Women in Christian Peacebuilding Movements:

The Women Who Influenced Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Leymah Gbowee and the Women's Liberian Mass Action for Peace, and the Necessity of Just and Inclusive Processes *post bellum*

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Within the past two decades, researchers have contributed to a growing body of evidence that inclusion of women within peace processes leads to more durable peace. A Report of the Secretary-General on women peace and security, published by the United Nations Security Council in 2020, confirmed that between 1992 and 2019, "women were, on average, just 13 percent of negotiators, 6 percent of mediators, and 6 per cent of signatories in major peace processes worldwide. About seven out of every ten peace processes did not include any women mediators or women signatories."[1] The United States Institute of Peace cites an International Peace Institute study that examined 182 signed peace agreements between 1989 and 2011 and found that "when women are included in peace processes, there is a 35 percent increase in probability that a peace agreement will last 15 years or more."[2] The United Nations first affirmed the vital role of women in peacebuilding processes in the year 2000, with Security Council Resolution 1325, and has since passed nine subsequent resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security.[3] . In light of the historical exclusion of women from leadership roles and the continued minimization of the role of women in negotiating or moderating peace processes, research on the role of women in historical and ongoing nonviolent movements should be carried out in multiple academic fields, including Religious Studies, with particular attention to the ways that Christian patriarchal systems and biases limited or minimized female leadership and how current and future peace processes can be more inclusive of women's participation and scholarly contributions.

Feminist historian Judith Bennett warns that women need more attention from historians, but that "inequality of the sexes should not be intellectualized in a way that forgets the hard lives of women in the past, the material forces that shaped and constrained women's activities, the ways that women coped with challenges and obstacles."[4] The study of Leymah Gbowee was inspired, in part, by Pope

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[1] Facts and figures: Women, peace, and security | What we do | UN Women – Headquarters
[2] The Essential Role of Women in Peacebuilding | United States Institute of Peace (usip.org)
[3] Promoting women, peace and security | United Nations Peacekeeping
[4] Bennett, Feminism and History, 258.

Francis' World Day for Peace message in 2017, which some argue foreshadows a future encyclical on nonviolence. In that message, he mentions those whom he holds as exemplars of nonviolence: Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Leymah Gbowee. The unusual inclusion of a woman leader, combined with her affiliation with the two other leaders whom the Dr. Aiken's syllabus highlights, piqued my curiosity. Gbowee's description of her organized nonviolence does not disappoint. This paper will examine the autobiography of Dr. Martin Luther King's description of the nonviolent campaign for justice in the civil rights movement in the latter 20th century United States through a feminist lens, including his treatment of women and his thought influence on the field of nonviolence and female leaders in nonviolence, the autobiography of Nobel Prize winner Leymah Gbowee, who led a women-based peace movement in Liberia, and the importance of inclusion of women in post-conflict peace processes, as well as the necessity of solidarity within oppressed groups, in order to establish a more robust and sustainable peace.

Women who Influenced Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King, Jr., names thirty women in his autobiography, which spans from his childhood until his assassination in Memphis. Of those thirty women, twelve were civil rights leaders, six were relatives, five were friends, ex-girlfriends, and a secretary employee, four were 'children martyrs,' two were mentioned as prominent world leaders, and one was a crazy would-be assassin. In terms of the pages devoted to these women, King devotes the most writing by far to his wife, Coretta Scott King, whom he mentions on forty-three pages. He writes of his daughter Yolanda Denise King on fourteen pages, but in most instances she is still an infant, smiling or playing or crying at night. She speaks once, to ask her mother why her father is in jail, to which Coretta replies that "he is in jail to help people."[5] His third-most mentioned woman is Rosa Parks (eight pages), followed by a tie between his mother Alberta

[5] Autobiography of Martin Luther King, 158

Williams King and daughter Chevene King (four times each), although Chevene is spoken about as one of the children and does not speak in the text. Next in order of frequency, with three pages each are Juanita Abernathy (wife of Ralph Abernathy, mentioned only in conjunction with Ralph) and Izola Ware Curry (King's first would-be assassin, "a woman who would later be judged insane," who stabbed him in the chest). He mentions twice his daughter Bernice Albertine King, with text that simply notes her birth. He also twice mentions civil rights leaders Helen Gahagan Douglas and Fannie Lou Hamer. The remaining women are mentioned once.

