A Study of Walter Wink’s Powers as Exemplified in Martin Luther King Jr. and Aung San Suu Kyi with Special Reference to the Political Context of Burma/Myanmar

Aung Htoo

A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

2018

Faculty of Culture and Society through Laidlaw College
Abstract

Burma/Myanmar has been under a military dictatorship for fifty-three years. This dissertation examines the spirit of Burmese politics, interacting with the conceptual framework of Martin Luther King Jr., Aung San Suu Kyi and Walter Wink. It begins with a critical exploration of various ethical formulations of nonviolence by Wink and other scholars. After the exploration of Wink’s theology of nonviolence, the chapters 4 and 5 consider King and Suu Kyi’s philosophical and practical applications of nonviolence. King and Suu Kyi masterfully advance their views of nonviolence in their own contexts. A critical interaction between King, Suu Kyi and Wink in the fields of leadership, religion, and ethical principles (chapter 6) constructs a theoretical basis for the main body of this dissertation (chapter 7). This interaction reveals that violence and nonviolence are far greater than a means to achieve the desired end. Both have a spiritual dimension. When this spiritual aspect is saturated in a particular culture, it cannot be easily removed. The true political spirit of Myanmar is revealed by its long history of violence being employed as a means to change the government. This Burmese political spirit pervades the areas of leadership, religion, and ethics. Against this backdrop, Suu Kyi rises up to transform the spirit of Burmese politics. This dissertation concludes that expounding Burmese politics through the eyes of King, Suu Kyi, and Wink enables us to discern its spiritual nature which has been long rooted throughout the nation’s history and to draw some implications for Christians in Myanmar.
Dedication

To the Burmese Christians who are devoted themselves to witness the whole gospel in a wholistic way.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .................................................................................................................................i
Dedication ..............................................................................................................................ii
Table of Contents ...............................................................................................................iii
Attestation of Authorship ...................................................................................................vii
Acknowledgements .............................................................................................................viii

PART ONE

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION
   1.1. Context of the Study .................................................................1
   1.2. Significance of the Study .............................................................3
   1.3. Method of the Study .................................................................9
   1.4. Thesis of the Study .................................................................11
   1.5. Outline of the Study .................................................................15

Chapter

2. TWO CONTRASTING ORDERS: THE DOMINATION SYSTEM AND
   GOD’S DOMINATION- FREE ORDER
   2.1. Exploring Wink’s Theology of Nonviolence ..............................19
       2.1.1. An Analytical Summary of Wink’s Powers Trilogy ..........19
           2.1.1.1. The Domination System ...........................................28
           2.1.1.2. God’s Domination-free Order ...............................29
           2.1.1.3. Nonviolence or Jesus’ Third Way: Ending the DS ......31
       2.1.2. Why Wink? ........................................................................35
   2.2. Wink in Dialogue with Others: Toward a Constructive Frame ....37
       2.2.1. Power as the Basis of a Christian Social Ethic ..................38
           2.2.1.1. Hermeneutical-Methodological Critiques ..............39
           2.2.1.2. Theological-Philosophical Critiques ......................47
       2.2.2. The Powers and the Domination System .........................52
       2.2.3. The Powers and God’s Domination-free Order ...............62
       2.3. Summary of the Chapter ......................................................67

Chapter

3. JESUS’ THIRD WAY OR NONVIOLENT ENGAGEMENT: A CRITICAL
   CONSTRUCT
3.1. Engaging the Powers Nonviolently ........................................69
  3.1.1. Jesus’ Third Way ......................................................70
  3.1.2. Why Nonviolence? ..................................................75
  3.1.3. Just War, Pacifism, Christian Realism, Just Peacemaking,
         and Nonviolence ......................................................82
  3.1.4. Violence and the Cross ..........................................91
  3.2. An Examination of What-if Dilemma ............................101
  3.3. The Powers, Church and Nonviolence ..........................104
  3.4. What’s Next When the Powers Fall? Toward a Reconciliation ...112
  3.5. Summary of the Chapter ..........................................115

PART TWO

Chapter

4. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. ON NONVIOLENCE
  4.1. Biographical Exploration: How King Came to Believe
       in Nonviolence ....................................................118
     4.1.1. Parental Influences .........................................119
     4.1.2. Intellectual Quest ............................................123
  4.2. Involvement in the Civil Right Movement ....................147
  4.3. King’s Principles of Nonviolence: A Critical Examination ....157
     4.3.1. Nonviolence as a Method of the Strong ..................157
     4.3.2. Nonviolence as a Path to Reconciliation .................159
     4.3.3. Nonviolence as the Weapon against Evil ................161
     4.3.4. Nonviolence and Redemptive Suffering ..................163
     4.3.5. Nonviolence and Inner Strength ..........................165
     4.3.6. Nonviolence and Justice ....................................166
  4.4. What Would You Do? ..........................................168
  4.5. Summary of the Chapter ........................................170

Chapter

5. AUNG SAN SUU KYI ON NONVIOLENCE
  5.1. Parental Influences ...............................................173
  5.2. Intellectual Upbringing .........................................178
  5.3. Entry into the Myanmar Politics ...............................180
     5.4.1. The Military Regime and Suu Kyi .........................182
     5.4.2. Physical Attacks on Suu Kyi ..............................188
5.5. Principles of Nonviolence: A Critical Examination ……………………..191
  5.5.1. Why Not Violence? ……………………………………………………191
  5.5.2. Nonviolence as a Buddhist Ethic ……………………………………194
  5.5.3. Mettā as the All-Embracing Principle of Nonviolence …………..198
  5.5.4. Nonviolence as a Revolution of the Spirit ……………………..203
5.6. Dialogue, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation ………………………………207
5.7. Rule of Law and Nonviolence …………………………………………...210
5.8. A Proponent of Principled or Pragmatic Nonviolence? ……………….214
5.9. Suu Kyi after 2010: A Look at Her Current Political Life …………..215
5.10. Summary of the Chapter ……………………………………………...224

PART THREE
Chapter

6. KING AND SUU KYI IN DIALOGUE WITH WALTER WINK
  6.1. Nonviolence and Leadership: A Correlation ………………………….226
  6.2. Religion: Engaging Buddhism with Christianity ……………………..238
  6.3. Ethics of Nonviolence: Engaging King and Suu Kyi Via Wink ………247
    6.3.1. Why Not Violence? …………………………………………………247
    6.3.2. Nonviolence and Love: Engaging King’s Agape and Suu Kyi’s Mettā Through Wink’s Loving Enemies …………………250
    6.3.3. Principled or Pragmatic? …………………………………………253
    6.3.4. Principles of Nonviolence: King and Suu Kyi via Wink ………256
  6.4. What If … Or Self-Defense? …………………………………………..275
  6.5. Nonviolence and the Church ……………………………………………277
  6.6. Summary of the Chapter ………………………………………………279

Chapter

7. ENGAGING WITH BURMESE POLITICS THROUGH WINK, KING AND SUU KYI
  7.1. Violence, Power-Struggles, and Buddhism: A Historical Review ………281
    7.1.1. Monarchical Period …………………………………………………282
    7.1.2. Colonial Period ……………………………………………………...287
    7.1.3. Post-Colonial Period …………………………………………………290
  7.2. Supernaturalism, Politics and Buddhism ……………………………….292
  7.3. Ethnic Diversity and Religion ……………………………………………295
  7.4. A Quest for the Spirit of Burmese Politics …………………………….299
    7.4.1. Understanding Burmese Politics ………………………………….301
7.4.2. General Ne Win as a Resuscitator of the Spirit of the Burmese Traditional Politics .........................................................303

7.4.3. Suu Kyi as an Agent for Political Transformation ......................311

7.5. The Failure of the Four 8s Protest .............................................318

7.6. Traditionalism or Transformation? ...........................................321

7.7. Summary of the Chapter ..........................................................332

Chapter

8. CONCLUSION: POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS IN MYANMAR

8.1. Implications of Nonviolence for Christians in Myanmar ..............334

8.1.1. Theological .............................................................................335

8.1.2. Ethical .....................................................................................340

8.1.3. Socio-Political .......................................................................345

8.2. How Should Burmese Christians Begin to Engage with Burmese Politics? .....................................................347

Bibliography ......................................................................................353
Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

[Signature]

07 May 2018

Aung Htoo
Acknowledgements

I believe that writing a dissertation is not merely an intellectual business. To come to fruition, it needs other supports: financial, emotional, spiritual and social. Without these aids, this dissertation would have never been brought out. First and foremost, it is God who has stirred up a passion in me for this research. Let Him alone be praised! At the same time, I would especially like to express my gratitude to the following people for their manifold assistances:

My supervisors Stephen Garner, Nicola Hoggard Creegan, and Myk Habeets for tolerance with the tardiness of my work, English writing, and their thoughtful, yet critical advice that has sharpened my arguments

The Leadev-Langham that tirelessly fund donors not just for my study, but also for my family during our stay in Auckland, New Zealand

Laidlaw College for sharing an office to study and being a community of theology where my theological horizon was broadened, and AUT for providing research and book costs

Merv Coates and his friends who shared their times with me amidst their hectic schedules for proofreading the thesis

My parents and parents-in-law for their prayer support and encouragement during my study years

Auckland Chin Bethel Church where I spoke God’s Word on every Sunday for fellowship over long years of my stay in Auckland
My wife Esther Van Dawt Kim and our children Teresa, Katherine and Francis for their company and endless patience the whole way through.
PART ONE

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Context of the Study

My passion for the topic of “nonviolence” is birthed out of personal experience and my knowledge of the fraught history of Myanmar. The military rule was well entrenched before my birth. I was born in July 1972 in the Ne Win era. Under his authoritarian rule, I grew up in a politically naïve and unconcerned way. In 1988, a historic protest broke out, known as “the Four 8s” (08/08/1988).¹ I was a high school student at the time. The countrywide protest opened my eyes to the true nature of the military government. From then on, my concern over Burmese politics began to grow. However, the church where I grew up had a different view of politics. Pastors and Christians with whom I was familiar were unconcerned about politics. The church’s interest was solely in the spiritual. The impression I had was that politics has nothing to do with Christianity. This attitude might perhaps have been exacerbated by the government’s unofficial policy on non-Buddhist religions. All non-Buddhist religious people did not find favour in the eyes of the political elites. Even worse, the passivity of Christians in Myanmar in times of political upheaval led me to question the relationship between Christianity and politics. This study is part of my quest for the nexus between Christianity and politics in the context of Myanmar. Therefore, it entails a brief survey of the political context of the country.

Myanmar is known as the country under the longest military rule. To be specific, the country had been under two successive military regimes: the first ruled the nation from March 1962 to July 1988; the second from August 1989 to November 2015. The year between 1988 and 1989 was a transitional period. The history of Myanmar – monarchical, colonial, and the post-independence period – is full of bloody, brutal and violent acts in times of political and power struggles. Father Sangermano, who worked as a missionary in Myanmar from 1883 to 1806, once described, “There is not in the whole world a monarch so despotic as the Burmese Emperor.” Burmese monarchs viewed themselves as absolute lords of the lives, properties and personal services of their subjects. In the post-independence period (1948-1962), the country became politically democratic; however, the communist and ethnic insurgent groups rose up against the democratic government.

In 1962, General Ne Win staged a coup and ruled the country ruthlessly until he resigned in 1988. During that year, the whole country was in utter chaos, which lasted until August 1989. Those days were rife with violence, and people seemed to be demonized and callous. Out of his own experiences in those days, James Mawdsley reflects:

I nearly cry every time I think about it. What horrifies me every time is trying to imagine a man who is fit, strong, well-armed and surrounded by colleagues, who is backed up as well by one of the world’s largest armies, charging after hapless young girls and clubbing them to death … She will not die with one or two blows. He must hit her on the arms and back and chest before getting a few good shots in at her face. They are floundering in the water and he cannot get a good clear swing. But blows to the face will not kill her either. They just smash her into a pulp. At last he gets one on the back of her skull and suddenly she is still and her face sinks below the water.

---

2 Father Sangermano, The Burmese Empire: A Hundred Years Ago (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Company, 1893), 73
3 The topic of the practice of power among Burmese monarchs will be discussed at greater length in chapter seven.
4 The uprising on 8 August 1988 is known as the Four Eights (8.8.88), at the end of which another military regime replaced the old one.
In short, the history of the nation and the brutal onslaught of the regime against any political protests has imprinted on the minds of the people of Myanmar that nonviolence seems inappropriate in this context, and is likely to be ineffective.

In the context where Christianity is a minority religion, how should Burmese Christians live out their understanding of the Gospel? What might the resources from general Christian theology in dialogue with the context of Myanmar offer Burmese Christians to understand their everyday world and how to live in it? This thesis draws on Christian and Burmese perspectives of nonviolence and nonviolent engagement with society; drawing particularly from Walter Wink, Martin Luther King Jr., and Aung San Suu Kyi to answer that question, and contribute to the well-being of the Burmese context.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This thesis and its argument are located in the field of practical theology, which is “first of all an interpretative or hermeneutical task,” as Terry Veling argues. Gerben Heitink, in tracing the history of practical theology, concludes that modern practical theology has its beginnings in the 1960s. Since then a considerable consensus has emerged regarding the view that practical theology is a theological *theory of action*. Practical theologians, by and large, lay an emphasis on experience, the interplay of theory and practice, faith and action, the content of the gospel and the context. Simply stated, doing practical theology is an exploration of an interface between faith and action. Therefore, it is not a dichotomised understanding of theory versus practice, faith versus action, tradition...

---

6 Terry Veling, *Practical Theology: On Earth as It is in Heaven* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 54.
versus context, and so on; rather, it is an attempt to investigate the interplay or interface between them.

Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner figuratively describes that practical theology, unlike a “soloist” or “guest musician,” plays with concern for other disciplines or areas in theology. View ing it in this light, practical theology can have a dialogue both with theological education (biblical, historical, and systematic theological reflection) and non-theological disciplines, like sociology, psychology, anthropology, and so on. In other words, practical theology covers many disciplines, ranging from ethics, leadership, and religion to cultural studies.

Therefore, practical theology entails all human practices in our world, which is why it interacts affirmatively and critically with other disciplines – theological (biblical studies, church history, systematic theology and theological ethics) and non-theological (psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, and so on). As a dynamic and differentiated field, practical theology involves an interdisciplinary element. This is also one of the reasons why practical theologians use a variety of methods to do practical theology: literature-based, qualitative and quantitative research methods. Engaging theologically with the socio-political context of Myanmar clearly falls into the domain of practical theology, where the theological implications are lived out daily, and the daily living refines the theological reflection.

---

10 K. Cahalan & G Mikoski, Opening the Field of Practical Theology, 1, 4.
12 As this study of violence and nonviolence is located in practical theology because “practical theology’s focal interest is not directly in the philosophical but in the ‘performative speech acts’ of faith practice,” Helen Cameron, Deborah Bhatti, & others, Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Research (London: SCM Press, 2010), 13. There are a number of researches on the study of violence and nonviolence in the field of practical theology. David Tombs, “Lived Religion, (In)tolerance
This study is, by and large, an engagement between Walter Wink, Martin Luther King Jr. and Aung San Suu Kyi to synthesise a Christian response to the Burmese political environment. It does this to offer theological insight and teaching to the church and Christians in Myanmar that have, in my opinion, been lacking in engaging with their contemporary context. The hope is that this work may awaken and stir up the conscience of Christians in Myanmar, the majority of whom are politically indifferent.

but he was mostly known as the most prominent leading activist in the civil rights movement. He was awarded the Noble Peace Prize for fighting for racial equality in his time through nonviolent resistance. Like King, Aung San Suu Kyi is also best known for her unswerving commitment to nonviolence in resisting one of the most oppressive military regimes in the world. She also received a Noble Peace Prize in 1991 for her nonviolent resistance.

In this study, Wink’s Powers trilogy is used as a principle voice to engage the Burmese political context where power is arbitrarily practised. He is employed because he offers a well-developed theory of Christian nonviolence that provides a way to describe how power and violence function in a nation, a society and an institution, as well as in an individual within these institutions. Likewise, King and Suu Kyi are also used as dialogue partners with Wink, who practise and promote the concept of nonviolence. As the study aims to provide political implications for Christians in Myanmar where Buddhism is the state religion, King becomes a model to represent Burmese Christians, whereas Suu Kyi becomes a representative of the majority Buddhists. Hence, King and Suu Kyi are dialogue partners to engage with Wink in the socio-political location of Myanmar.\(^\text{13}\)

Since Christianity is a minority religion and theological education in Myanmar has lagged far behind other Asian countries, information and research available in biblical and theological education is sparse. Most doctoral theses done by native Christians in Myanmar are, by and large, concentrated on the fields of Christian missions, Christian-Buddhist dialogue, and moderately historical, pastoral and church growth studies.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{13}\) A detailed discussion of the reasons for using Wink, King and Suu Kyi in the study of Burmese politics will follow in later chapters: Wink, in chapter three; King, in chapter four; and Suu Kyi in chapter five.\(^\text{14}\) When searching theses relating to Christianity in Burma or Myanmar in the search engines of ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, EthOS – British Library’s Electronic Theses Online Service, and Open Access Theses and Dissertations, most of the theses found are intercultural, missions, evangelism, pastoral and historical studies of Christianity. If there are theses and dissertations focusing on Burmese politics, they are all secular or non-theological studies.
There is a paucity of study in Myanmar from a theological perspective on Burmese politics.\textsuperscript{15} Situating the research in the context of Myanmar where many Christians are politically unconcerned, the research also seeks to discuss the relationship between Christianity and politics.

This research will also contribute to Christians, both lay and full-time Christian ministers in Myanmar in a significant way. By arguing that Christians are socio-politically responsible for what happens in their society, the study aims to foster Burmese Christians, many of whom are politically apathetic, to become a consciousness-raising community. Furthermore, the contribution that the thesis pursues does not localise the context of Myanmar alone, but seeks to contribute to global Christianity as well. As located in the area of practical theology, this study will contribute to its field, especially in engaging with a particular non-Christian context through a theological lens. In this engagement, the study does not employ a single theologian alone; instead, it seeks to include other voices – Christian (King) and Buddhist (Suu Kyi).

So, the thesis is primarily concerned with Wink’s contribution as a theorist of nonviolence, and King and Suu Kyi as the practitioners of nonviolence. Hence, through an integrated lens, it refers to an angle which is created from the study of Wink, King and Suu Kyi on nonviolence; therefore, it is not necessarily a view of Wink, King or of Suu Kyi. Instead, it is a view created through a dialogue between a theologian (Wink).

\textsuperscript{15} During the two successive military regimes (1962-2015), freedom of press had been strictly restricted. Expressing personal opinion on political matters was not allowed. Writing any critical comments on the regimes was prohibited. To quote George Orwell, “It is a world in which every word and everything is censored… Free speech is unthinkable. All other kinds of freedom are permitted. You are free to be a drunkard, an idler, a coward, a backbiter, a fornicator; but you are not free to think for yourself.” George Orwell, \textit{Burmese Days}, Introduction by Emma Larkin (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2010), 96. Under such an extremely restricting law on press freedom, it is little wonder that there is a paucity of reliable information on Burmese politics. Even if a native Burmese scholar completes a critical study of the military regime somewhere outside of the nation, that scholar would never dare to go back to his home country in Myanmar. If he or she did, the government would arrest and directly imprison him or her. Truly, that is one of the reasons why sufficient information on Burmese politics is hard to find.
and two practitioners (King and Suu Kyi). This will be a lens through which to engage Burmese politics. Even though the thesis is located in the theory of nonviolence, it also extends to other fields such as politics, leadership, history, and religion. In doing so, the emphasis is not on politics, leadership, or religion in Myanmar per se. Instead, the discussion is centred on the principles and practices of violence and nonviolence that have predominated over the ways of practicing leadership, religion and politics.

Another significance of the study is that it also extends to the area of interfaith dialogue. The context in which the study is located is Myanmar where Buddhists are a majority, while Christianity is a minority religion. That necessitates the thesis having an integrated lens, which reflects both Christianity and Buddhism respectively. Therefore, Suu Kyi, as an exemplar of nonviolent proponents who define and practise nonviolence from a Buddhist perspective in the Buddhist context, is contextually appropriate; at the same time, it is also inter-religiously relevant to bring her into the dialogue. However, the study does not go beyond the scope of nonviolence and its related themes.

The underlying assumption in the whole thesis is that the notion of nonviolence, if regarded as more than a method but as a way of life, has some implications which can be applied in the fields of leadership and politics as well as in religion. The thesis also assumes that an integrated analysis of Wink, King and Suu Kyi will provide a penetrating lens by which to scrutinize the root problems of Burmese politics, thereby proposing some answers to them.

However, there are some limitations entwined in the study. As mentioned earlier, the primary concern of the thesis is the theory of nonviolence; however, it endeavours to

---

16 Kathleen Cahalan and Gordon Mikoski describe the interdisciplinary nature of practical theology. They state that practical theologians engage fields of knowledge beyond their own, ranging from biblical studies, church history, ethics, and systematic theology to psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology and so on, “Introduction,” in Opening the Field of Practical Theology, 4.
cover a wide range of other disciplines such as leadership, religion, and ethics. The purpose of covering these disciplines is not to discuss each of them at large, but to focus on the issues relating to the view and practice of nonviolence. It is assumed that we can make numerous implications behind the notion of nonviolence. For instance, the question in relation to leadership is, “Can a nonviolent leader be a tyrant or dictator?” For religion, “Does a religion enslave or emancipate people?” In relation to ethics, “Can the means be justified by the end?” Hence the treatment of leadership, religion, and ethics in this study is limited to the issues concerned with the notion and practice of nonviolence.

1.3 Method of the Study

This research is a literature-based study, which seeks to engage Burmese politics through the integrated lens of Walter Wink, Martin Luther King Jr., and Aung San Suu Kyi with the intention of fostering Christians in Myanmar to become a consciousness-raising community. In this dissertation, readers will come across such terms as “spirits,” “spiritual,” “spirituality,” and “principalities and powers.” Such terms are quite unusual within the professional vocabulary of the social and empirical scientists. However, this is a dissertation in the field of practical theology, and hence it necessitates the use of the theological and biblical language that comprises its professional vocabulary.

Swinton and Mowat define practical theology as “critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God’s redemptive practices in, to and for the world.” According to this definition, the practices of the Church are supposed to reflect God’s redemptive practices in, to and for the world. In order to be so, a critical

---

17 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 6.
theological reflection on how the Church interacts with the world is essential. The thesis adopts this definition to locate it in the field of practical theology.

This definition highlights the what and why of practical theology. That is, practical theology seeks to examine the way in which Christians engage in the world in order for them to faithfully participate in God’s redemptive practices. With this definition in mind, we will see the way in which Christians in Myanmar interact with the world. The aim for doing this is to ensure if their engagement faithfully reflects God’s redemptive practices. Christians in Myanmar, as a minority religious group, have several challenges in practising their faith in everyday living. This disadvantage leads many Christians to be silent and passive in public affairs. That is one of the reasons why preaching on social justice has not been heard in many churches.

In order to enable Christian involvement in Myanmar, this research seeks to draw practical implications for Christians by exploring Martin Luther King Jr. and Aung San Suu Kyi via Walter Wink’s Powers. The outcome of the study will challenge, inspire and enable Christians in Myanmar to get involved in public square so that they might participate holistically in God’s redemptive practices. Most of all, the study will give the ground and motivations why Christians in Myanmar should have for engaging in nonviolent political action. This is what is original about this research, and a contribution to the field of practical theology in such a way that practical implications for Christians in a particular context can be drawn through having a critical interaction between a theologian and practitioners.

Based on Swinton and Mowat’s definition, the thesis looks at Burmese history in relation to the use of violence in politics through the integrated lens of Wink, King and Suu Kyi, with the aim to drawing political implications for Christians in Myanmar, who view politics as an utterly worldly thing. As practical theology is multi-disciplinary, this
research covers a number of subjects such as the study of biblical vocabulary, ethics, history, and politics. But this research, unlike other research in practical theology, does not employ any qualitative research methodology, because its aim is to draw political implications for Christians in Myanmar by looking at the issue of violence and nonviolence in the Burmese political context via an integrated lens of Wink, King and Suu Kyi. Therefore, the approach of this thesis is not biblical studies, ethics, or history, but an integration of these subjects along with politics and sociology and centring on the issue of violence in the Burmese political context.

On the basis of this approach, this study seeks to engage Wink and other voices on nonviolence first, King and Suu Kyi second, and an integration of Wink, King and Suu Kyi third. In doing so, all voices will be critically compared with the view of achieving a synthesised or integrated lens. Once an integrated lens of Wink, King and Suu Kyi is established, it will be an interpretive framework to engage with the Burmese political context and to draw political implications for Christians in Myanmar. In doing so, this research will enable the church in Myanmar to faithfully participate in God’s redemptive practices in, to and for the world.

1.4 Thesis of the Study

As practical theology is multidisciplinary, this study engages fields of knowledge beyond its own – theological and non-theological disciplines such as peace and political studies. This engagement will not create a fuzziness – having no focus on what the research aims. Instead, as practical theologians do, this research undertakes a commitment to critically engage multiple sources available to it that can shed light on its purpose.18 In engaging with other disciplines, the focus is not to get side-tracked but to deepen the research. Therefore, this study explores not only a theologian and two

---

18 Kathleen Cahalan and Gordon Mikoski, “Introduction,” in Opening the Field of Practical Theology, 4.
practitioners of nonviolence, but also the socio-political context of Myanmar through surveying its history in order to bring a critical dialogue between them. This critical dialogue will bring out the contextual, practical implications for Christians in Myanmar. As Stephen Bevans argues, theology needs to take into account both the context of the past and that of the present. This study takes a serious exploration of King and Suu Kyi in their own contexts and engages the socio-political context of Myanmar with a view to drawing the implications for Christians in Myanmar. So bringing a late-twentieth century Christian theologian, a mid-twentieth century Christian activist and a contemporary Buddhist politician together in dialogue to speak to the Christians who live in the predominantly Buddhist Myanmar where military despotism had been booming for a half century will be the uniqueness and originality of this research.

Most contemporary literature on nonviolence focuses on its philosophical, religious, moral or pragmatic reasons. By and large, there are two approaches in practising nonviolence: pragmatic and principled. The practitioners of pragmatic nonviolence are greatly emphatic about the role of an end or result over the means; whereas, for those of principled nonviolence, the means and ends are intrinsically linked. For the former, what matters most is the desired result, not the methods, techniques or tactics; as the saying goes, the end justifies the means. In contrast, the principled approach suggests that the means to be employed must be consistent with the desired result.

This thesis argues that approaching nonviolence in either a pragmatic or principled (philosophical) way is too particularistic because it fails to discern the backdrop behind the notion of nonviolence. It is insubstantial to say that we choose nonviolence because it is effective. If so, the questions arise: Is nonviolence effective always? What if it fails to achieve the desired outcome? It is doubtless to say that the method of nonviolence

---

does not guarantee success. Thus, the pragmatic approach to nonviolence is apparently
superficial. For instance, King, known as a proponent of the principled approach, will
be discussed in chapter 4, and Suu Kyi, described as more pragmatic, will be examined
in chapter 5. We will see how sticking to one approach, either principled or pragmatic,
raises questions since the context is often more complex than we imagine.

Hence, the consistency of the principled approach regarding the inseparability of means
and end seems to underestimate the complexities of socio-cultural situations. If the
desired end is peace, the way to achieve it must be through peaceful means. It cannot be
through violent means. Logically speaking, the principled approach is more consistent
than the pragmatic approach, because the word “nonviolence” might be synonymous
with peace, while violence might not. However, practically speaking, the principled
approach has some problems. For instance, it would be inapprise and inapplicable for
the practitioners of the principled approach in the context of Adolf Hitler’s Germany,
Mao Zedong’s China, and Joseph Stalin’s Russia. Simply stated, the world in which we
live, the social issues we encounter, and the situations we are in are more complicated,
defective, and enigmatic than we can think.

Therefore, sticking to the principled approach in such an imperfect world may not truly
make sense, and some compromises must be made. This thesis seeks to explore the idea
of nonviolence not in the way mentioned above, but through looking at the system as a
whole. Instead of asking which approach – pragmatic or principled – the research seeks
to establish a theological framework through which to investigate the notion of
nonviolence. That is why the study looks at Wink’s theoretical formulation of
nonviolence in the light of other scholars, using King and Suu Kyi as exemplars.

Furthermore, this thesis argues that characteristically, the study of nonviolence entails
not only philosophical and practical elements, but also spiritual. Wink discovers the
spiritual characteristic of nonviolence through an in-depth analysis of the Powers language in the New Testament. In Wink’s vocabulary, it is the “myth of redemptive violence,” meaning violence can be overcome by violence. When this myth is deeply rooted in the world, it becomes the spirit, which cannot be superseded by anything else except through nonviolence. Likewise, Suu Kyi and King also acknowledge the importance of the spiritual dimension in nonviolent resistance. Suu Kyi perceives nonviolent resistance as a revolution of the spirit, whereas King sees it as fighting against the forces of evil, not the persons doing the evil, therefore it “is strongly active spiritually.” Thus, nonviolent resistance requires enormous spiritual or inner exertion, not merely physical action.

Here King and Suu Kyi have a similar view on the indispensable role of spiritual or inward exertion in the life of a nonviolent activist in the process of nonviolent resistance. Nonviolent resistance is, subjectively speaking, a way of spiritual exercise. However, Wink’s special concern for the spiritual dimension of nonviolent resistance is primarily non-subjective. In talking about the spiritual aspect of nonviolence, Wink’s emphasis is not upon the individual subjective dimension; but rather, on institutional, and therefore objective. Simply put, what matters for Wink is the spiritual aspect of an institution. To juxtapose King and Suu Kyi with Wink, the former argues that the real problem is not basically “out there” (rule, policy, regulation, administrative structures of an institution, organisation and so on), but “in here” (our social and psychological ego constructed by the context in which we are living), whereas the latter (Wink) stresses that the fundamental predicament is not just “in here” (our ego), but also “out there”; that is, the inward, invisible spiritual dimension of an institution, or the process of

22 Martin Luther King Jr., Stride toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story, Introduction by Clayborne Carson (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2010), 90.
socialisation. This will be discussed in detail in a later chapter containing a critical commentary of Wink’s Powers.

The thesis will also contribute to the ongoing study of violence and nonviolence by emphasising the spiritual feature of violence and nonviolence. Conclusions drawn in this research will provide all the practitioners of nonviolence, whether they are using the pragmatic or principled approach in general, with information and insight that would lead them to a deeper understanding of the nature and power of nonviolence. Particularly, findings from this research will also help Christians in Myanmar perceive that the method of nonviolence is not passive; but rather, it is active resistance to evil itself.

Finally, by using the Christian and Buddhist approaches of King and Suu Kyi, this thesis also engages the Buddhist and Christian views on nonviolence. In a sense, this study provides an interfaith dialogue considering both views. As love (mettā in Sanskrit, meaning loving-kindness) is at the heart of the idea of nonviolence both in Buddhism and Christianity, the study will in some measure contribute to the area of inter-religious studies.

1.5 Outline of the Study

The thesis question is, “What can reading the Burmese political culture through an integrated lens of Walter Wink, Martin Luther King Jr., and Aung San Suu Kyi contribute to Burmese Christians in particular, and non-Christians in general?” In answering this question, this thesis is divided into three parts with eight chapters in total. The first chapter of part one introduces the thesis by clarifying why the study has been chosen, how it will be organised, and the method for completing the study. Chapter two and three contain a critical analysis of Wink’s theology of the Powers. Chapter two examines Wink’s view of the two orders in conflict, which Wink calls the
Domination System and God’s Domination-Free Order. In doing so, I will bring in some dialogue partners such as Jacques Ellul, John H. Yoder, Miroslav Volf, Michael Foucault and Gene Sharp to engage with Wink as necessary. The chapter also examines an overview of Wink’s theology of nonviolence, as seen primarily in his own writings, to posit the framework of his theology. Among his own writings, the *Powers* trilogy (*Naming the Powers; Unmasking the Powers; and Engaging the Powers*), upon which Wink’s whole theological system of nonviolence is constructed, will be critically examined.

Chapter three is a critical commentary of Walter Wink’s idea of nonviolence or Jesus’ Third Way through the eyes of other nonviolence scholars and theologians. This examination will be done in the light of his critics as well as supporters to articulate the whole structure of the theology of nonviolence. To reach the aim of the chapter, the study constructively appraises Wink’s theology from the angles of the aforementioned scholars, as well as others, such as Stanley Hauerwas, Glen Stassen, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It then looks at secular work on nonviolence and power, such as that by Michel Foucault and Gene Sharp, as necessary, to show points of similarity and difference, and to strengthen the thesis of the study. Overall, chapter two and three seek to critically integrate Wink’s theology of nonviolence with the views of other scholars and theologians in the field.

Part two is comprised of two chapters (four and five) which explore the nonviolent resistance Martin Luther King Jr. and Aung San Suu Kyi practised in their respective contexts. These chapters examine the socio-political contexts and religious influences upon each person in their own historical backgrounds. In addition, the principles of nonviolence which they adhered to as they fought against their respective regimes are examined.
There are three chapters (from six to eight) in part three. Chapter six is an interactive discussion between King and Suu Kyi through the lens of Wink’s theology of nonviolence. In the discussion, similarities and differences between King, Suu Kyi and Wink are identified, followed by an assessment of each person’s view in the light of Wink’s theology. This chapter aims to create an integrated view of nonviolence for Wink, King and Suu Kyi, so that it could be a lens through which to engage Burmese politics. Chapter seven is a critical engagement of Burmese politics through the integrated lens of Wink, King and Suu Kyi. The first section of this chapter provides an overview of political and religious situations of the country of Myanmar throughout history. This review highlights how Buddhism has played a crucial role in the politics of Myanmar through the centuries. Additionally, the chapter also observes the general understanding of politics among Burmans, racial diversities and conflicts, and the role of supernaturalism in politics. It also examines the spirit of Burmese politics, which has been dominant in Myanmar since the precolonial period. The chapter establishes that reading Burmese politics via Wink’s Powers unmasks the fundamental flaws of Burmese politics.

The last chapter is the conclusion of the thesis, looking at Burmese politics through Wink, King and Suu Kyi in the areas of leadership, religion, and ethical roles; thereby drawing political implications for Christians in Myanmar. Engaging Burmese politics via the eyes of Wink, King and Suu Kyi exposes the deep-seated problems of the country, and at the same time it also sheds light on a range of possibilities for transforming the country into the culture of democracy. Therefore, this chapter is the crux of the whole thesis because it examines the spirit of Burmese politics in the light of the Buddhist-Christian dialogue, informed by Wink, King and Suu Kyi.
Chapter 2

Two Contrasting Orders:

The Domination System and God’s Domination-Free Order

This study engages Burmese politics by utilising the works of Walter Wink, Martin Luther King Jr. and Aung San Suu Kyi. Wink provides a theological-sociological lens for examination, and King and Suu Kyi act as contextual exemplars. This raises a question: Why are two Americans – Wink and King – used in a study of Burmese Politics, when their context is very different from that of Myanmar? Myanmar is a South-East Asian country, religiously Buddhist, and politically under military rule, while the context of King and Wink is mostly secular and practising a democratic system of government. This chapter and the next provide fundamental reasons why Wink and King are employed as key informants in this research to engage with Burmese politics despite contextual differences.

This chapter examines Wink’s construction of two conflicting orders: the Domination System (the DS) and God’s Domination-Free Order (the DFO). What are the DS and the DFO? How do they sharply contrast each other? How does each come into existence? What or who birthed them? To achieve this, Wink’s theology of nonviolence will be surveyed first, and then a critical interaction between Wink and other scholars will follow. This will establish a rationale for nonviolence. The following chapter (chapter 3) will be a critical dialogue between Wink and other scholars on the notion and principles of nonviolence. As noted in the introduction, the method employed in this chapter will be a critical, theological reflection to examine Wink’s Powers trilogy in the light of other scholars. In question, how can scholars respond to Wink’s Powers trilogy? At the same time, what can Wink offer back to those scholars? The outcome of this
dialogue will be a lens through which to engage the two practitioners of nonviolence, Martin Luther King Jr. and Aung San Suu Kyi.

2.1 Exploring Wink’s Theology of Nonviolence

Walter Wink (21 May 1938 – 10 May 2012) was a professor of Biblical Interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary, New York. Upon his retirement, he became an Emeritus Professor. He was a cross-disciplinary theologian who tried to integrate theology and psychology, especially the psychoanalysis of Carl Jung. Best known as a theologian of nonviolence, Wink was not only an academic, but was also actively involved in social activism. His book, *Violence and Nonviolence in South Africa*, is a product of his participation in nonviolent resistance in South Africa.\(^1\) Moreover, Wink was actively involved in the American civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War struggle and the campaign for nuclear disarmament.\(^2\) These experiences and active participation in resistance movements show that Wink, though a white American, has a strong sense of what it looks like living under despotic rule.

2.1.1 An Analytical Summary of Wink’s Powers Trilogy

Before engaging critically with Wink’s Powers trilogy, it will be helpful to summarise each of those and how they contribute to the development of Wink’s thinking on nonviolence. The three volumes are, *Naming the Powers; Unmasking the Powers;* and *Engaging the Powers*.

Wink’s first volume of the Powers is the most extensive investigation of the Powers language in the New Testament. Wink asserts that his work is a “pilgrimage away” from his predecessors who demythologised the Powers language to interpret and apply it to

---


their contemporary settings.³ The key argument Wink proposes in Naming the Powers is,

… “principalities and powers” are the inner and outer aspects of any given manifestation of power. As the inner aspect they are the spirituality of institutions, the “within” of corporate structures and systems, the inner essence of outer organization of the power. As the outer aspect they are political systems, appointed officials, the “chair” of an organization, laws – in short, all the tangible manifestations which power takes. Every Power tends to have a visible pole, an outer form – be it a church, a nation, or an economy – and an invisible pole, an inner spirit or driving force that animates, legitimates, and regulates its physical manifestation in the world.⁴

Wink buttresses this argument on the bases of exegetical study, Carl Jung, a process philosopher named Alfred North Whitehead, and a Jesuit priest named Pierre Teihard de Chardin who in some measure influences the process philosophy. As a New Testament scholar, Wink firstly completed a great deal of work examining biblical texts that spoke to both natural and supernatural powers, such as, “principalities and powers” (Eph. 6:12). Wink draws six preliminary hypotheses about the powers:

1. The language of power pervades the whole New Testament.
2. The language of power in the New Testament is imprecise, liquid, interchangeable, and unsystematic.
3. Despite all this imprecision and interchangeability, clear patterns of usage emerge.
4. Because these terms are to a certain degree interchangeable, one, a pair, or a series can be made to represent them all.
5. These powers are both heavenly and earthly, divine and human, spiritual and political, invisible and structural.
6. These powers are also both good and evil.⁵

After studying the powers language in the Bible, Wink lays out the last hypothesis,

“Unless the context further specifies …, we are to take the terms for power in their most comprehensive sense, understanding them to mean both heavenly and earthly, divine and human, spiritual and political, invisible and structural, good and evil.”⁶ Previous studies on the Powers draw a sharp distinction between spiritual and non-spiritual,

³ Wink, Naming the Powers, 5.
⁴ Ibid., 5.
⁵ Ibid., 7-11.
⁶ Ibid., 39.
heavenly and earthly, and visible and invisible. In contrast, Wink tries to synthesise those distinctions by creating what he calls an “integral worldview.” This synthesis runs counter to his predecessors who see spiritual and non-spiritual, heavenly and earthly, and good and evil separately. Against the backdrop of such interpretation, Wink insists that the Powers are not separate heavenly or ethereal entities, but the inner aspect of material or tangible manifestations of power.

As a cross-disciplinarian, Wink’s interpretation of the Powers from the perspective of myth relies heavily on a psychoanalyst named Carl Jung. For him, myths are not to be discarded, but instead considered revelatory. For instance, ancient Babylonians believed that the king and royal house were divine, and so shared divine supremacy. However, Wink believes that, “such myths of power are simply fabrications by the ruling classes;” thus, “they are the unconscious distillate of the actual spiritual quality … from the value systems and power relations of the existing state.” Therefore, myths are to be read as speaking symbolically of the real but invisible spiritual dimension of personal, corporate earthly existence. The Powers, for him, has dual identity – inner and outer.

Not only does Wink justify his interpretation of the Powers as the visible and invisible aspects of a material entity by the Jungian approach, he also affirms it through the lens

---

7 For instance, Wesley Carr insists that the NT writers saw the Powers to be altogether good. For Carr, the concept of mighty forces that are hostile to man, from which he sought relief, was not prevalent in the thought world of the first century A.D. Carr continues to insist that the Powers language demonstrates that the chief emphasis was upon angels as a means both of interpreting the activity of God among men, and of extolling the Lordship of Yahweh. In fact, evil was increasingly focused in the figure of Satan, *Angels and Principalities: The Background, meaning and development of the Pauline Phrase, Hai Archai Kai Hai Exousiai* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 122, 174. Wink was so dissatisfied with the way in which Carr argued because he saw that Carr’s work was largely in error. Reading Carr’s work led Wink to re-examine the Powers language in a much deeper and comprehensive way, so that he might be able to formulate Christian social ethics from it, *Naming the Powers*, ix-x.

8 Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 104. Italic is his.

9 Ibid., 134.

10 Ibid., 142. Wink’s emphasis on the interiority of an institution is also very similar to the Jungian concept of archetype. Archetype, according to Jung, refers to, “the structural components of the collective unconscious which are inherited and have developed through the consistent experiences of previous generations and seek expression in individual lives, i.e., archetypes include self, shadow, anima and animus, mandala, hero, god, sage, great mother, acolyte, the sun and moon, mother, father, son, daughter, and various animals,” David Matsumoto (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 50.
of process philosophy. With the paradigm of process philosophy, Wink redefines heaven not as a transcendent otherworldly place, but as a “home of the possible.”

For him, heaven is not “out” there, but “within;” that is, when a transformative possibility is accomplished, we experience the reality of heaven. In arguing so, Wink does not aim to advance a particular ontological position. Instead, he calls for the spiritual warfare to which the Christian church is called. Hence, he states that the war we are to fight is,

…the unseen clash of values and ideologies, of the spirituality of institutions and the will of God, of demonic factionalism and heavenly possibilities. The unique calling of the church in social change lies in making clear the dual nature of our task. We wrestle on two planes, the earthly and the heavenly – what I have called the outer and inner aspects of reality.

The second volume of the Powers trilogy, *Unmasking the Powers*, is a comprehensive exploration of seven words in the language of the Powers: Satan, demons, angels of churches, angels of nations, gods, elements of the universe, and angels of nature. In defining these words, Wink follows in the path of Rudolf Bultmann’s demythologised approach, which is an attempt to interpret the *kerygma* (the message of God’s decisive act in Christ) for the modern people by divesting the mythical forms to uncover the meaning of the Bible. As a modern western product, Wink discards the belief in the real existence of personal spirit-beings. Satan, for him, is not a metaphysical entity, but a function in the divine economy. Satan is a dialectical movement in God’s purpose which becomes evil only when humanity breaks off the dialectic by refusing creative choice. In short, Satan can be seen to be a chameleon that can be either a servant of God or evil, depending on our choice. In application, Wink suggests that we are not to deny

---

11 Ibid., 129. A process philosopher named Alfred North Whitehead views religion fundamentally as a struggle to internalise over our external living. He says, “Life is an internal fact for its own sake, before it is an external fact relating itself to others … Therefore (emphasis is mine), Religion is the art and the theory of the internal life of man, so far as it depends on the man himself and on what is permanent in the nature of things,” *Religion in the Making* (New York: Meridian Books, 1972), 15-16.

12 Ibid., 130.

13 Rudolf Bultmann believed that the world picture of the New Testament is pre-scientific and a mythical world picture. For instance, the Bible’s picture of the world as a three-story structure, with earth in the middle, heaven above it, and hell below it is, in fact, a myth, Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, translated by Schubert M. Ogden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 1.
and repress our evil but to strive “to face our own evil … to release the energy formerly devoted to restraining it, and use it for the service of life.”\textsuperscript{14} However, Wink seems to admit to the mystery of evil by saying that there is a residue of evil that we cannot defeat, of which we can trust God alone to transform.\textsuperscript{15}

In comprehending Satan, Wink’s approach is similar to René Girard, a French cultural anthropologist, whose mimetic theory is the backdrop through which Wink expounds the sacrifice and death of Jesus. Girard also sees that “Satan is the name of the mimetic process seen as a whole; that is why he is the source not merely of rivalry and disorder but of all the forms of lying order inside which humanity lives. That is the reason why he was a homicide from the beginning; Satan’s order had no origin other than murder and this murder is a lie.”\textsuperscript{16}

Regarding demons, Wink separates himself from the liberationist approach, which demonises the structural evil of the system and overlooks the predicament of the personal psyche. However, he also does not support the view held by many Americans, who symbolise the demonic as individual developmental malfunctions. What is more, the “third wave” or the Pentecostal-Charismatic’s view of demons as actual entities also does not satisfy him.\textsuperscript{17} The term “third wave” refers to a movement which is similar to both the Pentecostal movement (the first wave) and the charismatic movement (the second wave). It is composed largely of evangelical Christians who, while applauding and supporting the work of the Holy Spirit in the first two waves, have chosen not to be identified with either. The desire of those in the movement is to experience the power of the Holy Spirit in healing the sick, casting out demons, receiving prophecies, and

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 40.
\textsuperscript{17} Wink, \textit{Unmasking the Powers}, 41.
participating in other charismatic-type manifestations. This movement affirms the actual existence of spirit-beings.\textsuperscript{18} For example, C. Peter Wagner, a key leader in the third wave movement, views “principalities and powers” as evil spiritual beings, which can manifest themselves through institutions, natural phenomena, manufactured items, or human beings. These spirit-beings can possess a human person, and when they do so, they can be exorcised only in and by the name of Jesus Christ who defeated all evil spirits and his arch-angel Satan.

To reconcile these approaches, Wink creates three types of demonic manifestations: outer personal possession, collective possession, and the inner personal demonic. If a person has outer personal possession, he or she is possessed by “something that is alien and extrinsic to the self.”\textsuperscript{19} For instance, the demon-possessed man in the story of the Gerasenes (Mark 5:1-20) bears the brunt of the collective demonism, thereby personally having “a collective malady afflicting an entire society,”\textsuperscript{20} which is beyond personal restraints. Unlike outer personal possession, collective possession is the possession of groups or even nations by a god or demon that overpowers them to do whatever he or she wills.\textsuperscript{21} Wink sees the baptism practised in the early church as a form of exorcism because it “regarded everyone prior to baptism as possessed, by virtue of nothing more than belonging to a world in rebellion against God.” Simply put, “the very essence of collective demonism is its explicit and avowed idolatry of the leaders,”\textsuperscript{22} such as Adolf Hitler. For Wink, this possession is much subtler than others, because those who are

\textsuperscript{19} Wink, Unmasking the Powers, 43.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 43.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., Powers, 51. As Wink unmasks the Powers language from the Jungian view, the notion of collective possession is basically adapted from Jung’s collective shadow. For Jung, human psyche is not confined to individuals alone, but has a collective nature too. This collective psyche forms the “Zeitgeist” or spirit of the age. Nazi Germany is the best example to describe collective shadow (or possession for Wink). This possession or shadow can be seen in any mass movement, trend or gathering. A crowd at a football match forms a collective ego which casts a shadow or possession – uncontrolled hooliganism, Maggie Hyde and Michael McGuinness, Jung for Beginners (Cambridge: Icon Books, 1992), 90.
possessed seldom know until it is too late. The inner personal possession is the struggle for integrity within ourselves which is not to be exorcised, but “to be owned, embraced, loved, and transformed as part of the struggle for wholeness.”

By defining demonic possession in three ways, Wink intends that his proposal will help the readers to “identify the demonic as the psychic or spiritual power emanated by societies or institutions or individuals ... whose energies are bent on overpowering others.”

By the angels of the churches, Wink refers to the actual invisible spirituality of a congregation. Similarly, the angels of the nations also mean the real interiority of a social group or state. Gods, in Wink’s view, are structures that have mentality and communicability, through which personality and society are formed. By the elements of the universe, Wink refers to basic principles or entities through which the whole is established and sustained. However, the problem arises when a single principle is elevated above the whole, as it invites the rebound of the whole against the part. For example, “when we seek to justify ourselves by performing the tenets of some religious law, we can only feel guilty for failing …” Lastly, Wink sees the angels of nature as the archetypal beauty of the physical world and the whole universe. Overall, the entire volume of Unmasking the Powers is an exposition of all these powers in the light of the previous volume (Naming the Powers), wherein Wink argues that, “the Powers are simultaneously the outer and inner aspects of one and the same indivisible concretion of power.”

Wink, through the angles of the Jungian psychoanalysis and process
philosophy, presents that there is a spirituality of every institution in the world – church, nation, or social groups.31

To juxtapose the two volumes (Naming the Powers and Unmasking the Powers), the former lays a foundational premise for the argument, whereas the latter affirms the substantiation of the premise through examples – using the premise and applying it in interpreting the Powers. If so, the conclusion of the premise would be the third volume, Engaging the Powers,32 where Wink contends that nonviolence is the only means by which to bring the rebellious Powers back to the original divine purpose. It is crucial to note that Wink attempted to convey his purpose to formulate a Christian social ethic through the study of the Powers language. Practically speaking, the first volume highlights that any Power can become idolatrous by placing itself above God’s purpose for the good of the whole. If that happens, the onus is on the church to unmask this idolatry and bring the Powers back to their original divine purpose in the world.33 In the second volume, Wink sheds light on the ways in which Powers can become idolatrous, rebellious, and astray from God’s humanising purposes, that is, serving the basic human need to be fulfilled.34 In the third volume, Wink shows us how we can engage the

31 Wink used to emphasise this statement, “there is a spirituality of every institution in the world.” In his last public interview, he appeared to be convinced of that as he mentioned, “no matter where it goes or how it gets there, there is a spiritual reality,” Steve Holt, “Confronting the Powers: An Interview with Walter Wink and June Keener Wink,” Sojourners Magazine, December 2010.
33 Wink, Naming the Powers, 5. See also Thomas H. McAlpine, Facing the Powers, 22.
34 Walter Wink, The Powers That Be, 34. According to Wink, this volume is “in large part a digest of the third volume of the trilogy on the Powers, Engaging the Powers with elements from the previous two volumes: Naming the Powers and Unmasking the Powers, ix.” Therefore, I will cite from the Powers That Be sometimes, depending on the clarity of Wink’s presentation, since these two books (Engaging the Powers and The Powers That Be) are overlapped.
Powers in order that they might be brought back to their original divine plan. We will now take a look at how we can engage the rebellious Powers.

In *Engaging the Powers*, Wink begins by introducing a worldview, which he calls “integral.” Wink sees worldviews as the very foundation of the house of our minds. His description is succinct, stating:

> On that foundation we erect the walls and roof, which are myths we live by, the symbolic understandings of our world. The furnishings – the stuff to sit on, lie down on, and eat with – are our theologies and personal philosophies. People notice the sofa and rugs (our theologies), they comment on the structure (the key myths), but few notice the foundation (our worldview). It is covered, hidden from view.

There are, according to Wink, fundamentally five different worldviews: the ancient worldview, which sees everything earthly and heavenly as counterparts; the spiritualistic worldview, which values spirit over material; the materialistic worldview, which is the opposite of the spiritualistic worldview; the theological worldview, that looks at the spiritual world as noumenal; and lastly, an integral worldview, which sees everything as having an outer and an inner aspect. For Wink, this worldview opens the way for us to perceive the actual spirituality or “withinness” at the centre of the political, economic, and cultural institutions of our time. After introducing an integral worldview, Wink powerfully applies his interpretation of the Powers as inner and outer manifestations of the same indivisible concretion of power and an integral worldview in creating a strong Christian social ethic. By and large, Wink’s social ethic can be categorised into three ways: the “Domination System” (DS), “God’s Domination-Free Order” (DFO), and the “Third Way of Jesus.”

---

35 Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers*: Wink, in his autobiographical reflections, describes that he has had great interest in worldview since he was a student at Southern Methodist University, Walter Wink with Steve E. Berry, *Just Jesus: My Struggle to Become Human* (New York, NY: the Crown Publishing Group, 2014), 52.
36 Wink, *Just Jesus*, 51.
37 Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 4-6; *The Powers That Be*, 15-20; *Just Jesus*, 87-89;
38 Ibid., 6. For Carl Jung, the spirituality or “withinness” is the collective unconscious, which means a realm of largely unexplored spiritual reality linking everyone to everything.
2.1.1.1 The Domination System

Wink views the world as operating under the Domination System (henceforth DS). For Wink, the DS is a system in which people stay within their own groups; a system where the poor become poorer and the rich, richer; or a vicious circle in which a person is enslaved. Regardless of doing their best with all their might, they are unable to escape from the System. This DS can be characterised as, “unjust economic relations, oppressive political relations, biased race relations, patriarchal gender relations, hierarchical power relations, and the use of violence to maintain them all.”³⁹ How did the DS originate in the human world? Who or what caused it to exist? For Wink, the reason the DS came into existence is the Powers’ rebellious derailment from the original divine purpose.

As noted above, God created the Powers for the welfare of humanity. However, they become demonic when they are derailed from their divine purpose. The derailment results in the DS. The “myth of redemptive violence”⁴⁰ is the spirit or soul of the DS. Wink contends that the DS has been deeply ingrained in human society throughout history. He unearths ancient Babylonian cosmogony and the myth of human creation, and puts this alongside children’s comics and cartoons such as Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Superman, Superwoman, Captain America, Long Ranger, Batman, and so on, with the ideology of national security, which makes a nation what it is.⁴¹

---

⁴⁰ The phrase “the myth of redemptive violence” is coined by Wink, referring to the belief that violence can be overcome by violence alone. In other words, it is a way of thinking and the belief that we can defeat violence through the use of violence alone.
⁴¹ Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 43. One of the most recent Marvel Comic characters is Captain America, a noble and honest superhero. The character was, in fact, created to help enhance the patriotic spirit of young Americans, thereby embodying the transcendent American ideals of liberty and justice, and becoming a unique symbol of the values underpinning the republic, Robert G. Weiner, ed., *Captain America and the Struggle of the Superhero* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009), 9, 15.
The ancient Babylonian cosmogony found in a mythic structure of other Ancient Near Eastern cultures, alludes to the fact that humans are inherently and intrinsically evil and violent; hence, it is no wonder why the belief in the myth of redemptive violence overpowers the whole human race. This DS irresistibly besieges all human races, so that no single person or community is exempted from its presence. Unlike the Babylonian myth, the Bible pictures a good God as the author of good creation. Neither evil nor violence is a part of creation, but they enter as the result of the actions of human beings. Wink’s attempt to picture the world as the DS helps us perceive the actual reality of the place in which we are living, whether we agree with his view or not. In a sense, Wink exposes the harsh reality of our world. The question before us is, “Should we pretend not to see it so, run away from it, or face its reality as it is?” Nevertheless, Wink shows that God does not leave humanity in a dead end; there is an alternative through which we can transform it into something.

2.1.1.2 God’s Domination-Free Order

Despite the fact that the world in which we live is cruel, Walter Wink argues that there is an answer to the DS which Jesus envisioned and implemented. It is God’s Domination-Free Order (henceforth DFO), or in biblical vocabulary, the Reign or Kingdom of God, which is antithetical to the DS. This DFO is characterised by gender equality, power-sharing, economic equity, equality of race, nonviolent confrontation, inclusive God-images, inter-dependent relationships, and the like. Nonviolence is the spirit or soul of the DFO. Jesus taught this, and demonstrated it in the way he lived. In Wink’s eyes, not only did Jesus envision the Reign of God, he also demonstrated how it could be achieved through his willing submission to death. The death of Jesus

\[^[42]\text{Wink, Engaging the Powers, 13-31.}\]
\[^[43]\text{Ibid., 14.}\]
\[^[44]\text{Ibid., 46-47.}\]
has broken the spiral of violence. To support this view, Wink relies on a French anthropologist René Girard’s theory of the “scapegoat mechanism,” and reads the sacrificial system of the Israelites in the Old Testament in the light of this view.

According to Girard, we imitate each other (mimesis) by desiring what others desire. This desire leads to mimetic rivalry when two or more people want the same thing at the same time. The rivalry between two people tends to spread in a mimetic contagion to everyone in contact with it. The mimetic contagion affects each individual, and the unrest between them becomes a spiritual mimetic force. This is the mimetic crisis.

Finally, this rivalry causes the breakdown of the order of the social distinctions which Girard calls the crisis of anti-differential or sacrificial crisis. To prevent this breakdown, society has to find a scapegoat upon which all hatred, resentments, and violent impulses are heaped. For Girard, real or symbolic, sacrifice is primarily a collective activity of the entire community, which purifies itself of its own disorder through the unanimous immolation of a victim. When a ritual was done in this manner, a scapegoat practice took place:

…the strange process through which two or more people are reconciled at the expense of a third party who appears guilty or responsible for whatever ails, disturbs, or frightens the scapegoaters. They feel relieved of their tensions and they coalesce into a more harmonious group.

Therefore, Girard sees the function of sacrifice as an action “to quell violence within the community and to prevent conflicts from erupting.”

46 Ibid., 145.
47 Britton W. Johnston, “René Girard’s Mimetic Theology as the Basis for a Fundamental Practical Theology (PhD dissertation: the School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2015), 29.
49 Wink, Engaging the Powers, 145-146.
50 René Girard, The Girard Reader (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000), 10. In saying that, Girard does not mean that all rituals have the same implication in the same manner.
51 Ibid., 11.
52 René Girard, Violence and Sacred, 14.
Wink believes that the scapegoat mechanism or sacrificial system is the soul of the DS.

But, Jesus has exposed that mechanism and broken the spiral of violence through his death on the cross. What made the death of Jesus unique was neither his suffering nor persecution, but his willing submission unto death. Through this submission, Jesus exposed the judgment upon him as a total miscarriage of justice and a crime against God. In rejecting revenge and violence, Jesus broke the spiral of violence. So, in Wink’s words, “God was working through violence to expose violence for what it is and to reveal the divine nature as nonviolent.”53 Thus, Jesus became the last scapegoat so as to reconcile us, once and for all, to God.54

In short, through Jesus, the scapegoat mechanism, the heart of the DS is exposed, and the spiral of violence broken. So, the gospel of Jesus has the power to render the scapegoat mechanism impotent and unmask the behind-the-scenes work of the Powers. The church, as the body of Christ, is called to live out the true meaning of the gospel; namely to unmask the scapegoat mechanism and disarm the Powers.55 Wink moves a step further than Girard regarding Jesus’ sacrifice. That is, Jesus’ willing submission to the powers that be, for Wink, is not just a way to expose the scapegoat mechanism of that time, but also a kind of resistance which Wink calls the “third way.”

2.1.1.3 Nonviolence or Jesus’ Third Way: The Way to End the DS

Walter Wink believes that Jesus as the bringer of the Kingdom of God or the DFO demonstrated its realistic vision through his teaching and example. He calls it Jesus’
third way or nonviolent resistance, which is an exegetical exposition of Jesus’
instruction in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:38-42.

You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”
But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on
the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and
take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to
go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and
do not refuse the one who would borrow from you (ESV).

For Wink, there are two standard responses to violence: flight or passivity and fight or
violence. Jesus’ way is not the first or the second, but the third way: nonviolent direct
action. Violence, for Wink, can only encounter the advocates of a system, not its spirit;
thus, it does not tackle the system deeply enough. Instead of violence, through
nonviolence we can transform the Powers and bring them back to their divine purpose,
which is the welfare of the human race. In other words, Jesus’ third way alone can deal
with both the outer, physical, visible aspects and the inner, spiritual, invisible
dimensions of a particular social system.

Wink’s reasons for nonviolence can be highlighted in seven points. First, through
nonviolent loving, an enemy can be transformed into a friend. Second, nonviolence
affirms that means and ends go hand in hand. Third, nonviolence demonstrates respect
for the rule of law. Fourth, through nonviolence, we can overcome our own evil within
us. Fifth, nonviolence is not legislation, but a gift and a method of discipleship. Sixth,
nonviolence is Jesus’ way of dealing with evil – it is the way of the cross. Seventh,
nonviolence is not reserved only for Christians; its principles are relevant to other
religions. Wink’s last point affirms the inclusive nature of nonviolence for any
religion as this research explores nonviolence from both Christian and Buddhist
perspectives.

---

56 Walter Wink, Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 57-93.
In listing these principles, Wink is aware of the risk of choosing a nonviolent response to violence. According to Wink, Jesus’ Third Way is much tougher and more demanding than the “flight” or “fight” positions, because it requires a person to be courageous and to dare to sacrifice even their own life. In addition, Wink affirms that the way to nonviolence is a life-long journey, preparing oneself to be ready to encounter whatever sacrifice at any time. Thus, Wink redefines the theological term “rebirth,” or being “born-again,” as dying to what our socialisation has spuriously produced in us.

The term “rebirth” or “being born-again” is one of the key theological themes in Christianity, especially among conservative evangelicals. For conservative evangelicals, “rebirth” is synonymous with “regeneration.” It is a change in a person’s disposition: from the lawless, godless self-seeking that dominates, to a disposition of trust and love, marked by repentance for past rebelliousness and unbelief, and ready compliance with God’s law.57 According to this definition, “rebirth” is more concerned with a change in the inner attitude in relation to God, than with social conditions. In contrast, Wink’s view of “rebirth” is more about the business of social conditioning, a horizontal relationship, rather than the vertical person-to-God relationship. This also means “abandoning our egocentricity not only as individuals, but as cultures, as nations, even as a species, and voluntarily subordinating our desires to the needs of the total life system.”58 With this radical commitment, Christians are called to live non-violently. So, nonviolence becomes more than a method: it becomes a lifestyle. Nonviolence or the third way that Jesus taught and exemplified through his life is, therefore, neither a “fight” nor “flight” response. It is “a way by which evil can be opposed without being

57 Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, 2nd ed., s.v. “Regeneration.”
58 Wink, The Powers That Be, 95, 97.
mirrored, the oppressor resisted without being emulated, and the enemy neutralised without being destroyed.”

In the last two chapters of Engaging the Powers, Wink articulates the way in which both prayers can sustain our inner life during the time of our engagement with the Powers. As traditionally understood, Wink does not see prayer like sending a letter to Heaven where God dwells; but through prayer, we are engaged in the act of co-creation with God. Having understood prayer in this way, Wink expands the scope of prayer by including the Powers, saying that prayer is not just a two-way transaction. Prayer involves not just God and people, but God and people and the Powers. The fallen powers always hinder, block and thwart our prayers to God, like they did with Daniel (Dan. 10:12). But we are not to be dismayed, because God can raise up the leader like Cyrus who delivered the Jews from Babylon. So, we pray because we trust in God’s miracle-working power. For Wink, he prays because he

… sees the demonic as arising within the institution itself, as it abandons its divine vocation for a selfish, lesser goal. Therefore I would not attempt to cast out the spirit of a city, for example, but, rather, to call on God to transform it, to recall it to its divine vocation. My spiritual conversation is with God, not the demonic.

Finally, Wink discusses what should come next after the Powers fall as a result of nonviolent engagement. Put differently, Wink sheds light on the necessity of what needs to follow in the process of reconciliation when liberation or revolution succeeds. He addresses the important questions, “How can the perpetrators and the perpetrated be reconciled? What are the essentials in the process of reconciliation?” Wink believes that the key to the process of reconciliation is forgiveness, without which no true reconciliation can come into fruition. However, he clarifies that reconciliation is the

---

59 Wink, Engaging the Powers, 189.
60 Ibid., 309-311; The Powers That Be, 190.
61 Wink, The Powers That be, 197.
62 Wink’s Powers studies are commonly known as a trilogy. But after the third volume, Wink wrote a follow-up book (When the Powers Fall: Reconciliation in the Healing of Nations), or maybe it is called the fourth volume of the Powers.
goal, whereas forgiveness is the means by which to achieve it. To illustrate, a victim can forgive his/her perpetrator who may be still alive or already dead. This kind of act is the attempt of a victim alone without the participation of the perpetrator. In contrast, reconciliation requires both parties – a victim and a perpetrator – to forgive and confess to each other and go forward into the common future together. Though forgiveness plays a crucial role in the process of reconciliation, the steps (truth-telling, apology and amnesty) to reach reconciliation vary from case to case.

2.1.2 Why Wink?

As mentioned before, Walter Wink was an American scholar and activist, whose socio-political context is fundamentally different from the context in which this thesis is located. The question – “Why do I then use Wink as a framework to formulate theological implications for Christians in Myanmar?” – can be posed. There are five specific reasons why Wink is chosen among a high number of Christian and non-Christian theorists of nonviolence.

Firstly, Wink’s comprehensive framework for interpreting the biblical term *kosmos* (the world) as the Domination System is convincing and germane to the context of Myanmar, where the domineering attitude is rampantly ingrained in the fraught history of the nation. Hence, this naming of the world as the DS will be a key thought through which to scrutinise the historical root of power-hungry attitudes in the areas of political leadership and administration in Myanmar via the eyes of Wink.

Secondly, Wink’s foremost accentuation of Jesus’ teaching, i.e. loving enemies, decisively relates to Myanmar where Buddhism is claimed as the state religion. What is

---

64 Ibid., 21, 33-35.
more, his thought-provoking question – “how can we find God in our enemies?”65 – is, to the Myanmar context, challenging as well as inspiring to all who struggle to surmount domination without creating new forms of domination. Since love (mettā) plays a vital role for all Buddhists, Wink’s exposition of love would apply to the Myanmar context where Buddhism is deeply entrenched in various sectors of society. Thus, through the conscientious study of love (for Buddhists, mettā), this research will bring out a common ground upon which both Christian and Buddhist activists can stand together to fight for the domination-free order (to borrow Wink’s term).

The third reason why Wink is chosen is the way he expounds the nature of the Powers. To put it in order: The Powers are good because God has created them to serve the humanising purposes of God; the Powers are fallen because they serve their own interests rather than God’s; and the Powers will be redeemed because what fell can be redeemed in time.66 Wink sees this schema as both temporal and simultaneous, in sequence and all at once. It is temporal because it is time-bound. It is simultaneous because the redemption of the Powers cannot be done once and for all due to their fallenness. Wink further explains that God’s liberation is for both human beings bound by the Powers and the Powers themselves. Therefore, the undertaking of redemption goes beyond the change in the individual; it reaches the fallen institutions. In other words, liberation is social as well as personal. This theological framework can be a foundation for assessing the socio-cultural structure of Myanmar, in which liberation is mostly considered as personal among Christians and non-Christians alike.

Fourthly, Christians in Myanmar, by and large, view the Powers as actual spirit-beings, and regarding them as structural is hardly ever heard in preaching and teaching in churches or Christian gatherings. To be specific, Eph. 6:12 is usually interpreted as

---

65 Wink, Engaging the Powers, 263.
66 Wink, The Powers That Be, 32.
spiritual warfare and we Christians are called to it. In the warfare, the enemies we are fighting are not human with blood and flesh, but actual spirit-beings, which cannot be seen or touched, but their presence and power is real. Further, people in Myanmar are culturally person-focused and much less structure-oriented than the Western people. People do not care much about what organisation or institutional structures (policies, rules and regulations, bylaws, and offices) are, but show more interest in who is the chief authority of the organisation. Therefore, Wink’s structural reading of the Powers language is very peculiar for his interpretation. The hypothesis is that examining the Burmese political context through the lens of Wink will expose Burmese politics in a way that has never been done before.

Finally, this study is a Christian approach to nonviolence using a Christian theologian, even though the location in which this study situates is predominantly Buddhist. It is not unusual to use a Christian approach to expand its applicability to another context. Wink, as a Christian scholar, exegetes a biblical passage (Mt. 5:38-42) to interpret and speak to the world both in affirmative and critical ways. Despite the contextual difference, the faith that Wink practised is still the same that Christians in Myanmar share; therefore, it is assumed that Wink’s ethical understanding of nonviolence must have something to speak to the context of this study.

2.2 Wink in Dialogue with Others: Toward a Constructive Frame

Bringing Wink’s theology of nonviolence into dialogue with other scholars will enable us to discern which parts of Wink’s view of nonviolence need to be affirmed, and which are to be integrated or reformulated. Wink’s contribution to social ethics through his interpretation of the biblical language of the Powers is extremely valuable. For example, Robert Ewusie Moses’ Practices of Power, the most recent work on the Powers language, says, “every work that addresses the biblical concept of powers must grapple
with Wink’s provocative thesis.” Of course, there are also some critical points to be made as there are commendable arguments Wink brings to the table. What follows in the discussion is, “What positive and negative comments do other scholars render Wink?” Likewise, “what can Wink offer in response to them?” More specifically, we will see the valuable thoughts of his ethical understanding of nonviolence through interacting with scholars who both agree and disagree with him. Following that, some critical points that he raises will be discussed, with the intention of constructing a frame for the study of Burmese politics.

2.2.1 The Powers as the Basis of a Christian Social Ethic

Wink formulates an ethical theory on the basis of the Powers language. How can this approach be justified? Or does this approach do justice to the biblical and ethical studies? How do other scholars respond to this approach? In general, some scholars have appreciatively argued for Wink’s view, while others have not. First, we will highlight some scholars’ appreciative arguments for Wink’s interpretation. A great deal of recognition is given to Wink for his discovery of the spiritual aspect of an institution, which he calls its “withinness” or “interiority.” For instance, Stephen Noll considers Wink’s Powers trilogy as a rediscovery of “the spiritual inside of the generic order of the elements of the world.” Similarly, Nancey Murphy comments that Wink’s discerning eye which distinguishes the spiritual from the material element, is unique in our individualistic culture. This reawakening of the awareness of the spiritual dimension helps us to be aware of the aspect of social entities which transcends the individuals involved in them. For Robert E. Moses, Wink is right to be commended for

challenging our modern obsession with materiality." Truly, it is untenable for people to believe in unseen spiritual things as the world is secularised. The word “secularization” describes the best way to talk about discarding the belief in unseen or spiritual things. In short, belief in the spiritual or unseen world is archaic and left in the premodern period. The idea of secularisation is defined as “the process in modern societies whereby religious ideas, practice and organization lose their influence in the fact of scientific and other knowledge.” Unseen things and scientifically unverified values are discarded in favour of scientifically tested facts.

Thus, Wink’s rediscovery of the importance of the invisible and spiritual dimension of an institution when applied to the area of social institutions will be a paradigm through which to seek the socio-political context of Myanmar where the Powers are visibly and invisibly, physically and spiritually dominant. How does Wink’s interpretation of the Powers as simultaneously the outer and inner manifestations of an institution do justice to the area of the New Testament and theological studies? What specific critiques can we give him?

### 2.2.1.1 Hermeneutical-Methodological Critiques

As mentioned, Wink’s Powers trilogy has had a significant impact on many Christian social ethicists. However, some critics fundamentally disagree with his interpretation of the Powers in terms of exegetical, hermeneutical and theological approaches. First, these critics point out that Wink lets his worldview be his exegetical base to interpret the Powers language, not the text itself. Chloe Lynch indicates, “Wink’s worldview is

---

72 In an interview with Wink, perhaps the last one before his death, Steve Holt introduces Wink’s Powers trilogy as the work that unpacks the spiritual significance of political and societal institutions (the biblical “principalities and powers’) and their role in systematic injustice, “Confronting the Powers: An Interview with Walter Wink and June Keener Wink,” *Sojourners Magazine*, (December 2010), 30.
more inviolable to him than the Scripture.”73 In his dissertation, Landon Matthew Coleman also observes that, “For the most part Wink mocks the ancient worldview and its interpretation of the principalities and powers.… On the other hand, he tries to redefine and re-word the ancient worldview itself so that it supports his proposals.”74

From an African perspective, Kabiro wa Gatumu suggests that Wink’s structuralist reading leaves us with numerous questions about whether it is logical to equate supernatural powers with the structures of human existence and the inner spirituality of an institution, and whether it is also reasonable to regard the “principalities and powers” as the inner and spiritual essence or gestalt of an institution or state.75 Thus, the prime critique against Wink is the dominance of his worldview in interpreting the Powers language.

