gave his life to Jesus Christ and was transformed.

In 1983, Marcos called an election that he thought he'd win. Aquino decided to return to the Philippines from medical treatment in the U.S. Shortly before leaving, he testified before a Senate subcommittee. He said, 'It is true, one can fight hatred with a greater hatred, but...it is more effective to fight hatred with greater Christian love...I have decided to pursue my freedom struggle through the path of nonviolence, fully cognizant that this may be the longer and the more arduous road...Only I will suffer solitary confinement once again, and possibly death...But by taking the road of revolution, how many lives, other than mine, will have to be sacrificed?'⁴

⁴ Charles Colson, *Kingdoms in Conflict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987)

When he stepped off the plane in the Philippines, Aquino was assassinated, most likely by Marcos' henchmen. When the accused agents were acquitted, his wife, Corazon Aquino, a homemaker and mother of five, said, 'I will run for President!' Catholic Cardinal Jaime Sin threw his support in behind Aquino. For the Filipinos, many of whom were Catholic, this united the opposition against Marcos. The saying that circulated joyfully was, 'Marcos has the guns but Aquino has the nuns.' Clergy and people locked arms and guarded ballot boxes. But Marcos and his supporters nevertheless stole ballot boxes at gunpoint all over the country. They purchased votes, etc. A week after the election, the Marcos dominated National Assembly proclaimed Marcos the winner. However, the minister of defense and a well-respected general declared the election rigged, stated their support for Cory Aquino, taking with them many officers and soldiers. Marcos came after them with tanks and gunmen. That's when Cardinal Jaime Sin got on the radio and encouraged the people to fill the streets. About two million men, women, children, people in wheelchairs, nuns and priests blocked the tanks, put flowers in gun tips, and refused to move. They had no training in demonstrating, so they just sang hymns and prayed. The army gave up and Marcos fled the country. Cory Aquino became the first woman President of the country in a bloodless revolution. As her husband said, 'It is more effective to fight hatred with greater Christian love.'

Case Study 6: Poland and Solidarity



The fifth example is Solidarity in Poland. After World War II, the British, the Americans, and the Russians secretly agreed to let Russia invade and keep Poland. So the Polish Army fought with Russia against the Germans. But when they fought back the Nazi's, the Russian army surrounded the Poles, disarmed them, and deported them to labor camps in Siberia. Can you imagine fighting with another army, and then being disarmed and deported by your allies?!? The Poles demonstrated and conducted strikes. The Soviets attacked them. Other demonstrations were suppressed with great bloodshed. But the resistance went on. The only institution not regulated by the Soviets was the Catholic Church, and the resistance movement developed within the Church. Catholics used printing presses to print the bulletins, newspapers, & journals of the resistance. They carried news from one city to another, organizing the movement.⁵

In October 1978, Pope John Paul II became Pope – he was Polish, and Poland erupted into festivals and celebrations everywhere in Poland. It was, and is today, about 95% Catholic. Two years later, Solidarity began out of a labor strike, and a Catholic man named Lech Walesa, an electrician without a high

⁵ Will Perdue, *Paradox of Change: The Rise and Fall of Solidarity in the New Poland* (1995) p.61

school diploma, became its leader. The Soviets cracked down. Lech Walesa was arrested. Priests were murdered by the Polish Secret Police (e.g. Father Jerzy Popieluzsko). In 1988, Lech Walesa organized another strike that lasted 80 days. That forced the Soviets to hold a national election and Solidarity swept it. In 1989, the Soviet occupation ended. Lech Walesa was elected President in 1990 and served for five years. Poland became a stable democracy almost overnight. Can you imagine Iraq turning into a stable democracy at the end of this year? That's similar to what happened in Poland. It was a miracle on the social level. How did it happen? In large part to the teaching and the spiritual presence of Jesus, and the service of the Christian community.

Case Study 7: Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia

Velvet Revolution, Czechoslovakia



The Berlin Wall fell on November 9, 1989. Starting in November 16 and 17 of 1989, Slovak students started gathering in what was then Czechoslovakia. Riot police tried to suppress their meeting. But many others joined. On November 21, the Roman Catholic Cardinal of the Bohemian lands, František Tomášek, publicly declared support for the students and criticized the policies of the Communist Party. On December 10th, a new government was sworn in – the first one in 41 years that was not dominated by the Communist Party. Another example of Christian leadership was Václav Benda. He was a Czech Roman Catholic activist, a mathematician by vocation. He and his wife had been longtime dissidents against the Communists. He established the Christian Democratic Party in 1989, and became chairman in 1990. Czechoslovakia peacefully became the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993.

