

# **From Conquest to Freedom Continued**

## **Part 5 “Reciprocity”**

Theologies of conquest are those theologies that serve to set one people group over and against another, claiming for their own group legitimacy, mandate or destiny to violate the sovereignty, autonomy or self-determination of others.

Theologies of conquest have been and continue to be used time and again to encourage and excuse theft of lands, military and political subjugation and/or wholesale slaughter of human beings, as well as subtler forms of cultural, spiritual, social and economic oppression. It is the nature of theologies of conquest to claim exclusive ownership of universal truth and/or special status as *the* chosen people. Others are alienated and dehumanized as pagan, heathen, unsaved or heretical. Theologies of conquest serve to develop and maintain hierarchical systems of government and church structure, as well as racial and socio-economic caste systems.

Theologies of freedom are those theologies that encourage harmony – the same harmony (unity in diversity) that is the very nature of Creator as mirrored in creation. Theologies of freedom encourage harmony between human beings and other human beings, on both individual and group levels, as well as harmony between human beings and the rest of creation, through loving the other as oneself – giving self in quest of freedom *for all* from bondage and oppression of every sort.

Theologies of freedom encourage recognition of giftedness and chosenness as well as neediness of *all* peoples (one’s own as well as others). They encourage the understanding that there is no place where Creator is not already made known through Creator-Offspring, no place where Creator-Spirit does not already move. In regard to the sharing of good news, theologies of freedom encourage an attitude of watching and listening first for the good news already there. They encourage an expectation of seeing Creator-Offspring’s presence already evident in every aspect of creation, including each and every human people and culture.

Far from encouraging attempts to recreate others after one’s own image, theologies of freedom encourage a humble attitude of seeking, respectfully and with permission, to help with what Creator is already doing in and through others while accepting reciprocal help *from* others. Theologies of freedom yield an understanding that reconciliation and proper relationship with Creator and reconciliation and proper relationship between individuals and groups on earth are interrelated and inseparable, with greatness measured not by ability to control others but by the active giving of self that the people may live.

This is the second in a series of talks on what I call the Four R's: the four essential and interdependent values of respect, reciprocity, reconciliation and relationship. These values are essential to living balanced lives, lives characterized by harmony and love – lives that value true freedom. This talk was originally shared in the Mid American Indian Fellowships in September 2005. Minor revisions and some deletions have been made.

## **To Save a Mockingbird**

It was early summer, blackberry season, and I had just turned eight years old. Just the summer before, our family had moved to the little farm, near Advance, Missouri, our parents feeling it was time to get us back home, out of the city. I was playing in the back yard, when I decided to climb the gnarly old apple tree that was visible from my bedroom window. There weren't many trees on the entire farm, when we first moved there. In the yard, there were only three: a maple to the south of the house, a walnut tree to the east and this old apple tree in the northwest corner. Walking toward the tree, I saw a baby bird on the ground under its twisted limbs. Drawing near, I had the sudden realization that this was a baby mockingbird. How did I know this? Did the knowledge come from some mystic revelation known only to eight-year-old Indian boys? Not really. Did it come from clues drawn from careful observation of the baby bird's shape or the color of its down? Not quite. No, my knowledge that this was a baby mockingbird came from the indisputable fact that an adult mockingbird was now fiercely intent on dive-bombing my head!

Forced to a stop by the incessant attacks, I spoke gently to the mother bird. "I'm not going to hurt your baby," I assured her. "If you want, I'll do what I can to help." From her perch in the apple tree, the mother bird cocked her head curiously to the side, assessing the situation. She stayed where she was, as I approached the baby bird and knelt down to see whether any injuries were sustained from its recent fall. As I knelt there, the downy little thing opened an orange-lined mouth wide and fluttered tiny wings, begging for food. It appeared to be whole and healthy but hungry. Running to a nearby fencerow, I returned with a ripe blackberry nearly as big as the little bird's head. When the mouth opened again, I dropped in the berry which disappeared in one gulp, leaving the baby bird begging for more. Suddenly uneasy as to how a diet of blackberries would set with one so young; I thought it best to return the fledgling to its mother's expert care. Looking up into the apple tree, I spotted the nest within easy climbing distance. The mother bird was still perched on a twig, quietly watching the proceedings. "If you want me to, I'll put your baby back in the nest, I said." Something in the look of her eye told me this was exactly her desire. Scooping up the baby in my left hand, I climbed the tree and gently placed the little bird back in her bed of sticks and grass. "Be more careful this time," I admonished, before descending back to earth. With a look of supreme relief, the mother bird flew to the nest and quickly checked the condition of her offspring before flying off to find more food.