Another critical comment is that Wink commits a methodological error, “an illegitimate totality transfer.”76 According to this critique, Wink, after his studies of all the Powers-related terminology in Naming the Powers, concludes, “Unless the context specifies … we are to take the terms for power in their most comprehensive sense.”77 Thus, his conclusion is generalising all Powers-related terms as imprecise, liquid, and interchangeable, therefore, they should be comprehensively understood. Upon this, Arnold critiques, “Because one term may have five different applications, it does not mean that all five applications may be used simultaneously.”78

---

73 Chloe Lynch, “How Convincing is Walter Wink’s Interpretation of Paul’s Language of the Powers,” Evangelical Quarterly 83.3 (July 2011): 264.
76 D. A. Carson defines this error: “The fallacy in this instance lies in the supposition that the meaning of a word in a specific context is much broader than the context itself allows and may bring with it the word’s entire semantic range.” D. A. Carson, Exegetical Fallacies, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 61.
77 Wink, Naming the Powers.
The third error that Wink commits according to his critics is personal belief. It is Wink’s unbelief in the existence of personal spirit-beings that disappoints conservative scholars who presume the biblical or ancient worldview to be real, or who believe in the actual existence of spiritual entities. In his observation about Wink’s Powers trilogy, Gailyn Van Rheenen also wonders, “Why these Western theologians were forced to find a new paradigm for interpreting spiritual powers in the Bible. Could they not have interpreted the passages literally as personal spiritual beings?” Arnold also indicates that Wink’s argument would be reasonable merely for unbelievers of the existence of personal spiritual beings; however, for someone like him who believes in their existence, it is “unnecessary and even erroneous.” In short, the abovementioned critics are concerned with his worldview assumptions, his exegetical and methodological errors, and his unbelief in the existence of spiritual entities.

My disagreement with Wink’s interpretation of the Powers particularly concerns his total disregard for the writers of the New Testament who viewed the powers as spiritual entities with intellect and will, whose actions affect human life on earth. To use a personal illustration, I was brought up in Myanmar where belief in supernatural entities is common. For me, no logical or reasonable argument is necessary to affirm the actual existence of spirit-beings. For missionaries, pastors, and any sort of Christian ministers in remote parts of Myanmar, no affirmation or approval of the existence of spiritual entities is needed; their actual realities seem so obvious. In many villages of Myanmar, the witch doctor or sorcerer is still more authoritative than the village or town sheriff or headperson. The villagers are more prone to follow whatever the sorcerer asks them to do.

---

81 See also R. E. Moses, Practices of Power, 34.
do than what the sheriff or village-head does. Despite my personal belief of the Powers as personal, this research focuses on the interpretation of the Powers as structural in the context of Myanmar. Actually, the majority of Christians in Myanmar regard the Powers as spirit-beings. What they fail to look at is the structural dimension of the Powers. Therefore, this study asserts that reading the Powers as structural would help us comprehend the politics of Myanmar in a different way.

True, Wink admits his unbelief in the actual existence of spirit-beings. But this bias leads him too far that he fails to find another explanation for those Powers. Instead, he equates demons and evil spirits with Carl Jung’s “psychic or spiritual power emanated by organisations or individuals.”\(^82\) His bias or unbelief in the actual existence of evil spirits compels him to be constrained to find another explanation.\(^83\)

Moreover, Wink’s mythical reading of human fallenness and the Powers language (demons, angels, gods, and evil spirits) has looked daringly modern that he seems forgetful to engage the ancient thought-form of viewing powers as personal spirit-beings. This imbalance between premodern and modern worldviews finally leads him to not just hermeneutical, but also theological flaws.\(^84\) His hermeneutical and theological presuppositions are rampant in interpreting and formulating the theory of nonviolence throughout the Powers trilogy. Could he not interpret those Powers as he does now without discarding completely the actual existence of spirit-beings?

If Wink’s theology of the Powers has such exegetical and methodical flaws, why does this study still use him as a lens to look at Burmese politics? There are some reasons why this study adopts Wink’s Powers trilogy. First, it is important to acknowledge that

\(^82\) Wink, *Naming the Powers*, 104.
\(^83\) See also Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 198.
there is a wide range of sources upon which Christian ethicists establish their ethical exploration and arguments. In general, there are different sources or bases of Christian ethics through which ethicists argue, establish, formulate ethical frames and deal with the moral issues Christians are facing. The sources are, by and large, the Bible, Christian tradition, Christian experience, and reason or natural law. For the Bible-based ethicists, they appeal to the Scripture in reflecting how Christians should live, though there is no consensus on how it should be done since many passages in the Bible can be interpreted in more than one way. For Christian tradition-based ethicists, what matters in Christian thought and practice is how the present church remains faithful to the original witness of the Apostles. Third, appeals to Christian experience which has a variety of forms, but essentially Christian life is regarded as existential commitment; that is, an individual Christian is moral, not simply because of acting morally, but also because of intending to act morally. The last group, reason-centred ethicists, believe the importance of Scripture, but they place more stress on the inherent logos of the natural world.

According to this category of Christian ethical bases, Wink falls under the domain of the Bible as the source for Christian ethics. As noted, even among the Bible-based ethicists, there is a wide variety of different approaches and theories for interpreting the Bible. Wink’s approach to interpreting the Powers is evidently not a conservative

---

86 Philip Turner, “Tradition in the Church,” in The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics, 130.
87 Robin Gill, A Textbook of Christian Ethics, 12.
88 Stephen Pope, “Reason and Natural law,” from The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics, 148.
89 Robin Gill states the seven problems for using the Bible in doing Christian ethics. First, a particular passage can be interpreted in more than one way. For example, Augustine varied in his interpretation of Genesis 3, differing from his earlier allegorical interpretations to literalistic ones. Second, there are different voices on the authority of the Bible, such as “is the Bible infallible?” Third, “it is difficult to treat all parts of the Bible with equal seriousness and attention and not to be biblically selective.” Fourth, there is a dispute regarding tensions between Old Testament and New Testament moral precepts. Fifth, should the words and actions of Jesus be given precedence over others? Sixth, how far can the teaching of Paul be reconciled with what can be known about the teaching of Jesus? Seventh, is the Bible still
approach, because he scraps the biblical-ancient worldview for its extraneousness to the modern context. As a biblical scholar, Wink has his own approach to interpreting the Scriptures, which he developed long before his Powers trilogy. This book is the *Bible in Human Transformation*, published in 1973. There, Wink proposes a paradigm shift in the way we study the Bible – a turn from biblical criticism to being subservient to human transformation.

In short, Wink’s hermeneutics engages what the reader has with what the text says. Interpretation, for him, is not “a question of accepting or rejecting what is said in the text, but of self and social exploration in terms of the question which the text, possibly even in an inadequate or antiquated way, has nevertheless been indispensable in helping us to recover.” In *Naming the Powers*, Wink follows the same hermeneutical approach, and makes it clear that his intention is not to remove the mythic dimension, but “rather juxtapose the ancient myth with the emerging postmodern (mythic) worldview and asking how they might mutually illuminate each other.” In fact, Wink is consistent in using a method he proposes in *The Bible in Human Transformation* for interpreting the scriptural passages in his later works. For example, in *Cracking the*...
*Gnostic Code: The Powers in Gnosticism*, Wink suggests that “ancient mythical language can and should be read, in the light of modern depth psychology, as a description of the interior dimensions of personal and social life.”

As examined, we have seen that Christian ethicists have diverse approaches in interpreting the Bible, despite using the same Bible as the source for Christian ethics. Wink has his own hermeneutical method in interpreting the Bible for ethical explorations; hence, it is unfair to consider his approach as faulty by another scholar’s method alone. What is more, we have noted that Wink is consistent in the way he treats the scriptural passages throughout his writings in the same method he proposes. Wink’s primary concern with hermeneutics is not about exploring objectivistic or historical reality but discovering an interface between what the text says and what the reader has in mind. In short, Wink’s approach and interpretation of the Powers language is safe and reasonably valid within his own interpretive framework. On top of that, the main focus of attention in this research is not on his hermeneutical approach to the Powers language, but on the social ethic that he advances. Therefore, his hermeneutic may be disputable, but a social ethic that he offers is, as described above, applicable to the political context of Myanmar.

Despite the criticism given, Wink’s interpretation of the Powers can still be justified by indicating two points. First, Wink’s Powers trilogy was developed to formulate a Christian social ethic. He admits that reading William Stringfellow’s *Free in Obedience* planted seeds in his mind of the possibility of constructing social ethics on the basis of

---


95 Truly, Wink’s interpretative frame can be criticised in numerous ways. But, this part does not necessarily relate to the key component of this research.
The implication is that Wink did study the Powers language with the aim of creating a social ethic. In addition, the stimulus for Wink in articulating his notion of the Powers was his personal encounters with military dictatorships in Latin America, where he experienced human rights violations and oppression under military dictatorships. Those experiences eventually led him to do an exegetical study of the Powers language. With the help of Stringfellow and his experiences in those South American countries, Wink launched his study of the Powers language in order to construct a social ethic. It is clear that his chief aim was to search for a social ethic rather than to seek the literal and historical meaning of the Powers vocabulary.

Secondly, in spite of his disbelief in the personal aspect of the Powers, Wink argues that they have a spiritual dimension. In order to maintain both structuralist and spiritualistic readings, Wink creates an “integral worldview.” Put differently, as a shrewd scholar, Wink attempts to be a go-between for the ancient worldview and the postmodern. Despite this, Wink’s integral worldview is not a new idea for the Asians. For instance, a Chinese way of thinking, known as the yin/yang figure, has infused the thinking of other Asians, such as Korean, Japanese, Burmese, and so on. So, it is not an integral worldview itself that is insightful, but his implication of it in the area of socio-political realities. For Asians, the “principalities and powers,” needless to say, are considered to be supernatural beings that independently exist and interfere in human affairs. What they fail to do is to see the connection between these supernatural powers and

---

96 Wink, Naming the Powers, xi; Walter Wink, The Powers That Be, 203. Stringfellow, though he was not a so-called academic theologian, caught Karl Barth’s attention, a giant of theology in the 20th century, during Barth’s visit to the United States in 1962. Stimulated by Stringfellow’s questions on the panel, Barth turned to the audience and said, “You should listen to this man!” Bill Wylie Kellermann (ed.), A Keeper of the Word: Selected Writings of William Stringfellow (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 1.

97 In a four-month sabbatical in 1982, Wink and his wife, June, visited Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and spent most of their time in Chile. Wink started seeing those who were suffering from human rights violations and hunger under military dictatorships in those countries.

98 Yin/yang is a concept of describing the interdependent nature of quasi-opposite forces such as male and female, light and darkness, high and low, hot and cold, water and fire, life and death. This view does not see these realities as opposites, but as complementary to each other. For example, there cannot be the bottom of the foot without the top.
institutions through the lens of yin/yang. The consequence is disintegration between them. In contrast, Wink’s view is an enlightening thought, recognising the spiritual and invisible dimension of an institution. Through Wink’s eyes, the missing connection between the Powers and institutions can be bridged. Wink’s argument for an intrinsic relationship between spiritual and physical is a lens for this research to look at the political context of Myanmar.

2.2.1.2 Theological-Philosophical Critiques

Wink is also criticised for his modern liberal theological positions, which, for some theologians, divert away from historic Christianity. The first is his view of God, angels, Satan, and heaven, which he adapted from process philosophy. Process theology has a view of God, which is similar to “panentheism,” differing from theism and pantheism.99 Panentheism is slightly different from pantheism. That is, God is in everything; He is present in all the world, but not limited by the world. Charles Hartshorne is often quoted to define the idea of God in process theism,

The two “poles” or aspects of God are the abstract essence of God, on the one hand, and God’s concrete actuality on the other. The abstract essence is eternal, absolute, independent, unchangeable …. The concrete actuality is temporary, relative, dependent, and constantly changing … Hence, God’s concrete knowledge is dependent upon the decisions made by the worldly actualities.100

In “panentheism,” God’s imminence or withinness in our world is given precedence over his transcendence. Stephen Noll indicates Wink’s failure in providing for the transcendent role of angels, especially the holy angels. What is more, Noll continues to say, “Given Wink’s world picture, this is not surprising: just as the angels are ‘within’ the world, so God also is wholly within the world (panentheism).”101 In addition,

99 Theism is mostly defined as the belief that God who is one infinite, all-powerful, all-knowing, completely good, exists and has created the universe, C. Stephen Evans, Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics & Philosophy of Religion (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), 114. Pantheism means all is God.
101 Noll, “Thinking about Angels,” 25. Panentheism is the view that God is in the universe, yet he is beyond it. There is a slight difference to pantheism, for which, God and the universe are strictly identical. But in panentheism, the universe does not exhaust God; however, it is part of the reality of God. It is true
Wink’s attempt to view heaven as the metaphor of “withinness” or “inwardness” instead of otherworldly or “above” is liable to make a theological error. For this, Lawrence Osborn specifies that “treating heaven as the soul of the earth is a significant step towards the divinisation of the cosmos.”

In treating heaven, angels, and demons as metaphorical images, Wink, in one way or another, might be called as an advocate of the “emergent or emerging Christian movement” – the movement that attempts to radically redefine the key concepts of Christianity, such as God, Jesus, heaven, hell, angels and demons, and so on. For example, a widely known emergent leader Rob Bell, in his book *Love Wins*, defines the concepts of God and heaven in three ways by looking at what Jesus means by heaven: first, heaven is sometimes synonymous with the name God; second, the future when heaven and earth are coming together; third, heaven as present, *eternal, intense, real experiences of joy, peace, and love in this life*, with an emphasis on the third definition of heaven, and saying heaven is a present reality.

Somewhat similarly, the emerging movement endeavours to find the relevance of Christianity in the context of post-Christendom. In an introduction to the book *The Church in Emerging Culture*, Leonard Sweet presents that a classic work of Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, itself has no

---

102 Lawrence Osborn, “Angels: Barth and Beyond” in *The Unseen World*, edited by Anthony N.S. Lane, 44.

103 Here it is used as “emergent or emerging” inclusively because some see these two differently, but others don’t. This movement is the most recent and growing Christian movement in the West, especially in the USA. This movement is also known as a form of postmodern Christianity. Robert E. Webber introduces a Christian movement led mostly by younger Christian generations in his book *The Younger Evangelicals* (2002). He is very optimistic about the future of Christianity that these leaders are bringing in. For Webber, these younger evangelicals are committed to witnessing the gospel which is biblically and historically rooted, and culturally connected in the 21st century, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 16-17. As a critic says, the weakness of Webber’s book is its lack of systematic research. It is more a compilation of observations from a sympathetic observer than the results of an academic analysis, Cory E. Labanow, *Evangelicalism and the Emerging Church: A Congregational Study of a Vineyard Church* (Surrey, GU: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 4.

relevancy in talking about the context of this time since it speaks in the modern context with an either-or or dichotomous mentality.\textsuperscript{105} Wink expressed once that he wished he would get involved in a leading role for the movement.\textsuperscript{106} In short, Wink is seen to some as moving away from an historic Christian teaching, which is fundamentally based on a particular interpretation.

More than that, Wink’s theological enterprise throughout his life is apparently liberalistic with humanistic emphasis. His two books – \textit{The Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of the Man} and \textit{Just Jesus: My Struggle to Become Human} – show the theological orientation that he had been pursuing in his life. It seems that whether Jesus is divine is not his concern. In \textit{The Human Being}, Wink explores Jesus’ life through a combination of the methods of historical-critical analysis and Jungian psychology with the intention of evoking Jesus as the archetype of the truly human.\textsuperscript{107} Jesus, for him, was the perfect archetype of what it means to be fully human, thereby reminding us to embody what Jesus embodied.

Hence, he makes it clear that his understanding of Jesus’ incarnation is different from the classic doctrine of the Incarnation. Since his approach is “Christology from below,” and he believes that the divinised Christ hinders human transformation. The major aim of the study is a theological precursor to the social ethics that he tries to formulate later. However, his Jungian approach in his Christology from below seems too strong, because he even suggests that Jesus himself was a Jungian.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{105} Leonard Sweet (ed.), \textit{The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives} (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 16-17.
\textsuperscript{107} Kelli S. O’Brien points out that Wink’s historical-critical analysis is the least satisfactory, “review of \textit{the Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of the Man},” eds., Sam Adams & John Carroll, \textit{Interpretation}, 57, 4 (October 2003): 455.
\textsuperscript{108} In the next chapter, we will see how this “Christology from below” leads him to argue for the \textit{Christus Victor} theory of atonement at the cost of other theories.
The second book, *Just Jesus* is a collection of Wink’s autobiographical memoirs, from childhood to his death, where he honestly expresses his struggle to become truly human like Jesus who is, though not the best, but *his* best. His personal experiences are wide-ranging: growing under a strict disciplinary father and intellectual mother, a Pentecostal conversion, personal involvement in the Selma march, work with the Guild for Psychological Studies, Buddhist meditation, complicated relationship with academia, and so on. Wink’s concern is about Jesus’ humanness, which inspires and motivates him to follow as it is described that the whole book is his attempt to humanise Jesus. In this regard, Wink’s theology is fundamentally humanistic in its nature and socio-political in its focus. Featuring Jesus as merely human enables Wink to justify that whatever Jesus taught and lived out can be applicable to anyone. Similarly, dismissing the historic doctrine of Jesus’ divinity helps Wink to include other non-Christian communities in such a way that Jesus is, like us, a mere man; thus, we all, regardless of religious differences, can join and resist the DS non-violently.

Further, Wink critiques liberation theologians, suggesting that they are reductionists because they, in his view, regard the Powers as just institutions and systems, thereby dismissing their spiritual dimension. However, Wink also becomes a reductionist by disposing of the transcendent and ontological aspects of heaven, God, angels and demons. When the transcendent nature of heaven, angels, demons and spirit world is made redundant from the discussion, what is left is nothing but the this-worldly sphere where humans are all held responsible for the existence of the DS.

---

110 In the 70s, Wink was denied tenure and academically shunned after publishing a book with the opening line: “Historical Biblical criticism is bankrupt,” Billy Wylie-Kellermann, “Struggling to Become Human,” *Sojourner Magazine* (August 2014), 39.
112 Wink, *Naming the Powers*,

50
Despite such theological presuppositions of liberal theology, this study takes Wink’s Powers trilogy as a frame to look at Burmese politics not because his liberal humanistic position is all convincing. This study, as described, indicates many disagreements with Wink’s views on God in a panentheistic manner, angels, demons, his single-dimensional interpretation of Jesus Christ, and his purely mythical view of the Powers.\textsuperscript{113} Wink’s theory of the Powers, simply put, theologically raises many questions regarding hermeneutics, methodology, philosophy, and theology. However, Wink’s structural interpretation is distinct from other structural interpretations in that he, as Arnold articulates, “Endeavours to probe more deeply into the meaning of the spiritual and reaches the conclusion that principalities and powers are ‘the inner and outer aspects of any given manifestation of power.’”\textsuperscript{114}

The fundamental frame of his social ethics that this thesis espouses for engaging the Burmese political context is Wink’s naming the world as the Domination System, interpreting Jesus’ teaching of “turning the other cheek” as the “third way” (nonviolence), and more persuasively, his ardent argument for nonviolence as the only path to transform the DS into the God’s domination-free order. But, the most thought-provoking question that Arnold and Lynch pose at the end of their critiques of Wink’s Powers is, “Can the Powers language be the fundamental basis for developing a Christian ethic?”\textsuperscript{115} Truly it is the question that Wink should pay attention to, but as he is no longer living, he leaves us to deal with it. If the Powers are considered as “structures” like Wink and others suggest, there must be several implications for social ethics. Even if they are viewed as actual spirit-beings, like Arnold and Lynch suggest, those powers still have an influence on the structures.\textsuperscript{116} For the former group, a

\textsuperscript{113} In the following chapter, we will also see a discussion of Wink’s understanding of atonement in detail.
\textsuperscript{114} C. E. Arnold, \textit{Powers of Darkness}, 198.
\textsuperscript{115} Arnold, \textit{Powers of Darkness}, 201; Chloe Lynch, “How Convincing is Walter Wink’s Interpretation of Paul’s Language of the Powers?” 266.
\textsuperscript{116} Arnold, \textit{Powers of Darkness}, 204, 208-209.
Christian social ethic can possibly be built upon the study of the Powers language since the Powers are considered structural aspects; whereas for the latter, it is more complicated than the former group to say that the Powers can affect human institutions. For instance, Arnold describes two counter-statements: The Powers do their best to influence the structures, and at the same time, evil still resides in the structures only insofar as the people involved are evil.\(^{117}\) If so, the onus of distinguishing between the evil affected by the demonic and the evil shaped by people is on him. Therefore, if the Powers are regarded as structural aspects, a study of social ethics can be constructed.

### 2.2.2 The Powers and the Domination System

Wink sees the radical plight of the human race as the Domination System, which emerged because of the Powers’ failings away from their divine vocation. How does Wink underpin the idea of the DS through biblical exploration? How does he compare the DS to other areas? And finally, how does he unmask the realities of the DS in the present world? Following that, a critical comment on Wink’s structuralist reading of the Scriptures will be discussed. Duane A. Garrett observes that Wink is good at modifying the New Testament words to reflect appropriately his understanding of the Gospel.\(^{118}\) For instance, Wink uses a biblical word *kosmos* (world) to identify and intensify the idea of the DS. Through the words *kosmos* and *aiōn* (age), Wink affirms how humanity is both systematically and temporarily under the DS. By the word *sarx* (flesh), Wink also indicates the overriding values of the DS upon the human race. However, L. M. Coleman argues that Wink’s replacement of John’s references to *kosmos* and Paul’s reference to *aiōn* with the DS is “flawed because he failed to justify the replacement.”\(^{119}\) In fact, Wink’s argument for employing these terms is to highlight how the DS

---

\(^{117}\) Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 204.
transcendently overpowers humanity, thereby showing that true liberation cannot emerge from the System itself, but only from something that transcends it.\textsuperscript{120} Truly, the word *kosmos* describes evil in the New Testament, referring to the order of society and indicates that evil has a social and political character beyond the isolated actions of individuals.\textsuperscript{121}

Not only does the DS echo the biblical concept of *kosmos*, it also epitomises the characters of our contemporary world. As Ted Grimsrud observes, Wink’s coinage of the term the DS “helps us understand our present context.”\textsuperscript{122} Hence, Wink’s idea of the DS is matched against even secular thinkers and ethicists. Various social ethicists name what they feel is the most fundamental human plight, which affects all aspects of human life. Wink’s DS can be illustrated with the ideas of two non-Christian thinkers, Gene Sharp and Michael Foucault. Gene Sharp observes that the four fundamental social illnesses are dictatorship, genocide, war, and social oppression;\textsuperscript{123} for Foucault, it is historical conditioning in which humanity, both individually and collectively, has been socialised. Sharp, as a political scientist, sees that it is the political power through which those illnesses, supposing the DS in Wink’s term, can be cured. By political power, Sharp refers to “the totality of means, influences, and pressures – including authority, rewards, and sanctions – available for use to achieve the objectives of the power-holder, especially the institutions of government, the State, and groups opposing either of them.”\textsuperscript{124} For Sharp, the places in which power is located varies from society to society and from situation to situation – the places such as social groups and institutions such as families, social classes, religious groups, cultural and nationality groups, occupational

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 27.
groups, economic groups, villages, towns, cities, provinces and regions, and so on. Therefore, *loci* of power set limits to the ruler’s power capacity. If power is mainly situated in governmental institutions, it would be very hard for the society to control the ruler. Hence, Sharp stresses the importance of strengthening *loci* of power in non-governmental institutions. Through the example of the French Revolution, he argues that effective *loci* of power can impose limits and controls over a ruler’s power, but when they are weak, absent, or destroyed, the ruler’s power will be uncontrolled.  

In Wink’s term, the power of the DS would always be mounting up as long as we respond to it in the first way (flight) or the second way (fight). As long as we fail to find an alternative or third way to engage the Powers, the DS will always be uncontrollable.

It might be too narrow to describe Foucault as a kind of historical determinist because Foucault never regarded himself to be so, as some of his opponents did. He firmly believed in human freedom. For him, the way in which individuals, in their struggles, *can* (emphasis mine) freely constitute themselves as subjects of their practices or, on the contrary, reject the practices in which they are expected to participate. This indicates Foucault’s strong proposal that there is always a way to escape from historical determinism or conditioning.  

Although he believes in human freedom, this freedom is liable to the imprisonment of historical conditioning. Put differently, a system of restoration is indeed possible. But, that system of restoration can also eventually reveal its flaws, and society would have to make an effort to reconsider that particular penal system. Therefore, Foucault asserts that whenever an institution of power in a society is

---

125 Ibid., 37.
involved, everything is dangerous. In this sense, even though a human being is psychologically or inwardly free, he or she is institutionally and socially under historical conditioning. In short, Foucault’s historical conditioning bears a striking similarity to Wink’s DS.

From a sociological perspective, Daniel Liechty sees the “principalities and powers” as “the unseen forces that often transform even our best and most humanistic intention into the service of violence and the system of domination into the world.” In Liechty’s view, where Wink differs from a sociologist’s view is that Wink, instead of establishing a social-scientific theory by interpreting the observed data, turns to an exegesis of mythology. For Wink, it is the DS that discloses the archetypal shortcoming of the human world.

Psychologically, Wink reinforces his concept of the DS, especially through the eyes of Carl G. Jung. For Jung, egocentricity is a mode of being possessed or having an “autonomous complex,” being unable to see the larger dimensions of the self. But Wink separates himself from Jung by saying the ego is a web of internalised social conventions, a tale spun by the DS. Jung emphatically regarded the ego as an autonomous inner complex, whereas, for Wink, this ego is also internalised by a heteronomous outer network of beliefs. Wink integrates a psychological understanding of ego with a theological view, deepening Jesus’ teaching of self-denial as abandoning

---

130 According to Jung, “an autonomous complex” occurs when we are split-off from our consciousness. When this happens, complexes develop a seemingly independent, autonomous will and quasi-life of their own, which can potentially engulf and possess the total personality.
131 Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 159. Wink acknowledges his indebtedness to Jung. In particular, Wink’s *Unmasking the Powers* is an attempt to integrate or present a reading of theology from the Jungian perspective. This book can also be considered to be the fruit of reading the Bible from a psychological perspective.
132 Ibid., 159.
our egocentricity not as individuals, but as cultures, because our ego has been entangled within the DS and the process of dying to one’s conditioning is never fully over.\textsuperscript{133}

Further, Ray Gingerich engages Wink’s DS in economic and political interests. Gingerich explicates that these interests can create an ethos, which is similar to the DS which dominates us as a church, a society, and as a nation.\textsuperscript{134} Miroslav Volf also draws a parallel between his theology of exclusion and Wink’s DS, thereby replacing the “Exclusion System” with Wink’s DS. Volf highlights, “Wink rightly points out to a complex transpersonal and systemic reality of evil which dominates, ensnares, and lures persons to dominate others.”\textsuperscript{135} Thus, Volf suggests that there is a connection between the exclusion system and the DS. Generally, Wink’s DS bears a striking resemblance to the terms that Gingrich and Volf have named in identifying the fundamental human predicament of society. The contrast is that Gingerich’s approach is politico-economic; Volf, socio-ethnic; and Wink, socio-political, respectively in their emphases.

As seen, in viewing Wink’s DS in the light of other disciplinarian perspectives, we have found some similarities between socio-political, sociological, psychological and theological studies. Despite the similarities, is there any distinction that Wink makes from those mentioned? What makes Wink different from others? What critical elements can be seen? To begin with, Wink’s argument against the negligence of spiritual, social and structural dimensions in the Western context is substantial. In his understanding, there are two possible reasons why the West neglects the spiritual dimension – materialism and individualism. First, materialism displaces spiritual realities like angels, spirits, principalities, powers, and so on. As a result, “the wells of the spirit have run

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 161.
\textsuperscript{134} Ray Gingerich, “The Economics and Politics of Violence: Toward a Theology for Transforming the Powers,” in Transforming the Powers, 113.
dry,” Wink, Unmasking the Powers, 2. In this second volume of the Powers Trilogy, Wink especially argues for the presence of the spiritual realities in the world. He asserts that the biblical terminology, the angel of nation and church, is not a celestial being; rather, he transposes it as the spiritualities of nation and church.


138 Wink, The Powers That Be, 2.


politics of justice, and a controlled, static religion.\textsuperscript{141} As a result of establishing a
controlled, static religion, God and his temple have become part of the royal landscape,
and God’s sovereignty is fully subordinated to the purpose of the king. When the
alternative community was removed and supplanted with a monarchical system, it was
the time to launch a prophetic ministry, argues Brueggemann, because “the task of
prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception
alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.”\textsuperscript{142}

Based on this statement, Marcus Borg suggests that Israel, which was liberated from the
domination system of Egypt in her beginning, re-established the domination system by
the emergence of kingship.\textsuperscript{143} For Borg, the domination system of Israel continued into
Jesus’ time. As Borg argues, it is true that Brueggemann’s concept of alternative
community, biblically speaking, is an all-encompassing concept of social, theological,
political, and economic areas. Wink’s expression of the DS merely as a socio-political
order, in this sense, does not do justice to the whole biblical narrative. The DS, in this
study, is used to portray the human society which is fundamentally in opposition to
God. Therefore, the DS should not be just socio-politically concerned, but also related
to the theological dimension.

Wink’s reading of the narrative of the fall of humans in Genesis 3 is mythical and
structural. For him, the story of the Fall is not a temporal event; instead, it is mythic,
hence it is always present.\textsuperscript{144} Because of this mythic interpretation of the Fall, Wink
locates the origin of the DS in human history, claiming that the basic structure of the DS
has operated for at least five thousand years from the time of the great conquest of the

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 32, 33.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{143} Marcus J. Borg, \textit{Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus} (London: Continuum
International Publishing Group, 1998), 12.
\textsuperscript{144} Wink, \textit{Engaging the Powers}, 76-77.
states of Mesopotamia around 3000 B.C.E. Since then, social systems have become rigidly hierarchical, authoritarian, and patriarchal. Violence has also become the spirit of the DS. To a certain degree, Wink describes human sin as ontologically prior to all social systems and structures, yet he lays emphasis on the systemic or structural dimension of evil. Thus, he concludes that evil is fundamentally structural.

However, reading the Fall in the biblical narrative from a structural viewpoint raises some questions. For example, what or whom should we attribute the blame in the cases of infamous despots like Hitler, Idi Amin, Gaddafi, two Burmese tyrants Ne Win and Than Shwe, and so on? Is it the structural problem of that time because of which such despotic leaders emerged? Or was it they who built the structure to support their rule? Those questions cannot be adequately answered in this section. There might be various possible ways to address these issues. One crucial tension in doing social ethics is a personal-vs-social dilemma. Both play a significant role in doing social ethics, and one should not be overstressed at the cost of the other. In other words, the personal dimension of sin should not be overlooked for the sake of the structural aspect in doing social ethics.

In this regard, a French sociologist and lay theologian Jacques Ellul (1912-1994) has a contrasting view to Wink’s structural reading of the Bible. Unlike Wink, Ellul reads the Decalogue and regards the last commandment (Thou shalt not covet) as the crux of the whole commandment. For Ellul, the covetousness, which is more personal than structural, is the fundamental plight of humanity. Covetousness, therefore, becomes “the spirit of power or domination … and it is not just a simple moral question but utterly basic.” Put differently, Wink sees that the myth of redemptive violence is the spirit of the DS, whereas covetousness, for Ellul, is the spirit of power or domination. In Ellul’s

---

145 Wink, The Powers That Be, 40-41.
eyes, the basic human plight is more than the idea of redemptive violence; it is the human heart where the spirit of covetousness can hold sway anytime. Once covetousness seizes hold of the human heart, it becomes much stronger than the belief in the myth of redemptive violence. Thus, Ellul reminds Wink that it is not only the belief in redemptive violence, but a covetous heart and mind which can instigate all forms of violence.147

In the context of Myanmar, the gravity of personal sin is so evident that two successive military dictators Ne Win and Than Shwe have shockingly impoverished the country in numerous ways – economically, educationally, culturally, and politically. Of course, we cannot state that it is they alone who are responsible for all the atrocities and economic impoverishment. There were also structural aspects that buttressed their evil acts. For example, the traditionally-inherited top-down leadership structure and the military doctrine of “unquestioning obedience to any order given by a senior” are part and parcel of the Burmese military governing structure, which has a tremendous impact on other institutions.148 These structural elements had to shape the lives of Ne Win and Than Shwe so significantly that they dared to commit such inhuman atrocities against all opposing political dissidents. Both structural and personal dimensions of evil are, in fact, intricately related in such a way that it is human beings who make institutions evil, and institutions, in turn, make human beings evil too.149

147 As an addendum, I wish to point out the weak point of Wink’s purely structural reading of the Powers. Wink has seen the Powers as an impersonal structural order which has inner and outer identities. This approach is not sufficient enough to scrutinise the Burmese politics because the despots who ruled the country have played a significant role. Like Clinton Arnold’s view, if the Powers as personal spirit-entities can influence human affections and decisions, a logical conclusion is that the powers of darkness, to a large degree, did influence the two Burmese tyrants Ne Win and Than Shwe. Those influences led them to create oppressive dictatorships in their country. As further research, we can launch a study of how the evil forces or the powers of darkness have influenced the despotic rulers in Myanmar. The study could also focus on the practices of occults, astrology, numerology and spiritism.


149 This will be discussed at greater length in the last chapter of this study.
If Wink’s DS and Ellul’s view of covetousness are juxtaposed, the conflict between personal moral integrity and the “withinness” of an institution can be clearly perceived. We need an ethic that deals with both personal and social matters. There is no such ethic that seeks to treat social problems alone without correlating them with personal morality. A person with high moral integrity has potential to transform social evil, while also being affected by the social conditioning.\textsuperscript{150} Even though Wink’s view of the DS opens our eyes to discern the spirituality of human society and institution, it has its limitations in coping with personal moral integrity. For example, Mohandas K. Gandhi’s personal morality, as his commitment to a nonviolent lifestyle grew, led his own people to regard him as a guru and even worship him as semi-divine. His moral superiority moved the people of his country and even others from all over the world. This shows that personal moral merit does play a crucial role in treating social problems.

As this study seeks to scrutinise Burmese politics through Wink’s structural reading of the Powers, the emphasis will not be on a personal dimension of evil. The difference that Wink makes is the way in which he perceives a personal aspect of evil: having acknowledged the profound understanding of the depth psychologist and Eastern mystics on personal ego, still overlooks the fact that ego itself is a “web of internalised social (emphasis is his) conventions, a tale spun by the DS that we take in as self-definition.”\textsuperscript{151} Put differently, ego itself is a product of the DS as a result of internalising the social conventions of the DS knowingly or unknowingly. This insightful opinion will also be a guiding point to look at the political culture of Myanmar. This insightful thought will help this thesis explore the nexus between personal and structural dimensions of evil in Myanmar.

\textsuperscript{150} This will be discussed at greater length in the last chapter of this study. 
\textsuperscript{151} Wink, \textit{Engaging the Powers}, 159.
2.2.3 The Powers and God’s Domination-Free Order

Wink expounds the nature of the Powers in three ways: their creatureliness, fall, and redemption. The three statements – the Powers are created, the Powers are fallen, and the Powers shall be redeemed – must always be held simultaneously. Understanding the Powers in this way, for Wink, helps him see the dual nature of all institutions. Wink succinctly writes: “God at one and the same time upholds a given political or economic system since some such system is required to support human life, condemns that system insofar as it is destructive of full life; and presses for its transformation into a more humane order.”

Here Wink’s account of the Powers essentially agrees with his predecessors like John Howard Yoder and Richard Mouw, whose readings of the Powers language, like Wink, are pre-eminently structuralist. Yoder did an exposition of the Powers language in one chapter of his classic book, the Politics of Jesus. For him, the Powers are pre-eminently institutions, structures and ideologies, but that does not necessarily mean that he rejects the literal meaning of the Powers language. Yoder looks at the literal meaning of the language and notes that the meaning of the Powers could literally mean demonic bondage, but he focuses more on the part of socio-political structures. He puts a great emphasis on their weight to operate human society. Thus, society and history, even nature, would be impossible without regularity, system, and order.

Likewise, Richard Mouw also did a considerable amount of study on the Powers in his book, Politics and Biblical Drama. Mouw did his study with the aim to discover the political relevance of Christianity. He first looks at previous interpretations, and concludes that Paul believed in the realm of created spiritual powers. However, what needs to be asked, for those in the 20th century, is “to what extent should we believe in

---

152 Wink, The Powers That Be, 32.
153 Yoder, The Politics of Jesus, 141.
the actual existence of the spiritual beings?” To draw a connection between those powers and human society, he contends that the Powers are operating behind the regular patterns and structures of social life. In doing so, Mouw does not mean that the political leaders are demon-possessed or communing with spirits. While maintaining the ancient-biblical view of the Powers, Mouw argues that Paul went beyond the Old Testament description of the spiritual powers by at least partially depersonalising the Powers. Thus, the Powers are nothing more than national or racial groupings, religious doctrine, moral rules, technology, sexual desires, altruism, and so on.

However, Wink separates himself from Yoder and Mouw who explain that the sovereignty of these Powers has been broken and disarmed by the cross of Christ. In contrast, Wink argues that God’s liberation is not only for humankind, but also for the Powers themselves. This idea rejects both a dualistic myth of good and evil and viewing the Powers as intrinsically evil. Thus, Wink asserts that the Powers were originally good and essential for the survival of human society. Wink also differs from Yoder and Mouw who see, without paying much attention to its spiritual aspect, the Powers as primarily structural. What is missing in Yoder and Mouw is the spiritual element of the Powers.

Generally, Wink’s theological framework of the Powers – their creation, fall, and redemption – is of prime importance because its implication is an inspiring breakthrough to any resistance against the Powers. The simultaneity of the Powers’

---

155 Ibid., 87.
157 See also the most recent work on Yoder’s theology of principalities and powers by Jamie Pitts, who did a revision of Yoder’s theology by a French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. There, he points out that Yoder’s theology of the Powers lacks personal and spiritual dimensions. Through the eyes of Bourdieu, Pitts reconstructs the idea that, “if society only exists in relation to God, who is spirit, then spirit is constitutive of society itself … Spirituality is thus metaphysical, rooted in the spiritual being of God,” Principalities and Powers: Revising John Howard Yoder’s Sociological Theology (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 34.
creatureliness, fallenness and redemption shows that transforming the DS is never-ending in this imperfect world. Thus, comprehending the simultaneous acts of this schema helps us to see a shining, but realistic future. First, knowing the Powers as God’s creation teaches us not to be always pessimistic about social institutions; second, knowing them as fallen also enlightens us not to be always optimistic about them; and third, believing their redeem-ability infuses us with hope, even in quasi-hopeless situations; and finally, holding them together can integrate within us a hopeful, but realistic, critical, but creative outlook.158 After framing the schema of the Powers, what Wink establishes is an alternative vision, which is antithetical to the DS. This alternative vision is the Kingdom or the Reign of God in biblical terms, yet Wink has re-invented it as God’s domination-free order (the DFO). The control of the DS is too strong for all human races to resist; therefore true liberation from the Powers cannot come within the Powers System, but only by something that transcends it.159

The kingdom of God (the DFO in Winkian terms) has been a central theme to many Christian social ethicists. N.T. Wright suggests that, “once you lose the kingdom theme, which is central to the gospels, everything else becomes reinterpreted in ways that radically distort, that substitute a subtly different ‘gospel’ message for the one Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are eager to convey.”160 Mark Chapman traces the two contradictory interpretations of the kingdom and their ethical implications through the studies of Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889), Johannes Weiss (1863-1914), Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) and the liberation theologians of Latin America. The first interpretation is the kingdom as “wholly other” that has nothing to do with this present

158 Wink, The Powers That Be, 32.
159 Wink, Engaging the Powers, 69.
world. The second is the kingdom as the institutional church. The former leads many Christians to ethically withdraw and isolate themselves from the world. The latter pushes Christians to participate in every area of society. The best representative for the former view is Johannes Weiss, Ritschl’s own son-in-law. For him, Jesus’ vision of the kingdom was wholly in the future and something which human beings could do nothing to bring about. An American social gospeller Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) represents the latter view of the kingdom. Rauschenbusch identified the kingdom of God with a particular social and economic system.

However, from the period during and just after World War II, scholars have begun to view the kingdom as both present and future. For example, George Eldon Ladd sums up his understanding of the kingdom with a threefold statement concerning the matter: the promise of the coming kingdom in the Old Testament, its fulfilment through the life of Jesus, and its consummation at the end of history. In the common usage, the kingdom of God is already present, but not fully consummated. In brief, it is already, but not yet. As a man of the 20th century, the reign of God, for Wink, is not simply future, but also present. Wink suggests that, “we do not know how much of God’s will can be realised in human affairs, but we must act as if the world can be transformed.” As a social ethicist, Wink also draws an implication: “Faith does not wait for God’s sovereignty to be established on earth; it behaves as if that sovereignty already holds full sway.” However, Wink paraphrases the kingdom of God as God’s domination-free order in order to accommodate his new coinage of the DS.

---

163 Wink, Engaging the Powers, 320.
164 Ibid., 323.
The question that Wink has to deal with in his paraphrasing is, “Is it justifiable to paraphrase the kingdom of God as God’s domination-free order (DFO)?” By and large, biblical scholars agree that the kingdom of God is a central theme of the Bible and the message Jesus spoke in his earthly ministry. Though the phrase is only found in the New Testament, its idea is hidden in the teachings of the Old Testament. G. R. Beasley-Murray highlights the three points that the Old Testament contains the theme of the kingdom of God throughout the prophetic writings: first, Yahweh as the universal ruler; second, the righteousness that Yahweh and his people practise; and third, the peace that Yahweh establishes.165 Beasley-Murray, after an exegetical study of the New Testament passages on the kingdom of God, concludes that, “according to Jesus, the coming of the kingdom of God is the determinative factor in his ministry of word and deed; it culminates in his death and resurrection and leads to his Parousia at an undefined time.”166 Therefore, he draws the implication that, “Christian existence is set between an accomplished redemption and an awaited consummation.”167 Theologically speaking, the kingdom of God is such an all-embracing theme, ranging from the time of the Old Testament to the coming of Jesus and the end-times or His second coming. In a practical sense, the kingdom of God is all-inclusive, there are no hidden dimensions. As the document, “A Kingdom Manifesto for New Zealand” states, the kingdom of God is an alternative vision of the world where God, humans, animals, the eco-system, and the Powers are all reconciled to each other.168

Looking at the kingdom of God in this light, Wink’s idea of God’s domination-free order seems humanistic in nature, socio-political and economical in its focus, and egalitarian in its vision; therefore, it is less theological than the biblical teaching of the

166 Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, 338.
167 Ibid., 339.
168 *A Kingdom Manifesto for New Zealand*, compiled by Wyn Fountain, Brain Hathaway, Gordon Miller, & other Evangelical and Charismatic Church Leaders in New Zealand and overseas, 1997.
kingdom. That is, Wink’s theology is, as noted, humanistic. His whole life itself is portrayed as a struggle to become human, and his doctrine of Christ is also Christology from below, stressing Jesus’ humanness. As theologically a liberal, Wink sees the kingdom of God from a socio-political perspective and paraphrases it as God’s domination-free order. The chart in which Wink lays out the differences between the DS and the DFO shows his theological presuppositions behind it.\textsuperscript{169} Thus, converting the kingdom of God into God’s domination-free order is a brilliant attempt to construct the theology of social ethics for Wink, but it puts some questions to biblical scholars discussed above. Therefore, Wink’s idea of the DFO does somewhat make sense in a social and ethical sense but is not wholly biblical and theological.

2.3 Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, I have analysed Wink’s Powers trilogy and discussed how it contributes to Christian social ethics. I have discussed Wink’s Powers trilogy in an engaging way, not favouring Wink at the cost of other voices. At the same time, I have also critically engaged Wink’s Powers in the light of other voices, showing that there are some things Wink could have paid more attention to. It is discovered that Wink’s recovery of the interior or spiritual dimension of institutions revolutionises the modern reductionists and materialists, who overlook or turn a blind eye to the unseen or spiritual aspects of human society. It is also discussed that Wink came to realise this spiritual dimension of our society through what he calls an integral worldview, which sees the outer and inner, material and spiritual, and without and within as inextricably and inseparably related to one another. With this view in mind, Wink interprets the Powers as not separate heavenly or ethereal entities, but the inner aspect of material manifestations of power.

\textsuperscript{169} Wink, \textit{Engaging the Powers}, 46-47.
This chapter also justifies some reasons why this study has taken Wink’s Powers as a lens to explore the political context of Myanmar. A fundamental reason is that Wink’s idea of the DS helps us see the persistent political violence of Myanmar throughout the nation’s history and how oppressive it is. Likewise, Wink’s view of the DFO envisions an alternative community, free of discrimination, domination, racism, classism, violence, exploitation, self-centredness, and contempt. Only through Jesus’ third way or nonviolent engagement, will the DS be transformed into the DFO. It is assumed that the whole frame will be a great tool to critique and construct Burmese politics.

Lastly, I have tried to engage Wink in conversation with other scholars in his interpretation of the Powers, the DS and the DFO. The chapter has pointed out that Wink’s coinage of the DS is truly an illuminating insight in understanding this present age, and the DFO infuses hope within us. But the chapter also points out that many of Wink’s ethical implications from his study on the Powers are anthropocentric or humanistic, socio-political and economical in focus. In the next chapter, we will engage Wink’s proposal of nonviolence as Jesus’ third way in dialogue with other scholars, and how it can transform the DS into the DFO.
Chapter 3
Jesus’ Third Way or Nonviolent Engagement: A Critical Construct

In the previous chapter, aspects of the work of Walter Wink were examined in order to establish its relevance for Christian nonviolent engagement with society and culture in Myanmar. In particular, Wink’s Powers trilogy, with its structural language of the Domination System and the Domination-free Order, has proved useful in framing a lens through which to examine the political context of Myanmar. The last chapter examined Wink’s work around those two structural descriptions. In this chapter, I shall analyse Wink’s view of the nonviolent way, which he also calls the “Third Way” of Jesus, in such a way that these ideas may be used to constructively engage with the case studies of Martin Luther King Jr. and Aung San Suu Kyi in later chapters.

This chapter also examines Wink’s view of nonviolence in the light of other peace scholars. In this interaction, Wink will be reviewed from the standpoints of John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, Glen Stassen, Miroslav Volf, Jacques Ellul and others. This critical engagement will affirm certain aspects of Wink’s theory of nonviolence while rejecting other points of his theory. The aim of the interaction is to integrate Wink’s theology with the wider scholarly context. Overall, the previous and present chapters provide an in-depth analysis of Wink’s Powers trilogy so as to have a dialogue with King and Suu Kyi, in order to engage with the political context of Myanmar.

3.1 Engaging the Powers Non-violently

If there are two radically different orders, the Domination System versus God’s Domination-Free Order, and if the present world we live in is named the DS, how can the DS possibly be transformed? Is there a way to the DFO? If there is, what would that
way be? For Wink, there are two standard responses to evil – fight or flight. Wink rejects both the fight and flight responses. Instead, he contends that there is a third way, which is nonviolence. Nonviolence is neither fight nor flight, submission nor armed revolt, passivity nor violent rebellion, surrender nor revenge, withdrawal nor direct retaliation. Nonviolence, in Wink’s view, is the third way, confronting or resisting evil in a non-evil way. He sees violence as the spirit of the DS and nonviolence as that of the DFO. We will expound what Wink means by the third way of Jesus, and how Wink’s argument for the third way or nonviolence may be associated with Yoder’s idea of “original revolution,” Glen Stassen’s “transforming initiatives,” and Volf’s “embrace.”

3.1.1 Jesus’ Third Way

Wink’s understanding of nonviolence as Jesus’ third way is basically an exposition of certain Bible verses (Matthew 5:38-39a). Despite his critics, a majority of scholars affirm his exegesis. In this exegesis, Wink argues that the translation of the Greek word, antistēnai is “do not resist” or “resist not.” According to this translation, the implication is that “one either resists or resists not.”

Put differently, there are usually two standard responses to conflict: flight (passivity) and fight (violence). In contrast, Wink argues that the word should be translated as follows: do not resist violently and revengefully. In the comparative study of his Transforming initiatives and Jesus’ Third Way, Glen Stassen supports Wink by quoting the two New Testament scholars, N. T. Wright and Donald Hagner, who side with Wink’s translation.

Wink continues to argue that in saying, “do not resist violently and revengefully,” Jesus’ intention is neither to be passive nor to be reactive violently. Rather, Jesus proposes a

---

2 Glen Stassen, “Jesus’ Way of Transforming Initiatives and Just Peacemaking Theory,” in Transforming the Powers, 129.
third way, which is neither submission nor assault, neither flight nor fight, but “a way that can secure one’s human dignity and begin to change the power equation.” For Wink, Jesus gave the three examples, which show how to practice the Third Way: turning the other cheek, rendering up the inner garment, and going the second mile. But, Richard Horsley argues that Jesus is not a pacifist; instead, he sees Jesus as a revolutionary, but not a violent political revolutionary.

Yet Horsley is uncertain whether Jesus taught nonviolence or not. For Horsley, Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount relates only to the people who were in oppressive conditions of poverty and debt in the Roman Empire. They were the people whom Jesus addressed and exhorted in order that they might “respond positively to each other and to be supportive of one another rather than divisive.” That means Jesus’ ethic, according to Horsley, does not relate to the sphere of imperial political-economic relations. Glen Stassen points out that Horsley’s argument is indeed concerned with Wink’s lack of dealing with economic injustice. He contends that Wink’s concern is mainly with the DS, but he does not deal with “the structure of justice that works to curtail domination by unchecked power.” Despite differing from one another, Wink and Horsley have a common stance, that is, they both do not regard pacifism as a form of purity, but as a means of winning justice for the oppressed.

Now we will discuss Wink’s idea of the third way in the light of John Yoder and Glen Stassen, to show some correspondences between Wink, Yoder, and Stassen. First, Wink acknowledges Yoder as a predecessor and a great labourer in bringing the Peace Church witness against violence into the mainstream of theological discussion, yet he does not

---

5 Richard Horsley, “Response to Walter Wink,” 130.
comprehensively cite him in his *Powers.* In the first volume of the trilogy, Wink mentions that his exploration of the Powers language simply confirms the findings of his predecessors, including Schlier, Berkhof, Stewart, Caird, Morrison, William Stringfellow, and Yoder. Thus, Yoder deserves to be included as a lens through which to consider Wink because of the legacies he bequeathed in regards to nonviolence and Christian pacifism.

What parallels can be drawn between Wink’s idea of Jesus’ third way and Yoder’s view of Jesus as the original revolutionary? According to Yoder, Jesus was a revolutionary in three ways. First, Jesus refused all the prevalent ways to change the Roman Empire, and instead he obeyed God unto death, thereby overcoming evil with good, and defeating the Powers. Next, Christ, through his incarnation, death, and resurrection, has brought in the new aeon. Lastly, Jesus has also created the church, the community of his disciples, to witness the gospel and follow His way. According to Yoder, this community exists not for the sake of “a simple moral rigor about not shedding blood but a robust alternative holistic social system.” Thus, Yoder’s prime focus is to see the story of Jesus as a whole by looking at the historical context of Jesus’ time, and establish how Jesus’ revolution differed from his contemporaries. But, Wink’s concern

---

7 Wink, *The Powers That Be,* 204.
8 Wink, *Naming the Powers,* 35.
9 In most of his study, Yoder used the early Christian church as the criterion to construct his pacifism. He believed that the first Christians were the real Christians. He argued that only studying their experience or making it a model will clarify what it means to be genuinely Christian at a later time, see John Yoder, *Christian Attitude to War, Peace and Revolution,* edited by Theodore J. Koontz, and Andy Alexis-Baker (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 42-43.
10 Yoder observed that there were four ways to respond to the repressive regime of the Roman Empire at the time of Jesus. The first was the way of the Herodians and the Sadducees who accepted the situation as it really was and attempted to save what they could by aiming at what was possible. The second was the way of righteous revolutionary violence, the path which the Zealots wanted. The third was the way of the Essenes who withdrew from the tension and conflict of the urban centre to maintain faithful copies of the text of the Old Testament. The last or fourth way was the option of “proper religion,” represented among the community, the way of the Pharisees. They lived in an urban setting, but they separated themselves from others to be pure and holy, see John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottdale, Pennsylvania and Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1971), 18-26.
is to show Jesus’ way through the exegesis of a particular scriptural passage, Mt. 5:38-39. What is common for both Wink and Yoder is that they both recognise Jesus as the centre of their ethical exploration. However, Wink and Yoder differ from each other in creating the basis for social transformation. For Yoder, it is the church or community as an alternative social system to transform the present system of the world. On the contrary, Wink acknowledges that the church is called to nonviolence in order to express its fidelity; however, he regards it as one among many groups that struggle to humanise the Powers. Put differently, the church has no special role to play in the world in the process of transforming the DS into the DFO.

Secondly, Wink’s third way of Jesus is analogous to Glen Stassen’s *Transforming Initiatives*. Like Wink, Glen Stassen begins his ethical exploration with the study of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Stassen asserts that throughout history, the interpretation of the Sermon was principally dyadic in its approach and called the antithesis “prohibitions” in its implications. According to the antitheses prohibitions, there are dyadic structures: one is traditional teaching and Jesus’ authoritative antithesis. For example, the traditional teaching is “Thou shalt not murder,” and Jesus’ authoritative teaching is to prohibit anger, thereby resulting in being reconciled.¹² For Stassen, there are not merely two options (e.g., eye for eye and violently resisting)) but there is another way (turn other cheek), which is neither fight nor flight, which Stassen calls transforming initiative. Through the triadic structure, Stassen shows the presence of third alternatives, which, for him, are the ways of deliverance. These third alternatives are neither prohibitions nor high ideals but transforming initiatives. Therefore, Stassen asserts that, “seeing the triadic structure transforms our reading of the Sermon on the Mount so that it teaches the grace-based transforming initiatives that enable deliverance

---

from bondage to vicious circles.”\textsuperscript{13} By \textit{transforming initiatives}, Stassen means in three senses: “it transforms the person who was angry into an active peacemaker; it transforms the relationship from one of anger into a peace-making process, and it hopes to transform the enemy into a friend.”\textsuperscript{14} Therefore, Stassen himself draws a parallel between his transforming initiatives and Wink’s third way of Jesus, thereby specifying the nature of the third way as “\textit{transforming initiatives that change our own way of relating to the enemy and that hope to change the enemy’s way of relating to us.”}\textsuperscript{15} What Stassen extends more in his exposition than Wink’s is that not only Mt. 5:38-48 but the whole Sermon has a transforming initiative structure.

In summary, Wink, Yoder, and Stassen all seek to establish their ethical exploration on the basis of Christology. To compare, Wink and Stassen are much more similar to one another than Yoder, because they both have established their argument on the Sermon on the Mount. However, what makes Wink different from Stassen is that Wink examines only particular verses from the whole Sermon (Mt. 5:38-39a), whereas Stassen establishes a triadic reading to interpret the Sermon. Yoder, instead of looking at a particular teaching of Jesus, views the narrative and drama of Jesus as a whole in order to establish Jesus as a pioneer of another revolution.\textsuperscript{16} Nevertheless, their prime concern is to contend with the relevance of Jesus in formulating a social ethic in this contemporary world. Therefore, their conviction is that an authentic transformation, if Jesus’ teaching is faithfully obeyed, is inevitable.

\textsuperscript{13} Stassen, “The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount,” 270.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 135.
\textsuperscript{15} Stassen, “Jesus’ Way of Transforming Initiatives,” 130.
\textsuperscript{16} In exploring theological influences on evangelicals in terms of political thought and action, J. Budziszewski observes that, “one of the reasons why evangelicals are drawn to Yoder is that he takes the story of Jesus seriously.’ To be more explicit, many evangelicals interpret the story of Jesus in the light of his teachings, whereas Yoder interprets the teachings in the light of the story, “Four Shapers of Evangelical Political Thought,” in \textit{Evangelicals in the Public Square: Four Formative Voices on Political Thought and Action} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 88.
When we look at Wink’s idea of Jesus’ third way in the light of Yoder’s original revolution and Stassen’s transforming initiatives, the integration we can establish is based on Jesus’ teaching and his person. Wink and Stassen advance their social ethics on Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, while Yoder’s view does not focus particularly on any specific teaching of Jesus, but on Jesus himself. Jesus is truly an original revolutionary, as Yoder suggests, and at the same time, Jesus teaches us the principles of how to do revolution as Wink and Stassen propose. Seeing Jesus as a person and his teaching in such an integral way brings home to us the fact that Jesus was a revolutionary with revolutionary ideas. Therefore, Stassen and Yoder do not discourage Wink’s interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount; instead, they reinforce his interpretation.

3.1.2 Why Nonviolence?

What makes Wink different from other exponents of nonviolence? Why nonviolence rather than violence? Or why not violence? What does Wink mean by violence? Wink does not explicitly define what violence is and what it is not. The way in which he reasons is asking whether violence should be the last resort in the place where nonviolence fails. If so, he finds himself enmeshed in the belief that violence saves. Violence, for Wink, is the violation of the nature of the DFO. In Wink’s view, peace might be achieved by means of violence, but the peace attained will not enable the culture of the DFO to be cultivated. He sees violence as, “the ethos of our times … the spirituality of the modern world.” But Wink, in defending Jesus’ use of the whip of cords in cleansing the temple (John 2:13-16), argues that even if violence is defined as injurious and lethal harm, Jesus scarcely can be accused of causing harm. However,

---

17 It is not to understand the word “revolution” and “revolutionary” in this contemporary context, but it should be read and comprehended in the light of what Yoder argues. Jesus is not an armed revolutionary like Che Guevara; he is not a social prophet like Martin Luther King Jr., either, though there are similarities that we can find between King and Jesus. His revolution is more than social, political, and economic.
18 Wink, The Powers That Be, 8.
19 Wink, Engaging the Powers, 13.
20 Wink, The Powers That Be, 68-69.
Wink seems unconcerned with defining the meaning of violence and nonviolence. Even distinguishing between force and violence does not appear to be reasonable to Wink. For some ethicists, force signifies a truly legitimate, socially authorised, and morally defensible use of restraint to prevent harm being done to innocent people, whereas violence means a morally illegitimate or excessive use of force. Wink argues that violence, in the hands of duly constituted authorities, is still violence. The real root of human society is not whether nonviolence works or fails, but “the long-term task of building a society founded on nonviolence.” In brief, defining the meaning of violence and nonviolence seems unimportant.

Glen H. Stassen and Michael L. Westmoreland-White define violence as “destruction to a victim or victims by means that overpower the victim’s consent whether systemic and structural or individual, direct or indirect.” In Wink’s eyes, violence is far more than harm or destruction; it is a belief in the myth of redemptive violence. Whether the means overpowers a person’s consent or not does not count since the DS overmasters us. Generally, violence can be defined, in Wink’s view, as the belief that violence saves, whereas nonviolence is seen as the transformative mode to transform the DS into the DFO. Therefore, violence reigns supreme over the DS, thereby becoming the spirit of it; nonviolence lies at the centre of the DFO because it is the only transformative mode.

The main reason why nonviolence proponents – whether principled or pragmatic – argue against violence is because of the nature of its dynamic-destructive spiral. That is, violence begets violence. However, Wink’s rejection of violence is based on far more than this vicious spiral. For him, violence is more than a means; it is a belief, a spirit, or

21 Wink, Engaging the Powers, 236.
22 Ibid., 237.
23 Ibid., 236.
spirituality – the spirit of the Domination System. Thus, this section will look at Wink’s ethical theory of nonviolence in the light of Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, Jacques Ellul, and Miroslav Volf to explore the parallels and divergence between them. The following discussion establishes both the affirmation and re-formulation of Wink’s ethical theory of nonviolence in the light of dialogue with other scholars in this area.

Yoder, as a prominent pacifist, also senses that there is a fundamental conceptual problem in human society, which is the just-war mentality. According to Yoder, the just-war mentality came into existence in the beginning of the Constantine period. On the contrary, Wink looks at the Babylonian myth of cosmogony, and then he indicates how the myth of redemptive violence has been steeped in human history. Yoder observes that everything with regard to Christian beliefs shifted from the time of Constantine: ecclesiologically, hierarchical system over people; eschatologically, the millennium was no longer forward-looking, but present-reality and the ruler became the model for ethical deliberations, and so on. As a result, Christian morality was reduced so that everyone could practise it.

Another scholar who reflects and deepens Yoder’s pacifism is Stanley Hauerwas, so I put Yoder and Hauerwas together since their views on nonviolence are fundamentally identical. Hauerwas’ view of a fundamental conceptual problem in human society basically parallels Yoder’s. Hauerwas assesses the assumption of American Christianity, that is, “Christians should have social and political power, so they can determine the ethos of society.” In Hauerwas’ eyes, this assumption is a mimic of “Constantinianism,” which used to happen when Christians ceased to become a minority and they accepted Caesar as a member of the church. Hauerwas refuses this

---

25 For more, see “Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics” in Yoder, The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel. In many of his writings, Yoder reiterates the permeation of the Constantinian paradigm down to all Christians through the centuries.
notion, an opinion which is also shared and strengthened by Jerry Falwell, an American Christian fundamentalist because Falwell, somewhat like Niebuhr, was enthused with a passion to render all Christians involved in American politics for impacting Christian values. According to Yoder and Hauerwas, the church as “messianic community” has its own value. Jesus Christ is the Lord of this community and it finds its rootage in Him, and its enablement in His resurrection. The cross is the centre through which the church identifies its solidarity with Christ. For Yoder, the way of the cross is fundamentally non-resistant. Jesus, when he was unjustly tortured and crucified by the Powers, did not resist in any form of violence; instead, he obeyed God. The cross of Christ demonstrates God overcoming evil with good, thus this is always God’s method in dealing with evil. In Yoder’s ecclesiology, the Church is a counter-social entity and its existence itself is “a proclamation of the Lordship of Christ over the Powers, from whose dominion the Church has begun to be liberated.”

One more scholar to interact with Wink is Miroslav Volf, Professor of Systematic theology at Yale Divinity School. Volf’s whole theology of nonviolence can be summarised with the two words, “exclusion and embrace.” Somewhat similar to Wink, Volf argues that the fundamental human plight is exclusion, and violence stems from its

---


27 “Messianic community” is one of the varied Christian pacifistic approaches, see John Howard Yoder, *Nevertheless: Varieties of Religious Pacifism* (Scottdale, Pennsylvania & Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1976), 123-128. In this book, Yoder surveys the diverse positions of religious pacifism and at the end, he identifies his position as “the pacifism of the Messianic Community.”


effect. For Volf, the basic form of sin is excluding others because of their otherness. Put differently, to maintain our identity, we distance ourselves from others. It is a stern discrimination between the “we” or “us” syndrome and “they” or “them” syndrome.

Looking at how Jesus’ table fellowships with outcasts, Volf asserts that Jesus changed the concept of sin: the real sinners are not the outcasts but the one who casts the other out. He contends that the answer to “exclusion” is “embrace.” If a “will to power” is the heart of exclusion, then a “will to love” is the heart of embrace. Therefore, Yoder, Hauerwas, Volf and Wink all begin their studies with naming a fundamental human dilemma: for Wink, it is “the DS;” Yoder and Hauerwas, “the Constantinian thought;” and for Volf, “exclusion.”

The last theologian for the critical engagement is a French theologian, Jacques Ellul.

Earlier we examined Ellul’s view of the Decalogue against Wink’s structural reading of the Powers. Here we examine the way Ellul regards violence and nonviolence. His approach to violence and nonviolence diverges from Wink’s approach. First, Ellul does not consider nonviolence as an effective tactic for any social reform, a self-evident truth in itself, or a justifiable form as Wink does. Rather, Ellul suggests that nonviolence is a personal commitment, not a political stance. Violence is, for him, universal; therefore, it is a natural human state. To illustrate, natural laws are universal, and it is unnecessary to ask if gravity is good or evil. So is violence! For Ellul, even in the situation wherein there is no other way but the use of violence, “the Christian can never entertain this idea.

31 Volf, “Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflections in the Wake of Ethnic Cleansing.” 49. The two phrases that he has coined succinctly articulate his theology of embrace. First, it is “catholic personality,” by which Volf refers to “a personality enriched by otherness, a personality that is what it is only because all differentiated otherness of the new creation has been reflected in it in a particular way.” Second, it is “catholic foreignness,” which is a kind of “distance that exists for the sake of transcending the exclusion of all other reality from the person’s identity.” Integrating the implications of these two terms are so crucial. Volf elaborates on the strength of this integration: if the idea of catholic personality avoids any form of exclusivism, catholic foreignness rejects a monochrome character of one’s own culture and confronts evil in every culture,” 44.

Second, violence, for Ellul, is the result of the broken communion between human beings and God. However, in the original created communion between God and the world, humans were the image-bearers of God’s love and freedom in the world, over which they were granted dominion. Thirdly, Ellul asks, “how can a person be nonviolent in such a naturally violent world?” For him, only through union with Christ who came into this naturally violent world, can a person be restored to communion with God so that he/she can break the ruptured world’s way of life. Otherwise or apart from this union with Christ, Ellul contends that it is impossible to live non-violently in such a violent world, because “the rupture from God prevents them from doing so.” Therefore, Ellul suggests, “we are invited to take part in a dialectic, to be in the world but not of it, and thus seek out a particular, a specifically Christian position.”

In conclusion, Yoder, Hauerwas, Ellul, and Volf are all alike in seeing nonviolence as specifically the essence of the Christian character. But, Ellul believes that violence is a consequence of the rupture in communion between human beings and God. Similarly, Yoder and Hauerwas consider violence as a persistent character of the world. For Volf, violence is a result of the exclusion system. In countering violence: for Ellul, it is the Christian who lives out God’s Word and resists all “the world’s forms of violence, while constantly confessing his/her own incapacity to fulfil this calling and seeking the forgiving grace of God;” and for Yoder and Hauerwas, it is the Messianic community or the Church which is called to choose, as Jesus did, the cross as an alternative strategy of strength, not weakness. Similar to Yoder and Hauerwas, Volf argues that it is the

---

33 Jacques Ellul, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1969), 170. The idea of ‘last resort’ is one of the criteria of *jus in bello* (just war theory), meaning that war should be made as a ‘last resort’ in the situation where there is absolutely no other way out of it.
35 Ibid., 186.
community of the crucified Messiah which is called to embrace others by the help of the
Spirit, who is the Spirit of embrace in order to break the power of the Exclusion System.
In short, Yoder, Hauerwas, and Volf provide a range of views, with an emphasis on the
role of the church, but Ellul focuses more on an individual Christian whose life is
committed to Christ. Categorically stated, Wink’s idea of the DS and the DFO is socio-
political; Yoder and Hauerwas are counter-cultural, because the church, for them, is the
counter-social entity to confront the system of the world;38 Volf’s Exclusion and
Embrace is socio-racial in nature; and Ellul’s vision of nonviolence and Christians is
more personal reconciliation with God or union with Christ than socio-political, because
nonviolence, for him, is a matter of personal commitment.

Thus, what Wink significantly fails to consider in his social ethic is the role of the
Church. He does not treat fairly the important role of the Church in pursuing his social
ethic, whereas Yoder and Hauerwas’ emphasis on the distinct nature of the Church
seems separatist or sectarian. These two polarities need to be examined so that this
study may be relevant to the context of Myanmar where Christians are a minority. If
Wink’s view of the Church is taken as a model, Christians have no distinct identity
among Buddhists. In the same way, if Yoder’s ecclesiology is modelled as a standard,
Christianity would seem to be sectarian. Therefore, the question to be dealt with is why
the role of the Church is important in creating a social ethic. We will see this discussion
in detail in the later part of this chapter.

38 Stephen Bevans, in his book *Models of Contextual Theology*, divides six approaches to doing
contextual theology: translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic, transcendental, and counter-cultural.
He places Stanley Hauerwas along with the later Lesslie Newbiggin in the category of the counter-cultural
model. According to Bevans, the counter-cultural model seeks primarily neither to translate the gospel in
terms of the context (as the translation model would do), nor to facilitate new understandings to emerge
from experience, culture, social location, and social change (as in the anthropological model), nor even to
discover new meanings of the gospel from a faithful exercise of praxis (the praxis model), but to truly
*encounter* and *engage* the context through respectful yet critical analysis and authentic gospel
proclamation in word and deed, *Models of Contextual Theology*, revised and expanded edition
3.1.3 Just War, Pacifism, Christian Realism, Just Peace-making, and Nonviolence

As the subject of the study is the concept of nonviolence according to Wink, we need a critical interaction between him and other Christian traditions, such as just war, pacifism, Christian realism, and just peacemaking. First, we will look at the two conflicting theories – just war and pacifism, since they have been competing against each other throughout the history of Christianity. Second, a discussion on Christian realism and just peacemaking theories will follow, since these two are more recently developed theories on violence and nonviolence than just war and pacifism.

For just war theorists, the question is: why not violence? Is violence always wrong? Can violent means be justified in certain circumstances? Just war theorists believe that a particular war is just if it meets the ten moral criteria of the just-war position in deciding whether to go to war (the historic ius ad bellum), such as just cause, proper authority, right intention, last resort, reasonable chance of success, proportionate means, peace as the ultimate aim, laws regarding how to conduct war (the ius in bello), noncombatant immunity, proportionality, and international treaties and conventions. Of course, there is, for just war advocates, a theological backdrop to defend their viewpoint. First, just war proponents believe that justice is an indispensable element without which no moral society can be established. For Christian exponents of the just war position, “Justice is cognizant of the fact that humans bear the image of God.” At the same time, it is also peace that proponents of just war theory seek – war not just for restoring justice, but also peace.

In Christian history, Augustine of Hippo (354-430) is known as the father of the just war theory. For Augustine, “war should be waged only that God may by it deliver

---

40 John Mark Mattox observes that there were pre-Augustinian philosophers who had used the idea of the just war theory. For example, Plato said, “the state must be organised for violent survival in an unruly
men from the necessity and preserve them in peace.”

Augustine believed that peace should be the object of our desire; therefore, war should be waged in order that peace may be obtained. One more important thing to bear in mind is that Augustine’s just war idea is centred on the implications of Christian love for non-combatant immunity and the protection of the innocent neighbour from unjust harm. Therefore, the combatants’ intention in war is extremely important: “even in waging war, cherish the spirit of a peacemaker, that, by conquering those whom you attack, you may lead them back to the advantages of peace.”

Putting love and peace together, we can conclude that if peace is the object of our desire, love would be the raison d’être for war.

For Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther, the reason for just war is based on the teaching of Romans 13:1: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God (ESV).” They argued that governing authorities are instituted by God himself; thus, it is not for individual Christians and the Church to interfere with the tasks of government. It is the government’s role to take responsibility to punish the wrongdoers and to approve the good citizens. In answering the question of whether war is evil, Aquinas lists three conditions: sovereign authority, just cause, and right intention. In defining sovereign authority, Aquinas articulated,

For it is not the business of the private individual to declare war (Bellum), because he can seek for redress of his rights from the tribunal of his superior. Moreover, it is not the business of a private individual to summon together the people, which has to be done in wartime. … And as the care of the common weal is committed to those who are in authority, it is their business to watch over the common weal of the city, kingdom or province subject to them. And

world.”

Even in the East, the notion of just war theory could be traced. To illustrate, Laotse, Chinese philosopher wrote in the sixteen century BC that, “war should be undertaken only with the utmost reluctance; and even then, it should never be continued beyond the point minimally required to achieve the purpose for which it was initiated,” Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War (London: Continuum, 2006), 1.


Ibid.

Augustine, Letter clxxxx To Boniface, ibid.
just as it is lawful for them to have recourse to the sword in defending that common weal against internal disturbances, when they punish evil-doers, according to the words of the Apostle (Rom. xiii.4).  

Like Aquinas, Luther believed that it is not for Christians to attempt to rule the world by the gospel by abolishing all temporal law and sword. If Christians do so, they would be loosing the ropes and chains of the savage wild beasts and letting them bite and mangle everyone. Since governing authorities are instituted by God, “Christians … do not fight as individuals or for their own benefit, but as obedient servants of the authorities under whom they live.” Like Augustine and Aquinas, Luther writes, “What else is war but the punishment of wrong and evil? Why does anyone go to war except because he desires peace and obedience?” For Luther, the question of authority is the central one where use of the sword is concerned; only from its perspective can the justice of the cause be determined and the right intention be maintained. In short, Augustine placed his argument for just war on the basis of the overriding duty of Christians to love their neighbours, thus his view of war, peace and love raises a question of logic, “Can peace be won by war and violence, which is the antithesis of peace?” For Aquinas and Luther, it is Christians’ responsibility to obey the authority since it is instituted by God himself. If Christians are to obey the earthly authority even in joining war, it is, by implication, Jesus’ acceptance of war. Since war itself is one of the worst forms of violence, how could peace be established through it?

