

Power-of-goodness: solid foundation for the practical implementation of the vision of a 'just peace'



by Martin Arnold¹

There is within human nature an amazing potential for goodness. ...There is something in human nature that can respond to goodness.
Martin Luther King Jr.²

1. Civil resistance, people power, power-of-goodness

In 2011, the World Council of Churches (WCC) invited all who seek peace to commit themselves to the Way of Just Peace. Building on insights gained in the course of the ecumenical "Decade to Overcome Violence", it commended "An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace" "for study, reflection, collaboration and common action". In connection with the "Way of Just Peace", the document refers to "nonviolent resistance" as "central" and "effective"³.

Peace researchers have reached new results on the effectiveness of "civil resistance"⁴, "people power"⁵, or "power-of-goodness"⁶ – these are new terms for the former "non-violent resistance". These findings allow deeper insights in to what is essential in the "Way of Just Peace". Konrad Raiser, the former General Secretary of the WCC, sees "a decisive widening and correction of perspectives [...] for all those who have been engaged during the ecumenical decade in the search for ways to overcome violence. [...] In particular, this research [on the power-of-goodness] can help to establish a more solid foundation for the practical implementation of the vision of 'just peace'."⁷

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² Martin Luther King, Jr. (1961): Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience. in: <http://bigfatgenius.com/2220%20Fall%202010/King%20-%20Love%20Law%20and%20Civil%20Disobedience.html> (2013-10-05)

³ World Council of Churches (ed.) (2011): AN ECUMENICAL CALL TO JUST PEACE, Geneva, p. 4-5. Online: http://www.overcomingviolence.org/fileadmin/dov/files/iepc/resources/ECJustPeace_English.pdf (2013-10-05)

⁴ Chenoweth, Erica; Stephan, Maria J. (2011): Why Civil Resistance Works. The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict. New York: Colombia University Press. Kurzfassung (2008) online: http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/IS3301_pp007-044_Stephan_Chenoweth.pdf (2013-10-05); Nepstad, Sharon Erickson (2011): Nonviolent Revolutions. Civil Resistance in the Late 20th Century. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁵ Schock, Kurt (2005): Unarmed Insurrections. People Power Movements in Nondemocracies. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.

⁶ Arnold, Martin (2011b): Gütekraft. Ein Wirkungsmodell aktiver Gewaltfreiheit nach Hildegard Goss-Mayr, Mohandas K. Gandhi und Bart de Ligt. Mit einem Geleitwort von Johan Galtung. Baden-Baden: Nomos. Online: www.martin-arnold.eu > Forschungsergebnisse > Übersicht (2013-10-05).

⁷ Ökumenische Rundschau 4/2012, p. 512 (translation K.R.).

Research studies on resistance campaigns in favor of more democracy show that⁸

- The comparison of 323 nonviolent and violent resistance campaigns from 1900 to 2006 shows: 53 per cent of the nonviolent ones were successful, while of the violent ones only 26 per cent were.

2 : 1 for Gandhi's concept



- Success of such non-violent action campaigns does not depend on the willingness of the target regime to use violence.

- Instead, they found the following important factors contributing to the success of resistance campaigns: widespread, cross-cutting, and decentralized mobilization; unity in the nonviolent opposition; diversification of nonviolent tactics; loyalty shifts among security forces.

The findings on power-of-goodness explain how these results are founded in human nature and how this power works. In addition, they show conducive mental preconditions derived from the experience and the ideas of successful non-violent protagonists.⁹

This essay in short presents the main results of this research answering the following questions:

How is it possible to confront effectively without violence or the threat of violence people or groups of people who are determined to use violence or are ready to do so? How can non-violent action be devised so that it can be effective in the face of opponents who are prepared to use violence?

The conclusions are based on the analysis of very different approaches which have been developed and successfully implemented by three protagonists.

2. Three architects and three designs for the power-of-goodness

Truth and humaneness are powers which need to be reckoned with.

