

A Vow of Nonviolence

Recognizing the violence in my own heart, yet trusting in the goodness and mercy of God,

I vow to practice the nonviolence of Jesus who taught us in the Sermon on the Mount:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons and daughters of God... You have learned how it was said, "You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy"; but I say to you, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. In this way, you will be sons and daughters of your God in heaven."

Before God the Creator and the Sanctifying Spirit, I vow to carry out in my life the love and example of Jesus

- * by striving for peace within myself and seeking to be a peacemaker in my daily life;
- * by accepting suffering in the struggle for justice rather than inflicting it;
- * by refusing to retaliate in the face of provocation and violence;
- * by persevering in nonviolence of tongue and heart;
- * by living conscientiously and simply so that I do not deprive others of the means to live;
- * by actively resisting evil and working nonviolently to abolish war and the causes of war from my own heart and from the face of the earth.

God, I trust in your sustaining love and believe that just as you gave me the grace and desire to offer this, so you will also bestow abundant grace to fulfill it.

(From Pax Christi USA and John Dear's *Disarming the Heart*)

1.

Violence Means Forgetting Who We Are

One day, in the mid-1980s, when I was working in a church-run refugee camp in war-torn El

Salvador, I journeyed up north into the province of Chalatenango to visit and pray at the graves of Ita Ford and Maura Clarke, the Maryknoll sisters murdered on December 2, 1980, for their solidarity with the suffering Salvadoran people. The bus I was traveling on, a typically crowded, old, blue school bus, filled with campesinos, was stopped by the brutal US-backed Salvadoran military. Everyone was ordered off the bus. Scores of Salvadoran soldiers wearing US army uniforms began searching us. All the women were forced to line up in front of the bus down the middle of the road while the men lined up behind the bus. It was a Sunday afternoon and there was not another sign of life as far as we could see. We stood in the middle of that narrow road, in a barren desert-like region surrounded by huge mountains far away on the horizon. Everyone knew that in situations like this, the military death squads might at any moment round people up and "disappear" them, if not shoot them on the spot. There we stood, somewhere in the north of El Salvador, surrounded by young Salvadoran soldiers holding machine guns aimed at us.

It was a normal road check. The soldiers were looking for guerrillas or weapons that were being transported to the revolutionaries. The soldiers' weapons were meant to intimidate us and to "protect" them. They filled the air with fear. I realized that any kind of accident could happen and I looked to see how the other Salvadorans alongside me were responding. They simply bowed their heads and stood in silence. They were praying that they would not be taken or killed. We were all searched one by one and questioned as to our reasons for traveling in that part of the country. After a long while, we were permitted to get back on the bus and proceeded on our way. In the end, I was never able to visit the graves of the martyrs because church people in Chalatenango warned me that soldiers would surely arrest me there and take me in for questioning.

On that day in El Salvador, I saw brothers and sisters acting toward one another as if they were objects or things to be feared or pushed around. I saw children of God--the Salvadoran soldiers--

-sadly trapped into a way of life, dehumanizing others and themselves. I saw the effects of systemic injustice on a worldwide scale, how imperial, institutionalized violence leads poor people to wage war against other poor people. I saw these things and wept because of our violence towards one another.

This scene is typical of our world. In El Salvador, the guns and daily bombing raids that I witnessed killed scores of people and left an entire nation paralyzed with fear and poverty. El Salvador's repressive government was sponsored by millions of dollars from the United States. Such violence is similarly aimed at the people of Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, and the Philippines. Elsewhere, as in Haiti, Somalia, and India, entire populations hang on the brink of starvation, disease and misery because they have no money, no food, no jobs, no healthcare, and no education. All their resources are controlled by the first world. At home, on the streets of Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles, California, people are gunned down every night in drug war fighting that is that natural consequence of a world given over to violence, injustice and death. I have seen this suffering around the world, in Central America, Haiti, Africa and the Philippines. I have seen the headquarters for this structured violence in places like Wall Street, the Strategic Air Command Base near Omaha, the Pentagon, the White House, the Bangor Trident Submarine Base, and the Lawrence Livermore Laboratories. From the bombs falling on poor Salvadoran campesinos, to the homeless on the streets of New York City to the people of San Quentin's death row, the violence is always the same. It kills.

What Is Violence?

One way to define violence is to see it as the act of forgetting or ignoring who we are-- brothers and sisters of one another, each one of us a child of God. Violence occurs in those moments when we forget and deny our basic identity as God's children, when we treat one another as if we were worthless instead of priceless, when we cling to our own selfish desires, possessions and security. It ranges from the self-hatred that flares in our hearts to the intentional harm or physical

injury we do to one another to the systemic injustice that leaves hundreds of millions of people in misery right this moment around the world. Our apathy and indifference in the face of relievable suffering and our willingness to defend our possessions and self-interests without any concern for our suffering neighbors are forms of violence. The lack of love in our hearts, the unwillingness to suffer with others in the struggle for justice, the pride that prevents us from forgiving others, and the insecurity, the fears and untruth in which we frame our lives are all varieties of violence.

