In the Steps of Pope John XXIII, the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr., and Archbishop Oscar Romero.

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When first published during the course of the Second Vatican Council fifty-two years ago, Pope John XXIII’s encyclical *Pacem in Terris* broke new ground in the attempt to build universal peace.[[1]](#endnote-1) While previous social encyclicals (including John XXIII’s own *Mater et Magistra*, 1961[[2]](#endnote-2)) had been directed to the venerable brethren and faithful of the Catholic world, *Pacem in Terris* was addressed “to all men of good will.” *Pacem in Terris* was not intended for Christian in-house discussion only. Peace is everyone’s concern. Also, the encyclical was groundbreaking in insisting on a goal much greater than an absence of war. April 1963 was the time of the Cold War. Capitalism in the United States and Europe and communism in the Soviet Union battled for greater spheres of influence. And nuclear proliferation presented a threat to human survival. But, even given the tremendous world tension, humankind’s goal must be greater than a simple lessening of conflict, John XXIII insisted. *Pacem in Terris* reminded that generation that the true subject of peace builders everywhere and of every stripe should be a deep and abiding peace on earth. And finally, *Pacem in Terris* affirmed that envisioning and describing such a peace, even a perfect peace, in itself is not sufficient. At most, it is a first step. Peace building is always an activity, one in which individuals and States make choices. Our own actions and those actions of our governments can lead to continuing the status quo or to more enmity among us and our neighbors or to greater peace on earth. If true peace is to come, it is going to be by trudging forward, step by step.

**In the Footsteps of John XXIII: Joining Human Rights to Obligations**

John XXIII claimed that peace was contingent on individuals and nations relating to one another as God intended. There was a social order established by the Creator. It was a moral order. It was an order that we can perceive in progress and change through reason and science. It was an order that we can harness for humankind’s benefit. This order established how people should relate to each other and to the rest of creation and how states should relate one to another.

The right order of creation was knowable to everyone, Christians and non-Christians alike, John thought, through natural law. That is, human conscience revealed the Creator’s intended moral social order to women and men and urged us to obey it. If structuring society as God intended, people and nations would be marked by justice, goodwill, charity, trust, freedom. And the world would know true peace.

John XXIII listed human rights that accompanied creation (paragraphs 11-38). Although significantly more extensive than the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness of the American Declaration of Independence, John’s list also was not comprehensive but instead offered examples. In other words, the encyclical gave insight into the types of rights that characterize human life when the world operates the way it should. The rights John XXIII listed included the right to preserve and develop life; the right to an education; the right to be respected; the right to freedom; the right to worship; the right to support when raising a family; the right to work; the right to ownership of property; the right to association; the right to travel; and the right to participate in public life.

But, the freedom of one individual sometimes infringes upon the freedom of another. So, most helpful to our thinking, John XXIII’s encyclical also reminded us of how each of these rights must be accompanied by corresponding duties. Individual rights walked hand-in-hand with corresponding obligations when building universal peace: “one man's natural right gives rise to a corresponding duty in other men; the duty, that is, of recognizing and respecting that right.”[[3]](#endnote-3) The most important of these duties, according to *Pacem in Terris*, was The Golden Rule, respecting the other.

The State played a role in preserving a balance between competing rights. Defense of an individual’s rights cannot justify oppression, for instance, or the inaction of the State against clear injustice. The rights of minority populations need be protected. Also, States faced obligations toward other States, such as not pursuing their own development at the expense of injuring or oppressing others. Again, the overarching duty was respecting the other. And in case of disputes, these should be settled by general form of public authority--like the United Nations Organization with its Declaration on Human Rights.

*Pacem in Terris* connected human rights with individual obligations in a manner comfortable not only to Roman Catholics but to Protestants as well. In that regard, the encyclical was thoroughly ecumenical. At the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, the great Martin Luther framed the double affirmation of individual liberty and duties with these words:

A Christian man is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to no one else.

