

Pursue peace on Earth this Advent season

John Dear | Dec. 13, 2011 | On the Road to Peace

A few weeks ago at the Pantex nuclear weapons plant near Amarillo, Texas, the United States dismantled its last B53 bomb. There was no fanfare and little publicity. Some people were probably sad to see it go.

Some reports called the B53 "the most powerful bomb" in our arsenal. It certainly was one of the most destructive weapons ever created, the bad fruit of Gen. Curtis LeMay and his insane nuclear club.

Built around the time of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, it was capable of releasing nine megatons of explosive energy, about 750 times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb. While the Hiroshima bomb had up to 18 kilatons of TNT, the B53, as I understand it, had 9,000 kilatons of TNT. It weighed 10,000 pounds and was the size of minivan.

"The B53 was a cornerstone of the U.S. nuclear defense for 35 years," a Pantex official said on the day of its demise. "Its final dismantlement is a significant event for this country and for the world."

For once, I agree. This event was a sign of hope, albeit a mustard seed of hope.

Surely you will say I'm naïve. The United States has tens of thousands of bombs, thousands of nuclear weapons, the most amazing array of small, precise "conventional" weapons, the latest satellite tracking systems and our terrific new drones, all of which maintain our imperial deterrent in lethal ways unimaginable 100 years ago.

Even better, the race is on at Los Alamos in New Mexico and elsewhere to come up with a new kind of post-nuclear weapon right out of *Star Trek* or *Star Wars*, a kind of global Taser gun or paralyzing wave force field. We are unparalleled experts at the art of war, you say. And we don't mind the cost of war, the collateral damage (the death of children, the spread of injustice, the breeding of future wars, economic collapse, the poisoning of land, sea and air ...)

Who cares about the last B53? We don't need it. We've still got the B83. We're doing better than ever!

I've been pondering this event for weeks. Surely the dismantling of the last B53, due in part to recent U.S.-Russian disarmament treaties, finally happened because it was obsolete. It could never hit its target. It was too difficult to transport, too costly to maintain and no longer necessary what with our arsenal of smaller, more precise nukes.

But how could we have ever created such a monster? Why do we allow such instruments of our own destruction to exist? Why don't we seek to abolish all our weapons and create a new world based on nonviolent conflict resolution and justice? What does the B53 say about our faith, our humanity? What does it tell us about our obedience to the God of peace and the nonviolent Jesus?

Advent is a time to renew our hope, and our hope lies with the coming of the nonviolent Jesus with his Christmas gift of "peace on earth." Living in hope involves pursuing his vision of a world without nuclear and

conventional weapons, a new world of nonviolence, justice, compassion and peace.

I hope that one day soon, we will recognize that these instruments of death are the ultimate terrorist weapons, that the way to end global terrorism begins with the dismantling of our own terrorist arsenal.

I hope that one day soon, we will realize that these weapons do not provide any real security, that they actually make us more insecure. They inspire others to build similar weapons, and bankrupt all of us -- financially, morally, spirituality -- in the process.

I hope that one day, we will learn that real security begins when we heed the ways of the God of peace, end our wars, eliminate extreme poverty, promote democracy through nonviolent means and protect creation. Real security based on our common reliance on the God of peace comes when we share our wealth with the poor so that no one starves, no one is homeless and no one dies unjustly, so that everyone has a fair chance at a just, peaceful life.

I hope that one day, we will institutionalize international methods of nonviolent conflict resolution, just as we once institutionalized international methods of violent conflict resolution.

On that day, in this Advent vision of hope, when we finally dismantle the last nuclear weapon, the last smart bomb, the last drone, the last Trident submarine, the last conventional weapon, probably no one will notice. By then, we will have learned the wisdom of nonviolence. Peace, not the B53, will be the norm.

This is what the prophet Isaiah spoke of long ago. God wants us to disarm our weapons and live in God's reign of peace, he proclaimed. This vision is the basis of our hope.

That's why we begin Advent each year with Isaiah's spectacular vision of peace:

In days to come, the mountain of God's house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it. Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us climb God's mountain to the house of the God of Jacob, that God may instruct us in God's ways, and we may walk in God's paths. For from Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of God from Jerusalem. God shall judge between the nations and impose terms on many people. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again. Come, let us walk in the light of God. (Isaiah 2:2-5)

Once you meet God, Isaiah announces, you begin to dismantle your arsenals and practice nonviolence as a way of life. Indeed, the only way you can know for sure that you have encountered God, he suggests, is if you are in the process of dismantling your weapons and transforming them into instruments of life-giving service.

Isaiah reminds us that the spiritual life begins when we listen to God, learn God's way of peace and nonviolence, and join God's disarmament campaign. As we begin to see reality through the eyes of peace, we understand the fullness of this vision?the coming of a nonviolent messiah and "peace on earth."

Every boot that tramped in battle, every cloak rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for flames? A son is given us, upon his shoulder dominion rests. His dominion is vast, and forever peaceful. (9:4-6)

Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid. The calf and the young lion shall browse together with a little child to guide them. The cow and the bear shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest. The lion shall eat hay like the ox. The baby shall play by the cobra's den and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair. There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain. (11:6-9)

As we pray during Advent for disarmament, the abolition of war, and the coming of the nonviolent Messiah's Christmas gift of peace, our hope is renewed. Our will to support the growing movements for justice, disarmament and peace is strengthened. Our hearts widen as we meet our disarming God who turns us more and more into God's disarming peacemakers.

Yes, we may appear naïve, but actually, we are pragmatic idealists, people of biblical hope, nonviolent activists who pursue Isaiah's vision of peace, peacemakers who follow the peacemaking Christ.

This Advent, we pray:

God of peace, thank you for the dismantling of the B53. Please give us the grace to "beat swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks," to dismantle all our weapons that we may welcome your reign of love, nonviolence and justice. Disarm our hearts, disarm our minds and disarm our spirits. Disarm our work, disarm our families, disarm our church, disarm our nation and disarm our world. Help us to live in the light of your peace. Amen.

John Dear's new book, [Lazarus, Come Forth!](#) [1], has just been published by Orbis Books. It 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. This book and other recent books, including [Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings](#) [2]; [Put Down Your Sword](#) [3] and [A Persistent Peace](#) [4], are available from Amazon.com. For more information, go to [John Dear's website](#) [5].

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[2] [http://www.amazon.com/Daniel-Berrigan-Essential-Writings-](http://www.amazon.com/Daniel-Berrigan-Essential-Writings-Spiritual/dp/1570758379/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1318348569&sr=1-1)

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[5] <http://www.johndear.org>

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