



ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM

Website: elephantsinthelivingroom.org



**FR. JOHN DEAR
CHRIST THE KING
DETROIT, MI
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Introduction

When we plan one of these sessions, we select a topic: timely and important; then we select the best speaker to match. Today, we have done it in superb fashion. John Dear meets these criteria. The topic could not be more important: the future of our planet; human life on this planet; the end of the world as we know it. In union with concerned scientists, consider an atomic clock: it's now two minutes before midnight; our world could end. President Trump has stated that if they can't do what we tell them, our military leaders can 'unleash fire and fury, unlike anything the world has ever seen,' today threatening attack in Syria that could lead to all out war with Syria, Iran and Russia. What's the answer? How do we respond out of our Christian faith? We need to find a way to peace. Gandhi says it's a choice between nonviolence and existence.

Bishop Tom Gumbleton



That brings us to consideration of a speaker: our choice: Fr. John Dear. John Dear has been an activist in the peace movement for thirty-five years. He has been involved in Acts of civil disobedience, especially in protests against the U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal. He's spent two years in jail and other nonviolent resistance actions. John Dear has led national peace movements. He served as director of the U.S. section of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. He has traveled

to various war zones: Iraq, Afghanistan, Middle East. He has lectured on peace and nonviolence on a regular basis. He has two books: *The Nonviolent Life* and *Radical Prayers*, available at the registration desk.

Recently, John was a participant in the Vatican Conference regarding Catholic teaching on war, particularly the just war theology, being called into question. The participants are working toward culmination in a Peace Day statement by Pope Francis for January 1, 2017, in which the pope has officially taught that all Christians are called to reject war and follow the nonviolent Jesus. John shared in the drafting of that statement. John is also involved in Pax Christi International and the Vatican Office on Social Development and World peace.

John was ordained a priest in 1993 and comes to us from the diocese of Monterey, California. Please join with me in welcoming John Dear to speak to us today on the nonviolence of Jesus as our way to peace.

Pope Francis, Jesus and Gospel Non-Violence

Fr. John Dear

Thank you, Tom Gumbleton and friends for welcoming me here; and thank you all for all you do for peace and justice and disarmament, for our suffering sisters and brothers, and humanity and Mother Earth for Jesus and the Church.

Tom asked me to speak on Pope Francis and Gospel nonviolence; so let me say a little about myself; our work with the Vatican on nonviolence; what nonviolence means; how Jesus was nonviolent; and then some concluding points, then we'll have a Q and A, and by the end, we will have resolved everything.....

So, a few years ago, Marie Dennis and I and a few others started to work with the Vatican under Pope Benedict to ask for a meeting to ask for an encyclical on nonviolence. Then he stepped down, Francis was elected, Marie got a meeting with Cardinal Turkson, and asked for a conference, and he agreed to host it. So, we had this amazing Vatican conference two years ago...



I went up to Cardinal Turkson, asked him to get Pope Francis to issue a new encyclical calling for the global return to the nonviolence of Jesus, for the end of the just war theory, for the institutionalization of nonviolence in the global church and the world itself, so that we can get on with the most important mission God has given us: the abolition of war itself, and preparation for the coming of God's reign of nonviolence and peace on earth.

He asked me in turn to write a draft of the next world day of peace message, which I did, and Marie submitted a draft too, and that became last year's Jan. 1, 2017, World Day of Peace message, "Nonviolence—a style of politics for peace," the first statement on nonviolence in the history of the church! Now we are hosting global calls for a theology of nonviolence; and getting ready for a second conference in January 2019. We may also be going to call for a global petition to give to Francis asking for the encyclical. Pray for this great project.

We need to make "active nonviolence our way of life," Pope Francis wrote in the World day of Peace message. "I ask God to help all of us to cultivate nonviolence in our most personal thoughts and values.... May charity and nonviolence govern how we treat each other as individuals, within society and in international life. When victims of violence are able to resist the temptation to retaliate, they become the most credible promoters of nonviolent peacemaking. In the most local and ordinary situations and in the international order, may nonviolence become the hallmark of our decisions, our relationships and our actions, and indeed of political life in all its forms."

