

Be Not Conformed to This World: Living Inside the Hurricane of Violence¹

Do not conform to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Romans 12: 2

In a world of moral hurricanes some people can and do carve out rather large ethical spaces. In a natural world and social world swirling in cruelty and love we can make room. We who are not pure ethical beings can push away the choking circle of brutal force that is around us and within us. We may not be able to push it far...but when we have made as much room as we can, we may know a blue peace that the storm does not know.

Philip Hallie²

Introductory Comments

United States Mennonites women over the age of 60 have a long history of hearing sermons based on this passage of scripture. In the 1940's and 1950's Mennonite women were the target of impassioned patriarchal preaching about their outward appearance and the community's demand for them to obey an ethnic kind of outer conformity to church teachings: long hair with central parts, coverings, cape dresses, black hose, unshaved legs, an absence of jewelry, etc. These particular teachings about nonconformity to the cultural world around them functioned as a denominational purity code for women and were often internalized as a personal form of women's self-other political correctness. In no subsequent era of my life have I lived among women who were so conscious [and so judgmental] about the clothing other women were wearing and how they parted their hair. Covering sizes seemed especially to denote personal piety or its absence.

As Mennonite women in many traditional communities have abandoned their "plain clothing", it is no surprise that teaching on this particular passage of scripture has fallen out of the Mennonite lectionary. While some conservative Mennonite communities continue the custom of wearing "plain dress", as more elders die, it becomes more and more unusual to see this cultural form of religious self-identification.

I want, in this sermon, to resurrect this particular teaching from the Pauline Epistle to the Romans. The Apostle Paul, in this letter, was seeking to explain salvation; he was not creating a cultic purity code. Some contemporary Biblical

scholars consider the Epistle to the Romans to be his most important work and most well-developed theological legacy.

Since I am not a Christian Scriptures specialist nor am I trained in Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic, I must approach this teaching as a member of the laity – as a person who sits in the pews rather than speaks from the pulpit. I must approach it, therefore, from within my own world view.

The Sixteenth-Century Anabaptists

The sixteenth-century Anabaptists lived, as we do now, in very dangerous and very violent times. They lived in a world where the dominant political and religious paradigm - a shared world view of church and political rulers – would shift right under their feet. They lived through an ideological earthquake that changed the Western world. That worldview tectonic shifting was accompanied by great violence – violence done by those vested interests with great institutional power and violence done by those with almost no power. Prince, Pope, priest and peasant all resorted to violence in attempts to coerce others to conform to their own world view or paradigm of reality.

Those of us who are Westerners are the direct descendants of that long ago era. Our shared post-Reformation heritage includes unspeakable violence done in the name of God [church] and Prince [state]: war, torture, body mutilation, rape, and murder. One of the aspects of that world order which carried over into the new historical era was the belief that only additional applications of violence solved the problem of human violence.

Most, but not all, of our Anabaptist ancestors resisted the violence of their time. In their writings and teachings they protested a resort to violence to solve religious and political differences. Refusing to accept the application of violence to solve human problems in their own era in history, they questioned the implicit infallibility claims made by the priestly castes of organized religion. Critiquing the corrupted forms of religious spirituality of their time, they insisted on a new way. They refused to accept the political allegiance claims made by princes and rulers. They saw themselves living under the leadership of a new order – one established by Christ.

Consequently, they were among the most targeted victims of this violence – running, hiding, always seeking to find a place of safety and peace. Seen as religious outcasts and as political subversives, the combined and dominating powers of church and state sought to eliminate their personal *and* communal dissent from the market place of ideas in their own era in history.

Much of the violence experienced by our Anabaptist ancestors was perpetrated by “good” Christians who genuinely believed that it was necessary to use violence to protect the “God-ordained” social order of political rule and

governance. In addition, much of this Reformation and Counter-reformation era violence was done by the institutional Christian church in the name of God. Anabaptists were hunted down and slaughtered by Roman Catholic rulers *and* by Protestant ones.

What happened, in essence, in the dominant world view of this era, was that the ruling political caste and the ruling religious caste both sought to invade the individual conscience and spiritual experience of less powerful others in order to manipulate it for the desires of the powerful. Dissent was not welcomed. Indeed, all dissent, no matter how principled, was vigorously attacked by powerful individuals who controlled the religious and political institutions of that era in time. This behavior was as true of the Pope as it was of the Prince.

