Resisting Terrorism
From Collective Trauma to Nonviolent Response

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When I teach my students about nonviolence, they often find it hard to believe that nonviolence could be effective in our world today. They concede that the nonviolent stances embodied by Gandhi and King were impressive and had a powerful impact, but they also perceive an enormous difference between our world and the world in which these two men lived. They argue that we live in a world defined by terrorism, a world in which some people are willing to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of taking the lives of others. We live in a world in which planes fly into buildings and people explode their own cars. Isn't this different from the world in which Gandhi and King lived? And isn't it self-evident that in our world violence is the only responsible way to respond to terrorism, since terrorists have no interest in "talking things out"? What use could nonviolence possibly have in our time?

These questions my students raise are genuine questions that reflect the concerns of many people, and I take them seriously. At the same time, as a theologian with interests in the historic peace churches, I find it hard to give up on nonviolence. I believe that nonviolence can provide an effective response to terrorism even today. To understand how, I use the field of trauma studies as a lens through which to analyze the psychological effects of terrorism and the character of a nonviolent response. I suggest that part of what makes terrorism so powerful is its ability to collectively traumatize communities and nations, such that the violence of terrorism becomes part of people's psyches. While the goal of this violence is to make those who are traumatized comply with the terrorists, terrorism can also

have the opposite effect. It can make some people respond violently, either by supporting the use of military force against those perceived as enemies or by harming others within their own communities.

A nonviolent response to terrorism involves drawing on narratives and practices that enable us to move beyond our collective traumatization and form ourselves as nonviolent people who refuse to act out of a space of trauma, either individually or through our foreign policy. I propose that King is relevant to this task. His life and work point to an understanding of nonviolence that extends beyond direct action strategies such as sit-ins and marches to include as well the creation of communities that draw on specific narratives and practices to resist traumatization and to transform violence that becomes embedded within people's psyches over time. But before exploring how King's nonviolence might provide resources for an effective response to terrorism, let me begin with a few words about trauma studies and the insight it gives us into the dynamics of terrorism and, more specifically, religiously motivated terrorism.

Trauma Studies as Interpretative Lens

Trauma studies is an odd academic discipline. It is made up of people from many different disciplines who all address trauma and, therefore, are engaged in what many scholars in the humanities call "trauma theory."[1] Those who study trauma ("trauma theorists") present diverse perspectives that address a broad range of questions and concerns. For example, many psychologists who study trauma examine the effects of domestic violence and sexual abuse on women, men, and children.[2] Some psychobiologists explore how trauma affects the brain and multiple levels of biological functioning.[3] In the field of literature, writers working on Holocaust literature broach the subject of trauma in a different way. They ask how we can write and talk about events that are so horrible it seems we cannot even describe them in words.[4] Legal and political theorists interested in trauma consider how collective violence harms whole communities and countries, as in the case of South Africa or Rwanda—and what healing involves for a nation shattered by this violence.[5] And some scholars in the fields of history and cultural studies analyze trauma by examining topics such as the Middle Passage and racial subjugation during slavery in North America and its aftermath.[6]

While these trauma theorists approach the study of trauma from different perspectives and ask different questions, they share the goal of understanding the dynamics of violence that lead to patterns of psychic wounding. Trauma theorists analyze how violent traumatic acts affect people, both in the immediate aftermath of the violence and in the long-term. In describing the long-term effects, they make an important distinction between “trauma” and “traumatic stress” or “posttraumatic stress disorder” (PTSD).[7] Trauma theorists do not all agree on the exact same definition of trauma, but they generally describe it as an overwhelmingly stressful event that elicits an intense sense of helplessness, fear, and loss of control.[8] Some examples include war, domestic violence, sexual assault, and natural disasters such as hurricanes and floods.

Trauma theorists explain that although some persons easily return to psychological health after experiencing a trauma, others develop traumatic stress or posttraumatic stress disorder. Bessel van der Kolk and Alexander McFarlane broadly describe this condition as “the result of a failure of time to heal all wounds.”[9] For those who suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder, the trauma is not simply an event that happened once in the past. It is constantly relived and re-experienced in the form of repetitive phenomena such as nightmares, flashbacks, and intrusive memories.

It is impossible to universalize the effects of trauma on people because different forms of trauma can produce different effects. Moreover, two people can experience the same trauma and respond quite differently to it. Nevertheless trauma theorists have found that certain core symptoms often occur in individuals who develop traumatic stress. One key symptom is hyperarousal, which Judith Lewis Herman describes as a condition in which people become physiologically aroused in response to different stimuli in their environment.[10] At a most basic level, hyperarousal is like having your “fight or flight syndrome” turn on too often and too easily. Most people can discern when they are in danger and only jump to a state of extreme alertness in those moments. But traumatized people who suffer from hyperarousal have difficulty telling when they are imperiled. They panic easily, which can lead them either to freeze or to overreact.[11] Herman observes that for those who develop this extreme sensitivity to stimuli, a wide variety of reminders in their environment can evoke memories of the trauma, “which often return with all the vividness and emotional force of the original event.”[12]

A second core symptom of PTSD is emotional numbing, a withdrawal from emotions and physical sensations. One form of emotional numbing is dissociation, a splitting of the mind that can occur during a stressful event and in subsequent moments of stress.[13] As Sandra Bloom observes, most of the time people are aware of what they just did or what is going on around them. But sometimes this isn't the case. During a trauma, victims may mentally "go away" or "space out" for a period of time; in more extreme situations, they may mentally leave their bodies and watch the trauma from a distance, as if it were happening to someone else.[14] This capacity to mentally separate from one's body can function as a defense mechanism. When people dissociate at the time of the traumatic event, they do not fully experience what is happening to them.

