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Agang's "No more cheeks to turn?" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Agang, S. B. (2017). *No more cheeks to turn?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. 128 pp. \$12.99. ISBN 9789966003386

The title question is a response to Jesus' words, "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also." What do you do when you have repeatedly turned the other cheek, and evil persists? This book offers a biblical and practical answer to pastors and church members facing violence and persecution. The author writes primarily to the Nigerian church, but his message is relevant to an international audience. Agang is a professor of theology and ethics, has authored several books on religious violence, and is regular contributor to *Christianity Today*. His theological training is evident in the care he takes to root his arguments in the biblical text. It is also apparent that he still has a pastor's heart, and many of his illustrations are drawn from his own experiences leading churches in times of persecution.

This is a short book of sixteen chapters of three to ten pages each, well suited for a small group or personal study. Each chapter ends with two to four study questions that challenge the reader to reflect not only on that chapter's teaching but also their own attitudes towards violence. There are occasional footnotes to materials referenced, and a short "Further Reading" list at the end that includes resources on the persecution of the Nigerian church and general works on non-violence. The appendices help situate the message within its African context. The author moves back and forth from his own experiences, to the wider African experience of violence, and then to the Bible's teachings on oppression, suffering, and forgiveness. The transitions among these nodes can sometimes feel disjointed, but it serves to keep the discussion from becoming either too abstract or too distant. The first six chapters explore the problem of violence, its roots, and our responses to it. The next five chapters focus on the teachings of Jesus on forgiveness and suffering, summed up in chapter 11, "The Way of Jesus." This chapter offers practical alternatives to returning hate for hate, and sets the stage for the chapters on teaching and doing. The remaining chapters explore non-violence and peacemaking as embodiments of Kingdom values.

The book has a prophetic tone. Agang is direct in challenging the church, and does not shy away from confessing his own failures, nor calling out others. The brevity of the book meant that some important theological problems were only lightly addressed, but it is well reasoned and carefully written. It is a good introduction to peace building, though too brief as a college text. It is recommended for a church library or personal use.

Reviewer

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