

## Battle for the Bible, Battle for the Soul of Humanity

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**Battle for the Bible, Battle for the Soul of Humanity**

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*Toward a Global Civilization: The Contribution of Religions; and numerous other works.*

**Reviews of:**

*Walter Rauschenbusch: Essential Spiritual Writings*. Selected with an Introduction by Joseph J. Fahey. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2019. Paper, 104pp., \$24.00, ISBN 978-1-62698-346-5 (print) | 9781608338108 (ebook). LCCN 2019017879 (print) | LCCN 2019020363 (ebook).

*Jesus and the Disinherited*. Howard Thurman. Boston: Beacon Press. 1996. (Originally published: New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949.) Foreword by Vincent Harding. Paper, 102 pp., \$16.00, ISBN 978-0-8070-1029-7.

*Backs Against the Wall: The Howard Thurman Story*. PBS special. 56 minutes, 46 seconds. Free public access at: [pbs.org/video/backs-against-the-wall-the-howard-thurman-story-cgv9gi/](https://pbs.org/video/backs-against-the-wall-the-howard-thurman-story-cgv9gi/) or

<https://www.pbs.org/video/backs-against-the-wall-the-howard-thurman-story-cgv9gi/> <[https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A\\_\\_www.pbs.org\\_video\\_backs-2Dagainst-2Dthe-2Dwall-2Dthe-2Dhoward-2Dthurman-2Dstory-2Dcgv9gi\\_&d=DwMCAQ&c=Cvk6809QJWx44KVfpEaK-g&r=-43ckM1fyvCtDsgaGhk1VMKiVK-i95wy4F-Y5fstD8M&m=x4-cuHfmMcsAwoX4pHoYpjBwvfrk8HDv9J9itycK-H0&s=1\\_ziSk5qAowacviRriVUI37TR-IKedGFn\\_NvB0lXj3Q&e=>](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__www.pbs.org_video_backs-2Dagainst-2Dthe-2Dwall-2Dthe-2Dhoward-2Dthurman-2Dstory-2Dcgv9gi_&d=DwMCAQ&c=Cvk6809QJWx44KVfpEaK-g&r=-43ckM1fyvCtDsgaGhk1VMKiVK-i95wy4F-Y5fstD8M&m=x4-cuHfmMcsAwoX4pHoYpjBwvfrk8HDv9J9itycK-H0&s=1_ziSk5qAowacviRriVUI37TR-IKedGFn_NvB0lXj3Q&e=>)

Any review should explore multiple layers, including a work's contents, its cultural and historical context, and the background of the author affecting how they approach their material and the meaning they ascribe to it. This review has more layers than usual, not only because it covers three works, but also because each of the three contains multiple, complex layers of its own. Besides the content, context and authors' backgrounds, these works are introduced by distinguished scholars and practitioners speaking later in time from a perspectives reflecting their own context and experience. Moreover, these works are separated by more than 100 years and diverse historical circumstances, yet share a common reference to, and inspiration from, the social teachings of Jesus who lived in yet another socio-historical context more than 2000 years earlier. In turn, the teachings of Jesus build on a prophetic tradition that evolved even deeper in time and is chronicled in the old Testament. Looked at collectively, from ancient prophets and Jesus, to discussions, interpretations, and applications in contemporary social settings, we can see a living, sometimes unifying, sometimes contentious narrative at the heart of western civilization and a

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moral compass for millions of people around the world. Where do the three works reviewed here fit in this larger, still evolving narrative?

Then, too reviewers need to consider the particular lenses through which they themselves are viewing a work. Every reviewer, including this one, engages with a work through the lenses of personal, cultural and historical circumstances that affect their perceptions and evaluation.

Finally, there are questions: “So what? ”Do religious narratives matter in a secular, scientific age? If yes, what happens when narratives diverge and conflict? Was Karl Marx right when he asserted that religion is the opiate of the people, easily manipulated by the powerful to dismiss cries of the oppressed, to suppress dissent, and to maintain unjust social systems? Or, as some claim, including these authors, is the Bible, particularly the example of Jesus, a moral compass and source of inspiration in struggles for social justice and human dignity?

