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9. POSTMODERNITY AND NON-VIOLENCE:
SINCERITY AND RESPECT FOR REALITY

POSTMODERNITY: DECADENCE OR RESISTANCE
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The massive destruction of human lives has been, without doubt, the most devastating and brutal fact of our more recent history. For this it is comprehensible that it should equally have been the fact that first provoked an early response. We are naturally referring to the doctrine of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) which was professed and confessed throughout his life with singular audacity and coherence by Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948).

The two basic supports of Gandhi's attitude towards life, intimately linked, were *satyagraha* (fortitude of truth) and *ahimsa* (non-violence). *Satyagraha* implies the duty of being a witness to truth in the face of appearances at all moments, and therefore it implies self-domination, sobriety, patience, valor, readiness in offering one's own life, and so on. It is at the antipodes of cowardice, which is more abominable than violence itself. *Satyagraha* supposes the consideration of truth as the permanent goal of life. *Ahimsa* supposes "the absence of bad intentions with respect to all that is living" and is related to the means, which for Gandhi are of the greatest importance, because "the means are like the seed and the end is like the tree. Between the end and the means there is a relationship that is as unavoidable as that between the tree and the seed"¹.

Gandhi constantly declared that the central nucleus of his doctrine proceeded from the great universal religions and especially from the Sermon on the Mount. The originality and grandeur of his doctrine consisted of bearing witness to such a grandiose tradition without admitting exceptional situations, and of so doing after the Modern Age. This is what we will try to expound on now.

The great Hindu thinker stated that he "will not admit the least recourse to violence in order to achieve success [...]. In spite of my entire sympathy for certain causes, I am totally against those who defend those causes by violent means. Therefore there can be no agreement between the school of violence and my conceptions"². This attitude implied the radical critique of modern thinking in a twofold aspect: with relation to the indifference of the means employed, and with reference to that which touches upon universality and non-violence.

As for the first aspect, Gandhi was confronting, in effect, the technocratic current which from Machiavelli to Darwin or Spencer had proclaimed the indifference of the means employed to attain a goal, as well

¹ Mahatma GANDHI, *Todos los hombres son hermanos*, Spanish translation by Luis Legaz, Sígueme, Barcelona, 1973, page 122.

² Mahatma GANDHI, *Todos los hombres*, cit., page 122.

as the pantheist current which within the Philosophy of the History of Modernity —especially in Hegel— had tried to evaporate the reality of evil by considering that in the ultimate instance it served the good. By trying to brace itself from the point of view of the Absolute, History appears as a spectacle endowed with meaning but lacking the distinction between good and evil. The rationality of History is above and beyond the rationality of individual histories, which are only modes in which the former appears. Universal History thus becomes sacralized and evil becomes banalized since thanks to the "invisible hand" a greater good can arise from evil³.

The pantheist (Hegelian) conception of History, in due course continued on other bases by Marx⁴, was severely criticized by Kierkegaard⁵, who accused it of justifying any aggression against the human person that should happen to have an attained goal. Kierkegaard, a thinker of the paradox and of complementariness, nonetheless stressed the irremediable disjunctive nature of the option between good and evil as the only manner of safeguarding the dignity of the human person. The central core of Gandhi's efforts rests in his personally having contributed in a powerful manner to reduce violence in history precisely due to his non-belief in its necessary rationality. "From evil there can come a good, but this depends on God, not on man. Man must know only that evil comes from evil, in the same way that good is explained by good"⁶.

The affirmation of the universality of non-violence in Gandhi is perhaps his greatest contribution, and it leads him to fully confront another relevant modern tradition: Lutheranism⁷, which openly declared that the doctrine of non-violence of the Sermon on the Mount was not applicable to politics, thereby establishing a radical separation between private and public morality. Gandhi expressly writes against this "double standard": "It is a blasphemy to affirm that non-violence can only be practiced by individuals and not by nations. It is by chance that nations are not made up of individuals?"⁸. Gandhi basically proposed to endow politics with an ethical base, and he considered that the "other means" that Clausewitz⁹ saw as the continuity between politics and war have to be completely eradicated.

In Gandhi we come across the exemplary harmonizing of the critique of History as necessary rationality, which the individual simply contemplates, and its sequel, the view of politics as the preparation for war, as a war that has already been initiated. In effect, the greatest leader of non-violence of the Twentieth Century sharply pointed out how the thesis of dissuasion present in the famous aphorism "If you want peace, prepare

³ Georg Wilhelm Freidrich HEGEL, *Filosofía de la historia*, cit., tome I, page 24 and following.

⁴ Karl MARX, *La ideología alemana*, cit., page 37.

⁵ Sören KIERKEGAARD, *Ou bien ... ou bien*, French translation by E. Prior and H. Guignot, Gallimard, Paris, 1943.

⁶ Mahatma GANDHI, *Todos los hombres*, cit., page 154.

⁷ Martin LUTHER, *Theologische Ethik*, quoted by José Luis LÓPEZ ARANGUREN, *Ética y política*, Guadarrama, Madrid, 1963, page 122 and following.