Many trauma theorists believe that when people dissociate during a trauma, their memories of the event get stored in the brain differently from non-traumatic memories. Unlike other memories, dissociated traumatic memories tend to be experienced in a sensory way rather than located in a narrative that survivors can easily recall and describe.[15] When the memories of trauma are stored in this way, they often recur as intrusive memories that pop up against the survivor's will. At times, these intrusive memories take the form of flashbacks in which the survivor mentally "views" the trauma as they would a movie scene. They are immersed in the memory of it and can visualize it in their minds as if it were happening again.[16] We have likely all watched movies in which a combat veteran mentally goes back to the war and visually sees in his mind painful scenes from battle. Other survivors do not actually visualize their trauma in this way but instead re-experience an image, smell, or sensation in their body that they had at the time of the traumatic event. For example, a man who was physically attacked may have the same pain in his arm that he felt when his attacker grabbed it. Those survivors who cannot consciously remember their trauma may not have any idea why they are having these sensations. But they experience them as quite distressing nonetheless.

In addition to these core symptoms of traumatization, trauma commonly causes several other symptoms that are particularly important to note. First, it undermines the sense of control that most people have. During a traumatic experience many victims have the sense of being radically out of control—overwhelmed, frozen, shocked, terrified. The unpredictable nature of the violence can fracture one's sense of control not only during the trauma but also in its aftermath, as survivors grapple with the knowledge that if tragedy

struck once it remains possible it will strike again.

Trauma theorists observe that this loss of control represents a particularly debilitating effect of trauma because human beings need a sense of control to function well in the world. In her book Shattered Assumptions, Ronnie Janoff-Bulman argues that on a conscious level, most of us know we cannot completely determine the course of our lives and that sometimes unpredictable or uncontrollable things simply happen. Yet on a deeper level, at the very core of our being, we tend to believe we are in control. This conviction enables us to go about our daily lives without being overwhelmed by all the things that could go radically wrong.[17] One reason that people often blame victims for their traumatic experiences is to protect their own sense that they can keep something like this from happening to them, if only they do the right things. And so they may say, for example, that a woman was attacked because she wore the wrong clothes or walked alone at night. In other words, she was in control and could have prevented the assault.

Second, trauma theorists argue that traumatic violence—particularly interpersonal trauma—undermines people's capacity for empathy by instilling in them both a deep distrust of other human beings and a strong sense of isolation.[18] Once a person has been injured by another human being, it becomes more difficult to believe in the good intentions of others and to develop lasting, healthy relationships. Fear of being harmed again prevents some trauma survivors from seeking such connections. As a result, trauma survivors often feel socially alienated and cut off from the bonds of human relationship. For some, this isolation is intensified by the experience of emotional numbing, which renders them unable to identify or talk about their feelings.

Third, trauma theorists contend that trauma can take away a survivor's sense of a temporal timeline. When people confront an overwhelmingly violent and stressful event, they sometimes respond by becoming preoccupied with it.[19] This happens, in part, because the core symptoms of traumatization—hyperarousal, emotional numbing, and dissociation—set in motion a pattern in which traumatic memories continue to circulate in the victim's psychic and physical structures long after the trauma has ended. This recirculation of the traumatic memories comes to dominate survivors' lives, making them feel stuck in the past and disconnected from the present. To put it differently, trauma can narrow the survivor's perspective, rendering his or her vision myopic so that the single traumatic event arrests the present. This undermines the survivor's ability to develop a positive vision for the future.

When people get stuck in a traumatic moment, the future, to the extent that they can imagine it at all, looks bleak indeed.

In describing the long-term effects of trauma in this way, trauma theorists reveal that trauma does not merely touch people's lives, affecting them in small and innocuous ways. Rather, it invades their bodies and minds and gradually fractures or even destroys the identities they had formed prior to their traumas. While trauma theorists do not use the language of "internal" or "internalized" violence, it is this realm of violence they address when describing trauma's ongoing effects. Often, when we think about violence we have in mind external violence—violence that assaults people from without. We think about the violence of war, domestic violence, and sexual assault. But in describing the long-term psychological effects of traumatic violence, trauma theorists point to ways in which the external violence that people have experienced can become internalized. The violence they have endured becomes embedded within them and continues to haunt them long after the violent event has ended. Their bodies, spirits, and minds hold within them the reality of the trauma as ever present, even as they move through time.