During 2020 and into January, 2021, while I was engaged in reading and evaluating these works in light of the above questions, a lot was going on within and around me that seemed surreal. Like millions of people across the US and around the world, I was confined to my home because of the surging Covid-19 pandemic. My county has a high percentage of African American, Latino and immigrant populations who were disproportionately affected and had unequal access to health care. Meanwhile, in cities across the U.S., massive demonstrations were underway in reaction to police killings of unarmed African Americans. Marches organized by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement brought together people of diverse faiths and races united in efforts to advance equal rights. The BLM demonstrations were largely nonviolent. But they attracted criminals, white supremacists and political extremists who used the opportunity to loot, vandalize, riot, and press their own agendas.

On June 1, 2020, Donald Trump, then U.S. president, running for re-election, and widely perceived as a white supremacist sympathizer, gave a speech on law and order at the White House. Then, flanked by the US Attorney General and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (the highest U.S. military position), he marched to St. John’s Episcopal Church where he was photographed holding a Bible. Thus he mantled himself with moral as well as political and military authority. To clear the way for this photo-op, BLM protestors were tear gassed, beaten, and forcibly removed from the streets. Not known to be a religious person, the President did not go into the church or pray. When a reporter asked whose Bible he was holding (upside down) and what his favorite passage was, Mr. Trump looked blank. When asked a second time, he reportedly replied, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.”

The next day Trump went for another religious photo -op, this time to a Catholic shrine honoring Pope John Paul II. The images of the president using religious symbols as props to legitimize the use of armed force against U.S. citizens pressing for racial justice brought him support from white supremacist Christians, but harsh condemnation from others. Catholic Archbishop Wilton Gregory (later consecrated as the first African-American cardinal) publicly slammed Trump for misusing a Catholic shrine. The Right Rev. Mariann Budde, Episcopal bishop of Washington, condemned the President for misusing a sacred text to inflame violence and division. The Bible declares that “God is love,” she said. “It is about love of neighbor . . . and justice.”

Jump forward to January 6, 2021. After losing the election by more than 8 million votes; after endless lies and failed lawsuits trying to overturn the election results, president Trump called supporters and white supremacist groups to assemble in DC where he and other political figures incited them to march on the US Capitol to disrupt Congress from certifying election results. Those who marched to the President's call included armed extremists who stormed the Capitol, trashed property, beat guards with flag poles, bats, and fire extinguishers, killing one of them, and sent members of Congress and the U.S. Vice President fleeing into hiding. Some demonstrators, though not personally engaged in acts of violence, morally supported those who were with yellow banners saying "Jesus Saves" and "Jesus 2020", equating Trump with Jesus as their Savior. One navy and gold banner read "[For] God, Country, Notre Dame." Officials of this Catholic university must have been appalled to see a beloved motto that is engraved in stone over a door of its basilica, and that holds memories of former students who fought fascism abroad, now mis-appropriated by neo Nazis to attack democratic processes at home. Later, following the House impeachment of Trump for inciting Insurrection, Franklin Graham, President of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, condemned Republicans who voted to impeach as betrayers of Christ.

So, to answer one of the above questions, do I think Marx was right that religion is an opiate that can be manipulated to maintain unjust social systems. Yes, I do, based on clear evidence in history, including President Trump's mis-appropriation of religious symbols for his political ends. But there is more to religion than was acknowledged by Karl Marx. One reason that religion can be used to manipulate people is that it often embodies archetypes, narratives, beliefs, and identities deep in the unconscious as well as conscious aspects of a culture. It is very difficult to bring about true social change without including these deeply held archetypes and their meanings. Marx was wrong to think the path to just social systems was to eliminate religion. So are secularists who suggest that religion is irrelevant in the modern, scientific age. The real challenge for social transformation is to lead people to a deeper understanding and interpretations of guiding archetypes and their meanings for contemporary life.

The Reverend Jesse Jackson, a civil rights activist who, as a youth, worked closely with Martin Luther King, Jr. and later ran for U.S president. once advised some of us involved in peace research that participants in the anti-Vietnam-war movement made a major mistake when they dismissed the Bible and burned American flags; they should have embraced these cultural symbols and helped people see their deep significance for peace and justice. Jackson's civil rights work was an outgrowth of his faith and commitment to the social teachings of Jesus and the command to build the Kingdom of God. As he indicates in the video reviewed below, he was deeply inspired in his civil rights work by Howard Thurman's teachings on the religion of Jesus. Martin Luther King Jr., was also deeply influenced by Thurman and Walter Rauschenbusch, as were many others in the U.S. civil rights and other social justice movements. So, do words written 50, 70, 100, or 2000 years ago still matter and can they affect the course of history? Yes, absolutely.

