**UNIT 7**

**Social Action**

**Lesson Aim:**

* To know the different ways in which we can respond to violence.
* Understand the power of nonviolence to transform relationships in society.

**Critical Awareness Task:**

Brain-shower on nonviolent social movements both contemporary and historical.

Relate some historical nonviolent triumphs and violent triumphs.

* Indian Independence struggle 1919-46, in a country of 300 million people 8,000 lives were lost with no British casualty. The Algeria struggle 1955-61 was at the cost of I million lives.
* ‘Solidarity’ in Poland lost 300 lives in 10 years of struggle against the Communist regime. In the Falklands war, Argentina lost 2,000 people in two weeks.

**Gospel story: Matthew 20: 25-28 Whoever is greatest shall be servant of all.**

“But Jesus called them to him and said, ‘You know that among the gentiles the rulers lord it over them, and great men made their authority felt. Among you this is not to happen. No; anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”

**Life narrative:** *We explore four general categories of responding to violence:*(1) To accommodate violence (2) To avoid it (3)To use violence to fight violence and *(4)*The tradition of cooperation and active nonviolence

**(1) Accommodating violence**: This approach sees no other option but passivity or silence. It goes along with violence. It maintains that there is nothing that can be done about this violence. *Ask the class:* Does this resonate with your experience? Have you found yourself doing this? Is this your usual response? Can you think of a situation like this?

*Then, resume reflecting on this topic:*

The problem with accommodating violence is that it is demeaning and dehumanizing. It reinforces a relationship that is fatally out of balance. It keeps an inhuman situation intact, where one person is above another.

**(2) Avoidance:** Avoidance means standing on the sidelines, to evade ‘’getting involved,’’ to decide it’s not ‘’my problem’’, or to deputize someone else (the police, the army) to deal with it. It is the act of becoming a bystander. *Ask the class:* Does this resonate with your experience? Have you found yourself doing this? Is this your usual response? Can you think of a situation like this?

*Then, resume reflecting on this:*

The difficulty with this approach is that it does not resolve the problem at hand, and it creates the illusion that we can stay ‘’above the fray’’ and not face the conflicts in our lives and in the life of the world.

**(3) To use counter-violence:** This approach maintains that there is no other option, and that violence only ends through a show of greater violent force.

*Ask the class:* Let’s take a minute and silently ask yourselves: Does this resonate with your experience? Have you found yourself doing this? Is this your usual response? Can you think of a situation like this?

*Then, resume reflecting on this:*

The problems with this method are that it reinforces the cycle of retaliatory violence; it does not address the roots of conflict; and it does not create a situation that meets the needs of the parties involved. Not only does it prolong suffering, it is often ineffective.

***Is there an alternative to these typical ways of responding? Yes***

**(4) Co-operation and Active Nonviolence - *A 4 step process:***

**1. Centre Ourselves**

In order to do this, we ask ourselves, “What am I feeling? “What is the larger picture? Where is God in this situation?’’ We also take time to centre ourselves and thus to decide what we should do in the situation at hand.

**2. Disclose Our True Selves – To Ourselves and to Our Opponent**

This means first discovering what I am truly feeling in the situation, and then articulating those feelings to the one with whom I am in conflict. Am I feeling anger? Is there sadness or hurt or fear underneath this anger? We should do this not in a way that ‘’hits’’ the other person, but in a way that tries to get across who we really are in this moment.

**3. Receive the Truth of the Opponent**

This may not be my truth, but it is theirs, and we will get no where until we both hear each other. It is also a way of acknowledging the other - *acknowledging* does not necessarily mean *agreeing.* We don’t have to agree with their position – or the interests that lie below their positions – but we can acknowledge the other person and her or his truth.

**4. Make Agreements, not Assumptions**

By disclosing ourselves and listening to the other, we have a chance to discover the truth and untruth of the situation. We then have the basis for making agreement about how we are going to be with one another, rather than assumptions. Many conflicts grow out of widely differing assumptions.

These four steps can be applied at every level of conflict: from interpersonal clashes to international hostility. In each circumstance, we are challenged to create the appropriate vehicles and climates to make each of these steps happen. It isn’t an easy process, but in the end it will repay us immeasurably.

**Prayer/Meditation:**

Song: ‘No Time for Love’ by Christy Moore **(resource disk)**

**Other Resources:**

Pax Christi on Nonviolence Triumphs.

Excerpts from W Wink “Powers That Be”.