Case Study 8: Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa



The last case study is the role of Christians and Archbishop Desmond Tutu in dismantling Apartheid in South Africa. At the age of 12, in 1943, he met and was later greatly influenced by a white Anglican clergy in Johannesburg named Trevor Huddleston who was an outspoken early critic of apartheid. In 1958, Tutu decided to enter the ministry. He became (in 1972) the first black to hold the position of Dean of St. Mary's Cathedral in Johannesburg. He led the South African Council of Churches in criticizing apartheid, restraining violence and advocating reconciliation through Jesus. For that, in 1984, Tutu received the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of 'the courage and heroism shown by black South Africans in their use of peaceful methods in the struggle against apartheid'.

Here's a snapshot of this man. One day Bishop Tutu was walking by a construction site on a temporary sidewalk the width of one person. A white South African man appeared at the other end, recognized Tutu, and said, 'I don't give way to gorillas.' Can you feel the racial insult? Tutu stepped aside, swept his arm, and said, 'Ah yes, but I do.'⁶ That shows the character and humor of the man saturated in the life and teaching of Jesus. In 1995, Tutu was selected by President Nelson Mandela to serve as head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It has worked on a national level towards amnesty, forgiveness, and reconciliation using Christian principles and allowing Christian people to practice reconciliation the way Jesus intended.⁷ By contrast, the U.S. government has never officially apologized for genocide, land seizure, slavery, and segregation, and has therefore pushed the discussion about human rights violations to universities; this is why many Americans on both sides politically feel like the 'liberal campuses' now lead the way on civil rights issues against a mostly conservative government. It's disappointing that some people at liberal campuses in the U.S. bash Christianity when such a good example of Christian reconciliation exists in South Africa.

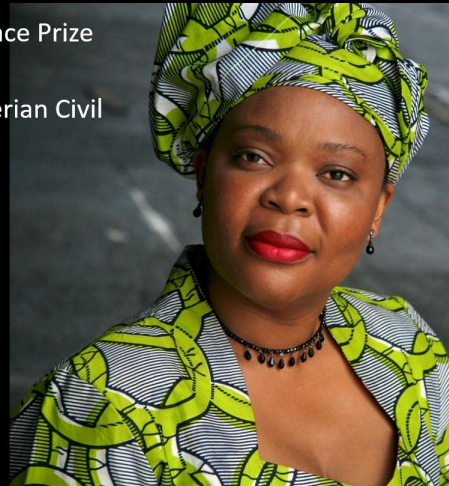
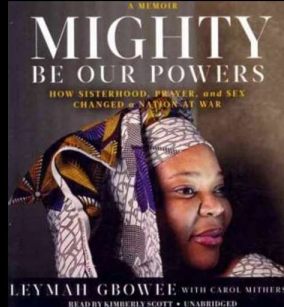
⁶ Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1992), p.191

⁷ Desmond Tutu's latest book is called *No Future Without Forgiveness*.

Case Study #9: The Women of Liberia

Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace

- Leymah Gbowee, Nobel Peace Prize winner 2011
- Helped end the Second Liberian Civil War, 2003
- 'Pray the Devil Back to Hell'



Finally, Christian women in Liberia, who also asked for the partnership of Muslim women, helped end the Second Liberian Civil War. Basically, they went on a sex strike. They told their husbands that they would not have sex with them until they brought an end to the fighting. Leymah Gbowee was one of the first leaders and is now a spokeswoman. She wrote about this in her book *Mighty Be Our Powers*, and you can find out more in the documentary called *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*.

Why Was Christianity So Influential?

I want to back up at this point and ask the question, 'Why have Christians been so influential recently?' Because the twentieth century more closely resembles the original conditions in which Christianity began. Back in Jesus' day, the world was divided up into tribe, nation, and empire. At one time, every religion was ethnic. There was no religion that was truly universal and could help human beings transcend ethnocentrism, racism, and nationalism.