The authors reviewed here clearly have a deeper, richer, understanding and experience of religion, and specifically of the teachings of Jesus, than those who raised "Jesus Saves" signs to support white supremacist and anti-democratic beliefs and violence. Their vision offers a way forward out of the fear, deception and hatred of these divisive times and toward what Martin Luther King, Jr. called a "beloved community."

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My first acquaintance with the Social Gospel movement, of which these authors are a part, did not come from my early education in Catholic schools. Nor from my Catholic father or grandparents. Had they known of it they would have been ardent supporters. When my grandfather's farm could no longer support a family of 13 children, he moved them to town and worked 12-hour days, 72 hours a week in a foundry. When he died of silicosis from the foundry dust he breathed into his lungs every working hour, his eldest son, my father, then in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, left school to work as a child laborer in the same factory that had killed his father so that his mother and siblings would not starve. Later, my father ardently supported labor unions, child-protection laws, and other social justice movements. For him, unions were next to God and never to be criticized in his presence. He was also a God-loving, church-going, man, holding his faith in one hand and unions in the other. But sadly, he didn't see that these two hands could be joined. He never heard priests or bishops of his church align the protection and dignity of workers and children with the Gospel they read at Sunday Mass. The relationship between them was one of the best kept secrets in the Catholic church. Only later, when I was introduced to the Papal social encyclicals did I learn of Catholicism's rich legacy of commitment to social justice, beginning with the rights of workers.

Similarly, I don't think my Lutheran mother, very devout and active in her church, ever heard of Rauschenbusch, Thurman, or the Social Gospel movement in her church. She too, would have felt her faith enriched, values affirmed, and life validated. And I would have known the social justice legacy my mother's tradition carried.

I share this story because it indicates why, on a very personal level, I am grateful to Joseph Fahey for producing this volume on Rauschenbusch and also to my daughter for gifting me with the book by Thurman who builds on and adds to the Rauschenbusch's pioneering work. Learning how both the Catholic and Protestant social justice movements arise from common ground and, despite their separate paths and distinct histories, mutually enrich one another, is deeply satisfying for one who comes from a family where two Christian denominations lived in uneasy truce, their separate faiths holding deep meaning for each of my parents, but also silent divides. The European wars of religion had ended hundreds of years ago but for its descendants the wounds it left had not yet healed. Religion was like the proverbial elephant in our home - always present, never to be talked about. The silence deprived us of realizing the richness of a joint Protestant-Catholic heritage. Thus, these volumes come to me now as blessing, conjoining two streams in social Gospel heritage that are mutually enriching.

Both streams had common origins in the wake and ferment of the European industrial revolution and abuses of the capitalist system. The resulting conditions of poverty for farmers and workers led Marx, who was born in the same town as my great grandfather, to write the Communist Manifesto and call for the overthrow of religion and governments. The same conditions led others, including my great grandparents, to emigrate. But there were others who stayed, and, while rejecting the communist solution, held up the Gospel as a guide for social change. Key in this latter category was Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler (1811-1877) who, as the Catholic Bishop of Mainz, Germany became renowned for applying the teachings of Jesus to addressing the social problems of his day. Ketteler, a contemporary and fellow countryman of Karl Marx, was concerned about the same historical conditions— inequalities and abuses in capitalism, low wages and working conditions for laborers, lack of education, health care, housing, and other basic human needs. But unlike Marx who saw religion as an obstacle to social change, Ketteler believed

individual human dignity and the common good could best be promoted through better understandings and practices in the Gospels. His writings and social initiatives influenced Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, or "revolutionary change" and "the rights and duties of Capital and Labor". The encyclical articulated the Roman Catholic position on social justice and the church's right and need to address social issues as they related to moral questions. It was the first of many encyclicals and letters on social justice, peace and ecological integrity produced by Popes and Bishops that were issued in the next 130 years. Similar work was underway in Protestant circles of Europe, with cross-fertilization of thinking. Into this cross fertilization came Rauschenbusch.