Trauma theorists point out that this internalization of violence sometimes fuels cycles of violence. Some trauma victims themselves become perpetrators. For example, research studies show that child abuse victims are more likely to abuse their own children or fail to protect them from abusive others.[20] In some cases, the violence that trauma survivors have experienced leads them to struggle with deep depression and anxiety; as a result, they may lack the energy and focus necessary to relate to their children and other people in a thoughtful and caring manner. In addition, the exaggerated fight or flight response that some traumatized people experience may cause them to react violently.[21]

It has become commonplace to say that violence begets violence. This discussion of trauma studies indicates that this discipline gives us an explanation why. Especially when the trauma is repeated, traumatic violence can lead to the formation of people who are familiar with violent patterns of interaction. Moreover, trauma can instill in its victims a deep mistrust of others and an intense desire to protect themselves. It can form people who become preoccupied with their traumas and have trouble seeing the broader picture. When we take into account these symptoms, it is not surprising that traumatized people sometimes respond violently towards others and even themselves. It is not surprising that traumatic

violence sometimes generates more violence.

Terrorism and the Dynamics of Trauma

This description of trauma's effects can help us to understand the psychological dynamics of both terrorism and religiously motivated terrorism. I want to note at the outset that using trauma studies to understand how terrorism works does not imply that everyone has PTSD. While many people in the world are exposed to terrorism or to the threat of terrorism, we do all not have traumatic stress in the clinical sense. But trauma theorists have found that traumatic violence can spread trauma symptoms across a given population, such that many people experience these symptoms to a lesser degree than those who have posttraumatic stress disorder.[22] For example, women often express fear of sexual assault and go to great lengths in their efforts to avoid it, even when they have not themselves been directly victimized. They may experience hyper-vigilance to certain stimuli in their environment, although to a less extreme degree than those who have experienced sexual assault.[23] I suggest that terrorism operates in a similar way, spreading symptoms of trauma not only to those who become clinically traumatized but to other people as well. Trauma studies, then, can help to illuminate its broader effects.

But before exploring how, we first need to establish a working definition of "terrorism." In his book Nonviolent Response to Terrorism, Tom Hastings defines terrorism as "the practice of using violence against civilians."[24] While this definition gives us a start, it remains somewhat broad, since it could include a range of violent events that we generally do not think of as terrorism. For example, bar fights and random muggings are acts of violence against civilians. I prefer to modify this definition to define terrorism as the use of or threat to use violence against civilians for ideological or political purposes and with the intent of psychologically traumatizing a given population.

This definition emphasizes that terrorism has both political and psychological dimensions. It is a political activity designed to achieve certain goals, such as silencing people who express dissatisfaction with their government's actions, discouraging a resistance movement, or communicating one's own anger and discontent with the policies and practices of another nation. At the same time, terrorism is psychological warfare, a powerful display of violence designed to traumatize people and compromise their ability to live in the world with a sense

of safety and security.

When successful, terrorism instills a deep-seated fear that lasts for years. For example, in the aftermath of 9/11 many Americans expressed both shock that a nation supposedly so strong could experience such violence and fear that it might happen again. These intense emotions have not completely disappeared over the past six and a half years. I live in Arlington, Virginia, just a few miles from the Pentagon, and am often asked whether I fear for my life, given my proximity to an area that is a likely target for another terrorist attack. How can I stand to live so close to Washington, DC? Do I worry about my safety, or the safety of my two-year-old son? Such questions reflect the lasting psychological effects that terrorism can have—and the immense challenges involved in restoring people's sense of security and control in the aftermath of a terrorist attack.

On the definition I have proposed, terrorism could take numerous forms. For example, one could argue that domestic violence constitutes a form of terrorism, insofar as it consists in repeated acts of violence perpetrated, in most cases, by men against women for the purposes of controlling them and rendering them subordinate. Domestic violence instills a kind of psychological terror in its victims, which, in many cases, prevents them from extricating themselves from the abusive relationship. One could also include in the definition of terrorism events that more commonly leap to mind when we hear the word: events such as the recent attacks launched by suicide bombers in the Middle East, the Birmingham bombings during the U.S. Civil Rights movement, the ongoing use of violence between Israel and Palestine, and the actions of the El Salvadoran government against the country's own citizens during the 1980s civil war.

As these examples suggest, nation-states can perpetrate terrorism as can individuals acting on their own. Hastings distinguishes between two kinds of terrorism: state-sponsored, which is committed by nation-states against other nations or against their own citizens; and the "terrorism of the irregular," which is committed by individuals or groups who do not represent the interests of their state.[25] For many people in the United States the word terrorism conjures up images of the terrorism of the irregular. We think of planes crashing into buildings, towers collapsing, and bombs on subways exploding. But when we think of terrorism only in this way, we adopt too narrow a perspective. We imagine terrorism as solely the work of extremist groups from the Middle East, as solely the work of people from a different culture and different religion.

Such a limited conception of terrorism is misguided on two grounds. First, it fails to recognize that while many citizens of the United States think of this country as only a victim of terrorism, others around the world see the United States as a nation that, on a regular basis, perpetrates terrorism against other countries.[26] Our record during the past century makes it difficult to dispute this claim. Our bombings of Iraq in 2003, our possession of weapons of mass destruction, our foreign policy in Central America, our support of Israel and apparent indifference to the plight of the Palestinians, and the extensive collateral damage caused by our nuclear attack on Japan during World War II have understandably led many people to see the United States as an agent of terrorism.