But Jesus was born in Israel under the oppression of Imperial Rome. First century Israel was actually brimming over with violent revolution. But Jesus launched a transnational reconciliation movement. He taught, 'Blessed are the peacemakers...love your enemy...turn the other cheek...give to those who ask of you.' Not in a 'be a doormat' kind of way, but with a commitment to engage humanity's evil. **Jesus exemplified this in every aspect of his life. Through birth, he entered an evil world. Through his teaching, he showed his followers how to engage the evil out there, and also engage the evil in here (point to self). For he had taken on a fallen human nature, the same human nature that we all share: one tainted by self-centeredness, sin, and evil. But through his moment-by-moment choices, he resisted every evil that he was tempted to do. Instead, he forced his own humanity back into alignment with the love of God. He literally bent it back into what God had always wanted for human nature. And bear in mind that it wasn't easy. Jesus lived out the love of God in the midst of the betrayals of his friends, the police brutality of the Romans, the jealousy and power mongering of the Jewish priests, the madness of the crowd, and the political cowardice of Pontius Pilate. He forgave everyone because of he was reconciling human nature to God by transforming his own human nature. Through his death, he put its self-centeredness to death once and for all. Through his resurrection, he came back as a new kind of human being, a fresh, God-soaked, God-drenched human being, completely victorious over human evil. And by sharing his Spirit with those who believe in him, he shares his victory over evil with us in an active relationship with us.**

That's why the early Christian movement can be described as a transnational reconciliation movement centered around Jesus' authority. They did things like care for infant girls who were left to die on Roman

doorsteps. They went into plague-stricken cities to care for the sick and the dying. High Roman military officials resigned when they became Christians because they couldn't participate in a system of imperialistic oppression and war. They knew Jesus was changing them through their relationship with him.

What About the Twentieth Century?

War Related Deaths

16th Century	1.6 million
17th Century	6.1 million
18th Century	7.0 million
19th Century	19.4 million
20th Century	108.0 million

Source: R.J. Rummel's statistics at www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/SOD.TAB2.2.GIF. Also, 20th-century governments murdered 7.3% of their people, through needless famine, labour camps, genocide and other crimes, vs. 3.7% in the 19th century and 4.7% in the 17th (from Rita James Simon's foreward to Moore and Simon, *It's Getting Better All the Time*, Cato Institute, January 2001)

But what about all the things like the Crusades and the Inquisition? I think that is best explained as tribe, nation, and empire corrupting Christianity over the course of a thousand years. I don't think I'm just making intellectual excuses. When we get to the twentieth century and see that more lives have been taken in that century than in any other century, including the last four centuries combined, and we go round up the usual suspects to blame someone, we look for Christianity. And yet Christianity is not there to blame. Start with Turkey's genocide of the Armenians in 1914. Then, World War I was devastating. Then move to the Holocaust under Nazi Germany. Then you have Stalin's purges in the Soviet Union, which had 13 million deaths at least. Then you have Mao's Cultural Revolution in China, the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, and other incidents. In fact, war related deaths in the 20th century come close to 108 million.⁸ That's more than the previous 20 centuries put together.

⁸ War Related Deaths, including Civilians: 16th century: 1,600,000; 17th: 6,100,000; 18th: 7,000,000; 19th: 19,400,000. Source: R.J. Rummel's statistics at www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/SOD.TAB2.2.GIF. Dividing by population also shows the 20th century to be the worst. 20th-century governments murdered 7.3% of their people, through needless famine, labor camps, genocide and other crimes, vs. 3.7% in the 19th century and 4.7% in the 17th (from Rita James Simon's foreward to Moore and Simon, *It's Getting Better All the Time*, Cato Institute, January 2001)

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Nation-building
Organized atheism

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What was the real cause of these massacres? Nation-building and empire were the real structural causes of the tragedies, not the teaching of Jesus. Again it's not to say that Christians didn't make mistakes. They did, and Christians need to be apologetic for that. But it was nation-building and empire-building done with religious language. The Crusades was nation-building facing outward. The Inquisition was an early form of national cleansing facing inward.

So if you are holding back on coming to Jesus because of 'the Crusades and Inquisition,' I don't think you can continue to hide behind those excuses, because you're confusing correlations and causes. Not only that, but if you feel strongly about the Crusades and Inquisition, then you need to feel twenty times as strongly about nation-building as a major cause – if not the leading cause – of injustice. The West as a whole rejected Christianity, but embraced the very thing that corrupted Christianity in Europe: tribe, nation and empire. YOU HAVE TO QUESTION NATIONALISM ITSELF, THE ENTIRE MODERNIST PROJECT, ALONG WITH ITS CULTURAL TWIN SISTER, ENLIGHTENMENT ATHEISM. SURE, ORGANIZED RELIGION MADE SOME MISTAKES. BUT ORGANIZED ATHEISM TOTALLY SUCKED!! AFTER THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, THE QUESTION IS NOT, 'HOW CAN YOU STILL BE A CHRISTIAN?' THE REAL QUESTION IS, 'HOW CAN YOU STILL BE AN ATHEIST?!?' JESUS IS THE SHINING RAY OF HOPE IN THESE NEW DARK AGES!!!