“I pledge the assistance of the Church in every effort to build peace through active and creative nonviolence. Every such response, however modest, helps to build a world free of violence, the first step towards justice and peace. May we dedicate ourselves prayerfully and actively to banishing violence from our hearts, words and deeds, and to becoming nonviolent people and to build nonviolent communities that care for our common home.”

Fifty years ago, on April 3rd, 1968, the night before he was killed, Martin Luther King Jr. said,

“The choice is no longer violence or nonviolence. It’s nonviolence or nonexistence.” I think that’s where we stand--on the brink of global destruction, called to reject non-existence and to choose nonviolence.



It’s good to be together because it’s such a terrible time, with this dangerous, narcissistic, racist, sexist, war making greedy lying sociopath, he who must not be named, but really, he is just a symbol of the system, the culture of violence, greed, racism and war. We now have a culture of permanent war, with wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Palestine. We threaten nuclear war with North Korea and the world; have 750 military bases

in over 150 nations; maintain 10,000 nuclear weapons; rampant racism, police brutality, mass incarceration, executions, sexism, massive tax breaks for corporations; supporting guns while doing nothing to stop gun massacres, turning away immigrant sisters and brothers, building new walls and prisons not schools and hospitals; letting the poor get poorer and sicker while the one percent of billionaires grows obscenely rich; and waging now permanent war upon Mother earth and the creatures, leading millions of creatures to extinction, and heading toward catastrophic climate change which will bring suffering and death to billions over the next century. This whole culture of violence, racism, greed and war has got to go. And all this violence and war is normal, legitimate and legal, and all this violence is in us. We have been raised to be violent, we have internalized it, and so we live and breathe violence and go along with the culture.

The good news is that Dr. King says there’s a way out, a way forward, a way toward a new future of peace with one another, the creatures, and Mother earth, and that is active, creative, organized, bottom up, grassroots people power movements of nonviolence. Dr. King defined active nonviolence as a way of life, a spiritual path, a positive methodology for social change that always works. He called nonviolence “power,” and said we’re not powerless, we have the power to change the world if we organize in grassroots movements of resistance and social transformation. We educate everyone in the methodology of nonviolence, try to institutionalize nonviolence, and work for a new culture of nonviolence.

I urge you to reflect on this clumsy word, to define it and practice it in your life like Dr. King and Gandhi. For me, active nonviolence begins with the vision of a reconciled humanity, a vision of the heart, the truth that all life is sacred, that we are all equal sisters and brothers, all children of the God of peace, already reconciled, all one, all already united, and so, we could never hurt or kill another human being, much less remain silent while our country wages war, builds nuclear weapons, and others starve. We renounce violence and vow never to hurt anyone again. We practice active universal love that resists systemic evil; persistently reconciles with everyone; disarms our hearts and the world; and practice unconditional, all-inclusive, non-retaliatory, universal love—with one condition: there is no cause however noble for which we support the killing of a single human being. We do not kill people; we do not kill people who kill people to show that killing people is wrong. We work to end the killings; to educate everyone in nonviolence; to institutionalize nonviolent conflict resolution and to work for a new culture of nonviolence.

So in my book *"The Nonviolent Life," I said nonviolence requires 3 simultaneous attributes:*

we are nonviolent to ourselves; at the same time we try to be meticulously nonviolent to everyone around us and the creatures and all creation; and third, that at the same time we join the global grassroots movements of nonviolence, because the only way that positive social change happens is bottom up people power grassroots movements of nonviolence.

Here's Gandhi: ***"Nonviolence means avoiding injury to anything on earth, in thought, word, or deed. Nonviolence cannot be preached; it has to be practiced. I am certain that if we want to bring about peace in the world, there is no other way except that of nonviolence. Nonviolence is the greatest and most active force in the world. One person who can express nonviolence in life exercises a force superior to all the forces of brutality. My optimism rests on my belief in the infinite possibilities of the individual to develop nonviolence. The more you develop it in your own being, the more infectious it becomes till it overwhelms your surroundings and by and by might over sweep the world."***

Gandhi called Jesus the most active practitioner of nonviolence in the history of the world, and if that is true, then every follower of Jesus has to become nonviolent and work for a new nonviolent world as he did.

