

Easter peace means no nukes

John Dear | Apr. 21, 2009 On the Road to Peace

Last week, on Easter Sunday morning, 60 of us gathered for Mass around a makeshift altar in the spectacular Nevada desert, about an hour and half northwest of Las Vegas. There in the natural cathedral of the wide open desert floor and the towering snow-capped mountains surrounding us, we celebrated the resurrection of the nonviolent Jesus.

After the benediction, 21 of us crossed the line and entered the grounds of the Nevada Nuclear Weapons Test Site. We were trying to put the resurrection into practice, to non-cooperate with death, and to welcome the risen Jesus? gift of peace here and now. It was a beautiful moment. Arrest followed swiftly.

To my mind, resurrection means refusing to cooperate with systems and forces of death. Edna St. Vincent Millay expressed this resolve far more poetically, saying, ?I shall die, but that is all I shall do for death.? People of resurrection do not cooperate with death or the machinery of death, making them people of nonviolence, love, and peace.

Resurrection people seek the abolition of war and the end of all violence, greed, poverty. They insist on retiring guns and nuclear weapons. Such people resist the systems of death, the social methods of death, and insist on the fullness of life for all. In biblical terms, a new creation. In terms more up to date -- a world of loving nonviolence.

President Obama?s recent call for [the abolition of nuclear weapons](#) [1] is a great leap forward. On Passion Sunday in Prague he said, ?As a nuclear power, as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon, the United States has a moral responsibility to act. We cannot succeed in this endeavor alone, but we can lead it, we can start it. So today, I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.?

But then his soaring rhetoric fell to earth with a thump. While it was important to speak of a nuclear-free world, he said, it will probably not happen in our lifetime.

Yesterday I had [occasion to speak on ?Democracy Now?](#) [2] with Amy Goodman (www.democracynow.org). There I insisted that the abolition of nuclear weapons must happen not only in our lifetime, but right now, this year. And the United States must take the leading, daring step. We must dismantle every single one of our nuclear weapons. This means, we have to push the Obama administration hard and demand they disarm our nation.

Nuclear weapons are bad for our economy. They drain public coffers and return little of the largess back to the economy. And, need it be added, they?re bad for the environment, bad for our health, bad for children, bad for all creatures.

They actually do not provide any security. They can?t protect us; in fact, they terrorize others into building and threatening the use of such weapons against us. They increase the likelihood of further terrorist attacks. And

because we look to these weapons as the gods who will preserve us, we've edged into blasphemy. They're robbing us of our souls.

In the end they won't preserve us. They themselves are the ultimate form of terrorism. I regard Los Alamos, where nuclear weapons are designed and maintained, not far from where I live, the planet's chief terrorist training ground.

David Robinson, director of Pax Christi USA, said recently,

President Obama's commitments to seek Senate ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, negotiate an end to the production of nuclear materials for weapons, and negotiate deep cuts in the Russian and U.S. arsenals offer real hope that we have turned the corner on the dangerous and destabilizing policies of the past 8 years. We need to support this commitment and convince the US Senate to support the Treaty. In addition, we urge the Administration to seek the proposed immediate, deep cuts in the U.S. and Russian arsenals within a specified framework that binds both nations to engage the international community in establishing a timetable for global, verifiable elimination of all nations' nuclear weapons.

Some media reports say that Obama plans on calling for the reduction of our nuclear arsenal to a thousand nuclear weapons. This, we must insist, is unacceptable. We do not want one nuclear weapon. We want zero.

Last month, Bishop Gabino Zavala, President of Pax Christi USA, in a speech at the University of Great Falls in Montana, [outlined Pax Christi's new disarmament vision](#) [3] and campaign.

I stand here today with great hope that a very new moment for dramatic and fundamental changes in U.S. nuclear weapons policies is within our reach. That which our political leaders do not see, or cannot say, we must. It is up to us as people of faith, and to all who hunger and thirst for justice and peace to give voice to alternatives to war, to elevate a prophetic vision of nonviolence, and to work for it -- with urgency.

History is full of surprises. Who could have predicted that nonviolent movements for democracy in Eastern Europe would usher in the end of the Cold War, or that dialogue between arch-enemies in South Africa would lead to the end of apartheid? Others before us did not lose hope in the long struggle to abolish slavery and torture. Why should the struggle to abolish war be any different? Why not elevate nonviolence as a strategy in the political discourse?

"Another world is possible," Bishop Zavala concluded. "Another path for our country is possible. It is necessary. We are the leaders we have been waiting for; and if the people lead, let us hope that our leaders follow.

While many around the country might be slowing down their work for peace and justice, thinking that we need to give Obama a chance and see what happens, I think we need to redouble our efforts. We need to put a full-court press on the administration and the Congress and demand *total* nuclear disarmament. Now, in this crucial year of negotiation and hope.

In that spirit, my friends in Pax Christi, New Mexico and I have begun organizing our annual "Sackcloth and Ashes" peace vigil at Los Alamos to commemorate Hiroshima, this year on August 1st, and featuring two Nobel Peace Prize winners, Mairead Maguire of Belfast, and Jody Williams, of the anti-landmines campaign. (See:

www.paxchristinewmexico.org).

And in that spirit, my friends and I crossed the line in Nevada, in pursuit of such a world, in pursuit of the promise of the risen Jesus. In light of his resurrection, we know now that our survival is guaranteed; that we need not live in slavery to fear, violence and death; that the gift of peace has already been given to us; that all we need do is spend our lives living in that holy peace, with all its glorious social, economic and political implications.

The promise of resurrection -- I could see it as I stood handcuffed with the others in the pen in the Nevada desert. I could see it in the expression of the police officer who smiled and wished me a Happy Easter. Over the decades thousands have crossed the line and been arrested there. (See: www.nevadadesertexperience.org) And as a result nuclear-weapons testing has stopped. If we keep pursuing that resurrection gift of peace, we will go even farther and receive finally the gift of a nuclear-free world.

Now more than ever, we need to walk toward that world, seek it, speak of it, insist on it, and welcome it in faith, hope and love. In the process, we will discover anew the meaning of resurrection.

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St. Anthony Messenger Press has just published, *John Dear On Peace: An Introduction to His Life and Work* by Patricia Normile. John also has two new books, *A Persistent Peace* (his autobiography, from Loyola Press), and *Put Down Your Sword*, (Eerdmans) a collection of essays on nonviolence, all available from www.amazon.com. This week, John will speak at Catholic University in Washington, D.C, and offer a retreat in Pennsylvania (see: www.kirkridge.org) For info on his books and speaking schedule, see: www.johndear.org

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[1] <http://ncronline.org/node/12813>

[2] http://www.democracynow.org/2009/4/20/longtime_anti_nuclear_activist_john_dear

[3] <http://ncronline.org/node/12589>