Violence begins in our hearts as we give in to fear, despair, hatred and anxiety, as we lose our inner peace, hate ourselves and hate God. Whenever we forget or ignore the reality that we are all equal, all children of God, all brothers and sisters of one another, all loved unconditionally by God, then our hearts turn from love and peace to the chaos of hate and fear. This negative state of forgetfulness feeds on itself and soon we find ourselves without peace in our hearts. We arm our hearts against the God of love and against others. We fester in self-hatred and a lack of peace. Soon, we start to lie, cheat, hate whole groups of people and act selfishly at the expense of the human family. Communication with others breaks down. We forget the hidden ground of nonviolent love that we walk on and we act as if we do not recognize who the other person is or who other people are. We no longer see the face of God in the face of the other person. Any common ground of equality or understanding vanishes. We are unable to see the world from the perspective of others and we cling to our own absolute idea of right and wrong. In our self-centeredness, we lose all concern for others, especially the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed and those who suffer. We no longer hold the vision of a peaceful human family loved by a nonviolent God. We are blind and give in to the darkness of violence.

With these insights, Thomas Merton wrote in the early 1960s that "the root of war is fear":

At the root of all war is fear: not so much the fear people have of one another as the fear they

have of everything. It is not merely that they do not trust one another; they do not even trust themselves. If they are not sure when someone else may turn around and kill them, they are still less sure when they may turn around and kill themselves. They cannot trust anything, because they have ceased to believe in God.(1)

When we characterize another or others as enemies, when we look with fear and suspicion at others, we reveal the violence in our own hearts, the fact that we have forgotten who we are and to whom we are relating. When we respond to threats or acts of violence by retaliating with violence or by passively receiving the violence without insisting on the truth of our unity, we act against the unity already given to us by God. We are so blind that we know not what we do and go against what is good for us by destroying the gift of peace already given to us. In our hatred, fear and hostility, we wage war against God and the human family.

The violence in our hearts and in our world stems from this lack of love for ourselves, our sisters and brothers and our God. It is grounded in self-hatred, fear and lies. It kills our souls when it appears to protect and save our lives. With every refusal of God's gift of life and love, violence leads us, not to security as we may assume, but to spiritual death. "Who dies first, the gunman or the victim?" Daniel Berrigan asks. The gunman, he answers.(2) "The nuclear weapons of communists may destroy our bodies," Richard McSorley wrote during the 1970s, "but our intent to use nuclear weapons destroys our souls."(3) Our preparation, threat and willingness to kill others reveal how we have armed our hearts against our nonviolent God and given our very souls over to the ways of death.

To descend into violence is to descend into nothingness and meaninglessness, to deny our existence and our meaningful identities as beloved children of God, where each one of us is equal and precious in God's sight. In violence, we forget our God and act as if we have no God. When we reject love, truth, hope and God in our everyday choices, in our complicity, apathy, boredom and passivity,

and in the bigger decisions of our values, employment, and lifestyles, we reject ourselves and the life we can lead together as children of God. Throughout history, violence has continued to lead to nothing but unhappiness, meaninglessness, despair, hunger, war, suicide, the design and use of nuclear weapons, the perpetuation of unjust social systems, and further violence.

As we descend this spiral of violence, as Dom Helder Camara calls it, we name each other, not as sisters and brothers, but as enemies, as inhuman objects. Instead of calling other human beings our sisters or brothers, we label them as "the enemy," as objects of our hostility. As we start to perceive others as "enemies," we arm ourselves further, give in to the spirit of violence, and encourage others to see ourselves as "enemies," as objects. Theologian Charles McCarthy defines an enemy as "one or many who negatively affect the survival of some self-interest," such as one's possessions, reputation or power.(4) An "enemy" poses a threat of harm to oneself, one's friends or possessions, or may have already committed violence toward oneself or one's self-interest. Quarrels and conflicts escalate as opposing people refuse to see each other as sisters or brothers as images of God to be loved unconditionally and nonviolently. As positions are made, each side insists that it is "absolutely right." With this conviction and unwillingness to listen, people feel justified in harming and ultimately killing one another.

Addicted to Violence

Once we forget who we are and begin to act violently, we start to legitimize the hurt we do and to systematize our wickedness. We keep working at this legitimization to defend our perceptions, our use of violence. With the systemic violence of society, we encourage one another to be violent with one another, to relate to each other violently. Like an alcoholic, we become addicted to violence. In societies and cultures of violence, where everyone is addicted to violence, the ultimate infliction of death on others--whether by gang murder, the mass murder of warfare or the legalized murder of

