

**MOVING TOWARDS NON-VIOLENCE
AND PEACEMAKING:
THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY**

by

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Prayer is the beginning and the end,
the source and the fruit,
the core and the content,
the basis and the goal
of all peacemaking ...
peace is a divine gift,
a gift we receive in prayer
... Prayer is living with God,
here and now.¹

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¹ Henri Nouwen - *Peacework – Prayer . Resistance . Community* (Orbis Books: New York; 2005)
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Introduction

This project has grown out of my ongoing commitment towards becoming an authentic follower of Jesus, out of my preoccupation with the ‘strength of the gentleness’ of his life, and in response to his uncompromising teachings on how his followers are to engage the world. I rely on many resources that accompany my experience. These include the writings of numerous authors and the helpful experience of other people, generously shared with me through friendship and in written response to a questionnaire².

Entering the Way

Christian peacemakers are drawn to this life in several ways. Each of these may be seen as invitations from God.

- We may experience a yearning to follow the words and ways of Jesus.
This responsiveness may be developed through meditation and reflection on the gospels and other scriptures.
- We experience deepening awareness of God’s call to be peacemakers, to join with Christ’s servant work of reconciliation.³
Throughout church history, the church has majored on the great mission of reconciling people to God, but has tended to neglect the mission of reconciliation between nations, groups and individuals.
- We long to address injustice as we develop understandings that there will be no peace on earth as long as there are hungry people whom we are not feeding, and as long as the world is divided between privileged and underprivileged. We begin to realise that all issues of injustice are also issues of violence. Our efforts towards justice and our choice to address each injustice non-violently are both actions cherished by God. It is difficult for peacemaking not to be both prophetic and revolutionary at times, but the means of this revolution ought always to be deliberately non-violent.

² See Appendix

³ See 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

- A time comes in our faith journey when our spirits become sensitised to the connectedness between all people and indeed all of creation. It is increasingly difficult for us to justify acting violently towards another when we understand that our actions are towards the “image” we all share.
- We become inspired and motivated by the examples of others who advocate and live non-violent, peacemaking lives.
- Our faith and beliefs are confronted by difficulties. The question, “What would Jesus do?” begs the supplementary question, “And *how* is he asking me to do that?”
- Everyday activities and events challenge our understandings of how we are to live as the reality of Christ’s presence in the world. So we begin to actively explore the possibilities of that life.

Countering these ideals, methodologies and actions we come to recognise profound personal struggle.

At a deep level, we just don’t want to live non-violently. It is hard and uncomfortable, exposing our vulnerabilities to disagreeable consequences on all sides. We quickly discover that the attitudes and actions taught by Jesus tend not to fit the dominant cultures that have most influenced our development.⁴

Then the Spirit of God seems to *create* discomfort within us. It becomes harder to hold theoretical beliefs and attitudes regarding non-violent love as we attempt increased openness to God. Quietistic living becomes simply impossible alongside our growing desire for authenticity. Our non-violence achieves validity only when its convictions are expressed.⁵

Deep and difficult internal work is needed as we work towards greater consistency between our inner and outer lives. We may become aware of self-directed violence

⁴ See Donald B. Kraybill’s *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Marshall, Morgan and Scott: Basingstoke, UK; 1978) for a very clear perspective on this.

⁵ Henri Nouwen - *Peacework – Prayer . Resistance . Community* (Orbis Books: New York; 2005) P.93, 94 - “*Christian resistance is non-violent, because the peace we want to bring is not of this world. It is brought not by enslaving our enemies, but by converting them; not by showing strength, but by sharing in the confession of a common weakness; not by becoming unapproachable, but by making oneself vulnerable; not by retaliation, but by turning the other cheek; not by violence, but by love . . . He chose to die on a cross, lonely, naked, vulnerable and defenceless. (His) way is the way without curses, weapons, violence or power. For him there are no countries to be conquered, no ideologies to be imposed, no people to be dominated. There are only children, women and men to be loved.*”

when we fail or change seems slow. We work at developing and attempting to maintain a perspective that we are involved in work that is God-owned, and God-timetabled. The peacemaker can only live out of a transforming relationship with God, which is then directed towards others and self. As followers of Jesus, we are drawn to his way of love, his way of truth, his way of the cross, his way of peace.

Connecting the Inner and Outer Journeys

As a nation, we New Zealanders have a chequered history of the worst forms of pervasive violence. We have also experienced inspired attempts at Christ-based peacemaking.⁶ We inhabit a country of peaceful landscapes and great beauty that can influence and motivate our spirits towards peace. But we share with people all over the world, identical vulnerabilities to the forces of violence and destruction in both our communal and individual lives.