### **Rauschenbusch: Transformation by Developing the Kingdom of God *On Earth***

Rauschenbusch, was born in 1861 in Rochester, NY to German immigrant parents. Fahey tells us that Rauschenbusch's father, August, was a Lutheran minister who later "became a Baptist because he thought their spirituality and governance closer to the New Testament ideal." After completing his basic education in the US, Walter attended college in Germany (1879-83), taking courses in the liberal arts and classics, and being exposed to emerging social sciences of political economy and sociology being pioneered in German universities, and likely, also, to divergent views of Marx and Bishop von Ketteler on how best to address social and economic injustices of the times.

Rauschenbusch returned to the U.S. in 1883 to study at the Rochester Theological Seminary and prepare for the Baptist ministry. After graduating in 1886, he became Pastor at the Second Baptist church in Hell's Kitchen, then a poor section in New York City where families were crowded in unsafe and unsanitary tenements and workers labored 10-12 hours a day, six days a week for pay so little it could not meet basic needs. He was particularly concerned about the welfare of children who were suffering neglect and dying of consumption. Identifying with those on the underside of capitalism, he called himself a Christian Socialist and urged worker ownership of the means of production. In one of his early writings, "Beneath the Glitter," the first of his essays in this book, written while he served in Hell's Kitchen, Rauschenbusch invited readers to look beneath the glitter of the city and see the suffering.

in 1891 (the same year *Rerum Novarum* was published by Leo XIII), Rauschenbusch took a sabbatical in Germany and wrote "Christianity Revolutionary," included in this volume. Although it was not published in his lifetime, it was a conceptual foundation for his later work. In it he sees Jesus as a continuation and successor of a long line of Old Testament prophets who were revolutionaries of their age. The prophets were not just dreamers and preachers; they were people of action who challenged the privileged and powerful to hear the cries of the poor. In announcing his ministry and purpose, Jesus opened the scroll with the text of Isaiah on being anointed by God to announce Good News to the poor and free the oppressed. In this essay Rauschenbusch asks, "What was this revolutionary mission of Jesus?" His answer: The Kingdom of God *on earth*. Not just in heaven in the hereafter, but here and now, on earth. He argued that this was not a new theme, but a vision upheld by the Old Testament prophets and abundantly repeated by Jesus, who passed that mission on to his followers.

Fahey notes that in our times of gender sensitivity the correct phrase might be "Realm" instead of "Kingdom" of God. My own preference is for Martin Luther King Jr.'s phrase: "the beloved

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community.” But whichever phrase is used, what are its characteristics? Rauschenbusch lifts up these key elements from the life and teachings of Jesus:

1. *love*. - the fundamental virtue in Jesus’ ethics;
2. *nonviolence* - Jesus rejected violence and bloodshed;
3. *universality* – inclusiveness; not one country or religion over others, but all humanity;
4. *avoid perils of wealth* – to build your life around possessing things is to lose the Kingdom of God.

In the essay on “The Kingdom of God”, Rauschenbusch insists that:

the Kingdom is not only in heaven but is to come on earth; that while it begins in the depths of the heart, it is not to stay there; . . . that while the perfection of the Kingdom may be reserved for a future date, the Kingdom is here and at work. . . .”

He stresses both the individual and the collective aspects of developing this kingdom on earth:

The Kingdom means individual men and women . . .who live rightly with their fellowmen. And without a goodly number of such men and women, no plan for a higher social order will have stability enough to work. But the Kingdom also means a growing perfection in the collective life of humanity, in our laws, in the customs of society, in the institutions of education, and for the administration of mercy; in our public opinion, our literary and artistic ideals, in the pervasiveness of the sense of duty, and in our readiness to give our life as a ransom for others.