capital punishment--become standard ways of proceeding. The abnormality of violence becomes normal. Our cultural and worldwide violence becomes a habit too ingrained to break. We are unable to become sober. In our addiction to violence and death, we are out of control. Soon, we wage world wars and threaten to destroy the planet and all of humanity. Like the alcoholic who eventually destroys himself, this worldwide addiction to violence reaches a point where the entire world is threatened with destruction. When the US dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and incinerated 130,000 people on August 6, 1945, we as a people crossed the line of self-destructive global violence. We now face the real possibility of global annihilation. We are destroying ourselves in our addiction to violence. Though the Cold War is over, we still have tens of thousands of nuclear weapons that can blow up the planet several times; we still maintain a fleet of Trident submarines that can each destroy whole continents of people; we still participate in the forty wars being fought on the planet; and we continue to prepare at the Pentagon and at Livermore Laboratories for a post-nuclear arms race, where laserbeam weapons (used in movies like "Star Wars" or "Star Trek") are being designed. The nuclear arms race and its research center, the Livermore Laboratories in California, are preparing for "one thousand years" of research and preparation for nuclear annihilation, according to Edward Teller, the inventor of the hydrogen bomb, in a speech at Livermore Laboratories on September 1, 1992.(5) We are still out of control. We are so out of control that we think we can go on for one thousands years with "bigger and better" weapons of mass destruction. Meanwhile, the culture and the world denies its addiction to violence, claims the arms race is over, and that disarmament is around the corner. The world insists that it is sober but it still drunk on violence. Like the alcoholic, we are so addicted that we have lost all basis in reality. We think we can go on forever with our global violence. In our massive, global denial, we do not think we will die. In reality, the planet and the human race continues to hang on the brink of destruction.

The Idols of Violence

Our original sin of violence has developed into armies that protect large groups and their possessions with mass violence and into the nation/state system that we have today that wields unparalleled violence. As we participate in national addictions to violence, we adopt patriotic and nationalistic symbols and ideologies which separate us from our sisters and brothers around the globe. We get caught in an uncontrollable, unreflected spirit which divides the human family. We lose faith in God and no longer believe in the reality that we are all one human family, or we invoke God's name in our wars against each other, as in the Persian Gulf war, where God was invoked by all sides, especially by George Bush, to bless the bombings and killings. Once we find ourselves in such situations, we give into our despair and blindness, and fall further into despair, self-hatred and violence against everyone. We lose sight of the vision of the global village, where all nations serve one another in peace and justice.

As we lose our faith in the God of peace and love, we create idols to take God's place. We no longer see the face of God in the face of our sisters and brothers; we do not feel the nonviolent spirit of God among us. Our addiction to violence so blinds us that we think that our weapons of violence are our only hope, our only security. They become "gods of metal," as the Maryknoll film puts it. Our guns, tanks, "smart" bombs, "peacekeeping missiles" and nuclear weapons become our gods, our idols. We place our faith, hope, trust and dependence in these idols and they justify our forgetfulness.

Though we do not say it this way, our actual faith is placed, not in God, but in weapons of mass destruction. The nuclear arms race is the prime example of our idolatry; it is the primary sign of our addiction to violence. We have forgotten that we are one family, have greedily pursued our selfish interests, and have produced weapons of mass murder to protect our possessions. The end

result of this denial of God has been the violence committed against the poor who suffer in hunger, disease, illiteracy, homelessness, unemployment and relievable misery. This idolatry kills the spirit of peace and love within each of us, causes us to arm our hearts, turn with hatred towards our suffering sisters and brothers and create systems of mass violence against the poor of the world. These systems of greed and war have now reached such global proportions that we are on the verge of destroying ourselves.

Charles McCarthy defines violence specifically as "responding to a person as an object for the purpose of self-gratification. Violence is forgetting or ignoring that there is an infinity behind every human face."(6) When we deny the presence of God in another human being by not loving and serving all humanity, we are on the road of violence. We are forgetting or ignoring who we are, who we are called to be and what we are about. All of us forget who we are at various moments in our lives and so we all commit violence. All of us have been raised in the human addiction to violence. The struggle of life is not to accept and legitimize our forgetfulness, our violence, but to repent of it, to resist it, and to transform it by doing good, loving others, and becoming people of nonviolence. The challenge before us is not to worship the idols of violence, but to follow the living God of nonviolence.

The Institutionalization of Violence

The violence that happens when we forget or ignore our basic identities can take various forms on a continuum of violence, depending on the extent to which we have forgotten or ignored our basic identity. This spectrum includes any use of personal, emotional, psychological, communal, national or international domination of one's will over and against another's will. Violence can take the form, on one end of the spectrum, from the hatred that lingers in our hearts, to the weapons that destroy humanity. Our silence, apathy and complicity in the systemic violence of militarism, the

nuclear arms race, poverty, starvation, disease, homelessness, the denial of human dignity, and other injustices, are a participation in violence and a legitimization of violence. The destitution and poverty which leads to the early and unjust deaths of the world's poor are caused by our first-world greed, by multinational corporations and the arms race.