---

45 Martin Luther, “Temporal Authority: To What Extent It should be Obeyed (1523),” from Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings, 2nd edition, edited by Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 436.
47 Ibid., 95.
The questions for pacifists are: Is pacifism a form of passivism? Is it a kind of isolationism? For nonviolent activists, is nonviolence a kind of non-resistance? Pacifism is, according to John Yoder, so diverse that it is impossible to give a single definition that covers all pacifists’ positions.\(^{49}\) Certainly, there are wide differences of opinion among pacifists themselves about their attitude toward a community at war.\(^{50}\) Though there are various types of pacifism, they are not individually disconnected because there is some possibility of overlapping.\(^{51}\) The word “pacifism,” the belief that war and violence are always wrong, is originally derived from French *pacifisme* and *pacifier*, meaning “pacify.”\(^{52}\) For discussion, pacifism is the belief in social activism that goes against injustice without resorting to violence.\(^{53}\)

In contrast with those traditions, Wink makes himself clear that his approach is different from these two conflicting theories: just war and pacifism. The contrast between just war and pacifism, for Wink, is that pacifism seems irresponsible in this violent world, whereas just war appears accommodating to the myth of redemptive violence. Thus, engaging Wink’s proposal for the third way with just war and pacifism will help separate and strengthen Wink’s approach for further analysis.

In general, there are chiefly two common concerns that both pacifists and just war theorists share. First, they both affirm the evils of war, its causes, conduct, and consequences. Second, the prevalent conditions of injustice and oppression really disgust pacifists and proponents of just war alike. In response to the pacifists Willard

---

51 Yoder, *Nevertheless*, 11.
53 John Yoder lists eighteen types of pacifism. Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. are also categorised as pacifists who used nonviolence as a method for social change, *Nevertheless*, 48-52.
Swartley and Alan Kreider, Arthur F. Holmes as a just war theorist, summarises the commonalities that they both share:

We agree in resisting the evils of war and violence. We agree in rejecting the idolatrous tendency in excesses of nationalism. We agree that their primary task is reconciliation and peacemaking. We agree in rejecting hate, retaliation and a vengeful spirit. We agree that the final solution lies in the power of Christ’s gospel and the coming of his Kingdom on earth.\footnote{Arthur F. Holmes, “Response to Willard Swartley and Alan Kreider,” in Oliver R. Barclay, ed., \textit{Pacifism and War: 8 Prominent Christians Debate Today’s Issues} (Leicester: IVP, 1984), 61.}

According to Duane Friesen, the influence of a common biblical theology of shalom is the key factor for both pacifists and just war theorists.\footnote{Duane K. Friesen, “The Convergence of Pacifism and Just War,” in \textit{War and Christian Ethics}, edited by Arthur F. Holmes, 365.}

Despite the common vision of shalom society, fundamental differences lie between them. The first difference is a moral one: while pacifism rejects all forms of armed violent means to actualise shalom, just war theorists allow the proportionate and discriminate use of armed forms in certain circumstances. The second divergence is theological: understanding the tension of the Kingdom of God – “already” and “not yet.” According to Friesen, evangelical pacifism tends to focus on the “already” side of the polarity, whereas just war tends to look at the “not yet” side of the polarity. From the side of the peacemaking category, he sees that they both are in their own polarisation. Thus, he concludes that what is needed is, “to accept the fact that there are differences among Christians, that no one position can contain the whole truth, and that each needs the other to correct its own inadequacies.”\footnote{Ibid., 372.} In Wink’s eyes, each has its own extreme: pacifism is likely to be legalistic for the sake of moral pursuit, whereas the just war theory is prone to being another form of the myth of redemptive violence. In contrast, the third way of Jesus has found itself betwixt and between in the debate of
just war and pacifism because it neither encourages a fight response (similarly just war) nor a flight position (pacifism).

However, Wink’s critique of pacifism arouses controversy among pacifists. As a pacifist, Ted Grimsrud responds, suggesting that Wink’s understanding of pacifism is incomplete because pacifism is, in fact, not synonymous with passivism because “pacifism” is originally derived from Latin *pacis*: “peace.” For pacifists, “peace” or “shalom” in the Old Testament term is the highest value and the goal toward which all pacifists pursue and dream. Grimsrud sees peace as a holistic concept which covers all aspects of life, “well-being, wholeness, and health of the entire community on all levels.”\(^{57}\) Therefore, Grimsrud argues that nonviolence is, “part of the pacifist commitment and not all-encompassing and positive than the term pacifism.”\(^{58}\) It is true that the idea of pacifism, if looked at generally, is varied. As Tristin S. Hassell observes,

> The variety of pacifisms mirrors the diversity of normative theories about moral judgment making: consequentialist, deontological, and virtue-based; moreover, the varieties of pacifism and nonviolence each adopts a peculiar definition of justice, violence, and peace, and all are forced into answering questions about who it is that pacifism applies to and under what circumstances.\(^{59}\)

Nonetheless, Wink’s argument against pacifism is mainly the conviction of pacifists’ non-resistance in the midst of injustice and repressive regimes. As discussed in his exegesis of Matthew 5:38-39a, Wink argues that translating the original Greek word, *antistēnai* as, “resist not” is improper. For Wink, many Christian pacifists interpret this word as “resist not” to justify their position as non-resistant. Further, Wink’s ethical exploration, as Grimsrud argues, cannot be confined to the concept of nonviolence. There are other key thoughts Wink has advanced, such as his comprehensive view of the world as the DS, the pervasiveness of the myth of redemptive violence, and God’s

---


\(^{58}\) Ibid., 56.

Domination-Free Order. If peace is what pacifists are straining for, the DFO is the dream of Wink. The DFO is also an all-embracing vision for all humanity if peace, as Grimsrud argues, is a holistic concept.

For Christian realists, is Christ’s teaching of loving enemies feasible enough in such a sinful and imperfect world? Christian realism is a term mostly known through an American theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr. His ideas dominated and directed it, and his thought is the key to our understanding of it. Essentially, Niebuhr’s “Christian realism stresses the role of power in maintaining order and accomplishing political purposes, but he also insisted on the necessity of checking power with countervailing power.” In *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, Niebuhr expresses that sin is both religious and moral. It is religious because of human rebellion against God, and at the same time, it is moral and social because of human injustice. However, Niebuhr focuses more on the social and moral dimension of sin than religion, saying that, “the ego which falsely makes itself the centre of existence in its pride and will-to-power inevitably subordinates other life to its will and thus does injustice to other life.” In short, Ed. Miller and Stanley Grenz give a succinct explanation of Christian realism, this theology was called Christian realism because, first, it entertained no illusions about the human situation as defined by sin; it was realistic about sin’s inevitability and universality. Second, it found in the biblical and Christian perspective the most adequate account of sin, … and of the fallenness of humanity. It was a “pragmatic” endeavour because it was driven

---

62 Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, Volume One: Human Nature (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 179. In fact, Niebuhr’s anthropological outlook was a product of his pastoral experiences among ordinary people in Bethel Evangelical Church in Detroit, Michigan. Against the historical backdrop in which liberal teaching on human innate goodness and political utopia was dominant, Niebuhr projected a view of human inborn wickedness based on the Scriptural teaching. He became such a sharp critic of reigning pacifism at that time, and civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr. It is incorrect to consider violence as a natural and inevitable expression of ill-will, and nonviolence of good-will; therefore, violence is intrinsically evil and nonviolence intrinsically good, Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1960), 171-172.
by an interest in practical solutions, or at least responses, to the sinful human situation.\textsuperscript{63}

What Niebuhr contended is that the Christian hope, therefore, can be found only in the grace of God amid man’s sin, not in others such as natural law or human love. Likewise, he viewed the gospel as the source of divine mercy which can overcome a contradiction within our soul.

Hence, realistically, “Christian love must leave the evils of this life by means of just laws and, when necessary, by the use of force.”\textsuperscript{64} However, Niebuhr did not regard war as \textit{just}; instead, he saw it as sin. What he argued is that war, when necessary, is to be held only for the cause of justice. Thus, as some scholars argue, he is pragmatic in this regard, focusing on what can be done here and now, rather than looking forward to what is to come. Wink, as a student of Niebuhr, was impressed by Christian realism in terms of the emphasis on grace, the Holy Spirit, and miracles. But, he did not fully accept it as his own because it compromises the myth of redemptive violence for him.\textsuperscript{65}

Lastly, there is a recently developed concept in the study of peace and war, which is known as the just peacemaking theory. These theorists do not give much attention to the issue of whether there is a so-called \textit{just} war or whether making war can be justified. Instead, just peacemaking theorists seek to define and implement the praxis that prevents war and violent conflicts with the aim of creating peace.\textsuperscript{66} Glen Stassen, as one of the theorists, argues that just peacemaking, unlike the just war theory, Christian

\textsuperscript{63} Ed. L. Miller & Stanley J. Grenz, \textit{Fortress Introduction to Contemporary Theologies} (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998),25.


\textsuperscript{65} Wink, \textit{Engaging the Powers}, 279, 308.

\textsuperscript{66} Glen Stassen, as a proponent of just peacemaking, lists seven practices of the just peacemaking theory. They are: affirm common security, take independent initiatives, talk with your enemy, seek human rights and justice, acknowledge vicious circle, participate in peacemaking process, end judgmental propaganda or make amends, and lastly work with citizens’ groups for the truth. See Glen Stassen, \textit{Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace} (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 94-109.
realism, and pacifism, seeks the third option. That is, instead of asking either just war or pacifism, Stassen explores the question, “what initiatives are we to take for the prevention of war?” In other words, the just peacemaking theory is closer to Wink’s notion of Jesus’ third way than just war, Christian realism, and pacifism. But its focus is more on the side of prevention and conflict-resolution, than a change of institution itself, paying greater attention to negotiation, diplomacy, etc. On the contrary, Jesus’ third way, for Wink, is basically to resist any system of domination non-violently.

Tracing these traditions, Wink shows that the third way or nonviolence goes beyond the former three views. On the one hand, he attempts to adhere to the pacifistic position with regard to principled nonviolence, yet he seems to be dissatisfied with pacifists’ non-resistant position in the heat of conflict. On the other hand, he tries to adopt the position of just war in regard to siding with justice and being angered by injustice, yet he is poles apart from their use of violence. For him, the just war theory is in one way or another supportive of the myth of redemptive violence. In short, he sides with pacifism with regard to principled nonviolence, but not with their non-resistant attitude. Wink seriously considers all form of injustice like the just war theorist and the Christian realist do, yet he by no means approves of the use of armed force.

To conclude, pacifists, just war theorists, and Christian realists are all debating with one another in favour of their own view. Some accuse the pacifist position as being idealism, while just war and Christian realism are considered to be too compromising in terms of morality. This quasi-unending debate between just war, Christian realism, and pacifism is a moot question. But what can be learned from just war and Christian realism is that sin is mysteriously rooted in the world. It is not just the DS, where the

68 It seems that the most unacceptable aspect of just war to Wink is not the list of criteria through which a particular war is justifiable or not. What embarrasses him is that the just war theory is another form of the belief in the myth of redemptive violence. See Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 153.
human race is caught. It is also a matter of the human heart where the egoistic attitude is deeply entrenched. This is where Wink’s Powers theology should be re-made to include the mysterious dimension of sin, which is deep-seated not only in human society but also the human heart. However, what needs to be viewed with caution is that the use of violence should not always be justified on the ground of human imperfection.

3.1.4 Violence and the Cross

Today we highly regard tolerance, peace, and inter-religious dialogue as the imperative ingredients in such a culturally and religiously pluralistic society. Things pertaining to violence, any form of terrorism, and social or religious exclusion are considered to be the threats to social tranquillity. This affects Christianity. Thus, a number of theologians and biblical scholars have begun to give greater attention to the study of peace, justice, non-violence, and violence than before. The violent stories in the Bible become one of the serious subjects to them. In particular, believing Jesus’ death as substitutionary atonement for human sin looks disgusting and totally unacceptable to many theologians.

In studying non-violence from a Christian perspective, the cross where Jesus was violently killed is such an enigma to Christian scholars. In *The Lost Message of Jesus*, the authors argue that the idea of divine forgiveness, unable to forgive without drawing blood, leads to a form of cosmic child abuse.\(^{69}\) Therefore, it is essential for this study to discuss the cross and non-violence. Any Christian theological reflection on violence and non-violence has to tackle the mystery of the cross – the God who saved humankind through the most violent death of his Son, Jesus Christ.

My disagreement with Wink is the overemphasis on the *Christus Victor* theory of atonement at the cost of others, and especially that his severe criticism against the substitutionary theory is one-sided. In the following, I will discuss the way in which Wink argues for the *Christus Victor* so passionately that he disdains the historic

\(^{69}\) Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 182.
Christian faith on substitution atonement. Wink also examines the violence in the Old Testament and the theory of atonement through the eyes of a Swiss Catholic theologian Raymund Schwager and a French anthropologist René Girard. First, Wink’s view of Jesus’ death only from the Girardian angle is a purely structural reading of the Gospel. Wink reads the death of Jesus as the end of all sacrificial systems through the lens of Girard. In Girard’s understanding, the sacrificial system of ancient time – Jewish or non-Jewish – is nothing but a form of organised violence for the sake of social serenity.\footnote{70}

Thus, the sacrificial system became a preventive action to control the greater violence: a scapegoat is chosen to absorb all the violence in order to prevent a greater amount of violence. Jesus, through his willing obedience unto death, became a scapegoat. For Girard, what makes Jesus’ sacrifice distinct from others is not his suffering and agonies, but it is Jesus’ willing submission that unmasked the reality of the powers by denouncing the verdict passed on him, thereby revealing their judgement as a total miscarriage of justice. Put differently, the judgement passed on Jesus by the Powers itself, in turn, judged them. As John Yoder affirms, Girard’s insightful contribution provides an understanding “both of the imperative for retaliation and of the way the cross breaks the chain.”\footnote{71}

\footnote{70} According to Girard, we imitate others (mimesis) by desiring what others desire. This desire leads to mimetic rivalry by the time two or more people want the same thing at the same time. This rivalry causes the breakdown of the order of the social distinctions which Girard calls a “crisis of distinctions.” To prevent the breakdown, a society has to find a scapegoat upon which or on whom all hatreds, resentments, and violent impulses are heaped. Girard posits that this is the way sacrifice becomes salvific for the society and the sacrificial system becomes the overarching principle of both religion and culture. Girard’s idea of mimic desire is similar to a basic teaching of Buddha. In Buddhism, the root-cause of evil is \textit{tanha}, which can be best translated as desire. To attain the \textit{nibbana}, which is the ultimate goal of all Buddhists, one must extinguish \textit{tanha} (desire). But Girard’s view is only one-dimensional in the sense that he defines it from a structural point of view. Thus he regards mimetic the desire as the root of violence and the cause of the scapegoat mechanism. In contrast, Buddha viewed the desire as the root of all sufferings, which seems more comprehensive than Girard’s.

\footnote{71} Yoder, \textit{The War of the Lamb}, 177.
On the one hand, Girard’s non-sacrificial reading of the sacrifices in the Old Testament is indeed enlightening in that it exposes the hidden nature of sacrifice in such a way that sacrifice is not just a religious offer to appease gods or spirits for blessings. It is also a form of scapegoating, putting all the blames upon a sacrificial victim, thereby freeing the community. On the other hand, this reading brings into question the whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament. That is, it is a moot point to contend that the whole sacrificial system in the Old Testament is merely a scapegoat mechanism. In particular, Wink’s reading raises a question to the adherents of “penal substitutionary atonement,” according to which Jesus, through his willing submission, was punished or penalised in the place of sinners, thus the justice be done, and God’s forgiveness be experienced. For those believe in the substitutionary atonement, Wink’s reading of the Old Testament’s sacrificial system through the lens of Girard is thoroughly one-sided because he neglects the important dimension of “sacrifice as God’s appointed means to atone for the sins of his people.”

Despite the insightful contribution of Girard’s reading, it does not encompass a wide range of the meaning of Jesus’ death. As it is basically a structural reading, it trivialises the personal dimension of evil or sin. Volf points out that exposing the scapegoating mechanism will not suffice because people have a proclivity to “re-mask what has been de-masked when it fits their interests.” The problem of evil or sin is far more complex than the structural. Sin is not just out there, structurally and socially embedded, but also inwardly present within us.

Not only does Wink apply Girard’s scapegoat theory in interpreting the cross of Jesus Christ, he also employs Carl Jung’s psychoanalytic method for understanding it. For

---

72 Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey and Andrew Sach, Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution (Nottingham: IVP, 2007), 236.
73 Volf, Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Reflection, 292-293.
Wink, sin is alienation, which is not solely the result of our rebellion against God, but it is the way we have been socialised by alienating rules and requirements. Based on “You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, the Domination System (Eph. 2:1-2), Wink regards sin as the result of socialising the culture of the DS. He insists that we are to be dead insofar as we have been socialised into patterns of the DS.74 Thereby Wink verifies that the Christus Victor theory of atonement, according to which what Christ has accomplished is neither to appease God's wrath nor to substitute our death, but precisely to overcome the Powers themselves. When sin is defined as merely being dead by the Powers, it would be justifiable for him to say that the Christus Victor is the only valid atonement theory.

Further, seeing the cross of Christ in the light of Girard and Jung’s views, Wink asserts that the idea of a God who is wrathful is intolerable. Thus, he rejects the historic Christian teaching of Christ’s death as substitution for human sin. If he is correct, the teaching of the Church through the centuries on the God of justice, who judges justly humankind is nothing but reckless. It is true that God is love, and his love is unconditional, but it does not mean that sin or evil that we commit does not matter to God. In this sense, Wink’s view of God is distorted because he lays great emphasis on God’s love at the expense of the justice, which is also an essential ingredient of God’s attributes. How can the God who is just and holy receive humans who are unholy, evil, filthy? Put it in syllogistic reasoning, God is holy and man is unholy, therefore a bridge must be built to reconcile the holy and unholy; God is just, and injustice is evil, therefore the just God must exercise justice for the evil that humans have committed; or God hates evil and evil must be treated, therefore God’s treatment of evil must be just.

74 Wink, The Powers That Be, 90; Engaging the Powers, 157.
In reconciling between the holy and the unholy, the just and unjust, there must be
someone or something which goes between so that the between-ness of the holy and the
unholy, the just and the unjust may be resolved. For Wink, the one who goes between
the conflicting parties seems unnecessary. God is love, and at the same time, the biblical
God also hates evil; therefore, his treatment of evil must reflect his justice. If not, God’s
love, justice, and holiness would contradict each other. But, Wink argues that we are
forgiven; now we can repent! God loves us; now we can lift our eyes to God. The
enmity is over.\textsuperscript{75} How does it happen? God is no longer vengeful, but He accepts us as
we are. Where does Wink acquire this idea of God? For him, it was Jesus who
introduced such a radical image of God. Wink argues that Jesus taught divine judgment
not as an end but as a beginning, not to consume but to purify, not to destroy but to
awaken people to the devastating truth about their lives.\textsuperscript{76} If it were true, how could a
God, who was vengeful before, turn into a forgiving God? Who or what made him to be
so? Surely Wink must tackle these questions. Derek Tidball points out that justice is
never, biblically speaking, an independent entity but always an expression of the
character of a loving and holy God. The problem comes when we see the moral law of
God through the eyes of contemporary statute law, according to which a judge discards
all personal elements in the process of his judgement.\textsuperscript{77} For Wink, penal substitutionary
atonement seems to be a primitive idea of punishment. Hence, he seeks to “swallow up”
the idea of divine wrath in the concept of divine love.\textsuperscript{78}

As a matter of fact, Wink’s approach is simply humanistic because humans are not
innately evil. They become evil because of the socialisation that they go through in the

\textsuperscript{75} Wink, \textit{Engaging the Powers}, 266.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 266.
\textsuperscript{77} Derek Tidball, “Penal Substitution: A Pastoral Apologetic,” in \textit{The Atonement Debate: Papers from the
London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement}, edited by Derek Tidball, David Hilborn & Justin
Thacker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 350.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 351.
reign of the DS. As the Powers are outward and inward, material and physical manifestations of an institution, we are not only physically socialised into the patterns of the DS, but we are also spiritually internalised into the values and beliefs of the DS. As a consequence, humankind becomes evil. Seeing the cross of Christ in this light, Wink interprets that what the cross does is simply to expose the Powers that turned away from the divine purpose, thereby bringing them back to the original divine purpose. This radically contrasts with the historic Christian doctrine of atonement which sees Christ’s death as substitutionary for human sin.

Moreover, Wink goes too far by placing Jesus in the same category of the nonviolent revolutionaries as Oscar Romero, Martin Luther King Jr., and Mohandas Gandhi.\textsuperscript{79} Wink sees that accepting arraignment, trial, crucifixion and death, Jesus stripped the scapegoating mechanism of its sacred aura and exposed it for what it was: legalised murder.\textsuperscript{80} In that sense, Romero, King and Gandhi reflect the same truth that was revealed in Jesus.\textsuperscript{81}

However, looking at the cross which is the salvific act of God merely from the perspective of violence and nonviolence diminishes the Christian gospel. The cross is God’s judgement against evil and redemptive work for humankind; hence, it should not be equalised with the conflicts between humankind. Certainly, Jesus stood in solidarity with them in the sense of unmasking and resisting the injustice of the powers that be. Yet his death is indeed far greater than that. Supposing, if Jesus were merely a man like these activists, he would be nothing but a hero whose death unmasked the Powers that be of that time. Volf states that not all the people such as King, Gandhi and Romero are, like Jesus, innocent. According to Volf, “the tendency of persecutor to blame victim is

\textsuperscript{79} Wink, \textit{The Powers That Be}, 86-87.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 86.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 87.
reinforced by the actual guilt of victim, even if the guilt is minimal, and they incur it in reaction to the original violence, committed against them.”

Hence, all humans are inclined to remake what has been unmade as it fits our interests. As a result, our society would always need such heroes in order that the never-ending operation of unmasking the Powers will be going on and on.

In short, Wink’s exposition of Jesus’ death, like Girard’s, is just single dimensional, therefore diminishing the scope of God’s liberation. If Jesus were taken as one of these social transformative agents, the implication would appear that Christians are called to carry on the unfinished task of unmasking the Powers that Jesus, Romero, King, and Gandhi did not finish.

Rejecting the substitutionary atonement, Wink revisits the Christus Victor theory, according to which what Christ has overcome through his death is the Powers themselves, nothing else. Hence Wink avers that Christ, through his death, has released all those under delusion and enslavement of the Powers. With this view, Wink continues to define forgiveness in such a way that God has forgiven us for complicity in our own oppression and in that of others. This way of defining forgiveness trivialises the depth of divine forgiveness. Daniel Graham Reid points out that the idea of seeing Christ’s death as a sacrifice for sin is sidestepped in the Christus Victor motif. In fact, God’s forgiveness toward humanity should be far broader than this because the Powers alone are not the guilty party for all evil. Lesslie Newbigin contends that seeing Jesus’ death as a revolt against established powers discards the biblical account of the radical sinfulness of human nature. He proposes that the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection should be interpreted in the light of the biblical account, not in our contemporary socio-

---

82 Volf, _Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Reflection_, 293.
political context. In contrast, Wink interprets the cross not in the light of the biblical narrative but through the cultural and socio-political lens, which leads him to repudiate the historic Christian doctrine of the substitutionary atonement.

According to the critique of Kevin Vanhoozer, Girard and Schwager have equated God’s salvation with the termination of the scapegoat mechanism and discarded the problem of guilt since the scapegoat mechanism has been unmasked. Ronald J. Sider also rightly points out that, “some pacifists seem inclined to reduce the doctrine of atonement to a revelation of God’s method of dealing with evil.” It is true that reading Girard enlightens us to see the cross as exposure of the scapegoat mechanism. However, Wink stresses this view so much that he depreciates other theories of atonement, especially the “substitutionary.” Eventually, his structural reading of the gospel leads to the negligence of the personal dimension.

So far, the discussion seems to lead us to conclude that the penal substitutionary atonement is biblically more justifiable than the Christus Victor. Certainly not. As church leaders throughout the ages have been arguing one theory over another, the meaning of the death of Christ is far broader than we can imagine. Therefore, the discussion does not aim to favour penal substitution over the Christus Victor or the Christus Victor over penal substitution. As mentioned earlier, any theological reflection on nonviolence is faced with the question of the cross where Jesus died. Wink, in tackling this question, favoured the Christus Victor over others in such a manner that other theories become flawed.

Of course, the *Christus Victor* theory of atonement contributes momentously to understanding the death of Jesus Christ. Christ’s death can also be viewed from a structural point of view, seeing it as an answer to structural evil. T. Scott Daniels highlights that Girard’s theory of scapegoat opens up new possibilities for understanding Christ as *Christus Victor*. That is, Christ exposes the Powers to which humans are captive, thereby liberating us from the captivity of the Powers. Put it another way, Christ’s death answers not just to the evils we individually have committed, but also to the Powers that overpower us. To quote Wink, it is true that we have rebelled against God, but that is not the sole source of our alienation. It is also the result of our being socialised by alienating rules and requirements.

Therefore, the way in which we should tackle the problem is not either *Christus Victor* or substitutionary atonement; in fact, they should be complementary. Two early church fathers, Irenaeus of Lyons and Gregory of Nyssa, although they argued for the *Christus Victor* theory, admitted that this theory of atonement does not capture all of the significance of the cross. They both include other images and metaphors in their writings about the cross and never put forward a single model as though it captured the whole meaning of the cross. Wink, in advocating the theory the *Christus Victor*, seems too daring and assertive in suggesting that other theories, especially penal substitution, are theologically risky except the theory to which he adheres. In short, if the *Christus Victor* depicts Christ’s death as exposure to the scapegoat mechanism, “substitutionary theory” explains how the cross has brought healing to an individual’s guilt.

---

88 Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 150.
In doing so, two questions to be asked are: “how can these two theories be reconciled? Or are they mutually incompatible?” Gustaf Aulén, known as the foremost voice of the Christus Victor theory, argues that the first one is the predominant view of the early church; however, he suggests that these three theories are not indeed completely contradictory, but they have their own contrary emphasis. While the former sees Christ’s work as primarily “a victory over the powers which hold mankind in bondage: sin, death, and the devil,”90 the latter looks at that “which is done by Christ as a man in relation to God.”91 Likewise Alan Spence, on the basis of Aulén’s study of three models, avers that atonement theories seem to be complementary to each other, yet they, if structurally and operationally analysed, are competing with each other.92 As a matter of fact, another fundamental reason these theories are competing is more than their emphases. Their emphases are principally the outcomes of their theological presuppositions. A good illustration would be: if the fundamental human predicament is regarded as personal guilt, sin, alienation from God, we will emphasise the importance of how Christ’s death brings about forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God.

On the contrary, those for whom structural evil is the fundamental human dilemma underscore Christ’s victory over the Powers through his death and resurrection. Neither of them is fallacious in viewing so. At the same time, neither of them entirely covers all the bases. The debate between the Christus Victor and “substitutionary theory” will surely be on-going since each has its own theological backdrop upon which arguments ensue. Therefore, I am in disagreement with Wink regarding this debate of atonement theories and the view of the fundamental human predicament. First, Christ’s death and

90 Gustaf Aulén Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement, translated by A. G. Hebert (London: SPCK, 1983), 20. In Aulén’s discussion against the Christus Victor and the “satisfaction theory,” Peter Albelard (1079-1142), as an advocate of “moral influence theory,” argued that “Christ is the great Teacher and Example, who arouses responsive love in men; this love is the basis on which reconciliation and forgiveness rest” (96).
91 Ibid., 83.
resurrection should not be understood from a single theoretical framework. As it is the key theological tenet of Christianity, it must have rich and varied meaning. As structural reading goes, Christ’s death and resurrection demonstrate the victory over the Powers. Likewise, Christ’s death and resurrection also assure us of God’s forgiveness of sin and reconciliation. Leon Morris rightly suggests that, “no theory (of the atonement) is adequate . . . We need the contributions of quite a few theories to express something of what the cross meant to the men of the New Testament”\(^93\) This shows that each theory of atonement, though not completely, can partially shed light on the wide-ranging meaning of the cross.

Therefore, it is clear that I argue against Wink’s sharp critique of “penal substitution atonement” in favour of the Christus Victor, but I agree in some measure with a view of Christus Victor, that Christ’s death disarms the principalities and powers. Each model of atonement sheds light on something of the truth of the cross and resurrection, whether it is substitution or the Christus Victor, but some have more weight theologically and biblically as part of an integrated picture of atonement. As this study is a critical reading of the political context of Myanmar, Wink’s structural interpretation of the Powers through the support of the Christus Victor is indeed convincing in that Jesus’s death disarmed the principalities and powers. In part three, we will see what his structural reading of the Powers can bring out in the latent structural characteristics of Burmese politics.

### 3.2 An Examination of What-if Dilemma

Hannah Arendt argues that Mohandas Gandhi’s strategy of nonviolent resistance would cause nothing but massacre and submission if he were encountering Stalin’s Russia,

---

Hitler’s Germany, and even pre-war Japan instead of England.\textsuperscript{94} The what-if questions are inevitable to all nonviolent adherents. What if someone breaks into our house? What if we were attacked by muggers? What if another race was committing an action of genocide against mine? What would we do if we were in such a situation? How do Wink, Yoder, and Hauerwas respond to the what-if dilemma? How does Wink deal with this dilemma differently from Yoder and Hauerwas?

For Wink, the what-if dilemma itself shows the absence of nonviolence in the lifestyle and culture of our society, so we are confused if nonviolence is applicable to certain circumstances. In addition, neither violence nor nonviolence guarantees success. As violence fails, so does nonviolence. However, Wink admits that there are certain circumstances in which nonviolence seems impractical. In such circumstances, violence would be a kind of apocalyptic judgement that affects everyone. According to Yoder, there is an assumption behind the what-if question. The question presupposes the individualistic notion: I alone can make a decision and the attacker seems pre-programmed to do all evils. Yoder’s response reflects the way God responded to His Son Jesus during the crucifixion.\textsuperscript{95}

For Stanley Hauerwas, the question is not “should I or should I not have an abortion?” but, “what kind of person am I going to be if I do this or that?” Hauerwas argues that it essentially entails not basic principles or individual choice, but the traditions wherein we are nurtured. Therefore, Hauerwas asserts that, “nonviolent persons do not have to choose to use or not to use violence, but rather their being nonviolent means they must use their imaginations to form their whole way of life consistent with their


\textsuperscript{95} John Howard Yoder, \emph{What Would You Do?} 41–42.
In a nutshell, Wink, Yoder, and Hauerwas have their own convictions on nonviolence. They are all alike in arguing that nonviolence is more than a means to achieve the desired result. For Wink, cultivating a lifestyle of nonviolence in all dimensions of our life is so important in the world where the belief in redemptive violence has been a pandemic. To cultivate such a culture of nonviolence, the essential requirement is the stories that can birth a living tradition.

Many scholars admit that it is controversial to regard Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a pacifist or just warrior in view of his involvement in the plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler. If pacifism is defined as rejecting all forms of nonviolent coercion, then Bonhoeffer is surely not a pacifist, like many pacifists are. Truly, Bonhoeffer has left us confused in understanding his theology and life. His pacifism and his joining in the Abwehr seem obviously self-contradictory. As André Dumas warns, “Bonhoeffer’s ideas do not deserve to be accepted uncritically because he died for them.” For Bonhoeffer, Christ is the only object to which all his adherence and allegiance are pledged. What is more, Christian ethics is, according to him, neither a principle nor a doctrine, but obedience to Christ who defeated evil by enduring it. To follow Christ is also not merely to profess Christ doctrinally, but to obey whatever the costs. In short, Bonhoeffer may be variously interpreted – pacifistic hero, a situational ethicist, and an advocate of violence. Consideration should be given to the price he paid for following Christ. However, his

---

98 *Abwehr* means “counter-intelligence.” It was a group of senior military men with civilian advisers in all fields of German life. Their sole purpose was to overthrow Hitler and the National Socialists (E. Robertson, *The Shame and the Sacrifice*, 197).
attempt at assassination cannot be justified because it is incompatible with Jesus’ teaching on loving our enemies. He himself acknowledges his act as a sin.\textsuperscript{100}

To conclude, Wink, Yoder, and Hauerwas as exponents of principled nonviolence affirm that violent means are unjustifiable for Christians who truly believe in Jesus and his teachings. Among these three, Yoder and Hauerwas appear more thoughtful and theologically solid than Wink because they critically explore the assumptions of this what-if dilemma and provide fair critiques. For instance, just as Yoder points out the individualistic worldview behind the assumption, so also Hauerwas critically discerns that decision-making is more than an individual act. However, Wink’s approach to this what-if dilemma is somewhat futuristic in the sense that he suggests that the path to nonviolence is neither within easy reach nor an instant success. It is a culture that always needs to be cultivated. Wink, Yoder, and Hauerwas all do not leave their options open for violence since nonviolence is, for them, more than a choice. Nonviolence, for Yoder and Hauerwas, is a character and attitude, whereas, for Wink, it is also spirituality.

3.3 The Powers, Church and Nonviolence

What is the role of the Church in the struggle of the Powers according to Wink? What has the Church got to do with the Powers? How should the Church be prepared to engage the Powers? If nonviolence is the only alternative to transform the DS into the DFO, who or what is the most responsible for this transformation? What is Wink’s view of the Church in terms of the Powers and nonviolence? Now I will discuss Wink’s view of the Church in relation to the Powers and nonviolence in the light of Yoder and Hauerwas.\textsuperscript{101} Then I will assess their ecclesiological viewpoint from the perspective of a

\textsuperscript{100} Wink, Engaging the Powers, 225.
\textsuperscript{101} As some critics see Hauerwas as Yoderian, it is true that Hauerwas is ecclesiologically an enlarged expositor of Yoder. Put differently, Hauerwas has deepened what Yoder has begun. Thus, when I in some
mission theologian Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998). Wink, Yoder, and Hauerwas, as western scholars, write their thoughts in their own context wherein Christianity is a predominant religion. In contrast, Newbigin, though being a westerner, worked as a missionary in India for nearly forty years. This interaction between these scholars aims to affirm Wink’s ecclesiology on the one hand and re-formulate it on the other.

In launching theological exploration, both Wink and Yoder seem to be somewhat similar to each other in the sense that the ultimate tension, for Wink, is between the DS and the DFO, while for Yoder, it is between the old and new aeons. Where they differ is how the DS or the old aeon may be transformed into the DFO or the new aeon. Wink believes that it is the DS that needs to be transformed into the DFO only through the nonviolent engagement of all sorts of socio-political groups; whereas for Yoder and Hauerwas, it is the old aeon that can be transformed into the new aeon only through God’s new community, which is the Church. Yoder distinguishes the role of the Church from the other, worldly social groups because the Church is the only social embodiment of the new aeon or the kingdom of God. But Wink makes no distinction between the Church and the world in relation to transforming the Powers, because of the applicability of nonviolence to all religious contexts.

Unlike Yoder and Hauerwas, Wink does not take the position that the Church that Jesus built has a unique divine purpose. His view of the Church is more superficial than Yoder, Hauerwas, and Newbigin. In an overview of early Christianity, Wink argues that the Church regarded nonviolence as the only way, thereby seeing war as antithetical to Jesus’ teaching. However, from the period of Emperor Constantine, a radical shift ensued. Many Christians, under the auspices of Constantine, began to see war, which had once seemed so evil, as a necessary evil to preserve and propagate the gospel. In

\[\text{\textit{parts mention Yoder alone without describing Hauerwas, it does not mean that it is Yoder’s view alone, but often that of Hauerwas as well.}}\]
Wink’s eyes, churches through centuries have not been loyal enough to follow the footsteps of their master Jesus Christ who struggled to overcome the D.S.\(^\text{102}\)

Wink’s key argument about the Church in history is its incapability to decide upon whether domination is wrong or not, which is why he exerts himself to reinforce nonviolence as the vocation of the Church. Thus, the Church has nothing to do with any forms of violence in any circumstances. However, what is important for Wink is that the church is one among many groups that struggle to humanise the Powers. Even God does not rely exclusively on the Church. Hence, the raison d’être of the church, like other socio-political groups, is to humanise the Powers for the welfare of humankind. Thereby he argues that the Church is not called to create a new society, but “to de-legitimate an unjust system and to create a spiritual counter-climate.”\(^\text{103}\) For him, the church is not distinct from other social groups.

However, Wink affirms that the primary task of the Church, though it has many functions, is to unmask the Powers, that is, practising a ministry of disclosing the spirituality of these Powers.\(^\text{104}\) For him, the call to nonviolence is a vocation of the Church – the vocation which is grounded in Jesus’ teaching, the divine nature, the ethos of the kingdom and the power of the resurrection.\(^\text{105}\) Therefore, the Church is called to nonviolence to express its fidelity to Jesus’ teaching; the call to nonviolence is a matter of legalism, of an absolute ethical norm, or of salvation, but because God’s grace invites us and enables us to do so.\(^\text{106}\) In fact, Wink, through this 21\(^{st}\)-century mind-set, looks at the fact that Jesus himself was not entirely free of ethnocentric attitudes. The


\(^{103}\) Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 165.

\(^{104}\) Ibid., 84-85, 164.

\(^{105}\) Ibid., 216.

\(^{106}\) Ibid., 217-218.
gospel was, for him, domesticated to androcratic (male-ruling) attitudes in the early church.107

Like Yoder, Wink discovers that the early church fell into the temptation of the power complex. Once it was the persecuted and oppressed, but it then became a persecutor instead when the Roman empire was Christianised.108 Augustine (d. 430) was the one, for Wink, who promoted the idea of using violence, if necessary, as a loving obligation to defend the innocent against evil.109 Wink’s argument is that the Church’s entrapment into the web of the just war mentality from the time of the Roman emperor Constantine has been so powerful that the myth of redemptive violence has been, since then, prevalent throughout Christian history.

Truly, the Church made numerous mistakes in its history. But does it mean that we should disregard the unique role of the Church in society? Or, alternatively, should we regard the Church as nothing but one of the religious entities? Of course not. Jesus himself did not demand his disciples to build a morally flawless community; instead, he commanded them to obey his teachings. It is evident that the church failed to obey Jesus’ teachings many times in various periods. Hence, the Church needs to be brought back to its initial call once it fails. What can bring back the Church to its rightful place is nothing but the Scripture, where it finds its Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. The relationship between the Church and Scripture is best described by the late Donald G. Bloesch,

The church can bear a true witness to God’s self-revelation in Christ but only insofar as its subordinates itself to Scripture and allows itself to be taught by the Spirit of God. The church can be a support for truth, but it is dangerously

107 For those who study ancient social, cultural and political values or beliefs, it has been a trap to critique ancient values in the light of contemporary context. There is no doubt that human civilisation is advancing on and on, technologically, medically, intellectually, and even some views on moral vision. Here, Wink’s critique or comment on Jesus and the early church is so much presupposed with the modern worldview.
108 Wink, Engaging the Powers, 110-111, 212.
109 Ibid., 212.
misleading to conceive of it as an incarnation of the truth. The church can be a helpful guide for people of faith, but it must never be thought of as guarantee for knowing the truth. The church is not itself the kingdom of God but a poignant sign and witness of the inbreaking of the kingdom into human history. The church is our mother and teacher in the faith but only insofar as it is open to being corrected and reformed by the wisdom of the eternal God as we see this manifested and embodied in Jesus Christ.¹¹⁰

Wink, instead of looking at the relationship between the Church and Scripture, looks into the failures of the Church in following Jesus’ teaching on loving enemies, and ignores its important role in society. If God himself does not depend on the Church as Wink argues, why did Jesus entrust his mission to the Church? If the Church has no significant role in unmasking the Powers, the question is, “where do other social groups, which struggle to humanise the Powers, learn how to confront the Powers?” If Jesus’ God is interested merely in whether we behave in a way consistent with the divine order, does it mean that what counts to God is nothing but social service and philanthropic work? Wink’s treatment of the Church does not do justice to the biblical teaching on the important role of the Church in society. Therefore, what necessitates this study is to recover the significant role of the church in confronting the Powers.

Unlike Wink, Yoder and Hauerwas have highly positioned the role of the Church in creating their social ethics in such a way that the existence of Church itself declares “the Lordship of Christ over the Powers, from whose dominion the Church has begun to be liberated.”¹¹¹ For Yoder, the purpose of the Church is to be the kind of humanity within which economic and racial differences are levelled so that it may become a structure and a power. Likewise, Stanley Hauerwas, as enormously influenced by Yoder, sees the Church as a social ethic, polis and God’s new language.¹¹² The Church is called to be a new reality formed and shaped by the values and norms of the kingdom

of God as seen in the life and destiny of Jesus.\textsuperscript{113} As to the Church as God’s new language, Hauerwas uses the analogy of the new language that God created at Pentecost, a language that is more than words.\textsuperscript{114}

In centring the Church as the basis of a social ethic, Yoder, like Wink, is conscious of what the Church wrongfully did in history. He calls it \textit{Constantinianism}, which is “the identification of church and world in the mutual approval and support exchanged by Constantine and the bishops.”\textsuperscript{115} As a result of Constantine’s Christianisation, the existence of the Church, instead of being the obedient follower of Jesus Christ, is only to maintain the present order of things by using any cultic means at her disposal to legitimise that order. What is more, the just war mentality began to take root in Christianity as one of the results. Both Wink and Yoder see the mistake that the Church committed in history. Wink, thus, concludes that the Church has no special or peculiar qualities compared to other social groups. On the contrary, Yoder has taken a lesson from that mistake and suggested that the Church should sidestep from it in order to be true to itself – God’s new community. By and large, Wink seems very inclusive while Yoder and Hauerwas appear to be exclusive or sectarian in relation to understanding the relationship between the Church and the world. What needs to be done, therefore, is to look for way to bridge the gap between Wink and Yoder. Put differently, how can the Church be \textit{in} the world, but not \textit{of} it?\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{113} Hauerwas, \textit{In Good Company: The Church as Polis} (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 6.


\textsuperscript{116} John 17:14. In her PhD dissertation, Elizabeth M.Mosbo VerHage notes that Yoder needs to flesh out his ecclesiology in order to reflect the dual nature of the Church – its identity and its mission.
Despite Yoder’s seemingly exclusive view of the church and Wink’s inclusive ecclesiology, Lesslie Newbigin goes between these two extremes. Somewhat like Yoder and Hauerwas, Newbigin views the Church as a community that has committed to following the footsteps of Jesus Christ. The Church is, hence, distinct because of its allegiance to Christ alone. In this sense, the Church is different from the world because it has its own values and principles. However, Newbigin sees the Church as being responsible for the world in three ways. First, Newbigin sees the Church as the eschatological community with a vision of “the holy city into which all the glory of the nations will be brought and from which everything unclean is excluded.” Therefore, the Church is called to commit without reserve to all secular work, but in doing so, the Church is to work in the light of its own values and principles.

Second, Newbigin sees that the Church is fulfilling the promise given by Jesus, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth;” Newbigin believes that this promise is being fulfilled as the Church goes on its missionary journey to the end of the time. During this journey, the Church enters into dialogue with new cultures and “learns new things and provides the place where witness is borne to Christ as head of the human race.” Third, Newbigin sees the world through the lens of the cross. The cross, for him, depicts the balance of two poles: the infinite love of God and the unmasking of the dark horror of sin. Thus, he suggests that all true Christian thinking should maintain this two-edged magnetic field: the amazing grace of God and the appalling sin of the world. By implication, the Church is called to cooperate with people of all faiths in struggling for justice and freedom, and at the same time, the Church is also to be aware of the

---

118 John 16:12-13 (NRSV).
119 Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 139.
appalling sin of the world.\textsuperscript{120} Hence, Newbigin’s view of the Church is more engaging than Wink’s and Yoder’s in the sense that the Church plays a significant role in the process of transforming the DS into the DFO. The existence of the Church is not for its own sake, but for the world’s sake, hence Christians should collaborate with people of other faiths in the process of creating a domination-free order.

Integrally speaking, the nature of the Church is, for Newbigin, particularistic, and at the same time inclusive. It is particularistic in the sense that Jesus is the only head or Lord of the Church, and except him, there is no other heads or lords. Likewise, it is also inclusive in that all peoples on the earth are invited to join. For this dual nature of the Church, Newbigin expressly states,

\begin{quote}
The Church is the pilgrim people of God. It is on the move – hastening to the ends of the earth to beseech all men to be reconciled to God, and hastening to the end of time to meet its Lord who will gather all into one. Therefore the nature of the Church is never to be finally defined in static terms, but only in terms of that to which it is going. It cannot be understood rightly except in a perspective which is at once missionary and eschatological, and only in that perspective can the deadlock of our present ecumenical debate be resolved.\textsuperscript{121}
\end{quote}

To conclude, Wink and Yoder go to their own extremes in terms of the role of the Church in relation to the world. For Wink, the Church is nothing more than a sort of social institution among many others; in contrast, Yoder puts too much emphasis on the distinct existence of the Church at the expense of its relation to the world. However, Newbigin sees a synthesis of the relationship between the Church and the world in the context where Christianity is a minority. As this research aims to formulate a nonviolence theology with reference to the context of Myanmar where Buddhism is the state religion, Newbigin’s paradigm is much more apposite to the Myanmar context than employing Wink and Yoder alone.

3.4 What’s Next When the Powers Fall? Toward a Reconciliation

The inevitable question that we have to encounter when the Powers fall is, “How are we to treat or deal with the oppressors, victimisers, and human rights violators?” Put differently, how should the reconciliation or the broken relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed, victimisers and victimised be established or amended? Here the attempt in this section is to engage Wink’s idea of reconciliation in the light of other peace scholars. Since transitional justice in post-authoritarian regimes is such an urgent and important subject in the global context, we should engage with this issue in this study.

Reconciliation is often equated with compromise, the toleration of injustice, and obedience to the higher powers. For Wink, this is a false reconciliation; Miroslav Volf calls it cheap reconciliation. Wink suggests that to reconcile is to “re-establish love between two or more estranged parties.” So how can such love be restored? The process of reconciliation is the most difficult and complicated task. Wink is more concerned with the question of how rather than that of who the reconciler ought to be. For Wink, forgiveness is a mechanism through which reconciliation might be achieved. But forgiveness is, in fact, a personal psycho-spiritual exercise. What about the victims who suffered excruciatingly and were unable to forgive their perpetrators?

According to the study of peace building in post-conflict societies, there are two approaches to reconciliation: “interpersonal or individual reconciliation” (IR) and “national unity and reconciliation” (NUR). The former seeks to reconcile victims and perpetrators on a personal level, whereas the latter focuses on creating a culture of

---

122 Wink, When the Powers Fall, 24-32.
124 Wink, When the Powers Fall, 16.
human rights, based upon an inclusive and democratic notion of citizenship. Thus, the
IR is mostly associated with either a religious paradigm or a medical/therapeutic one,
while the NUR relates to socio-political institutions. For the IR, confession,
repentance, forgiveness, and the restoration of broken relationships are given
precedence over structural issues. In contrast, the emphasis, for the NUR model is
placed on tolerance, peaceful coexistence, rule of law, democracy, human rights
culture, conflict resolution, transparency, and public debate.

If forgiveness is considered as personal, Wink might be categorised as an advocate of
the IR model. But Wink does not stop there in discussing reconciliation. He has a great
regard for truth, peace, and issues of amnesty, which are all intricately related in the
process of reconciliation. In the process, the unavoidable question is, “Should amnesty
be granted to all perpetrators?” Desmond Tutu once asked, “Can it ever be right for
someone who has committed the most atrocities to be allowed to get off scot-free,
simply by confessing what he or she has done?”\(^\text{126}\) Wink suggests that truth precedes
impunity, so “amnesty should be given only after all the facts are out and the victims
have had their say.”\(^\text{127}\) Similarly, Tutu describes, “amnesty is granted only to those who
plead guilty and accept responsibility for what they did.”\(^\text{128}\) This issue of amnesty is so
crucial because it is a matter of \textit{false, cheap} or true reconciliation. Stephen Parmentier
proposes four criteria: “searching for the truth about the past; ensuring accountability
for the acts committed; providing reparation to victims, and promoting reconciliation in
society.”\(^\text{129}\) Of course, no one can control the response of the perpetrators, but what can

---

\(^{126}\) Desmond Tutu, \textit{No Future without Forgiveness} (London: Random House, 2000), 47. Tutu worked as a
chairman in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) – a court-like restorative justice body
assembled in South Africa after the abolition of apartheid.

\(^{127}\) Wink, \textit{When the Powers Fall}, 33-34.

\(^{128}\) Tutu, \textit{No Future without Forgiveness}, 50.

\(^{129}\) Nicolas A. Jones et al., “Dealing with International Crimes in Post-War Bosnia: A Look Through the
be done is to assess whether or not their response is false or not. Wink is not merely on
the side of the IR model alone, he also takes the NUR model into consideration.

Although the NUR model discards some personal issues such as forgiveness, the
reconciliation sought after would be incomplete without it. Forgiveness, in spite of its
varied definitions from various (religious, social, or political) standpoints, is the
dynamic of psycho-spirituality, thus, it can hardly be institutionalised in our legal
system. Personal forgiveness is indispensable in doing reconciliation. The importance
of forgiveness notwithstanding, it alone cannot bring us into the territory of
reconciliation. Volf suggests that to achieve reconciliation is to be willing to embrace as
well as forgiving indiscriminately. “There can be no embrace of the former enemy
without forgiveness, and forgiveness should lead beyond itself to embrace.”\textsuperscript{130}
Similarly, Wink proposes that forgiveness, despite being a component of reconciliation,
is the first step because it requires us to instigate something – e.g., picking up the phone
or meeting face to face and trying to work things out.\textsuperscript{131} But for Volf, it is only through
the will to embrace others unconditionally while determining what is just and naming
wrong as wrong, can a true reconciliation be achieved.

In addition to understanding forgiveness as the business of the perpetrator, Volf insists
that it should also be an essence of Christian community if it faithfully follows its
master, Jesus Christ, who not only taught about forgiveness, but demonstrated it in and
through his life. Therefore, forgiveness is a concern of both individual and community.
Wink has lacked discussion on this – communal or collective forgiveness. But Volf
argues that this pursuit of embrace creates “a community of harmonious peace in an

\textsuperscript{130} Volf, \textit{Free of Charge}, 190.
\textsuperscript{131} Wink, \textit{When the Powers Fall}, 14.
imperfect world of inescapable injustice.” He advocates that the creation of this community of embrace is very vital in our contemporary culture.

3.5 Summary of the Chapter

As the study seeks to achieve a better and more refined understanding of nonviolence, I have also done a critical interaction between Wink and other voices in this chapter with the intention of seeking a critical reflection between them. In this chapter, I have engaged Wink with other peace scholars to explore the similarities and differences between them. It is suggested that Wink’s interpretation of nonviolence or Jesus’ third way can be compared to Yoder’s original revolution and Stassen’s transformative initiatives. It is discovered that Wink’s ethical exploration of nonviolence is socio-political in its focus; Yoder’s original revolution is ecclesiologically centred; Stassen’s transforming initiatives are peace-seeking. Despite their emphases, what they all have in common is that each establishes their social ethics on the teachings of Jesus.

At the same time, I have discussed how Wink’s third way is different from just war, Christian realism, pacifism, and just peacemaking. Just war, for Wink, is too compromising, whereas pacifism is morally legalistic. Likewise, Christian realism seeks relevance at the expense of loyalty to Christ’s principles, while just peacemaking is too result-oriented. In the most negative case, I have shown that Wink’s ecclesiological comprehension of nonviolent resistance is limited. He views the Church as having no important role in the struggle because it is just one among other social groups. In every study of nonviolence, the following question is, “what is next after the Powers fall?” Finally, I have explored Wink’s notion of reconciliation to affirm that reconciliation is the goal of nonviolence. For Wink, reconciliation is the complicating process in which forgiveness and truth play special roles. As part one has established a

132 Volf, “Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Justice,” 873.
theoretical formulation of nonviolence based on Walter Wink’s Powers by interacting with other peace scholars, part two will be an examination of two exemplars, Martin Luther King Jr. and Aung San Suu Kyi. First, we will look at Martin Luther King and his life, with an emphasis on his activism and moral view of nonviolence. Scholars scrutinise, argue, and establish their theory based on their predecessors or, for Christians, the Bible and traditions. If this is the way in which scholars do it, how do activists like King and Suu Kyi practise, enhance and advance their belief of nonviolence by their religious professions and traditions? We will see them in the following part two of the thesis.
PART TWO

Chapter 4

Martin Luther King Jr. On Nonviolence

In part one, we have seen a critical engagement of Wink’s *Powers* trilogy in the light of the views of other scholars. In part two, we will look at Martin Luther King Jr. and Aung San Suu Kyi as practitioners of nonviolent resistance in their respective contexts, to bring them into a critical dialogue with Wink, which will be discussed in part three. As the research is in the field of practical theology, King is here a voice or exemplary role model for practising nonviolence as a lifestyle, which is known as principled-nonviolence.

Overall, this study seeks to develop an understanding of nonviolence from a Christian viewpoint in the political context of Myanmar, where Buddhism has been predominant throughout the history of the nation. Inviting King as a dialogue partner in this study appears to be extraneous to the context of Myanmar because King’s struggle is predominantly against racism while the problem of Myanmar is chiefly military dictatorship. However, there is something in common between the context where King practised nonviolence and the political context of Myanmar. The use of violence to maintain the status quo is common in both backgrounds – that of the United States in King’s time and that of Myanmar. Thus, this chapter aims to look at how King formulated and practised his idea of nonviolence at the peak of oppressive segregationism. Using King as an activist who practised nonviolence from a Christian viewpoint, and Suu Kyi, a woman and exemplary activist who applied nonviolence from a Buddhist perspective, would enable this study to engage Christianity with
Buddhism regarding nonviolence. Therefore, this chapter brings out a Christian voice through King for discussing nonviolence in the political context of Myanmar.

Further, King is known as an advocate of principled or philosophical nonviolence, whereas Suu Kyi’s approach to nonviolence is pragmatic. For the former, nonviolence is not just a means or tactic to achieve a goal, but it is a principle to live out and a lifestyle to embody. For the latter, nonviolence is a means or tactic to achieve the desired end. Simply put, the former regards nonviolence as an end, while for the latter, nonviolence is a means to an end. By using King as a voice for principled nonviolence and Suu Kyi as that of pragmatic nonviolence, this research will be inclusive to cover the discussion of nonviolence both from the angle of inter-faith dialogue (Christianity and Buddhism) and that of differing approaches to nonviolence. This chapter investigates how King came to become an ardent champion of principled or *ideological* nonviolence. In doing so, the discussion entails three parts: first, how King came to believe in the philosophy of nonviolence; how he practised it and how that practise made his belief stronger; and finally, the way he profoundly advanced it from a Christian perspective. The exploration of King’s life and influences will provide a voice for principled nonviolence (King) to engage with that of pragmatic nonviolence (Aung San Suu Kyi) in the light of Walter Wink in the following chapters.

**4.1 Biographical Exploration: How King Came to Believe in Nonviolence**

Martin Luther King Jr. was not raised in the culture of nonviolence. In his time, violence was so rampant that the whole nation of the United States was dealing with suppressive racial injustice and racist attacks. His daily experiences of segregation, police brutality on his people (blacks), and seeing with his own eyes an incident of the Ku Klux Klan beating and savagely lynching a black man led him to hate whites vehemently. The question that was indelibly imprinted on his mind during his early
years was how he could love people who hated him. How could a person filled with intense hatred come to embrace nonviolence and teach his people to love the white oppressors? King was able to cultivate the lifestyle of nonviolence in the heat of such racial hatred. In this chapter, we will see how King’s quest for the answer to social evil during his early life and his academic studies led him to be an advocate of principled nonviolence. In tracing his life, we will observe the contextual situations in which King grew up and led the resistance so that a comparative analysis of both his context and the Burmese context may be discussed.

4.1.1 Parental Influences

King was significantly influenced by his parents. In James Cone’s words, “King made history, but he was also made by history.” The foundation for his principles began in his home where he was nurtured to esteem, respect, and value himself with a sense of “somebodiness.” The parental influences on King were so huge that he eventually blended the character traits of each his parents. In fact, his father and mother were seemingly contradictory personalities. His father Michael King was tough and self-determined. He was known as “a strict disciplinarian.” When his children broke rules, he would often whip them. Despite being raised in the condition of abject poverty, Michael King worked hard to provide for his family. He taught his children to rely on themselves without giving any excuses.

3 Clayborne Carson (ed.), The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr., 3.
4 David J. Garrow, Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (New York: Quill, 1999), 34.
6 James Cone, Martin & Malcolm & America, 22.
What is more, Michael King had a robust spirit of protest. As a pastor, he never limited his pastoral ministry to the spiritual dimension alone. Throughout his pastoral ministry, he preached sermons that dealt with both the mind and the emotions of the congregation, while also addressing their material condition. Furthermore, Michael King never felt satisfied with the injustice and discrimination which devalued the blacks. As a pastor, he appealed to his congregation to participate in protests he led.

Observing King and his father’s life, Burrow Jr. remarks that King inherited not only the protest tradition from his father, but also the way of thinking about and doing ministry. That pastoral legacy which King received from his father Michael King was formative in his later intellectual quest for an answer to the racial injustice of that time. In short, King received a legacy from his father in two areas: the protest spirit and an idea of Christianity that views spiritual and social dimensions in an integral way.

Unlike his father, King’s mother Alberta Williams was raised in a comfortable home and educated at Spelman College. King’s impression of his mother was very different from that of his father. Alberta was, unlike her husband, soft-spoken and easy-going. She was also a deeply committed Christian. While Michael King was forceful, outspoken, and bossy, Alberta King was submissive to her husband and took a backseat to him. Her hand in the family seemed invisible. King described his mother as the one who worked behind the scene showing motherly care, the lack of which would have been detrimental to her family.

Like her husband, Alberta never complacently adjusted to the system of segregation. That was a characteristic that both Michael King and Alberta King shared. Besides, it

---

8 Ibid., 52.
was Alberta who “instilled a sense of self-respect in all of her children from the very beginning.”

Showing much care for all her children, she created a family where love was ever present. Therefore, King, in one of his letters to Alberta during his studies at Crozer Theological Seminary, wrote that he had “the best mother in the world.” Most of all, King learned how to be inwardly strong and courageous under the care of his mother.

Interestingly, the personalities of Alberta and Michael King were poles apart from each other. While the former was soft, the latter was tough. Alberta was slow to anger, but her husband was a stern disciplinarian. In a sense, their differences seemed to complement each other, instead of contradicting. Put differently, Alberta King filled something Michael King lacked, and vice versa. What if King had been raised under the hands of parents who were both either strict disciplinarians or too forgiving and soft? If it were so, we might probably be reading about another King who might be either a disciplinarian or too forgiving. Martin Luther King, under the influences of such parents, had been well prepared both inwardly and outwardly for his future nonviolent resistance. As a result, King’s character became a combination of the two quasi-antithetical personalities.

How far did parental influence on King go? What was their influence on him in regard to the spirit of nonviolence? Was the spirit of nonviolence something he was already familiar with? Does it have anything to do with his family upbringing? In his writing, he traced how he came to be acquainted with the idea of nonviolence only when he began his studies at Crozer Seminary. His wife, Coretta, also said, “The spirit of nonviolence was not inherited from Martin’s family.”

However, R. Burrow Jr.

12 Clayborne Carson (ed.), The Papers of Martin Luther King Jr., Vol. 1, 161.
contends that this comment is only partially correct. In Burrow’s understanding, it is true that King’s father and his paternal grandparents did not teach him to be nonviolent, yet his mother and maternal grandparents certainly did. Another scholar Lewis Baldwin also supports this view that King’s first direct contact with pacifism was through his mother. Alberta King’s gentleness, her motherly care for her children and even for the members of Ebenezer Church is where King first encountered the idea of nonviolence. Nevertheless, King did not naturally and effortlessly become nonviolent. Instead, he had been wrestling for some time in developing a nonviolent lifestyle. The dangers that he faced – his life was threatened several times, his house was bombed, and finally he gave even his own life for what he believed – proved that the journey he went through was a tough one.

Another impact on King was apparently the church his father pastored. For him, the church was a second home and Christianity was something that he grew up in. Black theologian James Cone observes that, “the church at that time was a dominant institution in the social life of Atlanta’s African-American community, serving as the source for leadership development and also providing the moral values which leaders used to achieve justice for blacks.” If his family was the place where he learned about self-worth and the value of being human, church (Ebenezer Baptist Church) was the place where he experienced the spirit of community, as Cone observes. Perhaps, his

---

15 Cited from Rufus Burrow Jr.,Extremist for Love, 10.
16 Papers, vol. 1, 361. See also Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr., 6.
18 Ibid., 25. The Jim Crow Laws were the laws of segregation practised at the time of Martin Luther King Jr. From Delaware to California, and from North Dakota to Texas, many states could impose legal punishments on people for consorting with members of another race. The most common types of laws forbade intermarriage and ordered business owners and public institutions to keep their black and white clientele separate. For instance, “Buses: all passenger stations in this state operated by any motor transportation company shall have separate waiting rooms or space and separate ticket windows for the white and coloured races; Nurses: no person or corporation shall require any white female nurse to nurse in wards or rooms in hospitals, either public or private, in which negro men are placed,” Jim Crow Laws, from: http://www.nps.gov/malu/learn/education/- jim_crow_laws.htm (accessed 17 March 2015).
vision of “beloved community,” to a certain extent, originated from the church where he grew up and the church he went on to pastor.

Despite the parental nurturing and religious upbringing, King was still struggling to find a satisfactory solution to the racism of that time. What is worse, he had been entrapped in the circle of reactive hatred for some years. His personal experience and witnessing of the segregation at that time led him to a spirit of hatred. That spirit remained ingrained in his mind from an early time until he fully submitted to the philosophy of nonviolence. Under such an oppressive system of segregationism, it took some years for King to embrace the lifestyle of nonviolence. King’s journey to nonviolence, or how he cultivated a lifestyle of nonviolence in the midst of racial injustice, implies that there is always the possibility of resisting any form of injustice.

4.1.2 Intellectual Quest

King began his intellectual journey from 1944 to 1955. Even though he majored in systematic theology, the question of how he could love the people who hated him seemed to forcefully lead him to “seriously search for a method to eliminate social evil,” and he read widely in the areas of both philosophy and theology. Here the aim of this chapter is not chiefly to discuss each aspect of this in detail, but to trace how King progressively came to the conclusion that nonviolence is the best solution to transform the system of racism. Most of all, how did King intellectually go through different philosophers and theologians until he read Mohandas K. Gandhi’s writings?

19 Clayborne Carson (ed.), The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr., 7-12.
20 Martin Luther King Jr., Stride toward Freedom, : The Montgomery Story (Boston, Massachusetts:: Beacon Press, 2010),78.
Henry David Thoreau

Martin Luther King’s first encounter with the idea of nonviolence was through reading Henry David Thoreau’s “On Civil Disobedience.”²² Thoreau, as an abolitionist, wrote the essay to argue against slavery and the Mexican-American war at that time. The argument in the essay is that an individual should not allow any government to override or atrophy his/her conscience. For Thoreau, what matters most is to refuse cooperation with any evil system whether it is government or not.²³ Put differently, his concern is that we need to fight not merely against injustice, but also against complacency about any form of injustice. Thus, the idea of refusing cooperation with an evil system fascinated King, so he read it several times. In short, Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience” paved the way for King’s first intellectual journey towards nonviolence.

However, King himself differed from Thoreau in two ways. First, Thoreau did not believe in nonviolence for philosophical reasons, while King did.²⁴ The second is their view of law. Thoreau seemed to be more like an anarchist, while King believed in the rule of law. Nevertheless, Thoreau’s essay of “Civil Disobedience” was first and foremost an eye-opener for King in his journey towards the philosophy of nonviolence.

²³ The essay was originally a speech given by Thoreau against slavery, and an excoriation of the Mexican-American war at that time. The influence of this essay is immense in that it had a great impact not only on King, but also on Mahandas Gandhi. However Gandhi suggested that Thoreau’s impact on him had been overstated: “The statement that I had derived my idea of civil disobedience from the writings of Thoreau is wrong. The resistance to authority in South Africa was well advanced before I got the essay of Thoreau on civil disobedience,” cited from Clayborne Carson, senior ed., The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Threshold of A New Decade, January 1959-December 1960 volume 5 (Berkley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 2005), 149. Henceforth, this will be cited as King’s Papers vol. 5. Looking at his essay as a whole, Thoreau seemed to be pessimistic about order, state, and government, which is why he placed individual’s rights over the government, because the power and authority of the state or government is derived from these individuals. Therefore, he wrote, “I heartily accept the motto,—“That government is best which governs least;” and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which I also believe,—“That government is best which governs not at all;” and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient” pp. 29-30.
Walter Rauschenbusch

King’s first theological breakthrough came through Walter Rauschenbusch’s *Christianity and the Social Crisis.* Rauschenbusch helped him see that Christian involvement in social welfare could be theologically justified. Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) was the pastor of “the Second German Baptist Church in New York City.”

What King learned from reading Rauschenbusch is the inseparability of the spiritual and social dimensions of human life. That is, the gospel touches not only a spiritual but also a social factor. In fact, this is not a brand new idea that King came up with. He had learned this idea from his father already. However, his conceptual understanding of the interdependence of spiritual and social aspects was not theologically upheld.

Rauschenbusch justified the theological position by interpreting a biblical theme, the kingdom of God. For Rauschenbusch, the kingdom of God is an all-embracing theme without which Christianity would be individualistic, having no relation to the social order. Hence, Rauschenbusch asserted, “This doctrine (the kingdom of God) is itself the social gospel.”

Through reading Rauschenbusch – especially the chapter, “the social aims of Jesus” in *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century,* King established a theological basis for the social concern that he had since his childhood. Through the help of Rauschenbusch, King’s conviction regarding the inseparability of spiritual and social dimensions was theologically espoused:

> The gospel at its best deals with the whole man, not only his soul but his body, not only his spiritual well-being but his material well-being. Any religion that professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them and the social conditions that cripple them is a spiritually moribund religion awaiting burial.

---

28 Martin Luther King, “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,” in *A Testament of Hope*, 37-38; see also Martin Luther King, *Strength To Love* (np: Collins, Fount Paperbacks, 1977), 150.
Moreover, Rauschenbusch enlightened King to see the relationship between church and
the kingdom of God. He saw the kingdom of God as an ideal society wherein people
lived together and experienced brotherhood in cooperation, love and justice. For him, a
man himself with the help of God would be able to build such a society. Reading
Rauschenbusch brought home to King that, “the church should take a direct, active role
in the struggle for social justice.” Additionally, it was also through Rauschenbusch’s
eye that King came to see the centrality of love in social ethics. For Rauschenbusch,
love is the fundamental virtue in the ethics of Jesus. He asserted “love is the society-
making quality.” Perhaps, it was the first time King noticed the central role of love in
Christian social ethics.

Nevertheless, King did not accept every idea that Rauschenbusch argued. First,
Rauschenbusch, in King’s view, was trapped in “the nineteenth century cult of
inevitable progress.” Thereby Rauschenbusch became an uncritical religious Utopian.
The second point that King disagreed with is Rauschenbusch’s attempt to identify the
kingdom of God with a particular social and economic system. That, for King, was “a
temptation which the church should never give in to.” However, many scholars have
seen that King’s criticism of Rauschenbusch was not completely fair. Unlike the
optimistic liberals of that time, Rauschenbusch acknowledged human weaknesses and
frailty. He argued that, “if there were no evil, … , the Kingdom of God will still be the
end to which God is lifting the race.” Similarly, Robert Cross also confirms that

32 Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride toward Freedom*, 78.
33 King, “Pilgrim to Nonviolence,” in *A Testament of Hope*, 37; also in *Strength to Love*, 150.
34 Ibid., 171.
Rauschenbusch did not believe that “human nature was fully perfectible, only that man might become more Christ-like by seeking to build Christ’s kingdom.” In *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, first published in 1917, Rauschenbusch discussed sin more seriously than most of his liberal counterparts. There, he argued that the advancing of the Kingdom of God is not simply a process of social education, but a conflict with hostile forces. Therefore, the strategy of the Kingdom of God involves a study of the social problem of evil. In this regard, King did not do justice enough to critiquing Rauschenbusch’s theology of the kingdom of God. Despite these disagreements with Rauschenbusch, King had a theological breakthrough through Rauschenbusch’s influence in his journey to nonviolence.

**Karl Marx**

In tracing King’s intellectual journey, many scholars do not pay as much attention to Karl Marx’s influence as they do to that of Rauschenbusch, Mohandas Gandhi, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Anders Nygren. However King, in retrospect, largely discussed Marx’s teachings especially *Das Kapital* and *The Communist Manifesto*. There, King spelt out some reasons why he rejected Marx’s philosophy and some points at which he found it challenging. More importantly, King described communism in a number of his speeches and writings since it was a dominant counter-political ideology against capitalism. For example, he even preached a sermon with a title, “Can a Christian Be a Communist?” What is more, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) labelled King as a self-professed Marxist. According to the FBI, King did not profess

---

37 For example, Rufus Burrow Jr., in *Extremist for Love*, mainly discusses the intellectual impacts of Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr on King. John J. Ansbro focuses his discussion on King’s concept of *agape* love, which he adapted from the Swedish bishop Anders Nygren. Michael J. Nojeim in *Gandhi and King: The Power of Nonviolent Resistance*, comparatively examines King and Gandhi, thereby unearthing Gandhi’s impact on King.
39 Clayborne Carson (ed.), *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.* 445-454.
this publicly because doing so would sully his reputation. Adam Fairclough surmised that that critique was, perhaps, a product of the racism that permeated the Bureau under its chief, J. Edgar Hoover, who loathed King.\textsuperscript{40} True, King, in the last two years before his death, worked passionately for social and economic equality. Hence, it is necessary to look at how communism or Karl Marx, to a certain extent, inspired King’s passion for nonviolence despite the fact that he rejected its rudiments.

At the time of King, the ideological feud between communism and capitalism was politically so pervasive that a number of wars broke out. For instance, the Vietnam War was a repercussion of that feud.\textsuperscript{41} Communism, at that time, was considered to be the common enemy to fight against in the so-called democracy-flourishing Western countries. In the speech, “Beyond Vietnam,” King reflected communism as a challenge, saying, “It is a sad fact that because of comfort, complacency, a morbid fear of communism, … the Western nations that initiated so much of the revolutionary spirit of the modern world have now become the arch anti-revolutionaries.”\textsuperscript{42} Every tenet of communism was seen as evil or threatening. King read Marx’s \textit{Communist Manifesto} and \textit{Das Capital} so as to discern where he should agree and disagree with him.

Most of all, King rejected the ethical relativism and atheism of communism. So, he regarded communism as a serious rival of Christianity. Truly, it is menacing because communism devalues what Christianity values, especially theistic worldview. That led many Christians to react defensively and offensively against everything pertaining to communism. Pointedly stated, communism became nothing but evil itself. This

\textsuperscript{40} Adam Fairclough, “Was Martin Luther King a Marxist?” in \textit{History Workshop}, no. 15 (Spring, 1983): 118.

\textsuperscript{41} The Vietnam War (1954-75) was a war between the communist government of North Vietnam, inspired by Chinese and Soviet communism and that of South Vietnam, supported by the United States. It is also known as the “American War” in Vietnam. In the \textit{Encyclopedia of Britannica}, it is said that the war was also part of a larger regional conflict and a manifestation of the Cold War between the United States and the ex-Soviet Union and their respective allies, “Vietnam War, (1954-75)” \textit{Encyclopedia Britannica}, from http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/628478/Vietnam-War, (accessed 2 March 2015).

\textsuperscript{42} King, \textit{The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.}, 341.
approach seemed not fair to King because it was too offensive as well as defensive. If all humans have been searching for the truth in several ways, an atheist is no exception to this quest.\textsuperscript{43} So, it is crucial to look at communism in brief.

Karl Marx, the father of communism, was born in 1818 and raised in a Jewish home in Germany. For economic reasons, his parents had converted from Judaism to Protestant Christianity. That experience was a formative factor for him in becoming materialistic. It is, in his eyes, not God that mattered, but money. Marx deliberately argued that money, since it has the potential to appropriate all objects to itself, is the object \textit{par excellence}. He illustrated the omnipotence of money: “I am ugly, but I can buy myself the most beautiful woman.”\textsuperscript{44} Thus, Marx invested a great effort in looking at politics from a materialistic eye. For instance, he employed Hegel’s dialectic method but discarded all the supernatural or metaphysical elements to materialistically interpret human history and later formulate his idea of a revolutionary Utopia. Unlike Marx, King was raised in a family in which Christian faith was deeply entrenched, and the church where his father pastored was, as noted, also like a second home to him. His upbringing led him to easily believe in the God of love. King delineated his idea of God who is able, in \textit{Strength to Love}. This God, in his understanding, is “at work … not outside the world … Like an ever-loving Father, God is working through history for the salvation of his children.”\textsuperscript{45}

Even so, King was enormously impressed with Marx’s passion for social justice. He discerned a positive side of communism, which is, for him, the revolutionary spirit. Communism, in his understanding, is “a judgement against our failure to make


\textsuperscript{45} Clayborne Carson (Senior editor), \textit{The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Vol VI: Advocate of the Social Gospel} (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 2007), 512.
democracy real and follow through on the revolutions that we initiated.”  

