

The Coming Witness of the Catholic Church to the Power of Nonviolence and the Call to Peacemaking: My One Pager

By Terrence Rynne

My dream for many years has been-- the whole Catholic Church-- Pope, bishops, clergy, of course, but also every Catholic in the pews, might awake to Jesus' call to build a positive peace, reject violence and joyfully wield the power of nonviolent action. What power could be unleashed on behalf of the world.

That dream began to take shape during the Vietnam War. I was fortunate back then to read the book *The Nonviolent Cross*, by James Douglass, my first introduction to the nonviolent practice of Mohandas Gandhi. I learned that Gandhi saw Jesus as the "Prince of the Satyagrahis," young, brave and engaged, and that when Gandhi read the Sermon on the Mount as a young man it went straight to his heart. That prompted in me a life-long study of Gandhi and gave me a new lens with which to read the Gospels—culminating in my two books: *Gandhi and Jesus: The Saving Power of Nonviolence* and *Jesus Christ, Peacemaker: A New Theology of Peace*.

Current scripture scholarship confirms Gandhi's view of Jesus. He was not only nonviolent to the core, he rejected violence and he worked to change the structural sources of suffering in his society—the ways the Torah, the Sabbath and the Temple were being interpreted and used by the leaders of his society. He was, in other words, a proactive peacemaker.

Studying Gandhi also introduced me to the amazing achievements in the past century of nonviolent action. If the twentieth century was the bloodiest in history, it was also the century in which the power of nonviolence was revealed to the world on the broadest of political stages as a real alternative to war and violence. The more steeped we are in the great stories of successful nonviolent action the more strongly we can resist the blandishments of calls to violence. The more we can keep our vision clear and creatively find the nonviolent alternatives.

What does this understanding of the Gospels do for the Church? First it thrusts us right into the middle of the political struggles of the world—the same as Jesus. These are the struggles that people care about, organize about, agonize about. As Walter Wink put it so well: "The removal of nonviolence from the gospel blasted the keystone from the arch and Christianity collapsed into a religion of personal salvation."

For the last dozen years or so my work has concentrated on young people. My wife and I founded the Center for Peacemaking at Marquette University which focuses on young people in the midst of their undergraduate education- a time of seeking, change and idealism for many. It has been a delight to see them embrace the call to positive peacemaking and explore the power of nonviolence. They teach Peace Works, the skills of conflict resolution, in inner city

schools. They design internships for themselves to experiment with the tools of community organizing and nonviolent action in settings as diverse as working for young women who are victims of sex trafficking in the oil fields of South Dakota, to working with Hutu and Tutsi young people in Rwanda exploring how dance can heal the divides between them to taking what they have learned about conflict resolution to students in Cape Town to forming joint actions with the Afghanistan Peace Volunteers in Kabul.

What I have learned from them is that the message of Jesus' proactive, peacemaking and brave nonviolence makes Christianity come alive. The challenges that Jesus gives us are "soul-sized." Jesus' message is hardly tame or boring.

I hope we clarify our message on war and violence—make clear that our call is to be proactive peacemakers using the impressive tools of nonviolent action. And that we saturate the Church with this understanding.

On a side note—where else do we need to concentrate our attention? Citizens of the United States have a special obligation. We need to challenge in all the ways we can the American belief in violence as the path to security, that war protects the peace, that the soldier, not the peacemaker, is worthy of our praise, the ghastly commitment of resources to arms. We are the arms trafficker to the world. We need to stop.