"Violence is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all," Martin Luther King, Jr once said. He continued:

The old law of an eye for an eye leaves everybody blind. Violence is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his or her understanding; it seeks to annihilate rather than to convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood and sisterhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue. Violence ends by defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers.(7)

Gandhi wrote long ago that poverty is the worst form of violence. Following on this truth of reality, Jesuit martyr Ignacio Ellacuria, assassinated in El Salvador on November 16, 1989, wrote of different stages of violence, beginning with the systemic violence that leads to worldwide poverty. For Ellacuria and the Jesuits of El Salvador, violence was first and foremost the structured, economic systems that force the majority of people in the third world into hunger, poverty and misery. Ellacuria maintained that the first violence that needs to be changed is the "institutionalized, legalized violence, of economic exploitation, political domination and military might."(8) Ellacuria pointed out that the community of nations has been organized in such a way as to prevent the majority of people from getting basic necessities of life. This systemic violence is immoral, unjust and sinful, he insisted. From this structured violence follows a violence of repression. As people like the Jesuits of El Salvador begin to speak out against the structures of violence which benefit the few and kill the majority, they find themselves the targets of military regimes who protect the wealthy elite and big business. During the 1980s, the violence of repression in El Salvador killed 80,000 people, while in neighboring

Guatemala, over 100,000 people were killed. Hundreds of thousands of people who have spoken for justice and peace have been tortured and killed throughout Latin America, Africa and Asia. As Ellacuria observed, such repressive violence of military regimes almost always leads then to revolutionary violence.(9)

Reviewing these forms of violence, Thomas Gumbleton concludes that to be a peacemaker is to confront the unjust, economic, structured violence which leaves millions of people in misery throughout the world.(10) The poor of the world ask us to transform the worldwide economic structures which kill them everyday so that these systems can promote life and serve humanity. It is a challenge to remember that our sisters and brothers are dying because we have forgotten that they are indeed our sisters and brothers.

The Struggle to Remember

The struggle to be human today is a struggle to transform the forces of violence. It is a struggle to resist our addiction to violence, to become sober, to be people of nonviolence. In the effort to claim our inheritance as loved children of God, to be who we are, we are invited to love one another, to resist death and choose life for all our sisters and brothers around the world. In other words, we have to stop forgetting who we are. We need to remember who we are. We need to recall and return to the knowledge and awareness of our identity as sons and daughters of a nonviolent, loving God who has already reconciled us. We have to choose not to forget the truth of reality. We have to say No to violence, to allow God to disarm our hearts and to start participating in God's disarming of the world.

We do not want to forget that we are God's children, but we do forget, each one of us. Nonviolence is a way of remembering and recalling, every day of our lives, who we are and what we are about, and returning to that truth of life whenever we forget. It is noncooperation with violence,

a refusing to forget. Nonviolence offers a way toward the fuller life of love and community as God's beloved children. It is a way that can help us to be the beloved community of sisters and brothers that God created us to be.

2.

Nonviolence Is the Spirit of Love and Truth

Which Remembers

On January 30, 1956, a month and a half after the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott began, the home of Martin Luther King, Jr. was bombed. Dr. King was speaking at a church meeting when he heard the news. He sped home to find his wife Coretta and their two month old daughter, Yolanda, unharmed. The bomb had exploded on the porch and left broken glass all over the living room.

Montgomery had been filled with tension ever since December 1, 1955 when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man and was arrested. After he was asked to help lead the boycott, Dr. King began to receive many death threats. When the bomb went off, people were ready to fight back. A crowd gathered outside King's house. One man challenged a policeman: "You got your thirty-eight and I got mine. Let' shoot it out." Young men armed themselves with broken bottles and verbally abused the police. Montgomery was on the verge of a riot.

As the crowd continued to grow, Dr. King came out of his house and stood on the broken porch. His house was almost destroyed and his family could have been killed. He looked at the crowd

and said: "My wife and baby are alright. I want you to go home and put down your weapons. We cannot solve this problem through retaliatory violence. . . . We must love our white brothers and sisters, no matter what they do to us. We must make them know that we love them. Jesus still cries out across the centuries, 'Love your enemies.' This is what we must live by. We must meet hate with love."(11)

Slowly, people started to leave. Later on, a police officer told a reporter, "I'll be honest with you. I was terrified. I owe my life to that preacher and so do all the other white people who were there."(12)

Martin Luther King, Jr. consistently chose to remember that his persecutors were his brothers and sisters and he acted within that reality of truth. Instead of giving in to the temptation to respond with further violence, he responded with love and respect while still insisting on the truth of justice and peace.

Nonviolence is an attitude and a spirit of genuine love and truth toward all people in every situation which helps us to remember who we are and who we are called to be. Nonviolence is the peace of heart in which we love ourselves, our neighbors, all humanity and God. It is the act of making peace, resisting death, and choosing life. It means living out of a disarmed heart. Nonviolence refuses to cooperate with evil and resists injustice. It responds to each act of violence with good will and love while maintaining a commitment to the truth of justice. It is a willingness to undergo suffering in the struggle for justice and peace without inflicting suffering on others and without giving up the truth of justice and peace.