And a Christian man is a perfectly free servant of all, subject to everyone**.[[4]](#endnote-4)**

Freedom, for Luther, depended strictly on people’s relation to the source of freedom. He argued that all men, not just Christians, were under the Creator’s demand for justice.[[5]](#endnote-5) The demand for justice was a natural law that applied universally. Although the demand for justice was clear in the Old and New Testaments, “both nature and love alike teach that I should act toward others as I would wish to be treated by them.”[[6]](#endnote-6)

My own religious background is United Methodist, and Methodist epistemology likewise affirms natural law.[[7]](#endnote-7)John Wesley thought that there were a variety of ways of knowing God’s truth. For Wesley, the historical life, ministry, and death of Jesus provided our clearest insight into the nature and will of God. The Gospels told about Jesus. But there were many paths to knowing our place in creation. The Word of God was present through the scriptures. Reason allowed insight, for as people’s minds were created in the image and likeness of God, our thoughts (when thinking rationally) paralleled God’s thoughts. This allowed for a natural understanding of good and evil, right and wrong, to all humans regardless of whether ever hearing of Christ or his teachings. The sciences allowed insight into the divine–as did the visual and performing arts, imagination, and beauty. The study of history helped us perceive God, for God is active in history. Also feelings–longings and yearnings, moments of joy, despair, hope, and trust–gave insight into the divine will.

Methodism emphasizes the free will of the believer. Wesley was Armenian in that he believed that while God knew the future, he did not control it. As with Luther, the individual was completely free to respond to or deny God’s grace. But also the path to sanctification with Wesley presented a continual process of free choice. Every act, every moment provided an opportunity to love when not loving presented an equal possibility. The Christian’s free will was such, in fact, that the individual’s choices, when joined to the grace of God, could lead to perfect love.[[8]](#endnote-8)

Freedom, for Wesley, carried over to the social sphere. In 1774, he wrote a tract attacking slavery that was widely read.[[9]](#endnote-9) *Thoughts Upon Slavery* went through four editions in two years. In it, Wesley suggested the boycott of rum and sugar and followed up by supporting the creation of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1887. Another writing, “Testimony Against Slavery,” is even better remembered today:

Give liberty to whom liberty is due, that is, to every child of man, to every partaker of human nature. Let none serve you but by his own act and deed, by his own voluntary action. Away with all whips, all chains, all compulsion. Be gentle toward all men; and see that you invariably do with every one as you would he should do unto you.**[[10]](#endnote-10)**

Love manifested itself in service to humankind. Wesley not only fought against slavery. He opposed child labor, the working conditions of chimney sweeps and mine workers, living conditions in tenements. He pushed for prison reform and better schooling for the poor. In one of his sermons based on the text of Matthew 25, “For I was hungry, and ye gave me meat: I was thristy, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and in prison and ye came unto me,” Wesley referred to good works as “the perfection of religion.”

They are the highest part of that spiritual building were of Jesus Christ is the foundation. . . . The highest of all Christian graces . . . is properly and directly the love of our neighbor. And to him who attentively consider the whole tenor both of the Old and New Testament, it will be equally plain, that works springing from this love are the highest part of the religion therein revealed. Of these our Lord himself says, “Hereby is my Father glorified, that ye bring forth much fruit.” [[11]](#endnote-11)

Wesley referred to service to his fellow man as following in the Lord’s footsteps. The Christian, he thought, was liberated in order to serve. Wesley was not opposed to making money but presented an interesting twist on capitalism by preaching that “having first, gained all you can, and, secondly saved all you can, then give all you can.”[[12]](#endnote-12) In a follow-up sermon, “the Causes of Inefficacy of Christianity,”[[13]](#endnote-13) he decried that few Methodists kept his third dictum and urged his congregation to leave only half of their savings as inheritance to their children and to apply the other half in support of the poor in society. Wesley himself adopted the guide of keeping only ten percent of his earnings for himself while giving ninety percent for use of charity and evangelism.

The affirmation of radical freedom and radical responsibility to neighbor and community that we encounter in *Pacem in Terris*, Luther, and Wesley, of course has been the hallmark of Morehouse College. Founded as the Augusta Theological Institute in 1867 in the basement of the oldest independent African American church in the United States, the Springfield Baptist Church, the College’s original purpose was to prepare black men (that is, former slaves and the sons of slaves) for ministry and teaching. From its inception, Morehouse held that all men were equal in that they were created equal. For Morehouse, that people were created in the image of God indicated a connection joining our rational minds and especially our ability to love to God Himself. And that humans were created in the likeness of God indicated that we could develop our minds, grow in love, and generally progress on our pilgrimage to Heaven and in this life**.[[14]](#endnote-14)**

But is the appeal to men and women of good will enough? Is persuasion enough? We applaud how *Pacem in Terris* answered Jesus’ command to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37) by asking that we invest ourselves in others and in the world—in peacebuilding. The business world, the home, the schoolhouse are all proper places to glorify God. Christians and all people of good will are to engage their powers in labor towards Peace on Earth.

