

Applying Gandhian Theory and Strategy: **A Campaign for Inclusion in the Catholic Church**

The Catholic Action Network for Social Justice

438 N. Skinker Blvd. St. Louis, MO 63130
314.721.2977 www.catholicactionnetwork.org
Submitted May 16, 2005

I. Introduction

The Roman Catholic Church is at a watershed moment. As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger assumes the Papacy, the Church finds itself declining in number of schools, parishes, income, and priests. A variety of factors including internal policies and Vatican positions are creating an obsolete and dying Church. The Vatican policy of accepting only celibate men into priesthood, and consequently, Church leadership, has created a massive shortage of priests. The systemic cover-up of sexual abuse by American Church officials has shaken Catholics' faith in, and consequent support of, the hierarchy. In 2005 the Vatican is more isolated than ever from everyday church-goers, and is in danger of becoming entirely irrelevant.

Since Vatican II, many progressive groups have sought structural reform within the Catholic Church. Such reform goals have included achieving leadership equality for women and the laity, gaining inclusion for married priests, and achieving equal rights for gays and lesbians in the Church. These groups often use Catholic Social Teachings, early Church history, and certain Vatican II documents as a foundation. Such progressive organizations are mostly marginalized by the hierarchy, from the Pope himself to parish-level priests. Groups therefore remain outside the scope of the majority of Catholics due to the top-down nature of decision-making and information sharing in the Church.

By building alternative networks of support, emphasizing the dignity of every person, and refusing to cooperate in their own oppression, the people of India successfully ousted their occupiers. Progressive Catholics could successfully utilize Gandhi's theory of nonviolence, and his strategies for change to seek structural change in the Church. This paper will provide suggestions for strategy and theory largely gleaned from the work of Robert Burroughs' A Strategy for Nonviolent Defense. It will propose a campaign, based on Gandhian nonviolence, to structurally change the Catholic Church to better meet the needs of its members, especially women and the laity. In one word- a campaign for inclusion.

II. Theory

Human Needs Theory

Several theories contribute to a comprehensive understanding of nonviolent action. The first is the human needs theory, which simply asserts that one of our basic drives as humans is to get our essential needs met. These needs include basic needs (physical, psychological and spiritual), freedom (participating in decisions made about our lives) and dignity. While possibly subject to a certain level of socialization, these needs cannot be eradicated. On both a personal level, and on the international stage, when human needs are neglected, conflict occurs. As agents of change in the Church, we are seeking a Church that will better meet physical, psychological and spiritual needs, allow us to participate in decision-making, and recognize the dignity of all.

Modified Consent Theory

The second theory is the modified consent theory of power. According to this theory, power is not intrinsic to political leaders and elites. Rather, it is based authority (the acceptance by the people of the elite's

right to command,) human resources (the elite's allies and supporters,) material resources, and intangible factors (psychological considerations and ideological conditioning). When people withdraw acceptance or consent of the elite's right to command, the elite's power to dominate evaporates. Applying this theory to the Roman Catholic Church, we see that power is not inherent to the hierarchy; rather, it is based on the foundation of support from everyday Catholics accepting the hierarchy's authority, the allies and supporters, and material resources. One could extrapolate that certain tactics like letter-writing to Bishops and petitions to the Pope are counter-productive because they reinforce the power equation of hierarchical authority and laity submission.

Adding a few layers of complexity, this modified theory recognizes that there is not a magic formula for applying nonviolent strategy. The following qualifiers are important in considering the Roman Catholic Church. The modified consent theory recognizes three important considerations: 1) Elites do not always depend *only* upon the people they dominate in order to continue domination. That is, just because the defense withdraws consent does not mean the opponent will automatically concede. Therefore, we need to determine the extent to which Catholic elites depend on everyday Catholics. 2) Not all members of the dominated society have the same culture, rights or freedoms in order to withdraw consent from elite domination. Identifying the multitude of cultures and identity groups within the Church will be important in building a unified movement. These groups could include religious orders, parent-teacher groups, women's groups, and elderly and youth groups. 3) Humans are heavily influenced by social structures, so asking people to withdraw support from these structures may be difficult. If we build a movement that incorporates the Gandhian elements of nonviolent action and non-cooperation, recognizing the structural role of religion in people's lives will be important. This question will be treated further in the next section.