Riane Eisler in her book *The Chalice and the Blade*³ calls this kind of society a “dominator society.” In dominator societies, coercive and dominating behavior becomes the right of the few over the rights of the many. Use of the sword – or the repeating machine gun – in our own present moment of history both determines and reveals the dominating castes’ hermeneutic of history. In this hermeneutic, dominating individuals and groups make a claim on the present moment as well as on future generations.

What Amerindians call the *seventh generation effect*⁴ is set in motion within dominator societies by many different forms of violence: warfare, economic sanctions, structural violence, battery and assault, rape and other forms of gendered violence, and systemic violence against sexual minorities. Every act of violence has a consequence in the present moment and it also sets in motion a series of long-term reactions and responses. One of the most common consequences of violence is the breeding of more violence. Einstein’s aphorism applies here: we cannot solve the problem of violence at the level the problem was created. Violence, therefore, cannot be the solution to violence.

What we see, when we look back to the Sixteenth century, is the persistence of a very small group of people who said to one another and to their world: *There is another way; this is a way that does not participate in violence. That way is love of neighbor and love of God. The way to recognize God’s people on earth is by their behavior – behavior motivated by love and compassion for the suffering and economic deprivation of others. What we see when we look back is individual and communal behavior motivated by a theologically-principled resistance to doing violence.*

Our ancestor’s spirituality and faith was not primarily an abstract philosophical faith motivated by words of “perfection pie in the sky by and by.” Instead these illiterate peasants and a few well-educated men sought to live as transformed human beings inside human history. They sought to live truthfully, faithfully and nonviolently within their own historical moment in history, and inside that moment, to create the possibility and actuality of realized love for others. In part, this

impetus to love was manifested in the sharing of material resources and goods. Those who had material resources shared with those who had less. Those who could read the scriptures taught those who could not. Those who could provide shelter and safety provided it.

What was unacceptable to these Anabaptist ancestors was the common political and religious world view of their time. In that era, the beliefs of a secular ruler or the spiritual leader of the village became the required beliefs of all of the people whom the individual ruled over.

Thus, we see the Anabaptist emphasis on adult baptism. No longer, for these folks, was faith hereditary and tribal. No longer was their world view based on the belief and teachings of ruler, pope or priest. Embodied faith became, instead, a personal obligation. Each adult, they believed and taught, needed to choose for himself or herself which set of spiritual and community values s/he would live within. They recognized the moral obligation of listening to one's individual conscience as well as the social necessity of molding one's personal behavior to the needs of the living community. The needs of the self and the needs of the community were, therefore, held in a certain hermeneutical tension.

Making a persona decision and a personal commitment to a particular Anabaptist faith community meant, therefore, a decision to seek to live in peace with one's neighbors. It meant refusing to participate in the many cultural forms of structural and state violence that surrounded them.⁵

Shifting Paradigms

As we look about us today, I personally believe that another cataclysmic shift in world view paradigms has already begun. At this moment in time we live inside its opening moments. As the processes of globalization proceed, based on today's technologies of transportation and communication, new tensions come into view and old tensions are being exacerbated. As the West encounters the East and as the North encounters the South, the predominant political impulse is to use various forms of violence to dominate, control and exploit others for profit. Whether this is the violence of the gun, affinity violence in the home, or the systemic violence of the economic sphere, violation and violence spread across our news media with stunning simplicity. The American poet Maya Angelou's comment about *millions of ourselves killing millions of ourselves* seems increasingly apt.⁶

Perhaps, however, it is more accurate to say that multiple world-view paradigms are present and that they are, therefore, competing for our culture's attention. This is not unlike the lived experience of sixteenth-century Europe. We do not, therefore, at this moment in history know whether our century will be the breeding ground for peace or for unspeakable violence.

On the one hand we have fundamentalist and absolutist movements of many kinds – whether the variety at Jonestown, the apocalyptic group at Waco, TX, or the Opus Dei movement in world-wide Catholicism. Similar kinds of reactionary fundamentalist movements can also be found in Buddhism, Islam and in Judaism. They can be found in new age movements, such as the Carlos Castaneda cult in Mexico.