Bart de Ligt¹⁰

The plans of three “architects” serve as the starting point for the construction of an ideal-typical model of the power-of-goodness. These architects are: firstly, the Austrian Catholic, Hildegard Goss-Mayr (born 1930), the Honorary President of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation; secondly, the Indian Hindu, Mohandas K. (“Mahatma”) Gandhi (1869-1948); and thirdly, the Dutch freethinker, Bart de Ligt (1883-1938), described by contemporaries as the “Gandhi of the West”¹¹.

⁸ [see footnote 4:] Chenoweth 2008, p. 8.; Chenoweth 2011, pp. 50f.,58,195f.; Nepstad, p. 136.

⁹ See also www.martin-arnold.eu.

¹⁰ Ligt, Barthélemy de (1928): Contre la guerre nouvelle. Paris: Rivière, p. 109.

¹¹ Dungen, Peter van den (1990): Bart de Ligt, Aldous Huxley and the Conquest of Violence. Notes on the publication of a peace classic and an appreciation of De Ligt in Great Britain and the United States of America. In: Dungen, Peter van den; Noordegraaf, Herman; Robben, Wim (ed.): Bart de Ligt (1883-1938) Peace Activist and Peace Researcher. Zwolle, NL: Bart de Ligt-Fonds; Stichting Voorlichting Aktieve Geweldloosheid, pp. 27–47, p. 43.

There are two main reasons for selecting these three “architects”. Firstly, there is evidence for at least one successful application of each of their approaches:¹² Goss-Mayr’s approach was the basis for the “Rosary Revolution” in the Philippines in 1986, which brought the Marcos dictatorship to an end.¹³ In South Africa in 1914 the application of Gandhi’s satyagraha led to the repeal of racist laws targeting the Indian minority.¹⁴ And the application of Bart de Ligt’s approach led to the legal recognition of conscientious objection to military service in the Netherlands in 1923.¹⁵ Secondly, each of these three people comes from a different cultural background and has a different philosophy of life. This makes it clear that the power-of-goodness is not bound to a particular culture or to a particular religious faith. How did each of the three “architects” think their approach worked in terms of practical conflict management?

2.1 Hildegard Goss-Mayr’s Christian approach

According to Hildegard Goss-Mayr¹⁶, the initial impetus is to be found in the discovery of the power-of-goodness within oneself or in one’s own tradition, as an innate quality. Anyone who is aware of their own potential for the power-of-goodness is motivated to approach other people with goodness. This attitude is associated with the goal of “fullness-of-life for all”.¹⁷ The realisation of this goal is made possible by the power-of-goodness - or, in other words, truth, justice and love. The power-of-goodness comes from God, but an approach to others in the spirit of goodness can be developed and strengthened by each person: “It is essential that we give space to the love in ourselves and that we allow it to grow.”¹⁸

According to Goss-Mayr, tackling major social grievances with the power-of-goodness requires both taking action according to a concept, and inner and outer preparation: In addition to an attitude of goodness, certain skills are required which can be developed through training and practice. There are methods which can be used to facilitate cooperation between activists, analysis of the situation, dialogue with other people involved, self-critical evaluation of the actions taken etc. The purpose is to set in motion the “infectious” dynamic of interaction according to the power-of-goodness. This is achieved primarily by the contribution of the activists themselves: Through constructive action and non-cooperation they reduce their own part in the responsibility for the social grievance by no

¹² Ascribing success to application of the model does not imply that this is the single cause of any outcome, since effects always have many causes. Cf. Arnold, Martin (2011): Gütekraft. Ein Wirkungsmodell aktiver Gewaltfreiheit nach Hildegard Goss-Mayr, Mohandas K. Gandhi und Bart de Ligt. Mit einem Geleitwort von Johan Galtung. Baden-Baden: Nomos., pp 36-37., 61-62., 153-154., 199.

¹³ Goss-Mayr, Hildegard (1986): AKKAPKA – die gewaltfreie Bewegung auf den Philippinen. Dokumente, zusammengestellt von Hildegard Goss-Mayr. In: gewaltfreie aktion, Jg. 17-18, H. 65/66/67 3. u. 4. Quartal 1985, 1. Quartal 1986, S. 28–31; Zunes, Stephen (1999): The Origins of the People Power in the Philippines. In: Zunes, Stephen; Lurtz, Lester R.; Asher, Sarah Beth (ed.): Nonviolent social movements. A geographical perspective. Malden, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 129–157.