About the concern for social justice, King believed that Christians are bound to be in accord with communism. He continued to say that even though Christians do not accept communists’ creed, they must admire their zeal and their readiness to sacrifice themselves to the very utmost. So, later King’s passion for economic justice, because of the gulf between abject poverty and superfluous wealth, led him to criticise the lopsided view of capitalism from a socialistic or communistic view. In Michael Nojeim’s view, “King’s radicalism evolved into what can be referred to as “Christian socialism” or “democratic socialism.”

In an address, King proposed an idea on the possibility to integrate communism and capitalism: “You can work within the framework of democracy to bring about a better distribution of wealth; you can also use your powerful economic resources to wipe poverty from the face of the earth.” It is very obvious that King had been, perhaps unknowingly, impacted by the vision of communism and socialism in terms of equitable distribution of wealth. That vision was re-awakened and reinforced in a much deeper way when he left for Norway and Sweden in 1964 to accept the Nobel Peace Prize. There he was amazed and inspired by the democratic socialist tradition. In short, communism helped King see the negative side of capitalism; it also inspired in him a strong sense of socio-economic equality.

Another insight that King learned from reading Marx is the dialectical method of interpreting human history from a materialistic perspective. It is well known that Marx

46 Martin Luther King, *Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*, 341.
47 Clayborne Carson (ed.), *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. VI, 148-149.
was massively indebted to a German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Hegel.\footnote{I will discuss Hegelian dialectic in more detail later.} Marx, by using the dialectical method of Hegel, formulated the idea of communism. According to Hegel, dialectic is progressive. In any development, there are three different moments (for some scholars, they are a thesis, an antithesis, and a synthesis) that keep up the spirit of its journey. However, Hegel’s creation of this dialectical principle is not to interpret human history materialistically; rather, he attempted to view the accessibility of the infinite or to employ the Kantian term, the thing-in-itself.\footnote{Hegel, like some of the previous philosophers, had a view of the absolute. But his idea differed from Kant’s. To distinguish between their different views on the absolute is to divide them into \textit{transcendent} and \textit{immanent} metaphysics. The former defines the absolute as entirely different from totality and therefore as transcendent. The absolute, in this view, is categorically not part of this world. In contrast, the latter sees the absolute as a totality differentiating itself, Markus Gabriel, “The Dialectic of the Absolute: Hegel’s Critique of Transcendent Metaphysics,” Nectarios G. Limnatis, \textit{The Dimensions of Hegel’s Dialectic} (London & New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), in 80-81.} In contrast, Marx despiritualised or de-absolutised the Hegelian dialectic so that it might be assimilated to interpret human history materialistically.

Even though King did not accept Marx’s dialectical materialism, he seemed impressed with Marx’s argument of a revolutionary idea via Hegelian dialectic. As mentioned in King’s personal upbringing, he was reared at the hands of parents with two different personality types. His early upbringing itself led him to be inclined towards the principle of dialectic thinking. So reading Marx convinced him that capitalism and communism each bear a partial truth. For King, capitalism was so concerned with an individual enterprise that the collective dimension of humanity was neglected. Likewise, Marxism focused on collective enterprise at the cost of individual enterprise. The conclusion that King made is very Hegelian in method: “the kingdom of God is neither the thesis of individual enterprise nor the antithesis of collective enterprise, but a synthesis which reconciles the truths of both.”\footnote{King, \textit{Stride toward Freedom}, 83.}
Friedrich Nietzsche

King had an intellectual and emotional crisis prior to his conviction concerning *agape* love. That crisis was so severe that King hardly believed in the power of love. It was Friedrich Nietzsche whose writings left King with despair concerning the power of love. Nietzsche, known as anti-Christian, seriously attacked Christian values and teachings in order to re-invent the new values and culture that are fundamentally opposed to Christianity. For him, it was Christianity that created imaginary causes such as, “God,” “soul,” “ego,” “free will,” and imaginary effects such as, “sin,” “redemption,” “grace,” “punishment,” and “forgiveness of sins.” Most of all, he viewed that Christ on the cross is the most sublime symbol – even today. In his eye, “Everything that happens, happens in accordance with strife.” For him, life is a dynamic interplay of strife. Though he himself was a son of a pastor during his childhood, later in his life, he opposed Christianity and invented a morality which is radically hostile to it. All the attempts he had been making was to confront humanity with the most difficult demand ever made of it. As an existentialist, he did not endeavour to erect new idols or *ideals*. In his view, humanity is called to actively involve themselves within life’s dynamic nature in us. Therefore, he vehemently the well-established Christian ideals. One of the well-known idea that he advanced is “will to power.” For him, it affirms life through the enhancement of opposing activities or values. In contrast, the “will to truth,” an opposite of “will to power,” according to Nietzsche, requires unconscious submission, a weakness of will and repressed creativity. While “will to power” represents the new world order that he liked to create, “will to truth” represents Christianity that seeks comfort, peace and safety. Thus,

---

Nietzsche vehemently opposed the values of Christianity. Love, pity, and meekness are nothing but hurdles to those whose lives are committed to the “will to power.” Therefore, it is no wonder that King was bewildered by reading such anti-Christian philosopher Nietzsche. As John J. Ansbro observes, reading Nietzsche’s critique of Christianity confused King with the idea that Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is only the ethics for the conflict among individuals, not necessarily for social implication.\textsuperscript{57} However, King’s confusion did not last long, and in reading Gandhi his doubt about love and its wider implications were diminished.

**Mohandas K. Gandhi**

King came to know Mohandas Gandhi through hearing the address given by Dr Mordecai Johnson, president of Howard University, who had just returned from a trip to India. Johnson’s message was, indeed “profound and electrifying” to him.\textsuperscript{58} Through reading Gandhi’s works, his doubt about the power of love gradually faded away. His confusion regarding Jesus’ teaching of loving enemies was also solved. Most importantly, King was convinced that nonviolence or practising the love of enemies is the answer to social evil. Although he intellectually owed his beliefs to others such as Davis, Niebuhr, Marx, Rauschenbusch, and the like, Gandhi is the one who satisfied his desire of searching for social justice.\textsuperscript{59}

Gandhi is known with the title, “Mahatma,” meaning Great Soul. Scholars note that Christianity played a special role in the life of Gandhi. Gandhi religiously claimed to be

\textsuperscript{58} King, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*, 23.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 24. W. Watley notes an interesting trilogy of intellectual linkages in the thoughts of Henry David Thoreau, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr. King was influenced by Thoreau and Gandhi. Gandhi was influenced by Thoreau and had an abiding interest in the struggles of American Blacks. Thoreau was influenced by the great Hindu works, the Bhagavad-Gita, and the sacred Upanishads, and was a strong opponent of slavery. Put differently, “it is intriguing how the lines of Eastern and Western thought interlace in the formation of King’s social philosophy,” William Donnel Watley, “Against Principalities,” 29-30.
Hindu, yet he was inspired a great deal by Jesus and his Sermon on the Mount. For Gandhi, the Sermon vividly depicted his ideas of nonviolence. In the Sermon, Jesus gave his disciples the otherworldly norms and values to transform the current world. Similarly, Gandhi viewed nonviolence as a countercultural value to change the power of violence. For Gandhi, liberation through nonviolence is inclusively physical, material, social, political, and economical.

However, the theory of Christ’s death as a sacrifice for the sins of the world was deplorable to Gandhi. He saw Jesus merely as “a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice and a divine teacher, but not as the most perfect man ever born.”60 In his autobiography, Gandhi mentioned how he was often given a number of books about Christianity, yet none of them except Tolstoy’s The Kingdom of God Is within You struck him. He did not regard Christianity as a perfect religion or the greatest of all religions.

At the same time, he was also critical of some teachings of Hinduism, especially the concept of untouchability. In regard to religions, Gandhi was a free thinker, though he followed the traditions of Hinduism and some parts of Christian teaching. But Gandhi, as a self-professed Hindu, established his idea of nonviolence on the basis of Hinduism. For him, life persists in the midst of destruction. So he argued that there must be a higher law than that of destruction – the law that society would be well-ordered, intelligible and enabling a life worth living. He believed that that law is love – the law of love through which to conquer an opponent.61 He felt that the more he abided by this law, the more he felt delight in life. In short, reading Gandhi – the man with a strong conviction of love, re-opened King’s eyes to seeing the importance of agape love.

---

Despite the fact that King saw another world through the lens of Gandhi, it does not mean he was converted to Gandhi’s religion, Hinduism.

Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence is largely based on the doctrine of “ahimsa” which is derived from Hindi, meaning a combination of the two words “a” (none or without) and “himsa” (violence). Approximately translated, it refers to nonviolence, non-injury, or tolerance. For Gandhi, “ahimsa” meant much more than “nonviolence.” It means, expounded Gandhi, we are neither to offend anybody nor to harbour an uncharitable thought, even in connection with one who may consider oneself to be our enemy.62

What is more, Gandhi’s view of God and truth is typical of Hinduism. For him, God and Truth are inseparable because Truth is the most important name of God.63 The idea of “satyagraha” (“satya” means truth, whereas “agraha” means firmness, meaning in compound word “insistence on truth” or “holding firm to truth”) – the term through which Gandhi decoded his philosophy of nonviolence – highlights Gandhi’s whole religious and social perspective.64 For Gandhi, all people have only two ways to follow: either “himsa” (violence) or “ahimsa” (nonviolence). Gandhi’s conviction for ahimsa is so strong that he considered it as the only means to know God who is Truth and identified it as a positive and active state of love. Thus he wrote, “When you want to find Truth as God, the only inevitable means is love, that is, nonviolence, and since I believe that ultimately the means and the ends are convertible terms, I should not hesitate to say that God is Love.”65

63 John J. Ansbro, Martin Luther King, Jr.: Nonviolent Strategies and Tactics for Social Change, 3. In his writings, Gandhi used Truth with a capital T. The implication is that God and Truth, for Gandhi, are synonymous. Significantly, Gandhi did not regard God as personal. God, for him, is a force, the essence of life, pure, undefiled consciousness, truth, goodness, light and love. He sees God as the unseen power pervading all things, the sum total of life, and the indefinable, the formless, the nameless. However it does not make any difference to him whether one regards God as personal or impersonal, Glyn Richards, The Philosophy of Gandhi: A Study of His Basic Ideas (Surrey, TW: Curzon Press, Ltd., 1991), 2, 3.
65 Quoted from John A. Ansbro, Martin Luther King, Jr., 4.
In contrast to Gandhi’s exposition of nonviolence on the basis of Hinduism, it was Christianity that was always fundamental to King’s life. It was neither Gandhi nor his idea of love that basically shaped King. But, “King’s faith derived from such a love having been made flesh in Jesus of Nazareth.” 66 Lerone Bennett wrote:

King’s genius … was not in the application of Gandhism to the Negro struggle, but in the transmuting of Gandhism by grafting it onto the only thing that could give it relevance and force in the Negro community, the Negro religious tradition. 67

In his own words, King succinctly wrote, “Christ furnished the spirit; Gandhi showed how it would work.” 68 Thus, everything King thought and did is not an exposition of Gandhi’s ahimsa. For instance, God, for King, is personal – the one who works in human history. King believed that faith in God who is more powerful than anything played a significant role throughout his life. 69 Yet, Gandhi’s idea of God is more Hindu-theistic than Christian. For him, all embodied life is, in reality, an incarnation of God. Human beings are seen as the divine sparks. 70 So Gandhi believed that the most religious people live out most of the divine spark in them. During his life, Gandhi aspired to see God face to face, and God seemed very personal to him. But he did not claim to have seen God face to face. 71 In contrast, King’s emphasis was more on the justice and love of an all-powerful God – the God who sustains the universe and by his presence, King believes, the ultimate triumph of good over evil will be realised.

---

69 King, Strength to Love, 106-114.
70 Mahatma Gandhi, Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, selected and introduced by Ronald Duncan (London: Faber and Faber Limited, n.d), 30.
71 Despite the fact that Gandhi never made the claim of having seen God face to face, the inner voice was for him the voice of God. It was not a voice that came from a force outside of him. For Gandhi, a power beyond us has its locus within us. It is superior to us, not subject to our commands or wilful action, but it is still located within us. According to him, one acquires the capacity to hear this voice when the “ego is reduced to zero,” Tridip Suhrud, “Gandhi’s Key Writings: In Search of Unity” in Judith M. Brown & Anthony Parel, eds., The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 86. The use of the phrase, “inner voice of God,” that Gandhi frequently used indicates how he was influenced by Tolstoy’s The Kingdom of God is Within You.
Moreover, what made King distinct from Gandhi is his contribution to the Christian concept of *agape* or “disinterested love,” “redeeming good will for all men.” For Dennis Dalton, the idea of *agape* is quite similar to Gandhi’s spirit of inclusiveness.\(^\text{72}\)

In conclusion, Gandhi’s influence, albeit enormous, was specifically in terms of nonviolence. While Hinduism was the source for Gandhi to explicate his idea of *ahimsa*, Christianity is, for King, the foundation on which to construct his view of nonviolence. But Gandhi’s firm belief in love and strenuous commitment to nonviolence removed King’s despair regarding the power of love and replaced in him the conviction that love is the only power. King re-gained his belief in the power of love by reading Gandhi so that he re-read Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in such a way as to strengthen himself in the idea of the Sermon.

**Reinhold Niebuhr**

In the first chapter, I have already sketched a critical interaction between Niebuhr’s Christian Realism and Walter Wink’s third way of Jesus. Here we will mainly look at how Niebuhr’s writings profoundly bolstered King’s theology of nonviolence in a particular way.

Reinhold Niebuhr is known as a theologian, though he did not like to be called so.\(^\text{73}\) According to John C. Bennett, he has done more than any other American to change the climate of theology.\(^\text{74}\) Despite being previously influenced by liberal Christian thought, Niebuhr’s pastoral works at Bethel Evangelical Church in Detroit from 1915 to 1928,

---


eventually opened his eyes to seeing the impracticality of liberal Christianity. *Moral Man and Immoral Society* was the result.\(^{75}\) Niebuhr was a pacifist before, but later he became a sharp critic of pacifism.

Niebuhr had a strong view of sin. For him, the human predicament is fundamentally sin which has a profound dominance over individuals and society. So the religion of modern culture is a superficial religion for it attempts to find meaning without having discovered the perils to meaning in death, sin and catastrophe.\(^{76}\) With profound consciousness of man, he continued to critique those who optimised human history at all cost, saying that an optimism which depends upon the hope of the complete realisation of highest ideals in history is bound to suffer ultimate disillusionment. With this view, Niebuhr argued that the pacifistic movement is unrealistic. Pacifists, for him, are simply “social idealists who are profoundly critical and sceptical of the use of physical force in the solution of social problems.”\(^{77}\) Niebuhr, from a pragmatic perspective, did not focus much on the means by which to achieve a certain end; rather, he looked at the end result. For him, what matters is not whether Christians should cling to pacifism or not because the Christian gospel refuses simply to equate the Gospel with the “law of love.”\(^{78}\) He argues that there is not the slightest support in Scripture for this doctrine of nonviolence.\(^{79}\) As a Christian realist, he denied any form of absolutizing any doctrine or teaching.

Niebuhr’s sole basis for the argument of using violent resistance is the universality of sin, and so the conclusion was that war as a particular expression of sin can be justified.


\(^{79}\) Ibid., 107.
John C. Bennett argues that it was Niebuhr’s assumption that “war, horrible as it is, may be preferable to surrender to a totalitarian system.”\textsuperscript{80} From this point of view, Niebuhr pointed out that Gandhi’s nonviolent resistance against British overlords worked well because the British had reachable consciences. But he conjectured that the Gandhi method would presumably not have worked against a fanatic like Hitler.\textsuperscript{81}

Moreover, Niebuhr argued that the pacifists’ view of \textit{agape} love is also too idealistic; for him, such a love can never be practised in the world where sin is all-pervasive. For him, humans are sinners, thus justice can be achieved only by a certain degree of coercion on the one hand, and by resistance to coercion and tyranny on the other.\textsuperscript{82}

Truly, Niebuhr agreed with the pacifists in that he considers the law of love to be the law for the whole of humanity, including the political sphere. He wrote, “as God is love, the essence of human nature is also love… there can be no principle of harmony short of love…”\textsuperscript{83} But Niebuhr differed from pacifists in regard to how love should be carried out. Like pacifists, he believed that a simple endeavour to love in the personal realm is reasonably effective for overcoming evil. Despite this, Jesus’ \textit{agape} love is, for Niebuhr, a religious ideal and it has nothing to do with a normative ethic in a corporate or political realm. In the political area, Niebuhr talked more about justice than love. An ethic of love is a kind of perfectionism. Those who live by an ethic of love are always limited by their selfishness. Love can never be perfect.\textsuperscript{84} It is impossible for humanity
to live together without justice that includes all with whom we might join to form a communal society based on fairness that requires sacrifice.

In short, Niebuhr is neither a proponent of nonviolence nor of just war; he placed himself betwixt and between the debate of just war and nonviolence, agreeing with parts of each argument. What he called himself was a Christian realist. The term “realist” itself describes what sort of man he is. As a practically oriented pastor, Niebuhr used to examine the context before applying any means to reach any end – whether violence or nonviolence. He seemed uninterested in establishing any kinds of absolute.

Now the question is, “how did Niebuhr, as a sharp critic of pacifism and nonviolence, shape King’s idea of nonviolence?” According to the order of King’s intellectual journey, King, after the serious study of Gandhi, was already convinced that nonviolence was the method that he would adhere to. When reading Niebuhr, his conviction was challenged and somewhat shaken again. At first, he was confused and wondered if he should follow either Gandhi or Niebuhr. But as Charles Lemert comments, “confusion, it seems, had a maturing effect on King.”85 As King used to do previously in his intellectual journey with philosophers, he attempted to learn something valuable both from Gandhi and Niebuhr. The result is that King’s first confusion indeed disappeared, and his view of nonviolence was strengthened more than ever. King’s biographer Taylor Branch notes that his nonviolent tactics were influenced far more by Niebuhr than by the other oft-cited source. King also admitted that reading Niebuhr’s critique of pacifism left him “in a state of confusion.”86 If Gandhi indeed influenced King in terms of using satyagraha (soul-force) in resisting political dominance. King had much to learn from Niebuhr because they both formulated their social ethical view in the same context of the United States. For instance, in Moral Man and Immoral

85 Charles Lemert, Why Niebuhr Matters, 92.
86 King, Stride toward Freedom, 86.
Niebuhr observed the danger of mixing the wrongdoing and the wrongdoer in resistance, saying,

In every social conflict, each party is so obsessed with the wrongs which the other party commits against it, that it is unable to see its own wrongdoing … Individuals are never as immoral as the social situations in which they are involved and which they symbolise. If opposition to a system leads to personal insults of its representatives, it is always felt as an unjust accusation.  

King, in drawing the principles of nonviolence, clearly states that the ultimate goal of nonviolence is not to defeat the opponent, but to establish reconciliation. In Charles Lemert’s view, these words of King could be taken directly from Niebuhr. However, it is not just Niebuhr’s idea, but also Gandhi’s, because he used to make a distinction between individual Englishmen and the system of imperialism which they maintain.

But some aspects of Niebuhr’s thought regarding sin and the relationship between love and justice greatly helped King to see the whole picture of the human being. King, before a serious reading of Niebuhr, was mostly packed with the liberal doctrine of anthropology. Later he read Niebuhr and saw the presence and power of sin both at individual and societal levels. At the same time, King felt that Niebuhr was so preoccupied with the sinfulness of human nature that his view of grace and forgiveness seemed to be weakened. In addition, King, though he might be called an apostle of agape love, also learned from Niebuhr about the relationship between justice and love: “Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.”

---

88 Charles Lemert, Why Niebuhr Matters, 96.  
89 Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society, 249. There Niebuhr himself discussed how Gandhi also drew lines between the crime a person committed and the person him/herself.  
90 A historian David Chappell argues that King had already had an idea of human imperfection or flawedness before he came to be acquainted with Niebuhr. King’s essay on Jeremiah, “the rebel prophet,” written in 1948, showed some originality in academic work. He saw that evil is mysteriously rooted in individual humans and society. Echoing Jerimiah and Job, King wrote that history shows “the just suffering while the unjust prosper.” Evil is rampant in the universe: “Only the superficial optimist who refocuses to face the realities of life fails to see this patent fact.” Therefore, Chappell concludes that King’s relationship to Niebuhr is not a question of roots, but a question of affinities, A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 45-48.  
91 Clayborne Carson (ed.), The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.,
reading Niebuhr enriched King’s understanding of nonviolence. Niebuhr’s discussion about the relationship between love and justice also helped him see the inseparability of love and justice.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

Interestingly, Hegel was the last philosopher that King read in his intellectual odyssey, but the principal method through which King used to articulate the idea of nonviolence is mostly Hegelian. Hegel’s influence on King is not principally philosophical, but methodological in thinking. According to Hegel, something is identified – it is grasped at its point of origin; then something negative strikes, which, in turn, leads it to the next step where something of the earlier moment is retained still. For Hegel, this is the way all meaningful things evolve. Even the Absolute Spirit itself is not static, but a process, so dynamic. For Hegel, progress appears as an advancing from the imperfect to the more perfect; but the former must not be understood abstractly as only the imperfect, but as something which involves the very opposite of itself – the so-called perfect – as a germ or impulse. This dialectic process, in Hegel’s eyes, is something that drives human history; so history is a product of dialectics – a product (or synthesis) that has come out of the two contradictories.

Hegel’s analysis of the dialectical process helped King see that growth comes through struggle. King’s *magnum opus*, *Strength to Love* is the most vivid expression of his indebtedness to the Hegelian dialectical process. There he began with the statement: “truth is found neither in the thesis nor the antithesis, but in an emergent synthesis

---

92 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Reading Hegel: The Introductions*, edited by Aakash Singh and Rimina Mohapatra (Melbourne: Re-Press, 2008), 6. A number of scholars interpret Hegel’s dialectical principle in the form of the triad or three-steps of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. However, Roland Hall argues that this way of interpretation is mistaken because Hegel did not actually use the terms. In fact, even though Hegel evinced a fondness for triads, neither his dialectic in general nor particular portions of his work can be reduced simply to a triadic patter of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, s.v. “Dialectic” (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2006).

which reconciles the two.” A year before he was assassinated, King mentioned, “the old Hegelian synthesis still offers the best answer to many of life’s dilemmas.”

Looking at all his intellectual discoveries, King was not essentially a creative theologian or an originator of ideas. He just made the best use of the Hegelian dialectic in articulating his own standpoint, skilfully synthesising between two contradictories, such as between liberalism and neo-orthodoxy, or Communism and Capitalism. Like John Howard Yoder remarks, “King was not an academic. He was a product of the white Anglo-Saxon school, and he was intelligent, critical, and synthetic in thinking. …” But when it comes to nonviolence, King never compromised. For him, no synthesis could be established between violence and nonviolence.

**Personalism**

Not only was King influenced by great thinkers of his time, but a prevailing philosophy of that time also had a great impact on him: personalism. This might be defined as,

The thesis that only persons (self-conscious agents) and their states and characteristics exist, and that reality consists of a society of interacting persons. Typically, a personalist will hold that finite persons depend for their existence and continuance on God, who is the Supreme Person, having intelligence and volition. Personalists … tend to be non-utilitarian in ethics and to place ultimate value in the person as a free, self-conscious, moral agent, … holding that a good God will not allow what has intrinsic value to lose existence, they believe in personal survival of death.

This definition makes crystal clear King’s belief in the God who acts in human history; about his conviction of human intrinsic worth; his assurance of moral absolutes; and his

---

95 Cited from George Russell Seay, Jr., “Theologian of Synthesis: The Dialectical Method of Martin Luther King, Jr. As Revealed in His Critical Thinking on Theology, History, and Ethics (PhD dissertation, Nashville, Tennessee: Graduate School of Vanderbilt University, 2008), 52.
buoyant hope that justice will finally prevail. Personalism, for him, is “the theory that
the clue to the meaning of ultimate reality is found in personality.”98

Two recent scholars, David Garrow and David L. Chappell, strongly stress the
influence of Niebuhr’s realism on King, and downplay that of personalism. For them,
Niebuhr’s influence on King seemed more substantial than the philosophy of
personalism.99 But, their argument is not convincing if we look at King’s life and
writings closely. King himself described personalism as a “basic philosophical
position.”100 Since personalism was his basic philosophical foundation, it is necessary
to look at how this philosophy significantly enhanced his view of nonviolence.

George Washington Davis, a professor of Systematic Theology, introduced personalism
to King. Davis believed that, “God and history belong together.101” For him, God has a
purpose for the human race, and history moves toward a goal. That helped King see
God as a personal being who acts in human history. His belief in personalism was truly
a source empowerment throughout his nonviolent struggle. Reflecting his experience of
the Montgomery boycott, King asserted that God still works through history to perform
His wonders. It seems as though God has decided to use Montgomery as the proving
ground for the struggle and triumph of freedom and justice in America.102

To be specific, personalism convinced King in two ways: theologically and
anthropologically. Theologically, it gave him metaphysical and philosophical
grounding for the idea of a personal God, thereby affirming his belief in a personal
God. In his doctoral dissertation, King argued against both views of Paul Tillich and
Henry Nelson Wieman, who rejected God as a personal being. For Stephen B. Oaths,

98 King, Stride toward Freedom, 88.
99 Rufus Burrow Jr., Extremist for Love: Martin Luther King Jr., Man of Ideas and Nonviolent Social
Action (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 42.
102 King, Stride toward Freedom, 51-52.
King chose to write his thesis on the divergent theisms of Tillich and Wieman in order to deepen his understanding of personalism. For Tillich and Wieman, seeing God as a person is to limit God’s absoluteness. God, for Tillich, is transcendent; nothing can compare with what he is like. On the contrary, Wieman’s view is somewhat pantheistic, seeing God as the One who is in everything. Tillich stressed the transcendent nature of God, whereas Wieman focused on His immanent nature. Against their views, King argued that if God is not personal, it is unreasonable to speak of God’s goodness; it is also impossible to say that God is love because outside of personality, love loses its meaning. Due to the personal nature of God, he can love, be good and mindful of every individual. James Cone also highlights that King’s faith in the personal God deepened his commitment to justice and sustained him in his struggle, allowing him to be free from fear for his life or for his family.

Anthropologically, his belief in personalism assured King of a “metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all human personality.” Paraphrasing Martin Buber, King asserted, “Segregation substitutes an “I-it” relationship for the “I-thou” relationship and relegates persons to status of things.” Blacks were trivialised as a thing or property of traditional southerners of that time. That social milieu restrained blacks from fostering self-esteem and self-worth. Obviously, self-esteem and self-worth could not be constructed among the blacks unless they had a solid philosophical and theological basis. King, therefore, devotedly embraced personalism.

Despite the fact that King learned about nonviolence from various intellectuals during his academic life from his undergraduate to his doctoral studies, his academic honesty

---

107 King, *Strength to Love*, 160.
was called into question for plagiarism. The papers that have a number of instances of plagiarism are those written during the Boston years (1951-1955). Critics point out that King’s documentation is frequently sloppy and sometimes outright plagiarism. As Philip Yancey describes, “why does someone like him who masters in choosing words and prose feel the need to steal someone else’s?” His plagiarism disappoints scholars, and gives an opportunity for his opponents to disdain all his work. But is this critique too much of a generalisation? Should we discard everything King did on the basis of this mistake?

Nevertheless, King’s intellectual search for the solution of racism is a decisive phase in his life. Greatly indebted to Gandhi in learning nonviolence as a method, King did not fully adopt it as it was. Instead, he re-constructed its theoretical frame in the light of the scriptural teachings. In addition to Gandhi, there is a range of other intellectuals, like Niebuhr, Hegel, and Rauschenbusch, who broadened, deepened and refined his understanding of nonviolence. At that time, his discovery was merely on an intellectual or theoretical level. He was still inexperienced in a practical sense.

As this research also locates Wink, King and Suu Kyi in the context of military despotism, exploring King’s notion and practice of nonviolence in the socio-cultural milieu of his time will bring out a concrete notion of principled nonviolence. Likewise, analysing Suu Kyi’s notion and practice of pragmatic nonviolence in her own background in next chapter will also generate a concrete concept of pragmatic nonviolence. After these two views are critically engaged in the light of Walter Wink, we can draw some political implications for Christians in Myanmar. Now we will see

108 David Chappell, A Stone of Hope, 51.
how King began to work out his conviction of nonviolence practically in the civil rights movement.

4.2 Involvement in the Civil Rights Movement

The question of how he could possibly love the people who hated him was intellectually resolved during King’s college years. The time eventually came for King to test if what he learned was effective. But at that stage, King was not yet fully committed to the principles of nonviolence. How did he become an advocate of principled nonviolence? I will discuss how King’s belief in nonviolence strengthened his practice and how practising nonviolence, in turn, refined his faith in it through the civil rights campaigns he led. In the discussion, I will not detail each campaign King led, but I will survey all the campaigns to scrutinise the key events in which King practised what he learned from his academic studies. This analysis will expose the mounting tension between the power of nonviolence and that of racism. 110

The first campaign was the Montgomery Bus Boycott that took a year from 1955 to 1956 with the aim of establishing the Alabama bus laws as unconstitutional. That boycott succeeded more than its initiators expected. Equality in the Alabama bus laws was instituted, and it also resulted in a revolutionary change in the Negro’s evaluation of himself. 111 The self-esteem and self-worth that ebbed away under segregation were reclaimed through the accomplishment of the Montgomery movement. In addition,

110 Segregationism at the time of King was, in short, a racial problem. Yet it affected other non-racial factors. According to a sociologist Aldon D. Morris, segregationism affected three areas: economic, political and personal oppressions over blacks. Economically blacks were concentrated in the lowest-paying and dirtiest jobs. Next, they were systematically marginalized from political rights. Thirdly, segregation restricted blacks from personal freedom. So, Morris calls it the tripartite system of domination. Aldon D. Morris, Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1984), 1-2. In such a context, King rose up and led the movement until he was assassinated.

111 Cited from David Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 81.
King and the blacks discovered the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance – a method that all the blacks can work with.

Before the Montgomery movement, the practice of nonviolence seemed to be new both to the blacks and to King.112 Thus at first, King wondered if the boycott method was Christian or unchristian, moral or immoral; but later he sensed that the method might be used to establish justice in business.113 Regarding this, some scholars argue that the reason King and his fellows adopted nonviolent resistance was not primarily because of their theological and philosophical convictions about it, but because it was the only tactic the black people had to use.114 John C. Bennett wrote, “King did not choose nonviolence; nonviolence chose him.”115 Truly, the blacks at that time were powerless and dominated by the white majority, and there was no available weaponry to fight back against the whites. If the blacks had been militarily sophisticated, no one knows what kind of revolution the blacks would have embarked on.

Nonetheless, if Bennett’s argument were taken to be true, all of King’s intellectual, religious, and personal odyssey in the direction of nonviolence before would have been nothing but merely a myth. This criticism also contradicts what King said, that, “persons who used the nonviolent method of protest either because they were afraid or because they lacked the instruments of violence were not truly nonviolent.”116 In that sense, the Montgomery movement was the best window of opportunity for King to demonstrate what he had learned throughout his life. However, if the blacks were militarily sophisticated, war against the whites might have broken out already before King was born. On top of that he would not necessarily be attracted to finding an

---

114 See W. D. Witley, “Against the Principalities: An Examination of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Nonviolent Ethic,” (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1980), 86.
115 Quoted from W. D. Witley, “Against the Principalities,” 86.
alternative way to solve racial injustice since the fight would already be there; instead, he might become one of the armed fighters against segregationists.

After the Montgomery boycott, King was fully devoted to nonviolence as a way of living in a world where violence was prevalent. King’s life shows that nonviolence requires greater intellectual conviction than just a physical exertion; it entails the whole life commitment: intellectual, mental, and volitional commitment. Looking at the period around the 1950s, owning guns and knives among southern blacks and whites was as common as owning the clothing on their backs.\(^{117}\) Revenge against the violence of the white racists often occurred. What made the situation worse were the incidents of black-against-black violence and homicide. As King believed, nonviolence is not a method for cowards, but the way of the strong. Only strong persons could be truly devoted to nonviolence, leaving no place for violence. Only after his active involvement in the civil rights movement, did King enable himself to be fully committed as an advocate of principled nonviolence.

The second campaign that King led was the Albany movement (1961-1962). Despite the success of the first campaign, the Albany movement represented a failure. To be precise, the campaign failed without having gained anything it aimed for. The main mistake that King and his people made was not what they did wrong, but what they failed to do. Put simply, it was unpreparedness and a lack of planning for the campaign. However, the blessing in disguise is that King’s stature became a force that could not be ignored.\(^{118}\) Simply put, the Albany movement led King to become a well-known public figure.

---

\(^{117}\) R. Burrow Jr., Extremist for Love, 201.

\(^{118}\) Michael Nojeim, Gandhi and King, 234.
King, with great care and a thoughtful plan, led the third campaign (the Birmingham (1963) movement) to a great success. Birmingham was probably the most segregated city in the United States at that time, a place where violent attacks against the blacks often happened.\textsuperscript{119} Under the administration of the police officer Bull Conner, the protesters were brutally attacked during demonstrations. The Birmingham movement remarkably enriched King’s theology in such a way that he saw how evil was deep-seated in American society, individually as well as collectively. There he learned to differentiate just laws from unjust laws, and to defy unjust laws. There he also came to see that a real hurdle to the civil rights movement was neither white supremacists nor the Ku Klux Klan, but the white moderates who preferred order to justice. For them, peace is an absence of tension, instead of the presence of justice; so they reprimanded the use of nonviolent direct action. King was frustrated by the criticisms of those white moderates more than those of the white supremacists.\textsuperscript{120} Overall, the Birmingham campaign led King to become a sharp critic of the white moderates who opposed the nonviolent direct action that he was leading.

In 1965, King led another historic campaign, known as the Selma March. If the Albany event represented the nadir of the Civil Rights Movement, the Selma March was its zenith. The greatest gain that came from the Selma Campaign was the August 1965 passage of the Voting Rights Act, which essentially eradicated the Jim Crow Laws. What is more, the Selma movement had proved the power of nonviolence resistance.\textsuperscript{121} The Selma success was not, nevertheless, bloodless. Many ruthless beatings happened, especially on the notorious Bloody Sunday, 7 March 1965.\textsuperscript{122} Besides, Selma’s unique

\textsuperscript{121} Michael Jojeim, \textit{Gandhi and King}, 244.
\textsuperscript{122} King recalled that “the days can never be forgotten when the brutalities at Selma caused thousands all over the land to rush to our side, heedless of danger and of differences in race, class and religion.” \textit{Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?} (Boston, Massachusetts, 2010), 9. What made the march serious in the eyes of many was the fatality of a white man Rev. James J. Reeb of Boston from a serious blow to his head on the March 11, David Garrow, \textit{Bearing the Cross}, 405.
contribution was that several whites joined the march. So King saw the Selma march as a foretaste of the Beloved Community. It is truly reasonable to comment, as the King scholars do, that the Selma movement convinced King to see the beginnings of his dream of the Beloved Community. The Selma success truly empowered and fortified his conviction of the power and effectiveness of nonviolence.

As the civil rights movement was growing, King extended the movement from racial to socio-economic justice. In the inception of the civil rights movement, the campaigns King led prior to Selma basically aimed for racial integration. Everything King and the blacks were endeavouring to do was racially concerned. But the next march, the “Chicago Housing Project (1966),” was different because King expanded the movement by dealing with an economic issue – especially the gap between the rich and the poor. He discerned that the issue that the Northerners were facing was different from that of southerners. The appalling encounter King experienced was the physical devastation of the area – Los Angeles’ Watts. James Cone states that it was there that “King began to see that there are literally two Americas, one beautiful, rich, and primarily white, and the other ugly, poor and disproportionately black.” That experience led him to work for the economic advancement for black people within the system. Moreover, King was awed that most of the urban young did not accept nonviolence as the primary method for gaining their freedom.

More than that, King encountered opposition from his own constituents, especially the “Black Power” movement. It was a social movement which aimed to realise the autonomy of blacks. Black power means blacks exercising group power in all areas of life – political, economical, and socio-cultural. But it was, in King’s opinion, another

123 M. Nojeim, *Gandhi and King*, 244; James Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America*, 218. The idea of Beloved Community will be discussed at greater length in the later part of this chapter.
form of domination. For the advocates of black power, any means whether nonviolence or violence, could be used to achieve their goals. On the contrary, King persistently held on to nonviolence, and expressed his commitment to nonviolence by saying that, “if every Negro in the United States turns to violence, I’m going to stand up and be the only voice to say that it is wrong.”

The Black Power movement, nonetheless, illuminated King to see that “sharing power with blacks was not an item on the white agenda.” King came to analyse the word “power” in a positive way too. Power, for him, is the ability to achieve the purpose or the strength to bring about social, political or economic changes. He was aware of the danger of using power alone without associating it with love, thereby repudiating the concept of Friedrich Nietzsche’s “will to power.” Unlike Nietzsche, King contended that power should be accompanied by love. In short his understanding of power, love and even justice was well honed through analysing the philosophy of black power. The insight he gained is, “Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that is against love.”

As the Black Power movement led him to clarify the relationship between power and love, King’s experience in the slums of Chicago also revived what he had read from Marx’s writings about communism versus capitalism during his doctoral studies at

---

127 Here Nietzsche’s concept of “will to power” is often mistakenly construed. J. Keith Hyde argues that it is a misinterpretation to view Nietzsche’s “will to power” as a maudlin endorsement of brute strength. In fact, that overlooks the subtler nuances of his thought. He points out that Nietzsche once criticised the futility of unleashing brute force: “while a crude injury done him certainly demonstrates our power over him, it at the same time estranges his will from us even more – and thus makes less easy to subjugate,” J. Keith Hyde, *Concept of Power in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche* (Farnham, Surrey & Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), 56. For Nietzsche, life and its experiences are regarded as a dynamic interplay of opposing forces, creating conflict and tension. Lucy Huskinson also observes that the wrestling of opposing forces, for Nietzsche, exhibits the discord necessary for all existence: “everything that happens, happens in accordance with this strife,” Lucy Huskinson, *The SPCK Introduction to Nietzsche: His Religious Thought* (London: SPCK, 2009), 3.
128 King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 37.
Boston University. Many scholars view the Chicago movement as a failure because it did not produce an enforceable open housing law; but James Cone argues that Chicago was one of King’s great successes, in that it created the most important development in his perspective on America.\textsuperscript{129} When he saw the plight of poverty-stricken people in the slums of Chicago, what he learned from Marxism became a powerful tool to dissect the economic issues of that time. The real problem in Chicago was not racism, but poverty and unemployment. It was motioned in the proposal for nonviolent action as follows:

Educational opportunities in Chicago, … were hardly adequate to prepare Negroes for metropolitan life. A labor force of some 300,000 have found little beyond low paying service occupations open to them, and those few who possessed skills and crafts found their rank rapidly being depleted by automation and few opportunities for advancement and promotion.\textsuperscript{130}

King, despite the unsuccessful Chicago campaign, continued to launch a new project, which was known first as the Washington Spring Project, and later as the Poor People’s Campaign. The Campaign sought to dramatise poverty in the United States. For Michael Nojeim, King’s vision of reform in America reached full blossom, thereby seeking congressional passages of legislation: first, a minimum annual income for all Americans; next, a federal government commitment to achieve full employment; and finally, production of at least half a million low-cost housing units per year.\textsuperscript{131}

However, King was tragically assassinated on April 4, 1968, before the campaign was launched. In brief, King’s intellectual discovery of nonviolence during his college years led him to practise it, and his experiences, in turn, honed his understanding of nonviolence. King’s belief and practice of nonviolence, in the context where various forms of violence were rife, grew stronger than ever as he persisted in leading the movement. He developed a lifestyle of nonviolence in such a context.

\textsuperscript{129} James Cone, \textit{Martin & Malcolm & America}, 224.
\textsuperscript{131} M. Nojeim, \textit{Gandhi and King}, 254.
To look at his later life, two or three years before his assassination, King seemed to be struggling to cope with depression and frustration. In the comparative analysis of King and Malcolm X, Dennis Dalton points out that King’s later life relates, in impersonal tones, the success of a method, not any journey of the self. It is remarkable how little King’s ideas developed in the 1960s compared to his early writings. Towards the end, King suffered severe bouts of depression and agonised over pre-occupations with death. It seems that King was losing his heart or had burnt-out in leading the Movement. Or, he had a premonition of his own death, and he was so preoccupied with it. In short, various attacks (both physical and verbal), serious accusations from his opponents and the portent of his death led him gradually to be psychologically deteriorated. However, King’s life was too short. King’s whole activist life was a little over 12 years (1955-1968) while Gandhi lived for almost seventy-nine years. When King died, he was just 39. As Robert Holmes observes, King’s death at the age of 39 cut short a life that was probably nowhere near realising its potential for moral leadership. His premature death at the age of 39 leaves questions behind, such as, “How long could King persistently lead the Civil Rights Movement for social change?”

King’s deep conviction of nonviolence notwithstanding, his reputation for philandering disgusted many conservative Christians and moralists. It was factually correct that King did have sexual misconduct. The FBI taped numerous episodes in King’s hotel rooms. His closest colleague and friend Ralph Abernathy also revealed that King had extramarital affairs until the eve of his death. Under the FBI’s electronic surveillance,

---

134 Dalton observes that Malcolm had been a criminal, an addict, a pimp, a prisoner, a racist, and a hater; he had really believed the white man was devil. However, two days before his death, all this had changed. In commenting to Gordon Parks about his past life he said: “That was a mad scene.” And Malcolm was free. No one who knew him before and after this trip to Mecca could doubt that he had completely abandoned racism, separatism, and hatred, Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action*, 184.
135 Holmes, *The Ethics of Nonviolence*, 252.
King’s sexual misconduct was found out. Philip Yancey observes that King’s moral failing became an excuse for anyone who wanted to avoid his message. True, it seems unsound for many conservative Christians to regard King as a prophet. For instance, Yancey’s Confession of a Racist sparked a storm of anger among some conservative Christians. How should King’s sexual misconduct be considered? Should we say, like Mike Royko, Chicago News columnist, who asserted that, “King’s personal affairs had nothing to do with national security or his probity as a civil-rights leader? Or should we, like conservative Christians, regard him merely as a social activist whose moral failings made him unqualified? In fact, King’s life (both private and public) itself reflects his own anthropology which he adapted from the liberal teaching and Niebuhr’s doctrine of human being. King’s unswerving commitment to nonviolence and his love for the people of America (whites and blacks) reflected the liberal teaching of human being, according to which humans are inherently good. Like Niebuhr’s pessimistic view of human nature, King’s sexual misconduct manifests human sinfulness. In short, his life reflects a blend of two-contradictory anthropologies.

We have seen that all the campaigns King led did not succeed. A few such as Albany and Chicago Housing Project failed, whereas many campaigns (Montgomery March and Selma) largely succeeded. The Police’s brutal crackdown and arresting of many protesters including King during the Birmingham March stirred up the conscience of the whole America, and there came powerful and massive subsequent campaigns (Washington March and Selma), and the civil rights movement reached its peak. This confirms the discovery of Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan about the

138 See Yancey, Soul Survivor, 38-40. There presidents of Bible Colleges raised the question, “how can a womaniser and plagiariser become a prophet?”
139 In fact, the FBI’s hateful vendetta against King was flagrantly illegal and unconstitutional. Acting Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach was also shocked when he found out about the FBI’s dossier on King, and he took the matter directly to the President. But Johnson made no effort to rein Hoover in, Stephen B. Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound, 315, 316.
effectiveness of nonviolent resistance: nonviolent campaigns are, in general, more
effective than violent campaigns in contexts where either type of resistance has the
potential to succeed.\textsuperscript{140} Chenoweth and Stephan discover this finding from the
comparative analysis from many nonviolent campaigns that had been gone through
from 1900 to 2006. The results show that nonviolent campaigns are more likely succeed
in the face of repression than are violent campaigns.\textsuperscript{141}

Somewhat similarly, Wink also contends that nonviolence generally works where
violence would work, and where it fails, violence too would fail.\textsuperscript{142} What is more,
nonviolence sometimes works where violence would fail. Reading King’s life and the
influences upon him helps us see that it is possible to find a solution for social illness
even in the severity of racial discrimination.

King’s belief in nonviolence was, until his active involvement in resistance, merely
intellectual conviction. During the civil rights movement, he became a strong advocate
of principled nonviolence. In next chapter, we will explore how Aung San Suu Kyi
became a practitioner of pragmatic nonviolence in a context where violence has been a
means to seize power. In both contexts, the use of violence to maintain the status quo is
a reigning political culture. Both King and Suu Kyi, amid such a culture, have clung to
their belief in nonviolence. As King and Suu Kyi are both practitioners of nonviolence,
their views are not as profoundly and systematically articulated as Wink’s. When
King’s nonviolent resistance against segregation is viewed and interacted with Wink’s
framework, we can see that first, King was socialised in a segregated social milieu.

\textsuperscript{140} Erica Chenoweth & Maria J. Stephan, \textit{Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent
\textsuperscript{141} Eric Chenoweth & Maria J. Stephan, “Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of
\textsuperscript{142} Wink, \textit{Engaging the Powers}, 239. Wink illustrates that neither violence nor nonviolence might have
been effective in Stalin’s Russia, and neither has succeeded so far in Burma/Myanmar, 239. It was 1992
when his book, \textit{Engaging the Powers} was published. Now we can say that nonviolence has worked in
some measure in Myanmar.

156
Later during his college years, he became re-socialised intellectually by studying a number of theologians and philosophy, and eventually he became fully convinced of nonviolence for social injustice. At last, King began to practise what he believed by leading the Civil Rights Movement until his death. We will discuss the critical interaction between Wink, King and Suu Kyi in detail in later chapters.

4.3 King’s Principles of Nonviolence: A Critical Examination

So far, I have argued that King’s philosophy of nonviolence is not merely an outcome of his personal upbringing and his intellectual enterprise, but also of applying what he studied and discovered throughout his life in all the civil rights movements he led. Through an intellectual quest, King reached the conclusion that nonviolence was the best way to handle the socio-political injustice at that time. All the things he learned were being refined as he experimented with them during his nonviolent struggles. As a result, King formulated six principles, which were in one way or another a refined comprehensive view of his philosophy of nonviolence. His speeches and writings are an exposition of these six principles. What follows is a critical examination of each of these six principles and how they are interconnected.

4.3.1 Nonviolence as a Method of the Strong

The first principle of nonviolence is that it is not a method of the coward, but of the strong. Scholars point out that this is an echo of Gandhi.143 For Gandhi, fear and cowardice are unacceptable, so he said, “cowardice and ahimsa do not go together any more than water and fire.”144 On the surface, the way of violence when fighting against oppression seems more courageous than that of nonviolence because using arms also requires a great deal of physical strength. In contrast, the nonviolent method is

---

144 Quoted from Glyn Richards, The Philosophy of Gandhi: A Study of His Basic Ideas, 35.
sometimes considered as passive or nonaggressive because it is not a physically aggressive force. As a matter of fact, what is required for a nonviolent resistance is far greater than physical energy, so here King was referring not to physical strength, but inner and spiritual force. Therefore, King argued that cowardice and fear are stumbling blocks to be surmounted if nonviolence is to be practised.

Because of this, King spent a great deal of time in analysing fear. For him, there are four antidotes to fear: first, recognition of the reasons behind our fear; second, courage as the supreme virtue; third, love as something that can vanquish fear; and fourth, faith in the God who is in control. Prior to his analysis of fear, King had personally encountered a frightening moment, so he knew first-hand how fear could emotionally paralyse a person. This incident became known as his divine experience in the kitchen.

This divine experience is perhaps the best illustration to portray why King believed nonviolence is the method of the strong, not cowards. It happened during the Montgomery bus boycott. One night, King got a phone call before he went to sleep. An angry voice on the phone threatened that he would be killed if he marched to Montgomery. Terrified, he was unable to remain in bed any longer. So, King got up and went to the kitchen for a cup of coffee. Though he had heard this kind of threat before, on this occasion he was losing his heart. Finally, he could think of nothing else to do but to bow over the kitchen table and pray to the God whom he believed was a personal Being.¹⁴⁵ After the prayer, King heard God, through an inner voice, speak to him telling him to stand firm. In that moment, he experienced the presence of God in a way that he never had felt before. All his fear was wondrously faded away and his soul began to be filled with all the strength and courage to face anything. That experience was so crucial.

to him, that King could then not only master his fear, but also his conviction of nonviolence grew stronger than before.

Therefore, King, like Mohandas Gandhi, was so convinced that a coward could never become truly nonviolent unless he mastered the fear inside himself. If people choose nonviolence simply because they are afraid or merely because they lack the instruments of violence, they are not truly nonviolent, but instead are cowards. Like Gandhi, King understood that it was the spell of fear that had to be broken. This principle raises a question, “how can those under the extreme oppression overcome the fear?” For instance, fear is a day-to-day reality in the lives of the people of Myanmar, whose minds and hearts had been conditioned through the “leadership by terror” for more than five decades. How can such a people be motivated to become courageous for nonviolent resistance? Robert Holmes rightly puts it people, like Gandhi and King, in such a situation are not to being afraid but overcome it.

4.3.2 Nonviolence as a Path to Reconciliation

King’s second principle of nonviolence was that the chief aim of nonviolence is to end enmity and win friendship, or reconciliation between nonviolent resisters and their antagonists. This principle is also an adapted idea from Gandhi. Gandhi believed that friendship was a key concept in attempting to heal the enmity between Indian Muslims and Hindus of that time. An intense conflict between Indian Hindus and Muslims was

---

146 The oft-quoted statement of Gandhi is this: “where there were only a choice between cowardice and violence, my advice is violence.”
147 To quote Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi was convinced that, “the dominant impulse in India under British rule was that of fear, pervasive, oppressing, strangling fear, that it was against this all-pervading fear that Gandhi’s quiet and determined voice was raised: Be not afraid …,” cited from Dennis Dalton, Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 163.
148 The phrase “leadership by terror” is adopted from Manfred Kets de Vries’s Lessons on Leadership by Terror: Finding Shaka Zulu in the Attic, which is the in-depth case study of the life of Shaka through the lens of psychoanalysis, Lessons on Leadership by Terror (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2004).
149 R. L. Holmes, The Ethics of Nonviolence, 212.
prevailing across the country, especially around the time that India was about to gain independence from Britain.\textsuperscript{150}

In the same vein, King’s ultimate purpose for nonviolent resistance was far greater than achieving desegregation; it was integration. It was the creation of the Beloved Community where all racial, social and economic boundaries are broken down. To illuminate his vision, King distinguished key terms such as segregation, desegregation, and integration. Segregation, for him, is a system that denies blacks equal access to public spheres, while desegregation is eliminative and negative because it only discards the legal and social prohibitions. On the contrary, King strongly proposed the notion of integration. He defines integration as “creative, therefore, more profound and far-reaching than desegregation; it is the positive acceptance of desegregation and the welcomed participation of Negroes into the total range of human activities.”\textsuperscript{151} To employ Hegelian dialectic, integration is neither thesis (segregation) nor antithesis (desegregation), but it is a synthesis (integration). Therefore, the ultimate goal of the civil rights movement, in King’s view, was not desegregation, but integration because it is only through such integration, that the Beloved Community can possibly be created.

What role does nonviolence play in creating integration and the Beloved Community? King’s idea of integration and the Beloved Community is connected to that of the inseparability of means and ends. For King, the means we utilise are crucial. In his understanding, it is logically out of the question to attempt to foster such a community by means of violence, because violence can only breed more violence. Since the end that King sought was reconciliation and the Beloved Community, the means to reach it

\textsuperscript{150} Mohandas Gandhi, \textit{Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi}, 178. Once Gandhi undertook a penitential fast for twenty-one days to appease the warring Hindus and Muslims and to revive their friendship, Uma Majmudar, \textit{Pilgrimage of Faith: From Darkness to Light} (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2005), 180

\textsuperscript{151} King, “The Ethical Demands for Integration,” in \textit{A Testament of Hope}, 118.
could only be nonviolent. Violence has, therefore, no place in the Beloved Community, which itself is the product of nonviolence. So King adopted the means of nonviolence because our end is a community at peace with itself.152

If nonviolence is the means to bring about the end (the Beloved Community), then love is the crux of the community. For King, this community is all-inclusive of Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Buddhists. He envisioned that the call for such community is “a call to all humans for an all-embracing and unconditional love.”153

Love, as the overarching principle of all the subjects King talked about, is central to the notion of the Beloved Community. This love is best expressed in interpersonal relationships. Only through this type of love will opponents be transformed into friends.154 In Where Do We Go from Here, King’s vision is articulated: “We still have a choice today: nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation. This will be mankind’s last chance to choose between chaos and community.”155 For King, the end that nonviolent resistance seeks is not the defeat of his opponents, but reconciliation with them.

4.3.3 Nonviolence as the Weapon against Evil

Seeking reconciliation as the end, nonviolent resistance is not directed against people, but against evil itself; not against those who work within the system, but against the system itself. This principle also reflects Gandhi’s ahimsa. In Gandhi’s view, “man and his deed are two distinct things … Hate the sin and not the sinner.”156 From the

154 King, “Facing the Challenge of a New Age,” in A Testament of Hope, 140.
156 Quoted from Dennis Dalton, Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 239. Gandhi encouraged his people to distinguish evil from evildoers; that is, not to non-cooperate with evil, but to love English people who discriminated against Indians on the basis of race. Ahimsa, for him, is more than shunning violence or harm, but doing good even to the evildoer. Satyagraha, for Gandhi, distinguishes between people and systems; one may hate the system but not the people who are involved with the system, Glyn Richards, The Philosophy of Gandhi, 51.
beginning of the Civil Rights movement, King discerned the difference between the whites that worked within the system and the system. He made it crystal clear that their fight was not against the segregationists, but the segregation; not against whites, but against the notion of white supremacy. Put it another way, the struggle was not between whites and blacks, but between justice and injustice, between the forces of light and the forces of darkness, and between interracial harmony and racism.157

However, it is impossible to completely dissociate an evil social system from the personal moral responsibilities of the individuals who maintain it.158 Of course, depersonalising evil is quite unwarranted. Systemic evil can lead humans to behave in evil ways, but that (systemic) evil does not come out of nothing. It is a human product. In fact, one reason why King depersonalised racism was his understanding of human nature. He believed that a human has a potentiality to become good or evil. This belief of King was a result of retaining a balance between two theological positions – the liberal optimistic view of human nature and that of Reinhold Niebuhr.

King’s understanding of human nature seems still optimistic in that he believed that human nature can be changed. Human nature can, for him, respond to goodness because a human being is not totally depraved. But the questions that need to be asked are: Why were a number of whites so complacent and even antagonistic to the movement? Should we lay the blame for this on the system or condemn the racial bigots? Can evil that a person has committed be exclusively separated from him/herself? Who invented the segregation system? In fact, humans commit evil because external evil has influenced them, and at the same time, because evil is already inside humans. From

157 Some Christian scholars suggest that King’s perception of the fight against evil itself is similar to the biblical idea of fighting against powers and principalities, P. G. Heitzel, Jesus and Justice, 63; Watley, Against Principalities, 301. King, of course, did not use this biblical vocabulary of powers and principalities. Yet if principalities and powers were construed as socio-political structures, it is true that King’s nonviolent resistance was not against people, but against principalities and powers.
158 R. Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society, 249.
sociologist Peter L. Berger’s viewpoint, society is a human product and at the same time, a human is also a product of society. Of course, the idea of hating sin, but not the sinner is revolutionary. Yet it is truly complicated in practice. The role of justice and rule of law should be considered in this principle since truth, justice, and forgiveness are indispensable ingredients in restoring a friendship or reconciliation. As Niebuhr points out, it is impossible to completely disassociate an evil social system from the personal moral responsibilities of the individuals who maintain it.

Therefore, it seems idealistic to depersonalise evil in an absolute sense, because it is people who maintain an evil social system. Evil has been an unsolved mystery throughout human history.

However, Niebuhr admits that it is morally and politically wise for an opponent to mingle sin and the sinner. In social reform, what matters is to reduce animosities and preserve rational objectivity in assessing the issues under dispute. The more the egoistic element can be purged from resentment, the purer a vehicle of justice it becomes.

The idea of hating evil and not the evildoer, albeit seemingly impossible, is an essential characteristic of social activism for nonviolent change.

4.3.4 Nonviolence and Redemptive Suffering

If nonviolent resistance is against evil, not people, the inevitable outcome for the resisters is suffering. So, King asserted that nonviolent resistance calls for a willingness.

---

159 Peter L. Berger, The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 3, 4. James M. Dixon summarises that the individual and society are dialectically related through the processes of externalisation, objectivation, and internalisation. Man creates society through interaction. Society becomes an objective fact through the typifications of habitualised actions and through language. Man, in turn, accepts these objective facts and internalises them. It is in the order of objectivation that religion enters in. The second order of objectivation — legitimation — is an explanatory and justifying process for institutions and on the highest level of legitimation — that of symbolic universes — it is such a process for the whole social order. Religion is a symbolic universe of meaning beyond and prior to everyday life that aims at ordering and protecting man and his social reality from the marginal experiences of life, especially the most fearful and radical —death, “Review of the Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Spring, 1968), 40-41.

160 R. Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society, 249.

161 Niebuhr, Ibid., 249-250.
to suffer without revenge. This principle was also adapted from Gandhi. Like Gandhi, King also stressed the inescapability of suffering in nonviolent resistance and interpreted it in the light of biblical tradition. David Chappell traces King’s view of suffering that as a Christian theist, King had a “dilemma.” Out of the study of Jeremiah and Job, King came to see “the just suffering while the unjust prosper.” For him, the ultimate solution for problem of evil is not intellectual but spiritual; therefore, the Christian answer to evil is ultimately contained in what he does with evil, itself the result of what Christ did with evil on the cross. That idea that unearned suffering is redemptive is King’s gloss on the sacrifice of Jesus, his guide to the path of following in His footsteps. Most of all, his personal trials also taught him the value of unmerited suffering.

King acknowledged suffering as a powerful social force in both violent and nonviolent resistance. However, how it becomes a creative and a powerful force is different in these two contexts:

Violence says that suffering can be a powerful social force by inflicting the suffering on somebody else and you achieve some end by inflicting suffering on another… The nonviolent say that suffering becomes a powerful social force when you willingly accept that violence on yourself so that self-suffering stands at the centre of the nonviolent movement and the individuals involved are able to suffering a creative manner, feeling that unearned suffering is redemptive, and that suffering may serve to transform the social situation.

---


164 David Chappell, A Stone of Hope, 50.


166 James M. Washington (ed.), A Testament of Hope, 47.
So, suffering can be redemptive if someone seeks to transform it into a creative force. Secondly, King views suffering as the way of Christ and the cross.\textsuperscript{167} For him, nonviolent activists willingly allow themselves to be the victims of violence, as they are convinced that their suffering and cross-bearing will result in the redemption of social institutions. King compared his life to a cross-bearer that bore their cross to die upon.\textsuperscript{168} Only through bearing the cross, can reconciliation occur and the broken community be restored.

4.3.5 Nonviolence and Inner Strength

The fifth principle of nonviolent resistance is that it “avoids not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit.”\textsuperscript{169} Like Gandhi, here King deepened the scope of nonviolence by intermingling physical with mental or psychological dimensions. In Gandhi’s \textit{Satyagraha}, the use of violence in any form, whether in thought, speech, or deed, is exclusively proscribed. \textit{Satyagraha} resists the will of a tyrant wholeheartedly but never by resorting to hatred or violence.\textsuperscript{170} King also asserted that nonviolent resisters refuse not only to shoot their opponents, but also refuse to hate them. For him, hate never degenerates hate; rather, it intensifies its existence in the universe. Only through love, can the chain of hate be loosened and broken. This principle affirms that nonviolence requires a force which is stronger and more demanding than an external or physical force. It is a force, being generated from inside or the human soul. King expounded this principle by extensively employing the idea of \textit{agape} love. Love, for King, is concerned with internality – something operating in the human heart by the divine hand. In King’s eyes, \textit{agape} love is the love that seeks not one’s own good, but the good of others. It is also the love that recognises the fact that

\textsuperscript{167} King, \textit{Stride toward Freedom}, 170.
\textsuperscript{168} King, \textit{The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.},
all of life is interrelated. Thus, nonviolence demands more than physical force; it requires inner strength that draws on *agape* love.

### 4.3.6 Nonviolence and Justice

The last principle of nonviolence, for King, is that the forces of the universe bend toward justice. In other words, it is a hope that “justice will prevail.” In his view, it is the God who empowers him to stand firm on the grounds of nonviolence in the midst of adversities. His belief in such a God was crucial in his ability to withstand every threat and difficulty on his way to freedom and justice. With such a faith, King asserted that we, through nonviolent engagement, might become co-workers with God.171 As a Christian, King justified his position using the stories of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. The Good Friday was not the end, as Easter Sunday dawned. Nevertheless, King did not confine the applicability of this principle to Christians alone. Instead, he believed that it also works out in the lives of the devotees of nonviolence who do not believe in a personal God, but still believe somehow that there is something in the universe (be it an unconscious process, an unmoved mover, or a personal God) that works for the unfolding of justice.

In summary, King shared Gandhi’s ideas of nonviolence in drawing these six principles. In a sense, these are not his original ideas that he developed himself; rather he adapted from Gandhi’s ideas in such a manner that he Christianised them all. If Gandhi were discarded in reading these six principles of King, it would sound purely Christian – there seems to be no Hindu-toned characteristics. Both King and Gandhi are activists who practised what they believed in. They were not academics, yet they were critical and good at synthetic thinking. As both Gandhi and King, John Yoder observes,

---

were the products of white Anglo-Saxon schools, they were skilled at integrating what they learned from those schools and what was going on in their respective contexts.  

Like Gandhi, King tried his best to make religion the foundation of his movement. Gandhi foundationally based all his arguments for nonviolence on Hinduism, whereas King formulated his view of nonviolence on the basis of Christianity. Essentially, both Gandhi and King articulated their political mission at enormous personal sacrifice by pursuing religion-driven social action, and they trod the same pathway at the ends of their lives. Their lives shed light on the integral relationship between politics, morality, religion and social concern; once one is removed for sake of others, what is left would be a deformity. What makes them different, by and large, is that they adhered to a different religion (Hinduism and Christianity) upon which they formulated their principles of nonviolence, and through which they articulated their views and actions. As discussed, these six principles of nonviolence, though each has its own significance, are clearly interrelated. As an exponent of principled nonviolence, King formulated these six principles to guide and navigate his actions, and through them he lived his life. In the next chapter, we will look at Suu Kyi as a pragmatic nonviolent practitioner and highlight her view of pragmatic nonviolence, so that King and Suu Kyi may interact with each other to draw some practical implications in order to engage with the Burmese political context.

King’s principles parallel those of Wink and Suu Kyi. For instance, the method of nonviolence, for King, requires an enormous deal of courage. Wink also presents three stages (flight, fight, and nonviolent). If a coward wants to move from the first stage (flight) to the third (nonviolent), he or she has to go through the second stage (fight).


Only after having courage to fight back (second stage), can he or she move to the third, nonviolent resistance. In the same way, Suu Kyi also stresses the importance of courage or freedom from fear in nonviolent resistance, which we will detail more in next chapter.

4.4 What Would You Do?

The unavoidable question for all advocates of nonviolence is: “what would you do if someone entered your house and attacked your family?” Unlike many theorists of nonviolence, King’s response to this what-if dilemma was not primarily philosophical. Instead, it was his personal experiences which brought him to firm conviction and commitment to nonviolence. So, I would like to highlight how his experiences led him to become an advocate of principled nonviolence, and then I will look at his response to the what-if questions.

During the Montgomery boycott, King’s use of nonviolence was still tactical, employed as a method for resistance – nothing more. In fact, King was intellectually convinced that nonviolence was the best solution to deal with social illness at that time; however, he was not fully ready yet in a practical sense. Therefore, he still carried a gun with him for self-defence. In Rufus Burrow’s comment, King still adhered to the idea of retaliatory self-defence.174 Through serious conversations with his close friends and colleagues, Bayard Rustin and Glenn Smiley, King finally renounced all tactics of self-defence. In retrospect of Montgomery, King wrote,

> The experience in Montgomery did more to clarify my thinking in regard to the question of nonviolence than all the books I had read. As the days unfolded, I became more and more convinced of the power of nonviolence. Nonviolence became more than a method to which I gave intellectual assent, it became a commitment to a way of life.175

---

King’s wife, Coretta, also stated that:

In the early years, when he first preached nonviolence Martin would be asked the inevitable question put to all men of his belief, “What would you do if someone were attacking your wife?” He would answer them, “I am not sure, but I hope I would not respond with violence.” Later, as his ideals of nonviolence were tested in fire, he was able to answer more surely, confident out of his terrible experiences, that he would not strike out.176

Thus, adopting nonviolence as a way of life is, for King, not merely a result of philosophical speculation, but came through practice and experiences. Further, King was often asked whether self-defence was necessary for the movement. The question, “What would you do if someone attacked your wife and children?” seems inapt and totally irrelevant to King and those living at that time, because under the oppression of white supremacists, violence was a daily experience for the blacks. It was not “what if someone attacks,” but how attacks should be responded to. Thus, the idea of self-defence, instead of what-if, was a real issue. After his resolute commitment to nonviolence as a way of life, it is ridiculous to ask the question of self-defence to someone like King, because nonviolent activists see the misery of their people so clearly that they volunteer to suffer on behalf of others and put an end to their plight.177

In addition, King did not see a huge difference between defensive violence and aggressive or retaliatory violence. He argued that “when violence is tolerated even as a means of self-defence there is grave danger that in the fervour of emotion the main fight will be lost over the question of self-defence.”178 King asserted that he is ready to bear violence because violence creates more problems than it solves. The chain of violence (e.g., violence breeds violence) can never be broken down by violence. Only a refusal to hate or kill can put an end to the chain of violence in the world and lead us toward a community where all humankind can live together without fear.179 In short,

176 Coretta King, My Wife with Martin Luther King, 274.
177 King, “Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom,” 57.
178 Ibid., 57.
179 Ibid., 58.
King eventually reached the conclusion that any form of violence, even a kind of defensive violence, is undesirable.

3.5 Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, I have discussed King’s theory of nonviolence by exploring how he discovered that nonviolence was the best method for seeking social justice, and his implementation of it afterwards. It took a long journey for King to find the satisfying answer for the social illness of his time. To divide King’s pilgrimage to nonviolence into three scenes, his life before educational enterprise may be seen as a foundational period, because his parents’ influence and personal experiences led him to become a passionate seeker for the answer to racial injustice.

In the second place, his passion for social justice that was inherited from his childhood inspired him to untiringly continue his search for the answer by reading several great philosophers and theologians. Reading their works intellectually enriched him. But none satisfied him like the Indian man Mohandas Gandhi. Reading Gandhi opened King’s eyes to see that Jesus’ ethical teaching in the Sermon on the Mount could be applied not only on an individual level, but also in a corporate area. However, King did not become a Gandhian or a devout follower of Gandhi. King re-constructed what he learned from Gandhi from a Christian perspective so that what he was doing might be apposite to his own context. Thus, King’s philosophy of nonviolence is basically an exposition of the Gandhian method of nonviolence from a Christian perspective.

However, it took some time for King to reach a complete commitment to nonviolence or to become a proponent of principled nonviolence. In other words, the way he reached a total commitment to nonviolence is evidently not by way of philosophical speculation, but through the struggles he was experiencing. Despite his unswerving commitment to nonviolence, we have observed that King was not a morally perfect hero. Plagiarism in
a number of his writings and extramarital affairs became stumbling blocks for many conservative Christians and moralists to support the campaigns he had been leading. His life itself reflects the anthropology he adhered to. That is, King believed that humans are neither totally deprived nor basically good; instead, he retained the balance between the liberal optimistic view of human nature and Niebuhr’s pessimistic notion of human imperfectability.

As King was convinced of nonviolence as the only way to racial integration, he developed six principles of nonviolence. As examined, these principles are interconnected. To dissect all of these principles, what can be observed is that agape love is the most overarching and unifying principle of the whole philosophy of nonviolence. It is also discovered that the principles of nonviolence are originally not his own, but Gandhi’s; however, he re-formed them in the light of biblical teachings and Christian worldview. This chapter has also brought out a Christian view through King’s notion of nonviolence to engage a dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi and Walter Wink so that an integrated lens may be created to investigate the political context of Myanmar. This investigation will bring out the political implications for Christians in Myanmar.

The next chapter will be an analysis of Suu Kyi’s Buddhist understanding of nonviolence. How King discovered nonviolence and applied it in the violence-filled context of that time will, to a certain degree, also reflect Suu Kyi’s nonviolent (spiritual) revolution in the political context of Myanmar where seizing power by means of violence has continued throughout its history. Although what they resist against is different, how they persist in their resistance is the same. The next chapter will present this similarity in detail, so that the critical interaction between King and Suu Kyi may be investigated in the later part of this study.
Chapter 5

Suu Kyi on Nonviolence

The previous chapter discussed Martin Luther King Jr.’s ethic of nonviolence by looking at his familial and intellectual upbringing, his nonviolent resistance in the civil rights movement, and an articulation of his principles of nonviolence, thereby categorising him as a champion of principled, philosophical or ideological nonviolence. This chapter examines Aung San Suu Kyi and her understanding and practice of nonviolent resistance. This research has taken King to be a voice for Christians and principled nonviolence for which the way of nonviolence is not just a means to achieve a target, but an end. Similarly, the study has also chosen Suu Kyi to be a voice for Buddhists and pragmatic nonviolence, which regards nonviolence as a means to attain a goal. Further, this research aims to contribute something to Burmese Christians who live in the country where Buddhists are a majority. Thus, through using Suu Kyi as a voice for pragmatic nonviolence to interact with King as practitioner of principled nonviolence, an integrated lens will be developed so that political implications for Christians in Myanmar may be drawn.

This chapter will focus on her personal and intellectual upbringings; her entry into the Myanmar\(^1\) political arena; the struggles she has been through; and her articulation of nonviolence from a Buddhist perspective. At the same time, it is also necessary to discuss the current situation and how she is dealing with the politics of Myanmar at present so that we may discern how she persists in sticking to the principles she has practised before. This chapter analyses Suu Kyi’s view of nonviolence with the aim of

---

\(^1\) Here, I use the word Myanmar and Burma or Burmese interchangeably. When it is used as a noun, I use either Myanmar or Burma. For an adjective form, I use Burmese instead of Burma or Myanmar.
presenting Suu Kyi as a Buddhist voice in the dialogue with King and Wink, with special reference to Myanmar.

5.1 Parental Influences

One of the questions that people across the world often ask Suu Kyi is how she had been coping with the maltreatment and the brutal schemes of the regime during her house arrest. In considering this question, it is important to trace how she became such a woman of iron will. In doing so, her personal upbringing – how she was raised by her parents – needs to be examined. Parental influences on Suu Kyi are truly immense. This chapter begins with an introduction on her father Aung San who died when she was only two. It is not strange to see a father’s influence on his children. But in the case of Suu Kyi, it appears to have been more than usual. How could Aung San, who died when his daughter was two years old, influence her in such an unusual way? To deal with this question, it is necessary to sketch the life of Aung San, because he is such a legendary character imprinted in the minds of the Myanmar people.²

Born on the 13th February 1915 at Natmauk village, Aung San was recognised as the founder of the Burma Independence Army, which later became the Burma Defence Army, and is now the Myanmar Defence Army or Tatmadaw.³ Since high school, the political affairs of the country captivated Aung San.⁴ When he became a student at Rangoon (now Yangon) University, Aung San was actively involved in political activities. Because of his political engagement, he was expelled from the university on two occasions.⁵ Aung San’s contemporary Dagon Taya notes that he found no interest

---

² By “Myanmar people,” I mean all citizens from all different ethnic backgrounds.
³ In a literal sense, the word Tatmadaw means the king’s royal troop. It is the word that has been used for a long time in Burmese history.
in other things except politics. What made him unique from others is his character. Many people who knew him in person identified him as an ill-mannered, unsocial, rude and straightforward character. On the surface, these characteristics were indeed unappealing to anyone in the socially sensitive world. Indeed, Aung San did not pay as much attention to outward social interactions as he did to inward qualities such as courage, honesty, and integrity. He was unsocial, but honest; straightforward in speech, but benevolent; ill-mannered, but sincere; and dared to sacrifice his life for the sake of his country. His recorded speeches, which are well known among the Myanmar people, are the best illustration of his character. For those who do not know Aung San’s personality, his speeches might seem rude, harsh, or even insulting. However, the majority of the Burmese population deeply admire and applaud his speeches even today.