For reactionary fundamentalist movements, the use of personal and social violence is justified on many different ideological grounds. But an underlying preoccupation is that the God-chosen few can, and should, dominate and control the many. Cultural elites are free, therefore, to do acts of destructive violence in their God's name or in the name of a political ideology. The violence done in God's name is often more violent than the violence done by the nation state in its own name.⁷

As we pay attention to a wide variety of dominator groups, we see that each invokes the name of its particular God or ideology. God-naming thus becomes a form of reproducing, replicating and sustaining coercive, dominating agendas in which the few take and maintain dominating control over the many. God's name and a particular theology of God's name become clubs to wield in defense of a particular world view and belief system. In workshop settings (Kalamazoo, 2006), philosopher Sam Keen commented upon the interpenetration of theology and war. War, he claimed, is profoundly theological.⁸ I would make the same claim for violence in general.

On the other hand, we have multiple critiques of these kinds of spiritualized neo-fascist movements. One current critique that interests me very much has originated inside the overlapping medical sciences and Noetic sciences communities. This particular set of research questions about human violence is based on evolutionary biology. One prominent question being studied and debated is whether or not humanity as a whole can deliberately develop a new form of human consciousness which is less dependent upon violence to achieve its social aims. Can we, these visionary scientists and philosophers ask, can we as an entire species, deliberately and rapidly move away from our well-evidenced human proclivity to use violence, individually and collectively, in order to manipulate social power and to resolve human conflicts?⁹

As did our Anabaptist foreparents in the social chaos of the Sixteenth century, we simply will need, as a people, to live through this time of competing and shifting ideological paradigms – seeking to understand it as best as we can.

One hypothesis which has surfaced inside the medical branch of the human consciousness movement includes the following. For any human act of creation to occur in the outer world – for example, the building of a nuclear weapon – it must first occur inside the human mind, in short, inside human consciousness. Inasmuch as human consciousness is the sole source of materialization in the

outer world, if the human species can deliberately guide its own evolution towards less violence then long-term species survival is more likely. Consequently, if humanity can deliberately transform human consciousness away from the creation of and inner preoccupation with negative emotions and thoughts (such as desires for revenge, rage, or hatred of others) and fantasies or actual plans for acts of violence then the deliberate creation of acts of violence will not be able to manifest in the outer world. In short, if violence becomes unthinkable in the inner world of human beings, then materialized violence in the outer world becomes impossible. For this to happen, human beings will need to take control of their own evolutionary processes – something unprecedented in human history.

The reverse of this hypothesis is much more sobering. The more we create and harbor images of violence in our inner world of human consciousness, then the more likely we will be to manifest violence in the outer world. In a culture which celebrates violence, it is eminently visible that violence has colonized our contemporary human consciousness and continues to do so. Whether this is our news media at the dinner hour; the video games we play; the movies we watch; the sporting events we favor: many different opportunities exist in our culture to receive messages about the desirability of dominance and violence as *the* preferred way to solve human conflict problems and to establish personal or political control over others. Culturally we continue to believe in the now-suspect evolutionary doctrine of survival of the fittest, i.e. the most powerful and the most dominant member of the species will pass on his or her genetic material to future generations. We cling to the belief that dominance and its concomitant violence is inevitable and, perhaps, even necessary. Many Christians, for example, cling to belief in the myth of redemptive violence.¹⁰

It is perhaps already clear that for this visionary community of human scientists, human consciousness is not only an individual experience of the inner self. Rather, there is a vast and pre-existing interpersonal sea of human consciousness and culture into which each human being is born. Each human being, in turn, contributes to this vast, ever-changing sea of human consciousness but the sum total is greater than the sum of the total of contemporary human life. Residues from previous generations are also present. This vast floating ocean of transpersonal consciousness is, however, very responsive to individual consciousness. What affects the individual affects the whole. What affects the whole affects the individual.

In other words, as individuals and communities begin to deliberately attempt to change their inner experiences of human consciousness away from violent imagery towards more pacifistic imagery, the vast ocean of transpersonal consciousness will, by its very nature, begin to change as well. As the transpersonal sea of consciousness shifts, changes also occur inside individuals.