For several years after that, until it finally died and had to be cut down, mockingbirds came each spring to build a nest and raise their young in the gnarly old apple tree. After the tree was cut, they nested in one of the other apple trees in the little

orchard we had established by then. It always seemed that the mockingbirds knew me, and on moonlit nights, I would fall asleep to the varied music of their songs.

## **No One Went Hungry**

After moving to the little farm, one of the first crops we raised for sale was watermelons. In fact, Daddy raised the first crop of melons before we moved, driving down from St. Charles on weekends to cultivate and hoe, so that when we moved down in August, ripe watermelons were there waiting for us.

At first, we had some trouble with thieves in the melon patch. It wouldn't have been so bad if they had just slipped in at night to take only one or two melons, but this thievery was laced with vandalism. We went to the patch one morning to find dozens of melons burst open and left to rot. People were also stealing melons that were already picked and in the yard waiting to be sold. When we returned from church on Sunday, a pickup truckload might be missing. Momma and Daddy decided to buy a puppy and get a watch-dog raised in, but he would be no help until the following year. We were all about at our wit's end, when something happened that solved our stealing problem.

Just before Labor Day weekend, a carload of teenage boys pulled into our driveway. Daddy went out to see what they wanted. Piling out of the car, the spokesman of the group said, "Our vocational-agriculture teacher, Mr. Davis, sent us here to see how much it would cost to get a pickup load of watermelons for an FFA watermelon party. Daddy looked the young men over. Two of them hung back from the others, looking sheepish. Their heads tucked down, they kicked at the gravels of the driveway. "Those two have been here before," Daddy thought to himself. "Either that, or they know someone who's been here before, of a night or of a Sunday morning."

In answer to the young men's query, Daddy said, "I'm not about to *sell* any melons for any FFA party. But I'll tell you what I'll do. You bring a pickup truck out here. I'll help you load up, and I'll *give* you a pickup load of melons for your party. Fair enough?"

We didn't have any more trouble with watermelon thieves, at least, not so's you'd notice. What we did have was a lot more people coming to the farm to *buy* watermelons. Even then, Daddy always had to give out samples. Oh yes, Daddy also tied an "honor box" to the maple tree in the front yard, so people could buy watermelons while we were at church on Sundays.

We never had much money, but we had the things we raised. Aside from melons, we raised strawberries for sale and sweet corn and green beans. We raised other vegetables mostly for our own use. We raised hogs for awhile, and we generally kept some milk cows and chickens. We didn't go hungry. Momma and Daddy never let anyone go away from our place hungry. If someone came to visit, they got fed. It didn't matter what time of the day or night it was. If it was the pastor from the General Baptist church, where we were members, or anyone from the pastor's family, they not only got fed but loaded down with produce. Momma gave them a cup of coffee and a snack when they first got there, and Daddy kept them occupied until there was a regular meal to share. When they left, they went with a sack or basket of whatever was growing on the place at the time – tomatoes or squash, turnips or apples, along with meat from the

freezer, eggs and fresh milk. Early Sunday morning, on the way to church, Momma and Daddy would restock the pastor's larder again with another gallon of milk, another dozen eggs, and, as I said before, whatever else happened to be growing at the time. My parents may not have put more than a couple of dollars a week in the collection plate, but with them around, no pastor's family ever had to worry about missing any meals.

### **The Sermon on a Level Place**

He [Jesus] went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon....

Looking at his disciples, he said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.  
Blessed are you who hunger now,  
for you will be satisfied.  
Blessed are you who weep now,  
for you will laugh.  
Blessed are you when men hate you,  
when they exclude you and insult you  
and reject your name as evil,  
because of the Son of Man.