In the Sermon on the Mount, he commands nonviolence: "You have heard it said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; but I say offer no violent resistance to one who does evil." In a world of permanent war and total violence, this is the starting point for Christians. Tolstoy spent the last 25 years of his life preaching that one verse. Gandhi read it every day for the last 45 years of his life. We have to start taking it seriously too. Then Jesus says, "You have heard it said, love your countrymen and hate your enemies, but I say love your enemies and pray for your persecutors then you will be sons and daughters of the God who lets the sun rise on the good and the bad and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust."

Notice, he does not say: "However, if they are really bad, and you follow these 7 conditions, bomb the hell out of them." Notice too that in this the most political sentence

in the entire bible, which not only outlaws war and killing but commands universal nonviolent love, Jesus describes the nature of God as totally nonviolent. These two teachings are the key to discipleship, the Church, peace and the future of humanity.

Jesus organizes a campaign of nonviolence, like a nonviolent military campaign, like Gandhi's Salt March, and sends 72 people ahead of him, saying, "I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves." He leads a grassroots nonviolent movement that seeks to disarm and heal and welcome God's peace. He marches to Jerusalem, walks into the Temple, the center of systemic injustice, and turns over the tables of the moneychangers in



nonviolent civil disobedience. He doesn't hurt anyone, kill anyone, or bomb anyone, but he is not passive. He takes direct nonviolent action and accepts the consequences. This is the normative behavior of Christians. Christians do not kill; they take nonviolent action to stop the killing and injustice.

That's all well and good, someone once said to me, but sometimes you just got to kill people. No. We have been commanded to be nonviolent. Everyone is redeemable; nonviolence works; wars can be ended. We can overcome evil through organized goodness; we never overcome evil through greater evil. The means are the ends; those who live by the sword die by the sword. Nonviolence is our only practical political solution left.

In the upper room, Jesus takes the bread and says, "My body broken for you." He takes the cup and says, "My blood shed for you." If he were a good American he should have said, "Go break their bodies for me; go shed their blood for me." No, "My body broken for you, my blood shed for you, do this." This is the new covenant of nonviolence, the methodology of Jesus.

Then, he's in Gethsemane, here come the soldiers, and Peter realizes he's about to be arrested, and Peter thinks, "We've got to protect our guy." He thinks: "If there was ever a just war in human history, if violence was ever divinely sanctioned in all of history—this is the moment," and he's right! As he takes up the sword to kill, the commandment comes down, "Put down the sword."

Dear friends, these are the last words of Jesus to the church before he was killed—"Put down the sword." It's the last thing they heard him say; and it's the first time they understood how serious he is about nonviolence, so they all run away, and abandon him.

So, Jesus is arrested and mocked and tortured by six hundred drunken soldiers, and never once retaliates or even gets angry. Anyone can kill or drop a bomb; the nonviolent Jesus was the bravest, most courageous person who ever lived. As he is executed, he practices perfect nonviolence till the end, saying, "The violence stops here in my body. You are forgiven, but from now on, you are not allowed to kill." God affirms his nonviolent life and raises him.

Resurrection means having nothing to do with death, having not a drop of violence in you. The military uses death as a social methodology and brings good people to death; the Church knows that in the light of the resurrection of the nonviolent Jesus, death does not get the last word; that we would prefer to undergo death than inflict it on anyone; and that our attitude is that of the poet Edna St. Vincent Millay who said, "I shall die but that is all I shall do for death." We know that in the resurrection, our survival is already guaranteed, so we announce that the days of war and killing are coming to an end.

If we want to be people of resurrection, we have to renounce death and practice active nonviolence.

So, for the Christian, there is no such thing as a just war. War is never justified. War is never blessed. War is the mortal sin. War always leads to further wars. Jesus does not teach us how to kill or wage war, but how to love and wage peace, how to be nonviolent and resist evil, how to pray and suffer and die gracefully. For the Christian, the just war theory is blasphemy, heresy.