¹⁴ Since Gandhi’s contribution to the liberation of India from colonial rule is disputed, the unambiguous success in South Africa is referred to here.

¹⁵ Dungen, Peter van den (1989): Introduction to the 1989 Edition. In: Ligt, Bart de: The Conquest of Violence. An Essay on War and Revolution. London: Pluto Press (Libertarian critique), pp. ix–xxvii, p xvi.

¹⁶ Cf. Goss-Mayr, Hildegard (1981): Der Mensch vor dem Unrecht. Spiritualität und Praxis gewaltloser Befreiung. Wien [u.a.]: Europaverlag; Arnold, Martin (2011): Gütekraft – Hildegard Goss-Mayrs christliche Gewaltfreiheit. Overath: Bücken & Sulzer.

¹⁷ Goss-Mayr, Hildegard (2002): Elemente der Gütekraft. Anhand von Beispielen erklärt. In: gewaltfreie aktion, Jg. 34, H. 131, pp. 16-25. The expression has been derived from John 10:10.

¹⁸ Goss-Mayr in an unpublished interview with M.A., 3rd August 2004.

longer supporting or simply tolerating it. This action motivates others to join in. It is “infectious”. Such a process can be strengthened by words or actions which touch the consciences of other people who are involved. However, if key people in powerful positions cannot be persuaded to cooperate, the actions can be intensified. Mass non-cooperation is regarded as the most extreme form of action. It can lead to the removal of a social grievance, because the exercise of power depends on the cooperation of both those exercising power and those who are subjected to it. Removal of support by those who are subjected to power therefore results in a loss of power for those exercising it, which in turn increases the activists’ chances of success. So far Goss-Mayr who brought the concept for the “Rosary Revolution” to the Philippines (see below). The people of the Philippines coined the terms “offering dignity” and “people power” to describe what they were doing and what was effective.

2.2 Mohandas K. Gandhi’s Hindu approach: satyagraha

Mohandas K. Gandhi described satyagraha¹⁹ as “the Force which is born of Truth and Love”.²⁰ His approach is based on the assumption that everyone has a predisposition to goodwill and fairness because of their deep inner connectedness with every other person. This quality can be awakened and developed in everyone. The most valuable quality in a person is their potential for selflessness. This means that satyagraha cannot be used to serve one’s own selfish interests.

Satyagraha has two meanings: in the broader sense, satyagraha means acting with goodwill and fairness - by reducing one’s own contribution to a social grievance, by providing assistance, or by undertaking constructive action. If this does not achieve the desired result, Gandhi recommended engaging in satyagraha in a narrower sense of the term. This may be “satyagraha against ourselves”²¹. According to Gandhi, this works in the following way: The acceptance of foregoing something, of loss or of suffering (e.g. through fasting) increases self-discipline, selflessness and the tendency towards all-encompassing goodwill. So, one’s own more powerful contribution may be enough to remedy the grievance.

Gandhi maintained that, if the removal of a social grievance requires the cooperation of other people, these people should be addressed in a way which encourages them to act out of their own predisposition to goodwill and fairness. Not only the hope for this effect, but also the need to maintain respect for their dignity, means that humiliating someone personally or in public, or harming them in any other way is not permitted. But first it is necessary to clarify the question as to whether or not the other people involved recognize the social grievance as such and see themselves

¹⁹ Cf. Blume, Michael (1987): Satyagraha. Wahrheit und Gewaltfreiheit, Yoga und Widerstand bei M.K. Gandhi. Gladenbach: Hinder + Deelmann; Arnold, Martin (2011): Gütekraft – Gandhis Satyagraha. Overath: Bücken & Sulzer. – Gandhi described his approach with the new word satyagraha, in Western terms it would be the *power-of-goodness*. (Gandhi explained satyagraha as „love-force“, „truth-force“, and „soul-force“ and stressed that the aspect of force or power as crucial. However, normally he used for satyagraha in English “non-violence” which is the translation of the old term ahimsa which, in India, is highly respected. In the Western world non-violence suggests rather something lacking of strength, because violence is estimated as powerful. So “nonviolence” does not express Gandhi’s assumptions on satyagraha and is therefore misleading. In addition, for Gandhi satya (= truth) has another meaning than in the West, for example: „Truth (Satya) implies love“ (Gandhi, Mahatma [1999]: Electronic Book of The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi. [CD-ROM]. Publications Division [ed.]. New Delhi: Icon Softec, Vol. 34, p. 93).)