The root of the Hebrew word for peace, "shalom," means 'whole' in a twofold way: peace within oneself and peace between people. The spiritual life of peacemaking attempts a balance between retreating into our internal place of peace and living as a peacemaker in the world.

The contemplative/mystical stream of Christianity can seem to be an inward and selfish spirituality. However, the openness and receptivity in prayer that it advocates must inevitably lead us to increasing awareness of God's heart for mission and towards involvement in the social activities and methodologies of God's reign among us. The personal spiritual growth streams of faith must meld with the active missional streams for the ongoing spiritual health and growth of individual Christians and the Church.

The inner journey towards peace invites us into solitude, silence, reflection, mindfulness and struggle – within the context of our prayer relationship with God. The outer journey is conversion towards active non-violence, speaking truth, open and peaceful involvement with others and God's world – all within the same context of our relationship with God. These inner and outer journeys mirror and challenge each other.

⁶ Refer to Appendix 2 – 'Non-violence and Peacemaking – A Resource for Spiritual Direction'

Undertaken together, they make possible reconciliation and transformation at many levels.

Living Peace

Having made an active choice for peace, we begin with ourselves – deciding over and over again to cooperate with God’s character of love and peace. There are many understandings to be gained.

- We recognise the violence in our own hearts as well as the violence that wracks our world. We open our hearts to God with the request that we may recover within ourselves that contemplative awareness that enables us to see the oneness of all. Non-violence ceases to be an optional extra to our faith, because all violence violates that oneness. We learn to see violence as an act of forgetting or ignoring who we really are in relation to others, and non-violence as the act of remembering.
- Prayer becomes our life-support. We continually return to God, out of our own brokenness, for acceptance, forgiveness and healing – to listen, to meditate and to express ourselves to the only One who knows and loves us completely. We experience the love and understanding that disarms our hearts and then invites us back into God’s work of love and peace. Our best participations in peacemaking emerge when our sense of who we are is anchored in God and when our trust is also centred there. In view of this, we attempt to engage life out of our sense of living in the presence of God. This foundation of deep prayer relationship immeasurably aids us throughout the interruptions, demands and ordinary tasks of life.
- The companionship of others is essential as we undergo this conversion away from violence and towards peace. So we take risks, choosing to disarm ourselves – lowering our guard towards others and inviting them in. Our faith may be “worked out” on a personal level much of the time, but peacemaking is the work of Christ’s Body. As such, it requires hard work and generosity of spirit from all who participate.

As individuals we can easily become discouraged and exhausted. For faithful and enduring resistance of violence and for the work of peace, we absolutely need mutual support and strong accountability relationships. So we choose to come

together with others who share our journey in different ways, for study, reflection, prayer and thanksgiving – strengthening the bonds between us and preparing for the other actions of our lives. We are bound to have differing opinions from many others with whom we share our lives and faith, but this shouldn't distract us from the essential pursuit of developing community. Our varied actions can all be engaged in and experienced as a form of communal prayer. The community of faith does hold much treasure. The wider community also holds a wealth of available resource for our up-skilling and growth as peacemakers.

Without this context of community, peacemaking can easily degenerate into forms of individual heroism. We may fall into satisfying our own inner cravings for meaning or recognition under the illusion that we are pleasing God. Peace is threatened by individualism. Individualism perpetuates isolation, which in turn fosters attitudes of difference, distinctiveness and superiority, drawing us into conflict. We can too easily adopt the arrogance of those who believe peace can be achieved by fighting. In a serving, supportive and self-critical community where the gifts each one brings are celebrated but where all serve the whole, there is a better chance that our peacemaking may become more God-serving than self-serving.

The Christian community is the primary place for exploring how we might best practise Christ's work of unity and peace. By confessing our own greed, hostility and violence to each other, and by offering and receiving again and again God's forgiveness – sharing our experience and pain while celebrating our joys – a community of peace has opportunity to emerge. Our 'other life', the Spirit of the living Christ within us, empowers us for this work of ongoing welcome and forgiveness. We are so grateful for this life, which enables the conversion of our own.⁷

Conversion to non-violent expressions of truth is an essential part of the prophetic call of the peacemaker. Truth isn't just not telling a lie. It is a way of being. It is authenticity and congruence. Conversion to truth means becoming a model of transparency and accountability. It means admitting our mistakes to our community and refusing to cover up or rationalise our own wrong actions.

⁷ See Romans 8:29

Conversion to justice means being on the side of the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed, and becoming sensitive to the cry of the earth. We become one with their struggle. We dare to take a position on socio-economic and ecological issues even if this will result in diminishing wealth or persecution from the powerful. We engage these areas most effectively out of the strengths of community.