This set of theoretical constructs interests me greatly because of the research we have about the relationship of media violence to real-life violence. The question – still debated – is simple: does the presence of so much real-life violence in our world cultures (war, rape, murder, domestic abuse, physical assaults, gun violence, and systemic oppression of others) feed upon metaphoric, iconic and symbolic representations of violence? For example, in our culture's attraction to Batman, Superman, the Terminator, etc. are we, in essential ways, creating an addictive and self-perpetuating culture of violence by colonizing the minds of the young in ways which teach them to solve human problems by coercive force?

In his book and video *Faces of the Enemy* Sam Keen reminds us that before we ever engage in violence against another human being or human community, we create an enemy in our mind.¹¹ Once the enemy has been created in human consciousness, it becomes possible (and probable) to demonize him or her as evil and less than fully human. This then gives us psychological, sociological and theological permission to engage him by means of violence confrontations.

For Keen, the symbolic or iconic image takes center stage in the visual form we know as propaganda. The enemy is visually imaged to be less-than-human. For example, we can revisit the ape-like-bloody-toothed Hun imagery which was created by Allied propaganda machines during World Wars One and Two.

Today all we need is a representation of Hitler's mustache on an enemy's face. For example during the early stages of the United States invasion of Iraq, named Enduring Peace, during the George W. Bush presidency we saw images of Saddam Hussein's face drawn with Hitler's mustache. The inherent message conveyed was simple: *this is a totally evil dictator who must be destroyed for the peace of the world.*

We know, in generalities, that the cultural meme of actual violence replicates itself in multiple cycles of future violence. The vanquished in one war rise up to declare war against the victors in subsequent generations.¹² Violence begets more violence. No matter how much damage war does to human lives and communities, Keen reminds us that the war system is one that endures across time and space. But he also affirms that which I too believe: if any aspect of this enduring system can be transformed, the system can self-destruct.

Archbishop Elias Chacour, an Arab Christian leader in Palestine, reminds us that all human beings are first born as babies. They are not born as ideology-believing Muslims, Jews, or Christians. As the newborn individual matures, she or he encounters the myths, symbols, icons, metaphors, laws and social customs of their birth culture, they absorb the cultural ethos and it becomes part of their own personality structure or their own share of human consciousness.¹³

A Personal Question

If humanity is, indeed, able to direct its own evolution of consciousness, these questions become very personal. They become questions of learning non-conformity to the status quo in order to transform the self and the culture at large. If as individuals, for example, we deliberately choose participate in the ongoing formation of the transpersonal sea of human consciousness, then what is the impact of our very personal decisions regarding our own acts of violence? What is the impact of our human decisions to forego acts of violence?

When, before acting, we imagine acts of revenge or carry resentments about other's behavior, how do these simple cognitive acts alter the transpersonal sea of consciousness towards enabling acts of revenge and acts of betrayal? When we imagine carrying out acts of vengeance, for example, how do these imaginational fantasies change us and how do they change the vast, ever-changing sea of human consciousness? If we come to understand that each of us is both a perpetrator of violence and a victim of violence, how does that awareness begin to shape and change our own personal share of human consciousness and human behavior? How does it shape our determination to participate in the evolution of human consciousness away from violence?

If these human consciousness hypotheses contain any wisdom at all, those of us who wish to work for the transformation of culture away from its addiction to violence need to begin first with our own personal share of human consciousness and then secondarily within the collective consciousness of the social groups to which we belong. We need to make choices about deliberately re-training our mind's proclivity to seek out violence imagery in our daily encounters with others.

Thich Nhat Hanh's work on anger, *Cooling the Flames*,¹⁴ is very helpful in his discussion of the relationship of anger and rage to violence. He urges his readers to deliberately and consciously cool their personally experienced flames of anger and rage. He is not, however, asking his readers to deny the embodied presence of anger and rage. Instead he recommends that individuals need to manage these emotions – by removing their fuel source in human thought. He warns us, therefore, to stop feeding our fear, anger, and rage. We do this, he suggests, by gaining control over our thoughts. When we think about what we do with our thoughts and emotions, it becomes clear that they are our human responsibility to manage.

When we begin such practices as meditation and mindfulness practices in the present moment, the presence of the noisy and sometimes malicious monkey mind becomes almost immediately knowable. Once we know the thoughts which occupy us most of the time un-self-consciously, then we can refuse to give these malicious thoughts the freedom to manifest. We can begin to deliberately replace our malicious and revenge-seeking ideas and fantasies with those that better fit our desire for pro-active peace and an absence of violence.