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.* Vol. 17, p. 412.

as playing a role in maintaining it. If this is not the case, it is necessary to address the difference of opinion conscientiously. In such a situation it may be appropriate to involve an institution respected by all parties, e.g. to investigate the disputed facts. If clarification of the situation results in confirmation of the social grievance and their own part in it, then the people concerned would join in work to remedy it, so long as they already have enough goodwill and are sufficiently unselfish to bring about greater justice. If they still do not want to get involved, satyagraha actions (in the narrow sense) which target these people specifically, should appeal to and strengthen their sense of justice, their goodwill and their selflessness. According to Gandhi, this works by the activists reducing (or continuing to reduce) their own contribution to the social grievance, e.g. by no longer obeying an unjust law. This still applies, even when such action brings with it significant costs or risks (e.g. of arrest). Reducing one's own contribution can be achieved not only by giving up certain products – such as food²² – but also through strikes and boycotts as forms of non-cooperation. It is precisely this suffering which should lead to increased inner conflict in the other people involved, which in turn increases the pressure to follow one's own feelings of goodwill and join in the remedying of the social grievance. This impulse can be strengthened indirectly - e.g. by appealing to God in prayer, through winning over respected and influential people, or by public relations activity.

But what if satyagraha leads the people addressed by it to harden their position or even take opposing action? Gandhi's answer is that satyagraha in the narrow sense is to be practised until the social grievance has been remedied. The activists should continue to reduce their own contribution to the social grievance. In so far as they show greater fearlessness, self-discipline, and willingness to suffer (even by losing their lives, if necessary), than the opposing actions - whether experienced in the past or expected in the future - would warrant, they present the other people involved with an irresistible challenge until they finally play their own part in remedying the social grievance.

2.3 Bart de Ligt's freethinker approach: Geestelijke Weerbaarheid

Bart de Ligt's expression "Geestelijke Weerbaarheid" means mental/moral assertiveness.²³ "Mental" and "moral" refer to human capacities. The mind, i.e. reason, enables people to recognize truth. And morality, the sense of what is morally right, leads to being humane. In de Ligt's opinion, truth and humaneness operate as "powers which need to be reckoned with"²⁴. They are mutually reinforcing: Both urge the construction of social conditions of human dignity through justice, freedom and humaneness, and the remedying of grievances caused by a lack of these qualities. This can happen at both personal and group levels through the application of one's own mental and moral capacities. Truth and humaneness form the basis for both the actions of activists and for the effects of their actions, because they have the power to evoke resonance in the minds and morality of the other

²² Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand (1977): Eine Autobiographie oder Die Geschichte meiner Experimente mit der Wahrheit. Gladenbach: Hinder + Deelmann, pp. 276-277.

²³ Cf. Ligt, Bart de (1925): Kerk, cultuur en samenleving. Tien jaren strijd. Arnheim: Van Loghum Slaterus en Visser., pp. 213-233; Ligt, Bart de: The Conquest of Violence (1989). An Essay on War and Revolution. London: Pluto Press (Libertarian critique) (1. Ed. 1937); Arnold, Martin (2011): Gütekraft – Bart de Ligt's humanistische Geestelijke Weerbaarheid. Overath: Bücken & Sulzer; Jochheim, Gernot (1977): Antimilitaristische Aktionstheorie, soziale Revolution und soziale Verteidigung. Zur Entwicklung der Gewaltfreiheitstheorie in der europäischen antimilitaristischen und sozialistischen Bewegung 1890-1940, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Niederlande. Frankfurt am Main / Assen / Amsterdam: Haag und Herchen / Van Gorcum.

