

## The Most Durable Power

*This excerpt is from a sermon King preached in Montgomery, Alabama, on 6 November 1956, just seven days before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against Alabama's bus segregation laws.*

Always be sure that you struggle with Christian methods and Christian weapons. Never succumb to the temptation of becoming bitter. As you press on for justice, be sure to move with dignity and discipline, using only the weapon of love. Let no man pull you so low as to hate him. Always avoid violence. If you succumb to the temptation of using violence in your struggle, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness, and your chief legacy to the future will be an endless reign of meaningless chaos.

In your struggle for justice, let your oppressor know that you are not attempting to defeat or humiliate him, or even to pay him back for injustices that he has heaped upon you. Let him know that you are merely seeking justice for him as well as yourself. Let him know that the festering sore of segregation debilitates the white man as well as the Negro. With this attitude you will be able to keep your struggle on high Christian standards.

Many persons will realize the urgency of seeking to eradicate the evil of segregation. There will be many Negroes who will devote their lives to the cause of freedom. There will be many white persons of good will and strong moral sensitivity who will dare to take a stand for justice. Honesty impels me to admit that such a stand will require willingness to suffer and sacrifice. So don't despair if you are condemned and persecuted for righteousness' sake. Whenever you take a stand for truth and justice, you are liable to scorn. Often you will be called an impractical idealist or a dangerous radical. Sometimes it might mean going to jail. If such is the case you must honorably grace the jail with your presence. It might even mean physical death. But if physical death is the price that some must pay to free their children from a permanent life of psychological death, then nothing could be more Christian.

I still believe that standing up for the truth of God is the greatest thing in the world. This is the end of life. The end of life is not to be happy. The end of life is not to achieve pleasure and avoid pain. The end of life is to do the will of God, come what may.

I still believe that love is the most durable power in the world. Over the centuries men have sought to discover the highest good. This has been the chief quest of ethical philosophy. This was one of the big questions of Greek philosophy. The Epicureans and the Stoics sought to answer it; Plato and Aristotle sought to answer it. What is the *summum bonum* of life? I think I have discovered the highest good. It is love. This principle stands at the center of the cosmos. As John says, "God is love." He who loves is a participant in the being of God. He who hates does not know God.

## Students and the Movement:

### An Interview with Diane Nash

Diane Nash left her native Chicago in 1956 to attend Howard University in Washington, D.C. In 1959, Nash transferred to Fisk University in Nashville. The first

chairman of the central committee of the Nashville Student Movement, Nash led the campaign to desegregate the lunch counters of Nashville's department

stores. She organized sit-ins, trained students, and selected the Nashville contingent for the Freedom Rides.



Because I grew up in Chicago, I didn't have an emotional relationship to segregation. I understood the facts and stories, but there was not an emotional relationship. When I went south and saw the signs that said 'white' and 'colored,' and I actually could not drink out of that water fountain or go to that ladies' room, I had a real emotional reaction. I remember the first time it happened was at the Tennessee State Fair. I had a date with a young man, and I started to go to the ladies' room. And it said 'white' and 'colored,' and I really resented that. I was outraged.

In Chicago, at least, I had had access to public accommodations and lunch counters. So, my response was, "Who's trying to change these things?" I remember getting depressed because I encountered what I thought was so much apathy. At first I couldn't find anyone,

and many of the students were saying, "Why are you concerned about that?" They were not interested in trying to effect some kind of change, I thought.

And then I talked to Paul LePrad, who told me about the nonviolent workshops that Jim Lawson was conducting. They were taking place a couple of blocks off campus. Jim had been to India, and he had studied the movement [of] Mohandas Gandhi. He also had been a conscientious objector and had refused to fight in the Korean War. He really is the person that brought Gandhi's philosophy and strategies of nonviolence to this country. He conducted weekly workshops where students in Nashville, as well as some of the people who lived in the Nashville community, were trained and educated in these philosophies and strategies. There were many things I learned in

Diane Nash (left) sitting with black students at a lunch counter.



Diane Nash (second from left) sits with other blacks enjoying a meal at an integrated lunch counter.

those workshops that I have used for the rest of my life.

I remember realizing that with what we were doing, trying to abolish segregation, we were coming up against governors of seven states, judges, politicians, businessmen, and I remember thinking, "I'm only 22 years old. What do I know? What am I doing?" I felt very vulnerable. So when we heard that other cities had demonstrations, it really helped, because there were more of us. And I think we started feeling the power of an idea whose time had come.

The movement had a way of reaching inside me and bringing out things that I never knew were there. Like courage, and love for people. It was a real experience to be seeing a group of people who would put their bodies between you and danger. And to love people that you work with enough that you would

put your body between them and danger. I was afraid of going to jail. I said, "I'll do telephone work, and I'll type, but I'm really afraid to go to jail." But when the time came to go to jail, I was far too busy to be afraid. And we had to go, that's what happened.

I think it's really important that young people today understand that the movement of the sixties was really a people's movement. The media and history seem to record it as Martin Luther King's movement, but young people should realize that it was people just like them, their age, that formulated goals and strategies, and actually developed the movement. When they look around now, and see things that need to be changed, they should say: "What can I do? What can my roommate and I do to effect that change?"