

Worship and Action for Peace Letter, 4/9/04

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

When we look past the dark headlines of war, terrorism, and seemingly vast violence, 2003 shines as a year of extraordinary accomplishments for nonviolent collective and individual action, for “Jesus’ third way.”

In the Gospel of Matthew, the life of Jesus is bracketed by acts of hideous violence. Upon his birth, Herod is said to respond to being outwitted by the Magi by ordering the slaughter of all the boys under the age of two in Bethlehem and its vicinity. (Matt. 2:16-18.) And at his death, as we have lately been starkly reminded (in the film *The Passion of the Christ*), Jesus is subjected to the violence of the cross.

By bracketing Jesus’ life with these acts of violence by the domination society, Matthew highlights the revolutionary message of “Jesus’ Third Way”: neither violence nor passivity, but active nonviolent resistance. Walter Wink explains in *The Powers That Be: Theology For A New Millennium* (Doubleday 1998), at pages 100–101, 109, 111:

Jesus is not telling us to submit to evil, but to refuse to oppose it on its own terms. We are not to let the opponent dictate the methods of our opposition. He is urging us to transcend both passivity and violence by finding a third way, one that is at once assertive and yet nonviolent.

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To those whose lifelong pattern has been to cringe before their masters, Jesus offers a way to liberate themselves from servile actions and a servile mentality. And he asserts that they can do this *before* there is a revolution.... They can begin to behave with dignity and recovered humanity *now*, even under the unchanged conditions of the old order. Jesus’ sense of divine immediacy has social implications. The reign of God is already breaking into the world, and it comes, not as an imposition from on high, but as the leaven slowly causing the dough to rise (Matt. 13:33). Jesus’ teaching on nonviolence is thus integral to his proclamation of the dawning of the reign of God. Here was indeed a way to resist the Powers That Be without being made over into their likeness.

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Jesus, in short, abhors both passivity and violence. He articulates,

out of the history of his own people's struggles, a way by which evil can be opposed without being mirrored, the oppressor resisted without being emulated, and the enemy neutralized without being destroyed. Those who have lived by Jesus' words - Leo Tolstoy, Mohandas Gandhi, Muriel Lester, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, César Chávez, Hildegard and Jean Goss-Mayr, Mairead (Corrigan) Maguire, Adolfo Perez Esquivel, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and countless others less well known - point us to a new way of confronting evil whose potential for personal and social transformation we are only beginning to grasp today.

At this Easter time of remembrance of Jesus' suffering, sacrifice, and resurrection, there is abundant evidence that "[t]he reign of God is already breaking into the world." Even a partial catalogue of examples from 2003 of the power of creative, practical nonviolent action would include:

- The "Rose Revolution" in the republic of Georgia, which saw a people refuse to abide the theft of their political process and force the abdication of a corrupt president. *Tbilisi's Polyphonic Carnival*, Amy Spurling, Open Democracy, Nov. 27, 2003, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/debates/article.jsp?id=3&debatelid=33&articleid=1619>.

- The people's revolution in Bolivia, in which the nation stood against plans of their government to sell the nation's principal resource, natural gas, to foreign interests and in the process forced a change in administration. "Bolivia at a Crossroads," Newton Garver, CounterPunch, Dec. 8, 2003, www.counterpunch.org/garver12082003.html.

- Millions standing for peace on February 15, 2003, as well as at other gatherings, drawing strength to each other by their simultaneous presence across the globe for peaceful alternatives to invading Iraq. *The Peace Movement One Year Later*, Mark Engler, Foreign Policy in Focus, March 2004, www.fpif.org/papers/2004peace.html.

- The Geneva Accord, a possible path to reconciliation in Israel-Palestine presented by nongovernment Israeli and Palestinian leaders. (Full text and additional information can be found at: www.tikkun.org/community/geneva/index.cfm?action=full_text .)

- The Group of 21 nations, which said "enough" to a domination system of "globalization" that was biased against developing peoples. "How the World's Poor Changed Dynamics of Global Politics," Philip Thornton, *The Independent*, Sept. 15, 2003, www.commondreams.org/headlines03/0915-02.htm.