Five points comprise the spirit and way of life which is nonviolence: (1) nonviolence means remembering and acting out of our basic identities as God's sons and daughters; (2) nonviolence flows from heartfelt, unconditional love which accepts suffering in order to right wrongs and which serves

others humbly; (3) nonviolence invites solidarity with the poor and the oppressed; (4) nonviolence involves active, peaceful resistance to violence and injustice through courageous truth-seeking that works to transform society; and (5) nonviolence relies on God and is rooted in prayer.

Nonviolence Means Remembering We Are All God's Children

The first step along the way of nonviolence begins with remembering that we are all God's children, all of us equal brothers and sisters, all of us sons and daughters of God and that we are meant to love one another as our loving God loves us. From this worldview and understanding, all our acts of peace and justice follow. This remembering is itself the daily act of recalling our basic identities and living out of them. It constantly returns to God, allows God to disarm our hearts and accepts the peace of heart that God offers to each of us. As we accept God's disarming love everyday on our lifelong journeys and remember who we are when we meditate on the reality of God and God's love, we become more and more who we already are--beloved sons and daughters of God. In this disarming practice of remembrance, we live our lives in the Spirit of God, growing more and more aware at each moment of God's active presence in us, in the human family, in the whole world.

Once we remember who we are, that every human being is our sister and our brother, then we realize that we could never hurt another person, much less kill someone, wage war, sit idly by while millions starve to death, or be complicit in the systemic violence that leads to poverty and the arms race. This constant remembrance of the unity of all life calls us to renounce violence. It urges us not to use coercive, harmful force and not to threaten to use violence, no matter what the situation, no matter how much violence we face, no matter how noble the cause. It maintains that violence is never justified, that there is no such thing as a just war. It understands that the means are the ends, that the way to peace is peace itself. In this attitude of life, we conclude with Gandhi, "I am prepared to die but there is no cause for which I am prepared to kill." Such is the basic choice of nonviolence:

to choose life and promote justice no matter what the cost for oneself, no matter what the situation, but without bringing harm or death to anyone.

Because it is a constant remembering of the unity among all human beings, by its very nature, nonviolence involves community. It cannot be lived and practiced alone; it is not a rugged individualism but a participation in what Dr. King called "the beloved community of humanity." Remembering the beloved community of humanity means participating in the re-formation of that local and global human community of nonviolence. The active remembrance which is nonviolence, then, is not practiced in isolation, but in the messy world of violence. The active nonviolence which re-members the human community does so precisely in those places where the underlying unity of us all has been forgotten, ignored and divided. Active nonviolence confronts that forgetfulness with the good news of our reconciliation in God.

Nonviolence is noncooperation with violence, especially in the face of violence. It is refusing to forget who we are and an insistence on the truth of God's love which unites us all. It is returning evil with good and insisting that we are all equal, all God's children. Nonviolence is every act of positive goodwill, rooted in that underlying unity among all people, that seeks justice and peace for all people. It means putting God's vision of the reconciled human race into practice. As Elizabeth McAlister writes, "Nonviolence is persistent reconciliation."(13)

Nonviolence Flows From Unconditional, Active Love

A second characteristic of the way of nonviolence is that it is a spirit and force of love, a love which is unconditional, non-retaliatory and sacrificial, a love which stands up and says "No" to violence and "Yes" to life. Centuries ago, the Greeks used three words for love: eros, which connoted romantic love and reciprocation; philia, which expressed intimate affection between friends or the love which is returned because one is loved; and agape, which meant understanding, unconditional,

redeeming goodwill toward all women and men that seeks nothing in return. Agape is the "disinterested" love in which the individual seeks not his or her own good, but the good of his or her neighbors. Nonviolence includes the fullness of agape, all positive, active love for true human good in ways that help and cause no harm to others.

Theologian Charles McCarthy observes that agape has two main features: (1) a willingness to suffer and take on the violence of others as we struggle for justice and peace and seek to transform evil into good--all without even the desire for retaliation, and (2) a willingness to serve others (especially suffering humanity) without even the desire for reciprocation.(14) Once we remember that we are all beloved sons and daughters of God, then we take these steps and put into practice this love of God. We try to right wrongs by loving others as our own brothers and sisters without hurting them, contributing to the violence or seeking our own selfish ends, including service in return. Agape means selfless love. Nonviolence means living a life of selfless love that serves others and promotes justice in this spirit of love. Nonviolence accepts the suffering meted out to us but does not return further violence and it serves others without any hope of service in return. Unconditional, non-retaliatory love seeks to end the suffering of others, to end violence and injustice everywhere. It says, like Jesus on the cross, "the violence stops here, with my own body and soul where it is transformed by love into love." Nonviolence is the willingness, the choice, and the act of taking on the violence of others, suffering through it without retaliating by returning violence for violence, and thus freeing others from the trap of violence so that they can love and be loved in return. It breaks the descending spiral of violence once and for all by promoting the love of God. In this way of life, one never strikes back, but stands straight, full of love and respect for others, still insisting on God's truth. By suffering through violence and returning it with love and truth, nonviolence turns the process of violence around and begins the transformation of the world into God's nonviolent reign of justice and peace.

