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From: Mark Colville <amist...@yahoo.com>

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Subject: Responses to Tom Cornell

Thank you, Scott (and Ciaron and Michelle and Frank) for your attempts to direct this into a dialogue about nonviolence and Christian witness in the present context. While I appreciate the unique burden that many New York City-based Catholic Workers seem to feel they need to bear more than the rest of us, I've outlived the desire to engage a discussion of the aims and means of the Catholic Worker as if we should be trying to preserve some kind of "orthodoxy" based on what Dorothy said or didn't say. In fact, I like to think that if Dorothy and Peter are consciously present to us now, this very thing is what probably pisses them off the most! Also, I would ask you to keep in mind, Scott, that there's a difference between "personal attacks" and statements that hurt the feelings of people who, on some level at least, regard the legacy of either the Catholic Worker or Plowshare movements as something they are personally invested in articulating or defending. And that describes basically all of us who are talking here, not just my friend Tom Cornell.

With that preface, I will briefly add a couple of points to the discussion, the ones that hit closest to where I'm living right now...

I have come to regard Plowshares as an essentially inescapable commitment in the attempt to practice Christianity as a U.S. citizen. Here's why:

Looking at what Tom wrote, there are a couple of gaping holes in his position as he articulates it. One of these is the willingness to engage in that familiarly vague equation of property destruction with violence, which seems so inarguable in a capitalist consumerist culture, while he completely neglects any mention of idolatry. According to what I understand to be biblical faith, there is simply no way to worship God authentically without addressing idols, or specifically that with which we have replaced God in the grasping for personal power and ultimate security.

Nuclearism in the U.S. Empire has become a compulsory religion, one that demands assent and allegiance, punishes non-participation, and above all, requires a faith that is utterly incompatible with the teachings of the Bible. Nuclearism does not simply stand apart from Christianity. It refutes all of the basic tenets of Christian faith (beginning with the one that demands I place my ultimate security in God alone), while at the same time claiming that the U.S. has the exclusive right and duty to take up these weapons precisely because we are a "Christian nation" and a chosen people, destined to dominate the world as well as preside over (and survive) its end. These are the perversions by which my country claims the right to build and possess these weapons with the intent to use them, again. It follows, then, that the U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal is a collection of idols, actively worshipped by a nation that simultaneously claims the mantle of Christ, and allowed to continue to exist largely beyond the moral scrutiny of its churches, virtually all of which have made their peace with the American Empire. It further follows that the U.S. Christian has a unique responsibility to smash these idols, as constitutive dimension of a life dedicated to the liberation of self, church and community from this stockpile of mortal sin that possesses us like a New Testament demon. Idols are not property, nor are they something that the Bible counsels us to avoid, ignore, argue with or vote against. They are to be acknowledged and removed, with the understanding that nothing less than the worship of God in spirit and truth is at stake.

Jesus overturned the moneychangers' tables in the Temple because those tables, located there, were a powerful symbol of the assertion that God approved of and cooperated with the oppression of the poor. The action Jesus chose as a response was prophetic because it exposed the meaning of the symbol while at the same time pointing toward its conversion. (Was it violent? Personally, and particularly in light of the oppression of the poor, I have always considered that to be a ridiculous question.) Plowshares actions do exactly the same thing. End. Of. Story.

Finally, I will say this: Most of us are familiar with the argument proffered by some Plowshares activists; that if we lived in Nazi Germany and knew about the concentration camps, none of us would be engaging in the absurdity of a discussion about the violence/nonviolence of tearing up the railroad tracks that led to the ovens at Aushwitz. We would simply either do it ourselves, or give as much support as we could to those who were willing to do it in our name. And yet some of us apparently have no problem with a nearly forty-year debate about the morality of personally dismantling a nuclear weapon. Why? Because we've become delusional, comfortably numb under the spell of empire, to the point where we refuse to acknowledge what these weapons are.

The existence of nuclear weapons is an ongoing, relentless assault on the human community and the planet itself. They are the empire's big stick that authorizes every other violence, neuters the rule of law, entrenches white supremacy, perpetuates endless war and environmental destruction and ensures impunity for all manner of crimes against humanity. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s public life was centered on exposing what he called the "triplets of evil" in our society: Racism, militarism and materialism. Near the end of his life, he said this: "The ultimate logic of racism is genocide." Nuclear weapons are not only a threat to our future. They are used every day. They kill, every day. They are the ultimate logic of the delusions to which we as a nation are addicted. Aushwitz is still open. The emergency is now. Swords into plowshares.

Mark Colville

JULY 29, 2015 Interview with Luz Catarineau and Mark Colville, Amistad Catholic Worker, New Haven, CT
<http://www.btlonline.org/2015/seg/150807cf-btl-colville.html>