Behind John XXIII’s conception of human rights rests the conviction that the Creator had provided a storehouse that would satisfy every physical need when used as intended. Creation was ordered and operated through discernible laws. Along with Luther, Wesley, and the Baptist founders of Morehouse, we may even expand John XXIII’s thoughts and express them in our own words. People play a special role in creation: human labor transforms the raw gifts of nature, multiplying and increasing their benefit. Through creative imaginations and work, people participate with God in crafting a good world. People are also entrusted by the Creator to be stewards of creation, caring for everything in the world and making sure that this storehouse delighted and benefitted future generations. The purposes of the Creator in these regards were not a mystery. God revealed them through Her actions in history, through covenants, numerous spokespersons, and Sacred Writ. And since men and women were created in the image of God, beauty, intuition, and an innate sense of justice give clues as to human rights and responsibilities. Reason, especially, provides a natural understanding of men and women’s place in creation. From this storehouse, creatures are intended to experience life in abundance. But because of greed or fear or rebellion or ignorance, people often do not use the Creator’s gifts as intended. Social structures have become warped. In theological terms, sin has distorted the intent of creation. And the result is a world filled with unnecessary suffering, poverty, a deep divide between the haves and the have-nots. But social injustices can be rectified if people would only restructure society along the lines intended by the Creator.

But how exactly are we to bring about such conditions of true peace? How to build a society marked not only through the absence of war but by justice, by people who enjoy a full range of human rights and who assume corresponding duties, a society with less poverty, more education, greater economic equality, and a more equitable distribution of goods between individuals and nations? Here is where the prescriptions of *Pacem in Terris* fall short in our view. While the encyclical tremendously affected Catholic social teaching in a variety of ways, it is not clear that in itself it has moved our world much closer to the enduring peace visualized by the Pontiff. Critics sometimes point to John’s idealized vision of individuals and community. Of greater concern, however, are the encyclical’s suggestions (or lack thereof) for changing the structures of society to bring about this better community. After offering a few concrete recommendations (e.g., more pronounced activity by the United Nations; the illegitimacy of military force), *Pacem in Terris* falls back on the persuasive voice of the Church to bring about change. Like Luther, Wesley and so much of Christian moral theology, John XXIII falls back on the prescription of converting individuals, men of good will, to a new course of action. John eschews force and especially violence of any kind. But can non-violent persuasion be effective in building a just society? In producing true peace?

**In the Steps of Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Program for Changing Unjust Social Structures**

When in December 1964 at Oslo, Morehouse College’s most famous graduate, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., accepted the Nobel Peace Prize, he sounded much of the optimism for true peace voiced by Pope John XXIII. “Sooner or later,” he said, “all the people of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace, and thereby transform this pending cosmic elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood.” [[15]](#endnote-15) Dr. King refused “to accept the cynical notion” of an arms race. He believed that there was “still hope for a brighter tomorrow . . . that people everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits; . . . [that] the lion and the lamb shall lie down together and every man sit under his own vine and fig tree and none shall be afraid; . . . that we shall overcome.”[[16]](#endnote-16)

Violence was no answer, he claimed, for while sometimes momentarily successful, violence never brought lasting peace. In fact “civilization and violence [were] antithetical concepts,” to him. Dr. King’s answer was love—a love that rejected all revenge, physical aggression, and retaliation.[[17]](#endnote-17)

As we all know, Dr. King termed his alternative for building peace “nonviolent resistance.” While being physically passive, the method was both active and aggressive spiritually. King wasn’t *asking politely* for black equality. Non-violent resistance asserted aggressively the rights and duties also enumerated in John’s encyclical in order ultimately to effect justice: “We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until ‘justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.’"[[18]](#endnote-18)

With characteristic humility, Dr. King credited the method of nonviolent resistance to India’s great liberator Mohandas K. Gandhi—giving credit also to Morehouse’s own Benjamin Elijah Mays for introducing him to it. But as there was something borrowed about Dr. King’s method of nonviolent resistance, there was much new to it also.