King often notes the contributions of women to the civil rights movement. During the bus boycott in Montgomery, King mentions the important role of Irene West, who helped to call civic leaders to the first organization meeting, and offered her "large, green Cadillac to her assigned dispatch station, and for several hours in the morning and again in the afternoon one could see this distinguished and handsome gray-haired chauffeur driving people to work and home again."[6] "Another loyal driver," King writes, "was Jo Ann Robinson. Attractive, fair-skinned, and still youthful, Jo Ann came by her goodness naturally. She did not need to learn her nonviolence from any book. Apparently indefatigable, she, perhaps more than any other person, was active on every level of the protest. She took part in both the executive board and strategy committee meetings. When the MIA newsletter was inaugurated a few months after the protest began, she became its editor. She was sure to be present whenever negotiations were in progress. And although she carried a full teaching load at Alabama State, she still found time to drive both morning and afternoon."[7] He had earlier mentioned Jo Ann Robinson, describing her as one of two prominent leaders in Montgomery. "Two members of the Social and Political Action Committee – Jo Ann Robinson and Rufus Lewis – were among the first people to become

[6] Autobiography of Martin Luther King, 66
[7] *ibid*

prominent in the bus boycott that was soon to mobilize the latent strength of Montgomery's Negro community," he writes of the early civil rights movement.[8]

While reflecting on the Nobel Prize, King credits a number of individuals, but lists a woman, Fannie Lou Hamer, as the second acknowledgement. He first describes her contribution to the movement. "We will never forget Aaron Henry and Fannie Lou Hamer," he writes. Their testimony educated a nation and brought political powers to their knees in repentance, for the [Democratic] convention voted never again to seat a delegation that was racially segregated."[9] He later writes of Hamer, "In the final analysis, it must be said that this Nobel Prize was won by a movement of great people, whose discipline, wise restraint, and majestic courage has led them down a nonviolent course in seeking to establish a reign of justice and a rule of love across this nation of ours: Herbert Lee, Fannie Lou Hamer…"[10] When King lists the names of white supporters, he includes women in approximately half of his acknowledgements, which approximates the participation of women in the Civil Rights Movement: "I am thankful, however, that some of our white brothers in the South have grasped the meaning of this social revolution and committed themselves to it. They are still too few in quantity, but they are big in quality. Some – such as Ralph McGill, Lillian Smith, Harry Golden, James McBride Dabbs, Ann Braden, and Sarah Patton Boyle – have written about our struggle in eloquent and prophetic terms."[11] King also notes the important contribution of Dorothy Cotton, one of four Southern Christian Leadership Conference staff whose outreach to colleges and high schools "exceeded our fondest dreams." [12][13] He mentions the leadership of women like Mary McLeod Bethune and Mahalia Jackson

[8] Autobiography of Martin Luther King 48
[9] Autobiography of Martin Luther King 253
[10] Autobiography of Martin Luther King 257
[11] Autobiography of Martin Luther King 199
[12] Autobiography of Martin Luther King 206.
[13] Dorothy Cotton is only mentioned once in King's autobiography. She was later named director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. In 2019, Pulitzer Prize-winning King biographer David Garrow published FBI files that described Cotton as King's "constant paramour." Dorothy Cotton later told Dr. Jason Miller, a professor at North Carolina State University, that she and Dr. King were best friends and lovers. Dr. King's affairs were first

when imagining the future of the four girls killed in the bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham on September 15, 1963, Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley.[14]

King's description of his wife most frequently emphasized her supportiveness (four pages) and her calmness during crisis (four pages). After that, he recalls his correspondence with her (three pages), and her advice (two pages). What made King fall in love with Coretta, however, was her mind. "I will never forget, the first discussion we had was about the question of racial and economic injustice and the question of peace. She had been actively engaged in movements dealing with these problems. After an hour, my mind was made up. I said… we ought to get married someday."[15] His experience of marriage to Coretta is one of calm support. King describes Coretta's supportiveness when he was elected president of the Montgomery Improvement Association: "I told her, somewhat hesitantly – not knowing what her reaction would be – that I had been elected president of the new association. I need not have worried. Naturally surprised, she still saw that since the responsibility had fallen on me, I had no alternative but to accept it. She did not need to be told that we would now have even less time together, and she seemed undisturbed at the possible danger to all of us in my new position. 'You know," she said quietly, 'that whatever you do, you have my backing."[16] As time between King and his wife diminished, "she never complained, and was always there when I needed her… calm and unruffled, Coretta moved quietly about the business of keeping the household going. When I needed to talk things out, she was

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alluded to by his friend Ralph Abernathy in a book published a decade after King's assassination, and were later substantiated by FBI files and recordings, as well as interviews with Ms. Cotton. According to Cotton, the morning that King died, she and King had an argument that caused her to fly home early: she had waited up for him all night in her motel room, but instead of coming to her room after his speech to the United Mine Workers, he had intimate encounters with two other women that night. Georgia Davis Powers, one of the other women, references the affair in her book I Shared the Dream