As Dr. King observed, such unearned suffering is redemptive.

Agape includes an active life of service toward those who are unable to pay one back, a service which does not demand service in return, a service which is both humble and pure, ingrained in one's being as an attitude and a lifestyle. This service is committed to those in need and meets those needs, bringing life, dignity and justice in the process.

The active, nonviolent love which is agape loves all people, particularly those labeled as "enemies" of one's group or nation. It loves those of us who continue to commit violence and support systemic injustice, those of us who are trapped in the spiral of violence. Martin Luther King, Jr. stressed that "nonviolence does not seek to defeat or humiliate the 'opponent,' but to win friendship and understanding," and "is directed against forces of evil rather than against persons who happen to be doing the evil."(15) Agape was central to King's nonviolence. He defined agape as disinterested love especially towards the "enemy-neighbor" from whom no good could be expected in return, only hostility and persecution. King wrote:

Agape is not a weak, passive love. It is love in action. Agape is not loving to preserve and create community. It is insistence on community even when one seeks to break it. Agape is a willingness to sacrifice in the interest of mutuality. Agape is a willingness to go to any length to restore community. It is a willingness to forgive, not seven times, but seventy times seven to restore community. If I respond to hate I do nothing but intensify the cleavage in broken community. I can only close the gap in broken community by meeting hate with love. If I meet hate with hate, I become depersonalized, because creation is so designed that my personality can only be fulfilled in the context of community....Agape means a recognition of the fact that all life is interrelated. All humanity is involved in a single process, and all men and women are brothers and sisters. To the degree that I harm my brother, no matter what he is doing to me, to that extent I am harming myself....If you harm me, you harm yourself.... When I am commanded to love, I am commanded to restore community, to resist injustice and to meet the needs of my brothers and sisters.(16)

In this spirit of agape, King knew that nonviolence "avoids not only external physical violence, but also internal violence of spirit." King's nonviolence was grounded in a peaceful, disarmed heart. It was an attitude and a spirit free from violence, which frees one to love and to be loved, to be oneself, to

be a beloved child of God. Such love loves everyone and does so publicly, breaking all categories and all boundaries. It transforms everyone and reveals the love of God. Indeed, the practice of agape in the struggle of truth and justice proclaims the nonviolent coming of God on earth. Because it is based in unconditional love, nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice, not people.

Nonviolence Invites Solidarity with the Poor and the Oppressed

The active love of nonviolence invites us to love our enemies, all those who threaten and suffer from governments. In this love, we reach out with all our hearts to those who are under the gun of the oppressors. The enemies of governments are first of all the poor, the oppressed masses of the world who suffer in hunger and misery. The enemies who suffer from governments are the poor, the homeless, the hungry, women, children, the unborn, those on death row, and those with whom they wage war. Nonviolence is the active love of siding with the opponents of one's government, listening to their grievances, and working for an end to the killing so that peace and reconciliation can be restored, the beloved community of humanity enhanced, and our underlying unity re-revealed. It recognizes the face of God in the face of the enemy and understands that our enemies are our very own sisters and brothers. Beyond that, nonviolence understands that our enemies can teach us about the truth of our humanity; they show us how to be human, how to love, if we but first love them with all our hearts. Nonviolence finds God in the enemy.

To live nonviolence is to find God everywhere in everyone. Since most of humanity suffers in misery and poverty and since God sides with the poor in their sufferings, as the scriptures testify, nonviolence calls us to side with the poor and the oppressed of the world. To make peace is to promote justice for the poor. To promote justice for the poor requires that we walk with the poor, that we accompany the poor, that we live in active solidarity with the poor. Such solidarity enables us to understand the realities of systemic violence and how we can contribute to God's transformation

of the systemic violence which kills millions of our sisters and brothers around the world each year. This active love invites us to make what the Latin American church calls "a preferential option for the poor."

Nonviolence sides with the poor and the oppressed and sees the world from their perspective at the bottom. It is a life of solidarity with all the poor, a commitment to accompany the poor in their struggle for justice and peace, and a pledge to follow their nonviolent lead in the transformation of the world. To accompany the poor is to live simply, to give away our possessions, to befriend the poor, to make their cause of justice our own, and to enter into their life as best we can. Like Jesus, this solidarity will mean entering into the powerlessness of the poor.

In the end, this preferential option for the poor, for the oppressed, and for our enemies, is a preferential option for justice, for reconciliation, and for peace. It is a preferential option for God who lives in the poor, the oppressed and the enemies of the world. God actively loves the poor of the world. God loves God's enemies, all human beings who turn away from God. Being the sons and daughters of God means becoming like God, our mother and father. That will require that we love the poor, the oppressed and all enemies.