²⁴ Ligt, Barthélemy de (1928): Contre la guerre nouvelle. Paris: Rivière, p. 109.

people involved. For de Ligt, working for freedom, justice and humaneness means acting with freedom, justice and humaneness oneself. This means doing four things:

- a) *Beginning with oneself*: According to de Ligt, the basis is a desire to improve oneself. This begins with *recognition* firstly of one's own mental/moral powers and then of the possibility that one may oneself be a part of a social grievance or the system which causes it. This includes becoming conscious of one's own part in what is happening. Recognition is followed by *action*. This begins with reducing one's own contribution to the social grievance concerned, e.g. by refusing to do demeaning work, undertake military service, or follow inhumane orders. One refuses "to collaborate in injustice". The actions and the attitude behind such witness shine out to other people, within whom similar impulses can be awakened or strengthened. Other people may follow one's example and begin to think over how to change themselves in the same way. Some social grievances can be overcome in this way. However, where major social grievances are concerned, preparation is required.
- b) *Preparing oneself and others*: In both the short and the long term, diverse activities serve to strengthen the mental/moral capacities of both oneself and one's own community and within wider society and people on the other side. Possible 'amplifiers' are addressed. This could include respected personalities, and organisations and media who may be sympathetic to the cause. All in all, on the one hand, it is a question of consciousness-raising, including publicity, and also of knowledge and education. On the other hand it requires organisational preparation of strikes, boycotts, civil disobedience or other mass actions. And it is also necessary to prepare oneself for whatever countermeasures may be expected.
- c) *Communicating with the other side*: According to de Ligt, it is necessary in the first place to recognize the mental/moral capacities, in other words, the moral values of the opposing side, in order to then awaken and/or strengthen such impulses within them. This includes creating bonds of mental/moral sympathy. Activists use both words and actions to appeal to reason and morality. They aim to maintain contact with the other side at all times. The expected result is that the opposing side - where groups are concerned, often only a few within the group to start with - will feel so motivated to work together for greater freedom, justice or humaneness, that they begin to participate in remedying the social grievance. But if they reject the activists' appeals or even react with violence, perhaps by instigating repressive measures by the state, de Ligt recommends continuing to take action with a strong mental/moral attitude, in order to strengthen the inner impulses towards truth and humaneness which may be present within some members of the opposing side, so that police or soldiers, for example, may refuse to obey orders. As a result, members of the opposing side see their own interests and mental/moral responsibility in a different light and themselves contribute to greater freedom, justice and humaneness and to remedying the social grievance. If this is not enough, de Ligt interprets it as a signal to undertake a further kind of action.
- d) *Mobilizing social amplifiers of truth and humaneness*: The activists now appeal directly to possible 'amplifiers',²⁵ and also to the masses to become more active themselves - either because they are directly affected by the social grievance or out of solidarity. De Ligt believes that the resonance in their minds and morality leads them to amplify the

²⁵ See above b).

mental/moral impulse and the original appeal of the activists - possibly through public action (e.g. mass meetings) organized by themselves. In this way the impulse towards truth and humaneness can develop a momentum of its own. If it is not strong enough, the action is to be continued until the social grievance is remedied by people cooperating for freedom, justice and humaneness.

3. How the power-of-goodness operates

*Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit,
says the LORD Almighty. (Zechariah 4:6)*

View of human nature and worldview

Certain convictions regarding the nature of human beings are basic to the ideas about how the power-of-goodness works.

All human beings are bound together by their common humanity. They tend towards goodwill, justice and truth (amongst other things). We want to be treated in the same way ourselves. The predisposition to goodwill and fairness does not always get the upper hand. It can however be stimulated, even in people who do not believe they have a conscience.

Human beings can recognize relative truths. They can behave unselfishly. They strive towards – and have a right to – freedom. And, even if they are less directly involved in a problem, they can strengthen these tendencies in a group or community in relation to that problem.

Human beings cannot be completely manipulated or controlled.