Furthermore, Aung San’s popularity was not only among his ethnic group the Burmans, but he was also hugely appreciated and trusted by other ethnic minorities. According to a Chin ethnic leader, Bogyoke Aung San was a unifying factor in the historic conference. Simply put, Aung San’s honest interest and concern for the ethnic minority groups appealed to their leaders.

Being a daughter of such a legend of Myanmar has had a remarkable impact on Suu Kyi in many ways. She studied her father Aung San from various sources such as published materials, her extended family members, and the people who knew him personally. It seems that as she studied her father, she came to know more about him, and that led her to have greater esteem for him. Thus, some critics decry that Suu Kyi is

---

7 Burman is the dominant racial group among other seven other minor ethnicities.
8 Vum Ko Hau, “The Spirit of Panglong,” in Aung San of Burma, compiled and edited by Maung Maung, 150. The Conference is known as the Panglong Gathering where most of the ethnic leaders attended with the aim of building union for the country.
obsessed with her father. For instance, Michael Aung-Thwin, one of her personal acquaintances during her studies in Japan, commented that she was always talking about her father.\(^9\) Later, Aung-Thwin’s critique became the then military junta’s propaganda against Suu Kyi.

However, the word “obsessed” seems too severe for her. Even Michael Aung-Thwin mentioned that he would be too if his father were as famous as hers.\(^10\) As a matter of fact, Aung-Thwin’s comment is simply personal. When he remarked so, Suu Kyi was not yet such a famous icon across the globe. To this critique, Suu Kyi herself also responded that it is not obsession, but respect and admiration.\(^11\) Besides this, the conclusion that can be drawn is that: if Aung San were an obsession for Suu Kyi, the majority of the Burmese population would be obsessed with him, too, because Aung San has left an indelible imprint in the psyche of the majority of the population in Myanmar. Jesper Bengtsson also discerns that this accusation is particularly strange if one considers that almost everyone in Burma regarded Aung San as a hero.\(^12\)

Most importantly, being a daughter of Aung San has birthed a sense of responsibility in Suu Kyi: a responsibility to do something for the people of Myanmar. For Suu Kyi, it is more than her father’s influence; it is a sense of duty for her country people as well.

Being a daughter of Aung San has, therefore, made her destined to serve her country, Myanmar. She acknowledges that one of the important reasons why she has taken part in the democracy movement is because of the love she has for her father. For her,

---

\(^9\) Nicholas Farrelly, “Interview with Professor Michael Aung-Thwin,” from http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2007/11/28/interview-with-professor-michael-aung-thwin/ (accessed on 11 February 2014). Both Suu Kyi and M. Aung-Thwin completed their research at the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University in 1985-1986. At that time, Suu Kyi was with her younger son Kim doing her research, but her husband and older son Alexander were in Nepal, doing his research.

\(^10\) Ibid.


loving her father and the country Myanmar are inseparably linked. In this sense, Suu Kyi may be a moral heir of her father, Aung San.

In fact, Aung San was more than a father to her; metaphorically, he was like an idol whose ghost had possessed his daughter, Suu Kyi. If this is called “obsession,” she was, of course, obsessed with her father. She expressed it in an early interview, “When I was young I could never separate my country from my father … even now it is difficult for me to separate the idea of my father from the concept of my country.” When she was in Japan, a man Aye Chan confronted her by saying, “In Burma there are Shans, Karens, Kachins, Chins and so on. They all make up Burma. Burma doesn’t belong just to the Burmans.” The flush ran over Suu Kyi’s face. Perhaps, it was first time Suu Kyi encountered the voice of ethnic minorities. For Michael Aung-Thwin, Suu Kyi was a divisive figure, forever harping on about her father. In this sense, Suu Kyi’s regard for Aung San is more than her love and admiration. It leans towards obsession and perhaps deifying or treating him as a god of the nation. Truly, Aung San was considered by many Burmese as the founder and national hero of modern Burma, but not all the ethnic minorities (Karens, Kachin, Chins, Shans, Rakhain, and so on). For many ethnic minorities, Aung San is just a leader with the same Burmese superiority mentality. What makes him different is that he showed more concern for minorities than other nationalistic politicians during that time.

Like Aung San, her mother Khin Kyi also had an enormous influence on Suu Kyi. After Aung San’s unexpected demise, Khin Kyi, without re-marrying, took on all the household responsibilities and raised all her three children. Patricia Herbert, who lived

---

in Rangoon in the Ne Win years, said, “Khin Kyi was such a dignified woman with a very distinctive voice … it was a very clear voice, very authoritative without being domineering: you paid attention to what she said, and I think in that sense she must have had a huge influence on her daughter.” It was Khin Kyi who instilled in the mind of her children a strong memory of their father. Ma Than É, a close friend, mentor and adult role model for Suu Kyi, also wrote that it was Khin Kyi, who “impressed upon the children their obligation to Burmese social and moral values and brought them up in the Buddhist faith.” In that regard, Suu Kyi has become the person her mother Khin Kyi wanted her to be.

Khin Kyi is also known as a strict disciplinarian with “a warm-hearted personality.” Suu Kyi, under the nurture of such a mother, developed characteristics, such as courage, honesty, and discipline. Khin Kyi’s influence on her daughter Suu Kyi was not limited merely to character and attitude, she also implanted a love for the country Myanmar and its people in her daughter’s mind, regardless of religious and ethnic differences. Suu Kyi recalls how her mother raised her up: “From my earliest childhood my mother taught me this idea of national unity (to live together in harmony in the midst of ethnic diversity); not by merely talking about it but by including it in everyday work.” In one of her speeches, she gives a personal illustration:

… we always had people from various ethnic groups living with us. At that time my mother was working with nurses. Nurses from all over the country would come to Rangoon to attend classes on childcare. She would invite those from ethnic minorities to stay at our home. Since my youth, then, I was taught to live closely with people from other ethnic groups.

16 Peter Popham, The Lady and the Peacock, 167.
19 Alan Clements, Voice of Hope, 86.
21 Ibid., 220.
Another noticeable influence that Khin Kyi had on her daughter Suu Kyi was in teaching her to value and maintain Burmese traditions. Many of those who are acquainted with Suu Kyi affirm that she, despite growing up in the Western context, could keep in touch with the aspects of Burmese customs, traditions, and even the Burmese language. Put differently, her upbringing in the UK was unable to inhibit her love for the country; instead, she has lived up to her mother and father’s expectations in regard to loving the country, and valuing and maintaining Burmese customs and traditions. Suu Kyi, under the rearing of such a mother has inherited a sense of duty and courage to do what is right, as well as indiscriminate love for the country and its people. This personal upbringing under such parents is a decisive factor that empowered Suu Kyi to lead unalteringly the nonviolent resistance against the then military regime.

5.2 Intellectual Upbringing

If the parental influence has outfitted Suu Kyi with a sense of responsibility and love for her country, how did her education furnish her to cherish and embrace freedom, justice, and human rights? How much does Suu Kyi’s educational enterprise prepare her for the nonviolent resistance? Generally, Suu Kyi has a very good educational background. She completed her basic education at the English Methodist High School (EMHS) in Yangon, Myanmar, until her mother moved to New Delhi, India, as a Burmese ambassador in India. She continued her college education at Lady Shri Ram College, India. There she came to be familiar with Mohandas Gandhi’s nonviolence philosophy. Being fascinated by Gandhi’s nonviolence, Suu Kyi read not only Gandhi’s writings, but also those of the philosophers who had influenced Gandhi.22 So, Gandhi is

---

the first person through whom Suu Kyi was intellectually illumined and inspired to resolutely commit to nonviolence.\textsuperscript{23}

In 1964, Suu Kyi continued her undergraduate degree, concentrating in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics at St. Hugh’s College in Oxford. The subjects she took reveal her desire to dig deep into politics, philosophy and economics. According to Ang Chin Geok, the reason Suu Kyi chose to study economics is not because of her interest in it, but because economics seemed a useful subject for a developing country.\textsuperscript{24} Another biographer of Suu Kyi also mentions that her interest is not in politics, philosophy and economics, but in English, Japanese or forestry. Thus, Suu Kyi seemed to be experiencing a clash between what she wanted to study and what she thought she ought to study for the sake of her country Myanmar. As a result, for some of the subjects she took her grades were average, not outstanding.\textsuperscript{25} Nevertheless, this educational background expresses how her heart was devoted to her country even before she had any chance to do something for the country. After completing her BA in 1967, Suu Kyi went to New York, USA, and worked at the United Nations for three years while she was doing her postgraduate studies. During this time, she developed an appreciation for famous nonviolent activists, like Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.\textsuperscript{26} In short, Suu Kyi’s educational enterprise was a stepping-stone in preparing her for when the time would come for her to do something for her country Myanmar.

Further, it is not only the education itself she pursued, but also the socio-cultural context where she studied. Both the education she undertook and the learning environment where she had been nurtured highly value and practise the ideas of freedom, justice, democracy and human rights as universal norms. Ethnically she is a

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{24} Ang Chin Geok, Aung San Suu Kyi: Towards a New Freedom, 26.
\textsuperscript{25} Peter Popham, The Lady and the Peacock, 194.
\textsuperscript{26} Ang Chin Geok, Aung San Suu Kyi: Towards a New Freedom, 29.
Burmese; however, culturally and intellectually she is more western. Well-versed in the concepts of democracy, freedom, justice, and human rights, she is eloquent and articulate in interpreting them in speech and writing by using Buddhist and Burmese cultural symbols, tales and concepts. During her studies at Oxford, she met Michael Aris whom she married in 1972. They had two sons – Alexander and Kim. Until she got involved in Burmese politics, she and her family spent in England, the US and India.

5.3 Entry into the Myanmar Politics

Looking at her early life, Suu Kyi did not have the desire to become a politician. All she wanted was simply to contribute something to her country – in particular, simply to start several libraries in Myanmar. How could a woman with such a vision turn out to be a nonviolent activist, politician and a voice of freedom across the world as well as throughout Myanmar? What pushed Suu Kyi to enter the politics of Myanmar?

On 2 April 1988, Suu Kyi arrived in Yangon, Myanmar, to attend to her ailing mother in Yangon Hospital. Until then, she did not have any intention to get involved in the Burmese politics. Coincidently, this was during the student protest, which began in March 1988 and increased in intensity in August. In the hospital, she saw numerous protestors being battered and wounded by gunshot. For a woman who loves and feels responsible for her country, it was unbearable to see the ex-regime’s brutal attacks against the protestors. Eventually it led her to join the movement and become involved in Burmese politics. Unfortunately, the junta denounced Suu Kyi as an opportunist politician who used the Four 8s as the best chance to become a national heroine. In one sense, the regime’s reprimand was somewhat sensible because it was not Suu Kyi’s initial desire to become a politician. But, the denunciation was unacceptable for the

28 The 1988 uprising is known as the Four 8s. In fact, the protest began on the 12th March 1988 and reached its peak on the 8th of August 1988.
following reasons. First, Suu Kyi felt a deep responsibility to do something for Myanmar. For such a woman, encountering the army’s brutal attacks against the protestors was agonising. At the same time, she began to notice that the need of Myanmar was more than establishing libraries. The country needed a thorough reform of its political structure. Thus, she states that she has taken part in the democracy movement in Myanmar because of her love of the country and a sense of responsibility toward its people.29

However, Suu Kyi was politically naïve; she had no experience whatsoever. She did not have a passion for it as her father had. Politics was of no interest to her, though she read “Philosophy, Politics, and Economics” in undergraduate studies at Oxford. Instead, her passion was to become a writer. Though she loves the nation Myanmar, most of her life was spent in the West. The woman who lacked political passion happened to engage in Burmese politics. During her undergraduate studies at Oxford, she did not take any part in the university’s political life. When she was informed about “the struggle of the Greenham Common women besieging the US military base in the English countryside in protest, her response was that these women would be better advised to go home to their families and their duties as wives and mothers.”30 How could such a woman efficiently and effectively engage in the politics of which she has no interest or familiarity?

5.4 Political Life of Suu Kyi (1988 – the present): A Survey

This research looks at two personalities, Martin Luther King Jr. and Aung San Suu Kyi. While the former passed away almost fifty years ago, the latter is still alive, therefore it necessitates a survey of Suu Kyi’s ongoing struggle for freedom and democracy. Suu

Kyi, although born in Myanmar, grew up in a very different political context in the United Kingdom where law, human rights, and democratic values are more respected, practised, and cherished than in Myanmar. As such a woman, how could she resolutely develop a nonviolent resistance against one of the worst repressive regimes in the world? In this survey, I will focus on how Suu Kyi persists in struggling for democracy against one of the most brutal despotic military regimes in the world by looking at major events that she encountered, not by narrating her life chronologically.

5.4.1. The Military Regime and Suu Kyi

The key phrase to depict the conflict between the junta and Suu Kyi is indeed the power struggle. As a matter of fact, the conflict between the junta (known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council / State Peace and Development Council) and Suu Kyi is not something between the powerful and powerless, but between two powers. Each has its own power. The power of SLORC/SPDC is institutional, whereas Suu Kyi’s power is personal. The regime does not have what Suu Kyi has, and vice versa. It led to a fierce fight between them. The discussion of this power struggle will shed light on understanding Suu Kyi’s commitment to nonviolence.

Being a daughter of Aung San and her rhetorical skill in public speeches enabled Suu Kyi to win instant fame within a short time when she entered politics. As her popularity was growing across the nation and the globe, the regime’s bitter hatred toward her became fiercer. Under such an attitude, Suu Kyi received various reproofs from them, most of which are too subjective and even prejudicial; therefore, those may be called stinging rebukes. First, the regime accused the NLD in particular and other party politicians in general of practising “personality politics.” For the then junta, these

---

31 After Ne Win resigned from power, the military regime by the name of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) came to power. SLORC was dissolved on 30 March 2011 by Senior General Than Shwe and it was renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).
politics would lead the nation to disunity. Thus, they justified their coup by stating that
the army is the only true father and mother to the public because it is the only genuine
institution that has no special regard for any personality. Does Suu Kyi actually practise
personality politics?

To deal with this question, I would like to clarify two Burmese words – a-na and awza
– which can both be translated as power. Despite the fact that these two words are
power-related, I would like to name a-na as authority and awza as influence to analyse
the Burmese concept of power. An a-na is institutional, dictatorial, and centralised,
whereas awza is distributed and corporate. While the former is seen as top-down, the
latter is inter-relational. According to Gustaaf Houtman, the former does not cope with
awza (influence) through incorporation, but rather using exclusion.32 This strategy
made the awza (influence) leader more awza or influential, and at the same time, the a-
na (authority) leader more authoritarian. Houtmann argues that in leading the public,
the junta is strictly based on a-na, but Suu Kyi primarily relies on awza. As a result, the
more the regime holds on to a-na (authority), the more they become authoritarian. In
contrast, Suu Kyi’s awza, as she bears the attacks of the regime, grows stronger. A
political activist said, “We admire and love Suu Kyi and accept her policies because of

32 Gustaaf Houtman, “Sacralizing or Demonizing Democracy? in Monique Skidmore (ed.), Burma at the
Turn of the 21st Century (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005),134-135. Houtman has expanded
the discussion of awza and a-na in detail in his book, Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics: Aung
San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy. Tokyo University of Foreign Studies Monograph
Series No. 33 (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Language and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1999), 157-
167. In fact, a political scientist and Sinologist, Lucian W. Pye, pioneered a study of the Burmese concept
of power by analysing the term awza. His study focused on three words: pon, awza, and ahnadeh. The
first refers to the idea of grace, charity, election, destiny; the second, a kind of power; and the third, a
warm physical sensation towards others, Politics, Personality and Nation Building: Burma’s Search for
Identity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 147-148; with Mary W. Pye, Asian Power and
Politics: Asian Power and Politics: The Cultural Dimensions of Authority (Cambridge, Massachusetts:
concept of power focused only on awza alone. His study did not include the word a-na, which is also very
salient in understanding the Burmese concept of power.
her awza.” In this regard, Suu Kyi’s leadership looks like personality politics since Suu Kyi, in leading the people, focuses more on awza than a-na.

To take a closer look, Suu Kyi does not actually want a personality cult, but the cultural context of Myanmar seems to prevent her from avoiding this. There is a Myanmar saying, that only when a person is admired and loved enough, will people accept what he/she believes (lu ko khin hma tayar myin). The meaning of this saying may be interpreted differently depending on the context, but essentially it means that when people love and admire a person, they will heartily follow that person. It is impossible to force or coerce people to willingly follow someone. The concept of this saying is culturally entrenched in the minds of the Myanmar people. Suu Kyi, being a daughter of Aung San and having her personal charisma, has been so much admired and loved; therefore, her awza (influence) is so immense that she becomes a personality cult whether she likes it or not.

In addition, Suu Kyi is a globally prominent person, compared to other political dissidents in Myanmar. The United Nations, the foreign media and journalists have reverently focused on her. This international attention inflamed the SPDC’s and ex-Senior General Than Shwe’s animosity towards her. Than Shwe once countered a United Nations envoy, saying, “Why do you focus on only one individual when there

---

33 This is the interview completed by Jessica Harriden herself for her book, The Authority and Influence: Women and Power in Burmese History (Copenhagen S, Denmark: Nordic Institute Asian Studies, 2012), 221. Jessica Harriden, from the western perspective, compares Suu Kyi’s awza with Max Weber’s ‘charismatic authority,’ The Authority of Influence, 20. For Max Webber, there are three different types of authority: traditional authority, legal-rational authority, and charismatic authority. The first type is exercised by custom and ancient practices; the second, exercised by formal rules which have been established by proper procedure; and the last, the charismatic leader is obeyed because followers believe he or she possesses an extraordinary character that trumps existing rules or prevalent customs. See Steve Bruce and Steven Yearley, The Sage Dictionary of Sociology (London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), 14. Truly, the leadership Suu Kyi expresses is very similar to the charismatic type.

34 A Dutch, Burma scholar, Gustaaf Houtman, articulates how Suu Kyi’s followers highly position her even as the “Angel of University Avenue” (the name of the street where her house is situated) and as a “female bodhisattva,” in “Sacralizing or Demonizing Democracy?” in Monique Skidmore, ed. Burma at the Turn of the 21st Century, 133-153.
are 54 million people in my country?"  This question seems aggravating to the international communities. However, it is brusquely true in the sense that all the international communities, in particular the West, have taken a keen interest in Suu Kyi, ignoring other dissidents and opposition forces who worked sacrificially and suffered excruciatingly for the country Myanmar, perhaps even more than Suu Kyi did. Zauddin Sardar, as a cultural critic, assesses that the reason behind the West’s focus on Suu Kyi and the Asian female leaders like Benazir Bhutto (the 11th Prime Minister of Pakistan) is their embodying of the character of the West. Their educational upbringings at Oxford and their excellent English in expressing a language of democracy, human rights and modernisation capture the West. Sardar is right that the West’s intense focus on a single woman, Suu Kyi, is somewhat disturbing in the sense that their interest, albeit sincere, seems to ignore other political dissidents. The greater attention the international community paid Suu Kyi, the angrier the regime became. That heightened the regime’s attack on Suu Kyi which became more severe than ever. In short, because of the demanding situation of global as well as local populations, Suu Kyi is unable to evade personality politics, though she does not yearn for it.

On the other hand, the regime’s way of administering the nation itself is another form of personality politics. For instance, the first military government created by Ne Win and existing from 1962 to 1988 is known as the Ne Win era; and similarly, its succeeding regime (1988-2015) is called the epoch of Than Shwe. In the era of Ne Win, everything was under his control. He ruled the country as a monarch. Likewise, Than Shwe followed in the footsteps of Ne Win with regard to exercising power. Of course,

---

35 Benedict Rogers, *Than Shwe: Unmasking Burma’s Tyrant* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2010), 52
36 Ziauddin Sardar, “Kept in Power by Male Fantasy,” in *New Statesman*, (07, August 1998): 24, from http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/224374763?accountid=8440 (accessed 10 April 2015). In my understanding, it is true that the West’s focus on Suu Kyi is too much. As a result, many political activists who sacrificed so much more than Suu Kyi appear to be ignored. Suu Kyi does notice that there are a number of activists who have suffered much more than she has.
each had its so-called political tag with the former as the BSPP (Burmese Socialist Programme Party) and the latter as the SLORC and SPDC. Nonetheless, the whole system of each was based on a single personality. In that sense, personality politics is the system of the regime as well as that of Suu Kyi. However, the difference lies particularly in the way of producing the personality cult: Suu Kyi becomes an influential personality through *awza* (personal power) while Ne Win and Than Shwe seek to become dictatorial personalities with the aid of *a-na* (institutional power).

As the regime’s attempt to vilify Suu Kyi was unsuccessful, the accusations against her became sharper, more unreasonable and even preposterous in some cases. To illustrate the point, the two state-owned daily newspapers, the *New Light of Myanmar* and *Working People’s Daily*, often launched vitriolic attacks against Suu Kyi. According to their denouncement, Suu Kyi was nothing more than a prostitute who had three foreign husbands, with whom she practised all the wifely duties. She was also said to be a traitor because the international community supported every act she did. What is more, she was accused of being one who was destabilising the country.\(^\text{37}\) The junta used to attack her whenever an opportunity arose. For instance, the junta encouraged her to go back to the UK when her husband Michael Aris was dying. But Suu Kyi knew that the regime would never allow her to re-enter Myanmar if she did so. The regime then made an awful attack against Suu Kyi apropos of her family. The regime accused her of being disloyal to her family because she left her husband and two sons in the UK and remained alone in Myanmar simply to seek political power. They questioned, “Should she be more devoted to her family than to her country if there is only one option available?”

\(^{37}\) Than Shwe’s regime often attacked Suu Kyi through their mouthpiece, the newspapers, almost every day.
Of course, family is always what Suu Kyi had in mind. To look at her real life, Suu Kyi is a woman whose devotion to her family is doubtless. For example, she had plenty of photographs of Michael, Alexander and Kim, but she kept them upstairs in her private room at no. 54 University Avenue, Yangon, away from prying eyes. Feeling the separation from her family dreadfully, she once said, “Of course I regret not having been able to spend time with my family … One wants to be together with one’s family. That’s what families are about.”38 She went on to say, “I would like to have been together with my family. I would like to have seen my sons growing up. But I don’t have doubts about the fact that I had to choose to stay with my people here.”39 Simply put, she had a tough choice in choosing between family and the nation; and she has prioritised the latter over the former. Indeed, she did know that the dilemma she was facing was an either/or situation.

The harshest attack from the SPDC was that the ideas Suu Kyi was introducing such as human rights, democracy and freedom were incompatible with Burmese culture. In response to this, Suu Kyi compared it with Buddhism and its ideals of a righteous monarch. Specifically, through using various examples such as the ten duties of a king, mettā, thītsa, and so on. Suu Kyi articulated the compatibility of Buddhism and politics. In her writings, speeches and conversations, what is evident is an attempt to integrate politics and religion, thereby demonstrating the compatibility of freedom, democracy, human rights and Buddhism. Stephen McCarthy, in his essay on the “Buddhist Political Rhetoric of Aung San Suu Kyi,” concludes that Suu Kyi’s Buddhist political rhetoric was “a product both of her unique circumstances and her conscious decision to combine Buddhism with politics in a way that her father Aung San had not.”40 To sum up, the

39 Ibid.
power struggle between Suu Kyi and the regime is one-sided: the junta attacked Suu Kyi more than Suu Kyi did the regime. The conflict between *a-ña* (institutional power) and *awza* (influence), interestingly, shows the necessity to have both. There are things that *a-ña* alone cannot do and vice versa. Each mutually requires the other. Only through synthesising *a-ña* and *awza*, will there be an effective state that truly reforms the country of Myanmar.

5.4.2 Physical Attacks on Suu Kyi

As observed, the regime’s repugnance grew harsher as Suu Kyi gained popularity and found favour with national and international communities. This led the regime to attack Suu Kyi even physically. In other words, the government’s attack went beyond simply trying to make her lose heart and give up; they attempted to assassinate her. Among the attacks, the Danubyu and the Depayin incidents are most significant because they indicate two things: the inhumane audacity of the regime to conserve power; and Suu Kyi’s unswerving commitment to nonviolence in the heat of heartless violence.

Danubyu is a town in the Irrawaddy Delta about one hundred kilometres north-west of Yangon. It was on the 5th April 1989 during campaigning in the Irrawaddy District. She and her colleagues, while walking into the Danubyu, were stopped and told to return to the town from which they came. Suu Kyi courageously walked straight up to the soldiers who were aiming at her and ready to shoot. Fortunately, the order to open fire was declined.\(^41\) The Danubyu incident had a great impact on Suu Kyi in terms of the public and the junta’s views of her. After Danubyu, Suu Kyi became more renowned for her courage than before. Her courage appealed to many young activists, and so many young people rallied alongside her for the movement. Meanwhile, the military

---

\(^41\) See the more detailed story in Jesper Bengtsson, *Aung San Suu Kyi*, 82-83.
junta also realised how Suu Kyi was determined to strive for democracy regardless of death-threats. For the people living under such a brutal regime for decades, it is indeed an act of courage, and therefore immensely inspiring and challenging.

After the Dnubyu, the military placed Suu Kyi under house arrest until 1995. From 1995 to September 2000, she got involved different political activities. Then she was put under house arrest again from 2000 to May 2002, the year she was released again. That was the year when the second well-known incident took place. It was known Depayin massacre that broke out on 30 May 2003. Depayin was a town located in the Shwe Bo district, Sagaing Region. This event is mostly known as the “Depayin massacre.” While Suu Kyi and her colleagues were closely approaching Depayin, thugs numbering about three thousand with bamboo sticks, iron bars, and knives stopped their caravan and began to attack them.42 According to one witness,

The attackers beat women and pulled off their longyi (skirts) and their blouses. When victims, covered in blood, fell to the ground, the attackers grabbed their hair and pounded their heads on the pavement until their bodies stopped moving. The whole time, the attackers were screaming the words, “Die, die, die …” There was so much blood. I still cannot get rid of the sight of people, covered in blood, being beaten mercilessly to death.43

Their target was to kill Suu Kyi, but her bodyguards saved her. The Asian Human Rights Commission states that more than 70 victims were massacred in the incident.44 What matters most is that that incident was well thought-out and ordered by the then Senior General Than Shwe.45 According to the Asian Legal Resource Centre, the massacre at Depayin clearly amounts to a “widespread or systematic attack directed

---

42 The USDA was the organisation established by the then junta and has now become the political party, Union Solidarity and the Development Party, of the current government (USDP).
45 Peter Popham, The Lady and the Peacock, 361. Aung Lynn Htut was a former senior officer in the Military Intelligence and number two in the Burmese Embassy in Washington. After his boss Khin Nyunt was purged, he sought political asylum in the United States in 2005.
against [a] civilian population, with a knowledge of the attack, and is, therefore, a crime against humanity.”

In short, the Danubyu and Depayin incidents expose the regime’s determination to seize power regardless of complaints from local and global communities. It showed their single-mindedness in their efforts to retain power and their willingness to do anything if their power is endangered. On the other side, Suu Kyi and the NLD are also too dogged to sacrifice whatever cost to bring in democratic values to Myanmar. Put differently, they manifestly represent the most extreme encounter between violence and nonviolence throughout the history of Myanmar. Those incidents have widely publicised the ruthlessness of the regime and the fearlessness of Suu Kyi and the NLD as well.

Truly, Suu Kyi deserves the credit for her great perseverance in the face of vicious attacks from the ex-junta and her firm commitment to nonviolence. However, the only reason she became locally famous is, as mentioned, simply because of her father Aung San. As a western product, her dealing with the then regime was at first confrontational. The international community’s immense focus on her also disgusted the senior general Than Shwe and his accomplices. That added fuel to the flames of their rage against her. Once she was a housewife but she has become a celebrity. A woman who wanted to be a writer, is now a politician. The question that occurs to me is, “Can such a woman be an efficient and effective politician? And can she restore the country from the culture of dictatorship to that of democracy? If so, to what extent? Before we respond to these questions, we will look at her understanding of nonviolence.

---

5.5 Principles of Nonviolence: A Critical Examination

So far, I have briefly examined the life of Suu Kyi, how she began to be involved in Myanmar politics, and how she faced and non-violently fought against the military regime without losing hope in a better future for Myanmar. How could Suu Kyi stick to the nonviolent method to fight against such a dictatorial regime? Why is she so convinced about nonviolence?

5.5.1 Why Not Violence?

If Aung San is a personality who has immensely influenced her, why did Suu Kyi not follow in his footsteps in regard to using the means of forceful resistance for the sake of freedom? It is necessary to look at reasons behind Suu Kyi’s preference for nonviolence. Why did she not follow armed action like her father? The first reason is the age-difference between Suu Kyi and Aung San when each began their political careers. That is, she was over forty-four when she began her democratic movement, whereas her father was only eighteen when he entered politics.\footnote{Aung San Suu Kyi, *The Voice of Hope: Conversations with Alan Clements*, 85.} This age difference matters. Regarding knowledge, international experiences, education, and life experiences, Suu Kyi was far better equipped than her father, Aung San. Moreover, the different socio-political contexts in which they worked is also crucial. Aung San lived in the wartime during two World Wars. Many countries were at war, so the only single option at that time was to defend oneself by any means possible or die. It seems that for Aung San, armed force was the best solution. On the contrary, Suu Kyi lives in a time where people across the globe have become conscious of terrors, violence, and technologically advanced weapons. People in this time have become more aware of the advantage of nonviolence and the disadvantage of violence than those in the time of Aung San. History, to a particular extent, also affirms how nonviolent resistance, as a
technique, has overcome dictatorial governments, and so Suu Kyi has more advantages in acquiring the strength of nonviolence than her father, Aung San had.

More significantly, there is a fundamental reason Suu Kyi and the NLD follow the path of nonviolence. For them, violence perpetuates a cycle of violence. In other words, violence increases violence. It creates a tradition of changing the political situation through force of arms. If the military regime were overthrown by means of violence, people would be mentally conditioned to believe that violence can be defeated by violence alone, and thus the tradition of violence would never end. In Suu Kyi’s words, “if you want to change a system where might is right, then you have to prove that right is might.” However, Suu Kyi does not condemn violent activists who have been fighting against the regime for many decades. In a BBC Reith lecture, she asserts that she has taken the path of nonviolence for practical and political reasons, not for a moral reason. Through this, she has publicised her positive attitude toward violent activists in Myanmar.

However, it seems that Suu Kyi does not appreciate the use of armed force. In the lecture, she expresses it in the words, “if I were to support violence, it would only be because I believed that a short burst of violence, if you like, would prevent worse things happening in the long-run. Only for that reason would I ever support violence if I were to support it.” Has she even practised this? At present, she and NLD have become the

49 Aung San Suu Kyi, Voice of Hope, 115.
50 Aung San Suu Kyi, “Reith Lectures 2011: Securing Freedom: Lecture One: Liberty” from http://www.bbc.co.uk/reithlectures (accessed 7 April 2014). Many argue that even Gandhi, to a certain degree, supported violent means to fight for justice and freedom. But the question is, “Does it mean that Gandhi really advocated the use of violence when he said so?” In my understanding, Gandhi placed his emphasis not on supporting the use of violence, but in stressing the importance of courage for all nonviolent activists. Gandhi understood that the way of nonviolence requires greater psychological effort than that of violence. Here, it seems that Suu Kyi has mistakenly quoted Gandhi’s statement in order to affirm her stance.
51 Aung San Suu Kyi, “Reith Lectures 2011: Lecture Two: Dissent.” Like Suu Kyi, Desmond Tutu once showed himself as different to Martin Luther King Jr., stating that he is a “peace-lover” not a pacifist. Tutu understands that violence, for some of his people, is the only alternative because of the harsh
government of the country. From the inception of her government, Suu Kyi has been faced with the historically long-rooted Rakhain-Rohingya conflict. She organised a team and appointed former General Secretary of the United Nations Kofi Anan to lead the team in examining and reporting the conflict situation. The most recent event was the military fighting against Rohingya terrorists who attacked some security forces there. As a result, the international community has started to criticise the military and the NLD government for such a disproportionate attack against the Rohingyas. What the international community does not give proper regard to is the relationship between the military and the government. Suu Kyi and her government do not have any kind of power whatsoever upon the military because the constitution allows the military to stand on their own.

So far, Suu Kyi has been handling that Rakhine–Rohingya conflict with great sensitivity and delicacy, since it is such an enduring issue; it is not just racial, but religious. The issue is not that simple to deal with. There is no overnight solution to it. As it is a long-lasting conflict, it would surely take time to cope with it effectively. So the question is, “Should Suu Kyi condemn the military attacks against Rohingyas?” “What if Suu Kyi condemned the military attacks against Rohingyas?” To answer the question generally, she would receive a big applause from international community, but she would definitely lose her favour with the majority population of the country. Whatever she chooses will cause her to lose one support – either local or international community. Apparently the situation impaled Suu Kyi on the horns of a dilemma, forcing a choice between local and global support. The way in which she responded to the Rakhine-Rohingya conflict is neither fully yes nor no; instead she chose a middle-of-the-road response. That is, she stays silent on that issue. This discourages

international community, and gradually she has begun to fall into disfavour with international community. This shows that she becomes a full-blown politician who seeks to compromise instead of choosing one over other.

In ethical terms, there is a difference between a greater and a lesser evil. According to this theory, when given two bad choices, the one that is not as bad as the other should be chosen over the one that is a greater threat. This is, by implication, a position of pragmatic nonviolence. It is still the position of “the end justifies the means.” Her pragmatic view of nonviolence allows her to give fair credit to those who have fought for freedom through the use of armed force: including her father, Aung San, his comrades, and all the political activists. In short, Suu Kyi, in spite of personally leaning towards being a proponent of principled nonviolence, is politically aligned with pragmatic nonviolence and even violence. Put another way, it is a compromise which Suu Kyi came to learn from the inception of her political engagement. She has begun to learn how to compromise in her political dealings from the time she resolved to be a politician instead of being an icon of human rights.

5.5.2 Nonviolence as a Buddhist Ethic

Every reader of Suu Kyi is aware of how Buddhism plays a significant role in her life and political thought. Despite the contextual differences, Suu Kyi, like Martin Luther King Jr. and Mohandas Gandhi, is highly skilled at making religion the foundation of her resistance. For her, to be a Buddhist is to practise its teachings in all areas of one’s life: there should be no fragmentation between what one believes and what one practises. Through integrating politics and Buddhism, Suu Kyi first and foremost attempts to construct nonviolence as a Buddhist ethic. This makes her different from her father, Aung San. For Aung San, politics is mundane or this-worldly, whereas religion is a spiritual or otherworldly affair. Thus Aung San opposed the proposal of
making Buddhism the state religion while draughting the Burma constitution in 1947.\footnote{The 1947 constitution was implemented from the years 1948 to 1962, when Ne Win usurped the power of the parliamentary democratic government. Then Ne Win re-drafted the constitution, approved it in 1974, and enforced it until his resignation from politics in 1988. In 1988, the SLORC took power and they suspended the 1974 constitution. Under the SLORC, the 2008 constitution was drafted again and approved in 2008.}

In contrast, Suu Kyi views politics and religion as inseparable. For her, it is neither idealistic nor naïve to talk about \textit{mettā} in politics, but in fact, it makes practical sense.\footnote{Aung San Suu Kyi, \textit{The Voice of Hope}, 45.}

For example, practising \textit{mettā} as the basis of the relationship between the NLD members would make people come to realise how Buddhism is intricately connected with the political enterprise. Her intention is to let people see that “politics is about people … love and truth can move people more strongly than any form of coercion.”\footnote{Aung San Suu Kyi, \textit{Letters from Burma with A New Introduction by Fergal Keane} (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 17.}

What makes Suu Kyi and Aung San radically different in their views on religion and politics? In fact, the contexts where they developed their political rhetorics make them different from each other. Stephen McCarthy examines the idea that Aung San developed his perspective during his study at Rangoon University, whereas Suu Kyi’s view transformed noticeably while under house arrest in isolation. That is, her fusion of Buddhist meditation practice with her general, more developed Buddhist thought produced her distinctive form of political rhetoric.\footnote{Stephen McCarthy, “Buddhist Political Rhetoric of Aung San Suu Kyi,” \textit{Contemporary Buddhism}, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2004): 79.} According to McCarthy, the political contexts made Suu Kyi and Aung San different in the way they relate religion to politics. Of course, Suu Kyi’s practice of Buddhist meditation during house arrest has significantly influenced her desire to integrate politics and Buddhism. However, it is not the only decisive factor. There is another factor which is equally important.

Knowing the political importance of Buddhism, she interprets the politics of democracy in the light of Buddhist ideas to win the predominantly Buddhist population. In contrast, Aung San, in favour of other minority religions, rejected the proposal for
making Buddhism the state religion. This difference makes a radical distinction between Suu Kyi and her father.

Further, integrating politics with Buddhism is not an easy task. For example, the first post-independence Burmese Prime Minister Nu struggled a great deal in doing so. Nu was a devout Buddhist, and in the time of his presidency, Buddhism became the state religion. Nu is also known as one who attempted to become a Bodhisattva (a being striving for Buddhahood).\(^\text{56}\) But being a devout Buddhist, for Nu, clashed with the political tasks, such as using the armed forces.\(^\text{57}\) However, Suu Kyi does not see things in this way; for her, there is no conflict involved in being both a Buddhist and a politician. She believes that a person can be a politician and a good Buddhist at the same time. The difference, according to Suu Kyi, lies in the fact that while Suu Kyi does not purposefully aim to be a Bodhisattva, Nu did. To delve deeper into this issue, one can ask what if Suu Kyi had been the Prime Minister in the time of Nu? In Nu’s time, there were the civil wars between the state army and other minority ethnic groups and also the wars between the state army and communist insurgents. Currently, it is still a little early to objectively critique how far Suu Kyi can insist on synthesising politics and Buddhism, in which previous politicians, like Aung San and U Nu, had hardly seen its possibility.

Despite the fact that integrating politics with Buddhism is controversial, Suu Kyi views nonviolence as a Buddhist ethic by the Five Precepts. The first precept is to refrain from refraining from killing, harming, stealing, lying, and sexual misconduct.

\(^\text{56}\) Bodhisattva refers to an ordinary person who takes up a course in his or her life that moves in the direction of buddhahood, an enlightened one. Actually, anyone who directs their attention and their life, to practising the way of life of a buddha is a bodhisattva, described Kosho Uchiyama in “What is a Bodhisattva?” from http://www.tricycle.com/new-buddhism/bodhisattvas/what-bodhisattva (accessed October 21, 2014).

\(^\text{57}\) The word Bodhisattva is defined differently by two wings of Buddhism – Mahayana and Theravada. For the former, it refers to the one who postpones attainment of Nirvana in order to alleviate the suffering of others; while for the latter, it means the arhat or the one who has attained Buddhahood. But the term in Sanskrit literally means the one who seeks awakening (Bodhi) – thus, an individual on the path to becoming a buddha, Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. “Bodhisattva,” from http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/70982/bodhisattva (accessed 15 April 2014).
killing (killing of all living beings – animal as well as human). The second is to restrain from stealing; the third, to avoid sexual misconduct; the fourth, to refrain from false speech; and the fifth, to desist from drinking and using drugs that cloud the mind. Most Buddhists associate killing and sexual misconduct (rape) with violence. In short, Buddhism rejects any form of violence. But Suu Kyi broadens the idea to suggest that it is not just not killing that deals with violence; robbing (stealing) is also a form of violence because it violates someone else’s right to own property. In that sense, theft, for Suu Kyi, is also a form of violence. Likewise, telling lies is violence because it violates another’s right to hear the truth. With this view, Suu Kyi sees the use of intoxicating drinks and drugs as a form of violence. By having alcoholic beverages, one is harming oneself. Hence, Suu Kyi insists that nonviolence or ahimsa is at the root of the Five Precepts.58

In brief, notwithstanding her upbringing in the West, her interpretation of nonviolence and politics from the viewpoint of Buddhism is convincing enough to the Buddhist population of Myanmar. She skilfully integrates her ideas with local resources to let the public know that Myanmar desperately needs a revolution which is spiritual in its nature. So, she articulates the idea of nonviolence through the eyes of Buddhism with the use of existing stories, values, tales, and worldviews of the people.

However, Suu Kyi is a shrewd politician, knowing the right time, the right place and the right thing. In her life before political engagement in Myanmar, religion was not her concern. Practising Buddhism seemed not fascinating to her. Married to a Christian man, being brought up in the secular context, religion seemed to be an otiose matter that a person does in his or her private life. Her main concern was more with her father than religion. Perhaps she might have been quite knowledgeable about Buddhism and

---

58 Aung San Suu Kyi, The Voice of Hope, 64-65.
its teaching, but lacked practice in her daily living. Only after being involved in Burmese politics, has she begun to practise Buddhist meditation.\textsuperscript{59}

On the surface, Suu Kyi seems to contradict herself regarding her pragmatic position on nonviolence and Buddha’s teaching of the five precepts. The teaching of the five precepts is clearly a form of nonviolence. Yet Buddha once explained the danger of dogmatic thinking and improper learning of dharma in the parable of the raft. His teachings are compared to a raft, which could be used to cross the river, but not to cling to after crossing the river. Likewise, Buddha taught that his teachings are, like a raft, for crossing over with – not for seizing hold of.\textsuperscript{60} Thus, Suu Kyi’s pragmatic position on nonviolence is somewhat compatible with the teaching of Jesus.

5.5.3 \textit{Mettā} as the All-Embracing Principle of Nonviolence

As a Buddhist, Suu Kyi believes that \textit{mettā} (loving-kindness) is the key foundation in practising the teachings of Buddha in every aspect of life. In her understanding, \textit{mettā} is the only right way for her to change the course of the nation’s history. Using \textit{mettā} and other Buddhist terms, metaphors, and illustrations in the Myanmar context, Suu Kyi expresses her thought, struggle, and vision for the future of the nation. Her conviction is that Buddhism is pertinent enough to apply to the political context of Myanmar, where so-called Buddhist dictators have been present for a long time.

First, Suu Kyi, unlike traditional Burmese Buddhists, has somewhat a different view of \textit{mettā}. For instance, she looks at some forms of practices of \textit{mettā} in Myanmar and concretises the notion in a revolutionary manner. In the traditional Myanmar Buddhist community, \textit{mettā} is mainly practised in religious circles instead of in day-to-day

relationships. In particular, practising mettā in our relationships is less common than “sending or extending mettā” to other living beings as a form of religious exercise.\footnote{The conception of “sending or extending mettā” to other living beings is the commonly practised ritual. That is, sitting in front of the Buddha idol, a person recites a spell and says, “let every living being from all corners – east, west, south and north – be free from all kinds of harm, diseases, and be at peace.” This is what a Myanmar Buddhist calls “sending or extending mettā.”} In contrast, Suu Kyi has attempted to implement the notion of mettā in her daily or political career in having a relationship with her colleagues and the regime. Thus love or mettā, for her, is not an abstract idea, but something she and her colleagues practise in their everyday relationships. They work as a family and show real concern and affection for each other regardless of any pressures or difficult situations. So mettā, as the basis of their relationship, becomes something through which they can stand together and face the repression and dangers.

In addition, Suu Kyi’s view is that if we practise mettā through friendship and affection, it will be much easier for us to offer the same affectionate friendship to the people who may think of themselves as our enemies.\footnote{Aung San Suu Kyi, The Voice of Hope, 160.} In fact, what she is doing is an attempt to justify that there is a way to become a devout Buddhist and at the same time, a politician. In that sense, Suu Kyi’s view of mettā is revolutionary to some traditional Myanmar people because the practice of mettā can also be seen not only as one of the religious rites but also as an act in politics.

With this understanding, Suu Kyi sees mettā as active, and opposite to passive mettā and simply sitting there saying, “I feel sorry for them.” Unlike passive mettā, active mettā means doing something about the situation – something one can do to save someone else at the cost of one’s life.\footnote{Ibid., 43.} So, she openly expresses her desire for all people from all walks of life – monks, nuns and lay people alike – to take part in the movement. Nonviolent acts, done out of such mettā, are active, compassionate actions.
From a purely religious perspective, one can ask, “Does she politicise Buddhism?” Of course, the answer depends on one’s view of religion and politics. If religion is recognised as a purely spiritual business, Suu Kyi is apparently politicising Buddhism. On the contrary, if religion is regarded as being inclusive of all aspects of life, her call can be justified. Suu Kyi knows the essential role of Buddhism in the political history of Myanmar. From the time Buddhism came into Myanmar, it has been an intrinsic value in politics. Kings in the monarchical period highly regarded Buddhism as the state religion. In the same vein, the post-independence governments such as Nu and Ne Win also considered Buddhism to have a special role in politics. According to Donald Eugene, Nu also tried to demonstrate that Buddhism and democratic socialism were completely compatible and indeed complementary.  

Similarly, the then military government also legitimated their rule by using Buddhism because democratic values, for them, are contradictory to those of Myanmar. Buddhism has always been a vital force to legitimise the rules of all monarchs and post-independence governments since the day Buddhism came into the country. Suu Kyi’s predecessors legitimised their rules with the aid of Buddhism, so Buddhism was a means of legitimacy. On the contrary, Suu Kyi views Buddhism as a means to examine if a ruler is loyal to Buddha’s teachings. Buddhism, for previous governments, is a means of legitimacy, whereas for Suu Kyi, it is a means of investigation. Thus, Suu Kyi’s use of Buddhism in politics had been in conflict with that of the then junta. What makes Suu Kyi different from the regime is that the latter focuses on the outward form of Buddhism, while the former looks at the teachings of Buddha; the latter interprets Buddhism from a nationalistic viewpoint, and the former portrays Buddhism through humanitarian eyes.

---

Moreover, Suu Kyi believes that genuine *mettā* distinguishes between what a person does and what that person is. Simply put, *mettā* distinguishes evil from evildoers. For her, it is important to focus on what people do, rather than on what people are.\(^65\) With regard to this, she quotes a story of Angulimala – a man, known as a serial killer in the time of Buddha.\(^66\) Among Myanmar Buddhists, Angulimala is a well-known man who tried to kill even Buddha. Before meeting Buddha, he had already killed a number of people. The evil Angulimala had committed was so great that no one in his time believed he could be redeemed. When he heard Buddha saying to stop killing, he was struck and enlightened, recognising that what he was doing was wicked. Even when such an evil man Angulimala understood what he did was wrong and genuinely repented, Buddha took him as one of his followers. In Suu Kyi’s view, this story indicates that the evil Angulimala committed was horrendous, but the Buddha was able to separate what he was from what he did.

Suu Kyi’s further attempt to see politics through the eye of Buddhism is to seek common ground for other religions to stand together, and she believes that it is the idea of *mettā*. For her, *mettā* or love is so central to the teachings of every religion. As an

---


\(^66\) The name of Angulimala was not his original name. His name was Ahimsaka, meaning “the harmless one.” He was born with a dark fate, so he would one day become a robber. To deter that fate, his father sent Ahimsaka to the University of Taxila in order to study under a well-known Brahmin Guru. He was a brilliant student, thus becoming a favourite of the guru and enjoying special privileges. That fame led Ahimsaka to be envied by his fellow students. They developed a stratagem to suggest that Ahimsaka had seduced the teacher’s wife and had also boasted that his wisdom was superior to his teacher. The teacher believed that ploy and asked Ahimsaka something impossible, i.e., to get 1,000 human fingers to get the master’s approval – the approval that Ahimsaka needed to complete his training. So he became a bandit, killing pilgrims and traders passing through the wilderness, and collecting fingers. To be able to count the number of fingers, he strung them on a thread and hung them on a tree. But he couldn’t do that again because birds began to eat the flesh from the fingers. So he began to wear them around his neck as a garland. That was how he came to be known as *Angulimala*, meaning “garland or necklace of fingers.” According to the tradition, the Buddha perceived with his divine eyes that Angulimala had acquired 999 fingers, and was desperately seeking the thousandth. So he came to meet Angulimala. When Angulimala saw the Buddha, he drew his sword and ran towards the Buddha. Although he was running as quickly as possible, he was not able to catch the Buddha who was walking calmly. Eventually, he screamed at the Buddha to stop. Then the Buddha turned and spoke to Angulimala saying that he, the Buddha, had already stopped. He had stopped killing and harming people, and now it was time for Angulimala to do likewise. Those words struck Angulimala so deeply he threw away his sword and followed the Buddha. Later he became a monk.
example, she quotes a Christian Scripture verse, “perfect love casts out fear,” thereby identifying “perfect love” with mettā. The question to ask is, “Is the idea of Christian love essentially identical with the Buddhist’s view of mettā?” Hermann Oldenberg notes the significant differences between Buddha’s idea of mettā and Christian love:

One may compare the great figures here and there. Here saint Francis or Vincent de Paul, who practice love of God and love of neighbour to help the least of the lowly, the most deeply suffering of all sufferers, out of the warmest personal attachment. There Sariputta or Ananda, who sits down in the loneliness of the Indians forest to contemplate the maitri (mettā) and out of the cool quiet of Nirvana, to which he knows himself close, extends his good will toward people animals, and all creatures from one region of the world to another – the good will of one who has sought and achieved “not to love anything in the world. Are these not the citizens of two different worlds?

Besides, despite using a quasi-similar term, love for a Christian and mettā for a Buddhist, each defines it in accordance with their belief system. For Christianity, love is defined in the light of the personal God; in contrast, for Buddhism, mettā is expressed impersonally since it views the universe as an impersonal and purposeless order of physical-mental proportions. Winston L. King shows a striking contrast between them: due to its personalistic conception of the universe as governed by a supreme God, a Christian thinks, feels, speaks, and acts in interpersonal terms. In contrast, a Buddhist thinks, feels speaks, and acts in what the West calls impersonal. Thus, each religion seemingly has a universal expression of love or mettā, but they define it in their own terms.

In spite of the different interpretations of love or mettā, both Buddhism and Christianity believe that a better world would be possible if the way of love and mettā was valued and followed. For Christians, the better world may be called the Kingdom of God;

67 1 John 4:18. Adoniram Judson (1788-1850), an American Baptist missionary in Myanmar, in translating the Christian Bible from the original languages (Hebrews and Greek) into Burmese, used the word mettā for the word “love”.
while for Buddhists, it would be the world wherein humans are enabled to seek self-liberation. If Suu Kyi means mettā in this sense, it is indeed a common ground for Buddhists and Christians to stand together and act for the betterment of the world. Furthermore, practising mettā is, in Suu Kyi’s understanding, able to liberate us from the bondage of fear. In her well-known essay, “Freedom from Fear,” Suu Kyi characterises the politics of Myanmar as based on fear. Fear captures the ruling regime as well as the public. While the government and the public fear might be different, they both fear something. For the regime, it is the fear of losing power, but for the public, it is a fear of incarceration, fear of torture, fear of death, or fear of losing someone or something. But Suu Kyi optimistically wrote, as Matthew Walton observes, that fear, despite its insidious form, can be overcome by the courageous. According to her, the root of fear is a lack of mettā: “fear is rooted in insecurity and insecurity is rooted in a lack of mettā.” Where there is no mettā, there will be no security and vice versa. This insecurity eventually leads to fear. Therefore, only through mettā can fear be overcome because it alone can liberate people from the captivity of fear. In brief, mettā is the key element in defining and interpreting Suu Kyi’s concept of nonviolence.

5.5.4 Nonviolence as a Revolution of the Spirit

The term “spirit” or “spiritual” is a subject of crucial importance in understanding Suu Kyi’s idea of nonviolence. If mettā is at the core of nonviolence, what is its nature? For Suu Kyi, nonviolence is more than a method to fight injustice; it is a revolution of the spirit. In her eyes, a genuine revolution is not just an attempt to replace one government with another, but to change a “political system, which is guided by certain spiritual

---

values.” The unhappy legacies of authoritarianism cannot be easily removed. So nonviolence as spiritual revolution seeks to transform the values of the old system with those of the new system. In her essay, she brilliantly explains what she means by a revolution of the spirit, saying,

Without a revolution of the spirit, the forces which produced the iniquities of the old order would continue to be operative, posing a constant threat to the process of reform and regeneration. It is not enough merely to call for freedom, democracy and human rights. There has to be a united determination to persevere in the struggle, to make sacrifices in the name of enduring truths, to resist the corrupting influences of desire, ill will, ignorance and fear.

It is a revolution of the spirit through which Suu Kyi seeks to change the political system. This revolution is also spiritual in nature because she perceives how Myanmar has been subjected to monstrous repression, and so the revolution needed is more than political and social. It must be a movement of the spirit. As she believes in the inseparability of religion and politics, she also demonstrates how politics is spiritually connected. In the conversation with Alan Clements, Suu Kyi states, “spirituality and politics cannot be separated, ultimately; they both deal with the everyday life of people. And at the core of life – at the core of spirituality and politics – are the same qualities, that of human freedom and human dignity.” Because of the integral nature of politics and spirituality, a nonviolent struggle goes beyond the political enterprise. Therefore, in Suu Kyi’s understanding, the first thing that nonviolent activists need to do is to liberate themselves from the bondage of fear. Thus it requires courage. Throughout her essay, “Freedom from Fear,” Suu Kyi emphasises the importance of courage for nonviolent activists. For those who are on the horns of a dilemma – forced into a choice between passivity and cooperation with the prevailing system, the path to liberation is simply to

73 Aung San Suu Kyi, *The Voice of Hope*, 81-82.
74 Aung San Suu Kyi, “In Quest of Democracy,” from *Freedom from Fear*, 178.
75 Aung San Suu Kyi, *Freedom from Fear*, 183.
76 Aung San Suu Kyi, *The Voice of Hope*, 82.
depend on themselves. In the Buddhist vocabulary, it is *atta hi attano natho* (one is one’s own refuge).

Courage is an indispensable ingredient to enable this spiritual revolution. Courage requires the use of mental power as well as that of physical power. What Suu Kyi stresses is the latter form of courage. But it is, for Suu Kyi, not a naturally inborn gift for the majority. It is something that, “comes from cultivating the habit of refusing to let fear dictate one’s actions.”

Thus, the first step to becoming courageous is to confront our own fear, taking courage to shift our eyes from our own needs and to see the truth of the world around them. Not only does it take courage to see the truth of oneself and the world, but there are also two other aspects of courage – the courage to feel one’s conscience and the courage to act. Only through the realisation of courage, can an actual spiritual revolution take place.

Further, this spiritual revolution also calls for not only courage but also moral integrity. Suu Kyi understands that the deterioration of moral consciousness among the Burmese people is because of the corruption that has pervaded various sectors of society for several decades. The freedom or liberation she talks about is not just from political oppression, but also from moral corruption. So, she insists that Myanmar needs a spiritual revolution because it resists moral defilement as well as political oppression.

With the emphasis on a spiritual revolution, Suu Kyi has sensed that the need of Myanmar is far greater than democracy, freedom, and human rights. In order for

---

78 Suu Kyi, *Freedom from Fear*, 184. Suu Kyi herself had a hard time in living with fear while she was a child. She was afraid of the dark. To deal with this fear, she trained herself by staying in dark for some times for some days. After training herself for some time, her fear of the dark was gone. She used to tell this childhood experience in her writing and conversations with others. Perhaps, that experience might be unimportant to those in the western countries. But for the people in Myanmar, fearing the dark or ghosts is so common. Many Myanmar children, including myself, grew up with those horror myths and tales. When I was a child, some of the older playmates used to tell such horror stories and haunt me and my other playmates. It was indeed terrifying to us. So when Suu Kyi said, she had that experience, and described how she overcame such a fear, it shows her courage. Only those who ever feared something or someone understood how paralysing fear could be.

spiritual revolution to be realised, “there has to be a united determination to preserve in the struggle, to make sacrifices in the name of enduring truths, to resist the corrupting influences of desire, ill will, ignorance and fear.” In short, only through this spiritual revolution will the forces that produced the iniquities of the older order be overcome. But participating in such a spiritual revolution is not playing a zero-sum game; rather, its ultimate aim is to seek a win-win situation or reconciliation.

The question arises, “Did Suu Kyi use nonviolence because she had no other option?” “Now she has power, will she still use nonviolence in dealing with other political dilemmas?” Looking at what she said and did during her resistance against the then regime, it seems that she was a devout nonviolent activist. For example, she was so convinced that nonviolence is the Buddhist way. What is more, the tradition of changing politics through violent means through the history of the nation has perpetuated the Burmese political culture; therefore, only through nonviolence will that tradition be transformed into truly democratic principles.

To our surprise, Suu Kyi has changed so much from the time she resolved to be a politician instead of a public icon. From that time onward, Suu Kyi has learned to negotiate and compromise with the army generals rather than sticking to the principles of nonviolence. As briefly discussed, her silence in the Kachin war and Rakhine-Rohingya conflict apparently show that she liked to compromise rather than stick to what she believes. As a politician, she has to learn to gratify the majority rather than siding with the minority. Therefore, the answer to the question, “Will she still choose the nonviolent path now that she has power?” is perhaps yes, but not in an absolute sense because her government has no power whatsoever upon the army and the police. The power struggle between the army and her government has been tense since the

---

80 Aung San Suu Kyi, *Freedom from Fear*, 183.
inception of her government. Therefore, it is not that easy to say that Suu Kyi would take whatever means – violence or nonviolence to cultivate the democratic culture in Myanmar. What can be sure is that she is now a politician, therefore she would act and practise politics like a politician, not like a heroine of human rights. This is the major change that she has since she has power. This change is truly immense that she has been losing her reputation for democracy and human rights. For example, the British city of Oxford, where she studied, revoked the freedom of the City of Oxford award that she received in 1997 for her refusal to condemn the human rights violations.

5.6 Dialogue, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation

The end of the nonviolent struggle in the stories of Mohandas Gandhi in India, Martin Luther King, Jr. in the United States, and Nelson Mandela in South Africa is not retributive justice, but restorative justice; and not just to end enmity, but also to restore friendship. Reconciliation is indeed a vital component in the philosophy of nonviolence. In the context of Myanmar, the reconciliation needed is not just between the military regime and the opposition parties, but also between the army of the state and the ethnic minority groups. Ethnic rebellions that began post-independence are still going on in the present day in spite of the government’s various attempts for peace-talk. Knowing this situation, Suu Kyi asserts that, “the main impetus for struggle is not an appetite for power, revenge and destruction but a genuine respect for freedom, peace and justice.”

The first step towards reconciliation, in Suu Kyi’s understanding, is a dialogue. Dialogue, for her, is not a debate. It is not a question of losing face. It aims to find the best solutions for the country. She exemplifies this by decoding the word

---

81 Suu Kyi, “In Quest of Democracy,” from Freedom from Fear, 179.
“parliament,” which means “talk” in French; so talking, for her, is so essential because it is “better to shout at each other than to kill each other.”\textsuperscript{83} She believes that the answer to Burma’s problem is dialogue. Through dialogue, misunderstanding and differences may be resolved; and from there, an agreement and consensus between the opponents may be reached. When an agreement is reached, national reconciliation could possibly be realised. But unfortunately, the ex-junta showed no interested in such a dialogue, and so they replied that they would like to negotiate with her on the terms under which she would leave Burma. So a dialogue never happened in the time of the previous military government.

Further, Suu Kyi looks at and interprets reconciliation from a Buddhist perspective. She argues that the practice of mettā is a determining factor for reconciliation to be realised. For her, there are numerous ways to show mettā not only in a religious milieu but also in a socio-political setting. She suggests that Buddha’s way of reconciliation is certainly sacrificial: when the Buddha reconciled two fighting groups, he would go out and stand between them so that he would get injured first before they could hurt each other. So, Buddha’s way of reconciliation is neither one against the other, nor showing favour for one; instead, he placed himself betwixt and between them in the conflict. This way of expressing mettā will protect others at the sacrifice of one’s life.\textsuperscript{84} Hence, the road to reconciliation is painful and sacrificial because it demonstrates the active mettā.

In the process of such reconciliation, Suu Kyi perceives an inseparable nature of truth and forgiveness – no truth telling, no forgiveness; no forgiveness, no reconciliation. If reconciliation is the end to be pursued, truth telling is a means and forgiveness a way to achieve true reconciliation. Thus, she shows the importance of the role of truth in that, “denying the truth will not bring about forgiveness, neither will it dissipate the anger in

\textsuperscript{83} Aung San Suu Kyi, “The Need for Dialogue,” from \textit{Freedom from Fear}, 255.
\textsuperscript{84} Aung San Suu Kyi, \textit{The Voice of Hope}, 43.
those who have suffered.”\textsuperscript{85} If the truth is withheld, how can forgiveness possibly occur? Put differently, reconciliation can never be realised apart from truth-telling. Correspondingly, without truth-telling, forgiveness can never be experienced. Even if reconciliation without truth-telling and forgiveness happens, it would be, to quote Miroslav Volf, “cheap reconciliation.” This sort of reconciliation will never heal the wounds of the public who suffered under the former regime.

According to the two models of reconciliation, Suu Kyi’s understanding of reconciliation is more on the side of the IR (reconciliation between victims and perpetrators on a personal level) than the NUR (creating a culture of human rights on the basis of inclusive and democratic notion of citizenship).\textsuperscript{86} But she does not neglect the latter at the cost of the former. For example, Suu Kyi makes every effort to establish a rule of law, which is strange and unpractised in Burmese politics. At the same time, she also puts great emphasis on a culture of democracy, human rights, and so on. Being aware of the great need of the country, Suu Kyi does not favour one model at the cost of the other. The country Myanmar, in her understanding, needs a reconciliation that aims at personal as well as structural dimensions.

As noted, a dialogue between Suu Kyi and the previous regime never happened. Probably, this dialogue seemed undesirable and detrimental to the junta because it would have required a huge deal of willingness and courage, if necessary, to change what one feels is true, and to accept what one strongly opposes. The history of the democratic movement since 1988 shows how the regime mulishly refused to open dialogue. Likewise, in the eyes of the top generals, whatever Suu Kyi did and said seemed mere threats to them; to them, she is simply another power hungry politician. For example, the then Senior General Than Shwe regarded Suu Kyi as nothing but a

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{86} See more detail in p. 109.
Western product; and therefore, extraneous to Burma. Thus Suu Kyi’s idea of dialogue is theoretically perfect, yet for the junta, it seems simply unfavourable. In other words, the dialogue, which Suu Kyi talks about as a path to reconciliation, appears to be impossible in the political context of Myanmar. Thus, the reconciliation which Suu Kyi expected is truly comprehensive, but seemed unrealistic to the regime. Even though such a reconciliation did not happen during the era of the previous military government, the present political situation of the nation Myanmar is probably the most appropriate time to instigate national reconciliation: reconciliation between the military and all other political parties.

5.7 Rule of Law and Nonviolence

What is palpable from what Suu Kyi has written and said is that she is not an anarchist; indeed, her conviction of the rule of law is robust enough. In particular, she has repeatedly mentioned that it is extremely important for the government to establish the rule of law. What does the rule of law mean? What does Suu Kyi mean by rule of law? It would be inadequate to talk about the rule of law without articulating its meaning. Stephen Bloom suggests that without a concrete definition of the rule of law, it might be just “a political slogan rather than a tangible goal towards which objective progress can be measured.” Of course, Suu Kyi has something particular in mind regarding the rule of law. She has described it in her well-known essay, “Freedom from Fear” that, “Just laws can prevent corruption and at the same time it can also help to create a society in which people can fulfil the basic requirements necessary for the preservation

87 In Myanmar, the rule of law is translated into Ta Ya U Pa Day Soe Moe Yae. This translation perfectly conveys the idea of rule of law: to analyse the words, Ta Ya refers to just, impartial, or fair; U Pa Day simply refers to law; and last, Soe Moe Yae means rule, dominion, or supremacy. To re-combine these three words, the phrase refers to the rule of law that is just. Obviously the Myanmar phrase does cover the idea of rule of law more than the English word does. In English, the phrase only depicts the rule of law – merely law without “objective” or unspecified law. In contrast, Myanmar phrase inclusively covers the law which is just.

of human dignity without recourse to corrupt practices.” For Suu Kyi, law is something to protect individuals and ensure a harmonious and peaceful society. In her eyes, there is a distinction between unjust and just laws. Suu Kyi, when she talks about law, refers to the laws that are just and giving everybody equal protection. Everybody – including both the government and the governed – is subject to such laws; no one should be above the rule of just laws. Thus, Suu Kyi calls for every individual in the country to be prepared to stand up for justice: that is, not to say what is just is unjust and what is unjust is just.

In current Muslim-Buddhist conflicts in the Rakhine State, Suu Kyi, unlike other political leaders, points out that the root of such conflicts is the absence of the rule of law in those places. In other words, where there is no rule of law, injustice and violence will always prevail. As a nonviolent activist, Suu Kyi believes that establishing rule of law, to a certain degree, can diminish the prevalence of injustice and violence. Thus, nonviolence reinforces the establishment of the rule of law. However, the challenge is regarding the Burmese people’s negative views towards the law. According to the Myanmar Rule of Law Assessment, “the people of Myanmar, through history, have seen the law and law enforcement as the enemy.” This shows that for the population of Myanmar, law is detrimental. To be specific, the law or justice system that the Myanmar people have encountered throughout history is based on heredity status. Michael Aung-Thwin suggests, “Hereditary status in the 12th and 13th century was a legal principle upon which the concept of justice were based … social status rather than

---

89 Suu Kyi, “Freedom from Fear,” 183.
objective factors determined punishment.”

The late Maung Maung Gyi, as a political scientist, also describes two contrasting concepts: first, law-of-status, which means “an individual does not exist as an independent entity but as a component of a unit, either in family or in society,” and second, the rule of law. The former sees law as personal, whereas the latter sees it as impersonal. For the former, law is subjective and hierarchical; but for the latter, it is objective. According to Maung Maung Gyi, ruling figures throughout post-independence time were so steeped in the former that they could not appreciate the noble principles embodied in the rule of law.

During the years of the military rule (1962-2015), Burma’s legal system existed as an exploitative institution designed to maintain order, police politics, and extract resources from those swept up in it. “Law and order,” in Myanmar, is a collection of four words: ngyein (being still or quiet) wut (crouched) pi (pressed) byaye (flattened). Each has nothing to do with the ideas of law or rule. Nick Cheesman remarks that “law and order” in Myanmar is “a concept that reinforces existing political relations through exogenously imposed order.”

Even worse, the military rule has obfuscated the notion of the rule of law with their arbitrary use of power or “law and order.” Now the NLD has become the newly elected governing power, and Suu Kyi has been appointed to be “state counsellor” to have a role in leading the country. The serious challenge that Suu Kyi and her government must face is to cope with the traditional concept of the law-of-

---

94 Ibid., 170-173.
95 Cited from Elliott Prasse-Freeman, “Conceptions of Justice and the Rule of Law,” in *Myanmar: The Dynamics of an Evolving Polity*, 89. Even the current government is hardly said to be a civilian government because the majority of the ruling figures in it are ex-military. The 1988 uprising brought down Ne Win’s military government, and the successive military junta came to power with the self-designated name, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), which later changed to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Notably, there is a huge contrast between “law and order” and “the rule of law.”
status, and to replace it with the notion of the rule of law. Therefore, the most serious confrontation they face is a corrupted and exploited legal system within various institutions of the government.

However, Suu Kyi’s reiteration of the importance of rule of law is a form of generalisation. For example, Suu Kyi, as noted, views that it is the lack of the rule of law which is the root-cause of the Rakhine-Muslim conflict. In fact, the conflict is much deeper than rule of law. There are other factors hidden in the conflict, such as racial and religious. Buddhism and race play such an important role in Myanmar; they are inseparable. The protection of Buddhism is considered as a responsibility for all Buddhists. Population growth of Muslims in the Rakhine area is seen as a threat to Buddhists. This is seen as a major threat to Buddhist nationalists in Myanmar. There are some nationalist monks who said how military dictatorship is actually good for the religion, Buddhism. So, they do not like the country being opened to the outside world because it would make their religion less dominant.97 Suu Kyi’s view of Buddhism is not in conformity with Burmese Buddhists’ and the fact that she wants to internalise Burma’s social and cultural life.98 Can such a religiously enthusiastic people who have a negative attitude to law be possibly harnessed by rule of law? Can the racial and religious prejudice that is deeply and historically long-enduring in the hearts of Burmese Buddhists be healed by rule of law? Since Rohingyas are seen as illegal or unlawful immigrants from Bangladesh, rule of law is not the key to solution. So the root problem is not rule of law but whether Rohingyas should be seen as one of the ethnic groups in Myanmar.

98 Ibid.
One of the founding members of the NLD, the late Win Tin, noticed that “the people of Myanmar cannot regard the (Rohingyas) because they are not our citizens at all, everyone knows here that.” The real issue is that Rohingyas claim themselves as a race and the natives of the country. The term “Rohingyas” itself creates problem among the people of Myanmar. Therefore, they are not mentioned as “Rohingyas” in local medias within the country; instead, they are called as “Bengali,” because the Burmese people consider them as illegal immigrants or interlopers from Bangladesh. Even in the speech about Myanmar’s humanitarian catastrophe on 19 September 2017, Suu Kyi used the term “Muslim community” instead of Rohingyas. It is such an oversensitive issue within the nation. Looking at the problem from inside and outside viewpoint, it is not rule of law that can heal the crisis. What must be dealt with is, “should Rohingyas be regarded as a race and natives of the land?”

5.8 A Proponent of Principled or Pragmatic Nonviolence?

As mentioned, there are two approaches in the study of nonviolence: pragmatic and principled. To critically review Suu Kyi’s position regarding nonviolence, I would like to point out some contradictory points between what she has stated in the Reith Lecture, “Securing Freedom: Liberty” (I do not hold to nonviolence for moral reasons, but for practical and political reasons …) and what I have discussed above. The discussion above shows mettā as an all-embracing principle; her commitment to practising Buddha’s basic teaching of the Five Precepts in all dimensions of life; and an integral relationship between politics, spirituality, and morality.

What is more, having faith in freedom from all forms of fear and in freedom from moral defilement, Suu Kyi is apparently situated more on the principled or

---


100 Suu Kyi, the Reith Lecture, Securing Freedom: Liberty.”
philosophical side of nonviolence. Despite the fact that she holds on to nonviolence for political reasons, not because of moral beliefs, Suu Kyi’s practice of Buddhism is explicit enough to identify her as an exponent of principled nonviolence. On the surface, practising nonviolence for political reasons sounds like pragmatic nonviolence. However, it could also be argued that it is her attempt to include others who do not follow the nonviolent path in resisting the former government. That means Suu Kyi apparently does not want to exclude other activists who fought against the regime in the name of principled nonviolence. If she did so, she would spontaneously exclude all the independence fighters against the British Empire, including her father Aung San as well. From this viewpoint, Suu Kyi, despite her claim to be an advocate of pragmatic nonviolence, is more on the side of principled nonviolence.\textsuperscript{101}

5.9 Suu Kyi after 2010: A Look at Her Current Political Life

This research looks at Martin Luther King Jr. and Suu Kyi via Walter Wink’s Powers. Both King and Wink have passed away, but Suu Kyi is still a living figure. This necessitates looking at Suu Kyi’s present political life in this research. Since her release from house arrest in November 2010, she and the NLD had been working with the current government, widely composed of ex-generals that previously attacked her and the NLD before. In the recent general election, which was held on 8 November 2015, her NLD won by a landslide victory so that they were able to form a new government. The power transfer at the end of March 2016 went peacefully. In short, the genuine civilian government, which is publicly elected, has to govern the nation in March of this year (2016). I will explore Suu Kyi’s political dealings from the year she was released from house arrest to commencing her full political involvement. The exploration focuses on how Suu Kyi, as a proponent of nonviolence and one who seeks the

\textsuperscript{101} Whether Suu Kyi is an advocate of principled or pragmatic nonviolence will be discussed in the next chapter.
integration of politics and Buddhism, has started to transform the political system that has been perverted under the two successive military juntas into a system that echoes democratic principles and values.

