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American war-makers or Gospel peacemakers?

by John Dear

On the Road to Peace

In Seattle on Thursday night, I spoke about Jesus' Sermon on the Mount commendation: Blessed are the peacemakers. Jesus was a peacemaker, I declared, and anyone who claims to be a Christian has to become a peacemaker. Every Christian church should be a community of peacemakers. Every Christian university should be a school of peacemaking. Every Christian minister, priest, bishop or servant-leader should be a public, visionary peacemaker.

We're called to be not war-makers, but peacemakers. That's what life is about -- making peace with ourselves, one another, creation, all creatures and the Creator. And we're called to be peacemakers because we're all sons and daughters of the God of peace. That's the punch line from the Sermon on the Mount.

So why is peacemaking so rare? Why do war-makers abound and profit? Why does peacemaking have such a bad name? Why do we not encourage one another to become nonviolent peacemakers? Why are peacemakers so ostracized? Why do so many people hate peace?

We could speak of our ageless addiction to violence, our long history of warfare, the trillions spent on war with mere nickels for peace, the nonstop media propaganda glorifying war, the myths of "strength" and "defense," or the failure of the churches to teach peace. Most days, I think we just prefer the comforts of the war-making culture. On bad days, I think we do not believe in the God of peace.

And so the American empire bombs people, assassinates people, sends drones over people, builds nuclear weapons and categorically resists the possibilities of peace so it can maintain its global hegemony and make even bigger bucks from war for the 1 percent. We fund and support Israel's killing of Palestinian children in Gaza through its terrorist military and occupation. We bomb children in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen, maintain a global terrorist arsenal with our nuclear weapons, and bring death to the poor and

destruction to the earth. And we're preparing for war somewhere down the line with China.

I'm amazed, for instance, at the public humiliation of Gen. David Petraeus for an extramarital affair when instead he should be tried and imprisoned for war crimes, along with former President George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and President Barack Obama.

Through our war-making, we not only sow the seeds for future wars and guarantee that our global violence will backlash against us, but we reject our fundamental identities as sons and daughters of the God of peace and renounce our relationship as brothers and sisters of one another. What a cosmic tragedy, when we could be making peace with one another and share this beautiful planet together.

History and scripture demonstrate that social change for peace with justice comes most often through a bottom-up grassroots peace movement for disarmament, justice and nonviolence. This is how God works; this is what Jesus and all the great peacemakers did. And so, we reject the propaganda of war, encourage people not to join the military, denounce Israel's war on Gaza and our war on Afghanistan, practice Gospel nonviolence, call for the abolition of war and nuclear weapons, resist the culture of war and try to become peacemakers.

A new book, *Becoming Nonviolent Peacemakers: A Virtue Ethic for Catholic Social Teaching and U.S. Policy* by Eli Sasaran McCarthy, proposes a new ethics of peace that takes us from the old paradigms of warfare, greed, militarism and imperialism into a new global network of nonviolent relationships through nonviolent peacemaking.

McCarthy examines different approaches to nonviolent peacemaking, and recommends "a virtue based assessment" using the example of Jesus, Gandhi and Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the Pakistani Muslim apostle of nonviolence. Instead of arguing for the use of nonviolence to resolve global conflict "primarily as a rule or a strategy," he suggests a virtue-based approach, which, combined with the discourse on human rights and insights from Catholic social teaching, "could impact U.S. policy and other nations to move us closer toward disarmament, justice, reconciliation and peace." His academic study is certainly helpful, and I hope it will inspire dialogue in academic and government fields not only to recognize the futility of war and violence as a way of resolving conflict, but the potential of nonviolent peacemaking to create a more just world.

McCarthy concludes his study with seven core practices of nonviolent peacemaking from a Catholic perspective, which would have "significant implications for U.S. public discourse and policy" if we all began in earnest to undertake them:

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- celebrating the nonviolent Eucharist, along with prayer, meditation and fasting;
- training and education in nonviolent peacemaking, along with forming nonviolent peacemaking communities;
- attention to religious or spiritual factors, especially in public discourse, with interreligious dialogue;
- the constructive program with its particular focus on the poor and marginalized;
- conflict transformation and restorative justice, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions;
- unarmed civilian peacemaking through international implementation and local peace teams;
- and the development of well-funded, civilian-based defense systems.

I'm encouraged by McCarthy's scholarly, thoughtful book and the many other books on peacemaking and

nonviolence that seem to appear regularly now. Although largely ignored by the mainstream media and reviewers, the academia, church officials and, of course, government leaders, they demonstrate the ferment of a paradigm shift quietly sweeping the world as grassroots movements of nonviolent peacemaking continue to grow and struggle for change.

If we can continue to support these nonviolent movements for disarmament and justice and practice peacemaking in every aspect of our lives and in our local communities, we can help build up a global movement that will one day bring new peace to our poor world.

The question I proposed in Seattle is: How can we become better peacemakers? What might our lives look like if we committed the rest of our lives to nonviolent peacemaking? How can we welcome the nonviolent Jesus' resurrection gift of peace and carry on his mission of peace and nonviolence? What are the next steps for us individually, collectively and globally on the road to peace? These questions are worth exploring, McCarthy explains.

If we can see ourselves as peacemakers and spend our lives in nonviolent peacemaking, we will fulfill our vocations, according to the Sermon on the Mount, and be sons and daughters of the God of peace. That, of course, is what the spiritual life is all about.

Next week, John Dear travels to Afghanistan on a peacemaking mission. He will lead a retreat, "Jesus the Peacemaker," April 5-7. To see John's speaking schedule or to invite him to speak in your church or school, go to John Dear's website. His new book, *Lazarus, Come Forth!*, explores Jesus as the God of life calling humanity (in the symbol of the dead Lazarus) out of the tombs of the culture of war and death. John's talk at last year's Sabeel conference in Bethlehem is featured in the new book *Challenging Empire*. John is profiled with Dan Berrigan and Roy Bourgeois in a new book, *Divine Rebels* by Deena Guzder (Lawrence Hill Books). This book and other recent books, including *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings*; *Put Down Your Sword* and *A Persistent Peace*, are available from Amazon.com.

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