Structural Theory

The structural theory of power contributes to a Gandhian conception of nonviolence. Structures are simply by-products of certain types of social interactions that have become entrenched and therefore self-sustaining. Structures and tradition largely determine behavior, and limit individual choice and decision making. Structures are sustained by their acceptance by the elite, the acceptance of the elite themselves by the rest of society, and reinforcement from other structures. Smaller systems such as language, religion, education and technology also play a role in maintaining these structures. One example: Patriarchy, uses systems of socialization (parents employing gender roles), education (teachers encouraging mostly boys in science and math), and religion (churches relegating women to inferior roles) to maintain itself. It and also tends to reinforce other structures such as capitalism and the state.

The variable of structures must be addressed when creating a nonviolent strategy. It is not clear that the structures can themselves be removed, but rather challenged, and used to our benefit, while we simultaneously create alternative needs-meeting structures to replace them. Gandhi envisioned a society with a horizontal framework that alleviated hierarchical, exploitive structures. This vision was evident in both his critique of British imperialism and also in his constructive programs which emphasized self-esteem, security, social justice, and meeting the needs of all Indians (including the untouchables, lepers, women and indigenous people.)

The Catholic Church, if considered a certain sub-structure, employs systems of education, (from the pre-school to University level,) ritual, language, and social events. A certain "Catholic culture" exists in America; many people regard their very identity as Catholic. This could be due in part to the powerful role of these systems' influence on the worldview, psychology, and everyday lives of Catholics. Many progressive Catholics feel simultaneously disenfranchised by their Church's policies, and unable to leave the Church.

One could certainly find similarities between the domination of the British Empire over India and the rule of the Vatican over the lives of many Catholics today. Although religion today is mostly a voluntary association in contrast to an imperial occupation, some similarities in these two respective 'empires' could include 1) the imbalance of power between hierarchy/colonial government and layperson/Indian, 2) the institutionalizing of unjust laws (salt tax/sexist policies), and 3) the presence of a vast amount of wealth and resources among rulers.

Conflict Resolution

Gandhi considered conflict a fact of life. Rather than developing one specific plan for simply liberating India, he developed an entire method of dealing with conflict we can use for our campaign of inclusion. This technique, called Satyagraha, involves a humble search for truth while converting the opponent into a friend and participant in a problem-solving process. Satyagraha is characterized by three distinct principles. The first is the **unity of means and end**. That is, violence cannot achieve a nonviolent society, and achieving our goal means we must ourselves be explicitly inclusive. Secondly, the Gandhian approach presupposes **the unity of all life**, to expansively include all living creatures. We are connected to our opponent, along with all elements of our local and global environment. We must avoid demeaning the hierarchy (for example, by name-calling) and damaging our environment (for example, by creating excess trash or using Styrofoam) during this campaign. Lastly, the satyagrahi must be willing to **undergo suffering rather than inflict it**. This willingness, rather than a self-defeating masochism, demonstrates our love in action, and should be used in a way that elicits respect and furthers communication. We are willing to suffer (rather than cause others' suffering) to achieve our goal of inclusion.

In summary, the theory of nonviolence applied to our campaign for inclusion utilizes several elements. Religions and churches should be oriented towards meeting the needs of all members. When members' needs are not met, conflict occurs. One example could be the large number of young Catholics leaving the Church. The structural denial of human needs often benefits elites. An example could be the structural policy of denying leadership opportunities for Catholic women and laypeople, which denies the human need for participation and dignity, and consolidates power, wealth and decision making at the elite level. Elite power is dependent on cooperation by the people, support from allies, and resources. Satyagraha, Gandhi's method of conflict resolution, provides an excellent means of both reducing structural violence and compelling the opponent to participate in a problem solving process.

III. Strategy

With the foundational theory laid, we turn towards developing a strategy for our campaign. Four broad elements will be foundation stones of our strategy: A) assessing the current context, B) determining our purpose, C) stating the campaign's conception of nonviolence, and D) defining the aims of the campaign. We will describe these four elements in detail, and then outline the pieces that sit upon this foundation.