So, Christians and Catholics should no longer serve in any military in the world, or participate in violence, injustice or war. You cannot be a Christian, a follower of the nonviolent Jesus, and serve in the military. Christians and Catholics are called to practice active nonviolence, end war and the causes of war, and build a new culture of peace and nonviolence.

We're all addicted to violence; the church is like a global 12 step meeting, where we confess our violence, turn to our higher power, pledge to become sober people of nonviolence, make amends for our wars, and start a new sober life of nonviolence. It does interventions to help nations become sober people of nonviolence.

The military trains professional killers; the church is supposed to train professional people of Gospel nonviolence. The Church calls people to quit the military, as Archbishop Romero did, and urges them not to join the military, but to resist war and militarism, and make peace and practice nonviolence, and to work for the abolition of war and nuclear weapons and poverty and the coming of God's reign of nonviolence here on earth.

Conclusion: what does this mean for us?

First, we need to be contemplatives of nonviolence, mystics of nonviolence .

The only way to deepen in nonviolence whatever our religious tradition is through prayer, which means we have to become contemplatives and mystics, people who sit with the God of peace, who take intimate time each day for our relationship with the God of peace, who allow the God of peace to disarm our hearts of our violence and the wars within us so that we can be disarmed and become people of nonviolence.

So, I invite you to give God your own inner violence, to let go of your anger and resentments and hurts and revenge, to grant clemency and forgiveness to everyone who ever hurt you, and move from anger and violence to nonviolence and compassion for everyone, so that we radiate personally the peace we seek politically and pray for peace! We're talking about a new kind of holiness, a dangerous mysticism that is a threat to empire.

Second, we need to be people of meticulous personal and interpersonal nonviolence.

We have to be nonviolent to ourselves, to non-cooperate with our own inner violence, not to beat ourselves up, but to try to be peaceful toward ourselves. I think the work of nonviolent resistance is difficult because we are all raised in violence and once you get involved in these issues, it can trigger the lingering violence within us and reopen our own past wounds, and we need to be aware of that. We need to look deeply within and try to look at the causes of our violence and be gentle with ourselves and not beat ourselves up but try to cultivate interior nonviolence.

Then we have to be especially nonviolent toward everyone we meet every day from now on for the rest of our lives. We need to be attentive to our personal nonviolence, to be as loving and compassionate as we can. Which means, being really kind in community, letting go of old resentments and hurts, forgiving everyone, outdoing one another in kindness, and trying to create a real community of nonviolence that has something to offer the world.

Third, We all have to become students and teachers of Nonviolence.

We should all be studying Gandhi and Dr. King and Dorothy Day and the movements of nonviolence in history, and then start teaching nonviolence to everyone, everywhere, your families and friends and communities, and make this place a center for training nonviolence, a cell of nonviolence, a training camp, the place where everyone comes to learn and practice and live the life of Gospel nonviolence. Talk about it all the time. I even call Jesus "the nonviolent Jesus."

Fourth, help the Church become a community of nonviolence; help all your parishioners to become more nonviolent, talk about the Church as a community of nonviolence; we don't support war or killing or the flag...As I write in my new book, "They Will Inherit the Earth," we have to practice ESCHATOLOGY OF NONVIOLENCE

Fifth, we all need to become activists and organizers of nonviolence!

I asked Cesar Chavez shortly before he died, what we should do for peace and justice. He said, "Tell everyone: Public action, public action, public action! Tell everyone they have to act publicly for peace and justice for the rest of their lives."

As Archbishop Romero said: None of us can do everything, but all of us can do something. Every one of us is needed. Every one of us has something to offer. Every one of us, like Rosa Parks, can make a difference. Each one of us needs to be involved in some public action against war, for peace and justice, and to stay with it for the rest of our lives; to vigil, march, organize, leaflet, fast, protest and cross the line.

Whatever you do, do it well, with the spirit of love and hope and prayer, so that you are part of the global movement of active, creative nonviolence.