Conversion to interconnected well-being means to work towards more equitable distribution of resources and to put our own resources at the service of the poor. It is to refuse to be co-opted into any system of development that means the advancement of few and the exclusion of many. Again, it means to develop compassion based on our common humanity.

The existence of Christian community also offers hope. The visible expression of God's power to forgive brings hope that is greater than violence, oppression, hunger, war, or despair.⁸ It is an amazingly durable announcement of light that "darkness could not overpower"⁹, and life that cannot be killed. It is evidence of freedom from powers of oppression and the expression of an already attained victory.

- As peacemakers we need to find a 'place to stand' towards a violent world that often misunderstands or resents us. We can best resist powers of violence and destruction by choosing to focus on Life – and the fullness of life in Christ. We allow God's presence within us to call forth our life and to lift up all life for celebration. To work for peace is to work for life.
- We also choose commitment to the words of Jesus, "Do not judge", in our minds and our hearts, so that we might resist the violence of judging in negative words and actions. Ready judgements can be experienced as a form of moral murder. Categorising others puts them at a safe distance from me, invalidating our family ties. When we judge people to be good or evil, we play God. But when our hearts are anchored in God, the inner desire to evaluate and criticise others diminishes. It

⁸ John Dear, S.J. – *Living Peace - A Spirituality of Contemplation and Action* (Image Books, Doubleday: NY; 2001), P 206 – "Forgiveness is an act of faith in God, an act of hope in the future, and an act of love for our neighbours. If we dare forgive, we can trust that God will deepen within and among us the gift of peace."

⁹ See John 1:4

is the only the reality of God's forgiveness and love by which divisions among people are removed and relationships can be transformed.

- Many 'campaigners' for non-violence experience burnout when they realise that no seemingly significant change in a situation has been achieved. Peacemakers cannot depend on signs of success. Our resistance is based not on results, but on its own inherent spiritual integrity. We let go the compulsions of our success driven world, and avoid being overwhelmed by the very violence we resist by re-connecting with God, finding rest and recovery in our inner place of peace. Here, our resistance is freed from its need to be useful. We simply choose to be faithful and obedient, to live through contemplative and active prayer the life of transformation to which we are called – without calculating consequences or effects.
- We can tend to think of non-violent resistance as the active part of peacemaking and prayer as its contemplative part. It may be helpful to recognise that prayer can be a form of resistance. And resistance can be a form of prayer. An integration of the inner and outer journeys gives us a spirituality that will sustain and guard us, while making social change possible.

Focus on the Inner Journey

The inner spiritual journey is a persistent choice to be open and responsive to God's invitations and actions. It includes exploration and struggle, sometimes graced with revelation and times of joy. Questions arise, challenging our pre-existing beliefs, and possibly the beliefs and practices of our faith communities. For the would-be peacemaker, these questions will eventually and inevitably include:

- Is God non-violent? If so, what about (history, nature, disease, random events)?
- What about the discrepancies between the teachings / example of Jesus and some of what I find in the Bible?
- What about the scandalously violent uses to which the Christian faith has been put historically – is still being put?
- How do I love and relate to fellow Christians who just don't seem to get it?
- What about violent conflict in the church? Between churches?

- How do I evangelise without using destructive means?
- How do I address the wrongs of idle or oppressive faith? How do I deal with my own complicity in those wrongs?
- As our society's culture of acceptability around violent attitudes, speech and actions seems increasingly foreign to where I want to be, how can I positively utilise my God-gifted emotion of anger?
- How do I not succumb to the innate violence present in the rush and pressure and over-commitment of life?
- What do I do with my own inability to forgive? (Let alone my personal prejudices and bigotries!)
- How do I address (non-violently!) the darkness I find in myself?
- How do I answer God's call to be a peacemaker?
- What is God asking of me right now? What is God offering?

“Out of perfection nothing can be made. Every process involves breaking something up.”¹⁰

These disconcerting words hold very true for the inner processes of becoming a peacemaker. It is a lifetime's adventure, in which thankfully, God's own commitment to each of us and to the world has been made very clear. I find these words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer more reassuring.

“There is meaning in every journey that is unknown to the traveller”.¹¹

This inner journey of peacemaking holds some commonly experienced 'movements' of the spirit. Each of these movements needs to find safe process in our prayer.