Nonviolence Involves Resistance and Truth

The spirit and way of nonviolence includes active resistance to violence and injustice through a courageous, steadfast commitment to the truth of justice and peace. As the union of love and truth, nonviolence is a spirit and a way of active resistance to violence and injustice, to all that works against love and truth. Nonviolence is not passivism or apathy; it is action that disarms, reconciles, and helps others to see the reality that all are equal and meant to be treated with love and respect. Nonviolence actively seeks to change evil into good through the creative and courageous love and truth which it is rooted and grounded in. To be nonviolent is to insist on love and truth everywhere

and thus to spend one's life loving others and speaking the truth of justice and peace at all times. Given the systemic injustice, nuclear arms race and institutionalization of violence in our world, such active love requires that we resist the forces of violence and transform them through the love of God.

Nonviolence as active resistance addresses violence and injustice anywhere and everywhere, on the personal, family, communal, national and international level. This loving resistance insists that justice be done, that all killing cease and that peace be given a chance. It promotes conversion, reconciliation and the beloved community at every stage. On the personal and family levels, nonviolence acts in a spirit of love and truth which consciously confronts violence and selfishness in others by drawing it out of them, dealing with it, and inspiring others to open their hearts and change their lifestyles. It will be action that provokes a response and invites transformation. It draws out the hidden violence in our hearts by revealing it for all to see. The personal and communal witness of nonviolence, while beginning with a spirit of love and truth in one's own heart, is always other-centered and public. It is a process of disarming each other's hearts so that we can be free from the bondage of violence and be instruments of the disarmament of the world.

On the communal, national and international scale, committed nonviolence can change the world. Organized nonviolence reveals the power of love and truth. Active nonviolence on the societal level can take many forms. Presuming that participants in campaigns of nonviolence have renounced violence in their own hearts, it can become a movement for the transformation of the world. The nonviolent movements dedicated to transforming systemic violence and injustice always work in the long haul, though they may appear to fail in the short term. Nonviolent movements can take the form of vigils, fasts, protest marches, strikes, boycotts, tax resistance, and sit-ins. Nonviolent campaigns such as the nonviolent resistance in Denmark during World War II, Gandhi's nonviolent struggle for independence in India, and the US civil rights movement have demonstrated the great potential of

large-scale, nonviolent love applied to systemic injustice. The nonviolent campaigns which toppled the Marcos' regime in the Philippines, confronted China's tyranny, brought down the Berlin wall and brought down the Soviet Union make clear that if applied, nonviolence moves mountains. "The only thing that's been a worse flop than the organization of nonviolence," Joan Baez once said, "has been the organization of violence."

Nonviolence as public, active resistance to injustice and violence seeks to bring about the genuine good of all concerned, as Martin Luther King, Jr. explained: "The nonviolent resister must often express his[/her] protest through noncooperation or boycotts, but he[/she] realizes that these are not ends themselves; they are merely means to awaken a sense of moral shame in the opponent. The end is redemption and reconciliation. The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, while the aftermath of violence is tragic bitterness."⁽¹⁷⁾ In nonviolent resistance, conversion occurs when the aggressors recognize the common humanity in the nonviolent resisters who courageously suffer while resisting violence and demanding change. The revelation of that shared humanity opens their eyes, disarms their hearts and begins to transform systemic violence into justice and peace. The duty of the nonviolent resister is to maintain that spirit of love so that the aggressor can see that shared humanity, as well as to uphold the vision of a new world without violence or injustice.

At the heart of nonviolent resistance is a commitment to truth. King and Gandhi both understood that nonviolence begins in the stillness of each person's heart, as he or she seeks peace and tries to live in a spirit of love. As a spirit and an attitude of love for all others, nonviolence is, at the same time, a spirit and an attitude which courageously lives in and seeks truth, that which is right and just. This truth-seeking begins with honesty with oneself and others and does not permit lying or cooperating with untruth. As opposed to the moments of violence when we deny the truth and the

falsehood of violence, nonviolence seeks to accept and fully embrace the truth and is thus lifegiving. In nonviolent resistance, the force of love allows others to see what is true without resorting to methods of coercion, and enables others and those trying to be nonviolent to step more fully into the world of truth. The truth-seeking of nonviolence requires humility and openness. It refrains from judging people but judges violence as wrong and proclaims the vision of nonviolence. When this combination of love and truth is pursued by large groups of people in the public arena, the nonviolent transformation of the world begins again.

Nonviolence is a way of living in truth and talking truth to others. Truth is often lost because our pride gives way to lies, hatred, and the harm, both physical and spiritual, which people do to one another. Gandhi taught that Truth is God. Truth is revered, loved, and becomes the ground and the rock of our existence. In our efforts to seek truth, we patiently listen to others and accept new insight into truth with a spirit of peace. We change our ways when necessary and we suffer when necessary in order to help ourselves and others to see the truth more clearly. This nonviolent resistance to evil stands up in public and proclaims the truth of justice and peace. It is thus very risky, particularly in a world that denies its addiction to violence.