“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.

“But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have already received your comfort.  
Woe to you who are well fed now,  
for you will go hungry.  
Woe to you who laugh now  
for you will mourn and weep.  
Woe to you when all men speak well of you,  
for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.

“But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to

you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners,’ expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

He also told this parable: “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

- Luke 6:17, 20-49

In his “Sermon on a Level Place,” Jesus outlines what might properly be called the principle and the value of reciprocity. Reciprocity is both a principle and a value. As a set law of creation, the principle of reciprocity basically says, “In a creation where everything is related and interdependent, what goes around comes around, and what goes up must come down.” Whether we choose to understand it and embrace it or not, the principle of reciprocity always applies. It is as basic as the law of gravity. In fact, the law of gravity is only one aspect of the greater principle of reciprocity. If I jump off a high cliff without a parachute, I *will* fall to my death, whether I believe in the law of gravity or not. What goes up must come down. What goes around comes around. All of creation seeks the level place. It is not within Creator’s will that any person or people be set above another. The principle of reciprocity is always present to level the field.

Whether we like it or not, whether we admit to it or not, we are part of a creation where the principle of reciprocity is in effect. This is true no matter what we do or how we feel about it. We do not have any choice as to whether or not we will be affected by the principle of reciprocity. We do have a choice as to whether we place value on it or not. This brings us around to the *value* of reciprocity.

The value of reciprocity is what moves the circle of generous giving and gracious receiving that flows from an understanding of relatedness and interdependence. Along with respect, the value of reciprocity is essential for balanced and harmonious living and is, along with respect, an aspect of love.

You will see that there is much overflow between the value of reciprocity and the value of respect, as these two are interdependent values which, in turn, are interdependent with the values of reconciliation and relationship, which are also interdependent with each other. These four values tend to blend and flow together in never ending circles and circles within circles with no way to clearly dissect or categorize one from another.

The value of reciprocity flows from an understanding that all things are connected and related and must live together in interdependent circles for harmony and balance to be maintained. Generosity amounts to ½ of the value of reciprocity, the other half being an honest understanding of one's own neediness.

Remember in the biblical book of Job, when Job's friends come to straighten him out? Job's friends are generous to a fault, at least when it comes to advice. Yet, in the end, they find themselves in urgent need of Job's prayers (Job 42:7-10). In order to fully practice reciprocity, we must have a sense of our own insufficiency. Too often we see churches or other religious organizations "reaching out" to those they see as the "unreached, unsaved, unenlightened, unevangelized" peoples of the world, sharing with no thought that they themselves, may also be in desperate spiritual need. It brings to mind the Church of Laodicea to whom the risen Jesus sent a message. They thought they were rich when instead they were wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked (Revelation 3:17). One aspect of reciprocity is the practice of listening as well as speaking. We also do well to remember, as with the value of respect, that when entering another's space or territory, we listen *first* and speak *only* with permission.

The talking circle, a tradition shared by indigenous peoples all around the earth, is one way this aspect of the value of reciprocity is lived out. As the talking stick is passed, each person, no matter how old, no matter how young, no matter how supposedly educated or uneducated, has her or his opportunity to share from the heart.

An old Native woman once said to a group of white missionaries, "If you have come to save us, you are wasting your time and ours. If you have come because you consider your own healing to be bound together with our healing, sit down and let's talk." Matthew Fox, theologian and author of *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* and *Creation Spirituality*, says non-Indian churches desperately need to learn some lessons from American Indian people. The fact is we all can stand to learn from one another, and we all need one another.

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ..... If one part

suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

- 1 Corinthians 12:21, 26

The principle of reciprocity is present in every aspect of Creation. The earth rotates daily on her axis and revolves annually around the sun. The moon revolves around the earth and goes through the monthly cycle of phases. The winds move in circles around the earth, in big gentle circles or in tight violent circles such as hurricanes and tornadoes. Water evaporates from the oceans, is carried over the land as clouds, falls to earth as rain and flows through streams and rivers back toward the oceans, always seeking the level place. Seasons follow one after another and circle back again. Bird migrations and the reproduction of birds, animals and plants come in yearly cycles. Generation follows generation. We are born and every element of our bodies is of the earth. We die, and the elements of our bodies return to the earth. Everything moves in circles.