- Heroic acts of conscience, such as Rachel Corrie standing before an Israeli

bulldozer preparing to level a Palestinian home ("Rachel Corrie's Echo," from John Nichols' *Online Beat*, March 20, 2003, <http://www.thenation.com/thebeat/index.mhtml?bid=1&pid=505>); James Wilson (and involuntarily his wife, Valerie Plame) exposing the falsity of assertions about Iraqi nuclear weapons activities; Katherine Gun exposing the British and United States governments' spying on United Nations members and officials (www.accuracy.org/gun) ; soldiers in the United States and Israel declaring their conscientious objection to the violent actions of their nations; British Members of Parliament Clare Short, ex-Secretary of International Development (resignation letter: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/3019983.stm), and Robin Cook, ex-Foreign Secretary (resignation speech: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/2859431.stm), standing against the war actions of their government; four former heads of Shin Bet, the Israeli internal security service, issuing a statement acknowledging that lethal force is not an effective nor moral means for dealing with Palestinians ("Ex-Security Chiefs Chide Israel," BBC News, Nov. 14, 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3270491.stm).

- Peace work of nongovernmental organizations like Christian Peacemaker Teams (www.cpt.org), which expanded their teams into Iraq, while continuing their work in Colombia, Palestine and elsewhere; Nonviolent Peaceforce (www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org) in Sri Lanka; Friends Peace Teams (www.friendspeaceteams.org) in Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda; Peace Brigade International (www.peacebrigades.org), with volunteers protecting human rights activists in Colombia, Indonesia, and Mexico,

- Continued nonviolent witness by School of the Americas Watch (www.soaw.org) at the United States Army school in Fort Benning, Georgia.

- Irony of ironies, proof from Iraq that United Nations regimes of weapons inspections can be effective and reliable, and the resulting validation of the arguments of Hans Blix, then head of UNMOVIC, Mohamed ElBaroudi, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Scott Ritter, and others. Weapons of Mass Destructions and the United Nations: "What Happened in Iraq? The Success Story of United Nations Inspections," Keynote Address by Jessica Tuchman Mathews, President, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 5, 2004, www.ceip.org/files/Publications/JTM-Speech-UNWMD.asp?from=pubdate.

- Libya's decision, following years of patient discussion and negotiation, to renounce the myth of weapons and to rejoin the international community. "The Iraq War Did Not Force Gaddafi's Hand," by Martin S. Indyk, Director, Brookings Institution's Saban Center for Middle East Policy, *The Financial Times*, March 9, 2004, www.brookings.edu/views/op-ed/indyk/20040309.htm.

- Emergence of nonviolence doctrine into mainstream discourse through public figures like George Soros, Representative Dennis Kucinich, and Senator Robert

Byrd, and authors like Jonathan Schell [*The Unconquerable Word: Power, Nonviolence, and The Will of the People* (Metropolitan Books 2003)].

- Awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Shirin Ebadi, a Muslim from Iran, for her work defending the rights of women and children in Iran; an example of the emerging power of people outside the structures of the state to cause change in our societies. Nobel Lecture: http://www.nobel.no/eng_lect_2003b.html.

Friends are vitally important to one another, and so we need to tell each other how the Spirit is gathering and leading us in peace, on the small scale, locally: individually, in small groups, in our monthly meetings, wherever we are grounded. What is your experience of deepening faithfulness, of listening, of being given the power to stand firm and to speak from the Spirit? What actions are arising? What are the practices, structures or communities that support your worship and action?

Among Friends in New York Yearly Meeting, some are experiencing God's power "breaking into the world" through us. A number of Friends, for example, are saying that paying for war violates our religious conviction, saying this in worship, minuting unity. Nadine Hoover of Alfred Monthly Meeting asks (*Viewpoint, Friends Journal*, April 2004, p.5), "Should war tax resistance be a corporate testimony?" The subcommittee of NYYM Peace Concerns on conscientious objection to military taxation (COMT) has sent a letter to monthly meetings asking all of us to share our experience in this concern (see article in the April *InfoShare*, to be posted shortly at www.nyym.org).

These Worship & Action letters are another means for us to share with one another. Please communicate through the New York Yearly Meeting office (15 Rutherford Place, New York, NY 10003; office@nyym.org).

Jesus remembered those who ate the bread of affliction when they were slaves in Egypt. When we remember Jesus, we pray we may remember those who have eaten the bread of affliction in our own country and in other parts of the world. We pray that we are inspired by Walter Wink's vision of "Jesus' Third Way." We pray that God's power transform us, change our lives at home, our testimony and witness as a religious society, and our behavior in the world as a nation.

Peaceable greetings,

Linda Chidsey, Vicki Cooley, Fred Dettmer, Lu Harper, editors
Worship and Action for Peace Letters

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest

of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds or the air come and perch in its branches.”

He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

Matthew 13: 31-33 (NIV).

You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread?

Matthew 16: 8-11 (NIV).

When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds of despair, and when our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a creative force in this universe, working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil, a power that is able to make a way out of no way and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.

Martin Luther King, Jr., “Where Do We Go From Here?” SCLC Presidential Address, 16 August 1967 (www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/062.html).