Nhat Hanh asks his readers simply to observe these intense emotions and their correlating thoughts in order to learn from them. By allowing them to pass through internal and personal human experience without engaging the self in violence – this is one pathway to the transformation of human consciousness.

In some aspects of human biology this awareness is medically useful. I have learned, for example, that when I am overtaken by strong emotions of gut-wrenching grief, all I need to do is to acknowledge that grief has overtaken my emotional field. I simply pay attention and as grief begins to wane, I do not keep drawing it back by my thoughts. The half-life of these intense, stress-creating emotions is actually very short. If I refuse to nurture these emotional stressors, soon my mind goes on to another topic. This is not to deny grief. But it is a learned skill of managing grief so it does not dominate our lives or annihilate our relationships with others. The same is true of rage, hatred, revenge ideations, etc.

The essential attitude is learning to hear the continuous flow of thoughts that engage us every moment of our lives – most of which we are totally unaware of in conscious thinking. My own sense of this matter is that strong emotions are an indicator that it is time to become mindful and to pay attention. These strong emotions can be my foot-tapping impatience at a clerk's slowness in the grocery store line or they can be intense rage at witnessed or experienced injustice.

I am aware of two world religious or spiritual traditions that teach mindfulness. There may well be others. But Christianity and Buddhism both teach that the transformation of human consciousness is the spiritual task for each individual. Christianity utilizes the languages and methodologies of contemplative spirituality and personal transformation. Buddhism uses the language of mindfulness and giving up illusions. In both traditions what is at work is the development of insight and discernment about that which is real and lasting as opposed to that which is transitory and illusory. Practitioners of Christian contemplative spirituality such as Thomas Merton and David Steindl-Rast and Christian social activists such as Daniel Berrigan find brothers and sisters of the soul in Eastern religious practices of meditation and mindfulness. Thus, Merton shortly before his death could declare *Thich Nhat Hanh is my brother*.¹⁵ Thus, Thich Nhat Hanh has explored Christianity in light of Buddhist principles.¹⁶

Keep in mind the hypothesis that what eventually manifests in the outer world must first be conceived inside human consciousness. This is as true of the cultural form of war as it is true of the cultural forms of rape and domestic violence. It is also true of the often legitimized and institutionally organized forms of violence that we call repression, oppression, and tyranny. It is equally true of the cultural forms which manifest as structural or systemic violence.

If humanity survives its own violence, our descendents will look back and critique what took shape in our era of history. It is not possible for us to name the shape

and contours of the paradigm shift and the long term consequences that will dominate the next seven generations. Our task is to live within our own era of history with integrity, with compassion, and with an informed passion for justice that does not include violence as its major response to human conflict. While we have been born inside this moment of history – this particular eon – none of us can see the completeness of the paradigm shift that is underway. Since we live inside the womb of our own generations, we have only vague and incomplete intuitions about what potential futures look like. We do not know what time will gestate for the next seven generations. Yet we have an obligation to our descendents to make the human landscape as inhabitable as possible. To do that, we must work on this problem of human violence – seeking to shape-shift it.

The Pauline text from Romans becomes immediately relevant for our spiritual journey from violence to peace. Only as we are transformed in our inner world can we begin to transform our outer world.

Each one of us is one small evolutionary bridge over which history marches. We are, therefore, also the small bridge over which violence marches into the future. We can, in each present moment, therefore, make alternative decisions – over which an alternative future will march. We can agree with each other to forego all forms of violence as our primary way of solving human problems and conflicts.

The Role of Our Beliefs

If Sam Keen is correct, and I believe he is, that war (and violence in general) is a form of theology, then it is urgent that we re-examine all of our beliefs and cultural practices in light of the violence which surrounds all of us in Western cultures. If we wish to co-create a more peaceful world, we must ask ourselves a simple question: how do our most sacred beliefs and most precious values participate in the creation of a socio-cultural world that is violent? How do each of us – and how do I – participate in creating the whole in which human beings become repeatedly willing to violate the common humanity of others by engaging in violence or by supporting a culture which engages in violence?