Spirit movements (in no particular order)

- We recognise our own violence. Our tendency is to see our own evil in others, and we are shocked to discover and face our own evil potential.
- We become willing to sacrifice and restrain our instincts for violence and aggression in our relations with other people. In any situation where oppressive

¹⁰ Joseph Campbell

¹¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer – *The Cost of Discipleship* (First published 1937, this edition published by Touchstone; 1st Touchstone Ed edition: NY; 1995)

force is misused against another, peace is absent – whether it be physical, emotional, spiritual, ethical, economic, political, or military.

- We find new interpretations and uses for power. Society's understanding of power is "power over" – controlling, dominating, exploitative power. We need to understand power as from God's Spirit – "power within" – enabling, facilitating power. This often means we choose to give power away to others or simply lay it down as unnecessary or unhelpful for us to wield. We also come to see power as "power with", which means recognizing the diverse gifts, resources, and abilities of individuals and communities, while becoming part of gathering these together for the good of all.
- We struggle with pride. We can be tempted to feel morally superior or more spiritually enlightened than others. We may be self-congratulatory of our "good works" or desire personal recognition. But our peacemaker's "yes" to God's call must always be humble. Seeking personal success and popularity invalidates that response. Acts of peace are most often simple and unspectacular. They bring peace, not so much by what is said or done, but by their ability to bring greater connectedness with others. Non-violence is not simply a way of getting something desirable while we feel virtuous about not resorting to ugly or evil behaviour. Non-violence is perhaps the most exacting of all forms of struggle, and would be altogether impossible were it not for God's gifted moments of grace. Non-violence tries to exclude self-interest from our considerations. It includes unpleasant possibilities of personal isolation and suffering. Non-violence defends objective truth, so it can't be about proving an adversary wrong or making opposition yield. It explores our unconscious motives, ensuring that our non-violence is not a subtle form of moral aggression or provocation. Peace manifests itself quietly and gently. Jesus asks us to learn from himself, the Lord of Peace, who is gentle and humble of heart.¹²
- We struggle with constant temptations to focus more on issues than people. This inevitably leads to our mission becoming cold, calculating and impersonal. Competition can begin to dominate our compassion and winning the issue may mean loss of relationship. We need to remember that people all have names and

¹² Matt 11:29

faces, relationships, aspirations and lives. We need to look into their eyes and hold back on our quick diagnoses of them as ‘the problem’. We cannot love issues, but we can love people. Openness to loving people reveals the ways in which we may approach issues. We are never short of occasion to practise this kind of non-violent peacemaking - the ordinary relationships of our lives provide frequent everyday opportunities!

- We learn to explore and express what we feel along the way. Our attempts to follow the non-violent teachings of Jesus will take us through the full gamut of emotions. We experience excitement and joy through involvement in the work of Christ. We suffer repeated shock and confusion at our own capacity for violence. We experience anger. Anger keeps us from tolerating the intolerable injustices, ignorance, greed and fear that we see and experience, but we struggle with anger’s destructive potential towards others and ourselves. We may feel a sense of betrayal and shame at finding ourselves part of a church community that distorts or doesn’t teach the words of Jesus – maybe one that even condones and practises violence. We struggle to forgive others. The non-violent or ‘powerless’ message of peace is often unwelcome. It evokes anger, hostility and aggression from those who don’t yet understand it. This is inevitable but can be very painful, easily sucking us back into our own old ‘woundedness’. We may feel homeless and adrift as we undergo the painful process of losing our strong and treasured certitudes about ourselves, other people and our world. Often we just need to be held somehow by God in the resulting deeply ambiguous places. Our endeavours both internal and external seem often to fail, and at times depression may invite us in. Lasting rage can become inner resentment, which is the opposite of gratitude, and can make faithless victims of us. And if we treat those who perpetrate violence as “the enemy”, our work of peace becomes corrupted by absence of love. Even the sense of urgency and emergency that often fuels violence can drive and corrupt us as well. But intimate knowledge of being loved sets us free to look beyond our fears and speak and act compassionately and fearlessly for peace. Our God-relationship is where we experience that love.
- We need to find a balance between love and principle. It is supremely difficult often to put into practice what we believe. This tension is eased by fostering awareness that we are each capable of breaking every precious principle we hold,

of abandoning each truth we espouse, of caving into our own weaknesses a thousand times. And when we do succeed, it doesn't mean we won't fail there again. Learning to accept failure in ourselves helps us to understand and forgive the shortcomings of others. The aim of Christian non-violence is the healing and reconciliation of relationships – with God, with others, and with our earth. We respond to the call to proclaim God's grace – essentially through our love, openness to all, simplicity, humility, mercy, self-sacrifice and pursuit of justice. Love for the 'enemy' is the cornerstone of the message of Jesus and we are the visible presence of Christ in the world.