[14] Autobiography of Martin Luther King 230

[15] Autobiography of Martin Luther King, 35

[16] Autobiography of Martin Luther King, 58

ready to listen, or to offer suggestions when I asked for them."[17] After a bomb went off on King's front porch, he asked if his wife and baby were all right and rushed home. He recounts, "I rushed into the house to see if Coretta and Yoki were safe. When I walked into the bedroom and saw my wife and daughter uninjured, I drew my first full breath in many minutes. Coretta was neither bitter nor panicky. She had accepted the whole thing with unbelievable composure. As I noticed her calmness I became more calm myself."[18] He writes of her admiringly, "through all of these trying and difficult days, Coretta remained amazingly calm and even-tempered. In the midst of the most tragic experiences, she never became panicky or overemotional. She was always strong and courageous. While she had certain natural fears and anxieties concerning my welfare, she never allowed them to hamper my active participation in the movement. And she seemed to have no fear for herself… I am convinced that if I had not had a wife with the fortitude, strength, and calmness of Coretta, I could not have stood up amid the ordeals and tensions surrounding the Montgomery movement. In the darkest moments, she always brought the light of hope."[19] Jeanne Theoharis is critical of history's treatment of Coretta Scott King. "Both [Rosa] Parks and King were celebrated for their modesty and respectability," writes Theoharis, "… King for being gentle and beautiful… lurking behind these characterizations was an unspoken castigation and stereotyping of other black women, for being outspoken and outraged or being poor or overweight or loud or angry – and therefore not appropriate for national recognition."[20] King fell in love with Coretta Scott's mind, ideas, and passion for peacebuilding, but he takes great care in his autobiography to emphasize her supportive role, her passivity, her calm and even-tempered disposition.

Like his descriptions of his wife, King describes his mother first as "gentle and sweet," who worked "behind the scenes" and was "soft-spoken and easygoing."[21] Her inner fortitude, however,

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[17] Autobiography of Martin Luther King, 72
[18] Autobiography of Martin Luther King, 79
[19] Autobiography of Martin Luther King, 89
[20] Civil Rights History from the Ground Up, 408
[21] Autobiography of Martin Luther King, 3

caused her to "never adjust herself to the system of segregation. She instilled a sense of self-respect in all her children from the very beginning… she taught me that I should feel a sense of 'somebodiness'… she made it clear that she opposed this system [of the Jim Crow south] and that I must never allow it to make me feel inferior."[22] Within this description, one can hear echoes of the driving force behind King's nonviolence – a commitment to the outward expression of inward dignity. For King, he carried this sense of dignity further, eventually believing that because participation in the system itself cost one's own sense of dignity, all people, including the oppressed, are morally obligated to active nonviolent resistance to unjust systems. "[N]oncooperation with evil is just as much a moral duty as cooperation with good," King decides.[23] Part of this was because of the cost of dignity that evil oppression demanded of the oppressed: "Segregation… [led to] a corroding loss of self-respect [which] corroded their moral fiber. Their discontent was turned inward on themselves."[24] The cost went beyond a sense of dignity, and into spirituality. King writes, "the way of acquiescence leads to moral and spiritual suicide. The way of violence leads to bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers. But the way of nonviolence leads to redemption and the creation of beloved community."[25] While King emphasizes his mother's gentleness and soft-spoken nature, one can see the origins what is arguably the true spirit of King's nonviolent movement goes beyond gentleness and is rooted in a firm fortitude that stubbornly insisted on one's own innate human dignity.

King speaks admiringly of Rosa Parks' role in the civil rights movement. "One can never understand the action of Mrs. Parks until one realizes that the cup of endurance eventually runs over, and the human personality cries out, 'I can't take it no longer.' Mrs. Parks' refusal to move back was her intrepid and courageous affirmation to the world that she had had enough… her character was

[22] Autobiography of Martin Luther King, 3-4
[23] Autobiography of Martin Luther King, 88
[24] Autobiography of Martin Luther King 153
[25] Autobiography of Martin Luther King 134

impeccable and her dedication deep-rooted. All of these traits made her one of the most respected people in the Negro community."[26] Walking out of her trial, three men, Ralph Abernathy, E.D. Nixon, and Rev E.N. French developed the idea for an organization to guide and direct the protest. "These men," writes King, "were wise enough to see that the moment had come for a clearer order and direction."[27] That evening, a few hours after Parks was convicted for disobeying the city segregation ordinance, Martin Luther King was elected president of the new organization. During his first speech, which he describes as "the most decisive speech of my life,"[28] he says, "without notes or manuscript, I told the story of what happened to Mrs. Parks."[29] He later argues that Rosa Parks' action was not the cause of the protest, "but merely the precipitating factor. 'Our action,' I said, 'is the culmination of a series of injustices and indignities that have existed over the years."[30]

While King is careful throughout his autobiography to attribute credit to dozens of women who helped to form his fundamental beliefs, demonstrate leadership, and inspire further action to the civil rights movement, I argue that King failed to adequately center women's experiences. He does not mention Claudette Colvin, who was the first young woman to challenge the segregation of buses in Montgomery at the age of fifteen. In an interview with NPR, Colvin says that the civil rights movement organized around Parks because "she was an adult. They didn't think teenagers would be reliable… her [Parks'] skin texture was the kind that people associate with the middle class. She fit that profile."[31] After Colvin refused to give up her seat, she was arrested, jailed, and shunned by her community before becoming pregnant out of wedlock. Concerned that she would not win public affection, civil rights leaders instead chose Parks as a symbol of the movement, and she reenacted the act of protest nine

