

# ***A Lifestyle Consistent with our Non-Violent Struggle***

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I have been asked to "*reflect on our way of life from my own experience of non-violence and what it has to say to animators of JPIC.*" I will limit myself to that perspective, even though my life during many years in poor neighborhoods or sharing the manual work of poor and destitute people taught me a lot about lifestyle as well.

Non-violent actions require non-ambiguous trust in the inner power of free people.

During the last 35 years, I have participated in struggles against specific injustices and situations destructive to local, national or international peace. One of my involvements has been with Peace Brigades International in Guatemala, Sri Lanka, Northeast Canada, Haiti, and inside the USA in some struggles of the Native Americans, and in actions against nuclear weapons.

Non-violent struggle involves a balance of power between two parties. One uses material, economic, or structural power; the non-violent group refuses to place its trust in these forces and opposes an interior force. That interior force, especially

when it is shown in many people, creates a power that the violent power has to deal with. (Satyagraha = force of the soul). Never forget that non-violence is efficient through a balance of power, between two different types of power: on one hand the material power eager to dominate at the expense of destruction, and on the other hand, an interior/spiritual and generally collective power, which is careful to respect the dignity of the opponent.

However there are also examples of individuals witnessing of the two different powers even though a true balance of power is out of reach:

- 1) In 1968, in Paris I was near a man alone in lotus position in front of an armored police vehicle, blocking it for a significant time: I urged this man to get away because of the danger, he refused. His example gave me a powerful matter for reflection on the inner power facing an armed power.
- 2) All of us saw the solitary Chinese on Tiennamen square in front of the tanks. I do not want to discuss the strategy and the limited efficiency of these two actions: we would need more time. I only want to remind you of these two examples showing an interior power facing a brutal military power, and awakening others to this power.
- 3) Another example involving two individuals has been a successful action: a woman in Chiapas explained to the parish catechists how she had disarmed her drunk husband who was beating

her, when suddenly she rose to her feet and said "Kill me for good, but now." This sign of freedom awoke her husband from his drunkenness, and he stopped beating her.

An interior or spiritual power cannot be interpreted correctly if non-violent people have an ambiguous behavior towards the various forms of material power. If the woman had shouted her sentence while brandishing a stick or a knife, it would not have had the same power. It was the power inside her, a free person that stopped an out-of-his-mind husband. The groups of families of the disappeared: GAM in Guatemala, or the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, have shown an efficient inner power strengthened by a remarkable cohesiveness. The opposite, the simultaneous trust in material power, overcasts the power of the spiritual force residing inside a free person or a group.

This brought me to realize that for an efficient non-violent struggle, the best strategy should show clearly where the non-violent camp is placing its trust. It is a power of another kind. It cannot be a balance of power between two material powers. Moreover you are well aware that on a material level the poor are always disadvantaged. Their strength resides in their steadfastness and their solidarity defending their rights, their dignity, and their sacredness.

Facing a lifestyle that disdains sacredness, we need a lifestyle that clearly is a

witness to the divine dignity, and promotes it.

In the Resource Book sent to us by the JPIC office in Rome, in the article on Peacemaking, I wrote that one of the worst world-wide violence (maybe even worse than the apocalyptic nuclear threat) is the result of a subtle invasion of all cultures and nations by a dominating way of life. This happens through what I call the market culture that is a by-product of the Western culture and especially of the North American brand of such Western culture.

*The basis of that new invading culture is a faith, an almost religious faith, In the need to characterize and estimate everything by numbers. Mathematical models reign. Even further, the new culture presents the mechanisms of the free market as laws of the Universe and quasi-divine laws.*

The laws of the free market giving birth to a dynamic economy are imposed as the moral basis of a new culture: the market culture. Casualness permeates everything in such a culture and sacredness tends to vanish.

During three decades of involvement in non-violent struggles I felt the need to be coherent, and to have a lifestyle that says clearly where my trust lies. I worked to develop my trust in the inner power, refusing various powers esteemed by our culture, including a few amenities com-

mon in most of the Friaries. During various fasts in groups for political purposes, in the Gandhian tradition, I touched my physical weakness and how the divine power inside us could have outside effects.

Volunteers, some of whom were Quakers, formed the various PBI teams I belonged to. We were living together in a way very different from other foreigners, placing our trust in the inner force of our team. This helped the success of our work in defending endangered people.

Right now I think that all believers and especially Franciscans are called to challenge by non-violent means the market culture that draws sacredness out of every human being and every part of creation. In that non-violent struggle, I believe we need to beware of ambiguous behaviors, suggested to us in the name of efficiency. We cannot at the same time revere material power and the dream to create a non-violent culture. However, the coalition of spiritual forces against violence and injustice are welcome.

Now I am back to France after 25 years in the USA, and serving human rights in various parts of the world. I know that mainly because of my health as a 76 year-old man, my life is ambiguous, and not as unified as before. I do not live a

precarious life as I did during the most fruitful years of my life for the struggle against injustice. However, our community of Friars is fairly good, we help and receive former homeless persons previously despised and now retrieving their humanness in living in community households. Our community attempts to place relationships as a priority over structures, inside and outside the community. But we are not immersed in the midst of the powerless: we are a dozen Friars and postulants, in a Friary built in the 70's. Our housing, our meals, and various amenities make our lifestyle relatively comfortable. Many of our middle-class friends are quite compromised by the growth of the market culture that attacks humanity.

I appreciate some of these ambiguities because of my declining strength. This contradicts often what I know would be suitable for creating a worldwide non-violent society and culture. I attempt to be as honest as I can, and to show by my life that my main trust is in the inner power opposing injustices and violence. However, I suffer in the awareness that I continue to live in a way that is associated with a culture that violates the sacred.

Let us pray for courage in changing lifestyle.