- Out of our trust relationship with God, we find ourselves wanting to enlarge our ability to experience and offer trust. Trust entails living with the unknown and becoming comfortable with it. It implies walking forward when we don't know what the next step may bring. It implies decision-making before all the facts are in and all the scales balanced. It means loving in the face of hardship and turmoil, and a willingness to forgive others and ourselves. We seek this fundamental trust out of simple respect and gratitude for our status as acceptable to God.
- As we become less comfortable with the use of negative words and the language of fear, we learn to work with our own words, habits, methods and mannerisms. Fear is the most tempting force in peacemaking. It is easy to attempt to motivate others through 'prophesies of doom'. We learn to actively resist our violent thoughts, which otherwise may find expression in our words and manner of speech. If the strategies of violence and the strategies of peace become the same, the very heart that motivates our peacemaking will be lost.
- We become sensitised to God's call for intimate, growing relationship. Meditation on scripture, its phrases and stories, provides insight and challenge. 'Practising the presence of God' in daily life is helpful. Some of the 'Ignatian Exercises' of reflection and imaginative prayer, where we allow ourselves to be drawn in to experience the biblical passages, are very useful. A yearning for greater depth in our God-relationship may be seen as God's invitation to develop more contemplative prayer practice – using silence, solitude, reflection, mindfulness and our God-gifted senses for not just talking to God, but listening for God. In this solitary space we turn down our mind's noise, and create room for God to move

within us, changing us first, so we can be of use in changing God's world. In prayer we seek our home in God, God's wisdom, God's love.

Focus on Spiritual Direction

Support for these movements of the Spirit may be sought in spiritual direction. Spiritual direction is by nature a non-violent activity, a work of peace. It offers the following to those who choose this way:

- It is a relationship of being alongside another in their journey with God.
- It supports prayer, as it is itself prayer.
- It offers assistance in the processes of discerning God's invitations and communications.
- It explores inner and outer response and struggle.
- It provides safety, understanding and compassion for the expression of our difficult questions and our doubts, our absurdities and inner contradictions.

Some of the issues raised by aspiring non-violent peacemakers are seen by many church leaders as too 'difficult' for pastoral care. Sometimes unhelpful, shallow answers are given. Spiritual direction provides opportunity for those of us who have read and studied the scriptures and been moved by the words of Jesus to speak about our fears and apprehensions, to find words and other ways to express and explore our convictions, to explore non-violent solutions, to seek God in quiet listening, to discern the focus and actions of our prayer and to tell our stories in the 'fully present' company of another.¹³

Periods of transition and change in how we view God and the scriptures are part of this journey. A spiritual direction relationship helps us to recognise the efforts of God's Spirit towards our own in these changes and to explore our responses to those efforts.

Spiritual direction provides a place of recovery and healing, as all peacemakers will at times find in themselves one who suffers from, and one who perpetrates, injustice and violence. At times, we may need encouragement to enter into prayer, to actively listen

¹³ Kenneth Leech – *Soul Friend* (Morehouse: PA; 2001) P. xviii
“Spiritual direction is a personal ministry that takes place within a corporate framework; a framework of sacrament, discipleship and social action. It takes place within a context of theological reflection and social struggle. Only within such a context can it make sense and progress.”

and make ourselves available to God's healing and renewing presence. Prayer's solitude offers us a secure place where we connect with God, find the strength to be obedient, and the freedom and courage to act.

Those who choose the non-violent path are usually sensitive to misuse of power, and the power in the spiritual direction relationship must never be used to judge, but to facilitate prayer-relationship and to enable growth and development of the other as *God* directs.

Spiritual direction encourages pursuit and development of spiritual community. The spiritual life is one that we take "alone together."¹⁴ It is a dance between solitude and communion. Christian community does not substitute for finding our 'home' with God in solitude, but gives context and balance to our calling to live the Way of Christ. Christian peacemakers are very aware that they are called to be "reconciled to God". Often that will be expressed as a desire to be at peace with God. They are drawn strongly into relationship with Christ *as* our peace. The development of this image may be helpfully supported through the spiritual direction relationship.

Spiritual direction may also aid the development of a perspective of spiritual 'struggle' as working *with* the Holy Spirit rather than as violence itself. We may need opportunity to explore the question, "How does this struggle differ from violence?"

We serve the deepest truths of our faith by non-violence. It helps to have reminders that this path includes an active stance on non-violence towards ourselves. Self-insight can lead to self-loathing, which is also violence. The development of our inner peace requires us to show mercy, to forgive, to befriend, accept and love ourselves also. This choice overcomes the destructive darkness that lurks ever ready to seduce and paralyse. We don't attempt to fight this darkness other than by affirming and nurturing signs of life whenever they appear. We search for the smallest, most tender and vulnerable shoots in the broken places of our lives, encouraged again at God's ability to create life and beauty.

