

Greetings from Australia

John Dear | Mar. 27, 2007 | On the Road to Peace

G'day from Down Under! I've been on the road in Australia for a month now, from Sydney on the east coast to Perth on the west, then about face and back again. I spoke in Brisbane on the east coast, and down south in Melbourne on Port Phillip Bay, and Adelaide on the Gulf of St. Vincent, and Canberra, the inland capital, as well as Townsville, way up north in the tropics, across from Magnetic Island and the Great Barrier Reef. And southernmost of all, somewhere near Antarctica in Hobart on the gorgeous island of Tasmania, with other stops in between.

The tour is sponsored by my friends at Pace e Bene, a Franciscan-based group that offers trainings in Christian nonviolence all over the United States and Australia (See www.paceebene.org [1] for details and how to bring them into your area.)

The week before I arrived, on Feb. 18, Pope Benedict issued a welcome but unusual statement. He called upon Catholics everywhere to fulfill Jesus' commandment in the Sermon on the Mount to "love our enemies." The quintessential Christian commandment, finally pronounced from Rome.

"This Gospel is rightly considered to be the Magna Carta of Christian nonviolence," the pope said, "which consists not of giving in to evil -- according to a false interpretation of 'turning the other cheek' -- but in responding to evil with good, thus breaking the chains of injustice." Christian nonviolence, he said, is "the attitude of one who is so convinced of the love and strength of God that he is not afraid to face evil armed with just the weapons of love and truth." Love for the enemy, he concluded, is "the nucleus of the Christian revolution."

I bear a similar message. I've spoken already to thousands about Gospel nonviolence and have taken heart at meeting such good people grappling with the Gospel of peace, trying to follow the path of the nonviolent Jesus. I've been enlightened, as well, to see the American empire through the eyes of these Australian peacemakers.

They have a clear-eyed grasp on their government, as well, a pawn of the United States in Bush's war on Iraq. A U.S. military base looms along Australia's northern territory, near Alice Springs, called Pine Gap. There, U.S. radar facilities pinpoint the targets of every U.S. bomb that falls on Iraq. Pine Gap is also a link in the chain of the Missile Defense System, the U.S. Star Wars scheme for controlling outer space.

The collusion goes deeper. Along the northeast coast this June, some 15,000 U.S. soldiers, along with 12,000

Australian troops, will train in the largest U.S. military exercises here ever -- "Operation Talisman Sabre 2007." Rumors are on the wind that nuclear-armed U.S. warships will practice with depleted uranium along the endangered Great Barrier Reef. They'll pound the gorgeous fragile Queensland coastline from land, air and sea. Counter-plans are on the wind, as well. Many in Australia are beginning to realize the deadly consequences of aligning with the American empire. And a vigil against the war games is first on their list (see: www.peaceconvergence.com [2]).

Civil disobedience is on the list as well. The Pine Gap Four, for example, have engaged in it already. They're a cell of nonviolent Christian activists who walked onto the U.S. military base near Alice Springs on Dec. 9, 2005. In white coveralls, they announced themselves as a Citizens Weapons Inspection Team, then hung banners and dropped leaflets. Before long, they were arrested. Facing seven years in prison, they will be tried on May 29. (For information see: www.pinegap6.org [3].)

Heroes. Heroes of Gospel nonviolence. They exposed the hidden truth of the U.S. radar operations in Australia's backyard, a truth long obscured under official secrecy and gibberish. The Four demand the removal of all U.S. military installations here, and an end to Australia's support for our evil war on Iraq. In the process, they shine a light like the blazing Australian sun on what discipleship to the nonviolent Jesus looks like today. If we want to love our enemies, a straightforward first step is to put an end to our governments' plans to kill them.

Nonviolent revolution -- that's been my message at every stop, at each workshop, retreat, public lecture, and interview. Over and over I say we are all called to undertake with new vigor the Christian revolution of nonviolence -- in Australia, the United States, and everywhere.

We are, I tell them, Sermon-on-the-Mount people, people who embrace nonviolence as a way of life. We organize nonviolence as a new methodology for ending wars, for transforming unjust structures -- for beating swords into plowshares, to borrow a turn of phrase from the prophet. Such a revolution, if loving and tenacious, will one day give birth to a new world without war, poverty or nuclear weapons. And in that day we'll declare, "God's reign of nonviolence at hand." And so I join with the Pine Gap Four -- and now with Pope Benedict -- in calling people to choose to get actively involved in nonviolent campaigns for justice and peace.

Like most of us comfortable white, middle-class Americans, Australians are growing complacent and comfortable too. How easy to sit back, do nothing, and harrumph and grumble about the state of the world. The Gospel, on the other hand, challenges us to get up, get involved, and follow Jesus as he engages in nonviolent public action in the Temple -- and as he forgives those who arrest, imprison, torture and execute him.

Holy Week is a reminder that this journey is our own. We're to set our faces against the Jerusalems of our own place and time. We're to pursue justice with that same dangerous, holy, revolutionary nonviolence as did our Lord. And like him, publicly.

"Public action! Public action! Public action!" The words still ring in my ears, words out of the mouth of Cesar Chavez of the United Farm Workers movement. I had an evening with him shortly before he died, and I had asked, "What should I say to people who ask me, 'What should we do?'" He responded without missing a beat. And then he added for emphasis: "Tell everyone to act publicly for justice and peace!"

Many do that here, wonderful people engaging in local, national and global campaigns for justice and peace. I encourage them to carry on their work. They encourage me in return.

Upon my arrival home, I'll get the chance to practice what I preach. I stand trial in federal court in Albuquerque, N.M., April 12 for protesting the U.S. war on Iraq. My friends and I hope to put the war on trial and uphold God's law of nonviolence. Whatever the outcome, the journey to peace, together with friends around the world, is rich with blessings. And more, it foreshadows the coming of a new world of peace, justice and nonviolence, here and now.

John Dear's new book, "Transfiguration" (Doubleday) is available from Amazon.com or your local bookstore. For information, see: www.fatherjohndear.org [4]

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Links:

- [1] <http://www.paceebene.org>
- [2] <http://www.peaceconvergence.com>
- [3] <http://www.pinegap6.org>
- [4] <http://www.fatherjohndear.org>