Second, our narrow perspective on terrorism fails to fully appreciate the ways in which terrorism happens within the United States. Hastings argues that many citizens of the United States experience, as part of their daily life, terrorism caused by their own nation and by fellow Americans.[27] As examples, one could point not only to women's experiences of domestic violence but also to the experiences of people of color, who must deal on a daily basis with racism in the United States. For instance, Hastings observes that black Americans have long known what it means to experience terror.[28] The practices of racially-motivated violence, police brutality, and a discriminatory justice system constitute a kind of terrorism with which blacks in the United States must contend. Such practices deny many black Americans a basic sense of security in their everyday lives. It is easy to overlook this kind of terrorism if one sees terrorism simply as something perpetrated by extremists from another nation and another religion.

Trauma theory can help explain how and why terrorism works. It shows us, first of all, that terrorism terrorizes people in different ways. On the one hand, terrorism traumatizes direct survivors of terrorist attacks, such as those who lived through the collapse of the Twin Towers. These people may exhibit many of the classic symptoms of traumatic stress, such as hyperarousal, intrusive memories, emotional numbing, and dissociation. On the other hand, part of terrorism's power is its ability to affect not only those who have directly experienced and survived a terrorist attack, but also those who see themselves and their loved ones as potential targets in the future. In the aftermath of 9/11 waves of shock, grief, fear, and anxiety reverberated not just through New York and Washington but throughout the United States.[29] Due to the unpredictability and massive scale of the violence of

terrorism, the trauma symptoms it causes travel well.

Two symptoms are especially important to note. First, like many other forms of trauma, terrorism undermines people's capacity to experience empathy and compassion, which breaks down the bonds through which they can fruitfully and peacefully negotiate conflict. Many people show these emotions for their own nation's victims, at least in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attack. For example, after 9/11 many Americans expressed sympathy and care for fellow Americans who had suffered great losses. But far less common is empathy or compassion for the perpetrators or for their nation or group (hence the rise of racism and discrimination against people of Middle Eastern descent in the United States after 9/11). Instead, anger and fear clouds our vision, dampening our ability to show compassion and making us see the world in simplistic categories. There is "us" and "them." We are good while they are bad. We are victims and they are terrorists.

Second, terrorism constitutes a form of trauma that shatters people's sense of control. Recall that one of trauma's most debilitating effects is to make people confront, in a very real way, the unsettling notion that they cannot fully determine the course of their lives and that sometimes bad things happen that we cannot anticipate or prevent. Terrorism shatters our sense of control in a particularly effective way because we know there is not much we can do to anticipate or resist a terrorist attack. Staying home at night will not protect us from terrorists, nor will traveling in groups rather than alone. If we are hit by a bomb, there is not much we can do to escape other than hope we are lucky—the one who happens to be in the right place at the right time.

This loss of control has important implications for how people respond to terrorism. When we feel out of control, a typical response is to make some attempt to regain control, to assure ourselves that we can determine what happens to us. In the case of terrorism, this attempt to regain control often leads us to respond with force. We assume that the only way to assert control over terrorists who might attack us is to demonstrate to the world through violence that we are more powerful, a force to be reckoned with. And so in the aftermath of a terrorist attack on our nation, our need to be in control feeds into the cycles of violence already set in motion.

Trauma theory's interest in cycles of violence is, therefore, particularly relevant for analyzing terrorism because such cycles are precisely what we face when we encounter

terrorist activity. We can accurately speak of a terrorist act or event, but we must remember that an act of terrorism is generally not a single, isolated occurrence. Rather, terrorism is more often a series of events, an ongoing chain of violence in which one action inspires a range of psychological effects that may push people to respond with more violence. To put it in the language I used earlier, we internalize the violence of terrorism. And when internalized violence remains unresolved, people sometimes act out of their traumatization.[30] They act out of anger, fear, anxiety, grief, or a simple desire to protect themselves and their loved ones.

Trauma studies can help explain not only how the cycles of terrorism are generated, but also why it often remains difficult to see the cyclical nature of this violence. Recall that traumatic violence can take away our sense of a temporal timeline, rendering our vision myopic so that we remain fixated on the traumatic event and unable to think about much else. For many people in the United States, it was difficult immediately after 9/11 to think about anything other than the violence perpetrated in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, DC. It was difficult to think about the broader past and our role in the ongoing cycle of violence in the world. And it was difficult to think deeply about the fact that a violent response on our part would have consequences that last not for months or even years but for decades to come. In becoming fixated on the trauma, we lost the timeline that would put this violence in broader perspective.

In addition to clarifying the dynamics of terrorism in these ways, trauma theory also gives some insight into how religiously motivated terrorism, in particular, functions and why it may be traumatizing. When terrorism is defended on religious grounds, it has a profound effect on the victims, who often perceive this violence—unlike traditional views of war—as generated by religious fanaticism. Religiously motivated terrorism appears to be driven by the perpetrator's conviction that this violence is God's will—a conviction that, at least from the victims' point of view, is not necessarily accessible to reasonable argument. As trauma theorists observe, this apparently irrational and random quality is a key part of what can make certain acts of violence so traumatizing. It heightens the victims' sense of loss of control, which, in turn, intensifies their terror (or traumatization).

