Opinion
Guest Voices



Ken Butigan meets Pope Francis during a September 2019 conference at the Vatican called "The Common Good in the Digital Age." (Courtesy of Ken Butigan)



by John Dear

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On this episode of "The Nonviolent Jesus Podcast," John Dear speaks with Ken Butigan, author, organizer, activist, speaker, nonviolence trainer and a leader of Pace e Bene, a Franciscan-based peace organization.

Butigan is professor of practice in the peace, justice and conflict studies program at DePaul University. He has worked in many movements for social change, including campaigns addressing homelessness, nuclear weapons, freedom for East Timor and the U.S. wars in Iraq.

In the 1980s, Butigan was a founder and national coordinator of the Pledge of Resistance, which for nearly a decade mobilized nonviolent action for peace in Central America. He has worked for over 30 years with Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service, which has trained tens of thousands of people on nonviolent change and organizes Campaign Nonviolence, a nationwide effort seeking to foster a more nonviolent culture free from war, poverty, racism and environmental destruction.

In recent years, Butigan worked with Pax Christi International's Catholic Nonviolence Initiative and the Vatican to promote Gospel nonviolence around the world through the Catholic Church.

He has published seven books, including Pilgrimage through a Burning World: Spiritual Practice and Nonviolent Protest at the Nevada Test Site; Nonviolent Lives; and From Violence to Wholeness. Butigan earned his Ph.D. in the historical and cultural studies of religions at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. He lives in Chicago with his wife, Cynthia, and daughter, Leah.



Ken Butigan protests at the border of Gaza in August 2024 near a checkpoint from the West Bank. (Courtesy of Ken Butigan)

"One morning when I was young," Butigan said, "I was walking along and suddenly I was walking in the loving arms of God. It changed my life. I decided that I wanted to put God at the center of my life and it eventually brought me to the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley. Later, I took part in a demonstration against nuclear weapons which had an impact on me.

"I wasn't particularly political, but I was distressed by nuclear weapons, so I called Daniel Berrigan and asked to visit him when I was going to be in New York City. He invited me over. I was transformed in those three hours. At the end of it, I said to him, 'Let me know if I can do anything for you.' He responded immediately, 'Don't do

anything for me. Go find some people you can pray with and march with.' So that's what I have done throughout my life."

When describing his leadership in various campaigns, Butigan keeps returning to the refrain: "We have more power than we think."

"We have been preparing for this moment," he said. "We have more power than we think! We need each other, we need to be rooted in prayer, we need to follow the nonviolent Jesus and create conditions for a global shift."

Listen to the entire episode here.

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