“Man is neither innately good nor is he innately bad; he has potentialities for both.”²⁶

The effectiveness of power-of-goodness activities does not depend on the protagonists holding a particular worldview or religion in order for it to work. It is sufficient for the protagonists to believe unconsciously in the view of human nature described above. Individuals and groups may be committed to very different traditions, but as long as they do not contradict the basic assumptions of this view of human nature, they can work together towards remedying greater or lesser social grievances on the basis of the power-of-goodness approach. And they can do so fruitfully without having to make compromises which would call their own tradition into question. This also applies to people who believe (from a post-modern or radical constructivist point of view) that every fixed axiom of a worldview is either provisional or illusory.

Human beings do not have control over everything and never will have, so action taken in the spirit of the power-of-goodness - as in all undertakings, especially courageous ones - must be accompanied by trust in something beyond our control.

Offering dignity – also in everyday relationships

The power-of-goodness potential is not only present in political situations, but also in everyday relationships. Practising it in the family and between friends is quite normal. So we are hardly ever aware of it. Sometimes we are made aware of this energy when something unexpected happens.

²⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr. (1961): Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience. in: <http://bigfatgenius.com/2220%20Fall%202010/King%20-%20Love%20Law%20and%20Civil%20Disobedience.html> (2013-10-05)

I live in the city of Essen. The following happened in the Underground some years ago in August in the rush hour. Two young men were just about to beat up an African. The other passengers were frightened but nobody moved – except a little girl who stepped between the men and the African. She didn't say a word. The men looked stupefied, and made as if to push her to one side, but they didn't touch her. Other people, adults, now moved to intervene. Nobody was hurt. The youths got out at the next station, and everybody was relieved. The African thanked the little girl and the others who had shown their solidarity.

The racist attitude of the men on the Underground was lacking in dignity and at the same time an attack on human dignity. The behaviour of the little girl was full of dignity. She showed the men up, but at the same time showed them how to behave in a way more worthy of human beings. Using the Philippine expression, one might say that the little girl “offered them dignity”. Equally, the adults saw there was an acceptable way, one which preserved the dignity of all involved, to remove the threat to the African. The child's behaviour, originating in the power-of-goodness, was infectious.

“Offering dignity” is a powerful option for overcoming violence, because power-of-goodness lies dormant in every one of us. This energy begins to awake, namely to resonate in us, when we become aware of people who act out of this energy. Our own innate predisposition to the power-of-goodness makes us want to do the same, and to become active for more goodwill or more fairness, for more sustainability or more freedom. It depends on other factors whether we let ourselves be influenced to act in the particular situation.

Important?!

The power-of-goodness occurrence in the Underground in Essen was not reported in the press or in any mass medium. If there had been bloodshed, it would probably have been publicised. Events where the power-of-goodness is involved are less newsworthy than violence. They are however at least as important, if not more important. This is something we aren't sufficiently aware of and forget all too easily. We should take such events seriously, wherever they occur or however we hear about them. The power-of-goodness is of paramount importance.

Developing our potential: The relationship-centred self-image

We can develop our potential for the power-of-goodness. It depends on the image we have of ourselves. We behave towards other people in the same way as we see ourselves. The development which is meant here is a reorientation from an egocentric self-image to one centred on relationships. Our egocentric self-image says that everything is centred on ourselves, on me, on my own group, on “our country”, our way of life, our football club or whatever social unit we think of as our own.

A reorientation to a relationship-centred self-image involves:

- being increasingly aware of our relationships with the world around us, and realizing that people and the whole environment, including all those outside our own group, are essential for us and our self-image;
- being strengthened in our own identity;
- not believing that my own point of view is the only true and absolute one, but is relative; somebody who contradicts me might be right.

With this relationship-centred self-image, we can find our place in society more easily, and deal with our own personalities and with other people more satisfactorily.

This reorientation according to the power-of-goodness can be compared to Copernicus's Revolution of the Celestial Spheres. 500 years ago it was believed that the earth was the centre of the universe, and all the educated world was shocked at Copernicus's findings. The principle that everything revolved around the earth was no longer valid. Instead, "we move along with others on similar pathways in diverse and changing distances and relations." In this way Copernicus painted a much more appropriate picture of us and our relationship to the universe in which we live.

Copernicus's findings also apply to human relationships in the social context. New ways and possibilities open up. Just as the planets influence each other through gravitational force, we can influence one another as we travel along similar lines and in ever-changing relationships.