The apparent irrationality of religiously motivated terrorism also can increase the victims' sense that stopping the cycle of violence through peaceful means is impossible, since peaceful negotiations require some degree of reason and goodwill on the part of all parties

involved. When violence seems irrational, it reinforces the notion that counter-violence remains the best, and perhaps only viable, response; victory, presumably, can come only by overwhelming one's opponents with force. Moreover, finding alternatives to counter-violence may require that victims empathize with perpetrators—and it remains quite difficult to empathize with those whom one perceives as irrational and whose own capacities for empathy appear to have been destroyed by fanatical religious ideology.

In making religion seem like an irrational force, religiously motivated terrorism robs religion of its resources to respond to terrorism and to the traumatization it causes. It makes people see religion as a source of traumatic violence, not a potential resource for justice and peacebuilding. In my teaching, for example, I often find that my students hold a negative view of religion because they link it either with violence or with social conservatism in the United States. Certainly, one can argue that religiously motivated terrorism springs from a distortion or perversion of religion. One can argue, for instance, that religion often provides a cover for chiefly political motives, or that violence justified on religious grounds is more a function of social group phenomenon than anything authentic or intrinsic to religion itself. On these views, religiously motivated terrorism reveals the ways in which people can co-opt religious communities and discourses to further an agenda that remains alien to the authentic truths of their religion. But even if one believes these arguments (as I generally do), it does not change the fact that religiously motivated terrorism leads many people to perceive religion as an irrational, destructive, and traumatizing force.

Terrorism and Nonviolence

This brings us back to the question with which I began: What role might nonviolence play in resisting terrorism? Are the nonviolent stances of Gandhi and King outdated, or do they remain useful in an age marked by irregular and irrational violence?

I believe the nonviolence of King does remain relevant in today's world, partly because King himself was responding to terrorism. In Hastings' terms, King addressed both state-sponsored terrorism (perpetrated through the practices of police brutality) and the terrorism of the irregular (perpetrated by such groups as the Ku Klux Klan).[31] And King's nonviolent response to terrorism yielded considerable success: While the civil rights

movement did not accomplish everything its leaders had hoped, it did create real change in the segregationist South.

King's success stemmed partly from his ability to grasp two key aspects of the dynamics of violence and trauma. First, he deeply understood that violence can be internalized over time. In his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," King communicated this idea to the eight white clergy who criticized his actions in Birmingham as unwise and untimely. In his response to their criticism, King describes a young black girl who learns that she cannot go to the public amusement park because it remains open only to whites. King says that when she finds out why she can't go, you can see "ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky."[32] He further describes segregation as a system that instills in blacks a "degenerating sense of 'nobodiness.'"[33] With such examples he reveals his awareness that violence does not remain external to the identities of those it violates. Instead, it becomes internalized, shaping the psyches of its victims in a debilitating and deformative way.

Second, King understood profoundly not only the internalization of violence, but also the ways in which this internalization can lead to cycles of violence. Again and again, he exhorted his followers not to respond to violence with violence. He asked them to undertake the training and discipline necessary to meet violence with nonviolence, even when under direct attack from their opponents. For example, a pledge that he used for volunteers in the 1963 sit-in demonstrations in Birmingham outlined ten commandments the demonstrators were to follow.[34] These commandments were designed to prepare them to seek justice and reconciliation while refraining from using physical force.

The ordering of the commandments reveals King's insight not only into the internalized nature of violence, but also into how people can break the cycles of violence that stem from this internalization. Heading the list are the commands to "meditate daily on the teachings and life of Jesus" and to "remember always that the nonviolent movement in Birmingham seeks justice and reconciliation—not victory."[35] Surprisingly, refraining from violence does not show up on the list until number eight. King's choice to use a set of commandments structured in this way suggests that to enact this crucial command of refraining from violence one must first undergo certain disciplines that form a person's character in a particular way. More specifically, it suggests that to stop cycles of violence we must find ways for people to transform internalized violence and to integrate nonviolence into their identities instead.

This insight points us toward a broader understanding of nonviolence. When my students argue that nonviolence cannot effectively address terrorism, it is partly because they think of nonviolence solely in terms of nonviolent direct action. They imagine protests, marches, sit-ins, and demonstrations, and they wonder how these activities could undermine organizations such as Al-Qaeda. But both King's work and trauma theory provide us with a structure through which to analyze a different dimension of nonviolence. If cycles of terrorism emerge from people who have internalized the violence of terrorism, then a nonviolent response entails resisting terrorism's psychologically traumatizing effects. Such resistance prevents us from acting out of our traumatization and allows us to interrupt the cycles of violence that terrorism generates.

