

From Jacques Ellul's 1969 book *Violence*

One thing, however, is sure: unless Christians fulfill their prophetic role, unless they become the advocates and defenders of the truly poor, witness to their misery, then, infallibly, violence will suddenly break out. In one way or other "their blood cries to heaven," and violence will seem the only way out. It will be too late to try to calm them and create harmony. ...So, instead of listening to the fomenters of violence, Christians ought to repent for having been too late. If the time comes when despair sees violence as the only possible way, it is because Christians were not what they should have been. *If violence is unleashed anywhere at all, the Christians are always to blame.* This is the criterion, as it were, of the confession of sin. Always, it is because Christians have not been concerned for the poor, have not defended the cause of the poor before the powerful, have not unwaveringly fought the fight for justice, that violence breaks out. Once violence is there, it is too late. And then Christians cannot try to redeem themselves and soothe their conscience by participating in violence.

...If an ethic is Christian, it is a product of the faith, acceptable and possible only to faith. Therefore it is literally impossible to require others to obey that ethic -- to demand that they live as if they were Christians, even though they do not possess the faith. ...On the other hand, an ethic that would be equally valid for Christians and for nonChristians -- in virtue of its not being specifically Christian -- would necessarily be a non-Christian ethic. ...In so far as I firmly believe that faith in Jesus Christ requires action of a specific, unique, singular kind, I must admit that the counsels on violence issuing from the faith are addressed to faith, therefore can have no meaning for those who do not believe that Jesus Christ is Lord. For example, we cannot expect non-Christians to bear oppression and injustice as we ought to bear them. So we cannot do as the church has so often done: remind the world's oppressed of their "Christian duty" to submit and practice resignation.

To us, this "Christian duty" is native. We Christians must submit and bear unjust suffering "for if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval" (I Peter 2:20). But we cannot make this a law for all men. We must accept injustice *ourselves*, but we can neither require others to bear patiently, nor serve as example for them, nor yet bear their suffering for them. That is to say, we cannot [accept] the injustice done to others. The Christian's first act of nonviolence is that he refrain from asking others to live as if they were Christians. When violence is in question, it is not our business to lecture them and urge them to be nonviolent. ...In whose name, or why?

...But now let me give a warning. If the Christian cannot demand, cannot even suggest, that nonChristians should act as though they were inspired by the Christian faith, he must take the same attitude toward the revolutionaries and toward the state. To demand that a non-Christian state should refrain from using violence is hypocrisy of the worst sort; for the Christian's position derives from the faith, and moreover he exercises no responsible political function. To ask a government not to use the police when revolutionary trouble is afoot, or not to use the army when the international situation is dangerous, is to ask the state to commit hara-kiri. A state responsible for maintaining order and defending the nation cannot accede to such a request.

In the face of a non-Christian state, all the Christian can do is -- not read it a moral lecture, not rail at it and demand the impossible; not these things. All the Christian can do is to remind the state that, though it be secularized and its officials be atheists, it and they are *nevertheless* servants of the Lord. Whether they know it or not, whether they like it or not, they are servants of the Lord -- *for the good*. And they will have to render account to the Lord for the way they did their service. Obviously the Christian's task is not a very pleasant one. He is ridiculed, he is isolated from other political movements; he cannot howl with the wolves!

On the other hand, if a statesman, the president of the republic, openly declares himself a Christian, then -- on the basis of his own faith -- the total demands of the Christian faith can be set before him. ...With and only with these men, and only on the basis of *their* affirmation of faith, could Christians and the Church hold dialogue on matters of this kind. But here, too, Christians must refrain from participating in mass movements. They must not join others in passionate condemnation (or support), in the name of fifty humanist motifs put forward by non-Christians, of such a politics conducted by a statesman who calls himself Christian. The important thing is to make him see that he has to draw the consequences of his faith; and perhaps he will verify the fact that it is impossible to be a Christian and at the same time to conduct a successful politics, which necessarily requires the use of some kind of violence.