A. Assessment

Preparing a campaign depends upon an accurate assessment of historical, cultural, and structural context. When Gandhi returned to India from South Africa, he spent many years traveling the country, simply listening to the Indian people. Such a listening process can include:

1) Knowing the details of the oppression (*Historical facts, how, why, etc.*)

Historically, why has decision making in the Catholic Church been confined to celibate males? What has the role of the laity been throughout the history of the Church, and what Church documents address this issue? What is the current state of Church decision-making at the levels of parish, diocese, country and internationally?

2) Completing a structural analysis of the oppression's causes (*What structures are at play, what systems are supporting these structures, etc.*)

Who is benefiting from the exclusion of lay people in decision making? In what way? What structures are involved- hierarchy, patriarchy? What systems (perhaps Catholic school education, the use of exclusive language in Mass, etc.) support the oppression?

3) Assessing the political, religious circumstances (*How powerful is the opponent, and what groups does the opponent depend on*)

What resources does the hierarchy possess? How is the Catholic Church funded? What allies does the hierarchy have?

4) Making decisions about what will be possible in the campaign (*What campaign participants will be willing to do*)

Who will participate in the campaign, and how much energy and stamina will participants have for the campaign? What factors could add or detract from what is possible in the campaign?

B. Purpose

Broadly speaking, the purpose of a nonviolent movement is to create processes and structures that satisfy human needs. Our broad purpose for this campaign is inclusion. This purpose can be articulated in a list of requests. This list should accurately reflect the needs of the campaign, unify different groups within, and be within the opponent's power to yield. The list should both expose the moral weak points in the opponent's position, but also commit to meeting the opponent's needs. Some suggestions:

- 1) Remove the 'priestly veto' from parish councils; require lay consultation and approval in the governance and operation of church matters at all levels, including financial, administrative, and personnel decisions
- 2) Open Sacramental ministry to the laity; provide priestly training to those who feel called regardless of gender, or marital status
- 3) Commit to meeting the needs of current priests; allow retirement at appropriate ages
- 4) Define a preferential option for women, racial minorities, the poor, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community in Church participation and programs
- 5) Utilize a lens of social justice and equality for internal policies and external programs with specific resources, policy guidelines and pastoral letters

C. Conception of Nonviolence

A specific campaign's conception of nonviolence will determine the type of strategies and tactics used. Many (but not all) of Gandhi's campaigns were principled-revolutionary; they attempted to change foundational structures of imperialism (rather than isolated governmental policies) through disciplined and explicit nonviolence. Nonviolence was considered a way of life, permeating all aspects of the campaign. The revolutionary dimension asserts that significant change does not come through elite good will but through mass resistance to oppressive structures and creation of alternate structures.

D. Strategic Aims

With the purpose outlined, the campaign should develop the broad strategic aims of 'defense' and 'counter-offense'. These aims will focus on consolidating the will and power of the campaign to resist, and then altering the hierarchy's will and power to dominate.

1. Defense

The first strategic aim is to consolidate the will and power of those excluded from decision making to resist oppression. Smaller goals toward this aim provide positive, reachable objectives that contribute towards building the campaign participant's will and power.

The **strategic timeframe** determines the number, nature and duration of campaign stages. To reach each goal, stages should include both nonviolent resistance and constructive programs. The initial campaign stage might include tactics that everyone can do (ribbon wearing, etc.) to attract the broadest population possible. Often art, music, and spiritual traditions can help build such support. Along with this resistance, a constructive program, such as lay-led prayer services, will help 'be the change' we seek.

In maintaining adherence to nonviolent principles, **leadership** should be both open (not secretive) and decentralized. While this doesn't mean that every meeting is open to absolutely everyone, it does mean that all participants have a measure of say in decision-making at some level. If several national progressive Catholic organizations allied to implement this movement, a natural structure of local and national groups could serve as a starting point.

Traditional media sources, largely controlled by national and transnational elites, are at best an unreliable way to get the message out and engage mass participation. Therefore our campaign should employ both new and already-established networks of **communication** (websites, alternative news sources).

