

Racism and Discrimination in our World

By Fr. Dave Heney

I look at our history and see systemic discrimination and even deadly persecution, and on a grand scale. I see people suffer under an oppressive regime that has outright hatred for them. This happens when a minority culture suffers under an overwhelmingly powerful culture and government authority. How can people survive under such duress? How should they respond?

Of course, I am talking about the early Catholic Church that suffered under the brutal and cruel Roman Empire. That empire was about the same size of the United States and considered followers of Christ an existential threat to its ancient pagan culture. Christians could expect a range of hostilities, from losing property and jobs, to arrest and torture, and in several periods of Roman history, being hunted down and horribly executed.

The early Church also wondered about the right response to brutal social attacks. They recalled Chapter 10 from the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus *sends* His disciples precisely into those hostile pagan areas! He called them to action not victimhood ...and in a unique way.

He sent them not to violently *confront* pagan people, but to peacefully *convert* them, and to use genuine friendship, authentic care, and sometimes challenging love. I describe His method in detail in my latest book, *“Luke 10 Leadership.”*

Our Lord taught His followers not to *complain* about human sinfulness but to personally and courageously choose each day to *change* it peacefully through love. He taught them to never let another person’s lack of faith and love affect their own. Even if surrounded by evil people they would still live and nourish their own faith, hope, and love. Let that be your decision as well.

Today, many groups claim they are oppressed, just as early Christians were by Romans. Some groups violently fight back. Yet, it makes no sense to resent receiving violence ...by then using violence yourself.

Violent revenge just makes you the same as your oppressor!

God knows that all people, even our nation’s founders, are a mixed bag of good and bad behaviors, and so He never reduces us only to our worst sins of the past, but rather recognizes our growth and development and a changed life for the future.



The only successful answer is from Our Lord ...seeking lovingly to convert and not violently confront. Conversion happens by slowly developing sincere and caring relationships. The early Christians spent a lot of time learning about their Roman neighbors, and even helping them when needed! Their

courageous and compassionate care made an impact, and after just a few generations, *the entire Roman Empire soon became Christian.*

The Church in later centuries certainly had seriously injured itself and others whenever it forgot the peaceful conversion lessons of Luke 10, and so has a unique and authentic credibility now to call all groups back to the peaceful way of the Lord.

Rev. Martin Luther King followed that peaceful non-violent path and it soon very practically led to the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Voting Rights Act of 1965, both ending legal, but of course, not personal racism. *Most important, they provided a peaceful and legal recourse to correct injustice.*

Our Lord knew what works and what doesn’t. Let us pray that the early Church record of success will come to those groups that most need it now.

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