

Excerpt from Anthony Bartlett's *Seven Stories: How to Study and Teach the Nonviolent Bible* (Hopetime Press, 2017), pages 8-9. © Used with permission.

INTRODUCTION

There is a quote attributed to Richard Rohr, and even if he didn't say it, it is certainly worth repeating. "Many Christians have to go through a time and experience of atheism, because the God we have been taught to believe in does not exist."

This book is nothing less than a schooling in necessary Christian atheism about a God of violence. But underlying and vitally more important than that, it is the revelation of the God of love who has been there all along, and whose very character of love prods this kind of atheism into being!



The course of study provided here shows how Jesus' teaching and practice of nonviolence are rooted in the deepest and most dynamic levels of the Old Testament, and ultimately are nothing less than the full revelation of the Biblical God and God's plan for us. Divine nonviolence is the core of the Bible's journey of revelation, from Eden to the New Jerusalem.

If you are picking up this book for the first time do not doubt that it contains the germ of something capable of transforming everything. Not only does it show that the God of the Old Testament is consistent with the God of the Sermon on the Mount, but it carries a sea-change in the meaning of church. Rather than an institutional guarantee for an afterlife, Christian identity is a profound journey of human change in this life, one always intended by a God of unimaginable love and vitality. The resurrection of Jesus is a pledge of a transformed Earth where all of history is invited into a fullness of life, a time and place where violence has no part.

If God is nonviolent then God's identity in the world has to struggle against the default violence of human identity. How can God's face be seen clearly when the eyes we see with are framed and focused by cultural roots and memes of violence? Here is the contribution of the theoretical anthropology of René Girard, itself deeply influenced by the Biblical record. The Girardian perspective enables us to see how humanity has been formed from originating events of violence and how the Bible both reveals this and calls us into an entirely new way of being human. Girardian insight provides a major driving force for this textbook and its method at interpretation.

If the Bible is anthropological revelation — showing us the violence of human cultural origins — then the Bible must carry within itself a critique of its own theological forms. If on the one hand the Bible tells about human violence and on the other about God, texts about the latter will always be written and read in tension with texts about the former. It is only over the course of development of the whole Bible that resolution will be possible, but the tension must be always kept in mind. We get the kind of God our minds are equipped to understand. Violent minds understand God violently; and perhaps nothing more violently than "God," the generative concept at the source of human cultural evolution. But the Bible is never univocal about God: there are always stresses and strains, like a landscape bending and warping around a geological

fault. Genesis is particularly suggestive of the way our thought of God has to be decoded according to awareness of generative human violence. If God, after the devastating universal flood, decides “I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done,” what clues for deciphering are being given us? But then the whole labor of the text, from Genesis to Revelation, is a journey of decoding the Bible by the Bible.

Today we are on the cusp of an enormous shift, from colluding with inherited tropes of violent divinity, to surrendering completely to the dramatic truth revealed through the whole Bible: nothing less than a nonviolent God bringing to birth a nonviolent humanity. We offer this coursebook as a heartfelt contribution to this worldwide movement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword

Acknowledgments

Introduction

How To Read This Book

Method

Lesson 1 — Critical Tools

Lesson 2 — The Problem of Atonement

Lesson 3 — Original Violence

Story 1: Oppression to Justice

Lesson 1 — The Hapiru

Lesson 2 — Exodus

Lesson 3 — Sermon on the Mount

Story 2: Violence to Forgiveness

Lesson 1 — Prehistories

Lesson 2 — Patriarchs

Lesson 3 — Prodigal Son

Story 3: The Land and its Loss

Lesson 1 — Deuteronomic Worldview

Lesson 2 — Response to the Loss of the Land

Lesson 3 — The Land and Jesus

Story 4: Wrath to Compassion

Lesson 1 — Suffering Servant

Lesson 2 — Compassion in Isaiah

Lesson 3 — The Cup of Wrath

Story 5: Victim to Vindication

Lesson 1 — Job

Lesson 2 — The *go'el*

Lesson 3 — Jesus and Jonah

Story 6: The Temple and its Deconstruction

Lesson 1 — Temple Theology

Lesson 2 — Prophetic Critique of the Temple

Lesson 3 — Jesus and Temple Deconstruction

Story 7: History to its end

Lesson 1 — Wisdom

Lesson 2 — Son of Man

Lesson 3 — New Paradigm

Glossary

Image Citation

“I am so grateful for Tony Bartlett. This new book provides a comprehensive overview of seven main storylines of the Bible, and helps us turn the Bible from a weapon (as it is too often used) into a pathway to justice, reconciliation, compassion, and peace.”

— **Brian D. McLaren**, author/speaker/activist