Having begun to conceptualize the individual and collective aspects of building the Kingdom, Rauschenbusch and other Baptist pastors founded the Brotherhood of the Kingdom in 1892 as a vehicle for promoting the Kingdom of God on earth as the hallmark of the Social Gospel. From 1897 until his death in 1918, Rauschenbusch was a professor at Rochester Theological Seminary and continued writing, speaking and organizing related to the goals of the Kingdom of God on earth. Among his written works were *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (1907), *Prayers of the Social Awakening* (1910), *Social Principles of Jesus* (1916). Extracts from these and other works are included in this volume. In the “Essay on Prayers” Rauschenbusch focuses on the Our Father, the only prayer Jesus taught, and the meaning of the phrase in that prayer, “Thy Kingdom Come, on *earth* as it is in heaven.” I will never again glide through that prayer without reflecting on the meaning Rauschenbusch has given it.

From a historical, as well as spiritual and philosophical, perspectives, this slim volume is a powerhouse and gem. I understand why Martin Luther King, Jr. (and also Gandhi, Bishop Desmond Tutu, Howard Thurman, and other social justice luminaries) were inspired by Rauschenbusch’s work in developing and sustaining their own social movements. And I know that my parents both would have found in it a source of validation and hope, not only for their own dignity and worth, but also for the relevance of the Gospel in their lives.

In his excellent introduction to this work, Fahey traces his own journey in social justice thinking, initially in Catholicism, including at Maryknoll Seminary, and later, while doing graduate studies in Christian Social Ethics at New York University and New York’s Union Theological Seminary, being introduced to Protestant theologians, including the Social Gospel work of Walter

Rauschenbusch. Now, sixty years after that encounter he states In the Preface that his purpose in producing this work is “to recover Rauschenbusch’s inspiring, and, yes, realistic message for the crises that beset us in the twenty-first century.” And, he elaborates, to “stir renewed interest by a generation of Christians who sorely need reminding of the revolutionary nature of Jesus’ s message and the mission of the Christian churches in seeking the Reign of God here on earth.”

By “Reign of God” Fahey does not mean converting nonbelievers to Christianity; he is stressing the need for Christians to deepen their understanding of Jesus’ call to live more justly with one another and build a community that honors human dignity and the common good, a community based in just social systems where the hungry have food, the thirsty drink, the poor a livelihood, the imprisoned rehabilitation, and all races and creeds are included. For Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospellers this was the Good News that Jesus consistently proclaimed: a vision and, in Fahey’s words, also a radical call “to transform the economic, political; and social structures of life *here on earth.*”

Fahey begins his Introduction with three quotes that connect the mission of Jesus, the Social Gospeler movement led by Rauschenbusch, and the civil rights and racial justice work of Martin Luther King, Jr. who was deeply influenced by Rauschenbusch. These quotes highlight a 2000-year line in a still vibrant call to social transformation.

**Jesus:** “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (*Luke: 6-20*).

**Walter Rauschenbusch:**

The spirit of God is moving men in our generation toward a better understanding of the idea of the Kingdom of God on earth. Obeying the thought of our Master, and trusting in the power and guidance of the Spirit, we form ourselves into a Brotherhood of the Kingdom, in order to reestablish this idea in the thought of the church, and to assist in its practical realization in the life of the world (in *Statement of the Brotherhood of the Kingdom, 1892*).

**Martin Luther King, Jr:**

It has been my conviction ever since reading Rauschenbusch that any religion which professes to be concerned about the soul of men and is not concerned about the social and economic conditions that scar that soul, is a spiritually moribund religion waiting for the day to be buried (in *Stride toward Freedom, 1958*).

**Howard Thurman: Transformation through the Inward Center**

Howard Thurman (1899-1981), built on, but also widened and deepened the scope of the Social Gospel movement. He widened its focus to include racial equality as well as economic justice. He deepened it to include inner transformation. He was convinced that social structures would not change without first reaching the inward center or soul of a people. In *Jesus and the Disinherited*, the work reviewed here, he examines the constraints of internalized racism and the inner processes of transformation that must occur if social transformation is to be made possible and sustainable. As a precondition for external changes, there must be a liberation and development of the inner spirit. In this he echoes Arnold Toynbee who was convinced from his studies of the rise and fall

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of civilizations, that new civilizations, new cultures and social forms, develop first from within, like a spiritual chrysalis in the souls of a creative minority, before they flesh out into the world.