Peacemakers may need help to re-focus on God's timetable for God's work. The questions and emphases of modern Christian spiritual direction are potentially useful

¹⁴ Sam Keen – Interview with Scott London - published in the October 1999 issue of 'The Sun' magazine under the title "On the Flying Trapeze: Sam Keen Ponders How to Be Free."

here. As action people, our attention is often on where we would like to be. Preoccupation with past events or future possibilities can lead to discouragement, passivity or despair. Lasting change comes slowly, but each moment of process asks to be embraced and fully lived.

Conclusion

The work of spiritual direction is prayer.

Prayer makes sense to peacemakers when seen as an act of stripping ourselves of everything, so as to be totally free to belong to God alone. God draws us into both the inner and outer journeys of peacemaking, asking us to critique our whole way of being in the world, to lay down our old selves, and to accept our new self, which is Christ.¹⁵

Prayer shows its fruitfulness in the development of loving, peaceful and creative relationships. Resisting violence and injustice bears fruit when it brings us into a deeper and stronger relationship with God. These are the inner and outer expressions of Christian peacemaking – the Way of Christ.

¹⁵ Galatians 2:20

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire Collation and Analysis

a) How long is it since you deliberately chose a non-violent approach to engaging your world?

Respondents identified their following of this path for between 20 and 50 years. They all showed a very long-term commitment to pursuit of both the “outliving” of their faith and belief system and its associated “inner work”. One chose to be a conscientious objector when faced with registration for military service during the early days of the escalation of the Vietnam War. Another dated the journey from a decision to follow Christ, described as choosing to “allow my life to be governed by an obedience above all other obediences. In other words, this following of Jesus was about principles and not just preferences. It seemed to me that Jesus demonstrated a principle of non-violence and thus my obedience to this Jesus meant that I too had to express such a principle.” Another describes the process, as “a slow unfolding of belief that has finally aligned me with the call my heart understood when I heard the words of Jesus as a child.”

b) Since that time, have you become aware of a parallel process of struggle with personal internal violence?

All responses are strongly affirmative! Areas of identified conflict in that parallel process were triggered by:

- *Parenting issues*
- *Power in leadership (own)*
- *Workplace injustices*
- *Social injustices*
- *Violence “against myself in terms of ongoing and relentless self-criticism, and general lack of compassion towards myself . . . Until relatively recently I have always found it much easier to feel compassion for others than for myself.”*
- *Frustration with lack of understanding from church leadership and others, while recognising my own complicity in that process.*
- *Exhaustion / Burnout*
- *Unexplainable (primal) anger*

The respondents’ self-discovery of an associated inner struggle against violent thoughts and action – as they pursued an outer life of non-violence – was well detailed. All felt some need to have an inner experience consistent with their beliefs and attempts to live out those beliefs. Two respondents recognised an escalation in their internal struggle when most involved in peacemaking efforts in their spheres of service.

c) Does this internal process have recognisable spiritual or faith aspects?

All respondents were definite in their affirmative replies.

One said, “My commitment to non-violence . . . is inextricably bound up with my commitment to Christ. It is my apprehension of Christ as the non-violent icon of a non-violent God that keeps me committed.”

Another replied, “my relationship with others and with creation is "spiritual" . . . The whole question of moral/ethical behaviour and how this relates to "beliefs" is for me a deeply spiritual issue.”

And yet another – “(It) is not just a matter of imitating Christ. Rather, it has a mystical dimension, in that one is conformed to Christ’s image through the assistance of Christ’s Spirit growing new desires within us, especially the desire for giving power away.”

Others stressed the need they felt to “stay close to God”, as they engaged non-violently with others and themselves – in the awareness that God would reveal the “gaps” in their inner growth and support their journey towards wholeness in both arenas.

d) What tensions/struggles have arisen in applying your principles of non-violence to your faith understandings and inner spiritual life?