Trauma theory provides a framework that helps us understand how we may accomplish this. It does so by outlining a variety of therapeutic techniques that enable some traumatized individuals to transform the psychological dynamics that result from their traumas. With regard to the specific dynamics I have discussed—the losses of empathy and sense of control that can feed one's participation in cycles of violence—trauma theorists point to one particular strategy. They argue that an essential part of transforming the effects of trauma involves putting the trauma in a temporal timeline.[36] This makes it possible for the survivor's myopic vision to expand, so that they no longer remain fixated on the trauma and can integrate the experience into their broader life story.

Part of what makes it possible for individuals to establish such a temporal timeline is to create a narrative of the trauma that locates it in larger context of their life. Repeatedly retelling the story of trauma and placing it in the context of "before" and "after" helps the individual to see the trauma not as the one moment that defines the rest of their life, but as part of a bigger story or ongoing narrative. As the individual retells this story, he or she puts the event into a framework that both recognizes its reality and offers some hope for a different future, a future not dominated by the experience of traumatic violence. While this contextualization may not entirely eliminate the traumatic symptoms, it can lessen their intensity and take away their power to retraumatize.

Although trauma theorists tend to focus on traumatized individuals, this discussion of resisting traumatization has relevance at the collective level as well. As King's work suggests, communities and nations, too, need to resist the effects of traumatization and deal

with internalized violence. In his own life King constructed a community that did just this. He did so by working within a religious framework, drawing on resources in the Christian traditions. Christianity is not unique in this regard; other religions can share this task, working from within their different traditions.

But I want to take a moment to analyze some of the theological resources that Christian communities use to enable people to resist traumatization and to internalize nonviolence. I will explore Christian discourse and practice since I am most familiar with this tradition, and since this analysis illuminates King's work. A relevant place to start is with the theme of temporal timeline. The Christian traditions place what happens in human life in a huge overarching timeline that spans from the creation to the eschaton, from the beginning of the world until the "last things" or end of the world. Moreover, Christianity understands this timeline to be defined by a narrative that has as one of its central moments an event of trauma, the crucifixion of Jesus. Yet within Christian traditions this trauma does not completely dominate the broader narrative; Christian theology at its best gives equal weight and salvific significance to all aspects of Jesus' existence. The story of his death, then, is held within the narrative of his life and resurrection, and within the much broader narrative that spans from the beginning to the end of time.

But Christianity does not just tell the story of a timeline that is larger than the lives of individuals. It also asks Christians to insert themselves into that timeline through their practices and rituals. Christians integrate themselves into the larger timeline by telling the stories contained within their scriptures and enacting them. They perform practices that are central to the gospel narratives, such as baptism and communion.[37] Christians believe that when they perform these practices, they participate in the ongoing story of Jesus' life. As they do so, this story becomes theirs as well, an integral part of who they are. More specifically, it comes to shape the ways in which they perceive and respond to reality. It comes to inform how they think, speak, act, and make decisions.[38] As Christians insert their own lives into this narrative framework and are formed by its stories, their own experiences of trauma are placed within a broader overarching timeline.

King draws on precisely such a narrative framework in his construction of a community that resists trauma and embodies a nonviolent response to terrorism. For him, the biblical narratives provide the foundation for his theological vision of God and humanity and for the concrete enactment of that vision in the civil rights movement. King deeply believed that

God created all human beings to be with each other and not separate from each other. He envisioned us as one humanity, intended to live together as a diverse, integrated community marked by personal and social relationships of love, justice, and hope. In his view, the story of Jesus' crucifixion provides the catalyst for this idea. King understands the cross as both "an eternal expression of the lengths to which God goes to restore broken human community" and as a model for how Christians should live their own lives: committed to the rule of love and confident in God's power to provide the resources they need to face the challenges of life.[39]

King's theological vision derived from his reading of the biblical narratives shapes his response to terrorism in at least two important ways. First, it gives him a persistent sense of empathy that counters the destruction of empathy that trauma causes. In his sermon "The Drum Major Instinct," King displays his own compassion for poor whites, who, in his estimation, have failed to perceive the extent to which they have been oppressed by middle and upper-class whites. Instead of simply condemning poor whites whose racism leads them to feel superior to blacks, King asks his audience to understand why they respond in this way. He explains that "the poor white has been put into this position, where … he is forced to support his oppressors. And the only thing he has going for him is the false feeling that he's superior because his skin is white—and [yet he] can't hardly eat and make his ends meet week in and week out."[40] In King's view, the poor white person's desire to come first represents a perversion of the "drum major instinct," the instinct to be great that the biblical narratives identify. He argues that Jesus of Nazareth asked his followers to be great but gave different meaning to the term "greatness." He asked them to be great servants, drum majors for peace and righteousness who would love humanity and have hearts full of grace.[41]

Second, the biblical narratives gave King an alternative perspective on control. Whereas trauma tends to break down people's sense of control, these narratives provide King with a way to relocate control. In his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," he makes the bold claim that "right defeated is stronger than evil triumphant."[42] Behind this claim lies the conviction that regardless of what human beings do, the direction of history ultimately lies in the hands of God. The world is not out of control, but it also is not completely in our control. The task for Christians, then, is not to seek complete control over the world but to live faithfully according to their sacred texts and traditions. King's comment reflect his own confidence

that God ensures that good will ultimately win out over evil, even if human beings cannot see how in the present time.[43]