In Chapter One, “Jesus-An Interpretation” Thurman writes of the need for religion, and specifically Christianity, to be relevant to the masses of people with their “backs constantly against the wall. . . the poor, the disinherited, the dispossessed”:

What does our religion say to them? The issue is not what it counsels them to do for others whose needs may be greater, but what religion offers to meet their own needs. The search for an answer to this question is perhaps the most important religious quest of modern life.

For Christians, Thurman believes Jesus offered a relevant response and model for transformation through the inward center when he preached that “The Kingdom of God is within us”:

[Jesus’] message focused on the urgency of a radical change in the inner attitude of the people. He recognized fully that out of the heart are the issues of life and that no external force, however great and overwhelming, can at long last destroy a people if it does not first win the victory of the spirit against them. . . Jesus saw this with almighty clarity. Again and again he came back to the inner life of the individual. With increasing insight and startling accuracy he placed his finger on the “inward center” as the crucial arena where the issues would determine the destiny of his people.

In his own inward journey Thurman was profoundly influenced by his grandmother who was born a slave. She could neither read nor write, and as a child he was delegated to read aloud to her from the Bible. He recounts how she was very particular about the verses she wanted read. He was not to read Pauline verses such as “slaves be obedient to your masters,” which slave owners cited to legitimize oppression and suppress dissent. But, again and again, she wanted to hear prophets, such as Isaiah, and the Gospels which offered the good news of freedom from oppression.

Thurman reasons that Jesus was born a Jew, a member of an oppressed community suffering under Roman occupation and military rule. Christianity, as it originally came from the teachings of Jesus, focused on those on the underside of an oppressive system. Only much later did it become a religion of the powerful and dominant. So, Thurman asserts, the original intent of Jesus – announcing good news to the poor and oppressed –was to awaken oppressed people to their inner dignity and power -- the Kingdom of God Within them. He compares the situation of black people in the U.S. and the colonized Jews Jesus was addressing. They faced similar conditions and dealt with a similar psychology. – a psychology of despair. Jesus cut through that despair to help them recognize their dignity and inner power. But to realize the fullness of that inner power--the kingdom of God within--they had to overcome what Thurman calls the three hounds of hell: fear, hypocrisy (deception) and hatred

### **The Three Hounds of Hell**

Thurman devotes the next three chapters to an examination of these three hounds, their hold on black lives, and how they can be dispelled, offering examples from the life and words of Jesus.

## **Fear**

The fear Thurman describes in chapter two is the fear of those on the underside of structural inequality. It is the fear of physical, emotional, and spiritual force inflicted by the powerful who hold the tools of violence over those they dominate. This fear dwells as a conditioning to an ever-present, overhanging threat that may strike at any moment, and affects the character and behavior of its victims who must always be on guard. Worst of all, it affects one's sense of self as not being worthy. It strikes at the soul. To break through this fear requires a sense of self as infinitely worthy. In Thurman's view, the Social Gospels support this sense of self-worth and dignity. All persons are children of God, held in divine life and love. Their lives matter.

## **Deception**

Deception is described by Thurman in chapter three as "the oldest technique by which the weak have protected themselves against the strong." It is a technique arising from the fear of being killed or defeated before one starts. Ethical questions are merely academic for those trying to survive in a social system in which one group holds all the power. But deception as a technique against those who have power over you carries an inherent problem: your whole life becomes a lie. There ensues a kind of spiritual and moral death. Moreover, deception perpetuates a system of oppressor-oppressed. To transform this system requires an inner shift in oppressed persons. Citing Gandhi (who believed "Truth" was God's best name, and truth-telling the best path to social justice), Thurman advocates "complete and devastating sincerity."

Jesus was a model, says Thurman, that "sincerity in human relations is equal to, and the same as, sincerity to God." It is not just a defense mechanism against the powerful. Sincerity or truthfulness is a way of noncooperation with, and ending, an unjust system.

In the presence of an overwhelming sincerity on the part of the disinherited, the dominant themselves are caught with no defense . . . They are thrown back on themselves for their rating. The experience of power has no meaning aside from the other-than-self reference which sustains it. . . . Instead of relation between the weak and the strong there is merely a relationship between human beings.