[26] Autobiography of Martin Luther King, 51
[27] Autobiography of Martin Luther King, 56
[28] Autobiography of Martin Luther King, 58
[29] Autobiography of Martin Luther King, 60
[30] Autobiography of Martin Luther King, 69
[31] Before Rosa Parks, There Was Claudette Colvin : NPR

months later. According to biographer Garrow, Rosa Parks, who was secretary of the NAACP, had a "natural gravitas" and was an "inherently impressive person," but he also believes that attention to Colvin "is a healthy corrective, because 'the reality of the movement was often young people and often more than fifty percent women.' The images you most often see," an article on Colvin by NPR notes, "are men in suits."[32] Rosa Parks, who had been an activist for twenty years, reformed the NAACP Youth Council in 1954, encouraging young people to take more prominent positions against segregation. "When 15-year old Claudette Colvin was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus in March 1955, many Black Montgomerians were outraged by Ms. Colvin's arrest, but some came to decide that the teenager was too feisty and emotional, and not the right test case," writes Dr. Jeanne Theoharis, professor of political science.[33] "Mrs. Parks encouraged the young woman's membership in the Youth Council and was the only adult leader, according to Ms. Colvin, to stay in touch with her the summer after her arrest." [34]

King's description of the events surrounding Park's arrest, trial, and conviction are both disconcerting and all too familiar to the female reader. By this time, Parks has dedicated two decades of her life to advocacy for civil rights. She was a nationally-placed member of the NAACP, one of the most respected citizens of Montgomery, and had the right disposition to win public favor. She refused to give up her seat on a segregated bus, was arrested, and had just been convicted and fined. The act evoked outrage throughout Montgomery and across the country, because it was an assault on the hard-earned reputation of a just and courageous woman. Rosa Parks, it could be convincingly argued, was poised to become the leader and voice of the Civil Rights Movement.

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[32] ibid
[33] Opinion | The Real Rosa Parks Story Is Better Than the Fairy Tale - The New York Times | Ghostarchive
[34] ibid

While Parks was bearing the consequences of defying segregation laws inside the courtroom, three men with local authority (male pastors of churches in Montgomery) walking out of the courthouse planned to leverage the occasion to take the movement to the next level. But at the gathering they planned for that evening, attended by 15,000 people, it is King, not Parks, who was a shoe-in to lead the nascent organization. King was a little-known, young pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church, while Parks was a seasoned activist who had just been identified by local and national civil rights organizations as someone who would move the national conscience. Like King, Parks was a committed Christian whose nonviolence work was rooted in the gospel. "From my upbringing and the Bible I learned people should stand up for rights just as the children of Israel stood up to Pharaoh," she said.[35]

At the meeting where King was vaulted into prominence in front of 15,000 attendees moved by Parks' leadership to attend the gathering, "Parks was recognized and introduced but not asked to speak, despite a standing ovation and calls from the crowd for her to do so," writes Emilye Crosby. "I do recall asking someone if I should say anything," Parks remembered, "and someone saying, 'Why, you've said enough."[36] Instead, her own story is told by Dr. King to the crowd, and he is vaulted to national fame. Parks later lost her job at a department store due to economic sanctions against activists, and then her husband lost his job as a barber after being told not to speak about his wife's role in desegregation. Parks was never employed by King's organization; she did not join him for his public speaking tours. It was not until eleven years after her arrest that the Parks family income recovered to its previous amount. During that decade of hardship, King reached heights of celebrity around the world. His first speech, which he calls his most decisive speech, leveraged the sacrifice of Rosa Parks to launch a civil rights movement for which King eventually became the national voice. Within this context, King's

[35] The Rebellious Life of Ms. Rosa Parks, 208
[36] Civil Rights History from the Ground Up: Local Struggles, a National Movement, 408

eventual downplaying of the role of Parks in the Civil Rights movement (she was "not the cause of the protest, but merely the precipitating factor")[37] seems particularly stinging.

At the same time, the way he speaks of Parks echoes his prayer for himself: "Help me, O God, to see myself in my true perspective… that a boycott would have taken place in Montgomery, Alabama, if I had never come to Alabama… O God, help me to see that where I stand today, I stand because others helped me to stand there and because the forces of history projected me there."[38] While King might not have reflected on the patriarchal preference of the historical "forces" of the 1950s, he strove to acknowledge with humility the limits of his own self-determination. He believed himself destined to change the course of U.S. history and change it he did. But I add, with the small and often-silenced voice of women in history, whether Rosa Parks might not also have been destined for a more prominent role, whether a more just arc of history might have included Rosa Parks, permitted to speak to 15,000 people inspired by her leadership just before the leadership of the MIA was chosen, freed from the oppressive subjugation of her sex at the same time that the nation rose up to break the oppressive shackles of segregation. I ask whether the Christian church, had it allowed women pastors, might have set the stage for a woman to join the three male pastors on the steps of the courtroom after Parks' sentencing. Such visible and vocal inclusion of women would have, the current research on peacebuilding suggests, made for an even more just resolution to the civil rights concerns of the mid-twentieth century. Women were certainly included and attributed, as demonstrated in the initial analysis of King's mention of women in his autobiography, but every instance of unjust exclusion has negative consequences for the whole, for "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."[39]

