

Adin
Ballou

Catechism
OF
Non-
Resistance

A New England clergyman who during his lifetime preached some nine thousand sermons and wrote about five hundred articles, Adin Ballou is one of the unsung heroes of American social reform and of the peace movement. His Universalist faith, whose principal tenet is that an infinitely good God must have decreed salvation for all people, may have inclined him toward socialism; he published a book on this subject, Practical Christian Socialism, in 1854. Earlier, he had founded the Hopedale Community in Milford, Massachusetts, with the object of establishing "an order of human society based on the sublime ideas of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man/sisterhood of woman, as taught and illustrated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Hopedale was a true sect-type community, its members binding themselves to abstain from murder, hatred, unchastity, alcohol, and the obligations of civil society.

This striving after Christian perfection led Ballou into the emerging peace movement as a founder, in 1838, of the New England Non-resistance Society and the author of Christian Non-Resistance (Philadelphia, 1846 and 1910), a rare volume useful for its illustrations of nonviolence in action. His memory as a pacifist has been kept alive by Tolstoy, and understandably so, for they were kindred spirits. Ballou, to some extent, and Tolstoy much more so, were both religious anarchists who abhorred government as inherently coercive and therefore hostile to life. Ballou is of interest today for two reasons: 1) from the purely historical standpoint he is a bridge connecting several traditions; the scriptural

pacifism and aloofness from government of the historic peace churches; the Quaker doctrine that love, expressed through nonviolent resistance, is a weapon against evil that removes the occasion for violence; the pacifist elements contained within Christian socialism; and later, the Social Gospel and the Satyagraha doctrine of Gandhi. 2) On a theoretical level he turns one of the main criteria of the just war into an argument for nonviolence. Nonviolent resistance to evil is simply more practical, less costly in every way, than war; as device for spreading this ideal, he gives prime place to the gradual leavening influence of a small, determined minority.

The following selection, from his Catechism of Nonresistance, has an interesting history. Possibly the rudimentary outline of a major work, the original text has been lost, surviving only in the lengthy fragment Ballou sent to Tolstoy and which Tolstoy later published in *The Kingdom of God is Within You*.

THE CATECHISM OF NON-RESISTANCE

Q. Whence comes the word non-resistance?

A. From the utterance: "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil." - Math. 5, 39.

Q. What does this word denote?

A. It denotes a lofty Christian virtue, commanded by Christ.

Q. Are we to understand the word nonresistance in its broad sense that is, as meaning that one should offer no resistance to evil whatsoever?

A. No; it should be understood literally as Christ taught it - that is, not to return evil for

evil. Evil should be resisted by all lawful means, but not by evil.

Q. From what does it appear that Christ gave that meaning to non-resistance?

A. From the words which he used on that occasion. He said: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also."

Q. Whom did he mean by the words "Ye have heard that it hath been said?"

A. The patriarchs and the prophets, and that which they spoke and which is contained in the Old Testament, that the Jews generally call the Law and Prophets.

Q. To what laws did Christ allude in the words: "Ye have heard?"

A. To those in which Noah, Moses and other prophets grant the use of personal violence against those who commit it, for the purpose of punishing and destroying evil deeds.

Q. Mention such commandments.

A. "Whosoever sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." Gen. 9, 6

"He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." Ex. C21, 12, 23, 24, 25.

"And he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death.

And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbor; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth." Lev. C24, 17 20

"And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified false against his brother; then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother. And thine eye shall not pity: but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." Deut. C19, 18 - 21

These are the injunctions of which Jesus speaks.

Noah, Moses, and the prophets taught that he who murders, mutilates, or tortures his neighbor doeth evil. In order to combat and destroy this evil, the evil-doer must be chastised by death, mutilation, or some personal torture. Transgressions are to be avenged by transgressions, murder by murder, torture by torture, evil by evil. Thus taught Noah, Moses, and the prophets. But Christ forbids all this. The Gospel says: "I say unto you resist ye not evil, avenge not one transgression by another, but rather bear a repitition of the offense from the evil-doer." That which has been allowed is now forbidden. Having understood what resistance we have been taught, we know exactly what Christ meant by non-resistance.

Q. Did the teaching of the Ancients admit of resisting transgression by transgression?

A. Yes, but Christ forbade it.

A Christian has no right in any case to take the life of, or to offend against the evildoer.

Q. May he not kill or wound another in self-defense?

A. No.

Q. May he enter a complaint to the magistrate for the purpose of chastising the offender?

A. No. For that which he does through others, he practically does for himself.

Q. May he fight in the army against foreign or domestic enemies?

A. Certainly not. He can take no part in war, or in the preparation therefor. He cannot make use of weapons. He cannot resist one transgression by another, whether he is alone or in company, either personally or through other agents.

Q. May he voluntarily select or drill soldiers for the government?

A. He cannot do this, if he wishes to be faithful to the law of Christ.

Q. May he voluntarily contribute money to assist a government which is supported by military power, executions, and violence in general?

A. No; unless the money is to be used for some special purpose, justifiable in itself, where the object and the means employed are good.

Q. May he pay taxes to such a government?

A. No; he should not pay taxes on his own accord, but he should not resist the levying of a tax. A tax imposed by the government is levied independently of the will of the citizens. It may not be resisted without recourse to violence, and a Christian should not use violence; therefore he must deliver his property to the forced damage caused by authorities.

Q. May a Christian vote at elections and take part in courts of law or in the government?

A. No. To take part in elections, courts of law, or in the administration of government is the same thing as participation in the violence of the government.

Q. What is the chief significance of the doctrine of non-resistance?

A. To show that it is possible to extirpate evil from one's own heart, as well as from that of

one's neighbor. This doctrine forbids men to do that which perpetuates and multiplies evil in this world. He who attacks another, and does him an injury, excites a feeling of hatred, the worst of all evil. To offend our neighbor because he has offended us, with ostensible motive of self-defense, means but to repeat the evil act against him as well as against ourselves - it means to beget, or at least to let loose, or to encourage the Evil Spirit whom we wish to expel. Satan cannot be driven out by Satan, falsehood cannot be driven out by falsehood, nor can evil be conquered by evil. True non-resistance is the only real method of resisting evil. It crushes the serpents head. It destroys and exterminates all evil feeling.

Q. But admitting that the idea is correct, is it practical?

A. As practical as any virtue commanded by the law of God. Good deeds cannot be performed under all circumstances without self-sacrifice, privations, suffering, and, in extreme cases, without the loss of life itself. But he who prizes life more than the fulfilment of God's will is already dead to the only true life. Such a man, in trying to save his life will lose it. Furthermore, wherever non-resistance costs the sacrifice of one's life, or of some essential advantage of life, resistance costs thousands of such sacrifices.

Non-resistance preserves; resistance destroys.

It is much safer to act justly than unjustly; to endure an offense rather than to resist it by violence; safer even in regard to the present life. If all men refused to resist evil the world would be a happy one.

Q. But if only a few were to act thus, what would become of them?

A. Even if but one man were to act thus, and the others should agree to crucify him, would it not be more glorious for him to die in the glory of non-resisting love, praying for his enemies, than live wearing the crown of Caesar, besprinkled with the blood of the murdered? But whether it be one man or thousands of men who are firmly determined not to resist evil by evil, still, whether in the midst of civilized or uncivilized neighbors, men who do not rely on violence are safer than those who do. A robber, a murderer, a villain, will be less likely to harm them if he finds them offering no armed resistance. "All they that take the sword shall perish by the sword" and he who seeks peace, who acts like a friend, who is inoffensive, who forgives and forgets injuries, generally enjoys peace or if he dies, he dies a blessed death.

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