- a) Theological – What do we do with the violent God of Scripture?
- b) The obvious anomalies between the seemingly uncompromising teachings of Jesus and the relative paucity of their representation to church adherents (both historic and present)
- c) Feelings towards fellow Christians who endorse violence
- d) Observing and being involved in the enormous amount of unresolved or unaddressed conflict between Christians and between Christian groups
- e) Seeing a lack of willingness for churches to discuss such issues openly, and if some willingness is shown, lack of depth or strong prejudices shown in the attempted efforts to address the issues.
- f) Struggling with theoretical (and possibly experienced) moral situations of “what if . . .”
- g) Identifying and dealing with attempted violent impulses in and/or towards oneself (anger, prejudice etc.)
- h) The achievement of some kind of consistency of belief with life’s actions
- i) Use of violent words and violent language
- j) Being part of a very violent world; trying to allow one’s perspective to focus on possibilities for change, and on the beauty in the world, rather than being tempted to “enter the darkness”, by becoming a ‘prophet of doom’, or by poor action choices while tired or in a less healthy personal space.
- k) Deeply ingrained habits
- l) The ‘giving away’ of power
- m) “Sorting out” anger as an emotion and learning to express it appropriately and usefully (including its place in prayer)
- n) Struggle with forgiving others

- o) Finding the will and strength to follow Christ's teachings on reconciliation when it is SO HARD.

One respondent commented: "It seems to me that one of the truly radical things about Christian pacifism is that it doesn't allow you to rest easy with such matters."

5. Have the ways in which you connect with and relate to God changed throughout this process? If so, please describe how.

All respondents expressed an awareness that their view of God had expanded in some significant ways. Each expressed this change of perspective in differently, e.g.

- "I now see "God" in very broad terms, as "life force" that is within and without me – which was not how it was as I started the non-violent journey in my teens while still a church-attending Anglican."
- "I think I have always related to God as a loving, non-bullying parent, which is why I think the idea of a non-violent Jesus makes such sense to me. What has changed is an ever-deepening appreciation of God's limitless compassion, God's unfailing forgiveness, and the restorative nature of God's justice."
- "Whereas it used to be that God was all powerful, all knowing and so on; perfection now carries the idea of vulnerability and not always being in control. This picture of perfection seems to be the image of God we get in the Hebrew Scriptures – where the 'experiment' of Israel failed. This vulnerability of God is also expressed in Jesus, where he was pushed around by the political, social and religious powers of his age."

Those who reflected on the "how" of this change in the ways they relate to God described the crumbling of 'walls' in their God-relationship, greater feelings of accessibility to God and acceptability with God. Some described a "gentler", or "more real" relationship, some an increasing sense of absolute dependence on God for this "impossible way of life", and others have at times felt some identification with God in his love for the world and the sufferings of Christ.

6. Are you able to identify steps/stages in your internal journey towards non-violence? Please state what these are if you are able.

Some respondents had previously considered this. Others were unable to at this point in their journey. One attempt was as follows:

- Observing the processes of war from a near vantage point
- In-depth study of the gospels – which faced (me) with the radicalism of Jesus
- Participation in a church (or other group) with a pacifist commitment
- Engaging with other Christians who embodied such a peacemaking lifestyle and theology.

Another described a process of conversions:

- a) Conversion to Christ's way
- b) Conformation to Christ' way
- c) Ongoing re-conversion to Christ's way in the face of ingrained blockages

And another:

- a) Being drawn by the 'spiritual magnetism' of the shining truth and deep "rightness" of Jesus' words and life.
- b) Studying and struggling with the scriptures.
- c) Learning from the lives and teachings of others who attempt to follow this path.
- d) Discovering that my ideals of following the above were easily shattered by the difficulty of the non-violent peacemaking life.
- e) Being an abject failure in my own strength greatly increasing my commitment to spending time with God and being filled and equipped for every little part of the tasks we shared. This has become ongoing and yet more necessary over the years, as I recognise my tendencies to become distracted or drift off course into less helpful attitudes and actions.
- f) Finding others who share this path of faith – for support, mutual learning, accountability and combined action.
- g) Ongoing sourcing of more learning to develop my skills and opportunities to serve as a peacemaker.

7. What sustains the inner peace you have found thus far?

Response here was varied, but with common themes. These included:

- Commitment to prayer, reflection and development of God-relationship
- Study around the subject
- Relationships with others who are engaging life from the same theology and lifestyle
- Re-establishing connections with wider / deeper realities on a regular basis (especially the natural world)
- The joy experienced in attempting to live life obedient to the commands of Jesus
- Taking care that it remains God's work so that I "don't take over".
- Remembering to get distance and rest when necessary, in order to maintain perspectives on situations and other people that are consistent with what I know to be God's view of them.
- Deliberately searching for beauty in all situations, people and places
- Being open to hope
- Practising gratitude

And then, from two different people, two sides of a paradox:

- I think non-violence (inner and outer) can only be sustained with hard work – i.e., with keeping at trying to figure it all out, keeping exposed to other role

models, continuing to talk about it and pray about it. Such is the seductive power and all pervasive power of violence, we can only resist it with dedication.

