



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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Gospel Nonviolence in a Violent World

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The theme of the August, 2004 LCWR-CMSM Assembly was "No Longer Bystanders: Creating Peace in Violent Times." How can religious leaders make a difference in a world plagued with violence? What is the gift that we bring to these difficult times?

EXPERIENCE

Each day we experience violence of all kinds: bombings and other terrorism, a pre-emptive war policy, a national budget that tramples the poor, murders by school children, domestic violence, diseases that could be avoided, trafficking of women and children. Is nonviolence possible? If not us -- who? If not now, when?

Pause and remember our nonviolent legacy and some shining examples of hope:

- When Jesus encountered the adulteress and her accusers ready to stone her, he used an imaginative and surprising nonviolent response and the attackers dispersed. (Jn. 8: 1-11)
- Gandhi led India to independence using *satyagraha*, resistance as soul power; a weapon the strong employ against the sword of violence, founded on the nonviolence that does not injure nor cause injury.
- Rosa Parks was weary of racism

and simply refused to move back on the bus. Her nonviolent action sparked the civil rights movement and changed US history.

- Hundreds were mobilized and motivated by Martin Luther King's philosophy and spirituality, "To our most bitter opponents we say: We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will continue to love you."
- Argentina's Mothers of the Disappeared had the courage to gather in the public square every week, wearing black with white handkerchiefs on their heads bearing the names of their sons and spouses, demanding to know from the repressive government the fate of their loved ones. They did this for 20 years, even after some of the women disappeared.
- Bud Welch whose daughter was killed in the Oklahoma City bombing advocates against the death penalty. "My conviction is simple. More violence is not what Julie would have wanted. More violence will not bring Julie back."

- Some grieving September 11 families have founded Peaceful Tomorrows whose mission statement includes, "By developing and advocating options and actions for peace and justice, we hope to break the cycles of violence." One goal is to educate the public about the severe limitations of the war on terror and discuss the global possibilities of nonviolent solutions. (www.peacefultomorrow.org)
- Women and men who know of the torture of peasants by Latin American military trained at Fort Benning have crossed the line at SOA vigils

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in acts of nonviolent civil disobedience. Several are serving sentences in federal prisons.

- Dorothy Stang, SNDdeNamur accompanied rural Amazon farmers as loggers encroached on their right to land, faced death threats, informed authorities about the injustice and laid down her life defending nonviolent action.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Much of the violence in our world is rooted in government policies that ignore the basic needs of the poor and oppressed. Pope John Paul II pointed out this analysis in his reflections on terrorism and his objections to the war in Iraq. With increasing access to technology in all parts of the world, desperately poor persons are very aware of the consumerism and over consumption that rob them of basic necessities.

There are three general responses to systemic evil: 1) violent opposition, 2) passivity and 3) nonviolence, i.e., using creative force and love power to heal and overcome damage from violence. Some Christians desire peace but interpret peace as being only the absence of conflict. They would like systems to change without having to be involved in changing them. Nonviolence, however, is active, not passive.

Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB tells the story of the snake that had bitten many people but was later taught by a wise person to be nonviolent. When the villagers discovered that the snake was harmless, they battered it until the snake returned to the wise one and complained. "The wise one replied, 'I told you to stop hurting people, not stop hissing.' Point: authentic nonviolence does not harm but it does know when to hiss. It hisses long and loud at every system and structure that trods the weak and powerless underfoot." (*Love Beyond Measure*)

REFLECTION

Nonviolence requires contemplatives and mystics who nurture the love, courage, and imagination to seek justice no matter the cost. As religious face this prophetic challenge we are supported by the gospel call to nonviolence, by Catholic Social Teaching and by the words and actions of a cloud of witnesses.

Nonviolence calls us daily to personal transformation. Surely transformation is required to live Jesus' call in Mt: 5:38-48 that includes the challenge: "I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you."

The most demanding aspect of transformation can be looking daily into the mirror of our personal attitudes and ac-

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tions. In "The Challenge of Peace," the US Catholic Bishops remind us, "All of the values we are promoting in this letter rest ultimately in the disarmament of the human heart and the conversion of the human spirit to God who alone can give authentic peace." (#284) "The practice of contemplative prayer is valuable for advancing harmony and peace in the world." (#294)

Imagination can nurture a life of nonviolence. When John Lennon was asked if he wasn't wasting time dreaming of peace, his response was, I want to put the possibility of peace into the public imagination. And I know as certain as I am standing here, someday peace will happen." In his book, *Prophetic Imagination*, Walter Brueggemann asserts that when considering an idea, "We need not ask whether it is realistic or practical or viable but whether it is imaginable."

Contemplation makes nonviolence possible. "To be visionaries of peace we need

to be contemplatives of nonviolence, people who imagine the God of peace," said John Dear, SJ. "Active nonviolence is much more than a tactic or a strategy; it is a way of life."

ACTION

1. Make note daily of your attitudes, feelings and thoughts and hold them gently against the norms of nonviolence in the presence of our loving God. Consider making the Vow of Nonviolence available from Pax Christi, USA. Daily prayer in response to this vow is a call to personal transformation.

2. "The toughest difference for us to embrace in religious life is ...theological. Can I be deeply at home with one who has another ecclesiology or Christology? Can we reach across the ideological fractures of our Church?" (Timothy Radcliffe, OP) Continue returning to members of your community with whom you disagree and openly listen to their convictions. Challenge the church in your diocese about the role of women.

3. Have a conversation with someone with a different political affiliation than yours and listen reverently.

4. Network with groups who advocate for peace and justice and participate in nonviolent actions that consistently bring compassion to public consciousness.

5. Find and use poetry, music and visual arts to expand your heart and empower you to "wage peace."

6. For inspiration and hope in living a nonviolent life, read about the persons named in this RTA, as well as the lives of witnesses such as Dorothy Day, Archbishop Romero, the North American church women martyred in El Salvador, the five Adorers of the Blood of Christ martyred in Liberia, members of your own congregation, and others you may know.