Relocating control in the hands of the divine does not let Christians off the hook for participating in the struggle for peace and justice. Instead, Christian narratives portray nonviolence and attention to the disempowered as central to the life and death of Jesus and therefore to the lives of those who profess faith in him. In his groundbreaking work The Politics of Jesus, Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder offers a reading of Luke's gospel that portrays Jesus as one who encountered social conflict and a variety of ways to respond to it. Yoder argues that the biblical narratives portray Jesus as one who repeatedly rejected the option of controlling or dominating his enemies with sheer force. Instead, he chose an alternative response: the creation of a new social reality in which all people could live in peace.[44] When Christians live into these narratives through their practices and rituals, the nonviolence of Jesus becomes a constituent element of who they are. It becomes the space out of which they think and act. This, of course, was part of the goal of the "Ten Commandments" King distributed to the demonstrators in Birmingham.

While both King and Yoder perceive nonviolence as central to the Christian life and message, they stand in the minority on this issue. Many Christians readily support the state's use of violence precisely because they do not perceive nonviolence as integral to the Christian traditions and find nothing within Christianity to support such an ethic. The historic peace churches—Quakers, Mennonites, and Church of the Brethren—have traditionally made nonviolence the cornerstone of their faith and continue to do so today.

The public statements issued by the leaders of these denominations in the aftermath of 9/11 reflect their deep commitment to nonviolence and to seeking a peaceful resolution.[45] But some individuals within these traditions, and many other Christians as well, remain reluctant to acknowledge the messages of nonviolence within Christianity and to allow these messages to shape their lives in a profound way.

This refusal to develop an appreciation for the messages of nonviolence within Christianity plays into the hands of many of our politicians. Since 9/11, United States' foreign policy has been directed toward a nation held within a traumatic moment. Many politicians, abetted by the media, have wanted to keep us in this space of trauma, because when we operate from this place we remain eager for control and are more willing to support a violent response. In

a Washington Post editorial, Zbigniew Brezezinski argued that the Bush administration has used the phrase “war on terror” to create a culture of fear that “obscures reason, intensifies emotions, and makes it easier for demagogic politicians to mobilize the public on behalf of the policies they want to pursue.”[46] When we remain stuck in the trauma, our vision continues to be myopic. And this myopic vision keeps us in the moment of 9/11, a moment dislodged from a larger timeline. It prevents us from thinking clearly about the causes of the terrorist attack and our role in the cycle of violence. Furthermore, it makes it hard for us to envision a way out of this cycle because we cannot conceive of a future that is different from the present.

Religion represents one resource that can help people to imagine a new future and place trauma in a broader temporal timeline. As an example of how religion can contribute to this task, I have argued that Christianity contains narratives that inform how people live in the world. When Christians integrate themselves into these narratives and develop an appreciation for their nonviolent messages, they cultivate communities that construct a nonviolent spirit marked by empathy, compassion, and a willingness to relocate control—a willingness to acknowledge that it is precisely when we strive to control the world that we invariably do the most damage. Other religious traditions also contain resources for forming a nonviolent spirit and way of being in the world. This opens up the possibility of coalition-building that involves constructing networks of communities among the world’s religious traditions that work to internalize nonviolence in order to create agents who can break the cycles of violence generated by terrorism.

This is possible, however, only if we do not allow those who perpetrate terrorism to co-opt religion. It remains important to keep in mind that religiously motivated terrorism makes people associate religion with violence rather than peace. In doing so, it robs religious communities of their resources to counter the traumatization that terrorism causes. King helps us understand how religious communities can resist this hijacking of religion and the traumatization of terrorism, since he recognizes not only the potential of nonviolence to interrupt cycles of violence, but also the role that religious narratives and practices can play in helping people internalize nonviolence. People who internalize nonviolence can embody empathy, compassion, and a willingness to relocate control. This, in turn, gives them the capacity to engage in strategic nonviolent action, which ultimately may prove worth exploring as one possible response to terrorism.[47]

1. 1. See, for example, Susan Brison's *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000); Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000); Jennifer Beste, *God and the Victim: Traumatic Intrusions on Grace and Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Mary E. Gilfus, "The Price of a Ticket: A Survivor-Centered Appraisal of Trauma Theory," in *Violence Against Women* 5, no. 11 (Nov. 1999): 1238-1257. The use of the phrase "trauma theory" should not be taken to imply that all trauma theorists share a unified view of trauma and its effects. Rather, those who study trauma present a diversity of views, which taken as a whole constitute the field called trauma studies or trauma theory.
2. 2. For instance, see Judith Herman's classic text *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992).
3. 3. See Bessel A. van der Kolk, "The Body Keeps the Score: Approaches to the Psychobiology of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," in *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*, edited by Van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, and Lars Weisaeth (New York: Guilford Press, 1996).
4. 4. See James Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), and Karl Plank, Mother of the Wire Fence: Inside and Outside the Holocaust (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).
5. 5. See Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998) and Herbert Hirsch, *Genocide and the Politics of Memory: Studying Death to Preserve Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).
6. 6. See Nell Painter, *Soul Murder and Slavery* (Waco: Markham Press Fund, Baylor University Press, 1995) and Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
7. 7. For example, see van der Kolk and McFarlane, "The Black Hole of Trauma," in *Traumatic Stress*, edited by Bessel A. van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, and Lars Weisaeth (New York: Guilford Press, 1996), 6.
8. 8. Van der Kolk, *Traumatic Stress*, 6.