Leymah Gbowee and the Women's Liberian Mass Action for Peace

[37] Autobiography 69
[38] Autobiography 105
[39] Letter from Birmingham Jail, Autobiography 189

Leymah Gbowee won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for her role in ending the Second Liberian Civil War through organized mass nonviolent protest of the interreligious women's Liberian Mass Action for Peace. The documentary *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* raised the profile of the nonviolent action in Liberia to new heights, and she currently serves as President of Gbowee Peace Foundation Africa, pushing for greater inclusion of women and leaders and agents of change in Africa. Her autobiography, Mighty Be Our Powers, documents her witness of the slaughter of the first Liberian Civil War soon after she enrolled in college. The conflict wreaks havoc and devastation on her family, and they fled violence, narrowly escaping a massacre of women and children in the church where they were sheltering.

Traumatized and displaced, Gbowee finds herself in an abusive relationship with a man who routinely rapes her. Although she claims early in the book that she was not raped during the war, she describes a pattern of rape within her cycle of domestic abuse. She recounts the first time her abuser, Daniel, hit her and then forced himself on her. "I should end this," she thought, and then found out that she was pregnant two weeks later. Her second child was also a product of rape. She recounts, "sometimes after he hit me, he'd want to have sex, then that struggle would get violent too… sex was not something I could negotiate or avoid…. By July [five months after the birth of her first child], I was pregnant again."[40] Likewise with her third child. She had begun working with refugees, and was growing in her sense of self, and began considering leaving again. "I might have [ended the relationship,] she wrote, "but for two things. The first was that Daniel came home late one night, and he and I had a very bad fight… when we stopped quarrelling, he wanted sex. He wouldn't listen to my 'no' and forced what he wanted. Within a month, I recognized from my body's signs that I was pregnant again."[41] He abused her throughout her pregnancy. She became pregnant a fourth time, but before she knew for sure that she was pregnant, she gathered her children and left her abuser.

[40] Mighty be Our Powers 48
[41] Mighty Be Our Powers 54

Gbowee's experiences of domestic abuse connected her to the first step in her peacebuilding journey. "Before you can take action, something must shift inside of you," she writes.[42] Finally, one night, she has a breakthrough. "I was a twenty-six-year-old woman with children who depended on me," she wrote. "I had to stop blaming my parents, Daniel, single motherhood, war for the way I was… my children had suffered so much, and they deserved so much more than they had. I was the only one who could give it to them."[43] The very circumstance that caused Gbowee to feel trapped in a cycle of domestic abuse – her motherhood – became the driving purpose for her to turn her life around. She began to run a Trauma Healing workshop, and eventually took steps to address her own trauma. "Hizkias Assefa wrote that there are four dimensions required for true reconciliation: you must be reconciled with God, with yourself, with your environment, and finally with the person who offended you," Gbowee writes. She acknowledges that her anger at her past relationship was holding her back. In a step towards healing herself, Gbowee travels to see Daniel again.

> "'Do you know why I came here today?'
>
> He shook his head.
>
> 'I came to let you go.'
>
> 'Hmm,' he answered, 'I thought you let me go years ago.'
>
> "Not in my heart," I said. "I still carried a lot of anger, so I've come to say that I forgive you. I forgive you. I'm moving on."
>
> There was silence, then, "Thank you."[44]

[42] Mighty Be Our Powers 72
[43] Mighty Be Our Powers 73
[44] Mighty Be Our Powers 103

Gbowee's reconciliation with her abuser inspired the first significant step in her peacebuilding work. She set aside a separate time, after her workshops on Trauma Healing, where women could share their experiences. She recounts:

> "As each woman took her turn talking, she would hold a candle so everyone else could see her face. I expected to hear about the war. Bus as would happen again and again in the future, the stories the women needed to share that night started long before the fighting did. The first to speak told us about her husband, whose unending demand for sex had burdened her with too many children. The head of port security confessed that she'd never believed she had any value as a person. A mother of four talked about an abusive marriage that she'd entered in her teens. Each speaker wept with relief when she finished; each spoke the same words: "This is the first time I have ever told this story." The women talked for five straight hours, until 3 AM."[45]

Gandhi writes, "God is Love. But deep down in me, I used to say that though God may be Love God is Truth above all. If it is possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description of God, I have come to the conclusion that God is Truth."[46] The basis of Gbowee's work was creating space for women to speak the truth, free from cultural constraints, free from judgment. There was power and healing in gathering women together to share their truths.