Two **patterns of tactics** can be considered when planning this campaign. The *sequential approach* uses tactics that each build upon the last, while the *cumulative approach* uses tactics that are more independent (not in a chain of building tactics) and which have significant impact standing alone. Three **categories of nonviolent tactics** are protest and persuasion, non-cooperation, and nonviolent intervention. An example- our goal is to resist the policies of a strategically important Bishop. Examples of the three categories could be that we picket the local Cathedral, refuse to supply materials or resources to it, or physically block it. All tactics have an element of **dispersion or concentration**. In choosing tactics related to the strategic goals, organizers should consider what is element is more effective- drawing people together or spreading them out.

A few things to remember when planning tactics: Be cognizant of what the tactic requires to succeed (a large number of people, a high level of training) and ensure that it makes sense strategically. Be aware of who is bearing the cost of certain tactics and make sure it is a sustainable choice. Be flexible and creative if something like a symbolic location needs to change. It is ideal for tactics to humanize the defense. Remember that the primary tactical goal is to maintain the initiative in both building campaign support and undermining the opponent.

2. Counter-offensive

The strategic aim of the counter-offensive is to alter the hierarchy's power and will to continue domination. Ideally, converting the hierarchy's will to participate a problem solving process would be a goal. Often this is unfeasible because the power balance favors the opponent, or the opponent misperceives the defense's goals or its own needs. This common misperception of needs illustrates the ineffectiveness of attempts to persuade elites to change. Therefore, undermining the hierarchy's *ability* to hold power-over is vital in achieving equitable negotiations.

Strategic goals will include undermining the support of groups within the hierarchy's constituency (such as religious orders, the Knights of Columbus, Parent Teacher Associations, etc.) and constituencies of the hierarchy's allies. This might begin with the goal of raising awareness and identifying specific groups whose support is necessary for the elite to continue aggression. This building of relationships with constituencies of the opponent and its allies is essential. Such third party solidarity groups can help formulate goals and provide support through skills, direct actions or by reinforcing local campaigns.

Using Gandhian nonviolence, the resolution of conflict with the opponent must include a commitment to meeting both sides' needs for security, meaning and self-esteem. Therefore, it is helpful to identify what needs the hierarchy is trying to meet by perpetuating exclusion.

Example from Indian Independence

The movement for Indian independence provides examples of these four elements. Gandhi's broad political purpose was Indian independence, articulated in eleven demands. The first strategic aim, the 'defense', included consolidating Indian support for the campaign. One strategic goal was to increase Indian power by measuring the level of participation (with careful attention to identity groups such as women). The second strategic aim, the 'counter offense', involved altering Britain's will and power to continue occupation. One strategic goal towards this aim was to undermine British power by mobilizing worldwide opposition. This could be measured by the level of international support for the British occupation and by British policy decisions that began to make concessions to the independence movement.

Starting Points for a Campaign for Inclusion

These strategies could be initiated by a collective of progressive Catholic organizations such as Catholic Organizations for Renewal, which includes over 20 local and national groups. Or a coalition of groups could create the campaign on a local level. Many different avenues could be utilized for organizing; local affiliates of national groups like Call to Action, participants and graduates from JustFaith groups (a justice education program), or representatives from different Catholic groups. A participatory forum could provide the setting for a wide audience to articulate broad purpose, list of requests, and strategic aims. Such a participatory decision-making structure should be present in all elements of the campaign.

In a nationally-initiated campaign, the collective of organizations could provide targeted support for a cluster of groups ready to implement the strategies. This would provide the building blocks for church-wide reform. An explicit commitment to Gandhian nonviolence will be important, as will employing tactics that both resist oppression and construct alternatives. This group should emphasize an intentional period of listening to the needs of all the diverse groups within the Catholic Church. This could involve visiting different parishes, asking questions, taking surveys, etc.

A campaign that seriously attempts to change the foundations of exclusion in the Church will require the commitment of people and organizations involved. Dozens of reform groups work on different aspects of Church policy. Working together will require these groups to expend common energy on a common goal that, if achieved, could mean real foundational change in the institutional church.

