NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

We must turn toward nonviolence in every area of society

John Dear | Aug. 21, 2012 On the Road to Peace

Last month's movie theater massacre in Aurora, Colo., was another wake-up call for our gun-crazy, violent nation. We grieve for the dead and wounded and join with others in a demand handgun reform, but what we need is a fundamental change among us all. This ongoing horrific violence and the daily violence we read about summon us to make a principled turn from violence to nonviolence. Every one of us, and every sector of society, needs to make that turn. Without our conversion to nonviolence, we will be forever stuck in the ancient mindlessness and downward spiral of violence. But we need not be stuck. We can choose to be nonviolent people.

Yes, we have to ban handguns and AK-47s. And we need to abolish war, executions, drones, Trident Submarines, extrajudicial assassination, state-sanctioned violence and nuclear weapons. We have a president who starts his day sending his kids off to school and deciding over coffee whom to assassinate. We send drones over Afghanistan, Yemen and Pakistan that terrorize children. We execute people legally. And in Los Alamos, N.M., we continue to build nuclear weapons like it is a normal thing to do. We hold the world hostage with our nuclear terrorism.

Everywhere we turn, we hear of more violence. We feel it in ourselves as if we've been infected by some kind of plague. For the many young people who are not loved, not taught to be nonviolent, not given any hope or meaning in life, not invited to join the nonviolent struggle for justice and peace, the nihilism and insanity of further violence can feel like a natural progression. "Everyone is violent, so I'll be violent, too," many think. They are not taught how to live nonviolently.

It's a wonder there aren't more massacres.

Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. both insisted we need a fundamental internal conversion from violence to nonviolence as the basis for our work for justice, human rights and peace. Each one of us, they argued day and night, has to reject that pull of violence and choose to live a nonviolent life and join the struggle to create a nonviolent world. This philosophical, moral and spiritual turning is the hardest step of all, the most courageous and the most needed. As more and more of us choose active, creative nonviolence as a way of life, we have a chance of creating a more nonviolent society.

Nonviolence needs to touch every area of society, but sometimes, I'm hard-pressed to find any areas of society that could be considered nonviolent. Our schools are training grounds of violence; most universities take millions from the Pentagon to train young people to kill. Wall Street mega-corporations seek only to make money for the elite and leave the poor and needy poor and needy. The media ignores those who teach and practice nonviolence and highlights violence morning, noon and night to sell their insipid ads. The legal profession has failed to outlaw our weapons, and the medical profession has failed to fight the epidemic of violence. Hollywood glorifies violence and brainwashes us into thinking that scenes of mass murder are entertaining. Our politicians serve the culture of violence and war. Only a handful of leaders, like Barbara Lee, John Lewis and Dennis Kucinich, uphold the politics of active nonviolence. And the churches, mosques and

synagogues by and large do not teach nonviolence; instead, they support through their silence or outright hypocrisy the culture of violence and war.

All of that has to change. We need the institutions of civil society to become nonviolent and then to advocate societal nonviolence that we can move toward a new culture of nonviolence.

Our educators need to step up to the plate and become educators of peace and nonviolence. Every elementary and high school and every college and university in the U.S. and the world should first of all be a training camp for nonviolence, where the methodologies of nonviolent conflict resolution are taught and the life of nonviolence is modeled. Everyone in the legal profession should help at some level to outlaw war, weapons and executions, while everyone in the medical profession should join the campaign to fight the cancer of violence. Everyone in the media should commit themselves to highlighting nonviolent conflict resolution, those who teach it, and how to live in peace. Hollywood should risk making inspiring movies like "Gandhi" and "Romero" instead of "The Dark Knight Rises" and "Terminator Salvation." And every church, mosque and synagogue should uphold the spiritual teachings of nonviolence so members become formed in their tradition of nonviolence and join the global campaign of disarmament and nonviolence.

Of course, every politician in the United States should be leading us toward a new nonviolent nation. Instead of supporting the Pentagon's wars and the labs' weapons, politicians should uphold the vision of a new culture of peace and nonviolence and point the way there. In their speeches, they should be asking us, "What would our land look like if there were no more guns, no more bombs, no more wars, no more poverty, if we were all nonviolent -- and what do we have to do now to help make that vision of peace come true?" We should be working diligently not only to stop all murders, executions and wars, but to make such horrors a thing of the past.