Gbowee reflects on how, at that time, she was often the only woman at the table, how she was often mistaken for the cook, and she began to question why women were not more integrated into the peace processes. "Women are the sponges," she writes. "We take it all in – the trauma of separated families, the death of loved ones. We listen to what our husbands and children tell us, we look at the destruction of our communities and belief systems, and we soak up that pain too. We hold it all in

[45] Mighty Be Our Powers, 105
[46] Essential Writings, Gandhi, 73

because we need to be strong, and complaining – or even sharing – is a sign of weakness. But holding in that kind of misery is as crippling as holding onto rage. I had found a way [with the Trauma Healing sessions] for us to squeeze it out."[47]

Gbowee understands the human person as a microcosm – like Gandhi, she believes that the self must be healed and purified before it can inspire peace. "Nonviolence is not a garment to be put on and off at will," Gandhi said. "Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our being." Gbowee was inspired by Gandhi's example of nonviolence. "Who was the Liberian Gandhi?" Gbowee asks herself. "I wanted to be like him."[48]

Like King, Gbowee sees the biblical dimension of her people's suffering. ""Fleeing from a battle that has suddenly overcome your home, running in terror under a hail of bullets: it was an experience Liberians came to call 'Exodus.'"[49] Professor Charles Marsh writes of King, "we do not find King speaking here of God by speaking of the boycott in a loud voice… the social movement as the mode in which the divine idea comes to expression. Rather, we find King speaking of the boycott by speaking of God... King rendered the civil rights movement as theological drama."[50] Likewise, flight from the war was for Gbowee and the Liberian people a lived, theological drama.

Narration is the means by which Gbowee communicates her experience of God. She describes, in her youth, running from her abuser: "One night, I ran from the bedroom, my nightgown in pieces, grabbed my Bible and shut myself in the bath. 'God,' I said, 'Guide me with a verse.' I let the book fall open: Isaiah 54. '*For the Lord has called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit… O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay*

[47] Mighty Be Our Powers 107
[48] Mighty Be Our Powers 107
[49] Mighty Be Our Powers 55
[50] Civil Rights as Theological Drama, Marsh 4, 5

thy foundations with sapphires…' … I came back to Isaiah 54 again and again over the next decade. I knew it was my promise."[51] She evokes powerful Christological imagery, such as the Crowning with Thorns (the third sorrowful mystery of the Catholic rosary and a suffering of Christ before His crucifixion). One of her Trauma Healing sessions she called Crown and Thorns. "By the end of that powerful session," she writes, "you see they're one and the same."[52] Within this session, she reframes women's identities in relation to the good. The women come to see themselves as mothers, providers, and peacemakers. This exercise recalls Gandhi's intentional use of language to reframe identities: he renamed untouchables "Harijans" or "Children of God." In his renaming, he situates members of the lowest caste in relation to God, rather than in relation to their oppressors, those who will not touch them. In this way, attention is given to God (rather than oppressive persons) and to the sacrality of human life and centeredness of those on the margins. The reframing of the women's identities in the Trauma and Healing workshops were necessary steps before the women could take steps to organize for peace.

Gbowee's Trauma Healing workshop laid the foundation for her later nonviolent organizing that eventually garnered worldwide attention. She transitioned from her Trauma Healing position and invested more time in the Women In Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET). She organized women from across Liberia, and across religious lines, to protest nonviolently for peace. "In the past, we were silent," she says to a crowd, "But after being killed, raped, dehumanized, and infected with diseases, and watching our children and families destroyed, war has taught us that the future lies in saying *no* to violence and *yes* to peace! We will not relent until peace prevails!"[53] They demanded of the president of Liberia an end to the second Liberian Civil War, and an answer in three days. When he did not

[51] Mighty Be Our Powers 47
[52] Mighty Be Our Powers 117
[53] Mighty Be Our Powers 135

respond, the women staged a massive sit-in. “The women of Liberia had been taken to our physical, psychological, and spiritual limits,” she writes. “But over the past few months, we had discovered a new source of power and strength: each other. We’d been pushed to the wall and had only two options: give up or join up to fight back. Giving up wasn’t an option. Peace was the only way we could survive. We would fight to bring it.”[54] Fifteen hundred women joined for her sit-in as Gbowee cried and prayed. The president drove by and saw the gathered women, but there was still not response. Gbowee describes their prayers: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want…” “In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful, Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds…”[55] Finally, they have the opportunity to speak with the president, who agrees to open dialogue with the rebels. The women persist. They called for a nationwide sex strike so that women could persuade their partners to end the war. “The message was that while the fighting continued, no one was innocent – not doing anything to stop it made you guilty.”[56] Like Gandhi and King before her, Gbowee saw complicity with injustice as a moral wrong, and action for justice a moral imperative.

When violence broke out again in Monrovia while endless ‘peace talks’ at a U.N. Conference led to nothing, the women had had enough. Just before the conference’s lunch break, the women looped arms and blocked the doors. “No one will come out of this place until a peace agreement is signed,” she said. When security guards approached her, she threatened to strip naked. “In threatening to strip,” she explains, “I had summoned up a traditional power. In Africa, it’s a terrible curse to see an elderly or married woman deliberately bare herself… for this group of men to see a woman naked would be almost like a death sentence. Men are born through women’s vaginas, and it’s as if by exposing ourselves we say ‘now we take back the life we gave you.’ Fear passed through the hall. ‘Madame, no!’”