We learn this principle and come to value reciprocity from careful observation of the earth in all her aspects. As we receive, we should also give. As we give we will receive, in Creator's own time.

This value of reciprocity is illustrated in our traditional ways. According to Cherokee tradition, as I have been taught, when we go to water, we give an offering of tobacco; when we go to the fire, we give an offering of tobacco; when we go out to gather herbs, we leave some tobacco; when we kill an animal for food, we leave some tobacco. In these ways, we acknowledge our neediness, show our gratitude and give something back. In this way, we practice the value of reciprocity. The annual ceremonies of the Cherokee people and of other indigenous peoples around the earth are all in keeping with the value of reciprocity. Most are thanksgiving ceremonies. When we offer ourselves in a ceremony, giving of our own bodies through fasting, sweating or ceremonial scratching and the shedding of blood, this is not to appease some supposedly angry God. This is to give back to the earth and to Creator/Appportioner for the blessing of life given to the people. This is reciprocity embraced and lived out (Romans 12:1). And, if a woman prepares ground, plants good seed and cultivates carefully, she will receive food for her family.

We see this value of reciprocity taught throughout the Bible.

Happy are those who consider the poor;  
the Lord delivers them in the day of trouble.

- Psalm 41:1 N.R.S.V.

When we see others suffering, our prayers and our resources should go out to them. We are all related. We too, will see a day of trouble come in our lives. Will we want others to help us or to simply look on with a cold heart and a tight hand?

When someone comes to our door, we must not let that person go away hungry. When we see someone in need, we are called upon to help as we can. Sometimes a person will sit and dream of all the people he could help if only he could win ten million dollars or more in the lottery. I know; I have daydreams like that, which is strange, because I never play the lottery! But did you know that most help for the poor is given

by the poor? Most help for the rich is given by the poor too! If we wait to get rich before reaching a hand out to others, we will never help anyone but ourselves. If we *do* grow rich, and the chances of that happening are slim, our hearts will most likely be seared over. We will have forgotten the daydreams of the good we would do if only....if only.... In a letter to people in the city of Corinth, Paul wrote about this very thing.

For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need.

- 2 Corinthians 8:12-14a

When Jesus sent his followers out to help their people, he said, “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8b).

Our Creator gives us the gift of life. What can we give to Creator? Everything we have is from Creator. We can give our own bodies, our own flesh and blood, but this too is from Creator. But when we give to others expecting nothing in return, we give as Creator gives.

Daddy grew up during the Great Depression in an area called, “The Old Field,” a flat, former Mississippi River bottom east of the town of Advance, Missouri. Daddy often told stories of “threshing rings” and “butchering rings.” According to the season, the people of the community, and it truly was a community, went from farm to farm, thrashing wheat, butchering hogs and putting their hands to other tasks better and more joyfully accomplished by a large group. The only remnant of this that lasted into my growing-up years was the hog butchering ring. We worked together with one other family to get our hogs killed, the meat processed and the lard rendered each winter. In spite of the hard work, I remember those hog butchering days as holiday times. Once, after a hog butchering, I remember Daddy telling this story from when *he* was a boy:

### **Four Fat Hogs**

One year in the late fall, a new family moved into the Old Field community. A few weeks later, the man showed up at our farm, saying he needed a few fat hogs to butcher. Dad showed the man his pen full of fat hogs and said, “Pick out what you need.” The man picked out four prime fat hogs. He and Dad loaded the hogs into his wagon, and the man drove off leaving Dad somewhat befuddled. Not one word had been said concerning payment for the hogs. “Oh well,” Dad thought, “he’ll be back to settle up later.” But throughout the coming year, the man said nothing about paying Dad for those hogs, even after inviting us to help with the hog butchering.

