

CREATING SECURITY BY BUILDING A CULTURE OF PEACE:  
A NONVIOLENCE PERSPECTIVE

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After the "people power" revolution that brought about the nonviolent overthrow of the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines in 1986, many were speculating about the reasons for the extraordinary and unexpected nonviolent collapse of the Marcos government. Cardinal Sin, the head of the Roman Catholic Church in the archipelago, had formerly been a Marcos supporter but as the regime grew more repressive and corrupt, began to be a critic and finally threw his full support behind the popular democratic movement headed by Corazon Aquino. When Aquino became president, Filipinos began to say that Marcos was defeated because he was without Sin!

Beneath the humor is an important insight about power that the philosophy of nonviolence emphasizes: governments derive their power from the people, and if the people withdraw their active consent, government institutions are weakened and can even be brought down through noncooperation and civil disobedience. Marcos, called "the Hitler of Southeast Asia," controlled the military, the economy, and the government. As repression and corruption grew, his control was undermined as a people's opposition movement grew and reached a critical mass, pushing the dictatorship to the point of collapse. This occurred without force of arms. It rested instead on "soul force" and was called "the people power revolution."

When Cory Aquino became president, a writer in the Philippines said that whereas Karl Marx and the armed freedom fighter had been the prevailing symbol of revolution in the twentieth century, the new symbol that would grow in importance in the twenty-first century would be the unarmed freedom fighter, the satyagrahi or votary of Truth that Gandhi called for.

The crucial importance of nonviolence applies not only to revolutionary struggles, but on the wider stage of world order, it provides us with a hopeful vision and methodology for building a just, free, sustainable, and peaceful planet in the twenty-first century. Weapons of mass destruction as well as other forms of weaponry threaten our future: as US president Dwight Eisenhower said so unforgettably of the arms race, humanity is hanging "from a cross of iron." It is not only the weapons of mass destruction but the arms trade that makes all types of weapons of war available throughout the world, even in the poorest societies. This addiction to violence underlies the belief of those who say that to have peace, you must prepare for war, and that to have justice, you use any means necessary. In other words, "The end justifies the means."

But this belief in the necessity and efficacy of violence is challenged by the philosophy of nonviolence. A.J. Muste said, "There is no way to peace. Peace is the way." That is, means and ends are interrelated, and peace will come through peaceful means. Through the philosophy and practice of nonviolence, we have begun to discover the power and applicability of this alternative vision in overcoming injustice and oppression, in resolving conflict, in protecting the earth, and in establishing peace among the nations.

### Love as the Supreme Unifying Principle of Life

In his last book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* Martin Luther King, Jr. referred to Love as "the supreme unifying principle of life." Although an "often misunderstood and misinterpreted concept," it "has now become an absolute necessity for the survival" of humanity. Found in all religions, Love -- in the words of King -- is a "Hindu-Moslem-Christian-Jewish-Buddhist belief about ultimate reality" that is summed up in the First Epistle of St. John:

Let us love one another for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. . . . If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

King found that the most satisfying and practical application of this belief was through the methodology of Gandhi, which moved religion from the inner life and person-to-person relationships into the transformation of society as well. Gandhi's methodology was based on the belief that God is Truth and Truth is God; this reality resides in every human being. Satyagrahi -- Truth force -- is to be applied to the building of a just and peaceful society. Gandhi said these applications were "experiments with Truth." King's legacy began with the application of the Gandhian approach to social change in the arena of civil rights, but in time he applied it in working for peace and against poverty as well. This reflected his maturing religious and political thought as he grappled with what he called the triple evils of US society -- racism, militarism, and poverty, interrelated and interdependent. Had he lived longer, he would certainly have continued to deepen in his understanding of oppression. He did not deal, for example, with sexism and homophobia, flagrant evils that must be rooted out if we are to have a humane society.

In King's final writings he wrote of a time when nonviolence would be widely studied and applied in the building of a global civilization. This has quietly but surely begun to happen. Opposition to war and the pursuit of peace have grown in the religious community. The academic study of peace, nonviolence and conflict resolution is spreading to a growing number of colleges and universities. Theorists and practitioners of conflict resolution, mediation, and negotiation are more and more found dealing with the problems and concerns of schools and communities, of nation-states and the United Nations. The United Nations seeks to promote "an agenda for peace" through preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping. UNESCO is fostering the idea of a culture of peace supplanting a culture of violence. As Frederico Major, director of UNESCO, has written:

The culture of peace represents an everyday attitude of "nonviolent rebellion," of peaceful dissent, of firm determination to defend human rights and dignity. It is a growing body of shared values, attitudes, behaviors, and ways of life based on nonviolence and respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, on

understanding tolerance and solidarity, on the sharing and free flow of information, and on the full participation and empowerment of women.