Before exploring Suu Kyi’s current political life, I would like to survey the political changes that have happened since 2010 in order to examine Suu Kyi’s political dealings in the present political context of Myanmar. On 7 November 2010, the military regime launched a general election in accordance with the new constitution, as approved in the referendum in May 2008. That election was nationally and internationally regarded as a sham. The ex-general Thein Sein became the president of Myanmar. From the beginning of his presidency, Thein Sein gave a number of pledges, like seeking the national reconciliation between the state military and other ethnic insurgents; the elimination of poverty; trying to be a clean government, and so on. He also promised that Myanmar was now “moving from an authoritarian system to a democratic one and that the reform his government has undertaken is irreversible.”102 Truly, he is mostly known as a moderate among military generals. For example, Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, after meeting Thein Sein, said, “I was so impressed with the meeting with your president because he was very frank and very open and we had a very open discussion.”103 Some positive changes have happened indeed. Many long-term political dissenters were released. The press had more freedom than before. The first public impression of Thein Sein was during the suspension of the hotly controversial China-funded dam project (known as Myitsone Dam project) in Kachin

State on 30 September 2011. This project was contracted between the Ministry of Electric Power No. 1 and the China Power Investment in December 2006.\textsuperscript{104}

Despite these positive changes, there are some critical points to be made. First, Thein Sein’s government did not tolerate political protests. For example, the police’s violent raid on Letpadaung copper mine protesters raised the question of the credibility of Thein Sein and his government.\textsuperscript{105} According to one BBC reporter, dozens of protesters were injured and more than 100 people were arrested.\textsuperscript{106} The population felt that the influence of Than Shwe behind Thein Sein’s government was still there. According to some political analysts, Than Shwe remained a dominant force in the country and kept in regular contact with the top brass from the military, in the government and the parliament, and notably the military.\textsuperscript{107} The present commander-in-chief, Min Aung Hlaing and other military leaders, including ex-president Thein Sein were a handpicked team of Than Shwe. Hence, even Thein Sein, despite his presidency, did not have control over the armed forces. Suu Kyi, in one of her interviews, remarks that the generals still manipulate power.\textsuperscript{108}

On 9 July 2012, Suu Kyi along with her colleagues took their oaths and officially began to attend parliament for the first time as lawmakers. Scholars, critics and observers were keenly watching how Suu Kyi was able to work constructively with the present government in the process of democratisation. People were aware that she, to a

\textsuperscript{104} It is this Myitsone dam project that set fire to the fight between the Kachin Independence Army and the Burmese military that has continued since 2011. Domestic campaigns against the project were also held, and local media open criticised the lack of transparency in that project.

\textsuperscript{105} It was the protest against the mine project operated by a Chinese company (Wanbao Mining) and the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (UMEHL), a massive military-owned company. The protest broke out because of the dispute between local villagers, and the government and Wanbao over land grabs and environmental damage.


particular extent, adjusted herself to the political environment. It is clear that Suu Kyi is a woman of principle, and committed to her beliefs without reservation. But she also adapted her position to a certain degree in working with the pseudo-civilian government of Thein Sein. To illustrate, Razali Ismail, a special envoy of the United Nations for Burma recalled the first meeting with Suu Kyi in Insein prison right after the Depayin incident. Her first words were: “I want justice, Raz.” However, after a year, Razali met her again. During that meeting Suu Kyi’s attitude towards the regime was quite changed, because despite the events at Depayin, she was ready to meet the generals for the sake of the people. Ismail remarks that, “Suu Kyi had come a long way to realise that democracy can only be done through the generals;” and he continued, “this realisation of hers is in stark contrast to the imperious, principled, and unbending Suu Kyi I had met over twenty meetings ago.”109 However, it does not mean that, according to Ismail, Suu Kyi had compromised on the principles she always stood for, but that she had broadened her outlook to accept certain things in working with the government as long as it helped the people.110 In one sense, Suu Kyi, albeit a woman of principle, has adapted to the Myanmar cultural context after struggling for many years.

With regard to her adaptation to the context of Myanmar, there are both negative and positive responses to her and the NLD in relation to Suu Kyi’s entry into the government as an MP, and her quasi-neutral stance regarding the Rakhine-Rohingya conflict and the war between the state army and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA).111 For some critics and sceptics, Suu Kyi’s and her party’s decision to enter the

111 The Rakhine-Rohingya conflict is a violent fight between two racial groups: Arakanese and Rohingya. Rakhine (formerly Arakanese) is one of the nationally recognised ethnic groups in Myanmar, who live in Rakhine State, northern part of Myanmar. Concerning religion, they are strong Buddhists. Rohingya is, according to the Myanmar people, known as the people who migrated to Myamar from Bengal (today, Bangladesh) during the period of British rule. These people are mostly Muslims. The Myanmar people see the Rohingya as “immigrants to Myanmar and thus they are not eligible for citizenship. While the majority of Rakhine live in the southern part of the state, Rohingyas mostly live in the northern part. The first attack happened in June 2012. According to the narrative, a young Buddhist woman in Rakhine was
April 2011 by-election seemed as though they were compromising too much with the regime. The basic disagreement was in their distrust towards the current government. According to Hillary Clinton, Suu Kyi knew the consequences she would face if she entered government. Suu Kyi would no longer personify the Burmese people’s dreams of peace and happiness and prosperity because she understood how hard it is to balance one’s ideals and aspirations with the demands of practical politics.112

Regarding the fight between the military and KIA and the Rakhine-Rohingya conflict, people waited eagerly for Suu Kyi’s response to these issues, as she is a public icon. But Suu Kyi’s response is that it is not a time to use her moral leadership, but to look at the root-cause of the problems.113 This reaction did not satisfy many people. Her silence in the face of these cries for help caused observers and activists to wonder about her underlying motives. For Maung Zarni, Suu Kyi is no longer a political dissident trying to stick to her principles. She’s a politician, and her eyes are fixed on the prize, which is the 2015 majority Buddhist vote.114 In the case of the Rakhine-Rohingya conflict, Peter Popham discerns that Suu Kyi is now on the horns of a dilemma: “If she were to speak out loud and clear against the attacks, she would win the applause of people in the

---

112 Cited from Peter Popham, The Lady and the Peacock, 400.
West.” But it would be the quickest way for her to lose the support of the majority of the population of Myanmar since anti-Muslim prejudice is so common among the Myanmar people. Thus, Suu Kyi is a shrewd politician with an ambition to become the president of the nation, who knows how to compromise; she should no longer be regarded as an icon of democracy and human rights.

During the previous government (2010-2015), many observers and critics considered that Suu Kyi, due to her desire to become the president, became a self-interested politician. The question is, “Is Suu Kyi a self-interested politician like these critics say?” Despite the national and international support, it is clear that Suu Kyi’s words would not be as powerful as the president and his ruling team in this Rakhine-Rohingya riot. Besides, the ethnic conflict in the Rakhine State is not an issue that can be solved within a short period, because it is a problem that has been present for many decades. In addition, it is believed that some military figures that are hostile to Suu Kyi, cunningly organised this conflict so that this situation would force her to speak out. In doing so, they hoped to defame her reputation. This seems reasonable because the way Thein Sein’s government handled this riot was unlike the way they deal with the political protests against them and seemed too lenient. If this is so, as Peter Popham observes, Suu Kyi’s silence may be seen as a sign of shrewdness. Although her silence might

---


116 Ibid.

117 For example, a number of protests against new education legislation broke out in Myanmar. According to the critics of the National Education Bill, this new legislation keeps the management of higher education in government hands, thereby stifling academic freedom. Haung Sai, a member of the National Network for Education Reform, who took part in the protests, told Al Jazeera, “the authorities were clearly in force and geared up to end as violently and as quickly as they could.” She continued, “The politics brutality was too much and we are getting more determined to make sure the reforms we want are seen through,” “Myanmar Police Crack Down on Students Protesters,” from http://www.aljazeera.com/-news/2015/03/myanmar-police-crack-student-protesters-150310123609713.html (accessed 14 May 2015).

be somewhat frustrating to the international community, silence might be the wisest way to respond to the situation. Therefore, it seemed impossible for Suu Kyi, as merely a parliamentarian, to effectively deal with the issues such as fighting between the state army and the Kachin armed groups, and the Rakhine-Rohingya conflict.

On the one hand, it is true that Suu Kyi should be seen as a politician instead of an icon. In her meeting with Hillary Clinton, she expressed that she would rather be seen as a politician than as an icon. As Ronan Lee concludes in the essay about Rohingya, truly Suu Kyi is “appearing more and more like just another politician and less like the international icon of democracy, freedom and human rights that she once was.” In short, Suu Kyi, whose personality is disciplinarian and perfectionist, has decided to become a politician, and this decision leads her to compromise her principles in numerous ways so that she might possibly work with the generals. Peter Popham rightly critiques that the criticism of Suu Kyi was rare until many months after her release (2010). However, as she came to politics, she came into focus. The world began to see through the startling beauty and the years of imprisonment to the person within.

Political changes in Myanmar have been so rapid that it has been a challenge to keep up with the latest occurrences. The power transfer went peacefully on the 30th of March 2016. The first genuine civilian president after fifty-three years, Htin Kyaw, has been elected. His government has created a powerful new role, known as “state counsellor,” for its leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. This new role has been created for Suu Kyi so that she may be able to work both in the executive and legislative branches of

---

121 Popham, The Lady and the Generals, 227.
According to the constitution drafted by the previous military regime, Suu Kyi is banned from becoming the president of Myanmar because her two sons are not Burmese citizens. Hence, she picked Htin Kyaw, one of her most trusted friends, to be president. Besides working as “state counsellor,” she is also the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the President’s office.

As a matter of fact, Suu Kyi wanted to become the president of the country. Before the 2015 general election, she repeatedly stated that she was interested in becoming president before the 2015 general election, though she knew that the Constitution disallows her to do so. That desire contradicts what she often said in her speeches on leadership. For example, she gave an address on “Democracy and Expectations on Young Leaders of the World” in the University of Tokyo on April 17 2013. There she mentioned,

> When I was released in 2010 after the election… I made it quite clear that one should not think in terms of position but in terms of responsibility. I said that I was not interested in giving particular positions to anybody, young or old. I would think of it as giving people a responsibility with the party, giving them a chance to take up certain responsibilities. And this is how I would like young leaders to look upon their tasks in life. 

If position does not matter in leadership, why did she want to become president? As Popham questions, can position and responsibility be complementary? Can they be totally separated? If she thinks of responsibility alone, why did she and the NLD create a position, “State Counsellor?” Why did she desire to become president? In this sense, Suu Kyi has contradicted herself. Placing an emphasis on responsibility at the cost of the position or vice versa is truly a one-sided view. Truly responsibility alone is inadequate, as is position. As was mentioned in the discussion of awza and ana, they

---

124 Popham, The Lady and the Generals, 224.
both are necessary to accomplish something in the political realm. Supposing somebody has awza, but no ana. What can he or she do? During the military regime, Suu Kyi possessed a great deal of awza but she had no ana. Consequently, she was unable to do things which only a person with authority could do. Now she and her government created a position, “State Counsellor,” because it is indispensable for Suu Kyi to have ana, without which she would be legally unable to accomplish anything. In spite of knowing herself the indispensability of ana or position, she still claims that what matters is responsibility, not position. To illustrate, a person has a strong sense of duty, but no position in an institution. How could such a person work in that institution? Responsibility and position should go hand in hand.

Now Suu Kyi’s government has begun their work for a year with the expectation of reforming one of the least developed countries, Myanmar. Nobody knows to what extent she can go on her spiritual revolution for the people of Myanmar. Ingrid Jordt, by examining the correlation between Buddhism and politics, comments that Suu Kyi’s “revolution of the spirit” does not look capable of achieving the genuine democratic transformation she had in mind. Rather, its notable success is being subsumed by the traditional Burmese tug-of-war legitimacy between Sangha (Buddhist monk) and state.125 True, Suu Kyi’s interpretation of Buddhism from a humanistic or secularised perspective is not well accepted by the traditionally bound Burmese, for whom religion, race, and politics are all inseparable linked. However, what Jordt fails to see is the religious and ethnic minorities who have begun to play a crucial role in the politics of Myanmar. Though Burman is the ethnic majority, there are still seven other ethnic groups who have been disregarded and mistreated by the two military regimes

---

125 I. Jordt, “Breaking Bad in Burma.”
throughout the nation’s history. Thus, Jordt’s comment on the basis of Burman’s integral view of race, religion and politics is just partially correct, not completely.

In short, it is still too early to comment either negatively or positively regarding how capable Suu Kyi and her government would be to lead the country, one of the least developed and most corrupted nations in the world, into democratisation. Yet, numerous challenges await the new government. To list some of them, the new government is faced with the challenges to cope with ethnic conflict, the demand of a federal state, grinding poverty, the educational system, and amendment of the constitution. However, a glimmer of hope for Myanmar has arisen. Time will tell whether the new government under the leadership of Suu Kyi will be able to fulfil the hope of people.

5.10 Summary of the Chapter
In the previous chapters, I looked at Walter Wink’s Powers trilogy and Martin Luther King’s view of nonviolence. This chapter has examined Aung San Suu Kyi’s understanding and practice of nonviolence in the light of her life and struggle for democracy in Myanmar. The next chapter will seek to integrate the views of Wink, King and Suu Kyi with the aim of constructing a lens by which to read the Burmese political context. The reading will help to draw political implications for Christians in Myanmar.

The chapter has shown that Suu Kyi’s love for her country was birthed from her parental influence. Though she was raised and educated in the Western context, her love for the country never grew cold. Therefore, the Four 8s incident led her to become a nonviolent activist. Suu Kyi is also shrewd in defining and interpreting politics, nonviolence, and morality in the light of Buddhism. She regards politics as multi-faceted, and therefore politics, religion and morality are all interconnected.
With this in mind, Suu Kyi makes an effort to revolutionise a historically-rooted idea of politics-as-a-dirty-game. She asserts that a person can be a good politician and a faithful Buddhist at the same time. With this faith, Suu Kyi views political work from the Buddhist perspective, saying that saints are sinners who go on trying. Now she has begun to lead the country as “state counsellor” with the newly formed government for a term which lasts five years. As a new government, immensely difficult challenges await them ahead. How could her government possibly cope with a legacy of corruption in all sectors of the country? How could she face challenges without giving up her values and her spirit of revolution? I will discuss these questions in the last chapter in the light of Walter Wink and Martin Luther King Jr. The next chapter examines a critical interaction between Wink, King and Suu Kyi in the areas of leadership, religion, and ethical exploration of nonviolence.

---

126 Suu Kyi, The Voice of Hope, 126.
In the part one, I have presented the introduction of the thesis and a critical commentary of Wink’s Powers trilogy and his view of nonviolence. In part two we examine Martin Luther King Jr. and Aung San Suu Kyi as exemplary nonviolent activists in the light of their supporters and critics. In this part three we will read Burmese politics via the eyes of Wink, King and Suu Kyi to draw political implications for Christians in Myanmar. In order to make this reading possible, we need to establish an integrated lens of Wink, King and Suu Kyi.

This chapter seeks to engage Martin Luther King Jr. and Aung San Suu Kyi through Walter Wink’s Powers in order to complement and correct each other. In doing so, all their voices will be heard equally, assessed critically, and corrected and complemented mutually with an intention to sharpening each other through interaction. This critical dialogue focuses on three areas: leadership, religion, and the ethics of nonviolence. Wink will be a principal voice in the dialogue with King and Suu Kyi, since this research takes Wink as a theologian and King and Suu Kyi as exemplary practitioners of nonviolence. This chapter will be a guide for the following chapter of this study, which explores leadership, the role of religion, and the political ethics that could be practised in Myanmar.

6.1 Nonviolence and Leadership: A Correlation

What does nonviolence have to do with leadership? On the surface, nonviolence appears to be merely a tactic to achieve something. Whether principled or pragmatic nonviolence, there are some robust philosophical presuppositions behind the idea of
nonviolence. If we examine those presuppositions, nonviolence can be seen to voice concerns about leadership. To ask a more specific question, can a nonviolent activist or one who believes and practises nonviolence become a tyrant or dictator? Alternatively, does nonviolence have anything to do with the abuse of power? My aim here is, through looking at King and Suu Kyi via a Winkian eye, to discern some reasons behind the notion of nonviolence that oppose the very foundation of tyranny and call for true liberation from all despotic rules. In working towards this aim, King and Suu Kyi will be the voices, and Walter Wink the lens through which to look at them.

As discussed in the second and third chapters of this study, Wink identifies two opposing forces in this world: the Domination System (DS) versus God’s Domination-Free Order (DFO). Each stands in total contrast to the other in exercising power, in politics, and in relationships. In the DS, power is exercised to control, destroy, and even take a life if needed; thus, it is usually either win or lose, domineering and competitive. This contrasts with the DFO where power functions to give, support, and nurture; therefore, it is typically win-win, based on partnership, and cooperative. Politics in the DS is seen as the conquest of all opponents, autocratic, and authoritarian; whereas, the politics in the DFO is considered to be diplomatic, democratic, enabling, and decentralised. The DS seeks to practise ranking, domineering hierarchies, racism, and a rigid “we/they” division in relationship with others. In contrast, relationship in the DFO seeks to nurture cooperation, equality of opportunity, and to be inclusive of all people, thereby being flexible in dealing with relationship issues.1

In whichever kind of leadership – political, economic, social or religious – power is an indispensable feature without which the exercising of leadership is impossible. The role of power is vital because politics is, to every degree, a way of exercising power both in

---

individual and collective ways. Both Martin Luther King Jr. and Aung San Suu Kyi understand power differently. For King, power is an ability to achieve a particular purpose. For Suu Kyi, power is a responsibility to do one’s best for those who have entrusted themselves to you. But Wink, instead of defining what power is, contrasts two kinds of power. Power, for him, is not to be over but to be with; not to take life, control and destroy, but to give, support, and nurture life; not a zero-sum game but a win-win solution; not to dominate but to partner; not merely to compete but to compete and cooperate.² Wink’s understanding of the nature of power reflects the philosophical backdrop of nonviolence; King’s idea of power is too general, while Suu Kyi’s is relational. That is, if power were seen as an ability to achieve a goal and a responsibility to do one’s best, the questions of how remain: How should a leader achieve a goal? How should a leader fulfil the responsibility? A leader can reach a goal by fraudulent means, and responsibility can also be met by dishonest means. Wink’s view of power enlightens us to deal with the questions of how – the important thing is not just what to achieve, but also how to achieve a goal. In other words, it is not just to have a goal to attain or responsibility to fulfil, but to have the right means to reach a goal or fulfil a responsibility.

Further, Wink continues to seek the role of power in the DS and the DFO. He highlights that the DS has constrained us from evolving and transforming our civilisation into a better future. Thus our destiny, under the DS, is not governed by free choice. Instead, the DS teaches us to value and use power to achieve above our goals. The DS overpowers all institutions in making decisions and selecting leaders. As a result, people have become slaves of their evolving systems.³ Leaders, despite leading their

---

² Ibid., 46.
³ Ibid., 42.
institutions, have no control over the DS; instead, the DS is in control.\(^4\) Hence, no leader in the DS is resistible to the power of corruption because they are inured to the vicious cycle of the DS. In contrast, power in the DFO is not the power-over, but power-with; not domination, but cooperation. Looking at King and Suu Kyi from this perspective, it is the DS itself into which they put every effort to transform the system into the beloved community for King or the culture of democracy for Suu Kyi.

Similarly, the power that King and Suu Kyi understand and practise is not the power of domination, competition, win-or-lose; but it is the power that gives, supports, and nurtures life; thus, it is cooperative, and win-win.

Both King and Suu Kyi resist the reigning domination system in their respective contexts: for King, it was segregation, while for Suu Kyi, it was military dictatorship. Both segregationism and dictatorship are so thoroughly deep-seated that no one who is trapped in the system is capable of transforming it. To resist the system, King and Suu Kyi did not abide in the reigning culture of their settings. Instead, they conceptualised the notion of power in the context of their visions: King envisioned it in the light of his American dream and beloved community, while Suu Kyi saw it in the light of responsibility and freedom from fear (freedom from the fear of losing power and fear of the scourge of power). Seeing power in this way, for both King and Suu Kyi, is indeed revolutionary in the contexts where they work.

Power-over or power to control and destroy, to quote Wink’s *Powers* trilogy, is the spirit or inner form of leadership in the DS. In King’s time, segregationist leaders exercised their power to control and dominate the blacks through the idea of white

---

\(^4\) Here Wink appears to be a political determinist. It is, to a certain extent, true because of his emphasis on the overwhelming presence of socialisation, which greatly impacts on those who lead and govern. In this sense, he sounds politically deterministic. On the other hand, he is liberationist in the sense that there is another order, which he calls “God’s Domination-Free Order,” antithetical of the DS. Thus, there is a possibility to transform the DS, that determines us in numerous ways, into the DFO.
supremacy. Thus, King and the civil rights movement were, in the eyes of segregationists, a threat that obstructed the spirit of their domineering leadership and was trying to eliminate the spirit of the system. In a nutshell, King’s nonviolent resistance challenged segregationists to change their way of exercising power.

Likewise, Suu Kyi revolutionises the idea of power in the land where it is seen merely as a privilege or license to do whatever one wants. The might-is-right idea is predominant in the political culture of Myanmar, hence what matters most is not whether we do the right things or not, but whether we have power. No one and nothing, even the law, is above the powers that be or those on top. In this context, Suu Kyi considers power as responsibility and the rule of law – a view that is entirely contradictory to the reigning culture of Burmese politics. Suu Kyi, therefore, asserts that what has corrupted Burmese politicians is not power itself, but fear of losing power and fear of the scourge of power. For the powers, it is a fear of losing power; whereas for the public, it is a fear of the scourge of power. Thus, Suu Kyi invites both parties to be free from fear. In Suu Kyi’s eyes, both the powers that be and their subjects are all trapped in the bondage of fear. Freedom from this spirit of fear is of supreme importance, because Suu Kyi believes that only through this would power-to-control be transformed into power-with or power-to-nurture.

More importantly, King and Suu Kyi developed the concept and practice of power against the backdrops of a system of segregation and a dictatorship. So the question is, “how could King (as the one who was raised in the culture of segregation where power was hierarchical and manipulative) and Suu Kyi (as the one who grew up in the culture of a dictatorial regime) cultivate in themselves a habit of power-with or power-to-nurture?” Wink looks at how people can train themselves to be free from the corruption
of power through a biblical vocabulary. This is a kind of rebirth.\textsuperscript{5} However, according to Wink, this rebirth is not just a private or inward movement alone. It also includes the necessity of dying to whatever in our social surrounding has shaped us in negative ways – dying to the socially formed ego. It means to die to things like racism, false patriotism, greed, and homophobia. To be more precise, we must die to the DS in order to live authentically. For Wink, that socially formed ego is not just an inner or private attitude, because the ego itself is a web of internalised social conventions of the DS.\textsuperscript{6}

Dying to powers means, positively speaking, surrendering our egos to the redemptive initiatives of God. To be more specific, dying to powers means to step out of the DS where violence is always the ultimate solution, into the world of the DFO, in which nonviolence is at the centre. From this Winkian perspective, King and Suu Kyi comprehend power not in accordance with the reigning culture of their times, but with the view of another world: the beloved community for King, and democratisation for Suu Kyi. In the Winkian sense, they both applied the idea of dying to the socially formed ego because despite living under the DS, they do not support this approach to power.

The white supremacy in the States and the view of power-as-privilege in Myanmar are both dominant leadership cultures. Both King and Suu Kyi learn to read culture as a text, and to read the “signs of the times” – the cultural Zeitgeist – and their effects on life. Against such cultures, they redefine power in the light of their respective dreams. As nonviolent activists, they both disregard the reigning culture of power because they know that power in nonviolence is fundamentally different from power in violence.

\textsuperscript{5} Rebirth is a significant term in evangelical theology. It is synonymous with regeneration, which is defined as, “an inner re-creating of fallen human nature by the gracious sovereign action of the Holy Spirit,” see Walter A. Elwell, \textit{Evangelical Dictionary of Theology}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 1000. Among evangelicals, it is mostly seen that it is an individual’s divine experience which radically and internally changed the individual from the inside out.

\textsuperscript{6} Wink, \textit{The Powers That Be}, 94-95.
Whether from a principled or pragmatic approach, nonviolence has no place for domineering power, which is controlling, destructive, and aggressive. Looking through Wink’s lens, King and Suu Kyi demonstrate that through the power they exercise, they do not seek to dominate and lord it over their peoples, but to nurture and support them. King and Suu Kyi, though they differ in approaching nonviolence from their respective religious viewpoints, are both convinced that nonviolence outlaws any form of oppressive power because it only allows power that supports and nurtures.

In terms of leadership style, both King and Suu Kyi are recognised as charismatic leaders who inspire, motivate and challenge their peoples. Max Weber first introduced the concept of charisma in explicating various forms of authority. He defines charisma as, “a certain quality of an individual personality virtue which he is set apart from ordinary men and created as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities.”\(^7\) Both King and Suu Kyi demonstrate their charisma in many ways. For example, they are both skilled at conveying their ideas, beliefs, and vision through public speeches and writings. Many scholars acknowledge King to be one of the great orators in American history. According to some witnesses of his oratory, “when he was behind a podium, he became charismatic.”\(^8\) Likewise, Suu Kyi’s first speech, *Speech to a Mass Rally at the Shwedagon Pagoda*, not only won the hearts of the great crowd, but also of the key opposition politicians.\(^9\)

What is more, both King and Suu Kyi express their charisma through identifying with their peoples. For instance, King, to experientially comprehend the real conditions of slum life in the ghetto, moved to Chicago’s West Side with his family and stayed there

---


\(^9\) Suu Kyi, *Freedom from Fear and Other Writings*, 192-198.
for some time. There he learned from first-hand experiences how a pressure-cooker
ghetto life really was. That fascinated and inspired many blacks living there, and caught
great media attention.\textsuperscript{10} One of his speeches in Chicago crystallised his leadership:

\begin{quote}
I choose to identify with the underprivileged. I choose to identify with the poor. I choose to give my life for the hungry. I choose to give up life for those who have been left out of the sunlight of opportunity. I choose to live for and with those who find themselves seeing life as a long and desolate corridor with no exit sign. This is the way I’m going. If it means suffering a little bit, I’m going that way. If it means sacrificing, I’m going that way. If it means dying for them, I’m going that way, because I heard a voice saying, “Do something for others.”\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

During her life in the UK, Suu Kyi used to garnish herself with the traditional costume as an expression of her identification with the people of Myanmar. Even though Suu Kyi is educationally a product of the West, she is fluent in the Burmese language and can masterfully articulate her ideas by using local resources (such as sayings, metaphors, illustrations, and images) without referring to Western intellectual traditions.\textsuperscript{12} This greatly appealed to a multitude of Burmese people. As a result of identifying with her people, Suu Kyi received love, admiration and respect from her people and from those across the world. This kind of leadership can be compared to the idea of “incarnational leadership” which is now promoted among Christian scholars.

The word “incarnation” is a theological term that refers to the act of God coming to earth in human form as Jesus. Based on this concept, incarnational leadership is defined as, "an attempt to imitate the self-emptying act of Jesus as the Word made flesh that came to dwell among us."\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, incarnational leadership promotes a leadership approach that values those of the people who are being led with active humility.

Therefore, King and Suu Kyi, through identifying themselves with the people, were

\textsuperscript{10} Stephen B. Oates, \textit{Let the Trumpet Sound: A Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.}, 408; see also Micahel J. Jojeim, \textit{Gandhi and King: the Power of Nonviolent Resistance}, 249.

\textsuperscript{11} David J. Garrow, \textit{Bearing the Cross}, 524.

\textsuperscript{12} Nonviolence guru Gandhi also wore simple sandals and a loincloth, thereby identifying himself with the daily costume of a male worker in India. Gandhi, though educated in the West, was skilful enough in articulating his idea through the cultural and religious symbols, metaphors, sayings, tales, and so on.

\textsuperscript{13} Corné J. Bekker, “The Values of Incarnation Leadership,” from \url{http://www.regent.edu/acad/-global/leadershiptalks/archive/dec_06_bekker.htm} (accessed 10 May 2015).
able to get a closer look at and better understand the real lives and struggles of their people.

Furthermore, leadership in nonviolence seeks to nurture and support people, not to overpower them. Nonviolent leaders refuse to use any form of violence in any situation for they have identified with the spirit of the DFO. As Wink illustrates that in the crucifixion, Jesus rejected the use of violence as a “last resort” and instead trusted God with the outcome, as he endured the cross.14 Similarly King and Suu Kyi, in their leadership, have exercised a great deal of power in leading their people, where the power they exerted is transformative and supportive, not domineering and overbearing. They have also repudiated violence as a last resort; instead, they endured all the threats and attacks of their opponents. In that sense, the ideas of dictatorship, authoritarianism, totalitarianism, despotism, and tyranny have nothing to do with nonviolence, because they all seek power to control, but nonviolent leaders seek to get rid of this idea and transform enmity into friendship.

Despite the great moral leadership of King and Suu Kyi, their charisma led their people to idolise them, and eventually, they inadvertently created personality cults. The civil rights movement that King led could not find a replacement for him after his assassination. Similarly, who will replace Suu Kyi after her retirement since she is eighty years old? Further, she has felt that the younger generation seems to be too ambitious or craving position instead of responsibility. As discussed in the last chapter, she stresses the importance of responsibility in leadership at the expense of the role of the position. For her, what counts is not a position but responsibility. As Peter Popham observes, there is Suu Kyi’s suspicion – anybody who wants to lead is a priori proof that they are not of the right moral calibre. That is because they have not given evidence

14 Wink, The Powers That Be, 69.
that they are of that calibre.\textsuperscript{15} Position and responsibility, as noted, should be interdependent.

In addition, how did King and Suu Kyi demonstrate their leadership? Did their belief in nonviolence influence their leadership styles? It makes us hesitant to give a fair critique to King’s leadership because of his untimely death. However, King had a team, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) which was composed of five executive directors, and in which King was president. The SCLC, in spite of the word “Christian, was also open to all, regardless of race, religion, or background.”\textsuperscript{16} The people in the leadership team were not yes-men who obeyed whatever King said without questioning. He also had a Research Committee, a kind of brain trust that would advise King on a structured basis. King himself found the meetings with the Committee stimulating and refreshing.\textsuperscript{17} His social environment did not allow him to become authoritarian; it limited the use of power for his own sake. Not only did King have a good social environment, he spent time building alliances. Having understood that it was impossible to achieve a major social transformation by working through his own organisation (SCLC), King strategically established trust and built personal relationships with the leaders of the national civil rights groups. He advocated the creation of alliances of many kinds – political, social, religious, intellectual, economic, and cultural. He was convinced that significant social change is best achieved in groups.\textsuperscript{18} As a team leader, King’s practice of power reflects Wink’s view of power: It is power with others, partnership and cooperation. He was target-oriented, which is why he did not care much about the differences of ideas, race, or religion.

\textsuperscript{15} P. Popham, \textit{The Lady and the Generals}, 225.
\textsuperscript{17} S. B. Oates, \textit{Let the Trumpet Sound}, 291, 292.
In contrast, Suu Kyi’s profile in the previous chapter suggests that she is a woman of principle, a disciplinarian, and a perfectionist. However, she begins to change from the year 2011 when she became a parliamentarian. A disciplinarian and a woman of principle now turned into a politician who learns to compromise. For example, her silence in the fight between the Burmese army and Kachins and the riot between Rakhine and Rohingya disappointed the local and international community. A western journalist also points out that as far back as 1988, Suu Kyi demanded students oppose the regime through nonviolent resistance. Later, she remained silent about the escalating violence of Buddhist Myanmarese (Burmese people) against Muslims. The one who is masterful in articulating the idea of democracy, human rights and freedom becomes now a politician who seeks compromises. Unlike King, she does not have a team of experts with whom she works out plans for the country. Peter Popham describes how Suu Kyi has lacked experience in working as a team:

There is a photograph of Suu at a meeting in Delhi in November 2014 with Narendra Modi, the Indian prime minister. Mr Modi is accompanied by ten men in suits, plus an interpreter. Suu is accompanied by her female aide, Dr Tim Mar Aung. The satirical blog Burma Tha Din Network, which posted the photo, captioned it, ‘Aung San Suu Kyi and her policy team meet with the Indian Prime Minister and his policy team. This wasn’t satire, it was the bizarre truth.’

What is worse, Popham continues to point out Suu Kyi’s detachment from her party by the way she treated her small entourage during her visit to England in June 2012. They were put up in hotels at the expense of the UK government, but Suu Kyi told them firmly not to use the hotel minibars or the laundry. Overall, Popham points out three problems with her leadership: her silence in the Rakhine-Rohingya conflict, the disorganisation in her office, and her alleged highhandedness. Popham is right in pointing out the second and third characteristics of Suu Kyi’s leadership style, but not

---

20 Popham, The Lady and the Generals, 244.
the first. The riot between Rakhine and Rohingya is, as discussed, indeed more complex and complicated than the international community thinks. This conflict ought not to be examined merely through the lens of outsiders. The disorganisation and lack of management skills is indeed disappointing to us. What has been confounding is that she gave an address on the leadership mindset in Singapore Management University on 22 September 2013 with an emphasis on the importance of team management and leadership. There she mentioned,

Teamwork is not something that is taught in our country because we don’t have an educational system that promotes teamwork. Leadership becomes more of a difficulty and more of a responsibility. Because what we are talking about is leaders, not commanders … Leaders lead. Commanders command; they expect the commands to obey whether or not they are reasonable. Leadership means convincing those whom you aspire to lead that the way you have chosen is the right one. It has to be a choice. They have to choose to follow you. That is what leadership is about.21

The question that occurs to me is, “Why does she not practise team leadership and management if she knows its importance?” It seems that she does not exercise what she believes or says – is it a form of self-contradiction or hypocrisy? If she believes in team leadership, why does she not create a team who can support, cooperate, and correct her if she does something wrong? Perhaps, the disorganisation in her office and her alleged high-handedness co-habits. What pushes Suu Kyi to be such a woman might be fame, honour, and respect that local and international communities have rendered her, and the titles such as Noble Peace Laureate, the heroine of human rights and freedom, the icon of democracy, and so on. The idolisation of the people across the country and the globe brings out self-sufficiency and high-handedness in her. Other people seem less capable, skilled, reliable, knowledgeable or perhaps less noble than her. Compared to King, Suu Kyi’s leadership is too personality-based, not team-oriented; spontaneous, not scheduled. To look at her practice of power from the angle of Walter Wink, she

---

evidently has failed to nurture and develop a cooperative work with others regardless of racial, religious and cultural differences. Despite the fact that she refuses the practice of personality cult, she could not exert herself to break through the labyrinth of public admiration.

6.2 Religion: Engaging Buddhism with Christianity

Belief in God or the word “religion” is, according to the new atheistic movement, synonymous with an irrational delusion and a social toxin. Religion, according to the late Christopher Hitchens, is, “violent, irrational, intolerant, allied to racism and tribalism and bigotry, invested in ignorance and hostile to free inquiry, contemptuous of women and coercive toward children.” After the events of September 11, 2001 in the USA, religion and God-professing faith communities have been severely attacked by atheists and non-religious secularists. The questions being raised are, “Is religion or belief in God still relevant to the pluralist society of the 21st century?” Or “should all religious institutions and belief in a supernatural God be discarded?”

Looking at King and Suu Kyi in the light of these questions, it is evident that religion, particularly Christianity and Buddhism, is not as destructive as the new atheists claim. Of course, religion has been used as a channel to uphold the systems of injustice throughout human history. In King’s time, Christianity was an instrument to buttress racial prejudice. White supremacists interpreted the Bible from a racist perspective. All the racially discriminative Jim Crows laws were also backed up by the prejudiced interpretation of the Christian Bible. Intriguingly, King did not rely on other religious beliefs.

---

22 Richard Dawkins’s *The God Delusion*, Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great*, Sam Harris’s *The End of Faith*, Daniel C. Dennett’s *Breaking the Spell*. These leading atheists vehemently argued against all kinds of religious beliefs in various ways.


24 In US history, the Jim Crow laws were the laws that enforced racial segregation in the South between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the beginning of the civil rights movement in the 1950s. The word “Jim Crow” was the name of a minstrel routine performed beginning in 1828 by its composer, Joseph
sources to resist against that discriminatory culture. Instead, he recovered a biblical Christianity with the principles of freedom, equality, and human dignity. It was one version of Christianity against another. Thus, the way in which King came to see and critique the problems of his country, was using the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. His historic speech, “I Have A Dream,” featured a number of quotations from prophetic books in the Old Testament. For example, the phrase, “justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream” is an almost exact adaption of Amos 5:24. King, in short, supported his resistance through recovering the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament.

In a similar way, the ex-military regime craftily exploited Buddhism to secure their power because they knew that it could be used as a powerful tool to legitimise their rule. Although Suu Kyi was raised in the United Kingdom where Christianity was culturally rooted, and was married to Michael Aris, a Catholic Christian, she did not generate her thought of resistance against the regime on Christianity. She is described as a socially engaged Buddhist because she has re-constructed Burmese political values in the light of Buddhist traditions and the teaching of Buddha. Therefore, Suu Kyi’s nonviolent resistance was also Buddhism against Buddhism. Thus, what matters is not religion itself, but how it is interpreted.

In Wink’s view, religion can be a part of the DS. For instance, Wink indicates that what killed Jesus was not irreligion, but religion itself. It was not lawless or irreligious people, but upholders of the religious orders (Judaism) of that time, who killed Jesus. However, Jesus’ crucifixion exposed the true nature of that religion. Jesus, though he

---


25 Here, I have identified the UK as the then Christian country because during the years (1964-1988), when Suu Kyi lived and studied in the UK, the influence of Christianity was still dominant. Nowadays, the UK has become a religiously pluralistic country, turning from a Christian to a post-Christian country.

26 Wink, The Powers That Be, 83.
was crucified, embodied the genuine form of what religion should be. Religion under the DS imprisons humanity instead of liberating it. Jesus, in Wink’s understanding, liberates the religion that had been institutionalised by the society of that time by absorbing all the violence directed at him, thereby exposing and unmasking the powers that unfairly judged him. When Jesus liberated the people from the religion of the DS, he did not do it from a non-Judaist viewpoint. He did not disregard the forefathers (Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and so on) of Judaism; instead, he re-interpreted them in the context of the kingdom of God, or God’s Domination-Free Order.

From the Winkian perspective, King and Suu Kyi did not act much differently to the way Jesus did in the sense that the main philosophical sources through which they supported and promoted their struggles were all familiar to their peoples. In Jesus’ time, the religion of Judaism was, under the DS, powerful enough to kill Jesus, who was the embodiment of true religion. In brief, the religious leaders of Jesus’ time, being ignorant of the spirituality of their religion, were overpowered by their religious system; but Jesus knew the essence of Judaism, so religion, for him, was a powerful source of liberation for the oppressed. In this sense, religion, whether Judaism, Buddhism or Christianity can either be used well or misused.

Hence, both Buddhism and Christianity, as religions, are paradoxical in their nature. That is, they can either be a tool for suppression or an instrument for liberation. As noted, the Christian Bible was often employed as a means to buttress the segregation in King’s time. Likewise, Buddhism was a powerful tool used to legitimise the military rule. In that sense, both Christianity and Buddhism, like other religions, are identical in nature. In the study of religion and the racial problem in the USA, Michel O. Emerson and Christian Smith indicate the paradoxical nature of religion: “religion has

27 Ibid., 85-86.
tremendous potential for mitigating racial division and inequality.”\(^{28}\) When the DS overpowers religion, it becomes a mechanism to enslave people. However, Christianity can be a liberating dynamism to bring in God’s Domination-Free Order for someone who does not operate in the realm of the DS. In the same way, Buddhism can become an emancipatory mechanism to transform Burmese politics if we repudiate the reigning culture of the DS, like Suu Kyi does. In Wink’s view, King and Suu Kyi are the ones who lived outside of the zone of the DS, so religion (Christianity and Buddhism), for them, is the most powerful mechanism to transform their nations.\(^{29}\)

If religion can be used as a tool either for oppression or emancipation, what would be the key to unlock the true nature of religion that liberates, not oppresses? Is there any means or secret through which we can interpret any religion – Christianity or Buddhism, in an emancipatory manner? To ask precisely, what are the keys through which King, Suu Kyi and Wink unlock the liberating messages of their religious writings? For King, it was the same religion of Christianity that the segregationists adhered to, and through which they justified the segregation system. Likewise, Buddhism was the religion through which the ex-regime validated their rule.

First, where did King learn the revolutionary idea of social justice? A historian of modern America, David L. Chappell, sheds light on the intellectual root of the civil rights movement. For him, the movement was not driven by liberal faith in human reason, but by a prophetic tradition that runs from David and Isaiah in the Old Testament, through to Augustine and Martin Luther to Reinhold Niebuhr in the twentieth century.\(^{30}\) Though he was indebted to Gandhi in terms of the nonviolent


method, his primary philosophical source was not Gandhi, but prophetic tradition, the church where he grew up, and his philosophical and theological predecessors.

David Chappell also concludes that King masterfully communicated with the world beyond his church, who bought much of his church with him into the “mainstream,” and who reminded his church and the mainstream how much they had in common.\(^3\) Despite the fact that the religion that the segregationists and King practised was the same, King, unlike the former group, had a different hermeneutic to interpret the Scriptures, and that hermeneutic was originally adapted from the prophetic tradition. Put differently, King did not read the Bible and understand it through the lens of the cultural presuppositions; instead, he took an interpretative lens out of the Bible itself and used it to understand the Scriptures.

Somewhat like King’s case, Suu Kyi practised the same religion, Buddhism, that the ex-regime practised, yet their interpretation of Buddhism was different. As discussed in the previous chapter, Suu Kyi articulated the relevance of democratic values with traditional Buddhism in the essay, “In Quest of Democracy.”\(^3\) Being racially a Burmese Buddhist, but culturally and intellectually a western product, Suu Kyi interprets Buddhism through the lens of western values on human rights, human dignity and human worth, thereby justifying democratic principles to Buddhism. What makes Suu Kyi different from King is that King interprets the Bible through the narrative within the Bible, thereby critiquing the Christianity practised among the whites. For Suu Kyi, the democratic principles that she adopted in the West become a lens to interpret Buddhism. Put another way, the lens through which Suu Kyi sees and understands Buddhism is originally western, so her approach is, unlike King, not a Buddhism

---

\(^3\) Chappell, A Stone of Hope, 48.
\(^3\) Aung San Suu Kyi, Freedom from Fear, 167-179.
through Buddhism but Buddhism through a western eye. Thus, Buddhist cultural conservatives do not appreciate her interpretation of Buddhism.

Furthermore, Christianity and Buddhism provide King and Suu Kyi with a comprehensive ethos for their philosophy of nonviolence. Despite being a product of western culture and education, Suu Kyi has formulated and articulated her political outlook and nonviolent struggle against the regime from a Buddhist perspective. The regime cunningly confronted her in several ways. One of their criticisms was that democratic values and principles are incompatible with the Burmese culture. Against that, Suu Kyi persuasively reinterpreted the relevance of democratic values and principles for Burmese people in the context of Buddha’s teachings. All her writings and interviews shed light on the integral relationship between being a Buddhist and a politician. Likewise, Christianity became the backbone of the culture of segregation in the time of King. The Bible, for segregationists, does not oppose slavery; and in fact, through direct and indirect examples, supports it. As a result, segregationists took it for granted that segregation was religiously authorised by their religion. What King did was to reinterpret Christianity in favour of justice, freedom, and love. As a man from a Christian family, a son of a pastor, and a pastor himself, Christianity had always been the source from which he developed and articulated the ethical principles of nonviolence.

As the religions King and Suu Kyi practised were sources for their philosophies, they were also psycho-spiritual sources for them. For instance, King’s experience of the divine presence in the kitchen, his belief in the God of the Bible, and his conviction of Jesus Christ as the one who died and rose again hugely inspired, motivated, and

33 Suu Kyi, “In Quest of Democracy,” in Freedom from Fear, 167-178.
34 Michael O. Emerson & Christian Smith, Divided by Faith, 34.
35 See chapter two where I have narrated the story of how King sensed the presence of the Divine in the kitchen while he was overwhelmed with fear.
empowered him to continue tenaciously and persistently in the struggle for freedom and justice. Similarly, Suu Kyi, during house arrest, trained herself through way of Buddhist meditation. According to her, spending time in meditation led her to increase her “mindfulness” in her everyday life.36 Most of all, King and Suu Kyi withstood a great deal of maltreatment in their struggles, yet they never sought revenge. They also refused to compromise their nonviolent approach. Wink believed that King and Suu Kyi reflected the same truth that was revealed in the life of Jesus, who never succumbed to the perspective of his persecutors by seeking revenge.37

In addition, what is striking in the comparison between King and Suu Kyi is their respective religious contexts. Christianity, for both black and white Americans, was deeply ingrained in the whole country in the time of King, and Buddhism, for the majority of Myanmar’s people, is seen as the national religion. Both King and Suu Kyi identified with the religion of the majority of the population. Hence, when they justified their struggle on the basis of the religion, it was not difficult for the public to accept it because the religions both King and Suu Kyi presented were not strange to them. Supposing that King was a Buddhist and Suu Kyi, a Christian, how would their peoples respond to them? Perhaps, this question is too speculative. Since Suu Kyi is a Buddhist and King, a Christian, the question seems extraneous.

Nonetheless, this issue is important because Suu Kyi’s struggle was one of Buddhists against Buddhists and King’s resistance was of Christians against Christians. Both the junta and its opposition, Suu Kyi, are Buddhists; therefore, the fight between them is

36 Aung San Suu Kyi, “The Benefits of Meditation and Sacrifice,” from http://www.enabling.org-ia/vipassana/Archive/K/Kyi/meditationSacrificeKyi.html (accessed 10 July 2015). “Mindfulness” is a step on the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism. It can also be translated as “attentiveness.” Mindfulness is called Sati in Pali and Smriti in Sanskrit. The system of Mindfulness built around the concept is mainly analytical, in contemplating the diverse factors in the body, the sensations, the thought-processes and phenomena, but goes further in a higher synthesis of consciousness, in Samādhi, Christmas Humphreys, A Popular Dictionary of Buddhism (London: Curzon, 1997), 198.
37 Wink, The Powers That Be, 86-87.
principally a power struggle. In the same way, King’s resistance against segregation was also predominantly social and racial since both King and his opponents were Christians. To illustrate this point in a clearer way, King’s contemporary Malcolm X also fought for his black fellows. However, unlike King, he was a Muslim. Of course Malcolm X also did his best, as King did, for the desegregation or the liberation of the blacks. Nonetheless, he was less well-known, recognised, or honoured, than King. Did the people of America support King more than they did Malcolm X on the basis of religion? To a great extent, this is true. Malcolm X’s critique of Christianity was fierce. He classified Christianity as white nationalism, and Islam as black nationalism; Christianity enslaves blacks; Islam liberates them. He saw Christianity as the root of segregationism. James Cone suggests that Malcolm X’s unrestrained critique of Christianity led him to be ignored by white Christians and receive less attention from black Christians.38

Likewise, if Suu Kyi were a Christian, would the Buddhist majority assist her as much as they do now? In the context of a Buddhist majority, Christians and Muslims are often disadvantaged in politics and culture. Since the 1962 military rule, government servants who are Christians have been disadvantaged in the promotion to key positions. This shows that religious identification in politics plays a crucial role for both King and Suu Kyi. This also raises the question of whether an individual from a minority religious background can become a leader like King or Suu Kyi. Should Christians and Muslims change their religious position to win public support? Would Christians or Muslims be able to win public recognition without changing their religious position? Perhaps King and Suu Kyi might not be able to deal with this question.

Finally, the most powerful and compelling argument that King and Suu Kyi made during their struggles was the integral relation of politics, morality, spirituality, and religion. The prevailing idea in the time of King was that Christianity was primarily concerned with spiritual things, such as how to get to heaven, and had nothing to do with life here and now. The role of a pastor was predominantly to care about the spiritual maturity of the congregation, not to interfere with the social and political affairs. King, through the eyes of his father and Walter Rauschenbusch, revolutionised this one-sided view of Christianity through arguing for the inseparability of the social and the spiritual from the perspective of the kingdom of God.

Likewise, Suu Kyi’s understanding of the integral nature of politics, spirituality, and Buddha’s teaching of mettā is also revolutionary in the Burmese political context. The politicians before her, such as the late U Nu, the first prime minister post-independence and also a devout Buddhist, felt it was impossible to be a politician and at the same time, a good Buddhist. For them, political business and religious duties seem incompatible and opposite. Thus Suu Kyi, when talking about morality, mettā, and thīsā (truth) in politics, was often confronted with the question, “why so much religion in politics?” For many politicians, it is too idealistic or naïve to talk about mettā in politics, as she described in conversation with Alan Clements. Against this dominant presupposition, Suu Kyi argues that politics is about people, so it is inappropriate to separate people from their spiritual values. With this view, Suu Kyi explored Buddhist principles and some relevant cultural values with a view to integrating religious values in her politics. In doing so, Suu Kyi revolutionised the idea that a person can become a

39 Aung San Suu Kyi, The Voice of Hope, 45. Often Suu Kyi was asked if it is reasonable to talk about mettā in political business. In her essay, she recalled her experience that people cheerfully contributed hard work and money to the late Buddhist monk, known as Thamanya Sayadaw because they believed their contributions would not be in vain, but benefit the public. Thus, she concludes that it is totally relevant to talk about mettā in the political context. What happened in Thamanya proved its relevance, Letters from Burma, 12.
good Buddhist, and at the same time, a good politician. In short, both Suu Kyi and King were deeply convinced of the integral link between politics and religion. For both of them, religion was not to be used to maintain power, but to be a liberating force.

6.3 Ethics of Nonviolence: Engaging King and Suu Kyi Via Wink’s Eyes

So far, I have explored the connection between leadership and nonviolence in the lives of King and Suu Kyi from the Winkian perspective. I have also looked at how religion has a significant role in the concepts of nonviolence for King and Suu Kyi, via Wink’s Powers. Now I will examine King and Suu Kyi and the ethical principles of nonviolence from the Winkian perspective.

6.3.1 Why Not Violence?

Violence done in the name of religion, political ideologies, and racial issues are widespread in today’s world. Against this backdrop, scholars and leaders from religious, secular, social, and political circles voice various opinions. What is increasingly evident in societies nowadays is the search for peace – how we can possibly live in harmony in the midst of cultural, racial, religious, and philosophical diversities.\(^40\) In this context, the words “peace” and “nonviolence” are thrilling and comprehensive for scholars to articulate in their studies. They become such popular and frequently used words which can be heard and seen in political, social, and religious contexts. Tolstoy in Russia, Gandhi in India, Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States, and more recently, Mubarak Awad\(^41\) in the Middle East, the Dalai Lama in Tibet, and Aung San Suu Kyi in

---

\(^40\) In academic, social and international levels, a number of centres for peace and conflict studies have been mushrooming over the last decade. In the United Nations, peacemaking, peace-building, and peacekeeping are strongly emphasised and operated directly under the supervision of the Secretary-General.

\(^41\) Mubarak Awad is a Palestinian, born in Jerusalem, in 1943. He founded “Nonviolence International,” a non-governmental organization with the mission of promoting nonviolent action, a culture of peace, and seeking to reduce the use of violence worldwide, http://nonviolenceinternational.net/?page_id= 1580 (accessed 10 January 2016).
Burma/Myanmar, become the models of nonviolence. Why do King, Suu Kyi and Wink
denounce violence and encourage others to do so?

Before dealing with this question, we need to define violence. Defining violence and
nonviolence is not as easy as we might imagine. Glen H. Stassen and Michael L.
Westmoreland-White define violence as, “destruction to a victim by means that
overpower the victim’s consent.”42 To cover both structural and individual dimensions,
P. Iadicola and A. Shupe define violence as, “any action or structural arrangement that
results in physical or nonphysical harm to one or more persons.”43 Despite not using the
words individual and structural, the former definition inclusively covers both aspects.
The phrase, “by means that overpower” implies using a personal or institutional power,
weapon, or any object. The latter definition also entails a number of dimensions, such as
structural and personal, physical and nonphysical, psychological, or mental. However,
both definitions fail to engage in the spiritual or inner nature of violence, as they both
see violence simply as a means or an action. In seeing violence as a spirit of the DS, this
study needs to investigate the spiritual or inner nature of violence that runs deep in our
society. Hence, defining violence as an action or a means does not necessarily fit with
this study. In this context, violence is viewed with the belief that violence can save, can
establish order, peace and justice, and can achieve a desired goal. Put differently,
violence begins with the human psycho-spiritual domain since it is a belief.

What King and Suu Kyi have in common is their belief that “violence breeds violence.”
King believed that the beloved community could never be realised through violence,
and Suu Kyi believed that bringing about change through violence perpetuates the

Denny Weaver & Gerald Biesecker-Mast (eds.), Teaching Peace: Nonviolence and the Liberal Arts
43 Cited from Gregg Barak, Violence and Nonviolence: Pathways to Understanding (Thousand Oaks,
tradition of violence. For King, nonviolence is the only way to establish the beloved community; in Suu Kyi’s view, nonviolence is the best way to protect the people, and in the long run, it alone can ensure the future stability of democracy. They also both believe that violence contrasts sharply with their convictions of *agape* and *mettā*. Suu Kyi sees evil as stupidity, whereas King regards it as sin. Stupidity is *avijjā* (ignorance or *moha*), greed (*lobha*), and anger (*dasa*). In Buddhist terms, *Avijjā* is nescience or ignorance, unknowing, or delusion, which is the primary root of all evil and suffering in the world. This also puts a veil over our mental eyes and prevents us from seeing the true nature of things. When we are darkened with *lobha*, *dosa*, and *moha*, whatever we do will harm ourselves and other people.

For King, the reality of sin is on every level of human existence. King regards sin as separation, thereby arguing that segregation is an existential expression of tragic human separation on the basis of colour, an expression of their awful estrangement, their terrible sinfulness. He believes that sin is deeply rooted in human society. Even the way of nonviolence or realistic pacifism is, in King’s understanding, not purely sinless; it is the lesser evil. In general, Suu Kyi’s view of evil or stupidity is individualistic in the sense that *avijjā* or stupidity is a characteristic that can be mainly seen in an individual. In contrast, King discerns the collective nature of sin in human society. To conclude, stupidity as *lobha*, *dosa*, and *moha* is the root of violence for Suu Kyi, and the reality of sin is the origin of violence for King.

According to the Winkian outlook, the views of King and Suu Kyi concerning the root-cause of violence are not particularly explicit. For Wink, the world in which we live is under the Domination System (DS). In the DS, violence is the method of change. It was

---

44 King, unlike systematic theologians, does not define what sin really means. It seems that he, as influenced by Niebuhr, sees that sin has come in as a result of human revolt against or turning away from God. Consequentially, humans deny their creatureliness, and instead they desire to become like God.
the ethos, or spirituality, of the DS. Wink calls it “the myth of redemptive violence” in which humans are habituated and conditioned to accept violence. Peace through war, security through strength, victory through combat, and order through military suppression are the core convictions of the DS; they form the solid foundation on which the DS is founded in every society. Briefly stated, the myth of redemptive violence is so embedded in human history that people cannot see its true nature.

Unlike Wink, King and Suu Kyi pay attention to the vicious circle of violence, but they do not seem interested in why this circle exists. Wink answers that the myth of redemptive violence is the engine of that circle. As long as we fail to recognise the existence of the DS and do not look for an alternative, we will always be lost in the labyrinth of the DS. To recall the question of why not violence, Wink answers that any attempt to change certain things through violence can never liberate us from the DS, because violence itself is the spirit of the DS. Violence multiplies violence, and changing a political system via violence will never end the tradition of violence; instead, it will prolong it. Why does violence breed violence? Why does violence perpetuate a tradition of violence? Wink gives an answer to these two questions – the questions which King and Suu Kyi fail to deal with; it is simple, because the belief in redemptive violence is the inner spirituality of the DS. To combat the spirituality of the DS, what we need is an alternative, and that is nonviolence.46

6.3.2 Nonviolence and Love: Engaging King’s Agape and Suu Kyi’s Mettā Through Wink’s Loving Enemies

King, as noted, is an activist for principled nonviolence, whereas Suu Kyi is a proponent of pragmatic nonviolence. Despite this difference, they both had the conviction that the nonviolent path is more than a means; hence they talked a huge deal

46 Wink, The Powers That Be, 42, 113.
about *agape* and *mettā*, knowing that without this their resistances would be soulless and lifeless. Scholars may interpret King’s nonviolence in various ways, but what cannot be sidestepped is his emphasis on *agape*. Likewise, Suu Kyi adapted a Buddhist term, *mettā*, to identify her idea of nonviolence.

Wink, however, specifies that the kind of love necessary in nonviolence is the “love of enemies.” Wink’s idea of “loving enemies” is fundamentally theocentric. He believes that God is all-inclusive. He forgives us so that we may repent of our evil deeds. He also loves us so that we may lift our eyes to Him. God does not hate those whom we hate. Since God is compassionate toward us, he must also treat our enemies the same way. Therefore, Wink concludes that we are to be like God, having a love that is all-encompassing, loving even those who have the least claim or right to our love. As God can never be domesticated or nationalised, Wink asserts that we are to regard the enemy as beloved of God as much as we can.47 For King, *agape* is a love that is shown to all kinds of people, both friends and enemies. When we love others, we do so not because of their racial, economic, or political significance, but because God loves them. In this love, we love those who do an evil deed while hating the deed that they do. So *agape* love is transforming and redeeming.48 In that sense, King, as a Christian, does not differ from Wink.

However, Suu Kyi, as a Buddhist, is non-theistic and self-reliant in defining *mettā* and nonviolence. As Buddhism is a non-theistic religion, the name God is not mentioned in Suu Kyi’s writings and interviews, and even if it is mentioned, it refers to the Judeo-Christian concept of God. But it does not mean that Buddhism is an atheistic religion. In the context of Myanmar, the majority of Buddhists believe in the existence of supernatural deities. Truly, their concept of God or gods differs from the Judeo-

48 King, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Volume III*, 327.
Christian notion of God, but they accept the existence of a deity. In that sense, Burmese Buddhists are not atheists. The focus of Buddhism is the liberation of oneself from dukkha, meaning suffering, pain, and the state of being unsatisfied. Depending on God for one’s personal liberation is foreign to Buddhists like Suu Kyi.

As noted, Wink and King, as Christians, build their argument for agape and “loving enemies” on the Judeo-Christian concept of God. However, for Suu Kyi, belief in such a God seems, for Suu Kyi, unnecessary. Looking at these perspectives, on what grounds do they say that we should love our enemies? For King and Wink, we should love our enemies because God loves them with the same love he has for us. But for Suu Kyi, we should have mettā towards our enemies because it is the way of Buddha. Suu Kyi’s mettā is, unlike the Christian view of love, purely anthropocentric and horizontal; there is no theological or vertical dimension. This is a fundamental difference between Christianity and Buddhism.

In short, Buddhism and Christianity are theologically irreconcilable because of fundamental differences in their worldviews – e.g., Christianity is theistic, while Buddhism is not. Yet, it does not mean that King, Suu Kyi and Wink are contradicting each other in their ideas of nonviolence. These differences do not necessarily imply dissension. As discussed above, King’s agape, Suu Kyi’s mettā, and Wink’s loving our enemies fundamentally correspond to each other. For Christians, we are to love our enemies because God loves them just as he loves us. For Suu Kyi, we should love our adversaries on the basis of being human.

However, Wink’s exposition is much more accurate, articulate, and deeper than King and Suu Kyi when it comes to the idea of mettā or agape. Wink suggests that one’s enemy can be a gift. How can someone’s enemy possibly be a gift to him/her? Wink indicates that some common characteristics of our enemies can also be found in us. In
that sense, enemies can help us “see aspects of ourselves that we cannot discover any other than through our enemies.”\(^{49}\) Wink highlights that the enemies are therefore not an obstacle on the way to God, but they can be the way to God. Thus, loving our enemies can result in a double transformation: transforming ourselves, as well as transforming our enemies. In discussing the role of enemies, Wink does not differentiate between “we” (us-as-lovers) and “they” (our enemies-as-haters). According to this false dichotomy, it seems that we are destined to love, while our enemies are destined to hate. In contrast to this idea, Wink has discerned the commonality between our adversaries and us. Therefore, Wink deepens King’s \textit{agape} and Suu Kyi’s \textit{mettā} and advances from these ideas to suggest that the nonviolent resistance should aim to transform our repressed attitudes as well as those of our enemies.

\textbf{6.3.3 Principled or Pragmatic?}

As noted earlier, King was an activist for principled nonviolence, while Suu Kyi takes the pragmatic position. I have analysed Suu Kyi’s idea of nonviolence and put her in the pragmatic category on the basis of her statement, “I have not chosen nonviolence for moral reason, but for political ground.”\(^{50}\) R. J. Burrowes, in his study of Gandhi’s idea of nonviolence, distinguishes the principled from the pragmatic approach: the former believes in the inseparability of means and end, while the latter is not concerned about this; the former views nonviolence as a way of life, but the latter does not. Followers of the principled approach see the conflict as a shared problem with their opponents and are willing to accept suffering at the hands of their opponents. However in the pragmatic approach, the conflict is seen as having incompatible interests with their opponents, and they are more inclined to inflict suffering on their opponents rather than

\(^{49}\) Wink, \textit{Engaging the Powers}, 273; \textit{the Powers That Be}, 170-171.
\(^{50}\) Suu Kyi, “BBC Reith Lecture: Liberty & Dissent.”
to accept it themselves.\textsuperscript{51} Burrowes’ distinction between the principled and the pragmatic approach sounds too sharp. In his analysis, Suu Kyi cannot be characterised as pragmatic anymore because Suu Kyi does care about the delicate relationship between means and end. What is more, Suu Kyi sees the person and his/her deed as separate, and therefore never inflicts suffering on her opponents.\textsuperscript{52}

Robert L. Holmes, unlike Burrowes, categorises the principled nonviolence in two ways: absolute and conditional. If nonviolence is regarded as an absolute, the distinction between the principled and pragmatic approaches can be sharply drawn. But there is another sort of principled nonviolence, which is conditional. According to this kind of nonviolence, violence may sometimes be justified in a narrow range of cases. Violence may be used to prevent worse things from happening in the long run. By and large, both the principled and the pragmatic approaches justify nonviolence as the right means. The rationale, for the principled approach, will be moral, but for the pragmatic it will be social, political, economic, nationalistic, etc.\textsuperscript{53} Holmes’s distinction is perhaps more appropriate, which suggests that Suu Kyi’s basis for nonviolence is practical rather than political or moral. Nevertheless, Suu Kyi’s idea of nonviolence is still somewhat different from the characteristics of the pragmatic or conditional. To be precise, there is a quasi-contradiction in Suu Kyi’s nonviolence. She makes two statements that allude to the fact that she is an exponent of pragmatic or conditional nonviolence: holding nonviolence for political reason and allowing a short burst of violence to prevent worse things from happening in the long run.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{52} Suu Kyi, \textit{The Voice of Hope}, 172, 180.
Despite these statements, she has never employed violence on a personal level and has made every effort to abide by Buddha’s teachings of *mettā* in her life. The characteristics of principled nonviolence are manifested in her attempt to abide by Buddhist principles in her worldly dealings. If we look at her in this way, we can understand these two statements in a new light. When she describes that she has chosen nonviolence for political reason, she is pointing out her willingness to include other political activists who fought the regime through the use of armed forces for many decades. Similarly, when she talks about allowing a short burst of violence, she acknowledges human imperfection. Therefore, Suu Kyi should not be categorised as purely pragmatic or conditional. She may be best described as a proponent of politically pragmatic nonviolence. That is, personally she adheres to the Buddhist principle of nonviolence; however, she is pragmatic for political reason so that she may treat others who are different from her in using arms to fight against the regime as friends. Despite personally holding to the idea of principled nonviolence, Suu Kyi does not exclude others who do not share her principle. Thus, it is best to depict her as an advocate of pragmatic nonviolence for political reason.

It is clearly evident that King was a proponent of principled nonviolence. He renounced all kinds of violence. Nonviolence is, for him, not only a means to achieve something but an end itself because nonviolence is a way of life. The last sermon he delivered, “I See the Promised Land,” explicitly described his firm position regarding principled nonviolence. There he asserted that the choice before us is no longer violence or nonviolence, but nonviolence or nonexistence. King, according to Holmes’ categorisation, is an exponent of absolute principled nonviolence.

Like King, Wink admits that there are situations so extreme that one cannot conceive of any alternative to violence. He confesses that he does not know if he could be
nonviolent in a maximum-security prison like Sing Sing.\textsuperscript{55} To be specific, it is a situation where an oppressive power has squandered every opportunity to do justice, and the capacity of the people to continue is gone. Then the violence visited on the nation is a kind of apocalyptic judgment.\textsuperscript{56} But Wink insists that the church has no business legitimating the violence of war; instead, she is obligated to try to mitigate the violence. In that sense, Wink should also be categorised in the group of principled nonviolence. In short, Holmes’ category is far better than Burrowes’ because it best describes the position of these three personalities – Wink, King and Suu Kyi. According to Holmes’ category, Wink and King stand for absolute principled nonviolence, whereas Suu Kyi, for conditional principled nonviolence.

In a nutshell, King among them is the strongest exponent of principled nonviolence compared to Wink, and Suu Kyi is a shrewd politician who personally endeavours to abide by Buddhist teachings in her life, but she makes compromises with others for political reason. Wink, despite being an advocate of principled nonviolence, is aware of certain complex situations where there is no alternative except violence. To juxtapose each other, Wink’s position is much more convincing than King and Suu Kyi because King seems to be too dogmatic for his overemphasis on nonviolence, while Suu Kyi seems to be compromising her principles for political relevance.

6.3.4 Principles of Nonviolence: King and Suu Kyi Via Wink’s Eyes

Whether following an absolute principled or others-friendly idea of nonviolence, there are certain principles of nonviolence which King and Suu Kyi stick to. Wink also believes that some principles are time-tested and operationally proven, such as the congruity of means and ends, and respect for the rule of law. Here I will establish a

\textsuperscript{55} Sing Sing is a maximum-security prison operated by the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision in the village Ossining, in the US. The prison is located about 30 miles north of New York City on the east bank of the Hudson River.

\textsuperscript{56} Wink, \textit{Engaging the Powers}, 239-240.
dialogue between King, Suu Kyi and Wink in order to discuss it in the next chapter in which political implications will be examined for the context of Myanmar.

Means and Ends
For King and Suu Kyi, the end does not justify the means. They both believe that the means we employ must be congruent with the ends we pursue. Violence can never create the beloved community, nor can it uproot the tradition of the existing regime. It also cannot implant the democratic values in soil where a dictatorship has reigned for many decades. King was convinced that violence, hate, and revenge could do nothing except cause destruction; only through nonviolence, can friendship be established. In the same vein, Suu Kyi believed that changing a political system via violence perpetuates the tradition of violence. Wink also shows a number of examples to prove the consequences of violence in history. To be specific, Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union, Mao Zedong in China, and Ahmed Ben Bella in Algeria are examples of the negative effects of attaining power through violence, as these leaders caused the extermination of millions of people. Violence is addictive: once the path of violence has been chosen, it cannot be easily renounced by the new regime.57

King, Suu Kyi and Wink all have a firm grasp on the labyrinth of violence. However, Wink goes further than King by suggesting that violence is not just a descending spiral, but it also begets the very thing it seeks to destroy. Likewise, Wink explains that the use of violence can perpetuate the tradition that change can only be realised through violence because it is the spirit of the DS. Without changing the inner part of a particular system, a true transformation cannot be achieved. Additionally, from the Winkian perspective, the beloved community that King had been looking forward to and the democratisation that Suu Kyi has worked towards are parts of the DFO. Thus

57 Wink, The Powers That Be, 113.
the means they employ must be compatible with and reflect the desired ends they pursue.

In that sense, both King and Wink oppose a teleological ethic or consequentialism, which focuses on the end-result rather than the means. Put another way, Wink and King believe that certain kinds of acts are wrong in themselves, and thus morally objectionable. For instance, they all think that violence is morally undesirable; therefore, it cannot authentically achieve the desired end. Violence as the spirit of the DS cannot create the DFO because they are incompatible with each other. Furthermore, if democratic values are peace, freedom, and justice, the way to embrace those values should not be through violence. In the case of Suu Kyi, though she holds the position of pragmatic nonviolence, she has a strong conviction that bringing about change through violence has been a tradition in the politics of Myanmar throughout its history. She desires to end this tradition; therefore, she uses nonviolence as her political tactic.58 She knows that violence is not the right means to terminate that tradition. In this regard, she seems to be, like Wink and King, closer to a deontological or principled approach to nonviolence.

The debate regarding teleological and deontological ethical methods is unending among ethical theorists. Teleological theorists see deontological theory as, “one that either does not specify the good independently from the right or does not interpret the right as maximising the good.”59 At the same time, deontologists believe that “the right is not to be defined in terms of the good, and they reject the idea that the good is prior to the right.”60 By and large, the debate between them might be largely a comparison of emphasis (rather than actual disagreement regarding specifics). But in the case of

58 Suu Kyi, The Voice of Hope, 154.
60 Ibid., 206.

258
violence and nonviolence, King, Suu Kyi and Wink have discerned that their ultimate concern is not merely to change a socio-political system, but to end the vicious cycle of violence, and transform the interiority of the DS into the DFO. It, for them, is not a matter of choice or a matter of either “good” or “right,” but rather “good” and “right.” Teleological and deontological ethicists attempt to define “good” and “right” independently instead of looking for their common ground. However, King, Suu Kyi and Wink look at the relationship between them instead of focusing on their independence. In this sense, it would not do justice to categorise them into an ethical taxonomy, because their understanding of violence and nonviolence goes beyond the dichotomy of teleological and deontological ethics.

**The Rule of Law**

King, Suu Kyi and Wink all strive to emphasise the rule of law. By law, I do not refer to the idea of law in a biblical sense, but law in the sense of a system of rules practised in a country or society. They all believe that there are laws that must be followed, and so are all, unlike Henry D. Thoreau, non-anarchists. For them, there are unjust laws as well as just laws. King asserts that only those who defy unjust laws and are willing to accept the penalty by staying in gaol until that law is altered, truly expressed the highest respect for the law.\(^61\) Likewise, Suu Kyi perceives that law has been, so far, an instrument of state oppression since the military coup in 1962. Therefore, she indicates that just law can do two things: it can create a society where people’s basic needs are met, and it can also prevent a country from corruption.\(^62\) For Wink, Jesus willingly accepted the unjust sentence imposed upon him, thereby exposing it as a legalised murder. Like Jesus, we too should refuse to obey an unjust law by experiencing the

---

\(^61\) James Washington (ed.), *A Testament of Hope*, 49.
legal punishment, thereby affirming our willingness to suffering on behalf of a higher or just law. Simply put, we must be lawful in our illegality.\(^63\)

In talking about just and unjust laws, King philosophically frames his idea on the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas’s natural law. According to Aquinas, law is a dictate of practical reason issued by a sovereign who governs a complete community. This governance is called an eternal law. Humans, as intelligent creatures, can join in and make this eternal law their own, thereby making it natural law.\(^64\) Hence, King states that unjust law or the law that discriminates between the blacks and the whites on the basis of skin colour is not rooted in eternal and natural law.

Suu Kyi’s perspective is also similar to the idea of natural law in the sense that she is, despite her belief in Buddhism, a humanistic and political progressivist. Her conviction about democratic values and human rights proves that she is humanistic. In particular, her idea of rule of law hinges on the idea of democratic values and human rights. For her, democracy is an ideology that allows everyone, without being endangered or threatened, to stand up for their beliefs.\(^65\) The ideas of human rights and democracy are all interdependent, but democracy encompasses the other two (human rights and rule of law). In an interview, she expresses her vision to establish a culture of democracy in Myanmar.\(^66\) She believes that democracy is comprehensive enough to include other ideas such as human rights and rule of law.

In contrast, Wink, as a theologian understands rule of law from a Christian perspective. As largely discussed in the first chapter, Wink’s view of rule of law is founded on his exposition of the Powers, for which he owes a huge debt to his predecessors such as

\(^{63}\) Wink, The Powers That Be, 86.
\(^{65}\) Suu Kyi, Freedom from Fear and Other Writings, 198.
Hendrik Berkhof, Howard Yoder, and so on. In prefacing Berkhof’s *Christ and Powers*, Yoder introduces Berkhof as a pioneer in interpreting the Powers languages through modern eyes. Berkhof re-read the Powers language in a modern context and regarded it as human traditions and religious and ethical rules. His structural reading of the Powers impacted others. For example, Yoder, in his book *The Politics of Jesus*, reads the Powers as structures. Wink follows the structural reading of his predecessors and sees the Powers as the divine creation. In regard to rule of law, Wink believes that human society cannot survive without law because God established laws for us.

To conclude, King, Suu Kyi and Wink all have a high regard for the rule of law. When King and Suu Kyi were arrested during their struggles, they accepted the punishment. In doing so, they exposed the system of unjust law. Through a Winkian perspective, what made King and Suu Kyi unique is their willingness to suffer under the “misrule of law” or unjust law. They both defied the unjust laws of the systems, but accepted their unjust punishment in the name of a higher law that they wished to implant. Wink believes that our willingness to endure suffering on behalf of a higher law will expose the unjust law. In a nutshell, they both submitted to the principle of law in order to transform unjust laws into just ones.