- Peace is that which is the fruit of the Spirit and not the fruit of trying harder. It is a type of fruit that includes within it, dimensions of love, joy and self-control. In other words, the Christian tradition doesn't talk about many fruits of this Spirit but the one singular fruit that includes many facets. To grow in love is to grow in peace.
- 8. What resources/experiences/people have you found helpful in your own outward and inward movements towards non-violence and peace making?**

Listed as they came:

- Reading some of the well-known non-violence philosophers - Albert Schweitzer, Martin Luther King, and Gandhi
- Stories of the lived experience of others - Archibald Baxter (and his experiences as a WW1 C.O.) and Te Whiti-o-Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi (primarily in "Ask That Mountain")
- Involvement with groups such as Quakers. This brought exposure to both historic Quaker figures (especially John Woolman) as well as current NZ Quakers and their experiences, views and involvements.
- Involvement with the NZ movement against the war in Viet Nam, and the anti-apartheid movement
- Learning about and appreciating / celebrating the enormous diversity of human heritage and culture
- Experience of working in Viet Nam as a volunteer (1972-74, i.e. while the war there was still in progress) and exposure to local Buddhists, some of the North American Quakers working there, as well as the experience of working in a multi-national team, living as well as working together
- Other organisations, which give exposure to other people/ideas of different aspects of "non-violence" which is a very broad area of enquiry. Examples are Peace Brigades International (PBI) who send peace teams when invited into areas of conflict to support the work of local human rights defenders, and the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) which runs intensive 2 day experiential workshops for people both within prison and within the community, to look at and develop their own journey towards non-violence.
- Another great resource is "Pace e Bene".
- Mennonite scholars, friends, books and e-letters most useful
- Spending time with a spiritual director
- A "koinonia" ethic whereby each and every major decision of my life has been allowed to be critiqued by others. Without this sharing of my life with others, I may have remained blind to who I was. Given that others see us better than we see ourselves, I have needed to be in community so as to grow in the 'power under' way. So, from the outset, I have submitted each and every crossroads to a select group of five people. They have now travelled with me over thirty

years. This has meant that they can link present considerations with past conversations. In this process, accountability is authentic.

- Looking for common ground and remembering that God is God of us all, and aspects of God's character are present in us all.
- Going back repeatedly to the words and life of Jesus.
- Discovering that God can't wait to get involved in my small ways of living non-violently in everyday situations and relationships.
- Reading books that detail the non-violent stance of the early church, with quotations recorded for us from so long ago. It reassures me that such a life is possible with God.

One person commented, "The resources out there are endless"!

9. With hindsight, please consider what other things might have been helpful along the way – things that haven't always (or perhaps ever) been available to support your journey towards non-violence and peacemaking?

- Without question, what has been most helpful to me is deeply Christian discourse on non-violence. It is also what is most lacking in the wider church community.
- A faithful church would have helped me recognise the importance of peacemaking and non-violence sooner in my life
- Mentoring was not always available. In other words, being tutored into ways of non-violence by those more practiced. Such seasoned practitioners could have also invited regular active participation in acts of non-violence.
- I think a programme such as "Engage", which is run by Catholic Franciscans (Pace E Bene – San Francisco), as part of the 'Alternatives to Violence Project', would have been of enormous value earlier on for me.
- Quality Christianity-based courses / training in things such as anger management and conflict resolution.
- More people who understood or who were willing to try to understand – non-violence issues tend to polarise people and I often find myself in a very "alone" place.
- I consider that we are very fortunate today, with the advantage of ready availability of information and possibilities of connection with like-minded others. Not so long ago, those things were so much more difficult to find.
- People/resources to help with the theology and "difficult" bits of scripture
- Help with the "inner journey" – sometimes I have found God so difficult to relate to, and I haven't found much help in the church
- More emphasis on a reflective way of life.
- People who are living and *accessible* examples of this everyday peacemaking life – who can accompany us on from enjoying the theoretical pursuit of the subject into normalising non-violent action in our lives, both "inner" and "outer".

Appendix 2

‘Nonviolence and Peacemaking – A Resource’

CONTENTS

- ❖ Words of Jesus
- ❖ Other Scriptures
- ❖ Non-violence / Peacemaking
The Way of Christ and the Early Church
- ❖ People on Non-violence
- ❖ Some Quotations
- ❖ A Selection of Books and Articles
- ❖ Resources for Children
- ❖ Some Peace Organisations
- ❖ Groups That Historically Taught Non-violence
- ❖ Conflict Resolution
- ❖ The Philosophy of Non-violence
By Martin Luther King Jr.
- ❖ Other Helpful Practices

These documents are available on request from
corries@clear.net.nz