Dr. King left us with a description of his nonviolent approach in his article “The Current Crisis in Race Relations.”[[19]](#endnote-19) He stressed five facts: (1) The method actively resists evil. It is not cowardly and is not passive. The “mind and the emotions are always active, constantly seeking to persuade the opponent that he is mistaken.”[[20]](#endnote-20) (2) The goal of nonviolent resistance is redemption, reconciliation, and the creation of a loving community. Thus, the method does not wish to humiliate or conquer the opponent but to win friendship and understanding. (3) The method seeks to defeat evil, rather than persons (even when they themselves are caught in that evil). The fight is against injustice and for justice--not against unjust individuals. (4) Nonviolent resistance not only avoids physical violence but avoids what Dr. King termed “violence of the spirit.” He opposed hate campaigns or temptations to become bitter. The principle of love--loving the neighbor and one’s enemies--was at the core of any resistance. And (5) the resister can accept suffering without retaliation because the creative forces of the universe are on the side of justice. In a final analysis, justice will win out.

In theological terms, Dr. King was concerned with structural sin. Sin is what dehumanizes us, making us different than the Creator intended. Sin cuts us off from God and thus from other people. So while Dr. King was concerned with individual sin, he was most concerned with those structures or building-blocks of society that bring about injustice or allow it to happen. Clearly expressed in Dr. King’s article is the importance he placed on changing the attitudes, views, and actions of both followers and opponents. In keeping with a main thrust of *Pacem in Terris*, peace on earth will only come when people think and act more lovingly one toward another—that is when we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. How to change attitudes, views, and actions? To that effect, we may include also the great attention Dr. King and his followers gave to news coverage of peace building events. The newspaper and television coverage of the 1962 Birmingham confrontation with Bull Connor; the 1963 March on Washington; the 1964 voting rights Selma to Montgomery march with the “Bloody Sunday” confrontation at Pettus Bridge; and, the 1966 open-housing campaign in Chicago with the stoning of the marchers etc. played a major role in tearing down racial segregation in this country. Dr. King’s was a great effort in consciousness raising. Simply put, when white Americans saw themselves in these events, they did not like the people they saw. And when black men and women saw themselves and read about themselves in these events, they took courage and became more determined in seeking a better tomorrow.

Again in theological terms, society’s laws, justice system, monetary and banking regulations, economic organizations, wage and labor policies, tax codes, traditions of ownership and inheritance, cultural opinions, and even programs of education can be demonic in the sense that the structures may bring about injustice, which is fundamentally dehumanizing. Even more so, perhaps, than individual sin, unjust structures cause mass suffering. The sins are often hidden and even perpetrated by the “men (and women) of good will” to whom John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris* appealed. Because they often are hidden behind unrecognized privilege and good intentions, structural sins are harder to address than individual vices. And the Church itself sometimes participates unknowingly in such sinful structures.

Dr. King closely linked efforts of consciousness raising with aggressive attempts to change the laws and the enforcement of laws. To him, both thrusts were important to bringing greater justice in the United States. And all of us at this conference can recite some of the great Civil Rights victories that entailed the enforcement of court rulings and new legislation: Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954); the desegregation of the Montgomery City buses (1956); “the Little Rock Nine” (1957); James Meredith’s enrollment at Ole Miss (1962); the passage (1962) and ratification (1964) of the 24th Amendment abashing the poll tax; the Civil Rights Act of 1964; the Voting Rights Act of 1965; President Johnson’s Executive Order 11246 enforcing affirmative action (1965); Loving versus Virginia (1967); the Civil Rights Act of 1968; etc.

In sum, while Dr. King joined John XXIII in saying that true peace would come when individuals and nations fully committed themselves to human rights, not only by affirming them but also by accepting the responsibilities that accompany liberty, he pushed beyond the Pontiff by offering concrete steps for changing unjust social structures. Dr. King’s philosophy of nonviolent resistance, his activities raising awareness of how African Americans were treated, about America’s War in Vietnam, and about the great divide in our society of rich and poor, and his appeal to the courts and legislative bodies for fair treatment for all people changed the social landscape of America.