⁸ Mahatma GANDHI, *Todos los hombres*, cit., page 208.

⁹ Karl VON CLAUSEWITZ, *De la guerra*, Spanish translation by R. W. de Sotero, Matéu, Barcelona, 1972.

yourself for war", derives from a Philosophy of History in which evil seems to evaporate when it serves the good in the final instance. "Man has to simply know that evil stems from evil [...]. The lesson we have to learn from this tragedy of the Atom Bomb is that we will not free ourselves from its menace by making other bombs that are even more destructive, since violence is not capable of making violence disappear. Humanity cannot rid itself of violence except by means of non-violence"¹⁰.

We cannot find a more adequate answer than Gandhi's doctrine of *Ahimsa* to confront the menace of destruction. It is indeed a matter of replacing the will of dissuasion by the will of persuasion by means of human testimony that wholly eliminates violence. Only from this commitment can disarmament become a reality, and not only as applied to nuclear arms but also to conventional weapons. But it is convenient to recall that such a determined position against violence is only possible from philosophical bases similar to those held by Gandhi, in which there is the predominance of self-control and of service towards others in the presence of God. This interior disposition had already been demanded by Gandhi's mentor, David Henri Thoreau (1818-1862), the great precursor of non-violent resistance when he pointed out, as an indispensable condition for non-violence, interior silence, the chastity of the ear which avoids dissipation and falling into the triviality of the masses and into the indifference of the spectacle¹¹. In the same manner, Gandhi points out that the non-violent can have no other norm except that of faithfulness to the "little voice of conscience". The search for peace is impossible without the opening to contemplation, without that originating "competence" which is nothing else but "praying together"¹².

The influence of the human testimony and of the work of Gandhi has manifested itself in different directions and spheres within contemporary reality.

First of all, it was highly influential vis-à-vis the 1955 manifesto drawn up by Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein, in which they demand that "we learn to think in a new manner so that humanity can survive in the new situation created by the progress of science and technology". This manifesto, in turn, provoked the creation of the "Pugwash" association of scientists which was destined to attempt to put an end to the preferential dedication of scientists to research for warfare and therefore also to the arms race¹³.

Second, we must point out the proliferation of studies on the

¹⁰ Mahatma GANDHI, *Todos los hombres*, cit., page 154.

¹¹ David Henry THOREAU, *Desobediencia civil y otros ensayos*, Spanish translation by María Eugenia Díaz, preliminary study by Juan José Coy, Tecnos, Madrid, 1987, page 188 and following; pages 24, 28, 38 and following, and page 68.

¹² "Prayer for Peace", *Resurgence*, Schumacher Society, number 126 (January-February 1988), page 38.

¹³ The Russell-Einstein Manifesto is found in the appendix of the collective reader edited by Joseph ROBLAT, *Los científicos, la carrera armamentística y el desarme*, Spanish translation by Homero Alsina, Serbal-Unesco, Barcelona, 1984, page 373. The same book also contains the recommendations and conclusions of the Unesco-Pugwash Symposium on the topic of this book (scientists, the arms race and disarmament).

roots of violence and of peace, which commonly are known as studies in Polemology (Bouthoul, Fornari)¹⁴ or Peace Research or Irenology (Senghaas, Galtung)¹⁵. From these studies there would derive a more ample and integral notion of violence in which there is the inclusion of the different denials of basic human needs and of fundamental human rights, from misery or repression to alienation. Along with this, there would also be a more ample concept of peace, which includes as its fundamental elements the elimination of irrational fear, of indifference, and the promotion of solidarity, tolerance and loyalty.

But without any doubt Gandhi's greatest influence has been that of constituting the basis for resistance movements in favor of human rights, whose main expression is to be found in the civil rights movement of blacks promoted by the Baptist minister Martin Luther King (1929-1968). In what is perhaps his most significant book, very expressively entitled *The Power of Love*, the great black American thinker writes the following words, which reflect the mark left behind by Emerson and Thoreau: "As Gandhi's philosophy penetrated in me, my skepticism regarding the power of love gradually declined and for the first time I became aware of the fact that the Christian doctrine of love, acting through Gandhi's doctrine of non-violence, is one of the most powerful arms at the disposal of an oppressed people in their struggle for freedom"¹⁶.

¹⁴ Gaston BOUTHOU, *La guerra*, Oikos-Tau, Barcelona, 1971; Franco FORNARI, *Psicoanálisis de la guerra*, Spanish translation by Leoncio Lara, Siglo XXI, Mexico, 1972.

¹⁵ Johan GALTUNG, *Sobre la paz*, Fontamara, Barcelona, 1985; *The True World: A Transnational Perspective*, New York, 1980.

¹⁶ Martin Luther KING, *La fuerza del amor*, Spanish translation by Concha Aguirre, Aymá, Barcelona, 9th edition, 1971, page 155. See also the alternatives to defense in works such as the one by Gonzalo ARIAS, *La no-violencia, ¿tentación o reto?*, Sígueme, Salamanca, 1977.