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# 'No more hurting people,' 8-year-old bombing victim begs

John Dear | Apr. 23, 2013 On the Road to Peace

Last week marked a typical turn in our world of violence -- dozens killed in explosions in Iraq, U.S. drone attacks in Afghanistan, the ongoing U.S.-backed occupation of Palestine, the force-feeding of U.S. prisoners at Guantanamo, our president's daily perusal of his assassination list, millions of children starving to death around the world, ongoing U.S. preparations for nuclear war, the continued exploitation of the earth and its creatures, inner-city shootings, 14 dead from a fiery factory explosion in Texas -- and the Boston Marathon bombings.

I was in Ontario, Canada, last week to speak about nonviolence and was unable to follow the news from Boston. But I was stopped short by the heartbreaking photo of 8-year-old bombing victim Martin Richard [1] from Dorchester, Mass., who was killed while standing with his family at the finish line April 15.

In the photo, Martin smiles at the camera, holding a handmade poster with two red hearts and a peace sign. It reads: "No more hurting people. Peace." He made the poster at school in response to the shooting of Trayvon Martin in Florida.

"No more hurting people." For me, that's the voice of God speaking to us all. It's the cry of the world's children. It's the message of Jesus and Buddha passed on to us down through the ages.

"No more hurting people." That should be our headline, our mantra, our communal wisdom, our theme song, our one topic, our goal, our public policy, our new bottom line.

"No more hurting people." Here's the basis for a new foreign policy, for religion, for all politics from now on.

Young Martin's photo should have been on the cover of *Time* and *The New York Times*, but I'm sure the media dismissed it because it's too serious, too powerful. Sure, it's sweet and touching, but it runs against the grain of our government and its military, its wars and violent policies that hurt so many. And as far as the media is concerned, violence sells. Peace does not. We can't stir people up with a photo of a dead child calling for peace. They might do something!

I think Martin Richard was smarter than all the pundits, politicians, war makers and their chaplains put together. His wisdom and message stand at the heart of truth and reality. "Hurting one another doesn't work," I hear him saying. "You reap what you sow. Violence in response to violence only leads to further violence. All violence is terrorism. War never leads to peace. Those who live by the sword will die by the sword. Preparing to use nuclear bombs is the ultimate form of terrorism. We should stop our terrorist war making. The days of hurting others are over. Let's all live in peace."

For the past decades, the United States has been bombing and killing children around the world -- in Vietnam, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Colombia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen and Pakistan. The violence we spread around the world will whiplash back upon us; it has, too. I'm surprised there aren't more terrorist bombing attacks here in the United States.

It would be comical if it weren't so tragic when our pundits and politicians ask, "Why would anyone do such a thing to us?" We are so blind and naïve to the terrorism we Americans do to the world's children, not to mention the terrorism we prepare with our drones and nuclear weapons. These deadly preparations do not go unnoticed. We are inspiring millions of people to hate us. It's inevitable that a few of them will go insane with hatred and suicidal terrorism.

During my recent visit to Afghanistan, I heard many stories about how our drones and fighter bombers blew up loved ones. In the face of these American bombing raids, any one of us would join the Taliban. The question is: Why doesn't everyone in the world hate us and want to kill us? This is the legacy of decades of war making, bombings, terrorist attacks and nuclear threats.

If we do not want any more bombings here at home, we better stop bombing people abroad.

If we justify our all-American violence and war making, why shouldn't millions of our victims feel justified to do violence against us? So goes the age-old "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" policy, which Gandhi said just leaves us all blind and toothless, armless and legless, and maybe just plain dead. We should heed Martin and practice nonviolence. No more killing. Resolve everything nonviolently. Live in peace.

These past few days, I've been sitting with Martin Richard's sign. It helps me grieve and gives me hope. His sign points us in the right direction of nonviolence toward a new world of peace. Nonviolence, he seems to know, is the only remedy for the insanity of global terrorism that we have unleashed upon ourselves.

What if we listened to Martin Richard's plea? Wouldn't that be the best way to honor the death of this holy child, to hear his message of peace and do what we can to stop the individual and national hurting of other people? How can we help stop the infliction of violence and death on others? This, for me, is the great demand of life upon us all these days.