**Fear, Fearlessness and Nonviolence: Who is Nonviolence for?**

Who is nonviolence for? What would be an essential prerequisite for nonviolent activists? Every reader of King and Suu Kyi notices their fearless resistance against the domination system in their respective countries. However, they were not born with

---

68 Ibid., 5-7.
69 Ibid., 38.
70 Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 143.
71 Suu Kyi, in her book *Letters from Burma*, used the phrase “misrule of law.” There she described the lives of dissidents in Burma, “everyone committed to taking an active part in the endeavour to return the country to democracy has to be prepared to go to prison at any time,” Suu Kyi, *Letters from Burma*, 167.
courage; they struggled to overcome their fear. For example, King’s “kitchen experience” and Suu Kyi’s fear of darkness during her childhood best illustrate that they have learned to be fearless. As a result of their experiences of fear, they know that fear could overwhelm and paralyse a person. Therefore, King discusses the crippling downside of fear and highlights how it should be mastered. Likewise, Suu Kyi wrote an essay on, “Freedom from Fear.”\(^\text{72}\)

Wink also notes that the path of nonviolence is costly because nonviolence is not a way of avoiding personal sacrifice. In Wink’s view, there are three approaches to conflict: flight (passivity), fight (violence), and nonviolence.\(^\text{73}\) Put differently, these three approaches may be described as three stages. The first stage may be characterised by fear and cowardice; the second by violence, aggression, being warlike and hostile; and the third by militant nonviolence and nonaggression. Wink argues that a person who is in the flight position cannot easily move to active nonviolence because that person needs to be energised by the anger against injustice. Only then can the person be taught and trained to renounce violence and begin to follow the path of nonviolence.

Through looking at the recent history of nonviolent struggles, Wink has observed that people have resorted to nonviolence not because they believed in it, but because their opponents held a monopoly over weapons. Nonviolence was not a choice, but their only option. However, they felt confident in the nonviolent method when they saw its astonishing effectiveness and transformative power. Therefore, Wink believes that

---

\(^{72}\) Suu Kyi, “Freedom from Fear,” in Michael Aris (ed.), Freedom from Fear and Other Writings, 180-185. To my surprise, Suu Kyi’s exposition of fear is somewhat similar to Robert Holmes’ understanding. Holmes argues that fear is always of loss of some sort, whether personal, social or political, “Understanding Evil from the Perspective of Nonviolence,” in The Ethics of Nonviolence: Essays by Robert L. Holmes, 210. This essay was originally published in the Acorn: Journal of the Gandhi-King Society, vol. 19, No. 1, (Winter-Spring 2010), 5-13. Looking at the time of publication, Suu Kyi’s “freedom from fear” came prior to Holmes because Holmes’ “understanding evil from the perspective of nonviolence” was published in 2010, whereas Suu Kyi’s was published first in 1991.

\(^{73}\) Wink, Engaging the Powers, 187.
active nonviolence is not for the perfect, but for frightened, fed up, and even violent people who are trying to change. It is practical and applicable to anyone of any age.\textsuperscript{74}

From this Winkian perspective, King passed through the second stage, the “fight” position and then he came to nonviolent resistance. But Suu Kyi is quite different from King, because seemingly she did not undergo such a transition. Under the care of her mother and her upbringing in India and the West, she seems to have trained herself to become nonviolent.

**Nonviolence: A Fight Against Evil, Not the Evildoer**

Nonviolence is, for both King and Suu Kyi, not an attack to humiliate opponents, but against what their opponents have done. For nonviolent activists, it is important to distinguish what a person does and what that person is, because nonviolence is not a win/lose game, but a win/win approach to conflict. In the myth of redemptive violence, people tend to demonise those who do evil. For example, when a particular tyrant rules a particular state ruthlessly, inhumanely, and heartlessly, people tend to demonise that tyrant. Of course, this is true in Myanmar. The majority of Christians in Myanmar, under the rules of the cold-blooded despots Ne Win and Than Shwe, have sometimes seen those leaders as demonic. For King and Suu Kyi, depersonalising evil in that way is important because the ultimate aim of nonviolence is to win friendship or reconciliation.

In biblical terms, what King was fighting against was “principalities and powers.” For King, nonviolence was directed against the evil behind the people who did it, not the people themselves. Suu Kyi also often encouraged her people to focus on deeds rather than on the person who committed evil deeds. For this separation between evil and the evildoer, Suu Kyi, as noted earlier, gave the example of Gautama Buddha and

\textsuperscript{74} Wink, *The Powers That Be*, 118.
Angulimala, a mass murderer, the one who even tried to kill Buddha. Based on that story, Suu Kyi contends that the Buddha was able to separate the person from the deed. In terms of this depersonalising evil, Wink also argues from the idea of the Powers, which are the outer and inner manifestations of an institution. Those Powers are good, bad, and redeemable – all at once, according to Wink. From this understanding, Wink asserts that we are freed from the temptation to demonise those who do evil.

As discussed in the chapter on Martin Luther King Jr., it is hard to separate entirely the evildoer from the evil they commit. Reinhold Niebuhr insists, “It is impossible to completely dissociate an evil system from the personal moral responsibilities of the individual who maintain it.”75 Hans Walton also questions the concept of depersonalising evil: “How much of a person can be separated from his actions? And who, if not that person, is to be held responsible for those actions?”76 For the victimised who lost their lives, properties, and suffered physically, emotionally and excruciatingly under the victimiser, the unavoidable question is: where is justice? In such a context, what kind of justice would be relevant and appropriate to be exercised?

For the utilitarian, what is just is what produces the best outcome. Ethically utilitarianism focuses on the result. Whether a certain action is right or wrong depends on whether it promotes the general welfare of a community or country.77 On utilitarian grounds, perpetrators might justify that what they did was for the sake of the wellbeing of the majority. In contrast, Aristotelian justice seeks to relate two ideas: the questions of fairness and rights, and of honour and virtue. Justice, for Aristotle, meant giving persons what they deserve. For example, suppose we are distributing flutes. Who should

get the best ones? For Aristotle, it should be the best flute players. It would be unjust to discriminate on any other basis, such as wealth, physical beauty, or chance.\textsuperscript{78} In other words, it is justice according to one’s merit (or demerit). If we do a good deed, we will, in turn, receive good. But if we commit an evil, we would receive evil. This resembles Buddhist’s ethics: act good, receive good; act evil, receive evil. In short, the Aristotelian justice seems to be retributive.

For many Christian ethicists, a biblical view of justice is basically “restorative,” not “retributive.” Justice is meant to restore, not to re-pay: restoration of both parties, victims and offenders. However, even with restorative justice, restitution is likely to involve an element of punishment. Likewise, punishment ought to involve an element of restitution.\textsuperscript{79} Chris Marshall indicates that punishment in the biblical narrative is a means to an end, not an end itself; therefore, punishment serves as a mechanism for helping to promote such restoration.\textsuperscript{80} In the case of the Truth and Reconciliation Council in South Africa, scholars have observed some problems in performing restorative justice. For instance, there was a lack of accountability for perpetrators. The TRC also admits that restorative justice was undermined by the lack of the responsibility of perpetrators and because they did not take “responsibility for some form of restitution.”\textsuperscript{81} Depersonalising evil is, in this regard, allowing perpetrators to take full advantage of forgiveness and reconciliation to cover up the evils they have committed.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{81} Brandon Hamber, \textit{Transforming Societies After Political Violence} (London: Springer, 2009), 132-133.
\textsuperscript{82} The same thing happens in Myanmar, too. Generals who ruled the country ruthlessly state that the public should not look back and dig deep into what the generals did in the past to find the crimes they perpetrated. The majority of the generals are averting their faces from what they did. The next chapter will discuss this in more detail.
Nonetheless, King, Suu Kyi, and Wink, when depersonalising evil, assert that there is no such justice that disregards punishment. King stressed the importance of the active rule of law, as he said,

"Morality cannot be legislated, but behaviour can be regulated. Judicial decrees may not change the heart, but they can restrain the heartless. The law cannot make an employer love an employee, but it can prevent him from refusing to hire me because of the colour of my skin … Let us not be misled by those who argue that segregation cannot be ended by the force of law." 83

In the same way, both Wink and Suu Kyi also emphatically talk about the importance of the rule of law. If the rule of law were firmly established, justice would be done. For example, if a person steals, murders, or does something against the established law, that person would be disciplined according to the law. In this sense, depersonalisation of evil is, for King, Suu Kyi, and Wink, not perverting the justice system. So the counter-question should be: "what would happen if we intermix individuals and their deeds in a nonviolent struggle?" Obviously, the evildoers would be personified as demonic. There would be two divisions: we (the nonviolent activists) are good, and they (the opponents) are evil. Thus, everything would go well if they were defeated. Nonviolent resistance would be no different from the use of violence. Finally, the aim of nonviolence would also be a disguised form of revenge. In short, separating a person from what he/she does should be seen in the light of other principles like “the rule of law,” “the beloved community,” “democratisation,” and the realisation of the DFO.

**Nonviolence as Spiritual Revolution**

Suu Kyi is committed to a revolution of the spirit, whereas Wink is emphatic about the spirituality of institutions, nations, and the Christian church. What they have in common is, of course, rendering the spiritual dimension into socio-political activism. Unlike them, King does not employ the word spirit or spirituality in defining his idea of nonviolence. What do Suu Kyi and Wink mean by “spiritual” or “spirituality” when

---

83 King, *Strength to Love*, 34.
they talk about it?” How do they differ from each other? How can they enhance each other? How should King’s nonviolence be comprehended through the eyes of Suu Kyi and Wink?

First and foremost, the spirit or spirituality Suu Kyi and Wink are articulating is not an unseen realm where actual spirit-beings interfere in human affairs or mysterious experiences. Both Suu Kyi and Wink, as products of modern western education, apparently pay no attention to the actual existence of spirit-beings. What they do instead is have a great regard for the interiority of a person or institution, which they call spirituality. In other words, Suu Kyi looks at the interiority of a person, whereas Wink focuses on that of an individual as well as an institution. By “spiritual revolution,” Suu Kyi refers to de-internalisation of the values of the old system in order to re-internalise the democratic values. She believes that the way to transformation is through self-effort. The important thing, in her view, is to internalise for oneself the values of human rights and democracy, which are in opposition to the dictatorial ideologies. For instance, the Dalai Lama perceives the difficulty of bringing about peace through the internal transformation of an individual. But he affirms that it is the only way. Peace must be, for him, first developed within an individual; love, compassion and altruism are the fundamental basis for peace.84 Hence, Suu Kyi’s revolution of the spirit can be summed up as facing the truth in oneself and changing it by self-effort.

In reviewing the idea of Suu Kyi’s revolution of the spirit, Burmese activist Min Zin contends that the Burmese dissidents tend to make a “we-they” distinction; as a result, there seems to be no continuity between the previous regime and themselves. The we-they distinction here refers to the military being seen as a villain, whereas the dissidents regard themselves as the saviours of the country. In fact, there is no such distinction,

argues Min Zin. He points out that the government was not, in fact, a foreign body, but they were among the dissidents because the Burmese people have been moulded by a closed society under their rule for many decades. Unfortunately, a number of dissidents are unaware of those influences. So Min Zin states, “When we look at the mirror of military dictatorship carefully, we can find out some parts of our face.”85 As a result of the military dictatorship, democratic values and practices could be seen even among those dissidents, despite their fighting for democracy. In short, the influence of the military rule upon all the public – whether dissidents or not and whether they are conscious of it or not – is so immense that it is questionable whether a person could withstand such an overpowering presence.

Suu Kyi’s revolution of the spirit through Min Zin’s exposition is akin to the idea of Wink’s Domination System. The power of the DS is so deceptive that even many social and political activists are swayed to believe in redemptive violence. Therefore, Wink insists that what has to be done is to step out of that world, where violence is always the ultimate solution, into another world, where nonviolence is understood as the only transformative method. He also views nonviolent resistance as a double movement of psychic energy. For Wink, we identify our enemies as evil, and so unconsciously project our own evil onto our enemies. But what we neglect is that our enemies also evoke the evil within us. This is the two-way traffic of projection and introjection. With nonviolence, we are challenged to face this inner darkness inside us. As such, Suu Kyi and Wink are both convinced that nonviolence is not an easy way of life.

Unlike Suu Kyi and Wink, King concentrates on the inner strength of a person in expounding the notion of nonviolence, instead of using terms such as spirit or spiritual. For him, nonviolence is not passive and submissive, but active. In other words,

nonviolent resistance might be bodily passive, yet it is spiritually active. So he regards nonviolent resistance as the way of the strong person, not the method of a coward. In the Montgomery Bus Boycott, King encouraged the protestors, “If another person is being molested, do not arise to go to his defence, but pray for the oppressor and use moral and spiritual force to carry on the struggle for justice.” In saying that, King was aware that there were a number of blacks who used nonviolence as a tactic, not as a principle. So this spiritual activism is important not only for advocates of principled nonviolence, but also for those of pragmatic nonviolence. So for King, nonviolent resistance is also a kind of spiritual activism because it requires a great deal of inner strength.

Wink and Suu Kyi understand that nonviolence is truly revolutionary because it disallows the we-they distinction – the discontinuity between the enemies and us. In contrast, the logic of nonviolence for King seems to be this: enemies are evil and wrong; we (the nonviolent activists) are good and right; therefore, we are called to make them good and right. But Wink and Suu Kyi discern another dimension that is missing in King’s notion of nonviolence. That is what Wink calls “self-righteousness.” Wink and Suu Kyi support nonviolent resistance as a spiritual discipline because it deters the we-they syndrome – we are good, but our enemies are bad. The logic of nonviolence, for Suu Kyi and Wink, is that everyone (our enemies and ourselves) is imperfect; nonviolence is good and right; therefore, only through nonviolence can everyone (our enemies and ourselves) exert themselves to be good and right, because nonviolence has transformative power for us as well as for our enemies.

Wink furthers our understanding of spirituality from a personal to an impersonal circle. As discussed, nonviolence is a personal spiritual discipline, yet spirituality for Wink

---

86 King, Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story, 158.
does not end there because the Powers against which nonviolent activists resist also have, despite the impersonality of their nature, an interiority or spirituality. Wink suggests that every collective entity that has continuity through time has an angel. By angel, Wink does not mean an otherworldly celestial personal being. Angel here means the actual spirituality of a nation or institution as a single entity. The angel would then exist in, with, and under the material expressions of the nation’s life as its interiority.87

From this Winkian perspective, King and Suu Kyi, in their nonviolent struggles, opposed the interiority or spirituality of the systems in their respective nations by exercising their spiritual discipline. In that sense, King’s spiritual revolution was the revolution of the racist spirituality of America, whereas Suu Kyi’s revolution was that of the despotic spirituality of Myanmar. Segregation was deeply rooted and thereby becoming a spirituality of the States. Similarly, the dictatorial mentality was so strongly instituted that it became the spirituality of the nation, Myanmar. With this Winkian eye, the struggles of King and Suu Kyi can be understood profoundly in the sense that nonviolent resistance is more than socio-political activism. Rather, it is a revolution that can transform human society and individuals.

**Nonviolence and Suffering**

Wink, King and Suu Kyi all acknowledge the inevitability of suffering, sacrifices, and pain in the nonviolent struggle. For King, unearned suffering is redemptive. Originally, he adapted this idea from Mohandas Gandhi, but later he conceptualised it in the Christian term, “cross-bearing.” Cross-bearing is, for him, redemptive because it is the power of God in social and individual salvation. In Christian teaching, cross-bearing is a very important subject.88 For Dietrich Bonhoeffer, it is not the sort of suffering that is inseparable from mortal life, but the suffering that is an essential part of the specifically

---

87 Wink, *Unmasking the Powers*, 70.
88 Matthew 16:24-27.
Christian life. Bonhoeffer was profoundly convinced of how it is costly to follow Christ in the context of a totalitarian regime, because he himself lived in the time of Adolf Hitler. In one of his books, Bonhoeffer states that, “the ‘must’ of suffering applies to his disciples no less than to himself …, so the disciple is a disciple only in so far as he shares his Lord’s suffering and rejection and crucifixion.” Bonhoeffer’s understanding of suffering is not limited merely to the atonement theory; he applies Jesus’s death to the domain of the Christian life.

In the studies of Christ’s crucifixion, much attention is paid to his death as atonement. In any atonement theory, what must be considered is that the cross not only demonstrates God’s justice and love, but also directs our conduct in relation to others, including our enemies. Darrin W. Snyder Belousek examines the mission of the church in the light of the cross. For him, Jesus died for us “to set us free from sin and reconcile us to God, so that we might willingly enter our role as obedient servants of God’s purpose.” The mystic St. John of the Cross, in meditation on Jesus’ crucifixion, mentions that, “true spirituality seeks for bitterness rather than sweetness in God, inclines to suffering more than consolation.” King’s view of cross-bearing, though learned from Gandhi, is a genuinely Christian way of comprehending the cross.

Similarly, Suu Kyi, as a political activist, believes that she has been working for something worthwhile – democracy, for which she knows that sacrifices are inescapable. Using a Buddhist term, Suu Kyi articulates that sacrifice and mettā go hand in hand; thus it is the sort of sacrifice of a mother’ sacrificing herself out of her mettā

---

90 Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, 97.
91 There are a number of atonement theories, according to which Jesus’ death is read in salvific terms. A theory, known as Moral Example, regards Jesus’ death as the perfect example to follow.
for her child.\textsuperscript{95} To describe the suffering incurred by nonviolent resistance, King used the phrase “unearned suffering”, whereas Suu Kyi employs the word “sacrifice.” No matter which word – suffering or sacrifice – what makes them similar is that suffering is inescapable to nonviolent activists.

In Wink’s understanding, nonviolence is not passive, as some misunderstand it to be; rather, it is active. To be specific, it is not a way of avoiding personal sacrifice. However, Wink differs from King concerning redemptive suffering. For King, suffering is the transformative power of God. In contrast, Wink looks at sacrifice and suffering from the point of view of Jesus’ death and crucifixion. For Wink, what made Jesus unique was not his suffering, persecution, or death. Rather, Jesus’ uniqueness lay in his total rejection of complicity in violence. What is more, his arraignment, trial, crucifixion and death also unmasked the scapegoating mechanism. With this view, Wink considers that the deaths of other people like King, Gandhi, and Oscar Romero also reflect the same truth that was revealed in Jesus. Instead of arguing if suffering is redemptive or not, suffering and sacrifices for nonviolent struggles primarily, for Wink, unmask the DS.\textsuperscript{96} This view of suffering specifies what nonviolent resistance truly resists. That is, nonviolent resistance resists the Powers that worked visibly and invisibly behind all institutions, organisations, and nations. But King’s view of redemptive suffering and Suu Kyi’s idea of sacrificing out of mettā should not be discarded in preference of the idea of unmasking the system by absorbing violence and

\textsuperscript{95} Suu Kyi, The Voice of Hope, revised and updated (eBook by Ebooks by Designs, World Dharma Publications, 2012), 40. In the later life, Suu Kyi began to be strange. In the speech given at Tokyo University in 2013, she states, “I would like to talk about the word ‘sacrifice.’ People talk a lot about the word sacrifice. I find it personally rather embarrassing when people talk about the sacrifices I have made. Because I don’t think I have made any sacrifices,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=311BI-5PPyo&t=911s. Peter Popham comments on that, “Suu Kyi has often faced the charge of being hard-hearted. If true it could be forgiven, considering the great stakes for which she has played and is still playing. But wrapped up in this Tokyo meditation of hers on sacrifice and free will one detects something worse – a ravenous egotism that perhaps the years of isolation only made worse,” The Lady and the Generals, 227.

\textsuperscript{96} Wink, The Powers That Be, 86-87.
suffering. Wink’s view of suffering in the nonviolent struggle is structurally focused because it primarily seeks to unmask the unseen powers. Thus, Wink’s view reminds us never to succumb to violence in nonviolent resistance, because if we do, no distinction between violence and nonviolence can be made.

On the contrary, redemptive suffering, for King, and the courage to sacrifice out of mettā, for Suu Kyi, are psychologically concerned. King argued that we could transform suffering into a creative force if we respond to it without bitterness. It is true that suffering or sacrifice, if responded to with bitterness, can make someone aggressive, resentful, and vengeful, and that surely leads to violence. But, if taken as a virtue or creative force, suffering can transform one’s self. Of course, suffering is not a justification to prove whether a person is right. In the form of a question, for what reason do we suffer? The logic of suffering is: I am suffering, therefore what I am doing is right. Instead, do what is right and be prepared to suffer or sacrifice. If we juxtapose King, Suu Kyi and Wink, unearned suffering or sacrifice can, if taken as a virtue, do two things: transform our ego and unmask the real powers behind institutions, organisations, and nations. In nonviolent struggles, we have seen the inevitability of suffering and sacrifices; thus, being prepared to deal with them is always necessary for all nonviolent activists.

**Nonviolence and Hope**

Is there any connection between nonviolence and hope? Irrespective of whether they are pragmatic or principled, all activists, when they take a nonviolent path, have a desired end in mind. That is, they all begin with the hope that the resistance they take part in will be brought to fruition. Nonviolent resistance is always achievement-based, having

---

hopes and expectations. If hope is an essential ingredient in the nonviolent struggle, what is its source?

Both King and Suu Kyi have the similar conviction that justice eventually prevails. For King, it was this belief in justice and a God who works with humans to create a humane society. That belief led King to stand firm in the civil rights movement until his assassination. Suu Kyi, as a Buddhist, also believes in the human potentiality to do good, so she often said, “saints are sinners who go on trying.” These beliefs truly infused both King and Suu Kyi with hope; thus, they both were able to persist in their struggles against the dominating systems.

In Wink’s eyes, there is an absolute and unshakable confidence that the Domination System has an end. If there is a time of the reign of right, a chance of justice being done, and a time for the DS to be ended, when will that time come? For Suu Kyi, it all depends on how much effort we put into it, irrespective of hurdles. As a Buddhist, she believes in self-effort, so she characterises herself as a trier, one who never gives up trying to be a better person. She always discourages the passive onlookers, who just sit there and hope that things will happen. But King, as a personalist, believed that faith in God entails human participation in God’s activity. For him, it is not possible to solve the race problem simply through human endeavours, but only by participating with God. Human beings cannot do it alone and God will not do it alone either. What is needed is our cooperation with God, so that we will be able to build a better world.

In Wink’s understanding, the DS is already broken and the God’s Domination-Free Order has already been inaugurated in our world through Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. The DFO or the reign of God is not merely in the future; it is also in the present. What we can all do is not to try to save the world, but to act as if the world can be transformed. True, the presence of the DS might be still overwhelming in our current
situation, yet Christ’s victory has already been realised. This victory is what sustains faith; this faith is what enables victory. From the Winkian perspective, the belief that “the universe is on the side of justice” is, to an extreme degree, forward-looking and so is Suu Kyi’s conviction that “in the end, right will prevail.” For both King and Suu Kyi, their hope is principally concerned with the future and seemingly has no connection with the present. In contrast, Wink’s hope is not merely forward-looking, but also something that can be experienced in the present reign of God – the DFO is not too far distant from the historic grounds. The Winkian understanding offers us more concrete hope for the DFO than King and Suu Kyi do.

6.4 What If … Or Self-Defence?

There are some unavoidable questions for every nonviolent activist such as, “what if you are attacked by robbers?” “What if someone intrudes into your house and strikes your wife and children?” “Should we steal to feed our children?” King did not ask the what-if questions, but that of self-defence. Brutalities, maltreatments, and discriminations were encountered daily by blacks in the time of King. Thus, it was not a matter of choice but that of how to respond to such discrimination. In a nutshell, what-if questions are, for King, fundamentally tentative and indeterminate; that is, someone might face such attacks or not. For blacks, various forms of discrimination and attacks on the basis of racial difference were day-to-day experiences. King, from the time he was fully committed to nonviolence as a philosophy for life, tried to stick to the principles of nonviolence in whatever circumstance. Suu Kyi, as a present politician, does not concern herself with what-if questions like many ethicists do. Obviously, aggressive political maltreatment had been daily intruding on her and other dissidents during the previous military regime. What she and others, in turn, could do was decide how to respond to it, whether through flight, fight or nonviolent resistance. Under the suppression of aggressive injustice, many opposition parties were disestablished, and
many political dissidents lost heart. Some have still persisted in their struggles. Suu Kyi and the NLD, of course, have persevered in their nonviolent struggle for the cause of democracy. In short, what-if questions are not convincing and practical enough for King and Suu Kyi; thus, they are speculative for both of them. Once they have chosen nonviolent resistance, they live it out according to its principles.

But Wink, as a theorist and an activist, attempts to deal with the what-if dilemma. For Wink, these questions imply that there is misunderstanding behind them. That is, the myth of redemptive violence is so entrenched that we are inured to it; therefore, it seems to be almost impossible for us to think of any way except the use of violence. Another important fact is that neither violence nor nonviolence guarantees success. Nonviolence might fail where violence would fail; nonviolence might work where violence would work. However, violence might fail where nonviolence would work. Despite highlighting nonviolence over violence, Wink is aware of some special contexts in which violence is unavoidable. For example, consider an oppressive regime that has constrained all the opportunities for justice, and the people are left in despair. In such circumstances, Wink suggests that violence is a kind of apocalyptic judgement. However, this does not mean that violence in that situation is justifiable because choosing either lesser or greater evil is still evil. In that case, Christians should not try to judge those who take up violence out of desperation. In saying that, Wink sees the world as being imperfect and sometimes circumstances are complex. Nevertheless, violence, for Christians, should not be an option in any situation.

Furthermore, Wink highlights the importance of nurturing a nonviolent lifestyle corporately as well as individually. He perceives how our society desperately needs people like Leo Tolstoy, Mohandas Gandhi, King and Suu Kyi. Neither King nor Suu

---

98 Wink, The Powers That Be, 158.
Kyi were born and bred in a culture of nonviolence. Nonviolence has to be nurtured, enhanced, and cultivated, says Wink. At the same time, it should not be overlooked that the world in which we live is imperfect; thus, we should not expect that nonviolence will always succeed in any circumstance. Suu Kyi knows that there are some situations where there is no option for nonviolence. But King seemed to not allow any room for violence. Nonviolence, for him, is by no means a choice. That means that if nonviolence is temporarily discarded, it would be non-existent. What King and Suu Kyi have in common is that they both have nurtured their lives to be nonviolent in every way. King always urged and challenged his people to discard violence and stick to nonviolence. Likewise, Suu Kyi also encourages her people to be nonviolent even though she grants recognition to those who fought with arms for freedom. Wink so illuminates the importance of cultivating the culture of nonviolence so that people like King and Suu Kyi might rise up in the next generation.

6.5 Nonviolence and the Church

On his return from South Africa to India in 1915, Gandhi founded the ashram or monastery, which was later called Satyagraha Ashram, in Ahmedabad, India, with a purpose to lead a simple life of prayer, study, manual work and helping the local people. Ashram was home to Mohandas Gandhi from 1917 until 1930 and served as one of the main centres of the Indian freedom struggle. It was also home to the ideology that set India free. In the civil rights movement, the church played a vital role. For King, the church was “a second home.” The church was the primary source from which he gained spiritual, emotional and social strength to persevere in the struggle. Suu Kyi also recognises the great force of the church in political or social movements.

101 Martin Luther King Jr., The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr., 6.
across the globe. However, Buddhists are, unlike Christians, not organised around their monasteries.\textsuperscript{102}

King, despite having a high regard for the church as a second home, did not articulate the role of the church when he discussed nonviolence. But Wink has a clear understanding of the role of the church in nonviolence. The church, for him, is called to nonviolence to express its fidelity to Jesus Christ who taught and practised nonviolence. This call to nonviolence is a matter of discipleship because nonviolence is God’s way of dealing with evil in the world. So when the church is called to nonviolence, the call is not for pragmatic reasons, but ontological, because nonviolence reflects the very nature of God.

But Wink’s ecclesiology is inclusive, and he makes no distinction between the church and other social groups. That is, the church has no special role to play in society, but is just one of the social groups that struggle to humanise the Powers – nothing more, nothing less. The church, for him, is not the only group which God has assigned to liberate us from the deception of the Powers. The church is, like other institutions in society, fallen and idolatrous.\textsuperscript{103} However, Wink insists that the church must affirm nonviolence without reservation, because nonviolence is the way to the DFO. In short, Wink views the church, like other institutions, as an organised social group to disempower the Powers so that they may be liberated from the derailment of divine purpose. Nonviolence is forceful and powerful when it is collectively and corporately employed. In this sense, the church would become a social power to liberate the Powers when it holds steadfastly to nonviolence.

\textsuperscript{102} Aung San Suu Kyi, \textit{Voice of Hope}, 152.
\textsuperscript{103} Walter Wink, \textit{The Powers That Be}, 29.
6.6 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter brings the ethical and political ideals of King and Suu Kyi into dialogue with a Winkian perspective of the Powers. In this dialogue, I have examined their views of nonviolence in three areas: leadership, religion and the ethical principles of nonviolence. The reason I have done so is that nonviolence, if it is to be regarded as more than a means to an end, must encompass many aspects of life, such as leadership, religion and ethical implications. Nonviolence must have significant implications for leadership. Therefore, in the next chapter, I will argue how the philosophy of nonviolence can create a culture of leadership, which is not based on power-to-control, but on power-to-nurture. Next, it is extremely clear that religion profoundly guided and shaped the lives and works of King and Suu Kyi. We cannot appropriately study King’s ethic of nonviolence without any understanding of Christianity. Likewise, we cannot study Suu Kyi’s idea of nonviolence unless we have some comprehension of Buddhism. Hence the dialogue between King and Suu Kyi via the Winkian perspective will also be, in a later chapter, a guide to express the integral relationship between Christianity and Buddhism in the context of Myanmar.

Finally, this chapter also discussed the principles of nonviolence adopted by King and Suu Kyi in the light of Wink’s Powers. I have examined a number of areas of correspondence between King, Suu Kyi and Wink in their views of nonviolence despite religious differences. This chapter demonstrates that Wink’s view of the Powers is comprehensive enough to see the world as the DS and nonviolence as the only justifiable means to achieve another order, which is the DFO. True, King and Suu Kyi also each have their ultimate desired ends, which are similar to Wink’s DFO. What makes Wink distinct is his view of the DS, the DFO, and the means of transformation from the former to the latter. In a nutshell, Wink’s view is, as a whole, a comprehensive view that illuminates and sharpens the ideas of King and Suu Kyi. In the next chapter, I
will examine how power, violence and religion in the politics of Myanmar have been
practised in history, and how they are interconnected in engaging the Burmese politics
with King, Suu Kyi, and Wink. This examination will be, in one way or another, a
critical assessment of the Burmese political culture from a Christian perspective by an
integrated lens of Wink, King and Suu Kyi. This will provide the data for chapter eight
or the conclusion of the thesis to draw some political and theological implications for
Christians in Myanmar.
Chapter 7

Engaging with Burmese Politics through Wink, King and Suu Kyi

This research explores the Burmese political context through a dialogue between Martin Luther King Jr., Aung San Suu Kyi, and Walter Wink. In the last chapter, I discussed King, Suu Kyi and Wink in regard to the issues of violence, nonviolence, leadership, religion, and ethics. It shows that a leader who practises nonviolence, pragmatic or principled, can hardly become a tyrant or authoritarian, since the power in the notion of nonviolence is exercised to nurture and support, not to control or kill. Religion is paradoxical, in that it can be emancipatory or enslaving depending on our interpretation and the way we practise it. Nonviolence, whether it is pragmatic or principled, is morally centred on love or mettā, because it seeks not a win-lose, but win-win solution.

Now the study has come to its final part, which is to locate the dialogue between King, Suu Kyi and Wink in the political context of Myanmar. The discussion will be directed at areas such as leadership, religion, politics, ethics, and reconciliation. As today's Myanmar is, politically speaking, a rapidly changing nation in Asia, the study needs to be brought up to date with the recent political development of the country. Thus, I will also discuss the future of Myanmar in the last part of this chapter: how the newly elected National League for Democracy (NLD) has to encounter the challenges and difficulties ahead in cultivating a culture of democracy.

7.1 Violence, Power-Struggles, and Buddhism: A Historical Review

The nation of Myanmar is made up of a diverse range of communities that have continued to influence the distinctive nature of Burmese politics.¹ In order to discuss

¹ Andrew Selth has surveyed modern Burma studies and noted another group of scholars, the Western Academics, by presumptuously considering a democracy as the best form of government, are denying the
this complex political landscape, and particularly the interconnections between power, religion, and violence, a description of key aspects of the history that produced contemporary Burmese politics is required, covering pre-colonial (monarchical), colonial, and post-independence Myanmar. From this, further reflections connecting Aung San Suu Kyi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Walter Wink to the Burmese political environment will be made. Regarding Wink’s idea of the Domination System, this examination will lead the thesis to validate or invalidate the presence of the DS in the political tradition of Myanmar.

7.1.1 Monarchical Period

Burmese kings are infamous for their violence and cruelty against their rivals. The use of violence in seizing and retaining power was a common factor among the Burmese monarchs throughout the pre-colonial period of Myanmar. To illustrate the point, the founder of the first Burmese empire Anawrahta (1044-97) became king by slaying his older brother. As a consequence, he had sleepless nights for six months until Sakra (the ruler of the Universe in the Buddhist cosmology) came to him in a dream and said,

“O King, if thou wouldst mitigate thine evil deed in sinning against thine elder brother, build many pagodas, gu, monasteries, and rest houses, and share the merit with thine elder brother. Devise thou many wells, ponds and ditches, fields, and canals, and share the merit with thine elder brother.”

---


Anawrahta fulfilled the dream to atone for his evil deed. From then on, the belief that meritorious acts can compensate for evil deeds was birthed. Many kings after Anawrahta followed that tradition. Tabinshweti (1531-1550), who massacred in extending his kingdom, atoned for his cruelty by placing new spires on Mon pagodas and making a costly offering at the Shwe Dagon Pagoda.³ Anawrahta was also a zealous Buddhist, who led a thorough reform of religion in the country and promoted Theravada Buddhism during his rule. His enthusiasm for Buddhism led him to declare war on the Mons (the Talaings) because he wanted the Buddhist Scriptures, the Tripitaka from them.⁴ He spent most of his life collecting Buddha’s holy relics. At the same time, Anawrahta never tolerated any potential challengers to his throne. Thus, the late Burmese scholar Mya Maung observed that in Anawrahta, the two requisite qualities of an ideal ruler, the sacred priestly person and the mighty warrior, were fused together to form a role model for his successors. The story of Anawrahta seems to have left the legacy of purging and destroying many potential challengers to the throne or “the next king-to-be,” minlawns, under the advice of Brahmin astrologers, ponnars, and soothsayers – a practice revived and most vehemently followed by the military dictatorship of Ne Win during his reign.⁵ As the builder of the first Burmese empire, the legacy he left had a tremendous impact on later generations, even up until the post-colonial rulers, the first Prime Minister Nu, Ne Win, and Than Shwe.⁶

What is more, violence for the sake of unifying the country was also a characteristic of the Burmese monarchs. Anawrahta consolidated various tribes into a single nation. To maintain the consolidation, he was ruthless and stern to all his subjects, for he believed

---
⁶ The impact of Burmese monarchs on modern Burmese politicians will be discussed more in the following as needed.
that harsh measures were effective means to build a new nation. Likewise, Alaungmintaya’s unification of Burma (the founder of the third Burmese empire, 1752-1760) was cemented with the blood of his victims. Furthermore, the Burmese kings never tolerated any form of rivals. Lucian W. Pye writes, “The last Burmese king, on coming to the throne in 1878, sought to eliminate all possible contenders by executing his eighty half-brothers and sisters – since royal blood could not be shed, he had his relatives tied up in sacks and trampled by white elephants.” Seizing power and retaining it through various forms of violence was a distinct feature of Burmese politics during the monarchical period. The belief that all the evils a king committed for the sake of gaining and maintaining power can be compensated for makes Burmese politics distinct. Therefore, Burmese monarchs are perhaps notorious for their ruthless and cruel kingships. A Burmese historian, Than Tun, succinctly remarks that there are two distinct features of Burmese kingship: these are the right to rule first through conquest and second through descent. Of these two features, the former is the most important, and thus there were frequent rebellions from royal cousins, massacres of the king’s men, and blood purges whenever the throne was in danger.

Besides, the idea of the Burmese kingship was in some measure tailored to the Buddhist doctrine of *karma*. To a Burmese Buddhist, all the current conditions – good or bad, high or low, glory or disgrace – are not the consequences of what a person has done now, but what that person did previously in life. If a king is powerful enough that no one can dethrone him, it means that his *karma* is superior to and greater than all other opponents. Otherwise, if a rebel can overthrow a king, it means that the king’s *karma*...
was insufficient to maintain the throne.\textsuperscript{11} Put another way, the power struggle in Burmese politics is a \textit{karma} struggle between a king and his rivals. This notion of \textit{karma} significantly underpins the traditional Burmese view that, “He who kills a king must be a king.” Finally, the way Burmese monarchs exercised power was absolute. The king was not subject to any law – religious, legal, social, etc. He was the supreme ruler, and his word was law. No constitutional boundary was there to check and limit the autocracy of the king. The king was the most powerful person in the state and being the lord of land and water; he was also the lord of life and death as the land and water were the sources of all life. There was also no organised form of government in the Burmese kingship. The king and his favourites exercised power and authority as they wished. This resulted in sycophancy, bribery and corruption.\textsuperscript{12}

However, some patriotic Burmese authors argue that the Burmese kings were not despotic. They were not exempt from the operation of the civil law. These authors have tried to validate their argument by quoting Buddhist teaching on the ten moral precepts (or ten duties) of a king and other kingly rules.\textsuperscript{13} Maung Maung Gyi counters this, saying, “If it were true, Burmese kings would be the most perfect in this world.”\textsuperscript{14} John Cady also points out that there were, of course, some occasions when monks urged the deposition of unworthy monarchs, led revolts, aided royal personages to escape, and one even acted as regent. But the Burmese court chronicles show that the king brooked no


\textsuperscript{13} These duties are known as \textit{dasavidha rajadhamma} in Pali. Asoka (304-232 BCE) was known as the king who practiced those ten \textit{rajadhamma}. He rued India for forty-one years. He was a great warrior general and won many battles. After he embraced Buddha’s teachings, Asoka endeavoured to establish a just kingdom. Thus, he was known as “Dhammasoka,” meaning “pious Asoka.” from http://buddhaspace.blogspot.com/2012/07/buddhism-by-numbers-10-duties-of-king.html (accessed 23 November 2017).

\textsuperscript{14} Gyi, \textit{Burmese Political Values}, 21.
clerical challenge to his authority over the state.  

It was only in theory that the king was expected to observe the rules of kingship; in reality, the king was accountable to no power or authority.  

Than Tun remarks, “the only limitation to a king’s powers was his voluntary respect for Buddhist rule and precepts to rule with kindness. Otherwise, he was the lord and master of the life.”  

In brief, the autocracy of the king during the monarchical period was absolute. Therefore nothing, even Buddhism, was able to inhibit his power unless he wanted it to be so.

While his critique of Burmese monarchs is sometimes very sharp, Lucian Pye was moderate in commenting on the psyche of Burmese politics. For him, Burmese politics is paradoxical in nature: on the one hand, it is characterised by gentleness, religiosity, and a commitment to the qualities of virtue; on the other hand, it is also typified by violence, malicious scheming, and devious thinking. Therefore, he concludes, “any study which concentrates on one to the exclusion of the other will give a distorted picture of the total range of Burmese politics.”  

Similarly, the late Mya Maung scrutinised the twin mystic qualities of a Burmese king: a just and benevolent ruler with a Buddha-like personality belonging to the nonviolent agricultural caste and also a conqueror of all enemies belonging to the Shatriyan caste of warriors.  

If so, to whom did the Burmese kings show gentleness, benevolence and religiosity? And to whom did they become violent, devious and malicious? Looking back on some characteristics of Burmese kings, they were aggressive, devious and malicious to all the potential challengers or rivals to their thrones, whereas they showed kindness, gentleness and

---

17 Than Tun, A Modern History of Myanmar, 91.
19 Maung, The Burma Road to Poverty, 18.
benevolent treatment merely to the unquestioning, obedient, sycophants and opportunists. The kings gave huge favour and opportunities to those who obeyed unquestioningly, so long as they did not pose any kind of threat to their power. So far, we can conclude that the practice of power during the monarchical era was the power to control and destroy; violence was massively employed to retain power; and the role of religion in politics was to legitimate the rule of kings. Therefore, the characteristics of the DS were deeply prevailing during the monarchical age. We will see if those characteristics of political culture continued in the colonial period.

7.1.2 Colonial Period

Violence in the name of peace and order continued to prevail throughout the colonial era. Right after Britain annexed the whole nation of Burma in 1885, numerous resistances broke out across the country. The fighting took place for five years (1885-1890). The Burmans, who considered themselves conquerors, now repeatedly encountered failures under British attacks. Those fighting years were, according to the British government, called the “Pacification of Burma.” As a result, the Burmese guerrillas and many villagers were massacred. The British army had in great measure pacified the whole nation in 1890. However, rebellions continued sporadically throughout the entire colonial period. According to Mary Callahan, the Burmese learned the power of the British-Indian army, against which they could not win. This greatly influenced the development of future military and civil institutions in Burma.

---

20 Burmans here refers to the majority ethnic group, which is dominant in all aspects of the country Burma.
22 Sir Charles Crosthwaite was a chief commissioner for the whole of Burma and served until 1890. He was known as a ruthless administrator among Burmans and he introduced carefully measures to frighten the villagers into submission. He published a book, Pacification of Burma in 1912, which was originally his own records of pacifying Burma.
Htin Aung also observes that the Burmese people began to accept the fact that the military might of the British was superior to theirs. In short, the British army power made a long-lasting impression on the Burmese people, in such a manner that they believed that there was no way to defeat the British, except by creating an army mightier than that of the British.

Moreover, there were some nationalist movements during the colonial era. Initially, the movements were mainly concerned about Buddhism and the decline of Burmese civilisation. Later, the nationalist movements became engaged in politics. The majority of Buddhist monks were also actively involved in the movements. For example, U Ottama (1897-1939) and U Wisara (1888-1929), were the leading monks. Ottama was, according to Michael Mendelson, more ardent and aggressive than other nationalist monks. But Wisara went on hunger strike in prison and died after 166 days.

The most political nationalist movement that emerged in the 1930s was the “Dobama Asiayone” (We Burmans Association) or the “Thakin Party.” Suu Kyi’s father, Aung San, was a leading figure. The leaders of the Association searched for better means to struggle against the British. They heard about Gandhi’s nonviolent resistance in India. However, the leaders of the Association, including Aung San, felt that submissive obedience to the use of force and weapons by the enemy was against the character of the Burmese people and Burma’s history and traditions. According to Angelene Naw, a biographer of Aung San, the younger generation of Thakin leaders adopted a more aggressive method in working towards the independence of Burma. In short, the

---

27 Donald M. Seekins describes how Wisara went on hunger strike for 166 days, Historical Dictionary of Burma/Myanmar, 474. But the history textbook in my high school says that it was 120 days. Thus the number of days is uncertain and confusing.
28 Thakin means lord or master. What promoted the young patriots to adopt the word was not love for the word itself but aversion formed when an Englishman or, worse still, an Indian used it in place of Mister, Khin Yi, The Dobama Movement in Burma, 1930-1938 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 3.
colonial period has left one lasting imprint in the mind of Burmese people; and that is the significance of military might in politics.

What is more, another long-lasting legacy that the colonial period left is corruption – the way the colonial state handled it. The corruption during the colonial state was pervasive. In the most recent study on the corruption during the colonial Burma, Jonathan Saha discovers that at that time “corrupt acts were not aberration from norms of state practice, as high-ranking British officials attempted to depict them.”

Saha demonstrates a contrast between pre-colonial and colonial Burma through doing a number of case studies on the archives from the colonial period. He observes that local notables in the time of monarchy used bribery to enhance their personal power and build their local followings, thereby challenging to the authority of the ruling powers. However, the subordinate officials of the colonial state did not commit acts of misconduct in order to increase their patronage manpower, raise an army, and attempt to overthrow the state; instead, they used their power to gain their possessions. Therefore, the corruption and acts of misconducts during the colonial state did not weaken the state; rather, the state was even enacted as a powerful and intrusive entity.

Saha’s research finding implies that power was overvalued at the expense of moral standards. Nothing seems more valuable than power. It does not matter whatever sacrifice has to be made so long as power is concerned. Maintaining power to the point of being corrupt and violent was at the heart of politics in the time of British Burma. Thus, war in the name of peace and corruption for the sake of power are two characteristics that ran deeply in Burmese politics in the time of colonisation. This demonstrates that certain

---

30 Ibid. Instead of viewing corruption as a sign of failure in state formation, Saha proposes that it should be studied as a set of deeply embedded modern state practices of long precedent, rather than as recent symptoms of post-colonial weakness. For him, the role corruption has played in the making of the modern state is significant. Through pervasive administrative disorder the colonial state was enacted, and corruption continues to be constitutive of the modern state in contemporary Myanmar, 132.
characteristics of the DS were still prevalent in Burmese politics during the British colonisation.

### 7.1.3 Post-Colonial Period

The post-colonial era can be divided into two periods: 1948-1962 (the years of experimenting with democracy) and 1962-2010 (military dictatorship). The years of experimenting with democracy were, in fact, rife with tensions between communism, socialism and capitalism, and between the Burman ethnic majority and various ethnic minorities. Communist and ethnic minority insurgencies were widespread across the country. What is more, the post-war Burma in 1948 was already war-torn. Whole infrastructures were devastated, crime rates were skyrocketing, and the economy was declining. Those cries were so intense that the new government of Nu was unable to cope with them. Nu’s government was thus sarcastically labelled as the “Rangoon (Yangon) government” because its rule stretched merely within Rangoon.\(^{31}\) The government’s power was not able to extend to other parts of the country.

More than that, the power struggle within the cabinets of parliament was so fierce that Nu mourned in the speech given on May 25, 1948, that,

> I unfortunately found that from the day the AFPFL (Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League) accepted office, some of its members turned away from the path of rectitude … (one) reason for the deterioration of the AFPFL members lies in the competition for power and influence. “Shall I sink if he wins power? Will he sink if I win power?” these questions are asked and one begins to fear and distrust the others. On account of these suspicions some wish to make sure by seizing power. Others exercising power experience the sweets of office and their desire for power is intensified.\(^{32}\)

During Nu’s government, the most basic religious reform happened. That is, the government established Buddhism as the state religion, which inspired the non-Buddhist minorities to organise to oppose the government. The secessionist movement

---


\(^{32}\) Gyi, *Burmese Political Values*, 112.
among ethnic minorities and factionalism within the governing party jeopardised the unity and stability of the nation. Though the first government post-independence attempted to establish democratic politics, it failed because of political ideologies, the division between the Bama majority and ethnic minorities, and enforcing Buddhism as the state religion. As a consequence, General Ne Win overthrew Nu’s government on March 2, 1962, and turned the country into a socialist republic, which he called, *The Burmese Way to Socialism*.

Burma reverted to the traditional political system of authoritarian rule when Ne Win ended the parliamentary system. As a consequence, the spirit of the Burmese traditional politics was revived; the use of arms and violence for the sake of peace and retaining power was brought back; and all sorts of corruption were tolerated as long as they were not a threat to the state. Ne Win ruled the country for 26 years. In 1988, another military regime, known as Than Shwe’s government, succeeded him. To sum up, Burma has been in a state of unrest and unsteadiness since gaining independence. Ideological uproar between communists and democrats, discord between the Burmese majority and ethnic minorities, and power struggles among politicians were so rampant that no former politicians were able to tackle the problems. When the military ruled the country, Burma reverted to the traditional political system of authoritarian rule. Thant Myint-U succinctly summarises the situation of post-war Burma:

> The gun has never been taken away from Burmese politics. There has not been a succession of wars; rather the same war, the same rhetoric, and sometimes even the same old rifles have staggered on and on, with only minor changes to the cast and plot and a few new special effects.  

---

33 I will discuss Ne Win’s rule more in the later part of this chapter.  
34 Thant Myint-U, *River of Last Footsteps*, 258.
7.2 Supernaturalism, Politics and Buddhism

What makes Burmese politics unique is the linkage between Buddhism, supernaturalism and politics. It is not only violence for the sake of power, but also religion and animistic practices that play a crucial role in Burmese politics. Put differently, the elements of the DS run deep in the political soil of Burma by means of religion, animistic myths, and superstitions. As this research seeks to explore the use of power and violence in the political context of Myanmar, it needs to examine what Burmese supernaturalism has to say about politics. Burmese Buddhism was always mixed with nat (spirit) worship, astrology and alchemy even before King Anawrahta of Pagan made Buddhism the state religion.\(^{35}\) In Burmese folklore, there are two kinds of nat: first, impersonal and local nats; and the second, thirty-seven personal and national nats. The former type is known as nats of the banyan tree, the hill, the lake, and the guardian nat of the village. But the latter came into being who were distinct personages with their own life histories.\(^{36}\)

There are two different features to learn in looking at the nexus between politics and Burmese supernaturalist ideas. First, the stories of the thirty-seven personal and national nats (how they became nats) demonstrate the Burmese political attitude towards power. To illustrate the point, one well-known story in the thirty-seven nats is that of Min Mahagiri. In his human existence, he was known as a blacksmith, Tin De, and he had a sister. They lived in the time of King Thinlikyaung. According to oral tradition, Tin De’s physical strength was so immense that the whole city quaked and trembled when he struck his hammer against the anvil. When King Thinlikyaung heard of this, he was afraid that Tin De would usurp his throne one day. So, he ordered his ministers to arrest

\(^{35}\) Maung Htin Aung, *Folk Elements in Burmese Buddhism* (Rangoon: The Religious Affairs Department Press, 1959), 1-5. Shwe You (the pseudonym of Sir J. George Scott, a British civil servant who lived in Burma for more than thirty years) argued that nat worship has, in fact, nothing to do with Buddhism. Many Theravada Buddhists denounced it as heretical and antagonistic to the teachings of the lord Buddha, *Burma: His Life and Notions* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963), 232.

Tin De. But Tin De ran away deep into the jungle. Intending to outwit Tin De, the king took his sister to be queen. After some time, the king persuaded the queen to bring her brother to him. Tin De’s sister believed the king and summoned Tin De to appear before the king. When Tin De came in, he was seized, tied to a saga tree (the Indian “Champa” tree) and burned alive there. The queen (Tin De’s sister), upon seeing her brother being burned, rushed into the fire and died with him. They both became nats. Similarly, another two of the thirty-seven nats (Mingyi and Minlay) were also condemned to death by King Anawrahta when he no longer trusted them. A French anthropologist Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière remarks that the stories of how the thirty-seven nats originated “underscores a confrontation between monarchical authority and local powers.”

Indeed, this shows that the fear of losing power had always been a concern for kings. This mentality has continued to permeate the lives of two military rulers, Ne Win and Than Shwe.

Second, in Burmese politics, astrology, numerology, and nat worship are more than superstitious beliefs; they are powerful instruments to grip, prolong and continually increase one’s power. A Burmese writer affirms that, “superstition runs deep in Burmese culture, and at times of difficulty people commonly rely on supernatural powers by consulting with soothsayers and astrologers who explain how to ward off harmful influences, remedy problems, and assure a peaceful life.” The first Prime Minister Nu used to consult a ponna (astrologer) whenever he had important decisions to make. Likewise, Ne Win also used to ask for advice from an astrologer to protract his

37 Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière, “The Taungpyon Festival: Locality and Nation-Confronting in the Cult of the 37 Lords,” translated by Annabelle Dolidon, in Monique Skidmore (ed.), Burma at the Turn of the 21st Century (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 68. “Taungpyon” is the name of the village which is ten kilometres distance from the northern part of Mandalay, the last Burmese royal city. Once a year, people from different parts of Myanmar gather together there and hold the festival to honour the spirits of deceased heroes or nats who belong to the Burmese pantheon of the thirty-seven nats.

38 I will discuss how Ne Win and Than Shwe were masterful in retaining power by any means in the later part of this chapter.

rule. Mya Maung, as a sharp critique of Ne Win and his regime, also points out that “all of these incidents (numerological and astrological) simply confirm … that Burma has been a traditional society with few changes in belief and behaviour for generations and that the reign of terror under Ne Win and his military commanders for nearly thirty years has reinforced the traditional belief system and barriers to modernisation.”

In the case of Than Shwe, his wife Kyaing Kyaing firmly believed in nats (spirits), astrology and yadaya (a ritual designed to ward off ill fortune). Because of her influence, Than Shwe had, reportedly, seven personal astrologers focusing on specific areas: the future of the country, his rivals within the regime, and dealing with Aung San Suu Kyi. In short, both Ne Win and Than Shwe manipulated numerology, astrology and yadaya in retaining their power. It is widely believed in Myanmar that they both had some skilled and powerful astrologers who were able to prevent their downfall and reinforce their personal power by doing yadaya che (the performance of individual acts as prescribed by astrologers to circumvent misfortune or dangers). Exploring Burmese supernaturalism and superstitious rituals helps us to see their attitude towards power and how it could be maintained through the manipulation of astrology. The folklores and the practice of astrology expose the certain elements of the DS that have been so dominant in the political context of Myanmar. Perhaps, some unbelievers in such supernatural superstitions might not pay considerable attention to such practices; but, numerology, astrology, sorcery, and animistic practices have been such a powerful means to usurp and sustain the power among Burmese politicians, in order for them to keep the Domination System operating in the country. For Wink, the belief and practice of Burmese in astrology and nat-worship seems to be absurd, however he would consider them as a power to enforce the DS.

---

40 M. Maung, The Burma Road to Poverty, 226.
7.3 Ethnic Diversity and Religion

In chapter three, we discussed that Walter Wink largely talked about reconciliation. For him, the final aim of nonviolence is not to defeat the opponents, but to establish reconciliation between the oppressed and oppressors. Likewise, Martin Luther King’s final aim was not to defeat the white man, but to win his friendship and understanding. His desire was neither segregation nor desegregation, but integration. Like King and Wink, Suu Kyi also seeks to bring about a reconciliation with the military. Put simply, friendship and reconciliation is the ultimate aim of nonviolent resistance. In the context of Myanmar, the reconciliation to be sought is not just between the military and the opposition political parties like the NLD (National League for Democracy), but also between the Burman or Burmese-dominated military and other ethnic minorities. Therefore, we need to do a brief examination of the ethnic diversities of the country Myanmar and the age-old conflict between the Burman majority and other ethnic minorities. Exploring the ethnic and religious differences will underline the importance of reconciliation.

As a country where a diverse mix of ethnic groups reside, Burma has not experienced a national sense of unity. There is no record of such national unity, even in precolonial Burma. Many Burma observers believe that the country’s long-standing minority problems must first be dealt with to establish a cohesive national and political identity. To trace the history of the precolonial period, it seems that the ethnic diversity was not a central issue. Ashley South points out that ethnic, political, social and religious identities were not so fixed and unipolar in precolonial Burma, as they became during

---

41 Here I interchangeably use the word Burmans or Burmese to describe a majority ethnic group.
the colonial period.\textsuperscript{44} Christina Fink also observes that mainland Southeast Asian kingdoms were, in the precolonial period, poly-ethnic, and rulers were constantly trying to bring in more people, regardless of ethnicity.\textsuperscript{45} What mattered at that time was whether one was a Buddhist and a member of an alliance with the ruling dynasty.\textsuperscript{46} So how has the conflict between Burmans or Burmese and other ethnic minorities come into existence?

Firstly, the British introduced a division to Burma to aid administration by dividing the whole nation into two areas: Burma proper where the majority of the Burmese lived and the Frontier Areas where non-Burmese ethnic people resided.\textsuperscript{47} While the British’s rule was direct in the former area, they indirectly ruled the Frontier Areas through local ethnic chieftains. John Furnivall says that British rule did nothing to foster national unity: their “divide and rule” policy encouraged racial antagonism and subverted the internal balance of power, rendering it unstable.\textsuperscript{48}

Second, the superiority mentality of the Burmese has been a dominant attitude since the monarchical period. They take pride in their race and religion and see themselves as superior to all other races, including white people. According to the Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma,\textsuperscript{49} the Burmese consider themselves as descendants of the Buddha’s family. The Glass Palace says that their racial name was Brahma, which is, according to Buddhist belief, the first inhabitant of the earth. The word Brahma has taken many forms in past centuries, such as Mrâmâ, Bamâ, Myanma; but always had the

\textsuperscript{44} Ashley South, Ethnic Politics in Burma: States of Conflict (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), 4.
\textsuperscript{46} Michael Gravers, Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma: An Essay on the Historical Practice of Power (Richmond Surrey, TW: Curzon Press, 1999), 19.
\textsuperscript{47} This was known and taught in the textbooks of Burmese history in government schools as “divide and rule,” that birthe the divisive spirit between Burmans and other ethnic minorities.
\textsuperscript{48} Cited from Josef Silverstein, Burmese Politics: The Dilemma of National Unity, 35.
\textsuperscript{49} Pe Maung Tin & G. H. Luce (translators), The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Myanmar (Sanchaung, Yangon: Unity Publishing House, 2008).
same meaning.\textsuperscript{50} For such people with a superiority mentality, British annexation of the country brought immense humiliation to them. What made the situation worse was the British’s administrative policy of divide and rule. That policy led ethnic minorities, especially Karens to be much freer than Burmans. Although the British Army pacified the whole country; they failed to win the Burmese support, for Burmans saw them as partial measures that favoured the minorities.

Another factor that has fuelled the divisive spirit between Burmese and non-Burmese people is religion. During the nineteenth century, a significant number of Karen people were converted to Christianity. So, they began to cooperate with the British people. Many Christian Karens helped crush an uprising in Lower Burma, and scores of them joined the British army and military police. They became instrumental in hunting down the Burman-led rebels that were fighting against the British.\textsuperscript{51} Karen Christians saw the Burmans as idolatrous, and fought for the British against anti-British Burmans. They believed that their struggle would contribute to the triumph of Christianity, and to the security and wellbeing of the Karen nation as well.\textsuperscript{52} In turn, Burmans also took revenge on the Karens on several occasions. For example, when the Burmese Independence Army (BIA), mainly composed of ethnic Burmans, fought against the British, the bloodshed began in the western Irrawaddy delta where many Karens lived.\textsuperscript{53} From the time of post-independence, Burmans have begun to take a dominant position in all aspects of the country again. Buddhism, in favour of the majority Buddhists, has

\textsuperscript{50} Arthur P. Phayre, \textit{History of Burma: From the Earliest Time to the End of the First War with British India} (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), 2. This was originally published in 1883. When the ex-military regime changed the name of the country from Burma to Myanmar, they justified it by saying that the term Burma sounded colonial in tone, and the new name “Myanmar” was more inclusive to other non-Burmese ethnic peoples. However, the etymology of the world “Myanmar” is more exclusive than Burma. Martin Smith also points out that the word “Myanmar,” for ethnic minority leaders, was simply the historic ethnic Burman name, \textit{Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity} (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1991), 21.

\textsuperscript{51} Thant Myint-U, \textit{The River of Lost Footsteps}, 23.

\textsuperscript{52} John F. Cady, \textit{A History of Modern Burma}, 139.

\textsuperscript{53} Thant Myint-U, \textit{The River of Lost Footsteps}, 231.
become the state religion under the governance of the first Prime Minister Nu. Nu’s
government also ignored the promise given at the historic Panglong Agreement.
According to the Agreement, each ethnic group was promised the right to exercise
authority in their respective areas and preserve their own languages and cultures. As a
result, the ethnic minorities’ distrust in Burmans has grown sterner, and some ethnic
insurgencies have occurred.

When Ne Win staged a coup in March 1962, his government aggravated the racial
prejudice between the Burmans and other minority groups. Key positions in government
were filled by Burmese Buddhists. Promotion in government offices was largely
restricted to Burmese Buddhists only. Ne Win heightened Burmanisation more than Nu
did.\textsuperscript{54} To promote the Burmans’ chauvinistic nationalism, the Historical Research
Commission at Rangoon (Yangon) University was launched under the supervision of
Ne Win’s wife, Ni Ni Myint. The Commission propagated the idea of Burman
superiority, that it was the Burmans who had ruled and dominated all the ethnic peoples
since the inception of Burmese history. Martin Smith asserts that the Commission was,
in fact, to whitewash Ne Win and his army as the current embodiment of all national
aspirations.\textsuperscript{55} Burmanisation reached its peak during Than Shwe’s era, who ruled the
land from 1992 to 2010). He promoted the slogan, “Amyo, Batha, Thathana,” meaning
“one race, one language, one religion.” In calling his race “Maha Burman,” which
means “great noble or master race,” Than Shwe reinvigorated Burmanisation. Non-
Buddhists and non-Burmans were harshly discriminated against during his rule. In
short, Burmese politics is a power-struggle (\textit{ana la pwe}). Seizing and retaining power

\textsuperscript{54} There are some reasons why Burmese support “Burmanisation.” The Burmese were known as warriors,
who attacked and conquered neighbouring countries such as Manipur and Thailand. Their historical past
gives the Burmese a distinctive national pride. This pride led them to feel superior to other races,
including the white westerners. Though historically questionable, Burmese think they are, as described,
descendants of Buddha’s clan and the first inhabitants of the world, Tint Lwin, “Contextualization of the
Gospel: An Effective Strategy for the Evangelization of the Theravada Buddhists in Myanmar,” (PhD
dissertation, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997), 12-13..

\textsuperscript{55} Martin Smith, \textit{Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity}, 36.
by any means is the traditional pattern of Burmese politics. In that power-struggle, Burmese supernaturalism (astrology, yadaya, and numerology) also plays a significant role. Violence in the name of unity and order is also another key factor in Burmese politics. What has stoked up the power-struggle is the Burmans’ superiority complex towards ethnic minority groups. The ethnic minorities’ response to the politics of Burmanisation was revolt, a heightened sense of separate and distinct identity, and a desire for political separation. How could such a racial barrier be possibly bridged? In history, Myanmar had a historic moment when ethnic unity was once made, though it was not perfect. That is known as the “Panglong Agreement.”

Under the leadership of General Aung San, the father of Suu Kyi, the Panglong Agreement was reached and signed by Kachin, Chin, and Shan on 12 February 1947 – a year before Independence. Since then, Myanmar celebrates February 12 as “Union Day.” Other ethnic groups – Karen, Mon, and Kaya attended there as observers. Now under the leadership of Suu Kyi, the 21st Century Panglong was held on 31 August 2016 the first time, and the second time, on 24 May 2017. However, consensus on the federal system, which is one of the key issues to be solved, is still a long way from being reached. The way of transforming the DS, where revenge and violence reigns, to the DFO (God’s Domination-Free Order), where the division between the oppressed and oppressors is reconciled, is not easy. The country which has been shaped by the characteristics of the DS has just begun the journey of reconciliation.

7.4 A Quest for the Spirit of Burmese Politics

I have briefly surveyed the political landscape of Burma/Myanmar from the monarchical period to the present republic. In doing so, I have aimed to discover the reasons for the long-standing tradition of authoritarian rule in the country. Now I will

---

examine the spirit of Burmese politics, with the aim of understanding the distinct nature of Burmese politics. What do I mean here by the word “spirit”? On the surface, this word seems to be irrelevant in discussing politics. As a matter of fact, it is not so. Wink also observes a growing recognition of the spiritual dimension of corporate entities even among secular thinkers, like Terrence Deal and Allan Kennedy, who have written a text for business entitled *Corporate Cultures: the Rights and Rituals of Corporate Life.*

Max Weber’s classic work, *the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* discusses how the religion of Christianity, particularly Calvinism, has birthed the spirit of capitalism. Weber also admits that the word “spirit” in discussing the sociology of religion seems pretentious. However, it best describes his argument for the articulation of capitalism. Once the capitalist spirit emerged, it became deep-seated in the culture where it was born. Similarly, Manfred Kets de Vries analyses totalitarianism and authoritarianism from the psychoanalytic viewpoint, and suggests how such despotic leaders should be prevented in the article, “The Spirit of Despotism: Understanding the Tyrant Within.”

Kets de Vries explores the process of how a despotic leader emerges and enhances his authority through various means, such as ideology, mind-control, scapegoating, and creating the illusion of solidarity. Thus, the spiritual dimension in discussing politics, economics, and cultures is no longer such a pretentious discussion. Myanmar, which has suffered excruciatingly in various ways under the military rule for virtually five decades, is steeped in blood and violence. Something is fatally flawed. This flawedness is seen in this study as a spiritual aspect or what Wink calls the “spirit”

---

57 Wink, “Redeeming the Entire Universe,” 175.
58 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* translated by Talcott Parsons (London & New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 13. Weber found that there was no such a thing as secular or sacred work because all work, for the Protestant Christians, is sacred. God wants all Christians to work hard. For a person living according to that work ethic, it is easy to accumulate money. But, Calvinism does not allow Christians to use money luxuriously or wastefully; instead they are to give to the poor. Thus, the Protestant ethic was the driving force that led to the industrialisation and development of capitalism.
of an institution or system. Looking at the flawedness as the “spirit” of Burmese politics, the following discussion will lead to the discussion of nonviolent engagement by King and Suu Kyi.

7.4.1 Understanding Burmese Politics

Before analysing the spiritual side of Burmese politics, I would like to begin with an etymological exploration of the word politics in Myanmar. In Burmese, politics is called nain ngan ye, literally meaning “affairs of the state, country or nation.” The idea of the state is a complex subject, and arguably the most central concept in the study of politics. Scholars define it in different ways, depending on political ideologies. The state is not synonymous with government, but essentially means “the whole fixed political system, the set-up of authoritative and legitimately power roles by which we are finally controlled, ordered, and organised.” In the Western concept, politics is regarded as the theory and practice of governing a country or a state. But politics originally meant what is happening between citizens in the polis, the Greek city-state. To be specific, it is “the polis, or civil community, ordering its life together on the basis of the public good.” In the context of Myanmar, politics and state are, to a certain degree, synonymous; though they are not entirely overlapped.

Politics or “affairs of the country/state” was, in the monarchical period, only considered a concern of the government or King; it had nothing to do with the public. Let those in the governing body alone be busy with such affairs! Those who had no part to play in it only wanted to shun these affairs. As described, the idea of politics or state is interestingly backed up by the Buddhist concept of karma (what a person did previously

60 Since state, country, and nation are loosely defined in Myanmar, I will interchangeably use these words as appropriate.
in life). Kings, and all those in politics became who they were because of their *karma*; and so did the public. So, the doctrine of *karma* was the dividing line between those in politics and those not. What is more, there is a remarkable traditional view of politics in Myanmar. That is, the government is regarded as one of the five common enemies.\(^63\)

How could such a view originate? Before the British occupation, the monarchical period of rule was one of fear and violence;\(^64\) there was no constitutional law to limit the autocracy of kings, and there was no organised form of government.\(^65\) To govern people meant to rule them by terror, that is, “to impress on the minds of the people the most reverential awe of the king’s sovereign.”\(^66\) Under such autocratic rulers, engaging in politics seems unappealing.

The first political leader who attempted to dignify the idea of politics was General Aung San. Aung San remained resolutely opposed to the deeply held historical view of politics. He believed that politics is neither a dirty game nor the business of politicians alone. A person’s life – where he lives, what he eats, and what he does – is, for him, always connected with politics. He insists that politics is no longer simply the business of politicians; it is for ordinary people. It permeates a person’s everyday life.\(^67\) That view was indeed revolutionary and eye-opening because it was explicitly against the prevailing idea of politics at that time. Sadly, Aung San was assassinated; and even worse, the democratic parliamentary system was also overturned.

\(^{63}\) Five common enemies are: fire that can burn properties; water in the form of floods; wind in the form of storms; theft; and kings or rulers.\(^{64}\) Gyi, *Burmese Political Values*, 27.\(^{65}\) Than Tun, *A Modern History of Myanmar (1752-1948)*, 89-90.\(^{66}\) Gyi, *Burmese Political Values*, 28-29.\(^{67}\) Josef Silverstein (ed.), *The Political Legacy of Aung San*, 95.
7.4.2 General Ne Win as a Resuscitator of the Spirit of the Burmese Traditional Politics

In trying to understand Myanmar politics, a Burma expert Robert H. Taylor considers the state not merely as a human institution, but something that has a life and spirit of its own.\(^68\) To affirm this, Taylor quotes Benedict Anderson’s idea of the state. Anderson views the state as an institution of the same species as the Church, the university, and the modern corporation. Like them, it ingests and excretes personnel in a continuous, steady process, often over extended periods of time.\(^69\) With this view in mind, Taylor examines the contemporary state of Myanmar, starting from the nature of the early modern pre-colonial state to the present; thereby exposing the continuities between the pre-colonial and contemporary periods. In his analysis, Taylor contends that the pre-colonial state in Myanmar was largely autonomous. The experimentation with a democratic system after 1948 fundamentally contradicted the political culture of Myanmar, so that it could not penetrate society, and therefore failed. For him, the state in Myanmar is the ultimate arbiter of societal conflicts. Hence Taylor attempts to justify the military coup and rule.\(^70\) He believes that Ne Win’s coup of 2 March 1962 is a reassertion of the state. In other words, it was Ne Win who resuscitated or reasserted the traditional pattern of Burmese politics, which was obstructed and stymied by the British rule and the establishment of their political system in the country.\(^71\)

Another scholar who also shared this view is Michael Aung-Thwin, who was born in Burma, and a son of a Karen woman and a Burman man. Both Taylor and Aung-Thwin are predominantly known as apologists for the two military juntas. Aung-Thwin’s assessment of the regime is much more optimistic than Taylor’s. Like Taylor, Aung-

---

\(^71\) Ibid., chapter five.
Thwin remarks that the so-called democracy after 1948 was a pseudo political system because it was structurally or conceptually foreign to the Burmese political culture. Aung-Thwin thought that Ne Win, who suspiciously deemed Western-style democracy and Marxism as inappropriate for Burmese politics, attempted to be neutral; hence, he adopted the policy of neutrality in international relations and pursued self-reliance and self-sufficiency. According to Michael Aung-Thwin, Ne Win strived to accomplish those policies through the resurrection of and preservation of certain economic, political, and emotional/intellectual relationships found in pre-colonial Burmese society.²² Aung-Thwin, like Taylor, concludes that Ne Win’s rule was a recovery of what was lost in history, thus resuscitating and re-establishing the real political spirit of Myanmar.

The late Mya Maung’s The Burma Road to Poverty passionately argues that Ne Win’s endeavour was nothing but a retrograde step.²³ In reviewing that book, David Steinberg remarks that whether Burma was a modern socialist or capitalist state, or a reversion to traditional Burmese political values in the period of the Burmese kingdoms under the rules of Ne Win and Than Shwe, was always a matter of issue with analysts.²⁴ In the following I contend that whether Ne Win endeavoured to revert the nation to the past on purpose is hard to prove, but what he did and how he ruled the country indicates a strong continuity of political values and attitudes from the monarchical period.

There are vast differences between the Burmese writers who had lived and suffered under Ne Win’s government and some Western scholars like John Badgley and Jon A. Wiant. Regarding political ideology, Ne Win, after the coup, formulated the “Burmese

---

²³ Mya Maung, The Burma Road to Poverty, 298.
Way to Socialism.” According to John Badgley and Jon A. Wiant, Ne Win’s Burmese Socialist Programme Party was a single-party government clothed in Marxian phraseology but dominated by the army elite bent on building society and culture from indigenous sources. In their analysis of Ne Win’s *Burmese Way to Socialism*, Badgley and Wiant argue that Ne Win and his government had had a crystal-clear vision for the future of Burma. According to a Burmese journalist for the Mirror newspaper, U Thaung, the paper “Burmese Way to Socialism” was indeed written within two weeks by a single man, U Chit Hlain, who was once a leader of a Burmese Communist Organization, the Red Flag. U Thaung remarks that Ne Win had had no idea what political ideology he should use to lead the nation at the beginning of his rule. He was merely a power-hungry man, so he mounted the coup.

Whatever the difference between domestic and international writers, it is undeniable that Ne Win’s government was a complicated mixture of traditional Burmese political values and modern political ideology. According to Wiant, Ne Win sought to place his rule centrally within Burmese history, and his symbolic appeals were to a legacy of the military administrator kings and more recently of Aung San, portrayed as the contemporary embodiment of the great Burmese unifiers. In this sense, Ne Win is the resuscitator of the spirit of Burmese politics that had been practised in the monarchical period.