[54] Mighty Be Our Powers 137
[55] Mighty Be Our Powers 138
[56] Mighty Be Our Powers 147

cried a general present.[57] The women begin to share about their families dying in the conflict, their children who are starving, and the attendees listened. Sensing openness to dialogue, Gbowee modified her demands, requiring that all attendees join every session and refrain from insults to the protestors. "The Liberian war didn't end of the July day we blocked the hall in Accra," she wrote, "… but what we did marked the beginning of the end. The atmosphere at the peace talks changed from circuslike to somber. On August 11, Charles Taylor resigned the presidency and agreed to go into exile in Nigeria."[58]

"Never forget," said Martin Luther King, Jr., "that freedom is not something voluntarily given by the oppressor. It is something that must be demanded by the oppressed."[59]

Inclusion of Women in Theories and Practices of Jus post bellum

According to Bishop Dr. Robert McElroy, Pope John XXIII saw peace built on "human rights, democratic institutions, and collective security."[60] The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops contributed to the growing body of Catholic thought on just peace in the teaching document *The Challenge of Peace*, in which they note that while the just-war tradition is still necessary, it is not sufficient; the church has a moral responsibility to join with others to build peace and to develop an ethic, theology, and practice of peace."[61] Since then, the growing field of *jus post bellum* has examined factors that promote healing after conflict. Because violence is cyclic[62] on both developmental/interpersonal[63] and systems levels, justice after conflict is critical for preventing another devolution into violence. An evolving academic

[57] Mighty Be Our Powers 162
[58] Mighty Be Our Powers 163
[59] Autobiography of Martin Luther King 353
[60] The Catholic Church and Peacebuilding: Bridging the Gap Between People Power and Peace Processes, USIP 9/2020
[61] Cusimano Love 75
[62] Understanding the Conflict Cycle — Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education (psu.edu)
[63] Conflict Cycle: A Useful Model for Child and Youth Care Workers (From Choices in Caring: Contemporary Approaches to Child and Youth Care Work, P 19-38, 1990, Mark A Krueger and Norman W Powell, eds. -- See NCJ-124239) | Office of Justice Programs (ojp.gov)

field describes how the just war tradition is making space for a new development of a just peace tradition in Catholic thought: jus post bellum, or justice after conflict.

King distinguishes between the absence of conflict and true peace, speaking of "an uneasy peace in which the Negro was forced patiently to accept insult, injustice, and exploitation. It was negative peace. True peace is not merely the absence of some negative force – tension, confusion, or war; it is the presence of some positive force – justice, goodwill, and brotherhood."[64] Beyond reconciliation and restoration, Catholic teaching has "a more expansive view of restoration," writes Cusimano Love. Citing Mark Allman, she says that restoration "establishes a societal, political, and economic environment that allows people to pursue a life that is meaningful and dignified. In short, the goal of war is not simply peace, but conditions that allow citizens to flourish as individuals and as members of a community." [65]

"Peace isn't a moment," writes Gbowee, "it's a very long process… we'd shown women's awesome power, but to me, our actions were the foundation of a movement, not its end product. It was time now to build on what we'd done, so in the future women's concerns wouldn't be pushed aside and we'd be full partners in running our communities."[66] A central criteria of restoration after conflict is "that of establishing civil society," writes Dr. Maryann Cusimano Love, Associate Professor of International Relations at the Catholic University of America, "creating the necessary social space for men and women to begin the work of restoring a nation's life."[67] A joint report by the Georgetown Institute on Women, Peace and Security and the Permanent Mission of the UAE to the UN found that "the post-conflict transition period is a critical window in the peace-security continuum, not only to

[64] Autobiography of Martin Luther King 455
[65] What Kind of Peace Do We Seek? Emerging Norms of Peacebuilding in Key U.S. Institutions, by Maryann Cusimano Love, 81
[66] Mighty Be Our Powers 168
[67] Cusimano Love 77

determine whether or not violence will relapse in a community, but also to secure women's political participation and support legal reforms mandating gender inclusion in government institutions. Increased women's meaningful representation reduces the likelihood of renewed conflict and is associated with more equitable and sustainable policy outcomes... However, we continue to see slow and uneven progress toward increasing women's global inclusion, and women remain underrepresented in participatory processes both at the national and sub-national levels."[68]

Inclusion of women in peace processes is associated with more sustainable peace. "The evidence is overwhelming," found a report by Inclusive Security. "Where women's inclusion is prioritized, peace is more likely – particularly when women influence decision-making."[69] This is because women tend to moderate extremism, promote dialogue, bridge divides and mobilize coalitions, and prioritize different issues during peace processes than men would.[70] Women suffer more severely in conflict, especially in ethnic wars and wars in failed states[71] due to the indirect effects of war such as human rights abuses, economic devastation, infectious diseases, and a breakdown in social order.[72] "Perhaps because of these unique experiences during war," writes Marie Reilly, "women raise different priorities during peace negotiations. They frequently expand the issues under consideration—taking talks beyond military action, power, and territory to consider social and humanitarian needs that belligerents fail to prioritize…. [and to] address development and human rights issues related to the underlying causes of the conflict."[73]