The following winter, Dad sold all the hogs he raised, keeping nothing back to feed the family. Going over to the new neighbor’s farm, Dad said, “I’ve come to get some hogs to butcher.” Dad knew the man



had raised quite a few hogs that year. Well, the man took Dad out to his hog pen and said, "Take what you need. Pick out the best." Dad sorted out four fat hogs. After he and the man finished loading the hogs into Dad's wagon, Dad turned and asked, "What do I owe you for the hogs?"

The man got a surprised look on his face. "What do you *owe* me for the hogs?" the man said, "I'd be ashamed to take money from a neighbor, not for butcher hogs to feed his family!"

You see, where that man was from, that's how they did things.

According to Cherokee tradition, as I understand it, a healer or spiritual helper does not push himself on others but waits for others to come to him or her and to ask, hopefully in a good way. Also, in the Cherokee tradition, as I am taught, a healer or spiritual person will not charge or put a price on his or her services. If, after a consultation or a ceremony, someone asks, "How much do I owe you?" or "What can I pay you?" the traditional healer, spiritual helper or elder may just shrug his shoulders or say, "No charge."

In today's world, a person may take this to mean that the traditional healer, spiritual helper or elder must be independently wealthy. I can tell you, that is most certainly never the case. Traditional people are always living on the edge financially. Dale Williams, an Aboriginal friend of mine from Australia, likes to say, "If you're not living on the edge, you're taking up too much room." In any case, when traditional indigenous people have more than they need, they generally give the excess away. Even when they have less than they need, they still give when they see someone else in need. When we ask for help from a traditional healer, spiritual helper or elder, we should remember the value of reciprocity. How important is this healing, ceremony, help or advice they are giving? It may be without price, but is it worthless? We must remember that what we are asking involves expenses and that this person has to eat and feed his or her family the same as everyone else. It may be that we have little if any money. Even so, we can find other ways to give, other ways to reciprocate for what we have received. We will be blessed for it.

It is said that whatever we send out, that will come back to us. I see this principle working with the newsletters I send out; there is always a stack coming back to me saying, "Moved, Left No Forwarding Address!" Seriously though, it is said that even the thoughts and feelings we send out will come back to us. The thoughts and feelings of our heart are prayers. If we have a good feeling and a good thought toward someone, it will go out from us as a prayer to help that person, then that same good thought and feeling will circle back to us and help us even more. This is why some traditional people never pray for themselves but only pray for others. There is this understanding that our prayers for others will come back to help us as well. At the same time, others are praying for us, and their prayers will help us too.

Whatever we send out will come back to us. This aspect of the principle of reciprocity does not only apply to good feelings and thoughts. If I have bad feelings and bad thoughts toward someone else, if I hate that person and wish harm on that person, those bad thoughts and feelings may well go out to do damage in that person's life, but they will come back to do twice the damage in my own life.

What goes around comes around. For good or for ill, the same principle of reciprocity applies. Just as Paul wrote to the Galatians: “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows” (Galatians 6:7). When we help another, help will come back to us, in Creator’s own time. But, by the same principle, when we hurt another, hurt will come back to us, again, in Creator’s own time. Some call this the “principle of imminent justice,” which is itself an aspect of the principle of reciprocity.

Regardless of what anyone may think on the matter, this same principle of reciprocity, including this aspect of imminent justice applies not only to individuals but to groups of people working together. The citizens of a town, tribe or nation will reap the benefits of benevolent acts decided upon together or by their chosen leaders. At the same time, when the government of a country or the powerful individuals or corporations controlling a country involve that country in acts of injustice (for instance, exporting terror to other lands), innocent citizens of that country will eventually pay the price. This is as true of a world empire or superpower-republic as it is of a desert dictatorship.

We cannot countermand the principle of reciprocity. At best, we may postpone its effects, for a little while. All aspects of creation will seek out the level place. Everything seeks balance. Even so, disaster may strike anywhere.

Remember this: the principle of reciprocity is always in force. When we are sending out harm and hurt into the earth, we may not want the principle of reciprocity to apply, but it does anyway.

Here’s the good news: When we take the value of reciprocity to heart and live our lives in accordance, we will not experience life without trouble, but we will find the joy of a balanced life, a life of freedom lived out in harmonious circles of relatedness and interdependence. This is the life Creator intends to be lived in the earth.

