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Non-violence, more than a New Year's resolution

John Dear | Jan. 2, 2007 On the Road to Peace

New Year's weekend brought three and a half feet of snow to the mesa high in the New Mexico desert where I live. So I've been sitting by a fire, trying to keep warm, reading and reflecting, enjoying the silence and solitude. The beginning of a new year is a good time for resolutions, but I think, given the world, we need more than resolutions, even good intentions -- we need solemn, religious vows, a whole new commitment to God's way of peace and love.

Twenty five years ago, some friends and I professed a vow of non-violence, as Gandhi did a hundred years ago. Not long afterwards, Pax Christi asked Eileen Egan and me to draft a vow, which they offered to Pax Christi members as a way to dedicate our lives to the Gospel path of non-violence. Since then, tens of thousands have professed it.

Thinking about the world's violence, poverty, wars and weapons, and enjoying the glorious snow covered desert scenery and distant mountains, I give thanks for that vow of non-violence and the journey it opened up for me. I certainly am not perfectly non-violent, but I have kept at the journey, and the older I get, the more I discover that the spiritual journey itself may be what counts most for it holds the greatest blessings.

I think Gandhi was right: the only solution to our personal, national and global violence is creative loving non-violence. The greatest challenge facing us as individuals and as a race is to become people of creative non-violence, which means from now on, we need to be non-violent to our spouses, children, parents, relatives, neighbors and everyone we meet, as well as non-violent to ourselves, non-violent in our work, non-violent in our language, non-violent in our politics and policies and attitudes toward humanity and creation itself.

This commitment requires daily meditation, ongoing study, Gospel-reading, community building, periodic training, and public action. Somehow, it means placing the God of peace at the center of our lives, as the goal of our common life journey, as the measure of all we do. If we can surrender ourselves completely, over and over again to the God of peace, we may find ourselves walking the path of non-violence and becoming instruments of peace. Non-violence, then, becomes a way of life, a journey of peace to the God of peace.

My friend Gerard Vanderhaar, a long time Pax Christi activist, completed an excellent new book just before his death in 2005. *Personal Non-violence: A Practice Spirituality for Peacemakers*, (published by www.paxchristiusa.org [1]) helps me to see where I am on the journey of non-violence, and how I can move from violence to non-violence. His reflections on such everyday topics as stress, anger, resentment, language, attitude, listening, leadership, driving, and bearing public witness for peace offer concrete ways toward growth and help me become a better person, more non-violent.

As we begin a new year and start again the work to abolish war, poverty and nuclear weapons, I thought I'd share with readers the original Pax Christi Vow of Non-violence as a way to recommit ourselves to the non-violent Jesus and his life of love and peace. It fits well within our long tradition of solemn, religious vows, and can be pronounced privately, in a local peace community, or at a parish liturgy. You can share it with family, friends, co-workers, neighbors and parishioners. Some people read it every morning as a way to remind themselves that they are invited to walk a path of non-violence.

If taken seriously, this vow can set us on a new course which will bring immeasurable blessings, perhaps even a lifetime commitment to peace, forgiveness, compassion and suffering love, a true, lifelong fidelity to the non-violent Jesus.

> Recognizing the violence in my own heart, yet trusting in the goodness and mercy of God, I vow to practice the non-violence of Jesus who taught us in the Sermon on the Mount:
>
> Blessed are the peacemakers, they will be called the sons and daughters of God. ? You have heard that it was said, "You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy"; but I say to you, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. In this way, you will be daughters and sons of your Creator in heaven."
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> Before God the Creator and the Holy Spirit, I vow to carry out in my life the love and example of Jesus
>
> ? by striving for peace within myself and seeking to be a peacemaker in my daily life;
>
> ? by accepting suffering in the struggle for justice rather than inflicting it;
>
> ? by refusing to retaliate in the face of provocation and violence;
>
> ? by persevering in non-violence of tongue and heart;
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> ? by living conscientiously and simply so that I do not deprive others of the means to live or harm

creation;

? by actively resisting evil and working non-violently to abolish war and the causes of war from my own heart and from the face of the earth.

God, I trust in your sustaining love and believe that just as you gave me the grace and desire to offer this, so you will also bestow abundant grace to fulfill it.

Fr. John Dear's new book, *Transfiguration*, will be published next month by Doubleday (and can be pre-ordered from Amazon.com). He will speak Friday, Jan. 12, in Phoenix, Arizona, on "Dr. King and the Way of Non-violence." For more information, see: www.johndear.org.

To learn more about Pax Christi and the vow of nonvolience, visit www.paxchristiusa.org [2].

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Links:
[1] http://www.paxchristiusa.org/
[2] http://www.paxchristiusa.org/news_events_more.asp?id=55