

LECTURE SERIES PUBLIC THEOLOGY

An International and Intercontextual Assessment



FAITH ACTOR IN CIVIL SOCIETY: BETWEEN CIVIL COMMITMENT AND RESISTANCE

OBJECTIVE OF THE LESSON

- ▶ To help the audience grasp the tension between the task of being a faith actor, civil commitment and resistance;
- ▶ To enable the audience to understand what civil commitment and resistance involved;
- ▶ To help the audience gain skills that will enable them to hold in total balance and learn how to integrate faith, civil commitment and nonviolent resistance;
- ▶ To be a model and teach other faith actors what commitment to civility and nonviolent resistance are all about: standing up against all structures and forms of human brutality and injustices in their families, communities, churches and society.

INTRODUCTION

- ▶ The integration of civil commitment and resistance is very critical in a world of systemic structures of injustices.
- ▶ In every civil society there are faith actors. They often have to grappled with the reality of inhumane tendencies: domination, exploitation, marginalisation, and oppression of the weakest members of a society, the poorest of the poor.
- ▶ Thus, civil commitment and resistance refers to those in every society who give priority to the claims of God's revealed image in the creation of every human, God's justice, love and compassion over and above the claim of their nationalism, regionalism, ethnicity or religious affiliation.

PUBLIC DISCERNMENT OF FAITH

- ▶ Any concrete faith actor needs to understand the connection between their Christian faith and public life, the contested public sphere, and so on.
- ▶ To be effective faith actor, one needs to collapse the sacred-secular divide.
- ▶ Christian faith is not meant for a private life, it is meant to be carried into every sphere of life. That is the only way the world of inhumane structures, destructive social, political, religious and economic infrastructures can be destroyed.

WHAT CIVIL COMMITMENT AND NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE INVOLVE

- ▶ In civil life the reality of the tension between the two—justice and injustice—can be overwhelming;
- ▶ No one involved in civil society can stand and watch injustice being perpetuated by those who are supposed to protect the vulnerable members—the poorest of the poor—of society from those who are unjustly taking advantage of them.
- ▶ The gap between truth and lie continue to grow to the detriment of the human race and the natural world. Justice and injustice are the difference between what is right and what is not.

WHO IS A FAITH ACTOR

- ▶ Nonviolent resistance in civil commitment is carried out by people of God who know him as a virtuous God of love, justice and compassion.
- ▶ They see a vacuum in these virtues in society and they rise up to say no to injustices! They recognise that their commitment in civil society is a calling and therefore it requires them to be custodians and dispensers of God's virtue of love, justice and compassion.

EXAMPLE OF FAITH ACTORS

- ▶ All through the ages, we have had men and women who have stood out as true faith actors: In Europe John Wesley, Parliamentarian William Wilberforce, Dietrich Bonhoeffer stand out; in Africa Archbishops David Gitari and John Okullu of Kenya, and Desmond Tutu of South Africa stand out; in North America Dr Martin Luther King Jr. stands out, Latin America, Gutierrez Gustavo stands out. In Asia Mahatma Gandhi has stood out as a faith actor, the messenger of nonviolent resistance.
- ▶ Their civil commitment and involvement in nonviolent resistance are based on the philosophy of Gandhi, “An eye for an eye will make the whole blind.” Nonviolent resistance can lead to peaceful repositioning and transformation of the existing structures of systemic injustice and moral decadences.

CONTEMPORARY THEORY OF RESISTANCE: JUST PEACEMAKING

- ▶ The world has taught us two theories of resistance: pacifism and just war theories. Today, however, ten Christian ethicists and theologians have added a complementary theory: just peacemaking. It takes both pacifism and just war seriously. Yet, it seeks to bring to the fore nonviolent action or resistance. It is an embodiment of Christ's vision of a world of shalom (peace as wholeness).
- ▶ It basically seeks to ensure that justice and love are served in the settling of disputes or in trying to stop the escalation of conflict violence in a given society.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- ▶ How can contemporary Christians become faith actors?
- ▶ What are the issues involved in your society that may require you to play the role of a non-violent faith actor, civil committer, and resister?
- ▶ How can a faith actor maintain a total balance between public commitment and civil resistance?
- ▶ Do you have contemporary Christians that are an embodiment of commitment to civil society and nonviolent resistance?
- ▶ What fresh ideas and skills have you learnt in this lesson that can help you to teach it?

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER READING

- ▶ Agang Bobai, Sunday et al, eds., (2020). *African Public Theology*. Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Publishing.
- ▶ _____, (2016). *When Evil Strikes: Faith and the Politics of Human Hostility*. Eugene, Oregon: PICKWICK Publications.
- ▶ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, (1963). *The Cost of Discipleship*, Revised & Unabridged Edition. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- ▶ Gitari, David (1996). *In Season and Out of Season: Sermons to a Nation*. Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Regnum.
- ▶ Moe-Lobeda D., Cynthian, (2002). *Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God*. Minneapolis, MA: Fortress Press.
- ▶ Stott, John, (1999). *New Issues Facing Christians Today*, Fully Revised Edition. Fulham Palace Road, London: HarperCollins Publishers.
- ▶ weblink: 30 Examples of Successful Non Violent Action. Culled from <https://www.dailygood.org/>