Not since the Crusades; not since the Spanish Inquisition; not since the Holocaust have we seen the leaders of the world's great monotheistic religions lined up and ready to slaughter each other in God's name. With our twentieth-century and twenty-first-century technologies, we moderns and post-moderns have created a world in which we human beings are literally capable of precipitating our own annihilation as a species. We live in a time when human beings have claimed God's prerogative to control and end history. This is a profound form of human idolatry. Keen reminds us: "the creation and possession of nuclear weaponry signals a profound willingness to initiate and to participate in genocide."

Exegesis

In his commentary on this text – *be not conformed to this eon but be transformed by the renewing of your mind* – Paul Tillich notes that nonconformity is a process rather than a code book of dogma and rules. Nonconformity does not consist of lists about that which is forbidden and that which is allowed. Inevitably, he claims, we exist in historical conformity with our social groups as well as live out our lives inside the prevailing philosophy of the historical era in which we live. He comments further, on the reality that religious establishments share in the conformed corruption of their own historical moment. Consequently, religious institutions (as do all other human institutions) demonstrate a mixture of good and evil. Each bears its own embodied witness to the inevitable corruption of its own historical era.¹⁷

Is it possible, Tillich asks, to escape conformity if one [inevitably] belongs to a group that is united by a common creed, ritual, ethical standards, ancient traditions, and regular shared acts of common devotion. To answer his own question, he describes and discusses individuals in each age who have resisted their eon's conformity by remaining open to the future; who have refused to absolutize that temporality which they have inherited and experienced inside their time of history.

What is needed to combat conformity is a life of authentic search and action. Non-conformity has to do with the living of a life of integrity, genuineness and transparency. Nonconformity, as a principle for religious and spiritual life asks of us that we see things as they actually are. It asks of us that we learn to give up our illusions about truth. We are asked to give up our self-culture destructive patterns and behaviors of making truth invisible. Nonconformity without our own era of history demands a secure inner center or ground of being from which we can watch for the presence of truth (or God) entering and luring us forward.

Tillich continues: *Here we see what nonconformity ultimately is – the resistance to idolatry, to making ultimate's of ourselves, our world, our civilization, and our church.*

He concludes by urging his readers: *therefore dare to be nonconformed to this eon...transform it courageously, first in yourselves, then in your world – in the spirit and power of love.*

In his writings, American biblical scholar and theologian, Walter Wink writes extensively on *the socio-cultural and religious powers* that shape contemporary secular and religious culture. His books serve as a primer for understanding these issues of conformity and nonconformity to the spirit of our times.¹⁸

Physician-author Rachel Naomi Remen writes and speaks repeatedly of the reality that American medicine is a holographic image of American culture. She describes the reality that our American practices of medical healing are much more aggressive than those of other industrialized nations (and are no more effective).

I want to claim the same for American religion in this new century. We who live inside the United States are recognized as a violent people inside the world community. Our fascination with and commitment to gun ownership, for example, has few if any parallels in the developed world. I believe that part of this dedication to violence has roots in the reality that we live inside a nation which probably has the most fire power of any powerful military empire in the history of humanity. Much of the world is appalled by our use of religious rhetoric in support of our attempt to gain global control by using multiple forms of violence – weaponry, economic sanctions, intrusive spying on personal communications, etc.

Our religious rhetoric often seems to me to be a holographic or mirror image of the socio-political rhetoric of the nation state.

The human sociological church as we know it (or temple, mosque, synagogue) is a human creation. Each known world religion developed inside human history. As we study church history, as Christians, for example, we become aware that there is a trajectory of faith and culture that spans millennia. When we look closely at this trajectory, what we find is a religious willingness to support the violence of each era's own eon. Therefore, I conclude that the human church is infected in each eon by a spirit of violence that conforms to the political state's violence. In such a reality, the human institutional church becomes highly susceptible to corruption by the prevailing spirit of its time in history. Contaminated by its surrounding culture's spirit of violence, it cannot speak the words of peace with integrity and authenticity.

One form of this corruption is idolatry. Idolatrous religious is a religion in which human beings claim to speak with the voice of God in a nearly total absence of humility, ambiguity, reasonable doubt, or realization that the human voice might be misinterpreting and misrepresenting the divine will for human life. They make the claim that their human actions are the actions of God's will.