Community Groundswells

In Russia, Korea, the U.S., the Philippines, Poland, and South Africa, what is significant is that the social movements were not the brainchildren of brilliant Christian leaders, although there were some great leaders. They were drawing on a larger history: Even throughout European Christian history, there is a strong undercurrent of faithful Christian protest to oppression and injustice: St. Francis of Assisi is a great example, walking unarmed into Muslim armies to share Jesus with them; the Moravian Christians selling themselves into slavery to care for slaves in the Caribbean. The Christians in these 6 vignettes claim continuity with this Christian tradition because this tradition accurately lived out the teaching of Jesus. And that tradition is what I invite you to consider tonight. This is the tradition of people individually making choices to live out the teaching of Jesus, and then having that result in something significant.

If I can be permitted to share a personal story at this point: Since my wife and I got married, we've lived in a low-income, high-crime area in Dorchester, down the red line. Our house has been broken into twice in these last 5 years. The first time our house was broken into, my laptop was stolen. But perhaps the hardest

thing for me was that my wife's engagement ring was stolen – the very ring that my grandfather had given to my grandmother; she had given it to me because I'm the only son of an only son. One of the people I suspected of committing this crime was a teenage young man from right next door. He had been to juvie lock-up twice, had gotten kicked off the high school basketball team for using drugs, and had generally not been interested in relationship with us. But last year, this young man committed his life to Jesus, cleaned up his act, and said to me, 'Do you have any extra room in your house? I think it would be good for me to live with you all.' I struggled with that a little bit. I said, 'But Lord, I think he's one of the kids who robbed our house!!!' But Jesus said, 'I have a great deal of love for him, and I'd like to love him through you.' So my wife and I invited him to live in one room in our house, and God has blessed it.

In his book, *Strength to Love*, King writes about coming to Montgomery to lead the bus boycott. Right after the protest, King and his wife got all kinds of phone calls and letters threatening their lives. After one such phone call, King says, 'I hung up, but I could not sleep. It seemed that all of my fears had come down on me at once. I had reached the saturation point. I got out of bed and began to walk the floor. Finally, I went to the kitchen and heated a pot of coffee. I was ready to give up. I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing to be a coward. In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had almost gone, I determined to take my problem to [Jesus]. My head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud, '...The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left...' At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never before experienced him. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice, saying, 'Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth. God will be at your side forever.' ...Three nights later, our home was bombed. Strangely enough, I accepted the word of the bombing calmly. My experience with [Jesus]⁹ had given me a new strength and trust. I knew now that [Jesus] is able to give us the interior resources to face the storms and problems of this life.'

I would be surprised if anyone here said that they don't struggle with evil. We are unable at times to forgive others. Or we desire vengeance. Or we don't genuinely love people who need support. Or when we don't see a tangible reward, we become apathetic about a cause. That's why it's important to engage the subject of evil in the way we have tonight. You see, we don't engage evil in a primarily *philosophical* way. We engage it *existentially*. We are involved. Maybe you can say with me tonight, 'That's right. I'm not all good. There is evil in me. And I need someone to deal with that. In fact, I need someone all the time to deal with that in me, because I carry that around.' That someone is Jesus.

I think realistically, what all of these stories tell me is that Jesus can triumph over the evil in us. There are so many Christians I could talk about who have not been victorious on the social-political level against some kind of evil. But what matters is that these people experienced Jesus give them victory over their own personal evil. They did not do the evil they were tempted to do.

So let me ask you what to do with this information. If you've been a Christian for a while but didn't know this, maybe you want to grow in your faith and make a commitment to explore Jesus and justice. If you're not a Christian, but have been thinking about Jesus for a while, perhaps you might want to talk to someone about what it's like to make a commitment to Jesus. If this is the first time you've heard about Jesus, maybe you just want to find out more. Regardless, please consider the real Jesus. The question I want to leave all of you with is this: Will you join Jesus in his triumph over our evil?

⁹ Dr. King said 'God' but I referred to 'Jesus,' feeling that the evangelistic context in which I spoke warranted this identification, and that this identification was acceptable from King's writings.

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