First of all, we have to examine our own lives and ask ourselves: Who are the people we have hurt, and who are we currently hurting? How can we stop hurting them? If we find that we are hurting one person, we need to take immediate action to stop hurting them, apologize to them and help them heal.

Next, we need to explore the communities and places where we belong and ask in a similar vein: Whom are we collectively hurting, and how can we stop hurting them? At school, in our religious communities, at the workplace, in our cities -- how do we personally support the collective violence inflicted by some upon others, and what can we do to stop that violence?

Finally, we can ask, who are the people we as a nation are hurting, and how can we stop our nation from hurting others? For us Americans, that list is long. If we were to take this child of peace seriously, we would have to withdraw all troops from Afghanistan immediately; make restitution to the people of Afghanistan and Iraq; stop our drone program; close Guantanamo now; enact tough anti-gun legislation; end the death penalty; dismantle our nuclear weapons, Trident submarines and fighter bombers; feed the world's starving poor; and fund nonviolent conflict-resolution programs around the world so everyone can eventually become nonviolent.

This vision of nonviolence is not a pipe dream. This is the message of Buddhism, Christianity, all spiritual traditions and all peacemakers. It's the message of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy Day, Rabbi Abraham Heschel, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Adolfo Perez Esquivel, Mairead Maguire, Oscar Romero, Muriel Lester, Pope John XXIII, Leymah Gbowee, Aung San Suu Kyi, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama. Young Martin simply holds up the aspirations of all our greatest peacemakers.

They call for foreign policies based on the fundamental rights of children, insisting that the rights of every child

on the planet take first priority beyond all national, corporate and militaristic interests. This kind of foreign policy demands that no child will ever be hurt again. There is no cause worth the death of a single child. Since the risk of hurting one child is too great, from now on, we fund and pursue the abolition of poverty, hunger, war, nuclear weapons and destructive corporate policies.

War and weapons have failed to bring peace, we realize now. We're also learning that where creative nonviolence has been tried through diplomacy, dialogue, sanctions and negotiation, it worked. If we spend trillions of dollars not on war and weapons, but on nonviolent civilian-based defense systems, nonviolent international peace teams, nonviolent intervention, diplomacy, dialogue, and nonviolent responses to terrorism, people can live in peace. If we stop our own terrorist attacks (such as our drone raids) and fund global food and clean water distribution, free health care, low-income housing and schools, we could not only win the world over and end terrorism, we could abolish war and poverty. We would make our world safer for children.

"Humanity must put an end to war or war will put an end to humanity," Dr. King preached at the National Cathedral a few days before he was assassinated. "It is no longer a choice, my friends, between violence and nonviolence. It is either nonviolence or nonexistence, and the alternative to disarmament, the alternative to a greater suspension of nuclear tests, the alternative to strengthening the United Nations and thereby disarming the whole world may well be an inferno that even the mind of Dante could not imagine."

"Humanity has to get out of violence only by nonviolence," Gandhi wrote. "Hatred can be overcome only by love. Counter-hatred only increases the surface as well as the depth of hatred. We have to make truth and nonviolence not matters for mere individual practice but for practice by groups and communities and nations. That at any rate is my dream."

I offer all my condolences to the Richard family and all the victims of violence, and congratulations, too, to the Richard family for raising Martin to be a peacemaker. In his short life, he points a way forward for the rest of us.

For the sake of Martin Richard, Martin King, Mahatma Gandhi and all victims of violence, let's do our part to fulfill the dream of nonviolence by no longer hurting people and ending the policies, structures, institutions and systems that hurt people.

That means that each one of us has to get involved anew, become activists, organizers and foot soldiers in the global movement of nonviolence and do what we can so that one day, the world's children might live in peace.

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To see John's speaking schedule for 2013 or to invite him to speak in your church or school, go to John Dear's website [2]. John is profiled in *Doing Time for Peace* *[3]* by Rosalie Reigle and with Dan Berrigan and Roy Bourgeois in *Divine Rebels* [4] by Deena Guzder. One of John's essays on Jesus' nonviolent action in the temple appears in the new book *A Faith Not Worth Fighting For* [5]. His book *Lazarus, Come Forth!* [6] and other recent books, including *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings* [7], *Put Down Your Sword* [8] and *A Persistent Peace* [9], are available from Amazon.com.

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