**In the steps of Archbishop Oscar Romero: Building Peace when There are no Legal Avenues for Justice**

Dr. King’s program of nonviolent resistance prevailed over time with the civil rights movement in the United States--at least to the extent that our society now provides greater opportunities for African Americans (and women) than before and in that we celebrate his birthday as a national holiday. But couldn’t we argue that nonviolent resistance succeeded in the United States precisely because our nation was founded on an ideal of equality before the law? Isn’t this a pattern peculiar to liberal societies such as our own? And further, isn’t it fairly easy to imagine situations where the laws and their enforcement and public opinion are so controlled by purveyors of violence that Dr. King’s approach might not have worked? Would his approach have worked, for instance, in Hitler’s Germany? In Stalin’s Soviet Union? In Kim Jong Un’s North Korea? With ISIS? Do John XXIII and Martin Luther King, Jr. provide directions for peace building even when a given State’s organs of justice themselves pervert human rights and when the newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations, and other instruments that form public opinion are overwhelmingly controlled by enemies of freedom?

Yes. And the biography of San Salvador’s Archbishop Oscar Romero helps us understand why.

The outline of Archbishop Romero’s story is well known—a professorial bishop who in 1977 was thrust against his own wishes into a position of confrontation with the brutally repressive government of El Salvador, becoming “the voice of the voiceless” masses until assassinated in 1980.

Like the great sixteenth-century defender of native-Americans, Bartolomé de Las Casas, Romero found it necessary to appeal to a court that transcended local borders. As Las Casas had written about the Devastation of the Indies and taken his Defense of the Indians to Valladolid and King Charles V , Romero addressed universities (Georgetown and Louvain), the National Council of Churches in New York, and President Jimmy Carter. The motivation was similar: rogue States depend on the acquiescence of others when perpetrating atrocities. So, to redress injustices in El Salvador, Romero urged President Carter to shut off military aid to the Salvadoran government. He appealed to President Carter, as a Christian and a defender of human rights, to guarantee that America would “not intervene directly or indirectly, with military, economic, diplomatic, or other pressures in determining the destiny of the Salvadoran people.”[[21]](#endnote-21)

Following in the footsteps of *Pacem in Terris* and Martin Luther King, Jr., Romero argued that the universe moved on the side of justice. And if El Salvador were left to its own designs, ultimately justice would win out over oppression. It was in fact the intervention of foreign interests, both political and economic, that allowed the repressive government of his country to remain in power. Instead of acquiescence, Romero petitioned people of good will from other countries to put public pressure on his own government to change its ways.

Peace building seems always to come with great cost to participants. Morehouse College well remembers the martyrs of the American Civil Rights Movement of fifty years ago. Rosa Parks and was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on the Montgomery city bus to a white passenger. So much violence and rioting accompanied James Meredith’s enrollment at the University of Mississippi that President Kennedy sent 5,000 federal troops into the state. Demonstrators were arrested in Birmingham, Alabama, for protesting segregation, and the nation was shocked by the images of brutality as the Commissioner of Public Safety used dogs and fire hoses against African Americans. Medgar Evers was murdered in Jackson, Mississippi. Four girls were killed in the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. Three young men who registered voters in Neshoba County, Mississippi, were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan. Fifty marchers were hospitalized at “Bloody Sunday.” Dr. King was assassinated on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. And this list could be expanded manifold.

Archbishop Romero was assassinated in 1980 while celebrating Mass remembering the death of the mother of the publisher of *El Independiente*, one of the few remaining voices of justice and human rights in the country. From there, the Salvadoran government’s violence escalated to the point that the government murdered approximately another 16,000 civilians the following year. In all, La Matanza (the Salvadoran government’s death squads and campaign of terror against its own population) led to the massacre of 75,000 people and the displacement of close to 20 percent of El Salvador’s population.[[22]](#endnote-22)

The homily Archbishop Romero was preaching, when killed, is eerily reminiscent of Dr. King’s last speech in Memphis, 3 April 1968, on the eve of his assassination. Did both men have a presentiment that they would die? Martin Luther King, Jr.’s concluding words are well known to us: “I’ve seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land. And I’m happy, tonight. I’m not worried about anything. I’m not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”[[23]](#endnote-23) What is so evident in Dr. King’s words are his solidarity with others who have suffered and will suffer in pursuit of true peace, including Jesus himself hanging on the cross. The Christian’s way of building peace can be no different than that of Christ crucified.