9. 9. Van der Kolk and McFarlane, *Traumatic Stress*, 7.
10. 10. Van der Kolk, *Traumatic Stress*, 13.
11. 11. Van der Kolk, *Traumatic Stress*, 219.
12. 12. Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), 37.
13. 13. Bessel van der Kolk, Onno van der Hart, and Charles R. Marmar, "Dissociation and Information Processing in PTSD," in *Traumatic Stress*, 306, 316.
14. 14. See Sandra Bloom and Michael Reichert, *Bearing Witness: Violence and Collective Responsibility* (New York: The Haworth Maltreatment and Trauma Press, 1998), 124.
15. 15. Van der Kolk," Trauma and Memory," in *Traumatic Stress*, 286-87.
16. 16. Bloom and Reichert, *Bearing Witness*, 116.
17. 17. Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).
18. 18. For an account of the relational consequences of trauma, see Herman, Trauma and Recovery and van der Kolk, *Traumatic Stress*.
19. 19. Van der Kolk, "The Black Hole of Trauma," in *Traumatic Stress*, 5.
20. 20. See Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 113.
21. 21. Bessel Van der Kolk, "The Body Keeps the Score: Approaches to the Psychobiology of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," in *Traumatic Stress*, 219.
22. 22. For example, see Laura Brown, "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma," in *Explorations in Memory*, edited by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Brison, Aftermath, 55; Karein Goertz, "Transgenerational Representations of the Holocaust: from Memory to Post-Memory," in *World Literature Today* 72, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 33-38; and Lori Hope Lefkovitz, "Inherited Holocaust Memory and the Ethics of Ventriloquism," in *The Kenyon Review* 19 (Winter 1997): 34-43.
23. 23. Laura Brown, "Not Outside the Range," 107. Hypervigilance is a trauma symptom that is closely related to hyperarousal. Hyperarousal refers to the condition of persistent physiological arousal that some survivors experience, and hypervigilance refers to the tendency to be always on the lookout for signs of danger. See Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 35. Unlike Brown, Herman does not use the term "hypervigilance," but instead speaks of "vigilance for the return of danger." She argues that this vigilance is a trauma symptom that falls under the broader category of

hyperarousal.

24. 24. Hastings, *Nonviolent Response to Terrorism* (Jefferson, N.C : McFarland & Company, 2004), 6.
25. 25. Hastings, *Nonviolent Response to Terrorism*, 6.
26. 26. John Dear, "How to Stop Terrorism," www.commondreams.org/views05/0710-23.htm.
27. 27. Hastings, *Nonviolent Response to Terrorism,* 93.
28. 28. Hastings, Nonviolent Response to Terrorism, 93.
29. 29. Trauma theorists have found that these emotions often accompany traumatic events and the reliving of these events through traumatic memories. See Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 25 and 108-9. See also Brison, *Aftermath*, chapter 1.
30. 30. See Carolyn Yoder, *The Little Book of Trauma Healing: When Violence Strikes and Community Security is Threatened* (Intercourse, Penn.: Good Books, Inc.), 30-44.
31. 31. *The Little Book of Trauma Healing*, 102.
32. 32. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Signet Classic, 2000), 69.
33. 33. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait*, 70.
34. 34. *The Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, selected by Coretta Scott King (New York: New Market Press, 1983), 74.
35. 35. *The Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 74.
36. 36. For example, see Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 177.
37. 37. See Shannon Craigo-Snell, "Command Performance: Rethinking Performance Interpretation in the Context of Divine Discourse," *Modern Theology* 16, no. 4 (October 2000): 475-494.
38. 38. John Howard Yoder, "The Believers Church and the Arms Race," in *For the Nations: Essays Public and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 153.
39. 39. See Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Walk through the Holy Land," sermon given March 29, 1959, at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and King, "Revolution; and Redemption," address given April 16 1964, to the European Baptist Assembly, Amsterdam, Holland. Both texts are in "Martin Luther King, Jr., Papers," Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Atlanta, Georgia.
40. 40. "The Drum Major Instinct," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James Melvin Washington (San Francisco: Harper

& Row, 1986), 264.

41. 41. Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope,* 265-67.
42. 42. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait*, 81.
43. 43. "Eulogy for the Young Victims of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church Bombing," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James Melvin Washington, 221-23.
44. 44. John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994).
45. 45. William Vance Trollinger, Jr., "Nonviolent Voices: Peace Churches Make a Witness," in *The Christian Century* 118, no. 34 (December 12, 2001): 18-22.
46. 46. *The Washington Post*, Sunday, March 25, 2007, B1.
47. 47. On the possibilities of a nonviolent response to terrorism, see Hastings, *Nonviolent Response to Terrorism* (McFarland and Company, 2004).