The Gandhian and Kingian movements have inspired individuals, groups, and movements to experiment with the power of active nonviolence to resolve conflict, establish justice, protect the innocent, save the earth, proclaim new visions, and build, in the words of King, "the beloved community." In its deepest expressions, nonviolence comes from the religious affirmation of the sacredness of all life, the unity of the human family, and the supreme importance of truth and love. While, as Gandhi said, "Nonviolence is as old as the hills" -- and Gene Sharp and others have documented the way people of widely different cultures, in places all over the world, throughout history, have practiced in varied ways the politics of nonviolent action -- it is in our century, especially in the last half of the century, that this alternative vision has begun to grow enormously in self-understanding and application. This vision has been a seedbed for social ferment, revolutionary change, and the building of a global civic society, with spiritual roots and a shared global ethic.

#### [2a.] Creating a Global Civic Society

These nonviolent efforts both strengthen and complement the commitment of the United Nations to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war." Preserving peace and promoting economic security, ecological well-being, and just, free, and orderly societies exceed the capacity of sovereign nation-states. They need grassroots input and initiatives from below, and vision and hope from above.

The Christian Science Monitor recently ran an analysis of the current UN debate about its future role in policing global conflicts with the headline "Why UN Quit as Fireman to the World's Hot Spots," with the subhead "Burned in Bosnia and elsewhere, UN retreats to aid-giving and peace-patrolling." This retreat from the enthusiasm and optimism following the end of the cold war reflects the complexity of the post-cold-war world, the appalling continuation of the arms race, the easy availability of weapons, and the financial crisis brought about by the US and other nations unwilling to pay their assessments. It also reflects the violent and dangerous number of conflicts between ethnic, religious, and national groups, requiring efforts for which the global community has insufficient commitment and inadequate experience.

As the United Nations cuts back and reassesses the nature and scope of its "agenda for peace," the fact remains that we share one planet and that "we must either learn to live together as brothers (and sisters) or we are all going to perish together as fools." In the world community that is being born, we will need a variety of approaches, centers of power, and organizations to protect the environment, mediate conflicts, uphold human rights, deal with natural disasters, and build a just, free, sustainable, and peaceful world.

Elise Boulding points out that in 1906 there were only 176 international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs). Today there are over 18,000 autonomous bodies and agencies, linking people all around the world and forming building blocks for our emerging transnational civilization. INGOs, says Boulding,

are the living body of the planet's civil society. They represent the whole spectrum of human interests and concerns, from peace, human and social development and human rights to environmental sustainability. The INGOs form the focus of contemporary nonviolence in action. Their practitioners, though

independent, are constantly working with governments in order to transfer efforts for human betterment from the enforcement mode to the empowerment mode.

We of the INGO community need to work with and alongside the United Nations in helping to build a peaceful, just, and free world community. We do it in ways most appropriate and consistent with our stated purposes. For example, the US branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) participates in NGO efforts at the UN, especially with regards to disarmament. At the UN Special Sessions on Disarmament, we have fostered community study and support of the sessions. We have sponsored "Plowshares Coffee House" programs (at the Church Center for the United Nations) with daily programs, activities, and hospitality for NGOs, members of the UN community, and the wider public. Alongside these programs we have been part of peace coalition marches, vigils, and demonstrations to press for a stronger commitment for disarmament. This has included civil disobedience at the UN missions of the US, the United Kingdom, China, France, and the former Soviet Union, to put public pressure on these states for nuclear disarmament.

Another example comes from the 1995 UN Women's Conference in Beijing. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom organized a "peace train" of women who went from Europe across the former Soviet Union to Beijing -- an imaginative project that helped unite and mobilize many women activists. The IFOR sent a delegation to the conference that included a number of women from the developing world. The International Fellowship of Reconciliation and the International Peace Bureau developed an information kit that contained profiles of women's peace groups, suggestions for follow-up to Beijing, and the addresses of over sixty women's peace groups around the world. Through its Women Peacemakers Program, IFOR is helping women activists develop nonviolent skills for dealing with oppression and working for social change, as well as connecting these activists with one another and with groups that have needed resources.