Purpose: Inclusion

List of Requests:

- 6) Remove the 'priestly veto' from parish councils; require lay consultation and approval in the governance and operation of church matters at all levels, including financial, administrative, and personnel decisions
- 7) Open Sacramental ministry to the laity; provide priestly training to those who feel called regardless of gender, or marital status
- 8) Commit to meeting the needs of current priests; allow retirement at appropriate ages
- 9) Define a preferential option for women, racial minorities, the poor, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community in Church participation and programs
- 10) Utilize a lens of social justice and equality for internal policies and external programs with specific resources, policy guidelines and pastoral letters

The following strategies aim to consolidate the campaign's will and power to resist oppression and to undermine the hierarchy's will and power to continue exclusion.

Strategic Goal #1: Gain Economic Self-Determination

Brief Assessment: The laity provides a great percentage of total operating funds that run individual parishes, dioceses, and ultimately, the Vatican. Most Parish Councils have *at most* an advisory role in determining where money is spent at the parish level, and the laity have almost no voice on how money is spent at the more regional, national and international level.

Possible Strategies and Tactics: Alternative Fund

Establish a fund where parishioners can donate their weekly contributions. Give the parish council, or other elected parish body, power to determine where these funds are spent. Establish a criterion for decision making about money- possible priorities could include 1) supporting poor parishes 2) donating to local or international charity or justice organizations 3) maintaining the Church facilities and staff.

Initial tactics could utilize a pledge of non-cooperation, a Sunday ribbon-wearing campaign, or the distribution of Alternative Fund envelopes. Fundraisers utilizing parish talent would build the movement's spirit and funding. The movement could call for a targeted non-giving Sunday to demonstrate the movement's broad base and capacity. This tactic could utilize pre-printed messages to put into the collection baskets. As the fund grows, so does movement in organization and ability.

This tactic serves as both a constructive program (creating the inclusive structure we want to see), it consolidates the laity's decision-making power, and undermines the hierarchy's ability to control financial decision making.

Strategic Goal #2: Gain Sacramental Self-Determination

Brief Assessment

The seven sacraments of the Catholic Church- Baptism, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Confirmation, Marriage, Anointing of the Sick, and Holy Orders- can only be performed by men who are ordained. Many progressive Catholics remain in their Church because they value these sacraments and rituals. The decrease in priest numbers has not led to an opening of 'sacramental empowerment' of lay people. Rather, many priests are forced to serve as roving sacrament-providers, with little pastoral contact with Catholics. This trend alienates both lay and cleric alike, but the Vatican does not seem inclined to open sacramental duties to lay people. Additionally, sacraments have recently been misused as punishment for political acts- during the 2004 American Presidential race, St. Louis Archbishop Raymond Burke publicly stated that he would deny Communion to Senator John Kerry because of his pro-choice stance on abortion.

Possible Strategies and Tactics: Sacramental Community

Develop a curriculum, using Church criteria and materials, for training lay leaders called to sacramental ministry. In seeking participants for this training, pay special attention to those formerly disenfranchised from priesthood- married people, women, etc. Hold lay-led prayer services and liturgies to both empower the movement and undermine the Church's ability to control worship. Use symbols of support, like buttons or a sign-on for those being trained and those who support them. Within parishes, seek to place members of the 'sacramental community' prominently on the altar, in co-celebrating capacities, etc. A direct action could involve supporters refusing communion from the priest at the front of church and proceeding to the back of church to receive communion from a member of the sacramental community.

This strategy empowers the laity with education and the right of sacramental participation. It increases the number who can administer sacraments pastorally. It embodies the inclusive change we are seeking and creates new communities of people called to sacramental life.

Strategic Goal #3: Gain Parish Self-Determination

Brief Assessment

Some parishes don't have a parish council. More have parish councils that serve as rubber stamps for the priest's agenda. A few have parish councils with real input and decision-making power. And none have control over the hiring or firing of the 'executive director', or parish priest.

Possible Strategies and Tactics: Empowered Parish Councils

Begin with parishes that have active and committed parish councils. Develop some sample parish council resolutions that require council approval (and that remove the 'priestly veto') in areas of priest and staff firing and hiring, financial decisions, and parish priorities. Outline a document of parish roles that creates a horizontal, rather than hierarchical structure for decision making at the parish level. This strategy should take into account the needs of the priest to remain an active member, and important implementer of policy. Further resolutions could include the requirement for decisions to be made within a specific criterion of social justice considerations, which could be developed by a parish social justice committee.