The girl in the Underground saw the danger for the African and also the situation of the youths. She joined their paths thereby putting herself in danger, but in this way was able to pave the way out of the degrading situation the three men were in.

If dignity, respect, goodwill, and fairness determine our actions, this attitude can be transmitted to others, it can be infectious.

Massive injustice

This is crucial especially in cases of massive injustice. Social abuses can be remedied, even when powerful key personalities are not prepared to be swayed. It is possible, because those in power are only powerful as long as others obey their orders or cooperate with them. If their subjects refuse to cooperate, their power crumbles to dust. This is what happened in the "Rosary Revolution" by "people power" in the Philippines in 1986, which had been well-prepared beforehand.

Men versus tanks

At the beginning of the 1980s, the oppression by the regime of the dictator Marcos was growing at a frightening rate. In 1984, Hildegard Goss-Mayr and her husband Jean Goss, who had worked for reconciliation and non-violent conflict management in a number of political situations, answered a cry for help from members of religious orders in Manila. They explained the power-of-goodness, stressing that commitment to this non-violent path was just as demanding as a commitment to violence. They held seminars for activists who were to disseminate these ideas and the appropriate techniques more widely. A newspaper was founded called "Offering Dignity". Thousands of people were instructed in the techniques of the power-of-goodness.

In February 1986, when Marcos announced a false election result, the opposition initiated a boycott of banks supporting Marcos. Parts of Marcos's army disassociated themselves from him and barricaded themselves in a camp.

Marcos ordered tank units to recapture the camp, but the civilian population crowded onto the streets and stood, offering bread and flowers, singing and praying, in front of the tanks. The tanks halted. Hours later the tanks left. The dictator's reign was over. After rebel soldiers had promised that Marcos and his family could leave unmolested, he fled the country.

How and why power-of-goodness gains in strength

Martin Luther King Jr.: "The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate... Returning violence to violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.

Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.”²⁷

The power-of-goodness works essentially in three ways, in one’s own action, in infectiousness, and in non-cooperation.

Courageous action engenders respect. If some people find it daunting, others are attracted by it. In the case of Marcos, non-cooperation spread more and more until his power finally disintegrated.

Because, in contrast to destructive action, the power-of-goodness does not endanger, injure, or kill other people involved, but wins them over to be fellow-campaigners, more and more people contribute to its strength. That is why the power-of-goodness can become a source of great strength.

4. What can we do as Christians and as churches?

All over the world, national and international, religious and non-religious organizations like Christian Peacemaker Teams, Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme (EAPPI), „gewaltfrei handeln“, Women Peacemakers Program, Peace Brigades International, nonviolent peaceforce (NP), Civil Peace Services, civil conflict management groups, and many others are working with approaches for diverse conflict scenarios. They have developed these approaches more or less consciously on the basis of the aforementioned ideas. Many of them have achieved wonderful success.

Churches can support these initiatives; train, employ and accompany people for such services; evaluate and learn from the international experiences; install a new service which, by team commitment, is able to effectively help in a non-violent and benevolently powerful way to dissolve the propensity for violence in violent conflicts, to install peace structures and thereby to contribute to freedom and to the protection of vulnerable groups of people (like NP in taking responsibility to protect them). To start practicing this by our own will strengthen a following proposal to the UN for such a service churches then can help to install. Churches can help to install an early warning system based on civil society; help to build peace workshops in many places empowering people to deal with problems or conflicts in the nearer or farther environment for the sake of just solutions (from neighborhood conflicts to disarmament of atomic weapons); foster peace research so that peace theology and peace education become central tasks of theology in research and formation in all its institutions at all levels; adopt power-of-goodness conflict management as an obligatory part of the curricula in the churches’ own instruction programs.

Applying the power-of-goodness is the appropriate method, not only in resolving conflicts but also in general in remedying abuses of all kinds. The most convincing way of saying NO to what is unacceptable (e.g. injustice, social abuses) is to say YES to more mature ways of contributing to more fullness of life for everyone.

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²⁷ Martin Luther King (1967): Where Do We Go from Here : Chaos or Community?, p. 62.