

Foreword to Jim Douglass' *Nonviolent Cross: A Theology of Revolution and Peace* (2nd edition, Wipf & Stock, 2006).

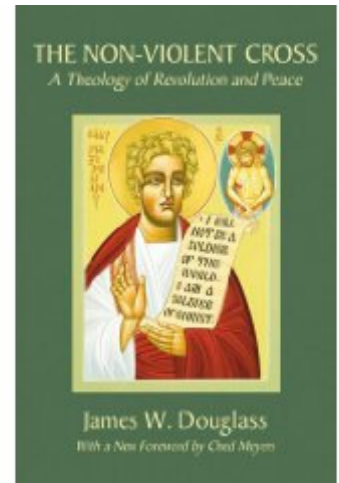
Foreword by Ched Myers

"We have assumed the name of peacemakers, but we have been, by and large, unwilling to pay any significant price," Daniel Berrigan wrote in the wake of his famous Catonsville Nine anti-war protest in 1968. "And because we want the peace with half a heart and half a life and will, the war continues, because the waging of war, by its nature, is total—but the waging of peace, by our own cowardice, is partial."

Berrigan's words have always haunted me, more so with the death this Spring of Virginia Quaker Tom Fox. Fox was abducted with three other members of the Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) in Iraq on Nov 26, 2005, and held by an insurgent group calling itself the "Swords of Righteousness Brigade." The other three hostages (Canadians Jim Loney of the Toronto Catholic Worker; Harmeet Singh Sooden of Montreal; and British Baptist Norman Kember) survived almost four months of captivity, but Tom Fox's body was discovered on a Baghdad street on March 9th, 2006. Fox's martyrdom invites those of us in North America who are committed to building nonviolent movements for social transformation yet again to search our souls regarding the cost of discipleship.

This is, then, an auspicious moment for Wipf & Stock to reprint James Douglass' *The Nonviolent Cross*. Published almost 40 years ago, this remarkable book represents the first full-fledged attempt to forge a nonviolent "theology of revolution and peace," and as such, remains a landmark for faith-based struggles for social change.

Douglass penned these chapters during that most passionate and consequential decade in modern U.S. and world history--specifically, in the difficult years between the deaths of John XXIII and John F. Kennedy in 1963 and Martin Luther King in 1968. The loss of the Pope, the President and the Prophet—the era's most significant hope-bearing leaders—figured significantly into this book's plea for a politics of redemptive nonviolence. Douglass' fierce advocacy for the oppressed was shaped, in turn, by the war raging in Indochina, the unraveling of racist colonialism abroad and apartheid at home, and the deepening grip of global economic disparity resulting from the failure of the progressive dream of international "development."



The Prophet put it most clearly in his famous Riverside speech of April 4, 1967 (exactly one year before he was assassinated in Memphis): Our national future would depend upon our ability to face and solve what he called the “giant triplets” of *racism*, *poverty* and *militarism*. *The Nonviolent Cross* was one of the first attempts to engage Dr. King’s incisive (and sadly, enduring) diagnosis.

Douglass was also one of the few American theologians who took up King’s challenge as a matter of faith *and* practice. “The first thing to be disrupted by our commitment to nonviolence,” he was fond of saying, “will be not the system, but our own lives.” Indeed, in the wake of this groundbreaking book, Jim moved steadily from ecclesial and academic circles toward activist ones, seeking to embody the *satyagraha* he calls for so eloquently. After serving a jail term (the first of many) for nonviolent civil disobedience at Hickman Air Force Base in Hawai’i in opposition to the Vietnam war, Jim moved to the Pacific Northwest where he co-founded Pacific Life Community, a network of Catholic Workers and peace activists resisting the manufacturing and deployment of the Trident strategic nuclear weapons system.

It was in this context that I first met Jim in 1977, as he and his wife Shelley were preparing to open the Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action next door to the Bangor naval base. I had already been deeply influenced by *The Nonviolent Cross* as a young activist and theology student. I was now beginning to meet those of Jim’s generation who became my mentors, particularly his colleagues Daniel and Philip Berrigan, Liz McAlister, and Ladon Sheats. Douglass’ book, together with John Howard Yoder’s *The Politics of Jesus* (1972), represented the most influential articulation of gospel nonviolence of that era. They animated a new generation of North American radical Christians of which I was a part, and paved the way for further theological and practical development of their insights. Indeed, rereading this book has felt like revisiting my own baptismal vows half a lifetime later.