If you don't know where to start, join my group, Campaign Nonviolence, which has a national week of action, every September, around Sept. 21, intl peace day. This September will be our 5th year. Last year we had over 1600 events in all 50 states against everything, and for a new culture of nonviolence. This year, we hope to have over 2000 events, so I invite you to organize something; see the brochure and contact us. Also, on September 22nd, we are organizing a national march. We're going to meet at the Dr. King statue in Washington, D.C., and walk in a spirit of silent prayer to the White House for a rally and demonstration and nonviolent civil disobedience, and you are all cordially invited to join us! See: www.campaignnonviolence.org

I invite you also to join our nonviolent cities project where we are asking activists and church people in cities to begin envisioning the future of their city as a community of nonviolence, to ask what you can do now to help make your city a more nonviolent city. This is all based on Nonviolent Carbondale. We now have 50 cities from St. Paul to Cincinnati, and I encourage you to join this project. See our website, campaignnonviolence.org

Sixth, be Visionaries of Nonviolence

One of the casualties of this culture of violence, injustice and war is the loss of our imagination. People across the country cannot even imagine a world without war, poverty or nuclear weapons. But that is our job. We are like our ancestors, the Abolitionists, who came along and announced an astonishing, breathtaking new vision, a world without slavery, the equality of everyone on earth. We are their heirs, New Abolitionists, announcing a new world without war, poverty, racism, nuclear weapons, or environmental destruction; a new world of nonviolence.

We have to keep on pursuing that vision of a new world of peace, justice and nonviolence, to be hopeful in our hopelessness and trust that the God of peace is doing her thing while we do ours. We have to hold up the vision, the wisdom, of a new world of nonviolence, a world without war, poverty, or nuclear weapons.

Finally, we must claim as our core identity we are God's beloved sons and daughters; know God is a God of peace, and as God's children, then go and make peace. And we must help others know they are the beloved sons and daughters of the God of peace

For me, this is the key for a spirituality of peace, nonviolence and reconciliation. "Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called the sons and daughters of God." (Mt. 5:9)

How was Jesus able to be perfectly nonviolent? At his baptism he heard that he was the beloved son of God---and he claimed that identity and was faithful to it from the desert to the cross, to his death. He went into the desert, and was tempted by the empire, by violence, to reject his core identity. The voice says, "Oh yeah, if you are God's beloved son, prove it! Do something!" But he refused to reject who he is, claimed his true identity as God's beloved son, went forward on the mission to resist empire and be a peacemaker and was faithful until the moment of his death, when he died still centered in his relationship with the God of peace. They said, "If you are the son of God, come

down from there..." Because he remained true to that fundamental identity, he practiced perfect nonviolent resistance and love unto death. We can do the same.

But the culture of war and death is always trying to tell us who we are. "You are nobody!" or "You are somebody if you buy this product." Or "If you want to be all you can be, join the marines," and we should add, "and kill for the empire." But Jesus tells us who we truly are. He says: "You are the beloved sons and daughters of the God of peace, not the sons and daughters of the empire or the culture of war and violence." You and I have to claim this core identity and remain faithful to it, so we go forth and make peace and resist empire and live in God's love and welcome God's reign of peace. And then we have to help everyone know that they are beloved sons and daughters of God, that they can be nonviolent, that they are loved and lovable and can love everyone.

That is why I define nonviolence as remembering who we are. Violence comes from forgetting who we are. And the social, economic and political implications of this teaching are astounding: if we are sons and daughters, then every human being is our sister and brother.

My hope and prayer is that we will become apostles, disciples, servants, contemplatives, activists, teachers, visionaries, prophets, champions, and saints of Gospel nonviolence.

Thank you. God bless you.

Edited by Photos by
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Please get John's latest books:

"The Nonviolent Life" and "Radical Prayers" from Paceyebene.org

"They Will Inherit the Earth" and "Thomas Merton Peacemaker" from Orbis Books.

"The Beatitudes of Peace" and "Walking the Way: Following Jesus on the path of Nonviolence" from 23rd Publications. All books available from amazon.com

See: www.johndear.org

Please Join John's Campaign Nonviolence.org project. See: www.campaignnonviolence.org.