## **Hatred**

In his fourth chapter Thurman offers a brilliant anatomy of how hate develops among victims of injustice, beginning from a lack of true fellowship, through the buildup of resentments, to hatred as an energizing force for self-realization that offers an illusion of righteousness. He sees hatred as a device by which individuals seek to protect themselves "against moral disintegration." He compares this to war situations where individuals who would not otherwise kill another person are trained to hate enemies so they can kill them without losing self-respect. This disciplined hatred offers a curtain of protection. On one side of the curtain you can be life affirming, on the other side, death-dealing. But in the end, hatred destroys the inner core of the hater. Once set in motion it cannot be controlled. It guarantees "a final isolation from one's fellows. . . . Hatred is death to the spirit and disintegration of ethical and moral values." It does not lead to freedom. Instead, it starves the creative spirit. It kills the soul. That is why Jesus rejected hatred, says Thurman. He saw that it "meant "death to the mind, death to the spirit. Jesus affirmed life and saw hatred as life's great denial.

### **Love -The Kingdom of God Within**

What then is the path forward? In chapter five Thurman answers: It is Love. Not an easy love that can be confused with feelings of good cheer and contentment. But love that comes of struggle--struggle to vanquish the hounds of hell and, hardest of all, to love even one's enemies.

Thurman begins this chapter by reminding Christian readers that "the religion of Jesus makes the love-ethic central." This ethic is a continuation of the Old Testament command to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might," and "thy neighbor as thyself." But who is this neighbor? Not just members of one's own family, clan, race, religion, country. Jesus was surrounded not only by his fellow Israelites, but also by foreign military and ruling forces, and by other religious and ethnic groups. The Gospels are replete with examples of Jesus extending love to Romans, Samaritans, Syrophoenicians, and others not from his primary group. Extending the command to love one's neighbors to such people brought criticism and reprisals on Jesus from those who could not abide it.

Loving even one's enemies is no ordinary challenge. Thurman compares the challenges Jesus faced with those facing black and other minority communities within unjust social systems today. There are three categories of enemies to embrace, each successively more difficult. The first is the personal enemy – a person who is part of one's primary community and with whom one was once on intimate terms but then the relationship became strained or broken. "To love such an enemy requires reconciliation, the will to re-establish a relationship." This kind of rift is the easiest for the disinherited to deal with because the rift is in their own world. Both sides are at the center and both matter.

The second kind of enemy are people from the primary group who seem to have betrayed and brought shame on their own group. Tax collectors in the time of Jesus were seen as betraying their own by serving Roman occupiers. To befriend and love even tax collectors as Jesus did required uprooting bitterness over a sense of betrayal. Such people have existed in every dwelling place of the disinherited through the ages, says Thurman. To respect and love them does not mean to condone their behavior. But the only way to break through, says Thurman, is to

esteem and lay bare the simple heart. This man is not just a tax collector; he is a son of God. Awaken that awareness in him and he will attack his betrayal as only he can—from the inside. It was out of this struggle and triumph that Jesus says, "Love your enemies. Do good to them which hate you." Hence he called Matthew, the tax collector, to follow him.

The third type of enemy, says Thurman, was exemplified by Roman rule in the time of Jesus. Enmity in this context was both personal and impersonal, with strong religious, economic and political elements. The religious division was especially strained, with the Jewish community committed to belief in One God and the Romans under a cult of emperor worship. To love in this case was a spiritual as well a political challenge. "Love is possible only between two freed spirits," says Thurman. To love across this Roman/Jewish, dominator/dominated divide Jesus and his followers would have to lift Romans from their enemy and dominator classification and see them as human beings with individual value.

There had to be a moment when the Roman and the Jew emerged as neither Roman nor Jew, but as two human spirits that had found a mutual, though individual validation.

But this would be almost impossible, says Thurman, unless both could emerge out of their limited social contexts. They had to be able to meet in shared environments of common fellowship and mutual worth and value. This is a reason Thurman sees segregation as immoral and evil: “Whatever it may do for those who dwell on either side of the wall. . . it poisons all normal contact of those persons involved.”

Thurman was particularly critical of segregated churches and dedicated a decade of his professional ministry to interracial worship and fellowship as a co-founder and co-pastor with Alfred Fisk, a white minister, of the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco.