### **Addendum to “Reciprocity”:**

After this talk was first published on the Mid American Indian Fellowships E-mail Linkup, one reader asked some very good questions concerning the principle of reciprocity: “If it is true that what goes around comes around or that a person reaps what he or she sows, does this mean that whatever happens is deserved? Does this mean the victims of Hurricane Katrina did something to bring disaster upon themselves? Does this mean that a disabled person must have done something to deserve the disability? Does this mean that when a woman is raped, she deserves to be raped?” What follows is my response to these questions.

There are verses in the Bible, especially in the Proverbs and Psalms, that might lead a person to believe this. One that comes to mind is the often quoted Psalm 37:25: “I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.” In the book of Job, Job’s friends assert that all the disasters experienced by Job are the direct result of Job’s unrighteousness. The friends do not want to believe the same sort of disasters may happen in their own lives, so they have

formulated this extreme doctrine that whatever happens in your life, you yourself must have caused to happen. They take the principle of reciprocity to its *illogical* extreme, and in the end, God calls them liars.

Much human suffering is caused by choices made by others or by choices made by those in power, made on behalf of others. I can choose to hurt someone who is entirely innocent. My choice will be outside of God's will, yet an innocent person will be hurt. If not for the principle of reciprocity, that would be the end of it, yet, as scientists tell us, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. My actions, whether against or on behalf of others, will come back to affect me and will probably also affect others whose lives are connected to mine. Also, much human suffering is just from living in the earth where there is birth, life and death, suffering having connection with all three. This too is in keeping with the principle of reciprocity. We are born. We live. We die. A new generation is born. Everything moves in a circle.

The book of Isaiah speaks of the impending invasion of the land of Judah by foreign conquerors as something the Jewish people, as a group, had brought on themselves. This is balanced with the "Suffering Servant" writings in the same book. While Christian scholars tend to interpret the "Suffering Servant" as a prophetic reference only to Jesus Christ, I think Isaiah's intent was to say that within any great disaster that comes upon a whole people due in whole or in part to that people's bad choices as a group; there are those who suffer innocently, for the sins of others. Of course, this flies in the face of the "Doctrine of Total Depravity" which says no human being is deserving of anything but hell fire, but so be it.

In the book of Jonah, Jonah went to prophecy against the city of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire. Jonah was disappointed when the people of Nineveh *seemed* to repent. He thought they would be spared. Actually, the people of Nineveh did not really repent, only had a good cry, and their city and empire were *not* spared, but destroyed. At the time, Jonah did not know this, and he was angry. He thought the Assyrian Empire, which had committed unspeakable atrocities throughout the region, was now getting off Scot free. The Creator spoke gently to Jonah concerning the innocent ones in the city of Nineveh, the children and even the animals, who had done no wrong, yet would suffer for the sins of others (Jonah 4:1, 11).

As for those who lost lives, loved ones or property due to Hurricane Katrina, for some, especially those in New Orleans, their loss may be due to choices made by others - by Jean Baptiste, who determined, against all advise, to build New Orleans where it is; by those who brought many of the people there originally as slaves; by those who build a levee system known to be inadequate; by those who built low income housing in the lowest lying parts of the city. When I see a disabled person, I do not assume the disability is deserved. I do not believe that any woman deserves to be raped. I absolutely do not believe that the ravaging of the lands we now call the Americas was the result of anything the indigenous peoples here had done or failed to do. As with the story of Job, the story of the American holocaust begins with a pronouncement of the innocence of the people about to be raped, enslaved, tortured and murdered. This pronouncement of innocence was spoke in the words of our enemy, Columbus, as he said, "These people truly are indio (with God)."

The invasion of the Americas was an unbalancing, indeed, in my view, the greatest unbalancing the earth has ever seen. The principle of reciprocity is that balancing or leveling impulse inherent within creation. It remains in effect. We have not seen the end of it. When there is imbalance, the innocent suffer. When there is balancing, once more, the innocent often suffer with the guilty. This should be no surprise [for followers of Jesus or for any who have read in the Christian Bible that] God spared not his own Son (Romans 8:32).

## **End of Part Five**

**To Be Continued....**

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