That means, of course, that the Obama administration should refuse to assassinate anyone; bring the troops home from Afghanistan; dismantle our drones and nuclear weapons; cut the military budget drastically; and use those infinite funds to rebuild our nation and world, including through the systematic education of everyone everywhere in the methodologies of nonviolent conflict resolution.

Gandhi and King insisted nonviolence is our only hope but requires a profound commitment as well as serious movement organizing. They taught that living and advocating the life of nonviolence, given our global addiction to violence, was the highest human ideal. If we are to survive, one day all our institutions, structures and nations will be nonviolent.

In light of the Aurora massacre, I hope we can each make a new commitment to nonviolence and do what we can, like Gandhi and King, to teach and practice nonviolence as a way of life -- among our families, in our workplace, in our local community, in our religious house of worship, and in every area of civic society, that creative nonviolence might become the new norm.

I find it helps to use the word "nonviolence" to talk about it with friends, relatives, co-workers, politicians and religious leaders. As a Gandhian experiment with truth, we can ask people how they define nonviolence, how they are becoming more nonviolent and what they can do to help create a more nonviolent world. Their answers might surprise us.

"Humanity has to go out of violence only through nonviolence," Gandhi wrote shortly before he was brutally shot down. "Hatred can be overcome only by love. Counter hatred only increases the surface, as well as the depth of hatred."

"My optimism rests on my belief in the infinite possibilities of the individual to develop nonviolence," he continued. "The more you develop it in your own being, the more infectious it becomes until it overwhelms

your surroundings and by and by might oversweep the world."

Martin Luther King Jr. said the same thing -- over and over, every day of his life. "The choice is no longer violence or nonviolence," Dr. King said the night before he was shot. "It's nonviolence or non-existence."

His last words still ring true. With the strength and time we have left, let's help one another move from our culture of violence into the vision, politics, economics, hope and life of creative nonviolence that one day, we might achieve a new culture of nonviolence.

***

John Dear will speak Wednesday at the spirituality festival in Edinburgh, Scotland, and Aug. 26-28 near London at the annual Greenbelt Festival [1] before embarking on a national speaking tour of England. His new book, *Lazarus, Come Forth!* [2], 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. To see John's 2012 speaking schedule, go to John Dear's website [3]. John's talk at last year's Sabeel conference in Bethlehem is featured in the new book *Challenging Empire* [4]. John is profiled with Dan Berrigan and Roy Bourgeois in a new book, *Divine Rebels* [5] by Deena Guzder (Lawrence Hill Books). This book and other recent books, including *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings* *[6]*; *Put Down Your Sword* *[7]* and *A Persistent Peace* *[8]*, are available from Amazon.com.

Source URL (retrieved on 04/28/2019 - 19:00): http://ncronline.org/blogs/road-peace/we-must-turn-toward-nonviolence-every-area-society

We can send you an e-mail every time On the Road to Peace column is posted to NCRonline.org. Go to this page and follow directions: **E-mail alert sign-up** [9]. If you already receive e-mail alerts from us, click on the "update my profile" button to add On the Road to Peace to your list.

Links:
[1] http://www.greenbelt.org.uk
[2] http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1570759367/ref=pd_lpo_k2_dp_sr_1?pf_rd_p=486539851&pf_rd_s=lpo-top-stripe-1&pf_rd_t=201&pf_rd_i=1584200405&pf_rd_m=ATVPDKIKX0DER&pf_rd_r=1GYTD8AM60P
[3] http://www.johndear.org
[4] http://www.fosna.org/
[5] http://www.amazon.com/Divine-Rebels-American-Christian-Activists/dp/1569762643/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1326209314&sr=8-1
[6] http://www.amazon.com/Daniel-Berrigan-Essential-Writings-Spiritual/dp/1570758379/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1318348569&sr=1-1
[7] http://www.amazon.com/Put-Down-Your-Sword-Nonviolence/dp/0802863574/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1318348607&sr=1-1
[8] http://www.amazon.com/Persistent-Peace-Struggle-Nonviolent-World/dp/0829427201/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1318348624&sr=1-1
[9] http://ncronline.org/email-alert-signup