### **Forgiveness.**

Preaching love is not enough. Love is a discipline, says Thurman, and the ethical demand is the same for privileged and underprivileged. But the challenge is even greater for those who have been marginalized or penalized not for anything they have done, but for who they are. Forgiveness in this case is very difficult, he asserts, but mandatory for three reasons: First because God has forgiven us again and again. There is in it an element of divine grace. Second, “no evil deed represents the full intent of the doer.” And third, the evildoer does not go unpunished. But the punishment is not up to us, but God and life. In the wide sweep of life, “our deeds track us down, and doer and deed meet.”

### **Spirit at work in life**

Thurman’s concluding advice is to let go of fear, deception and hatred, and allow forgiveness and love to have dominion in one’s heart. This, for him, is the kingdom of God within. He stresses the importance of seeing the Spirit at work in life and in people’s hearts. This spirit is universal, not limited by age, race, culture or human conditions: “For the privileged and under privileged alike,” opening ourselves with dedication and discipline to this spirit, enables us to live effectively in the chaos of the present as children of God.

*Jesus and the Disinherited* was originally published in 1949, more than 70 years ago, addressing a largely African American audience suffering under white supremacist policies. It preceded and perhaps prefigured later works such as Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) and a stream of works on liberation theology. Reading it now, and in the context of rising neo-Nazi and white-supremacist vying with Black Lives Matter and social justice movements combating for the soul of the USA, with religious leaders lining up on both sides of the divide, made it seem as fresh as the day it was written. I found myself underlining parts of almost every page because of the relevance for me and the challenges facing my country and the world. I understand why many others have done the same and why people like Martin Luther King Jr. is said to have carried it with him and read and reread it in his civil rights work.

Early on in this work, and in the 1996 introduction by Vincent Harding, the point is made that this is not a book about Christianity, with its creeds and theologies that have been misused to legitimize unjust systems, but about the relevance of the religion of Jesus to those struggling to realize their full humanity. It is not about Jesus as an object, to be adored, but about Jesus as subject, who

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struggled himself against fear, deception, and hatred and developed the inner discipline and volition to live and lead others to live lives that would incarnate the Kingdom of God within them and their communities. This work remains as relevant now as it was 70 years ago. It is not only for black lives, and not only for Christians, but for all who find themselves up against a wall, struggling for freedom and wholeness, for their own soul, and for the soul of humanity.

This work, like Fahey's volume on Rauschenbusch, could be used in courses on peace and social justice and the sociology of religion, in spiritual formation, in counseling, and in movement building, I was given these works as gifts, and valued them so much I gave them as gifts to others.

### **Video**

The video, *Backs Against the Wall: The Howard Thurman Story*, is a wonderful companion to Thurman's book on *Jesus and the Disinherited*. It can also stand alone. It chronicles Thurman's life, from his early years growing up in Daytona Beach Florida, the death of his father and important role his grandmother, who was born into slavery, played in his spiritual development; his loneliness as a child and his conversations with nature that fed his spiritual life; his education, including at Morehouse College where he graduated as valedictorian, Rochester Divinity School where he was also valedictorian, his time at Haverford College and the influence of Quaker teachings his teaching at Morehouse and later at Howard University in Washington DC and at Boston University, where Martin Luther King jr. was one of his proteges. It also covers his pastoral work and innovative pioneering in interfaith and multiracial worship services as a way to deepen human understandings and develop inclusive communities. And it features footage of his visit to India and meetings with Gandhi and their mutual enrichment of one another's lives and work.

The video features clips, commentaries, and tributes by a long list of luminaries in the U.S. civil rights movement, academicians, and others who were inspired and motivated by Thurman, including Martin Luther King jr., Jesse Jackson, John Lewis, Otis Moss, Jr., Vernon Jordan, Oprah Winfrey, Luther Smith, and more. Many thought of Thurman as a mystic as well as mentor who exemplified how contemplation is integral to social justice and transformation. Others point to his pastoral work as key in forming communities who worshipped together and were leaven for social change within their towns and cities. While Thurman was not at the front lines of the civil rights movement, he was at its spiritual core, mentoring, inspiring, nurturing and steering its moral course.

This video, which can be downloaded free, is not only a moving tribute to Thurman and his achievements; it also sheds a beacon of light on how those of us living now in a climate of fear, deception, and hatred can foster a future of fuller realization of our common humanity and how we can learn to live together on one Earth.