What are the *sui generis* characteristics of the spirit of Burmese politics? Maung Maung Gyi draws up a list of these characteristics as follows:

---

76 Mirror U Thaung, *Bo Ne Win Zatlan Shuut Thamya* (Yangon: Aphyu Yaung Sarpae, 2014), 206. In Myanmar, U Thaung was known as Kyae Mone (Mirror) U Thaung or Aung Ba La. He was a famous journalist who founded Mirror Daily Newspaper. In 1964, he was jailed, and his newspaper was confiscated by dictator Ne Win. He died on 3 April 2008 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA.
First, the tendency to view the government as evil; second, reliance on the
government for everything to be done; third, viewing the government as
omnipotent, omnipresent, and omnicompetent; fourth, the highly personalised
outlook in human relationships within the administrative infrastructure together
with pleasing the superior ethics; last, failure to appreciate the rule of law.78

For Gyi, these characteristics are, in varying degrees, still alive and strong. Ne Win
revived those characteristics. Thus, Ne Win was metaphorically a monarch figure in
terms of the way he exercised power. For example, rule of law and rule of person are
inseparable in the minds of the Burmese people. Since the monarchical period, personal
and institutional loyalty was to the individual monarch, and the locus of power resided
in the king. This form of power is so dominant that institutions are of secondary
importance to a king. No one in the modern era has exemplified that factor more than
Ne Win.79 Ne Win never tolerated anyone, even among his associates, who competed
with him for influence and popularity. That kind of competition was considered a threat
to him. So, Ne Win purged many of his close associates so that no one might rise
against him. Therefore, though his government might be coated with modern political
ideology such as socialism, Ne Win did resurrect the spirit of Burmese politics, thereby
restoring the traditional Burmese culture that had been practised since the monarchical
period.

Moreover, Ne Win’s resurrection of the Burmese political spirit is exhaustive. The
features of the Burmese political culture in the pre-colonial period are, “the
sacrosanctity and the central position of kingship, absolutism and the undifferentiated
functions of kingship.”80 However, the political ideas of parliamentary democracy in the
post-independence era had significantly impacted upon Burmese politics in the post-
colonial period. Upon taking power in 1962, Ne Win had set out to destroy that political
system root and branch because he wanted a retrogression to traditional Burmese

78 Gyi, Burmese Political Values, 154-175.
79 David I. Steinberg, Burma: The State of Myanmar, 50.
80 Gyi, Burmese Political Values, 14.
politics. At last, he regenerated the pre-colonial Burmese political system and re-designed Myanmar with the modern political flavour of the month. Simply put, Ne Win revived the spirit of the DS in Myanmar, which was impeded by the first government of the post-independence Burma; but now it came to life and began to overwhelm the political culture of Myanmar. Once it was entrenched, it would last long until nonviolence is enforced.

What is more, Ne Win consigned his legacy to his successors, and, until now, that legacy has been heavily entrenched in Myanmar politics. Put it into the context of this research, the spirit and life of Burmese politics, which was historically handed down, was entrenched by Ne Win’s successor Than Shwe. Than Shwe is the one who has institutionally and culturally empowered and heightened the spirit of Burmese politics. In fact, Than Shwe is much more energetic and enthusiastic in keeping that spirit revitalised in Burmese politics. Regarding personality type, Ne Win was outgoing, sociable, and extroverted in relating to other people; whereas Than Shwe is introverted, a man of few words, cold, aloof and distant in interpersonal relationships. Benedict Rogers’s depiction of Than Shwe’s personality is vivid:

Like Mugabe, Than Shwe faces an organised democratic opposition that has domestic and international legitimacy – one which he loathes. Like Kim Jong-il, he is reclusive, uncharismatic, and controlling. And like Saddam Hussein, Than Shwe is intolerant of anyone within his own regime who he feels may challenge him.81

On one hand, both Ne Win and Than Shwe have some similar characteristics, such as having unquestioning subordinates around them, and dictatorial characteristics in decision-making and their leadership style. On the other hand, there are some differences between Than Shwe’s regime and what Ne Win did before it. Robert H. Taylor lists these differences in his latest work, General Ne Win: A Political Biography, as a ceasefire agreement instead of political and military integration; diminishing the

81 Benedict Rogers, Than Shwe: Unmasking Burma’s Tyrant, 156.
cult of Aung San; the rapid adoption of Western modes of dress; the absolute control of
the army; doubling military expenditure, and so on. Despite those differences, they
shared similarities in how they ruled the country and the system they wanted to implant.
Both were seen as despots in the eyes of local and international communities. To the
surprise of all, Than Shwe was truly greater than Ne Win in exercising power.
According to one of the grandsons of Ne Win, Than Shwe was handpicked by his
grandfather to become vice chief of the staff Army in 1985. But the tragedy is that his
handpicked man, Than Shwe, became his worst enemy who placed him under house
arrest until his death. Aung Zaw calls it the doubly disastrous legacy of Ne Win.

There are three long-lasting imprints that Than Shwe left on Myanmar politics; these
would, though not indelible, last for years to come. First, it was the changing of the
Myanmar flag just 17 days ahead of the November 7 General Election in 2010.
According to Mikael Gravers, that flag is likely the result of an astrological
consultation. For some political dissidents, the flag is the symbol of the military
dominance over all the people of Myanmar. Taking a look at the flag, it shows no
diversity, which is why many ethnic leaders wonder whether it represents all the ethnic
people groups in Burma. A relatively big star in the centre of the flag symbolises the
dominance of military power.

The second is the relocation of the capital from Yangon to Naypyidaw, which is located
in the centre of the country. To trace Burmese history, most Burmese monarchs moved
their capital into the inland region of the dry zone for military consolidation when an

---

enemy had overrun the old capital. In addition to this, a high number of Burmese kings relocated their capital to manifest power and charisma, and to follow the royal tradition that the most powerful ruler should leave the old capital and build a new one. Dulyapak Preecharushh remarks that there are perhaps other reasons for Than Shwe to relocate the capital; nonetheless, the relocation has characteristics similar to those of the monarchical period. 85 Richard Cockett, in his latest work, sees “all the military regime’s attempts as recreating the Burma kingdom of old and reimagining Burma as if much of the country’s recent history never happened.” 86 Hence, Than Shwe was much more determined and devoted than Ne Win to increase and intensify the spirit of Burmese politics that had been practised from the time of monarchy.

The third imprint that Than Shwe left is the 2008 Constitution, which was drafted by the hand-picked constituent assembly. According to David Williams, the Constitution has problems which are too deep and reinforce historical tendencies. 87 By historical trends, Williams refers to the military regime’s dominance over the nation from the time of 1962. He lists the root flaws of the Constitution in different ways. Power was concentrated in the military, generally to men, or a single strongman ruler. In addition, the government does not pay much attention to individual rights and the ethnic minorities’ demands. 88 Williams concludes that the 2008 Constitution is at best a murky smear of light on the horizon. Thus, it could soon be extinguished by a military coup or civilian retrenchment, aided by international complacency and indifference. 89 Simply

88 Ibid., 118-119.
89 David C. Williams, “What’s So Bad about Burma’s 2008 Constitution?” 138.
stated, the 2008 Constitution places restraints on the elected government, for the president has no control over the military.

Having seen what Ne Win and Than Shwe did and how they ruled the country, we have concluded that there are obvious continuities between the ways of monarchical rule and those of Ne Win and Than Shwe. Perhaps, Ne Win might not follow the path of monarchs in ruling the nation with the intention of reverting to the past. But Than Shwe, looking at the way of his rule, might have every intention of making a retrogressive change to traditional political attitude and values. In the new capital (Nay Pyi Taw) that he established, we can see the 10-metre high statues of Burma’s three warrior kings (Anawratha, Bayinnaung, and Alaungpaya), standing high over the main parade ground.

To sum up, Ne Win rebirthed the spirit of traditional Burmese politics. What Than Shwe did, in turn, was to invigorate and bolster the spirit that Ne Win resurrected. Additionally, Than Shwe has structurally intensified the Burmese political spirit through the symbol of the country’s flag, the relocation of the capital, and the power of the Constitution so that no one or no alternative system can oppose it. Therefore, the Burmese politics that Ne Win and Than Shwe created is simply a renovation of pre-colonial politics with modern terms and tones. From Wink’s perspective, the political legacy that Ne Win and Than Shwe left was that of the DS. Since the DS is deeply entrenched in the land of Myanmar, can it be possible to transform it into the DFO where democratic values prevail? Will the DS that they generated last always? Can it be superseded by another alternative? Of course, nothing in this world is permanent; everything we humans create is always changeable. Now we will see how Suu Kyi has come to engage with Burmese politics, where the DS is rooted, with a view to transforming the DS into the DFO where democratic values reign.
7.4.3 Suu Kyi as an Agent for Political Transformation

If Ne Win and Than Shwe were seen as resuscitator and energiser of the traditional Burmese political spirit, respectively, Suu Kyi would be an agent for transforming that spirit, or the DS, into the DFO. In the time of the previous regime, Suu Kyi was accused of implanting the incongruous ideas and values of Western democracy in Myanmar. What she, in turn, tries to do is to validate the compatibility of democratic values and Buddha’s teachings: how politics, morality, mettā, and other Buddhist teachings correspond to one another. What, specifically, has Suu Kyi attempted to change or transform in Burmese politics?

First, Suu Kyi has primarily encouraged the Myanmar people to see and understand the inseparability of politics or “affairs of state or country” (nain gan yae) and their daily lives. According to the regime of that time, the real problem that the country had been facing was not solely political, but also economic. The regime cunningly diverted the public attention to economic issues instead of politics. But Suu Kyi knew the real motive behind the regime’s subtle advice. And so she said,

If you are concentrated on just making money in this country, you have to indulge in a lot of things that are … not quite strict. There is a lot of bribery and corruption going on. You do lose the morality if you are told to concentrate only on making money.90

Suu Kyi is so convinced that democracy is not just about a change of government, but a change in their everyday lives. Here her political understanding is very similar to that of her father, Aung San, who also saw the inseparable nature of politics and daily living. This view of politics radically challenges the traditional understanding, according to which politics is merely the business of the state or the rulers.

---

Besides, Suu Kyi’s conviction of the integral link between politics, morality and religion is also radical enough to confront traditional Burmese politics. In Burmese history, morality is not completely separated from politics. Even the previous military regime, which gunned down a number of Buddhist monk protesters in 2007, proudly called themselves devoted Buddhists. During their rule, ex-Senior General Than Shwe and his fellow generals all used to go and pay homage to the monks in any place they visited. As Buddhists, they believed that making merits (such as offering some useful materials to Buddhist monks, ornamenting pagodas with gold and other precious stuffs, and building pagodas) is itself part of morality. Monarchs and emperors, throughout Buddhist Asia, saw the patronage of monks and monasteries as both a moral duty and an advantage. As aforementioned, whatever evil is done in the name of or for the sake of power, can be compensated for or atoned by making the aforementioned merits. To recall the king Anawrahta, he was religiously a zealous Buddhist, so he waged war on the Mons (previously called the Talaings) to obtain a Buddha image and the Buddhist Scriptures. So, John Stuart remarks, “in spite of all his zeal for religion (Buddhism), he (Anawrahta) had caught nothing of its inner meaning or of the spirit of its founder.” For the previous regimes, doing such rituals seemed to be considered as morality. Morality, for them, is self-oriented because it focuses on what a person does and can gain. Therefore, it has nothing to do with others.

On the contrary, Suu Kyi’s approach to morality and politics is a socially engaged form of Buddhism, according to which mettā (loving-kindness) is at the heart of all

---

91 Merit-making is a common and key practice among Burmese Buddhists. That is, a person can earn and accumulate merits for this life or the next, by doing the things such as donating materials to monks, building pagodas, and so on.
relations. Instead of religious rites and rituals, what matters most to her is to abide by Buddhist principles in worldly dealings. For her, Buddhist morality is essentially the five precepts: abstaining from the destruction of life, theft, adultery, falsehood and indulgence in intoxicants. Her argument is that when the ruler fails to keep these precepts, what ensues is always disastrous. In her words, “the root of a nation’s misfortunes has to be sought in the moral failings of the government.”

In a nutshell, Suu Kyi’s view of morality is other-oriented because it is not merely a private or individual business. With this view in mind, Suu Kyi challenges the traditional values of Burmese politics. Indeed, the challenge is radically subversive, which is why it annoyed and angered the former regime. Wink also argues that we are dead insofar as we have been socialised into patterns of injustice. Wink reconsiders the notion of “dying to ourselves” as “dying to the Powers,” thereby “rebirth” is not just a private, inward event only, but dying to whatever in our social surroundings has shaped us inauthentically. In other words, we must die to the DS in order to live authentically.

To juxtapose King and Suu Kyi, King spent a great deal of time striving to see an alternative way to solve the social evil at that time through an in-depth study of various philosophers and thinkers. Through reading those philosophers and integrating their thoughts skilfully, King interpreted the Bible differently from those who used it to support the segregation. In particular, reading Gandhi opened his eyes to understand the ethics of Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount, “turning the other cheek” and “loving enemies” as the method for social reform. Prior to reading Gandhi, King took for granted that Jesus’ ethics were only effective in individual relationships.

---

94 Sallie B. King, in her book on Socially Engaged Buddhism, includes Suu Kyi as a socially engaged Buddhist, and refers to her interpretation of human rights and Buddhism, Socially Engaged Buddhism (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 139.
95 Suu Kyi, Freedom from Fear and Other Writings, 171.
96 Wink, Engaging the Powers, 157-158.
97 King, Stride toward Freedom, 84-86.
Wink, King and Suu Kyi all have their own hermeneutical lens to interpret the contexts in which they are.

In terms of religion and politics, Buddhism is principally regarded as a powerful tool to legitimise a kingship, government, and regime throughout the history of Myanmar – beginning from Anawrahta to the President Thein Sein. The previous government made every effort to justify their rule through the means of Buddhism. Similarly, Suu Kyi also saw Buddhism as a means of opposition against the then regime. Her appraisal of the regime was not based on other religious texts or sources, but on the same religious teaching of Buddhism. Just as the regime used Buddhism to defend and support their rule, so did Suu Kyi in critiquing them, and her attempts to unmask their pseudo-Buddhism through the Buddha’s teachings. Thus, Buddhism for the regime was a tool for the legitimacy of their rule, whereas for Suu Kyi, it is an instrument to correct the quality of the rule. Pointedly stated, both Suu Kyi and the regime forcefully employed Buddhism, but the way they did this was different: while one was for self-justification, the other was for self-correction.

More importantly, Suu Kyi’s interpretation of democratic values, such as human rights, freedom, and through the lens of Buddhism and its traditions, revolutionises the prevailing Burmese view of politics. To be precise, Suu Kyi investigates two ideas on politics in the history of Buddhism – *Mahasammata* and the Ten Duties of Kings98 – in order to demonstrate the correspondence between Buddhism and democratic government. *Mahasammata* was a devout Buddhist monarch who followed the general pattern of Indic kingship in Southeast Asia. True, he was a king who had absolute power on his own, but he was chosen by popular consent and required to govern in accordance with just laws. Therefore, Suu Kyi asserts that the concept of government

---

elective and sub lege are not alien to traditional Burmese thought. Further, Suu Kyi, through invoking the Ten Duties of Kings, insists that the idea of democratic government is not entirely strange to Burmese people. Even some of the traditional values serve to justify and to explain the widespread expectation of democratic government. In one way or another, Suu Kyi points out that the regime’s attempt to legitimise their rule on the basis of Buddhism and its tradition is just one-sided. She shows that there are other positive characteristics which align with democratic values and principles. Suu Kyi has exposed these features, thereby substantiating the compatibility of democratic government in the context of Myanmar.

Besides this, the path of nonviolence that Suu Kyi and her party the NLD have taken in resisting against the regime is a radical catalyst to transform the spirit of Burmese politics, because the tradition of changing the political situation through the force of arms has been a dominant feature since the monarchical era as observed before. Against such a political culture of violence, Suu Kyi and the NLD have resolutely committed to following the path of nonviolence, so as to resist the regime. In taking the nonviolent path, Suu Kyi’s hope is to transform the traditional spirit that has permeated Burmese politics. For Suu Kyi and the NLD, achieving democracy through the use of violence would permeate the tradition of changing the system in that way. Only through nonviolence, will a genuine democratisation be realised. Suu Kyi argues that if democracy were achieved through violence, the result would be the continual development of more effective methods of violence than those of the opposition, in order to pursue power. Being aware of the vicious cycle of violence, Suu Kyi regards nonviolence as more than a political tactic, but a spiritual belief. Like Wink and King, Suu Kyi is aware that once violence is rooted in culture, it gets us addicted. That means

---

99 Suu Kyi, *Freedom from Fear and Other Writings*, 170.
100 Ibid., 172.
it is not easy to discard the myth of redemptive violence in such a culture, because it prevents us from looking at another alternative. Wink, therefore, sees violence as the spirit of the DS and nonviolence as that of the DFO. King also avers that the choice we have is not violence or nonviolence, but nonviolence or nonexistence. Therefore, considering violence and nonviolence as merely tactics to achieve a desired outcome is a shallow idea, for it trivialises the real nature of each.102

Most importantly, Suu Kyi’s call for revolution of the spirit best depicts the epitome of her political involvement. Burmese politics throughout history had been merely power struggles between oppositions and even between those within the same political units. Pursuing power by whatever means available matters most to many Burmese politicians. Knowing the fundamental flaw of Burmese politics, Suu Kyi notes that what the country needs is more than a political revolution or changing one political system with another; it is a “revolution of the spirit.” The majority of the population, except those who experienced economic gains through cooperating with the junta, suffered under the overpowering force of unjust regulations in their everyday living for almost five decades. The mindset of the people is conditioned to believe that having power is most important. In such a context, Suu Kyi has strongly sensed that what the country needs is not just a political or a social movement. It is not enough to call for freedom, democracy, and human rights; it is not sufficient to aim at changing institutional policies and improving material conditions. There are forces behind the system which demonstrated the iniquities of the old order. To transform that old order, Suu Kyi calls

102 Now Suu Kyi has become the state counsellor, or a de facto leader of the country. She has been scathingly criticised by the international community, especially the Muslim community and some western countries for the way she is dealing with the Rakhine-Rohingya conflict. On 25 August 2017, the military operation launched in response to an attack by Rohingya insurgents. As a result, more than 600,000 Rohingya refugees fled to the neighbouring Bangladesh. This military crackdown was labelled “ethnic cleansing” by the UN. She gave a speech on that particular issue at the end of September 2017, but it did not satisfy the international community. Therefore, Suu Kyi has been blamed for her reticence about the brutal crackdown of the military. So the question is, “Has she shifted her belief in nonviolence to pragmatic violence?” This question will be discussed in detail in the conclusion of the thesis.
for a revolution of the spirit, born of an intellectual conviction concerning the need for change, with the determination to make sacrifices in the name of enduring truths, to resist the corrupting influences of desire, ill-will, ignorance, and fear.\footnote{Suu Kyi,\textit{ Freedom from Fear and Other Writings}, 183.}

In other words, the spiritual revolution that she talks about is not just changing material things, but transforming political and spiritual values. In this sense, Suu Kyi’s spiritual revolution bears a striking resemblance to Wink’s view of the DFO, according to which nonviolence is the only mode to transform the DS into the DFO. Suu Kyi and her team also knew that the end they had been pursuing was a peaceful nation; therefore, the means to attain it could not be violence. If the people of Myanmar want to change from one political system to another, the new system should not just be a system of rules, but should be something that represents their moral and spiritual values as well. Thus, those involved in the democracy movement in Myanmar are called not just for a change from the regime, but also for the revolution of the soul of politics. This spiritual revolution requires courage because fear, which the military regime has implanted in the minds of the people of Myanmar for so long, can only be mastered by courage.

Now, what have become evident are the contradictory views and practices of politics between the then regime and Suu Kyi. Both the regime and Suu Kyi have deployed Burmese traditional values and Buddhism to justify their conflicting views of politics. What makes them different is that the former follows the pattern of the traditional Burmese politics, while the latter sees it from the angle of socially engaged Buddhism. Thus, the regimes of Ne Win and Than Shwe focused on preserving the historic political traditions: Ne Win’s BSPP (Burmese Socialist Programme Party) coated the traditional Burmese politics with the modern political ideologies; whereas Than Shwe’s SLORC/SPDC re-told the history of the military (Tatmadaw) by tracing the prominent
monarchs (Anawrahta, Bayinnaung, and Alaungpaya) in the pre-colonial era, in order to legitimise their rule.

In contrast, Suu Kyi reads the Burmese political situations through the lens of socially engaged Buddhism. In doing so, she has dug deep into the Burmese Buddhist history to show that human rights and democracy are not alien to the context of Myanmar. This is how Suu Kyi has made every effort to transform the political spirit that Ne Win renewed and Than Shwe entrenched, into the modern democratic norms and values, supported by socially engaged Buddhism. It is a “revolution of the spirit.” Thus, this discussion about Ne Win, Than Shwe and Suu Kyi sheds light on the fatally flawed nature of the traditional Burmese politics. Ne Win and Than Shwe resurrected the spirit of Burmese politics in the precolonial period, but Suu Kyi has put every effort into transforming it into the culture of democracy through nonviolence. Looking at the way two military regimes and Suu Kyi practised politics through Wink’s eye, Ne Win made every endeavour to resurrect the spirit of the DS that had been practised during the monarchical period, whether he did it on purpose or not; Than Shwe, as his successor, put in more effort to invigorate and deeply infuse the idea of the DS in the political culture of Myanmar; but Suu Kyi, knowing the political culture of Myanmar, has strived with all her might to transform the DS into the DFO through nonviolent, spiritual revolution.

7.4.4 The Failure of the Four 8s Protest

Can we now say that nonviolent resistance against the military dictatorship in Myanmar has been successful? Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth not only did an empirical research from the nonviolent campaigns in contemporary history, but also a comparative case study on East Timor (1988-99), the Philippines (1986), and Burma
In the conclusion of case study, they discovered that there are several reasons why Burma failed while East Timor and the Philippines succeeded. In East Timor and the Philippines, repression against nonviolent resistance backfired to produce mass mobilisation, which in turn heightened the political costs of regime repression. Further security forces shifted their loyalty to the nonviolent resistance campaign. In addition to that, the international community came down heavily against the regimes. However, in Burma, nonviolent campaigns failed because it could not raise the costs of regime repression to the degree that the regime control was threatened. Further, overreliance on single personalities, the inability to reconcile across competing factions, and a lack of consistent information about human rights abuses left the nonviolent opposition campaign in disarray. Likewise, violent campaigns in Burma also failed because they were unable to mobilise the masses. In addition to that, the international sanction did not produce the desired results; mobilisation was selective and leader dependent.

To comparatively analyse the Four 8s Protest and King’s Selma march, which resulted in the franchise to African-Americans, we can conclude that the reasons why the former failed and the latter succeeded were the domestic factors – first, over-relying on a single personality and the inability to reconcile across competing factions. The whole population looked to a single personality, Suu Kyi, thus the movement was paralysed when she was put under house arrest. For the latter, although it was true that King was the most outstanding personality during the civil rights movement, there were also other contemporaries like Malcolm X.

104 Maria J. Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, “Why Civil Resistance Works, 37-41. This case study does not include the 2007 Saffron Revolution, mainly led by Buddhist monks. It is focused only on the Four 8s protest.
105 Ibid., 41.
106 Ibid., 39.
107 Ibid., 41-42.
108 See the chapter four where I analysed each of the marches King led.
In the case of Myanmar, there was no one who might compare favourably with Suu Kyi. The second factor was indeed much more serious than the first. During the Four 8s movement, there were a number of competing factions which desired to lead the movement in their own ways. In contrast, through leading the Selma march, the whole population of African-Americans had learned after many years of intimidation that their salvation was only in united action. When one Negro stood up, he was run out of town; if a thousand stood up together, the situation was bound to be drastically overhauled. Those two decisive factors play such a crucial role in determining success or failure.

However, we can also see the Four 8s Protest which lasted merely two years (1988-1990) in such a manner that instead of viewing it from a pragmatic outlook (either win or lose), it (the Four 8s Protest) still had a great impact and has become a milestone for the political history of Burma. The Protest united a number of university students who have not given up and have kept fighting against the dictatorship, and some have still been working as activists and politicians in the present day. Thus, the Four 8s Protest was not a total failure in the sense that it has generated a strong abhorrence of the despotism in the population of the nation.

Moreover, what needs to be observed along with the success of the Protest (the Four 8s), is the political and cultural history of the country. Why did Burmese military dictatorship last so long? Even now, it can hardly be said that military rule is over. We can say that Myanmar is partly on the path to democracy, and at the same time, the army is still in control of politics. That is, the army still has the power to hamstring the present government. In studying Burmese politics, it is, therefore, insufficient to assess Burmese politics without examining its political and cultural values, attitude, and history. It would not be adequate to gauge the success and failure of nonviolent

resistance by having a comparative analysis between Burma and other Southeast Asian countries. Thus, there are other reasons why the Four 8s Protest failed to overthrow the military government. As this research examines, Burmese political values, which have dominated politics for nearly a century, are still predominant even in this modern era. So, Myanmar desperately needs a genuine transformation from the old political values of the DS to the democratic values of the DFO. The question to ask is, “should we follow the path of Ne Win and Than Shwe, or of Suu Kyi”? To put it another way, should the people of Myanmar still stick to the old political values of the DS? Or should they make every endeavour to transform the DS into the DFO?

7.4.5 Traditionalism or Transformation?

Since gaining independence, the country of Myanmar has encountered the question of where it should be heading. Specifically, should Myanmar be traditionalistic or transformative concerning its future? By traditionalism, I mean the belief that regards traditions as more important than any other idea. In contrast, transformation refers to a process of changing something inside out from one thing into another. In other words, should the country continue to dwell in the glorious days of pre-modern political values in a monarchical era, or strive for change, or metamorphosis? This is the existential question for all of Myanmar to respond.

There are two scholars whose views are fundamentally similar, and poles apart from other scholars because of the cultural relativism and historical determinism in their interpretations of Burmese politics. Hence, they both are viewed as advocates of traditionalism, who contend that the values of democracy and human rights or of the DFO are incompatible with those of Burmese culture. They are Robert H. Taylor and Michael Aung-Thwin. In fact, they both are academicians trained in the area of the history of Southeast Asia. I have briefly interacted with them in the earlier discussion. I will now clarify their analysis of Burmese politics in more detail. Taylor is currently a
visiting professor at the City University of Hong Kong and visiting professorial fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, whereas Aung-Thwin is a Burmese historian, a professor of Asian Studies and chairman of the Asian Studies Program at the University of Hawaii. Both were trained to be historians, particularly regarding the history of Southeast Asia.

As historians, both Taylor and Aung-Thwin examine Ne Win’s military coup in 1962 and the army rule in the light of Burmese history. Chao-Tzang Yawnghwe observes that the military rule is, for both of them, seen “as restoring to the Burmese polity certain positive traditional values and symbolism, i.e., as an experiment, as it were, in a form of Burmese-Buddhist socialism designed to bring about some modernising changes while minimising its ill-effect.”¹¹⁰ In many of his writings, Taylor has strongly stressed the importance of the nation’s history for all readers in understanding the current political situations of Myanmar. So, he asserts that all the attempts for political change – whether democratic or authoritarian – are likely to result in failure unless the history of Myanmar, and how it came to be in its current condition, is not carefully studied.¹¹¹ By emphasising the country’s cultural distinctions, his writings on Myanmar have praised the military rule. His work, The State in Myanmar, is, according to David Scott Mathieson, almost an ode to autocratic expedience.¹¹² Taylor believes that the Burmese people welcomed the 1962 coup, and so they approved the authoritarian rule. For him, the Burmese state after the post-colonial period has two major weaknesses: parliamentary democracy itself and federalism, which were easily manipulated by politicians representing landlords, capitalists, and others seeking power and wealth for

¹¹⁰ Chao-Tzang Yawnghwe, “Ne Win’s Tatmadaw Dictatorship” (M.A Thesis, the University of British Columbia, 1990), 28.
personal rather than public ends.\textsuperscript{113} Therefore, Taylor concludes that abolishing them (parliamentary democracy and federalism) was necessary for the state to reaffirm itself over other institutions in civil society.\textsuperscript{114} In that book, Taylor also expresses his opinion on Suu Kyi. For him, Suu Kyi is an inexperienced politician without a good knowledge of the political history; she has simply become popular because of her father, Aung San. In particular, he criticised her for her confrontational approach to generals.\textsuperscript{115}

Likewise, Aung-Thwin sees the era from the time of British annexation (1885) to the end of parliamentary democracy or Ne Win’s coup (1962) as “meaningless order” – order that was largely irrelevant to the Burmese socio-political values and norms. With this view in mind, he interprets the 1962 military coup as an effort to restore “meaningful order” to a psychologically disoriented society, and resurrect a (Burmese) cultural identity.\textsuperscript{116} He insists that the 1948 independence from Britain, for the majority of Burmese, was largely a meaningless event; and for most Burmese it made little difference to the primary concerns of their daily lives.\textsuperscript{117} In general, Taylor and Aung-Thwin have something in common in the way they interpret the Burmese political situations. Not only do they both justify the military rule from a historical perspective, they also see it as culturally the most relevant. Taylor sees the contemporary political tension between the forces of militarism and the forces of democracy as a clash between the values of traditional indigenous communalism versus the values of modern and Western individualism.\textsuperscript{118} In his view, the military focused on the maintenance of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{113} Robert Taylor, \textit{The State in Myanmar}, 294.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Robert Taylor, \textit{The State in Myanmar}, 294.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 412.
\end{itemize}
tradition, while Suu Kyi and the NLD favour a concept of individual electoral rights and obligation. He is, therefore, sceptical about the democratisation of Burma in the future.

Aung-Thiwn is much more supportive than Taylor in regard to assessing the military rule in Myanmar. In the article, “Parochial Universalism, Democracy *Jihad* and the Orientalist Image of Burma: The New Evangelism,” he laid himself wide open to the criticism of those who regard him as an apologist of the regime. By parochial universalism, Aung-Thwin refers to taking the ideals of democracy and human rights as universal doctrines.¹¹⁹ For him, Burma has its own cultural and political characteristics, which are different from the westernised American values. In such a culturally diverse world, no values – American or other European western values – have a monopoly on others. He insists,

> I think it is because the arrogance that usually goes along with power requires more than just having it; it must also be validated by the powerless. Much like the white slave owner whose actual power over the black slave was simply not enough, he also needed to have the slave *admit* that the unequal relationship was the “correct” order of things; Burma – small, poor, weak and (to the U.S) insignificant (like Cuba) – by not kowtowing to the most powerful nation on earth, has, in effect, refused to acknowledge that desired link between power and virtue that is so important to the American self-image.¹²⁰

There are some critical points in the views of Taylor and of Aung-Thwin in interpreting Burmese politics. First, they both are mainly trained as historians, not as political scientists. As historians, they have significantly contributed many writings to Asian histories, especially Burmese; they both unequivocally encourage us to read carefully the Burmese history, in order to understand the military rule that had persistently dominated for more than five decades. However, their interpretation of Burmese politics through historical eyes is unwarranted. They, as historians, are seemingly too focused on historical factors – how the past has produced the present. In an interview, Aung-

---


¹²⁰ Ibid., 505.
Thwin insists that the current political situations in Myanmar are simply the products of the past – the past is in the present.¹²¹ Put simply, both Taylor and Aung-Thwin appear to be heavily influenced by historical determinism. In historical determinism, all human acts are determined exclusively by their antecedents; suggesting that given the same circumstances, people always behave in the same way.¹²² As historians, what Taylor and Aung-Thwin are trying to do is to show that all the political movements of the country Myanmar are perfectly regular and that, like all other movements, they are solely determined by their antecedents.

Though Taylor and Aung-Thwin may be regarded as the regime’s apologists, the former is somewhat moderate compared to the latter. In an interview, Taylor states that he is not the regime’s apologist; instead, his argument is that the responses made by the international community – such as Western sanctions, repeated condemnations, and so on – created more problems, and made the regime more reluctant for change. As a historian, he is convinced that it is not that easy to overcome years of history in the blink of an eye.¹²³ Despite this statement, Taylor’s writings basically underline the importance of the country’s history in dealing with the Burmese politics. The irony is that his works on Myanmar, by implication, happen to support the military regime whether he wants to admit it or not. D. S. Mathieson, in his review of The State in Myanmar, points out that Taylor barely acknowledges the fact that the military rule caused widespread repression for two decades. In his recent work General Ne Win: A Political Biography, he examines the dictator Ne Win in a positive way. He acknowledges that many lives were lost, and opportunities for development and

enrichment were destroyed during the Ne Win era. Nonetheless, he looks at the positive side of Ne Win’s rule, arguing that Ne Win created a nation which had the resilience to withstand more than twenty years of post-Cold War economic sanctions at the height of the Cold War.\textsuperscript{124} On the other hand, he seems to ignore how Ne Win’s government impoverished the country in numerous ways – economically, educationally, morally, and so on; and how the current and coming generations are still affected by it. To justify his perspective, Taylor quotes George M. Fraser:

\begin{quote}
You cannot, you must not, judge the past by the present; you must try to see it in its own terms and values, if you are to have some inkling of it. You may not like what you see, but do not on that account fall into the error to trying to adjust it to suit your own vision of what it ought to have been.\textsuperscript{125}
\end{quote}

Of course, to objectively examine someone (in this case Ne Win) in the past, it is of supreme importance to understand the historical context of his time. But, it does not mean that all the things Ne Win did for the sake of gaining power should be sidestepped merely on the basis of the historical context of that time. Put differently, it is a lopsided view to justify and favour the past at the cost of the future. It seems that Taylor, in his biography of Ne Win, is trying to justify all the evils Ne Win committed. In short, Taylor’s biography of Ne Win is, in fact, an attempt to optimistically explore what Ne Win had achieved; thereby suggesting that Ne Win was not such an evil dictator people think he was. The way in which Ne Win and Than Shwe ruled the country was apparently despotic; and to be precise, gaining power through the use of arms and violence reflects the practice of power in the DS, and it is radically poles apart from the practice of power in the DFO.

Even worse, Aung-Thwin’s articulation of the military rule as re-building the authentic Myanmar is much stronger than Taylor’s work. His article “Parochial Universalism” is,

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 5. George MacDonald Fraser, \textit{Quartered Safe Out Here: A Recollection of the War in Burma} (London: Harper Collins, 2000), 125.
in one way or another, a support of the military rule from the perspective of cultural relativism. There, he looks at the two conflicting cultural values between the United States of America and Myanmar. According to him, America’s political culture fundamentally values democratic principles, while the Burmese culture accentuates a traditional hierarchical system. But, in Aung-Thwin’s understanding, what the US has been doing is universalising the ideals of democracy and human rights and forcing them to be implanted in the soil of Myanmar, which has its own political values.

In the article, Aung-Thwin presents the two overpowering approaches in Burmese studies – whether one supports Suu Kyi’s political values or those of the military rule. It is, for him, not an either/or choice. He suggests that there should be more than two approaches in Burmese studies. According to him, the approach he has undertaken is neither one, whereby he received an unsigned death threat during the height of anti-Burma government sentiment.126 In “Parochial Universalism,” Aung-Thwin, by way of illustration, quotes from a Hindu myth, the Ramayana, in order to comparatively describe the military rule and America’s universalisation of democratic values and human rights.127 He represents the military rule as Vali, a monkey king, and America as Rama, the perfect human and a deity Vishnu incarnate. In the myth, Rama shoots Vali in the back because Vali took the wife of his brother who just died. In the monkey’s culture, taking care of one’s brother’s wife after his death was common and expected. But Rama tells Vali that there are higher ideals which, whether human or monkey, are

126 The letter said, “Dear Ko Aung-Thwin, Even though you are a teacher of history, partial to the military government, and wrote and talked of the economic success of the military government, one day, on the victorious day of the students’ revolution, you are going to repay the blood-debt of the students. [this can also be translated as “you will repay in blood.”] You have also betrayed your mother’s Karen race. All of this is going to be recorded in the students’ historical document. Victory to the Students’ revolution,” Aung-Thwin, “Parochial Universalism,” 495. Truly, it was such an unwise and audacious reaction against Aung-Thwin’s cultural relativistic approach, for which Burmese pro-democratic groups owe him an apology.

127 The Ramayana (Sanskrit: “Rama’s Journey”) is one of the two great epic poems of India, the other being the Mahabharata (“Great Epic of the Bharata Dynasty”). The Ramayana was composed in Sanskrit, probably not before 300 BCE, by the poet Valmiki, and in its present form consists of some 24,000 couplets divided into seven books, Britannica Academic, sv “Ramayana” http://academic.eb.com/EBchecked/topic/490529-Ramayana (accessed 20 August 2015).
to be followed. According to Aung-Thwin, Rama (representing the US) is universalising his human values to which all, whether human or monkey, should aspire to. Vali (representing Myanmar) is eventually convinced and acknowledges his inferior way of thinking. He deserves to die at the hands of such an honourable man, Rama.\footnote{Aung-Thwin, “Parochial Universalism,” 483.}

Aung-Thwin, through this myth, argues that like Rama, the United States should not shoot Myanmar in the back. On the surface, this example appears to be illuminating. However, in thinking deeply about this comparison, it degrades Myanmar as inferior while it eulogises the US as superior. Myanmar, needless to say, is much weaker and smaller in global relations than the US. However, it does not mean that the United States has a higher morality than Myanmar. If Aung-Thwin is a cultural relativist, he should look for another suitable example to back up his argument. His treatment of equating Myanmar to the monkey king Vali, while viewing the US as the deity Vishnu incarnate does not do justice enough to the politically complicated situation of Myanmar.

Moreover, what Aung-Thwin seems to neglect is the other side of the same coin. That is, the world in which we live is becoming a single village, which scholars call globalisation. Despite researchers’ diverse definitions of the term globalisation, what they have in common is “connection,” “inter-penetration,” or “interdependence.” For example, Manfred B. Steger defines globalisation as “a multidimensional set of social processes that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant.”\footnote{Manfred B. Steger, Globalization: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 13.}

Globalisation, in short, touches both internally and externally every aspect of
humankind and society; it touches politics as well as economics, and culture as well as academics. For Aung-Thwin, universalising human rights is a form of Pax Americana. What is more, he criticises that even awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Suu Kyi has political intent; therefore, it is a form of the secular canonisation. This criticism shows that Aung-Thwin, in favour of cultural relativism, goes too far. As a result, he also forgets the historical existence of “the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

Evidently, the Declaration is not the American invention, but it has come into existence through the cooperative endeavour of many nations. Historically, it is very strange to deem human rights as Pax Americana. The country Myanmar itself signed the bill of the Declaration. To take a look at the Declaration from the perspective of globalisation, human rights are:

- a set of universal claims to safeguard human dignity from illegitimate coercion… These norms are codified in a widely endorsed set of international undertakings: the “International Bill of Human Rights; phenomenon-specific treaties on war crimes, genocide, and torture; and protections for vulnerable groups such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Obviously, Aung-Thwin’s lopsided argument here suggests a wanton disregard for globalisation because he seems to be trapped in the web of cultural relativism and historical determinism. Historian A. G. Hopkins, unlike the historian Aung-Thwin, invites historians to engage in the debate on globalisation: “In a globalised world, ideas flow across boundaries even more smoothly than capital; therefore historians now have an opportunity to cross disciplinary frontiers by engaging this debate.” In saying so, I do not mean that all the things that globalisation brings about are to be uncritically

---

130 The Declaration did not just happen to come instantly, but it took time to come into reality. Being drafted by the Commission of Human Rights, which consisted of 18 members from various nationalities (Asia, Middle East, North and South Americas, and so on) and adopted by the General Assembly by a vote of 48, Myanmar was one of the countries that voted in favour of the Declaration.


accepted. The important thing is that it is not wise in this contemporary world to stick to one’s culture and isolate oneself from others in the name of cultural relativism.

Further, the historical condition of Myanmar overwhelms the interpretation of Taylor and Aung-Thwin so much so that they fail to see Burmese politics from any other perspective. Academically, politics is a different discipline that attempts to study the politics of humankind scientifically. In the study of dictators and dictatorship, Matasha Ezrow and Erica Frantz observe several causes of tyranny. They are the reduced level of institutionalisation, economic conditions, and the role of ethnicity.¹³³ Culture is just one of the reasons for tyranny. In this regard, the interpretations of Taylor and Aung-Thwin are too subjectively in favour of the cultural history of Myanmar.

Now we have viewed the considerable overlaps between the politics in the monarchical era and the post-colonial Burmese politics. Attaining and retaining power, peace, unity through violence, and the purge of any potential challengers is deep-seated in the political practice of the Burmese. It is a reigning culture of Burmese politics from the monarchical period to the present. Or apparently it is the characteristics of the Domination System, where the idea of power through violence is at the centre. The Military regime, as cultural conservatives, discouraged and scorned the idea of democracy, human rights and freedom by saying that these are alien to the cultural and political nature of Myanmar. Aung-Thwin and Taylor, from the cultural relativist approach, support that Ne Win and Than Shwe did their best in making a regressive change. Unfortunately, what Taylor and Aung-Thwin might not be conscious of is that their argument for the traditional political nature of Myanmar is supportive of two successive military regimes of the nation.

What can King, Suu Kyi and Wink provide for such a political culture? Evidently, they are not traditionalists who resist changing culture. They are all forward-looking: for King, it was the dream; for Suu Kyi, a culture of democracy; and for Wink, the Domination-Free Order. Each has a vivid dream for their future. In spite of being future-oriented, they did not forget the past, but learned from it without dwelling on it. Likewise, they did their best in their present time in order to realise the future they desired.

Thus, human beings are not merely products of the past, but they are also creative and forward-looking beings. It is absolutely fair to say that what happened in the past has a significant impact on the present. But, we are also naturally endowed with creativity for the future. What Taylor and Aung-Thwin fail to pay enough attention to is the question of the future. For them, the past continues to be the present reality, which is why we are facing its consequences. Logically we were; therefore we are. They neglect to ask the question, “So what can we do in the present for the sake of the future?” More simply, “If the past is in the present, how can we deal with the present for the good of the future?” We are reaping now what we sowed in the past. Simply stated, we ought to plant the good seeds now for the interests of the future.

Therefore, traditionalism, represented by the military, Taylor and Aung-Thwin, concentrates merely on the past and the present. Put simply, traditionalists dwell on the past, and they keep the past in the present. The past determines everything at all times – the past, the present, and the future. In contrast, the transformational approach is different from cultural conservatives and radicals: the former esteems the cultural heritage and preserves it, whereas the latter focuses on changing cultural values more radically. Thus, what Myanmar needs is neither cultural conservatives nor radicals, but the transformational approach, which examines the past with great care, dwells on the present, and strives towards the future with a purpose. If the people of Myanmar have a
desire to enhance the characteristics of the DFO, they have no option except transforming the values of the DS, because peace, justice and reconciliation can never be found within the DS. King, Suu Kyi, and Wink are advocates of transformation, who learn from the past and endeavour in the present to achieve the desired future. Put simply, they look at the past and stay in the present with the future in mind. For Wink, it is the people who embody the characteristics of the DFO through whom a genuine transformation of the DS will be launched; King also had a dream which strengthened him to endure any form of suffering with the hope of the future; and for Suu Kyi, her task is cultivating the culture of democracy in the land where tyrannic culture reigned.

7.5 Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, I have explored the idea that gaining and retaining power by any means is the spirit of traditional Burmese politics. In the power struggle, Buddhism becomes a means to legitimise the power usurped by violence; and the traditional Burmese rituals (astrology, numerology, and yadaya) are the backups for maintaining power. These political distinctives reflect the nature of the Domination System. Therefore, the conclusion to be drawn is that Burmese political culture has been a part of the DS since the monarchical period.

Under such a culture of the DS, Myanmar is faced with questions: “Where should the country be directed?” “Would the country go back to the traditional politics of the nation?” “Or continue metamorphosing it in the light of democratic principles and human rights?” Two successive military despots, Ne Win and Than Shwe, have resuscitated the spirit of Burmese politics that had been practised since the pre-colonial period. In contrast, Suu Kyi has attempted to lead the country into somewhere higher than it has been. This is, for her, a spiritual leadership. In this sense, the journey towards the revolution of the spirit must still be ongoing. Only through such a revolution, would the country that existed beneath the spirit of military despotism for many decades be
able to be transformed. Furthermore, in the process of this spiritual leadership or metamorphosis, Myanmar needs to recognise the inseparability of the means and end, and rule of law. In the next, and concluding chapter, I will draw some political implications for Christians in Myanmar with the aim of showing how Christians should engage in the political system of Myanmar.
Chapter 8

Conclusion: Political Implications for Christians in Myanmar

Walter Wink views the world as the Domination System (the DS) where violence lies at the centre. There is also an alternative order, which Wink calls God’s Domination-Free Order (the DFO), which can only be realised through nonviolence. This view is theoretically comprehensive, but it necessitates a detailed order of praxis. In order to be theoretically robust and practically relevant, the thesis has taken two practitioners of nonviolence, Martin Luther King and Aung San Suu Kyi, and has engaged them in a dialogue with the theology of Wink. From this discussion, what political implications can be drawn for Christians in Myanmar – Christians who see politics as an un-Christian thing, and who live in the country where despotic leaders reigned for nearly half acentury? From chapters two to six, we have seen a critical interaction between Wink, King, and Suu Kyi. In the last chapter (seven), we examined the Burmese political culture through the integral lens of Wink, King, and Suu Kyi. As this study is located in the field of practical theology, this chapter will draw practical political implications for Christians in Myanmar with a view to challenging how they should engage in the political context of Myanmar.

8.1 Implications of Nonviolence for Christians in Myanmar

What implications can we draw from the study of Wink, King, and Suu Kyi for Christians in Myanmar – the implications expected to be the sources for Christians in Myanmar to engage with the Burmese political culture which mirrors the features of what Wink calls, the Domination System? The implications are categorised into three divisions: theological, ethical, and socio-political.
8.1.1 Theological Implications

The first theological implication to draw from this study is that Wink’s view of the DS and the DFO is a new paradigm for Burmese Christians who were born and bred into such an authoritarian context. Wink reminds Christians that, whatever their socio-cultural locations, they do not belong to the system of this world. There is the alternative that Jesus calls the kingdom of God but Wink re-names it the Domination-Free Order. Unless Christians in Myanmar grasp such a sharp distinction between the two contrasting systems, they would be trapped under the delusion of the DS or worldly system. Seeing a distinction between the DS and the DFO helps Christians not only to identify with the values of the DS, but to embody those of the DFO. On the other hand, making a distinction between the DS and the DFO does not necessarily mean that Christians are supposed to isolate themselves from the surrounding society. In fact, Christians are called to live out the values of the kingdom of God with the aim of not separating themselves from the world but transforming the world or the DS into the DFO.

King and Suu Kyi, despite the fact that they do not view the world as Wink does, have clear mental pictures that envision, navigate, and empower them. King called it the dream of America, whereas Suu Kyi names it the culture of democracy. Their visions enable them not to identify with the values and ways of the system that they are overcoming. Instead, they live with the values of the system that they seek to bring in. Therefore, Christians as a minority group in Myanmar should be aware of the values and standards of the DS, lest they be inadvertently engulfed by those.

Most importantly, seeing the distinction between the DS and the DFO makes all the difference to Christians in Myanmar. First, it will change the way in which power is exercised. The way in which Christians in Myanmar exercise power will no longer be abusive but supportive, not controlling but nurturing, not overbearing but meek.
Therefore, Suu Kyi asserts that the present need for Myanmar is a spiritual leadership. In a lecture at Singapore Management University, she introduced a new idea of “Spiritual Quotient” (SQ). SQ is, for her, different from Emotional Quotient (EQ) and Intelligence Quotient (IQ). By SQ, she refers to reaching out somewhere we have never been before. The leader the country needs is someone who can lead the country to somewhere higher and better than we have been. Where we have been in the past is under military and authoritarian leadership. Such a spiritual leader will lead the nation to a new place, where democratic values are experienced.¹ She believes that only through such a spiritual leadership, can the mindset of the military or domineering leadership be transformed. For Suu Kyi, the mindset of such a spiritual leadership is, “the determination to serve, not to lead, and it is the resolve and the commitment to serve that decides who is the real spiritual leader, and not the desire to be a leader.”² Spiritual leadership is, simply put, a servant leadership. In authoritarian leadership, to lead is to control; but in spiritual leadership, to lead is to support.

In the DFO, Christians are called to serve, not to seek power. What matters for Christians is no longer gaining power but serving wherever they are. Since it is not the power to control, the people in the DFO always have a role to play because the world in which they live is always in desperate need of service. Unlike the politicians who cannot do any single thing unless they are elected, those in the DFO are always of service to the people who want to be served. This changes the way in which all politicians practise their politics. This kind of service would overturn the spirit of authoritarian leadership and bring about an authentic revolution of the leadership culture in Myanmar.

² Ibid.
Next, seeing a distinction between the DS and DFO also deepens the way Christians in Myanmar practice Christianity. Religion in the DS is a powerful instrument to validate the system; but in the DFO, it is a tool for self-correction. In Wink’s perspective, religion has two dimensions: outer and inner. For Wink and King, God is more concerned with our inner attitude than observing the outward rituals. Similarly, Suu Kyi believes that the essence of Buddhism is not the observance of Buddhist rituals, but having a right intention and attitude. When this central or inner teaching is overlooked for the sake of the outer or peripherals, the essence of religion becomes perverted. The repercussion of replacing the central teaching of religion with the peripherals has suffocated the spirit of religion. Eventually, religion becomes an instrument of oppression and a legitimacy for terror and violence.

Buddhism is dominant in every aspect of Burmese culture. Being Buddhist defines social and cultural identity as well as personal identity. Unfortunately, many people become so-called Buddhists just for the sake of identifying social and cultural standing. This means Buddhism becomes, for those people, a cultural identity rather than a way of life. When the essence of Buddhism, which is practising mettā in every area of life, is replaced with a racial identity, the religion becomes overbearing and exclusive to others.

As a matter of fact, both Christianity and Buddhism encourage us not to take everything for granted but to be self-critical. Self-examination is hugely emphasised in both religions. But the problem is that our ego or self is a product of the web of socialisation. Thus Wink stresses that it is imperative to die not only to our ego, but also to the Powers. That means we are to notice the power of socialisation – how our culture and society has significantly impacted on us, whether we are conscious of it or not. We are not to be trapped by the outer forms of religion, and forgetful of the spirit. If we do so, the consequence will always be calamitous. Focusing on the external forms of religion
at the cost of its interiority always adds fuel to the flames of the Domination System. When that happened, Christianity became a tool to vindicate segregationism, and Buddhism, an instrument to legitimate the despotic regime.

Therefore, King, using the prophetic traditions in the Old Testament, exposed how white Christians’ use of the Bible in reinforcing segregationism contradicts the real biblical teaching. Likewise, Suu Kyi’s socially engaged Buddhism has shed light on the inseparable relationship between politics and morality. Therefore, Buddhism and Christianity, if their essential teachings are carefully practised, can emancipate us individually and collectively from corruption, prejudice, and injustice. In this sense, Christians in Myanmar should search for a deep sense of meaning behind every outward form of Christianity, thereby performing their faith with deep conviction.

However, one important thing to note is that the distinction between the DS and the DFO does not create the we/they or us/them syndrome. Instead, understanding that the unsurmountable impact of the web of socialisation is upon both Christians and non-Christians breaks down the we/they or us/them syndrome. The real problem is not just our enemies or opponents, but also us, because we both are products of the same socialisation. As discussed in chapter six, Min Zin reflects Suu Kyi’s idea of revolution of the spirit, that there is continuity between the previous military regime and the dissidents. The regime was not a foreign body, therefore, when we look at the mirror of military dictatorship carefully, we can find some parts of our face.³ This will also shed the prejudice that the problem is them, not us, thereby leading us to genuine humility. And this humility will be a source out of which Christians can learn to work together with those who are different.

³ See chapter six, 266.
The third theological implication from this study of Wink, King and Suu Kyi is the knowledge of the integral relationship between spiritual and political, personal and social. Wink is convinced of the paradoxical nature of the personal and social: the irreducibility of the personal to the social, and the irreducibility of the social to the personal. For him, God’s will is not just the transformation of people, but also of society.\(^4\) Similarly, King also learned the integral relationship between the personal and the social, at first from his father, and later from the father of social gospel, Walter Rauschenbusch. The gospel, for King, deals with the whole man, not only his soul, but his body; not only spiritual well-being, but material well-being.\(^5\)

Likewise, Suu Kyi separated herself from previous Burmese politicians, who dichotomised politics and Buddhism. Instead, politics, for her, is integrally related to Buddha’s teaching of *mettā* (loving-kindness) and *thissa* (truth). She believes that it is appropriate to talk about *mettā* and *thissa* in the political context because politics is about people.\(^6\) Wink, King, and Suu Kyi all shed light on the integral nature of politics and the religion they practise. An overemphasis on the personal at the cost of the social, and on the spiritual at the risk of the political, is apparently lop-sided. This radically challenges the mindset of Burmese Christians who regard politics as non-spiritual. As mentioned in chapter one, Christians in Myanmar – especially Pentecostal Christians – are unconcerned about politics.\(^7\) In the country where military despots ruled for a nearly half century, Christians with such an attitude and outlook should no longer remain

\(^5\) King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 78.
\(^6\) Suu Kyi, *Letters from Burma*.
\(^7\) Some months ago, I met a prominent Pentecostal leader. We had a talk about my dissertation. He knew the title of my research. He said, “Hay your thesis is about nonviolence and politics, right?” I replied, “yes.” And I continued to explain more to him about my thesis. Then he concluded, “brother, be aware that your thesis would be merely about political things.” What he meant by that implies that politics is an entirely different thing which has nothing to do with Christianity.
themselves aloof from the political affairs of the nation; instead, they desperately need to be transformed into a consciousness-raising community.

Finally, King, Suu Kyi and Wink are all fully conscious that what they are fighting is not an individual person but the system. In a nutshell, all of them see evil which is resided not only in an individual person, but also within society. Put simply, it is systemic evil or sin – an evil or sin that is entrenched in the system of a nation or institution. We are not to blame a particular person for this systemic sin. The people in a society, institution, or nation are all responsible for that systemic evil. This is a great challenge to Christians in Myanmar, who regard sin merely as individual such as stealing, cheating, smoking, adultery, fornication, killing, and so on. In contrast, King, Suu Kyi and Wink see that evil that they are fighting against is more than what we personally did. This leads them to distinguish what a person is from what he or she does; so, they encourage their supporters to hate what people did, not them. Therefore, Christians in Myanmar are called to seek to fight against systemic sin as well as the individual.

8.1.2 Ethical Implications

The first ethical implication for Christians in Myanmar is the integral nature of means and end. If the desired end is peace, the path to it can never be through violence because they contradict each other. Wink and King have a firm conviction regarding the inseparable nature of means and end; but Suu Kyi, as a politician, is too compromising because she would allow a short burst of violence if it could prevent worse things happening in the long-run. Previously, she took the nonviolent path in resisting the military regime, so she was known as an icon of human rights. Since she has become a politician, she has started to change some of the principles she adhered to before. For example, her silence in the time of warring between Kachin and the Burmese army, and her response to the conflict in the Rakhine state disappoint the international community.
During the time of resisting Ne Win and Than Shwe’s regimes, Suu Kyi was prompt in making responses to what the regimes did in terms of breaking human rights. Now she seems to be too conscious of commenting on the military in either a negative or positive way. But it is understandable that Suu Kyi is faced with the hardliner’s military officers from the time she becomes a politician. It is inevitable for her to negotiate and compromise with them.

In this dissertation, we have seen that there are two ethical consequences for the political context of Myanmar presented in the interaction between King, Suu Kyi, and Wink. First, nonviolence is the only means to end the tradition of violence in politics because of the vicious circle of violence. Political change, throughout the history of Myanmar, has always been brought about through violence. The history of Burmese politics affirms this reality. Arms were always a means to achieve peace, order, and power. In other words, it is the culture of “might is right” or “redemptive violence.” So the tradition of violence has been prolonged in Burmese political struggles. King and Wink are ethically deontologists, seeing the inseparable nature of means and end in regard to building a culture of peace and order. The debate between teleological or utilitarian and deontological ethics is, in fact, ongoing. But in the case of violence and nonviolence, it is hard to put it into the category of teleological-deontological debate. Using violence as a means to build peace and order as an end is, in fact, self-contradictory because the means itself opposes the end. Violence itself is inherently malevolent toward others; whereas nonviolence is intrinsically benevolent.

Despite Suu Kyi’s compromising position in her political dealings, the integral nature of means and end is one of the principles of nonviolence that Christians in Myanmar should bear in mind. This principle challenges the Christians in the military and who join the insurgencies to fight against the military. For Christians, Jesus’ death on the cross indeed proves that if the end is peace, the way to it cannot be through violence or
arms. Jesus Christ paid his life on the cross so that the enmity between God and humanity may be ended and peace be made. Thus, the integral nature of means and end is Christ’s way; and so, it should be the way of Christians.

Secondly, seeing the person as separate from what he or she does is a very crucial ethical principle for Christians in Myanmar to learn. Wink, King and Suu Kyi all stress the importance of this principle in such a way that in nonviolent resistance, what we are to fight against is not the persons who do evil things, but the evils that they do. Theologically speaking, it is also the way in which God redeemed humankind. That is, God loves sinners but hates sin; therefore, he paid the wage for sin on the cross in order to save sinners.⁸ Unless we separate a person from his or her deed, we will end up fighting people, not the evil or system.

Thirdly, nonviolent resistance for Wink, King and Suu Kyi is not a win/lose solution, but win/win. To put it another way, the aim of nonviolence is not revenge, but friendship, reconciliation, or ending enmity. This is also very vital to Burmese Christians, most of whom are from ethnic minority groups, such as Chin, Kachin and Karen, racially discriminated against from the time of Ne Win’s coup, 1962. Burmans’ racial discrimination caused a grievance and hatred among minority groups. As a consequence, the Christians from these ethnic minorities have a strong dislike and distrust for the ethnic majority, the Burmans. That nonviolent resistance is not to defeat enemies, but to win friendship, radically challenges Burmese Christians to see their hatred and grievance inside.

---

⁸ That God loves the sinners but hates the sin does not necessarily affirm the teaching of universalism that says that everyone will be saved at the end because God will not let them be tormented eternally in hell. The point here is to put an emphasis on the “way” in which God saved sinners through Jesus Christ. This is theologically a controversial issue that the thesis does not focus on. So I mention that the emphasis is not to support the universalism, but the way in which God saved sinners.
Further, this implication can also be applied to the whole nation of Myanmar in its journey to national reconciliation. Myanmar, as a country of diverse ethnic and religious groups, has been struggling with racial divisions since the colonial period. At present, the conflicts that are going on are not just between the military and the opposition political parties, but also between majority Burmans and ethnic minorities. The most long-lasting tension is between the Buddhist majority and non-Buddhist minorities. On 3 November 2012, Thein Sein’s government launched the Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC), with the vision of playing a key role in the development of a peaceful nation inclusive of Myanmar’s ethnic diversity. However, the centre was criticised for its incapability to cope with the violent conflict in the Rakhine state and the fighting between the military and the ethnic armed groups in the Kachin and Shan states. According to Bertil Lintner, the centre is incapable of promoting the peace, thus becoming an organisation which is being paid for doing nothing.

However, a glimmer of hope dawned for Myanmar in November 2015 when the National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory in the general election. The present government, when power was transferred to them in March 2016, said that Suu Kyi would lead the country’s peacebuilding. With the name of the 21st-century Panglong, the first conference was held on 31 August 2016 under the leadership of Suu Kyi. Suu Kyi did her best in bringing many key players to the table, including the rebel armies that did not sign a ceasefire drafted by the previous government. However, the conference has ended with a long way ahead. An attendant reported, “We were able to

---

present our proposals at this conference, but nothing important happened.”

The second Panglong conference resumed on 29 May 2017, which ended much better than the first. A Chinese reporter Song Qingrun describes, “Notably, some important consensuses are federal democracy, equal rights of all ethnic groups, decentralisation of power to autonomous areas.”

The present government, with a deep conviction, is committed to establishing a national reconciliation, therefore they resolved to run the 21st-century Panglong conference until the conflict is resolved.

Truly, the road to reconciliation in Myanmar cannot be reached overnight; it will take time. The conflicts between the then military regime and opposition parties, between the Burman majority and non-Burman minority, and between Buddhists and non-Buddhists are not recent, but age-old issues. Wink argues that the discrete steps towards reconciliation or peacebuilding have to be created depending on the cultural context. Hence, these steps might vary from case to case depending on contexts.

There is no one-way approach to reach reconciliation in Myanmar. Despite the variety of these measures, there are certain elements without which the journey towards true reconciliation would be impossible. They are truth-telling, forgiveness, and apology.

According to the two models of reconciliation: the IR (Interpersonal or Individual Reconciliation) and the NUR (and National Unity and Reconciliation), King, Suu Kyi and Wink all may be categorised into the former because forgiveness for them plays a crucial role in the process of reconciliation. However, they do not all neglect the structural aspect of reconciliation in favour of the personal focus. It is not a choice of either the IR or the NUR. In Myanmar, a number of people had been victimised under

---

14 Wink, When the Powers Fall, 21.
the despotic regime in various ways. The hatred toward the military men is so seriously entrenched that reconciliation without forgiveness would not heal the wound of the nation. At the same time, the people of Myanmar also suffered structural injustice under the military rule. Therefore, reconciliation without structural change and without giving proper attention to truth-telling, forgiveness, and apology would be unable to establish the culture of democracy, human rights, and rule of law. In this context, what Myanmar needs is not merely personal, but also structural aspects in processing reconciliation.

Overall, the ethics of nonviolence is neither dogmatic nor legalistic. Wink is very precise in this regard, the church is called to nonviolence not in order to preserve its purity, but to express its fidelity – fidelity to its master Jesus Christ.\(^\text{15}\) Since nonviolence is not a matter of legalism, but of discipleship, Christians are not called to impose nonviolence on others, and if they do, it will negate the essence of nonviolence. The very reason why Christians follow the way of nonviolence is not because it works, but because it reflects the very nature of God.\(^\text{16}\) For Christians, nonviolence is not an option because they follow the path of nonviolence out of their love for God, not out of the sense of obligation. Thus, the basis of ethical choice is love, not law. Transferring from the DS into the DFO is a process since we live in the same world where these two orders are in conflict. If nonviolence is a matter of discipleship, then discipleship is a process – the process of transferring from the DS into the DFO.

8.1.3 Socio-political Implication

King, Suu Kyi, and Wink all believe that nonviolent struggle never disparages the rule of law. Historically, the idea of the rule of law was first introduced in Myanmar by the British colonial administration. The Burmese society is, however, person-centred. That is, what a person of high social status says is stronger than what is written in the law.

\(^{15}\) Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 217.  
\(^{16}\) Ibid.
The idea of rule of law is, therefore, strange and alien to Burmese culture. Burmese people have had difficulty in understanding the concept of the rule of law since the post-colonial era. For instance, a Burmese political leader in the post-independence era saw the rule of law as disintegrating the Burmese social life because it was an outlandish idea to Burmese tradition. The people of Burma believe that humans are not made for a law, but a law is made for humans. On the other hand, the idea of the rule of law is, by implication, that no one is above the law; everyone, whether the ruler or the ruled, is subject to the law. In such a context, how can the culture of the rule of law be cultivated? Doing so will be counter-cultural between the cultures of person-centred and rule-centred. In other words, it will be an encounter between “law for humans” and “no one is above the law.” The former sees humans as being at the core of everything, while the latter looks at all humans on an equal level. Neither is entirely wrong. At the same time, they are not also against each other. So, the question that arises in the process of democratisation in Myanmar is, “How can we meaningfully engage these two cultures?”

To take a closer look at the encounter, the traditional Burmese concept of law and the rule of law do not contradict each other, but they unveil the paradoxical nature of law. On the one hand, law should be made for humankind in order for us to live in peace; but on the other hand, everyone – including the ruler or the governor – should be subjected to the same law; all citizens should be considered equal before the law. In fact, they do not contradict each other. When it says that law is made for humans, it should not mean that a particular group or person is in control of the law. Instead, it says law is made for humans so that human society may exist in order and peace. Likewise, when it mentions that no one is above the law, it does not mean that we all are, like robots, supposed to

---

live under lifeless regulations and rules. Rather, it means that we humans have a tendency to commit evil or stupid acts, therefore we need rules.

Thus, we need something that might prevent us from committing evil or perverting justice. In this sense, “law for humans” does not contradict the idea of rule of law; but instead, they complement and mutually correct each other so that the former may not be stressed over the latter, and vice versa. The point here is not to debate which one (law for humans or rule of law) is more important than the other, but how they should be engaged. In the process of democratisation in Myanmar, this engagement would play a vital role.

8.2 How Should Burmese Christians Begin to Engage with Burmese Politics?

In discussions of violence and nonviolence, many studies focus on the tactical or strategic and moral aspects. However, Walter Wink argues that nonviolence is not merely a socio-political tactic to achieve the desired end, a moral or religious code to gauge somebody’s moral eminence or religious standing. It has a spiritual character. In the same way, violence is not merely a means to change a government or system. It also has, like nonviolence, a spiritual dimension. In this study, the word “spiritual” or “spirit” refers not to an otherworldly realm or extrasensory perception, but to the internality or innerness of an institution. In the previous chapter, we have seen that the political culture of Myanmar throughout its history mirrors the spirit of the DS, which is redemptive violence – massive use of violence for gaining power and making changes. How can the spirit of the DS in Myanmar be transformed?

First and foremost, the misconception of politics as non-spiritual or un-Christian among Christians in Myanmar has to be exposed. Distinguishing Christianity from politics is unwarranted because what matters is not whether Christianity is apolitical. In fact, Christianity itself is an alternative political order because it stands for the kingdom of
God or the DFO, and at the same time, it contrasts sharply with the DS. This provides a theological framework for Christians in Myanmar to scrutinise the political context of Myanmar. This examination will be a lens to lead to a paradigm shift in the way Burmese Christians see politics and Christianity.

As examined in chapter six, religion – Christianity or Buddhism, can be a means either to liberate the oppressed or to oppress people. This gives Christians in Myanmar advanced warning that the way they practise Christian faith does matter. So how should Christians in Myanmar practise Christianity in such a manner that it would bring about a genuine liberation for people? As noted, what makes a distinction between those who use religion for justifying their power and those who regard religion as self-correction is that the former lays huge emphasis on the observance of rituals and regulations of their religion, whereas the latter looks at the teachings of the religion to examine themselves for correcting their lives. Therefore, Christians in Myanmar are called to ask themselves, “Why do we do what we do?” They are not to practise outward aspects of their faith, e.g., going to church, reading the Bible and spending time in prayer for the sake of religiosity. Instead, practising Christian faith should be a heartfelt response to the God who first loves us.

Of course, there are always a number of people who just happen to be Christians or Buddhists simply because of their parents and the race to which they belong. For example, there is a saying in Myanmar that, “to be a Burman is to be a Buddhist.” In other words, nationality and religion are intertwined. This mentality leads many Burmese people to simply become Buddhists not because they personally are convinced, but because of their parental and racial background. The same thing also happens with Christianity. According to the two contrasting systems (the DS vs the DFO), everyone is born and bred into the DS; no one has happened to be in the DFO by birth. Transferring from the DS into the DFO is the second event which happens later,
when he or she receives the gospel of Jesus Christ.\(^{18}\) Therefore, the church should be the place in which people come to know the gospel and receive it, thereby transferring from the DS into the DFO.

As mentioned, Christians in Myanmar are not just religiously a minority group, but majority of them are from ethnic minorities. As a consequence, Christians in Myanmar have double discrimination. That is, they are discriminated on the bases of both religion and ethnicity. This discrimination has socio-political repercussion, resulting in many Christians in Myanmar weakening a sense of responsibility for the affairs of the nation. Therefore, Wink’s perspective of the DS and the DFO can help Christians in Myanmar to see that they are not to be trapped in that bondage of the DS but to overcome it. When it is overcome, they can seek a way to work with Buddhists or other non-Christian religions for the betterment of the nation.

How should Burmese Christians start to engage in the politics of Myanmar that have been overwhelmed by the power of the DS? For Christians who have been under the socio-cultural context of authoritarian rule, there is no doubt at all that they must be more or less irresistibly influenced by the system. Where can they learn the alternative standards and values of the DFO? There is no place for Christians in Myanmar to learn those of the DFO except a church where they gather together for worship and fellowship. This is where Wink’s argument is feeble because he considers the church as nothing but one among other social organisations. Perhaps, Burmese people, for Wink, could learn to be part of the DFO through the practice of Buddhist dhamma. As this research seeks to encourage Christian influence on society, I want to put an emphasis on

\(^{18}\) I think that this kind of second event would restrict the entry into the DFO and Wink might disagree with me. But I would say this as a gospel-centred Christian. This might be also where we disagree each other.
the important role of the Church in society. So it does not mean that Buddhists can never be part of the DFO by practising Buddha’s teaching of dhamma.

In contrast to Wink, I argue that here comes the vital role of the local church in nurturing new standards and values of the DFO in Burmese Christians. In sociological terms, the church should be the social location where Christians would be newly socialised. Stephen Charles Mott rightly argues for this:

If we are to reject significant aspects of the cultural context, we must be able to react against the approval of the very community that previously has been crucial to us. This calls for a higher form of community, which can “out-vote” the influence of the former community. A new process of socialization is needed.\(^\text{19}\)

Since their day of birth, Christians in Myanmar have been socialised into the realm of the DS. What they are accustomed to are its standards, values and criteria. Therefore, when we decide to follow Christ and his ways, we are called to a new process of socialisation. This new socialisation can never be realised aside from the church or community where Christians, irrespective of cultural and racial differences, learn the new standards, values and beliefs of the kingdom of God or the DFO. Today, what Burmese Christians desperately need is the community which embodies the standards and values of the DFO, and the community where Christians can be newly socialised. Like King, the church where one belongs to should be a second home for Christians in Myanmar. Therefore, local churches in Myanmar should not be constrained by observing rituals, denominations and doctrines; they should preach, teach and witness the whole gospel holistically to their neighbourhoods in such a way that people will join in the process of new socialisation.

Most of all, the church should be a place where Christians not only learn Jesus’ teaching of nonviolence, but also where Christians see what nonviolent lifestyle looks like. As violence and the abuse of power has been prevailing in all areas of life in Myanmar,

local churches in Myanmar are called to open their eyes to see its pervasiveness and
cultivate the culture of nonviolence or create a new social reality so that a new
socialisation may take place among the congregation. Here the culture of nonviolence or
a new social reality does not refer to the approach of pragmatic nonviolence but that of
principled nonviolence. Throughout the thesis, it has been emphasised that nonviolence
is far more than a tactic or method to respond a certain social evil; rather it is a spirit
which someone might not see it but have a sense of its penetrating presence. When
Christians in Myanmar begin to realise this call to nonviolent lifestyle, the hope for a
genuine transformation in the nation will be dawned.

In putting an emphasis on the crucial role of local churches in Myanmar, this research
does not exclude the role of non-Christian communities such as Buddhist, Hindu and
Muslim in working for the advancement of the nation. Of course, Christian churches are
not perfect community; they are communities of sinners, saved by the grace of God –
sinners who are saved not by their own merit but by God’s grace. Since they are saved
by God’s grace alone, there can never be moral superiority between Christians and non-
Christian people irrespective of their religious identities. This opens the door for both of
them to work together for the good of their country. As discussed in chapter six, the
logic of nonviolence is that nobody (us and our enemies) are perfect; nonviolence has
transformative power; therefore, only through nonviolence, will the division between
them and us be broken by the power of nonviolence. Nonviolence, in this sense,
humbles Christians not to see others as different but to welcome them so that they can
cooperate with them for the sake of the country.

Despite the importance of partnership with non-Christian communities in cultivating a
culture of democracy, Christians should have a commitment to peace and nonviolence –
an unswerving commitment which is not based on neither effectiveness nor result but on
the wholehearted obedience to God. To quote Yoder, Christians commit themselves to

351
nonviolence and peace not to show that they are wonderful people, not to ensure that their love guarantees success, not to indicate that they have better political or economic system. Instead, Christians are called to love their enemies because God does so and commands his followers to do so.\textsuperscript{20} This might be somewhat unpromising or even bleak for the Christians in Myanmar in the time when people are preoccupied with result or desired end. Unless a certain method or approach results in a desired end, they just discard it. But Christians do not follow the path of nonviolence not because it is effective, but it is “God’s method of overcoming evil with good.”\textsuperscript{21} Only through such a radical commitment, will Christians in Myanmar together with those from other faiths be individually and collectively able to truly revolutionise the dominant values of Burmese political culture.

\textsuperscript{20} Yoder, \textit{He Came Preaching Peace}, 20.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 19.
Bibliography

Books, Journals, Magazines, Theses and Dissertations


Chloe Lynch, “How Convincing is Walter Wink’s Interpretation of Paul’s Language of the Powers,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 83.3 (July 2011): 264.


Fairclough, Adam. “Was Martin Luther King a Marxist?” in *History Workshop*, no. 15 (Spring, 1983).


_____. Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community? Boston, Massachusetts, 2010.


**Sources from Internet**