Here are Archbishop Romero’s last words:

We know that every effort to better society, especially when injustice and sin are so ingrained, is an effort that God blesses, that God wants, that God demands of us. . . . We remember with gratitude this generous woman [Doña Sarita] who was able to sympathize with . . . all who work for a better world, and who added her own grain of wheat through her suffering. . . . We know that no one can go on forever, but those who have put into their work a sense of very great faith, of love of God, of hope among human beings, find it all results in the splendors of a crown that is the sure reward of those who labor thus, cultivating truth, justice, love, and goodness on the earth. . . .

This holy mass, now, this Eucharist, is such an act of faith. . . . May [Christ’s] body immolated and this blood sacrificed for humans nourish us also, so that we may give our body and our blood to suffering and pain—like Christ, not for self, but to bring about justice and peace for our people.

Let us join together, then, intimately in faith and hope at this moment of prayer for Doña Sarita and ourselves.[[24]](#endnote-24)

While speaking this phrase, Oscar Romero was killed. He died in solidarity with Christ and all who suffer to build peace.

**Conclusion: The Logic of Violence and The Threat of Non-violence**

While Pope John XXIII died of natural causes, both King and Romero were assassinated. The latter were, perhaps, more directly opposed to the prevailing social and political orders in their respective societies, which may explain why they met violent ends. Yet sociopolitical opposition does not suffice to explain why non-violence so often breeds violent opposition. A crucial question remains: what is it that connects non-violence to violence? Why is non-violence so often perceived as a threat meriting violent (sometimes lethal) response?

Emmanuel Levinas argues that our normal way of being in the world—i.e., our characteristic ways of perceiving, understanding, and ordering experience—privileges immanence. We take what is Other, what we do not understand, and make it ours. Yet by integrating the Other into our own horizons of experience, the Other is effectively stripped of its alterity; the transcendence of the Other is reduced to the immanence of the Same. As Levinas puts it, “When the Other enters into the horizon of knowledge, it already renounces alterity.” [[25]](#endnote-25) Hence, our normal ways of being mask a deeper violence toward the Other. Our drive to know, to comprehend, to order is nothing more than a drive to eliminate that which is Other.

Yet our totalizing impulses can be interrupted by an encounter with the absolutely Other—namely, that which resists our drive to integrate it into our horizons of experience. Such experiences “pull us up short,” revealing the infinite depth of the Other, the limits of our finitude, as well as our ethical obligation to the Other. We encounter this Other not in the contemplation of God, but in the face of the human Other, whose “defenseless eyes” reveal an infinite depth that demands our response: “The epiphany of the Absolutely Other is a face by which the Other challenges and commands me through his nakedness, through his destitution. He challenges me from his humility and from his height.”[[26]](#endnote-26) This irruption of the Other into our horizons of experience obligates us, not in the sense of duty (for “duty” implies that there is a decision to be made about whether or not to fulfill the obligation), but in the sense of an immediate and inescapable call to responsibility—a responsibility that “empties the I of its imperialism and egoism,” binding it inexorably to the Other.[[27]](#endnote-27)

Non-violent resistance forces an encounter with the absolutely Other. While violent resistance strives to negate otherness by simply defeating the opposition, non-violent resistance forces perpetrators of injustice to acknowledge the humanity of those who suffer. This encounter with the absolutely Other is not just a political threat, but an existential crisis that threatens to disrupt the totalizing gaze of the “I,” creating an infinite responsibility to the Other. It is this crisis, I think, that often provokes a violent response. Yet, paradoxically, the assassinations of King and Romero did not lessen the scandal of their humanity, but broadcast it far and wide. As martyrs for peace, King and Romero force us all to acknowledge our responsibilities to the Other.

1. John XXIII*, Pacem in Terris* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1963). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. John XXII, *Mater et Magistra* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1961).