What is needed in each eon, therefore, is that we religious people must re-examine all of the legacies of the past – including scripture itself – in light of our culture's clear preference for violence to solve human conflict issues. We must ask ourselves if we are willing to consent to the perpetuation of many different form of violence in the name of our God and our culture.

I believe we must become non-conformed to this corrupted spirit of our time. I believe this is the underlying message of Jewish and Christian scriptures. The

trajectory of compassion, justice, love of neighbor, and care for the vulnerable is one we must continually re-visit and seek to re-embody. Love of neighbor, therefore, means that everyone we meet in every day life is included in our circle of neighbors. In a world of globalization, even the stranger half way across the globe is a neighbor. No one can be excluded if we seek to be faithful to the admonitions of scripture about including and caring for those who are marginalized and excluded in our own eon.

Becoming non-conformed is, as Tillich notes, not a list of behaviors to avoid or a code book of rules to enforce. Rather, it is a life-long process by which one learns to first understand and then secondly to critique the powers. As we do these, it becomes imperative that we so order our own lives by giving up our unthinking susceptibility to cultural and cultic propaganda. It becomes essential that we learn how to devote ourselves to discernment and to truth-telling. In the language of the sixties, we refuse to march to the dominating drums of our culture's follies but learn to follow our own inner drummer. Of necessity, we will then need to re-learn how to live justly inside of our various world communities.

In Buddhist language, the spiritual task of nonconformity is a process of continually confronting personal and communal illusions in a search for compassion and full awareness. In such a process the awareness of human suffering becomes visible.

The spiritual task for all of us is amazingly simple and amazingly complex. We must learn how to read the signs of the time of our eon and having read them, we must then learn how to make principled and morally coherent choices that further the healing of our own individual consciousness and the healing of the transpersonal sea of consciousness. I believe that this healing impulse is essential to the Jesus path. I believe it provides us with a pathway from our holographic addictions to violence, control, domination and subversion of the common good for purposes of power and control.

Be therefore nonconformed to the spirit of this current age; begin to be nonconformed by the renewing or transforming of your mind.

¹Endnotes

I am indebted to the Jewish ethicist and philosopher Phillip Hallie for this metaphor. See Hallie, P. (1997). *In the Eye of the Hurricane: Tales of good and evil, help, and harm*. Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press. See also, Bill Moyers Documentary, *Facing Evil* (1988). PBS

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Hallie, P. (1997). Frontispiece (p. vi). *In the Eye of the Hurricane: Tales of good and evil, help, and harm*. Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

³ Eisler, R. (1988). *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future*. New York, NY: Harper.

⁴ Traditional Amerindian elders remind us that we must consider the needs of the future seven generations in all of our individual and socio-cultural decisions.

⁵ Van Braght, T. (1860). *[The] Martyr's Mirror*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press.

⁶ Angelou, M. (1988). Conference keynote address: *Facing Evil*. Bill Moyer's Documentary, PBS. To purchase this documentary, visit <http://www.shoppbs.org/product/index.jsp?productId=11252196>

⁷ See Littell, F. H. (1958). *The Anabaptist View of the Church: Dissent and Nonconformity*. Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer.

⁸ Keen, S. (2006). Keynote Address: *The Art of Enemy Making*. Kalamazoo, MI: Common Bond Institute Conference, Engaging the Other.

⁹ For an example, see Bolen, J. S. (1999). *The Millionth Circle: How to change ourselves and the world*. Berkeley, CA: Conari.

¹⁰ Wink, W. (2004). The Myth of Redemptive Violence in J. H. Ellens (Ed.). *The Destructive Powers of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Vol. Three, 265-286). *Models and Cases of Violence in Religion*, Westport, CT: Praeger.

¹¹ Keen, S. (1991). *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination*. New York: Harper and Row; Keen, S. (2006). *Faces of the Enemy: Three Slide Lectures*, San Rafael, CA: Sam Keen Productions.

¹² The seeds for World War Two were sown in the defeat of the German armies in World War One.

¹³ Chacour, E. (2006). Keynote Address: *Engaging the Other*. Kalamazoo, MI: Common Bond Institute Program, Engaging the Other.

¹⁴ Nhat Hanh, T. (2001). *Anger: Wisdom for cooling the flames*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books

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