The first casualty of war is truth, as we saw in the Persian Gulf War. But the adage can be broadened: the first casualty in any act of violence is truth, the truth of our unity in God, our reconciliation. But because it insists on truth, especially the underlying truth of reality, the reconciliation already granted to us by God, active nonviolence opens the way to God and God's reign of justice and peace. It helps us to see God's truth, that we are all one, all God's children, already living in a world of peace and justice if we but accept it.

Nonviolence Is Rooted in Prayer

Nonviolence is impossible without God. As a way of life that resists evil, speaks the truth,

risks suffering and death and enters into the process of global transformation, nonviolence relies entirely on God. It begins with prayer, with a heart open to the God of peace. It is rooted and centered on God. Practitioners of nonviolence love the God of nonviolence and seek to live in God's spirit of nonviolent love. They spend time listening to God, and allowing God to disarm their hearts so that God can transform the world.

Nonviolence is a prayerful, lifelong journey that takes us deeper and deeper into the violence of the world and the sufferings of humanity where we encounter the fullness of God who is transforming us all. Thus, nonviolence includes daily, regular meditation on the God of nonviolence. This nonviolent God loves us, disarms our hearts, fill us with peace, gives us hope, and sends us forth into the world of violence with a greater willingness to love unconditionally, to serve others, to resist injustice, and to suffer joyfully in order to right wrongs. The way of nonviolence embraces the loneliness of life, enters into solitude, daily contemplates the vision of a nonviolent world and there encounters God. From this life of prayer and solitude of heart, we are able to be with one another, to develop our relationships, to find peace with one another and to transform our world. By centering ourselves in God every day and dwelling in God's peace, we can walk forward into the violent world with a disarming love that touches the hearts of our sisters and brothers and trust that God will transform us all.

"While you are proclaiming peace with your lips, be careful to have it even more fully in your heart," Francis of Assisi wrote long ago.(18) Peace of heart is cultivated through prayer. "My greatest weapon is mute prayer," Gandhi wrote.(19) "Prayer from the heart can achieve what nothing else can in the world."(20) Active nonviolence thus is rooted in prayer, meditation, and the contemplation of nonviolence. As we allow God into our hearts, we allow God into the world. Prayer is the key to this new world of nonviolence, justice and peace.

Nonviolence Is a Way of Transformation

Every act of nonviolent love helps us to remember again that we are all children of God, brothers and sisters of one another. With a sincere heart and a faithful desire to do the will of God, we can place all our trust in God and God will lead us as we try to become nonviolent because God is nonviolent and has promised us these things. When we act nonviolently, when we act in love and in truth, God is present and the transformation of the world is at hand.

This simple nonviolence can infuse one's mind, soul, heart and body and become a way of life. Anyone can begin to cultivate a nonviolent spirit and life and live in the world of nonviolence. Nonviolence is not an ideology, a strategy or a technique, but a peaceful spirit, a path to be followed, a way of life. Although human beings can never become perfectly nonviolent in this life, through discipline, prayer, sacrifice, and community, they can asymptotically approach nonviolence of heart and mind with each small act of love and humble service to the truth. With every risk of love and truth we take, no matter how small, we free others and ourselves further into a more peaceful world.

When we remember who we are and act out of that reality, then our little acts of love and truth will reconcile us to one another and transform our entire way of living with one another. We will begin to find harmony in ourselves, in our relationships with others, and in our world. In this process, we allow God to disarm our hearts and participate in God's disarmament of the world. As people of nonviolence, then we try to live as unarmed people, followers of the unarmed one, Jesus of Nazareth. Finally, then, the God of nonviolence will reign on earth as God reigns in heaven. The beloved community of God will be at hand. Because people are giving their lives to that Way of nonviolence right this minute, that reign of nonviolence is, indeed, at hand right now.

Martin Luther King, Jr. responded freely and spontaneously in the manner of nonviolence on January 30, 1956 when his house was bombed, and on many other occasions afterward, because

he made a fundamental, radical choice to follow the way of nonviolence, no matter how difficult that appeared and no matter how apparently futile. It was a choice he was continuously asked to make throughout his life. It was a way of life he did not turn from, though he failed often and struggled with it daily. Fundamentally, King was committed to the Way of nonviolence for life. Because of this commitment, he could say over and over again to those who supported injustice, war and violence:

We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will still love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws and abide by the unjust system, because noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good, and so throw us in jail and we will still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and, as difficult as it is, we will still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hour and drag us out on some wayside road and leave us half-dead as you beat us, and we will still love you...Be assured that we'll wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and one day we will win our freedom. We will not only win freedom for ourselves, we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory.(21)

Because we are weak and so often forget who we are and what we are about, some of us feel moved to profess publicly a commitment to the way of nonviolence in order to help focus our hearts and to begin or to renew our daily choice to follow the way of nonviolence.

(For further reading, order John Dear's *Disarming the Heart: Toward a Vow of Nonviolence* at www.heraldbooks.com)