   [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. John XXIII*, Pacem in Terris* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1963), §30

   [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Martin Luther, “Concerning Liberty Christian Liberty” (Project Wittenberg: <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/web/cclib-1.html>, 1520). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Martin Luther, “A Treatise on Good Works” (Project Wittenberg: <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luthworks.html>, 1520). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Martin Luther, “On Secular Authority: How Far Does the Obedience Owed it Extend?” ([http://home.roadrunner.com/̴rickgardiner/texts/secauth.htm>](http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luthworks.html), 1523). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Albert Outler, “The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in Wesley,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20/1(1985): 19-33; W. J. Abraham, “The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in the American Methodist-Episcopal Tradition,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20/1(1985): 34-44. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. John Wesley, “Sermon #40 on Christian Perfection” ([www.GodOnThe.Net/wesley](http://www.GodOnThe.Net/wesley), 1760). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. John Wesley, “Thoughts upon Slavery” [1774] in *A Collection of Religious Tracts* edited by J. Crukshank (Philadelphia: Lang <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/wesley.html>, 1784). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. J. D. Long, Pictures of Slavery in Church and State; Including Personal Reminiscences, Biographical Sketches, Anectodes, etc. etc. with an Appendix, Containing the Views of John Wesley and Richard Watson on Slavery (Philadelphia: John Dixon Lang <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/long/long.html>, 1857), pp. 406-407. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. John Wesley, “Sermon #99 on the Reward of Righteousness” ([www.GodOnThe.Net/wesley](http://www.GodOnThe.Net/wesley), 1760). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. John Wesley, “Sermon #50 on the Use of Money” ([www.GodOnThe.Net/wesley](http://www.GodOnThe.Net/wesley), 1760). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. John Wesley, “Sermon #116 on the Causes of Inefficacy of Christianity” ([www.GodOnThe.Net/wesley](http://www.GodOnThe.Net/wesley), 1760). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Morehouse’s is a radicalized view of equality that fits well with its Baptist and Protestant roots. According to Albert Outler [“Some Concepts of Human Rights and Obligations in Classical Protestantism” in Natural Law and Natural Right edited by A. L. Harding. Studies in Jurisprudence (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955) pp. 21-23], there were three specific ways Protestants extended the medieval view of equality: (1) The avowal of justification by faith through grace pushed the brotherhood and sisterhood of believers further by emphasizing how all are equally dependent on God for salvation. Justification occurred to individuals as they stood in the presence of God. The holy spirit could come to anyone, speak to anyone, touch anyone. No person’s position before God was to be traced to birth, family name, or standing in society. (2) A leveling between people also occurred because Protestants emphasized the sinful nature of man. Luther used the image of men and women being like sows in the mud, while at same time being sons and daughters of God. Following the Apostle Paul and Augustine of Hippo, Protestants emphasized that all people are sinful. This does not mean that Protestants did not continue to recognize different degrees of conduct, holding for instance murder to be worse than gossip. But it did signify all equally needed God’s grace. No one merited salvation. Man’s sinfulness was such that all equally deserved death but were equally saved through faith. (3) And finally, by affirming the priesthood of all believers, Protestants extended equality between ministers (as they became titled) and laity. All Christians, according to the Protestant tradition, are “a royal priesthood and a holy nation” (I Peter 2:9). Every Christian has a right and a responsibility to fulfill the duties of the priestly office. The need to mediate prayers and petitions, confessions of sin, and God’s response disappeared. Laity and ministers were equally priests one to another. All became equally responsible for the congregation. When standing before God, there no longer existed any in-kind distinction between those who had been ordained and those who had not.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech” [From Oslo, Norway, on 10 December 1964] in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* edited by James M. Washington (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1986), p. 224. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid., 226. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid., 225. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid., 219. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Current Crisis in Race Relations” [Originally published in *Presbyterian Outlook* and with this title in the *New South* (March 1958): 8-12] in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* edited by James M. Washington (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1986), pp. 85-90. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid., 87. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Oscar Romero, “Letter to President Carter” [February 17, 1980] in *Archbishop Romero Voice of the Voiceless: The Four Pastoral Letter and Other Statements with Introductory Essays by Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Martin-Baró* translated from the Spanish by Michael J. Walsh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), p. 189. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Perhaps the most trustworthy numbers come from the 1993 Report of the UN Truth Commission (<http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/salvador/informes/truth.html>. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Martin Luther King, Jr., “I See the Promised Land” [From Memphis, Tennessee, on 3 April, 1968] in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* edited by James M. Washington (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1986), p. 286. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Oscar Romero, “Last Homily of Archbishop Romero” [March 24, 1980] in *Archbishop Romero Voice of the Voiceless: The Four Pastoral Letter and Other Statements with Introductory Essays by Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Martin-Baró* translated from the Spanish by Michael J. Walsh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), pp. 192-193. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Emmanuel Levinas, “Transcendence and Height,” *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid., 18. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid., 18. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)