## Current Experiments and Initiatives

Proponents of nonviolence are pursuing the work of peace and security in a variety of ways, continuing Gandhi's idea of "experimenting with Truth." Most are small and woefully funded, but this is often true with emerging new directions and initiatives. Some of these are:

### (1) Building Grassroots Movements for Nonviolent Social Change

Across the world, grassroots groups are organizing and training people to deal with the violence, injustice, and insecurity in their lives. A particularly dramatic example is the People Power movement in the Philippines, which arose from many different groups -- labor, student, religious, community, peace -- working to protect the people from a repressive dictatorship.

The main political opponent of Marcos was Senator Benigno Aquino. While in prison, he had a deep conversion through his reading of the Bible and Gandhi. His assassination gave a strong impetus to the nonviolent way in the Philippines. As a result of an invitation from a community of nuns working among

the poor in the Manila area, the International Fellowship of Reconciliation sent nonviolence trainers there who held nine weeks of workshops with individuals and groups, especially in the religious community, in training based on the Bible and Gandhi's teaching of satyagraha. As Cardinal Sin later remarked, this helped bring a heightened awareness of the potential of nonviolence in the Marcos opposition. When Marcos called for a national election to validate his leadership, the resulting People Power movement, contrary to expectations, succeeded through a remarkable and innovative campaign during the election and its aftermath. It reached a critical mass when many hundreds of thousands of unarmed people poured into the streets to oppose the Armed Forces of the Philippines, ending in the collapse of the dictatorship.

The grassroots movement continues there, dealing with the whole array of social, economic, political, and environmental problems. Bringing down the dictatorship was only the first step in the long-term effort needed to bring about a just and peaceful society.

As in the Philippines, throughout the world grassroots movements continue their work, within communities but also building networks and alliances across all kinds of boundaries. An example is the work for peace. Campaigns and movements against landmines, arms sales, and nuclear weapons can be found from the most localized base -- e.g., removing landmines in Cambodia -- to the United Nations Special Sessions on Disarmament. In the civil rights movement in the United States there was the concept of "top down/bottom up," i.e., change that comes out of the creative tension between efforts at governmental and other leadership levels with the efforts at the base. They complement and advance the work of each.

A new development in nonviolent social change is the beginning of work with police departments. In the US, the King Center in Atlanta and the state King Institutes in New York and Florida responded to requests from various city police departments to work with police in training in nonviolent skills. The IFOR branch in Zimbabwe has a similar project.

## (2) Intervention in Repressive Governmental Policies

Pastors for Peace is a religiously-based US group opposed to the cold-war holdover in the rigid US policy towards Cuba, which seeks to isolate Cuba totally and prohibit trade, tourism, and all other kinds of international involvement with that island nation. Pastors for Peace organizes truck caravans that bring humanitarian supplies illegally from the US into Mexico and thence to Cuba. This has repeatedly put a spotlight on the absurdity of US policies, with US representatives going to great lengths to prevent pastors from taking items as varied as Bibles and computers to Cuba.

## (3) Bearing Witness Against Violence and Repression

Many peace and human rights groups are active around the world. Some of the most imaginative have been the work of women. For example, Women in Black have vigiled against the war in the former Yugoslavia and against the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. Mothers of the Disappeared have vigiled to awaken the public to the disappearance of husbands, fathers, and sons at the hands of military

oppressors. Lone voices such as Burma's Aung San Suu Kyi have stood firm against harsh governmental efforts to silence all democratic opposition.

#### (4) Citizen Diplomacy

The contacts between Western and Soviet citizens during the cold war, especially during times of great tension and the possibility of war, were unofficial, but in the long run extraordinary efforts to build understanding and trust from below. Many religious and peace groups went from the West to meet with their counterparts as well as various civic and, in some cases, official groups. Far fewer but also significant visits from Soviet countries came to the West. This movement did much to change the climate in East/West relations, helping break down the isolation and hostility that were so strong. In areas where there were serious differences, this movement also often helped open doors and change policies.

