

Advancing Nonviolence Session 3: Nonviolence, Violence, and the Hebrew Scriptures

pp.93-113 (from '2. Biblical foundations of nonviolence' up until 'Nonviolence in the Christian Bible')

Overview of Session

- Time to reflect on journey so far
 - Intro to reading Scripture
 - Group discussion on select biblical texts
 - Look at arguments from text on nonviolence within Hebrew Scriptures – consider violence in Hebrew Scriptures and what this tells us about God
 - Group discussion
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Reflections

- Anything that was struck you about nonviolence/violence since our last meeting? Any new insights/reflections you would like to share?
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Reading Scripture

- Scripture written by numerous different authors over period spanning more than a thousand years
- Hebrew Scriptures divided into different types of writings: Law – History – Poetry and Wisdom – Major and Minor Prophets
- Each book written for variety of different purposes/audiences e.g. in Hebrew Scriptures historical record of people/events, liturgical texts, poetry, stories to encourage/celebrate, symbolism/metaphorical stories, prophecies etc.
- Overall, tell us of journey of God's chosen people and relationship between God and humanity/God revealing Godself to humanity throughout history
- NB. Still engaged in this process – so Scripture still speaking to us to help make sense of our realities today
- All means a lot of different ways we can, and should, read Scripture e.g. Aquinas: Four Senses: 1) Literal i.e. historical, Spiritual: 2) Allegorical (symbolic/metaphorical/links OT and NT) 3) Moral 4) Anagogical (prophecies/future/relating to K of G)
- Helpful to read knowing what type of book looking at/intended purpose/audience – read in light of overarching themes of Scripture – asking what this tells us about God/God's relationship with humanity

Questions

Part 1:

- What arguments are made within *Advancing NV* to show God as nonviolent within the stories of a) Cain and Abel, b) the sacrifice of Isaac, and c) the Suffering Servant? What do you make of these arguments?
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Advancing NV: Hebrew Scriptures

Violence in Hebrew Scriptures

Why is there violence in the Scriptures?

- Showing the reality of human life
- Not shying away from violence that humans enact – exposes this violence
- Story of human salvation, showing reality/messiness of human experience
- Expose human desire to crave divine legitimation for violence
- Shows peace/covenant as hard things to attain

God as Nonviolent

God as creating a nonviolent world – humans who introduce violence – God condemns (Cain) - aiming to limit violence/show humanity to put trust of God as saving power, not violence (and ultimately, see with Christ, only God can offer salvation)

Why is God in close proximity to violence?

- Places God close to violence to reveal a God of peace and love. A God who engages in dialogue about violence/continues to show mercy in face of violence [Accompaniment]
- Use of violent language/imagery explains God's power in terms humans have understood power
- God appears to humanity through human lenses that are flawed/marked by sin = distortion of who God really is
- Violence in Bible, a revealing of our own violence, not God's

What does this tell us about God and nonviolence?

- A God that aims to limit violence – does not engage in human understandings of justice/retribution e.g. Deut. 20:13 won't allow extermination of all people, only males – aiming to limit and reduce human desires for violence/sacrifice of animals as concession to human violence
- God that continually shows mercy/continues to reach out to humanity, even in the face of broken covenants etc.

Links to Salvation History:

- God as a revolutionary: working throughout all of human history – process of continuous revelation, meeting humans where they are at particular moments in time – working in partnership with humanity – process of divine pedagogy
 - Calls particular group of people to live differently, to begin transforming the world- voluntary participation, not coercion/force (and therefore, sometimes this group get it wrong/a process of transformation) – not forcing particular actions/understandings, but rather accompanies and gradually reveals Godself [Witness/embody peace/build up spaces of peace]
 - Gradual understanding by people that their God is God of life/nonviolence
 - God as using nonviolent processes and practices: ultimately taking violence upon Godself, in full revelation of Christ, rather than eliminating violence through force
 - Actions always directed towards good/love - shows a God who consistently sides with the marginalized and oppressed [Links of violence and injustice]
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Questions

Part 2:

- What do the Hebrew Scriptures tell us about God and nonviolence?
 - What about God and violence? How do we reconcile images of God as violent with understandings of a God of love and mercy?
 - How might the Hebrew Scriptures add to our understandings of nonviolence?
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Quotations

‘Even though we come to know God through the violence that marks human history, the God of the Bible actively leads us towards love and nonviolence. This is God’s ultimate and final intention, and in the midst of violence he “baffles” and “deconstructs” the concepts and images that Israel has about God’.

‘God does not magically eliminate violence to move closer to love, but takes violence upon Godself in order to break this diabolical process’.

‘The nonviolent practice of God makes a way, even amid violence, that inspires and illuminates any human desire for nonviolence. Since violence imposes itself with the force of the sin of non-meekness, we recognize that meekness will bear the scars of violence. To claim that the practice of meekness can stand outside historical experiences of conflict and violence is illusory and falsely romantic and idyllic. To wish for peacebuilding that eludes and diverts from the paths of conflict is to lie to oneself and to the human condition. It is in the midst of conflict that love can open its way. This is the path that God has taken. And this will be the only possible way to teach the human being the difficult art of peace with patience and love’.

‘... God seeks people where they are in terms of religious and ritual violence and make them go one step further towards respect for life as a whole...’