Jim subsequently published several other books, extending his analysis of how *satyagraha* can and must transform our faith and politics: *Resistance and Contemplation* (1972); *Lightening East to West: Jesus, Gandhi and the Nuclear Age* (1983); and *The Nonviolent Coming of God* (1991). Yet it has been Jim’s *practice* that authenticates his theological reflections. The 1980s saw Ground Zero launch a nationwide network of nonviolent resistance to the “White Train” nuclear transportation grid. In the 1990s Jim fasted and acted around the Bosnian killing fields—an issue that confused many in the peace movement. He and Shelley then moved to Birmingham, AL to found Mary’s House Catholic Worker, where they now live and work. In the last decade, in addition to opposing the ongoing war in Iraq, Douglass has been supporting the King family’s efforts to win legal and public acknowledgment of the official conspiracy to kill the Prophet. Out of this has come a current research project he calls “Compassion and the Unspeakable in the Murders of Martin, Malcolm, JFK, and RFK.”

All of us who have tried to live and teach Christian nonviolence owe a profound debt of gratitude to Jim for the space he opened with both *The Nonviolent Cross* and his own exemplary discipleship. This is a “dated” book, but in the best sense of the word. Herein is a vigorous conversation with the most influential ethicists, theologians and social thinkers of the 1960s: Protestants Cox and Ramsey, Catholics Rahner and Stein, secularists Fanon and Hammaraskjold. Nor, sadly, have the dilemmas Douglass framed changed dramatically. For example his chapter on the Catholic Church and the Holocaust, understood through the lens of Andre Schwartz-Bart, deserves careful rereading today. And his lengthy analysis of the bankruptcy of just war theorizing in the churches is still all too relevant.

To be sure, some of Jim’s biblical and theological analysis has been improved on by subsequent exegetes and social theorists—yet his core conclusions have only been strengthened by this further investigation. And the text suffers from having predated the ascension of the women’s movement, as most literature from this period does—but the reader can be sure that Douglass has since journeyed firmly into feminism. Despite these limitations, the author’s presentation of the theory and practice of *satyagraha* remains both seminal and significant. This book introduced many of us not only to the urgent relevance of Gandhi, but to his successors such as Vinoba Bhave and Danilo Dolci. More importantly, it helped midwife a *new* generation of practitioners.

Faith-based movements of engaged nonviolence have grown over the last four decades. Here in the U.S. campaigns such as the Plowshares disarmament actions or Witness for Peace’s work in conflict zones have *deepened* the vocation of peacemaking. Internationally we have seen significant *broadening* of nonviolent campaigns, from the Philippines to Chiapas, and from Colombia to Palestine. Such efforts represent the fruition of seeds planted in part by this book. We might even say that, in the mysterious movings of the Spirit, Bishop Oscar Romero was one of Douglass’ progeny when he called on Salvadoran soldiers to lay down their arms a quarter century ago. So was Sr. Dorothy Stang, a nun from Ohio who was killed standing nonviolently in the way of illegal rainforest logging in Brazil just last year.

Perhaps no current expression of *satyagraha* better carries on the legacy of *The Nonviolent Cross* today than that of the Christian Peacemaker Teams. Foundational to CPT’s experiments in truth is a simple query, which echoes Berrigan’s indictment cited at the outset:

What would happen if Christians devoted the same discipline and self-sacrifice to nonviolent peacemaking that armies devote to war?

Tom Fox’s witness was a response. He “got in the Way”—the brilliant double-entendre that is the CPT slogan—nonviolently obstructing both the violence of the U.S. occupation and of reactionary terrorism in Iraq. His fate reminds the

church of Jesus' inconvenient but unavoidably central call to discipleship: "Whosoever would follow me must deny themselves and take up the cross" (Mk 8:34).

The pathological triplets of racism, poverty and militarism hold our world more hostage than ever. Thus the riveting assertion that opens Douglass' book is no less true today: "To see reality in our time is to see the world as crucifixion." *The Nonviolent Cross* is an extended *midrash* on Dr. King's stark ultimatum—nonviolence or nonexistence—which continues to haunt our future. Douglass' thesis continues to challenge communities of faith: nothing less than *satyagraha* will do if we are to embody hope in a world bent on annihilation, whether the slow death of ecological deterioration or the sudden extinction of nuclear 'shock and awe.'

I am deeply grateful for the way in which Jim Douglass, like Paul of Tarsus, helped us to recover the gospel of the cross. And for how he, like the apostle, understands that this cross is not a matter of dogmatic or spiritualized reflection, but a committed way of revolutionary struggle for justice and peace (Gal 6:17). The reprinting of this book is thus a gift to a new generation that is called more than ever to stand at the "crux of history."