After the US bombing of Libya and the continued isolation of Libya, the US Fellowship of Reconciliation sent a delegation there -- contravening US policy -- to meet with various civic, humanitarian, and official groups, believing that openness and goodwill create a better climate for solving problems between nations than isolation and hostile acts.

#### (5) Centers of Dialogue, Understanding, and Peace

Citizen initiatives can often work under difficult, even hostile, official relations to change attitudes and create openness. The Centre for Rapprochement in the Palestinian town of Beit Sahour brings Israelis and Palestinians together to break down barriers and build trust and understanding. Neve Shalom/Wahat al Salaam in Israel has an ambitious program of training and education for peace that grows out of a community where Israelis and Palestinians live and work together.

In the former Yugoslavia, peace centers in places as diverse as Skopje in Macedonia and Zagreb and Osijek in Croatia work under difficult circumstances to create a climate in which peace may begin to grow.

#### (6) Works of Healing in the Aftermath of Repression and War

With the enormous changes in recent years, with former dictatorships and various forms of repressive rule giving way to more open and democratic governments, there is an enormous need to deal with the suffering that has taken place. Among the widely varied responses to meeting this need, one of the most creative has been in South Africa where Archbishop Tutu heads the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Commission is dealing with the aftermath of decades of apartheid that led to imprisonment; torture; official, covert, and random violence; and death. Public testimony from the victims and the victimizers have exposed terrible things long hidden from view, helping to acknowledge what has occurred and building a climate for starting anew.

## (7) Peace Teams

The concept and implementation of transnational, multiracial, multicultural peace teams to go into areas of conflict, need, and unrest has been developing. Among the various efforts are the following:

Accompaniment is the idea of unarmed bodyguards providing international accompaniment for the protection of human rights, assisting activists in their risk-taking work, deterring violence against them, and making known the situation, in places such as El Salvador, Guatemala and Sri Lanka. Peace Brigades International has pioneered in these efforts, beginning in 1984 with the accompaniment of the Mutual Support Group for Families of the Disappeared in Guatemala.

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT). Sponsored by the Historic Peace Churches, they work for human rights, nonviolent resolution of conflict, monitoring situations of unrest and injustice, standing with victims, and publicizing oppression. The team in Hebron, for example, was there in the long months prior to the turnover of authority from the Israel Defense Force to the Palestinian Authority, and has remained there in the transition. Though a small team, they have used e-mail to publicize the situation in Hebron with great effectiveness. They have worked with Rabbis for Human Rights to stand with Palestinian families living under duress.

Cry Justice in Haiti. In 1993, Pax Christi and other peace groups formed a nonviolent presence near rural grassroots organizations facing violence in a volatile situation prior to Aristide's scheduled return.

Balkan Peace Team. Since 1994, a coalition of groups such as IFOR, PBI (Peace Brigades International) and WRI (War Resisters International) have had an international presence in the former Yugoslavia, seeking to prevent evictions by paramilitaries, supporting local human rights and social change groups, and meeting with officials.

Sipaz (Servicio Internacional Para la Paz, or International Service for Peace) is a coalition of groups responding to the situation in Chiapas, Mexico, formed in response to the invitation from peasants for an international presence to monitor, report, and support the peaceful struggle for justice.

Global Peace Service. The Swedish Council of Churches helped bring together religious, governmental, UN and various NGO groups to explore alternatives to military intervention and the training of international nonviolent peace teams prepared to go wherever they are needed.

#### (8) Zones of Peace

From the local to the national to the regional level, zones of peace are a very important concept for building security and reducing violence. Communities in the Philippines declared themselves zones of peace during the warfare between the Maoist New People's Army and the Marcos government. States like Costa Rica have prospered without an army, even when neighboring states were engaged in conflict. Nuclear Weapon-Free Zones have been established, all the way from the unilateral declarations of communities to international treaties such as the Treaty of Tlatelolco for all of Latin America, and the International Seabed Treaty for the ocean floor.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Mairead Maguire from Northern Ireland has spoken of the present time as one in which "the hard birthing of a new humanity" is taking place. The end of the cold war has thrown open the logjam of history. With the old certainties gone, defining every issue and struggle in light of the cold war is no longer possible. Will we be like the person with one demon cast out, only to be possessed by seven new demons -- or will we patiently and deliberately build this new humanity as we create a global civic culture, inclusive, open, nonviolent, and free? "Experiments with Truth" are helping to provide building blocks in that task.