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[68] Print (georgetown.edu)
[69] O'Reilly 11
[70] O'Reilly 8
[71] Plumper and Neumayer, Abstract
[72] O'Reilly 8, Anderlini, Women Building Peace: International Alert and the Initiative of Inclusive Security, *Inclusive Security, Sustainable Peace*.
[73] O'Reilly 8

Gbowee describes the challenges women faced in getting involved in political life. “Women needed a space where they could assemble and set up a committee to work with local decisionmakers,” she concludes. Villages agreed to donate plots of land to build “peace huts,” and the Evangelical Lutheran Church donated $20,000 for the structures to be built. Gbowee, through her work with child soldiers as well as at national and international organizing levels, understands the connection between person-person conflict and person-state conflict. Healing must happen at the level of the human person, personal friendships, and small communities before it can happen at a national level.

Finally, solidarity within oppressed groups is a necessity for a functional movement. Even during the conflict, women of differing political persuasions banded together and shared information during the Liberian peace processes. A major impediment to Gbowee’s optimism and continued work was the breakdown of solidarity between women. Gbowee laments the “tear them down syndrome,” when she felt targeted by other women who resent her success. Likewise, solidarity between those of different social or economic classes is necessary for lasting change. In his final speech, King called for unity among all African Americans: “the Negro ‘haves’ must join hands with the Negro ‘have nots.’”[74] Gandhi’s welcoming of the “untouchable” caste emphasized the need for solidarity. Groups that work for justice must have internal processes that are just and inclusive, and they must avoid infighting and division, lest their shared goals be frustrated.

Conclusion

Gandhi, King, and Gbowee are three exemplary cases of faith-based nonviolent resistance for justice, named as inspirations to the current pope of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis. King argued that, in order for nonviolence to be effective, it must be “organized” and “sustained.”[75] A striking

[74] Autobiography 352
[75] Autobiography of Martin Luther King, 98

commonality between the writings of Gandhi, King, and Gbowee is the persistence and patience required to persevere for justice, the humility and willingness to work together with large organizations of people, and the commitment to disciplined organizing, even at personal deprivation, hunger, or harm. King says that Gandhi taught him that if nonviolence is "planned" and "positive in action" it can be effective "even under totalitarian regimes."[76] Gbowee's and Gandhi's successful faith-based nonviolent action campaigns demonstrate that possibility. Dr. Erica Chenoweth's research found that between 1900 and 2006, nonviolent campaigns were twice as likely to succeed as violent insurgencies, resulted in a higher prevalence of post-conflict democratic institutions, and were 15 percent less likely to be followed by civil war. Nonviolent campaigns were four times larger than violent insurgencies, more inclusive, and more diverse by attracting more ambivalent people than a violent conflict would. Chenoweth's research found, moreover, that once 3.5% of the population engaged in protest activities, the protest was always successful – and only nonviolent campaigns had a record of exceeding 3.5% participation by the population.[77]

Gbowee's mass organized nonviolent protests had the spirit of King and Gandhi. Her approach to peace from a trauma-informed perspective aligns with Gandhi's understanding of peace as an outward expression of an inward reality. By engaging specifically with women, she identifies traumas that are disproportionately borne by women and creates space where they can speak, listen, and heal. Within the Civil Rights movement, empowerment of the *voices* of established female leaders in the Civil Rights movement like Rosa Parks would have strengthened the movement and allowed the justice to be more complete and more durable. Like King, Gbowee is a powerful public speaker and worked within complex structures that helped to coordinate mass action for peace. She dialogues with outside partners, but her efforts on organizing focus on those who are excluded from negotiations and from the

[76] Autobiography 130
[77] The success of nonviolent civil resistance: Erica Chenoweth at TEDxBoulder - YouTube

demands of justice. Like Rosa Parks, Gbowee dedicated the early decades of her life to the practice of peacebuilding and justice. Gbowee moved on to speak at international levels, getting involved in multilateral initiatives to include more women's voices in political and peace processes. A documentary about her nonviolent work raised her profile to international acclaim.

Lessons from the nonviolent organized activism of Gandhi, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Leymah Gbowee, rooted in and identified by a deep spiritual faith in God within a specific religious tradition, can and should be applied to ongoing processes for peace, both within stable societies with persistent racial and economic inequalities, as well as weak or failing states under authoritarian regimes. In particular, a growing body of research indicates that inclusion of marginalized voices in peace and democratic processes, especially of women and of oppressed ethnic and racial groups, leads to a more just, more durable, and more positive peace. Inclusion of faith leaders in peace processes allows for continued nonviolent, faith-based activism that has been so effective in the 20th and 21st centuries. Awareness of the times when women's voices were silenced is just as important as awareness of times when women were able to change the course of history with their public, transformative leadership, so that patterns of exclusion can be named and recognized while successful strategies that include and pay attention to marginalized voices can be replicated.

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