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Women, peacemaking and the church

by John Dear

On the Road to Peace

Women are the peacemakers. The world will not achieve peace without the energy and the work of women. So writes Dolores Huerta of the United Farmworkers. Gandhi said the same thing in 1947: Women are the natural messengers of the gospel of nonviolence, if only they will realize their high estate. It is for American women to show what power women can be in the world. You can become a power for peace by refusing to be carried away by the flood-tide of the pseudo-science glorifying self-indulgence that is engulfing the West today and apply your minds instead to the science of nonviolence. If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with women.

As I walk through the world of injustice, violence, and war, I see women wielding that power of peace and engaging the science of nonviolence. I think of the great women peacemakers I know and love. Joan Chittister and Kathy Kelly, Liz McAlister and Mairead Maguire, Franziska Jagerstatter and Theresa Kane, Edwina Gately and Helen Prejean, Hildegard Goss-Mayr and Joan Baez.

I say a prayer for the peacemaking women, now dead, who took an interest in my work and taught me the wisdom of peace. Eileen Egan and Mary Lou Williams, Mother Theresa and Mary Luke Tobin, Ruth Payne and Mev Puleo, Denise Levertov and Pat Donovan (mother of Salvadoran martyr Jean). Plus my own two grandmothers.

I celebrate the grassroots peacemakers who continue to inspire me. Shelley Douglass and Hildegard

Smith, Dorothy Cotton and Mary Lou Kownacki, Pat Gaffney and Judith Kelly, Nancy Cusack and Susan Crane, Carol and Frida Berrigan and Kathy Boylan, Catherine Morris and Davida Coady, Margaret Maggio and Rosemary Lynch, Judy Bierbaum and Sheila Salmon, Dorothy Hennessey and Anne Montgomery, Lynn Fredriksson and Lisa Goode, Janice Vanderhaar and Jane Ferdon, Sherry Larson Beville and Anne Symens Bucher, Cecilia Zarate Laun and Mary Anne Muller, Denise Daniels and Gloria Roy, Marie Dennis and Bette Moslander. My list could go on and on. That such a list can be compiled bears a kind of testimony. It testifies, among other things, that the age of patriarchy is in its last gasp, that women are leading us toward a new future of peace.

I hope and pray that women will not give up, not give in, and not walk away, that they will celebrate their calling to follow the peacemaking Christ, and that they will keep on working for justice and peace. Few men are interested in creative nonviolence; most of us men cling to old patterns of control, domination, and violent power, the methods that have brought us racism, war on Iraq, executions, violence against women and children and nuclear weapons. I hope peacemaking women will wear us men down with their creative, Gospel nonviolence so that one day soon we will together abolish war, poverty, racism, patriarchy, nuclear weapons and violence for good.

Several new resources can inspire and help. My friend Cindy Preston-Pile has published a powerful new workbook called *Traveling with the Turtle: A Small Group Process in Women's Spirituality and Peacemaking* (available from www.paceebene.org). It invites women to share their spiritual journey, move toward healing and peace, and deepen their peacemaking skills. Inspiring and practical, contemplative and political, appealing to both head and heart, Cindy helps unleash women's spirituality and, with it, hope for a world transformed. Joanna Macy and Edwina Gateley have hailed the book as a step forward for women's spirituality and practice. So have Isabel Allende and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Mairead Maguire. I hope women everywhere will use it to dig deeper into the roots of spiritual and active nonviolence to be a stronger voice and force for disarmament, justice and human rights.

Another resource comes from my friend Richard Taylor -- his new book with the exhaustive title, *Love in Action: A Direct-Action Handbook for Catholics Using Gospel Nonviolence to Reform and Renew the Church* (available from www.amazon.com). This terrific workbook shows how to apply nonviolence to any situation, including injustices within the church, so that all will be transformed. It is one of the best handbooks on engaging the science of nonviolence that I have ever read. Filled with beautiful photos and artwork, it offers specific, concrete, tactical steps for church workers, activists and organizers. What makes it particularly unusual is that it is written for Catholics involved in the struggle to transform the world -- and the church -- using Jesus' method of active love. I highly recommend it.

Call to Action has started a new campaign, "Just Church," to apply active nonviolence toward bishops, cardinals and other churchmen on the major questions facing the church (see www.cta-usa.org). This web-based program offers timely, concrete actions that people can take regarding various issues, crises and events. At the heart of their method also is active, nonviolent love. They push us to engage churchmen as Jesus did, to love as Jesus loved us.

Reading these hopeful new resources will give us all -- women and men alike -- new energy, strength, and courage to put love in action, to help the church model the justice and nonviolent love it proclaims to the world, and to fulfill our calling to be peacemakers. And it will particularly help us men, like Gandhi, to be converted to the power and wisdom of Gospel nonviolence, from women.

Pax Christi USA has just published an Advent meditation booklet by John called, "The Advent for the God of Peace," available from www.paxchristiusa.org. His new book, *Transfiguration* (Doubleday) is available from www.amazon.com and the new DVD about him (with music by Joan Baez and Jackson Browne) is available from www.sandamianofoundation.org. John will be sentenced in Federal Court in Albuquerque, N.M. Nov. 7. For information, see: www.fatherjohndear.org.

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