THE SPIRITUALITY OF NON-VIOLENCE
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Trying to outline a "spirituality of non-violence" invites us to reflect on the meaning of both notions. As we do, we will be treading on ground not many have traveled. Even the recently-published <u>The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality</u>,[1] has no entry on non-violence, much less one describing "the spirituality of non-violence." However, since fools rush in to fill a vacuum, I will do my best to offer here one kind of such a spirituality.

Having received a doctorate in spirituality (with a concentration on New Testament and Social Ethics), I also am well aware of another potential conflict that comes from trying to define a "spirituality of non-violence:" namely the conflict that can come from members of the academy who may "violently" disagree with my assumptions and definitions. Whatever, herein I will try to outline a "spirituality of non-violence" that will involve three steps. First we need to offer a working definition of "spirituality." Then we need to define "non-violence." Only when we have agreed on our terms can we suggest what a "spirituality of non-violence" might entail.

1. Defining "Spirituality"

Most definitions of "spirituality" seem to include variants of three main elements: some inner-dimension, an outer-thrust, and a notion of the environment or social location within which the former two take place. Common called "prayer," "ministry," and "community" or "religious experience," "external witness," and "relationships," all definitions generally assume their grounding in a personal source.

The first element involves some notion of the transcendent or the "Other," the second some external manifestation, while the third concerns the context within which the former two occur. Given this understanding, I would define "spirituality" as the experience of the "Other" that is expressed by one's engagement in society a particular set of relationships. This definition can apply generically to any kind of spirituality. Unfortunately and too often its triad of components popularly get stressed in a way that puts one of the three against one or both of the other two. Thus we have books written on "contemplative" spirituality, "apostolic" spirituality, and the spirituality of "community" as though they can be isolated.

Most people think of spirituality in terms of the inner life or our relationship with God. This limited view gets expressed in titles like "Spirituality and Justice." This can belie an assumption that justice reflects what we do "out there" while spirituality addresses what happens "in here," in our hearts. It also gets expressed when we juxtapose action and contemplation; even CMSM is divided between the "active" congregations and the "contemplative" ones! While this has functional merit, it can have deleterious consequences as well.

A parallel dichotomization occurs when we consider "mystics" and "prophets." The former contemplate the Word, the latter challenge the world. Somehow we think of the mystical life as dealing with the depths of our experience of God. The prophetic life consists of how we regard the world and confront its ways. However, if Isaiah 6:1-15 is any indicator, you can't have any authentic prophetic life with grounding in the mystical life. And, if the history of spiritual teaches us anything, we know you cannot have any authentic mystic who is not passionately involved in the world, even if one's social location be in a monastery in Lisieux. It's hard to find any popularly-known mystics who have not also been deeply involved in social concerns in a prophetic way: Francis and Clare, Theresa of Avila and John of the Cross, Catherine of Siena and Briget of Sweden, Thomas Merton and Mahatma Gandhi.

While all spiritualities will need to have some balancing of the three key components, the adjectives used before the word "<u>spirituality</u>" will nuance the definition. When this occurs, the core elements get expressed differently depending on whether the spirituality will be Native American or Buddhist, Franciscan or Salesian, Liberation or Ecological, Feminist or Male, Twelve Step or New Age, etc. Thus, for us living in the United States of America who are part of the Christian tradition, I would define "Christian" spirituality as the "experience of the God

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[1] Michael Downey, ed., <u>The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality</u> (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993). At "Nonviolence," the reader is directed to a discussion of "Confrontation and Protest." Nonviolence is not mentioned.

of Jesus Christ which we express in our ministry via relationships that take place in a world/planet with limited resources."

When people take courses in "spirituality," it will not be long before they are introduced to two main strains: the via positiva and the via negativa, the affirmative and negative ways. Traditionally called <u>kataphatic</u> spirituality, the via positiva finds God engaged in all of life. It stresses the omnipresence of the divine gracing everything. We find examples of this in St. Bonaventure's <u>The Soul's Journey into God</u> and the <u>Spiritual Exercises</u> of St. Ignatius. On the other hand, the via negative or <u>apophatic</u> spirituality stresses the need to empty oneself before God and others. In some circles this also is called <u>kenotic</u> spirituality after Paul's Philippian reference to Jesus as "emptying (<u>kenosis</u>) himself." Perhaps the clearest example of this spirituality is found in <u>The Cloud of Unknowing</u>.

Great spiritualities will reflect an apophatic or "emptying" element as well as a kataphatic or "engaging" dimension. Yet, except for the case of Jesus, one usually receives more stress than the other by many commentators. This will be important to remember as we try to sculpt a spirituality of non-violence. However, before doing this, we need to develop a notion of what we mean by "non-violence" itself.

2. Defining "Non-Violence"

We can't begin to understand what "non-violence" might mean without recalling what was written earlier in "Coming to Terms with Violence." A "non" something assumes the absence of that something. Thus our notion of "non-violence" must build on what has been discussed previously about violence itself.

We've seen that violence represents "any force that inflicts injury." The "force" as well as the "injury" can be physical or mental, individual or corporate, psychological or sociological, real or ideological, religious or spiritual, etc. Recalling our definition of "spirituality," this understanding of violence (as something that is "inflicted" on another) affects the third element of spirituality: relationships, ie. community. Thus, when violence is <u>experienced</u> (the first dimension of spirituality) and/or <u>expressed</u> (its second component), its force not only undermines the possibility of healthy <u>relationships</u> or <u>community</u> (third level); it ordinarily undermines the possibility of authentic spirituality itself.

If violence entails any force that inflicts injury, then non-violence represents any force that enables health. It is the refusal to inflict injury, to do harm. These varying manifestations of force and injury/health are manifest at the individual, interpersonal, institutional, infrastructural, and/or ecological levels of relationships. When non-violence is the (physical or mental, individual or corporate, psychological or sociological, real or ideological, religious or spiritual, etc.) "force" that is used, it promotes healthy or holistic forms of community. Violence undermines the possibility of community; non-violence builds it up. Their contrast can be charted as follows:

VIOLENCE = any force that inflicts unjust injury = destructive of relationships
NON-VIOLENCE = any force that enables health = constructive of relationships

In considering our definitions of violence and non-violence, it seems to me the stress should not be placed on the "result" (ie, the injury/health) as much as on the source (ie, the kind of force that is used). Thus the distinguishing characteristic in these two definitions must concentrate neither on the injury nor the health that results from the specific use of force, but the kind of force that <u>creates</u> this effect. Thus, with violence, the stress rests not on the injured one(s) but on the perpetrator. With non-violence we look not so much to the consequence, but to the force that creates the effect. The necessity to consider the source of (non)violence invites us to a further examination of the notion of "force" itself.

Force can be individual or collective. Whether violent or non-violent, the (ab)use of the force will be exercised personally or organizationally. This latter, corporate sense is what I read in Gerry Brown's words to CMSM at its 1994 Milwaukee Assembly: "I challenge all of us to join <u>forces</u>, on the national and regional levels, and most especially in cities, towns and neighborhoods in a corporate effort to eradicate violence from the hearts of our brothers and sisters, to create environments of safety and peace, and to change those structures that hold our young people in social and psychological bondage."[2] In any and all of these understandings of force, the notion of power is essentially linked.

We've already seen that force implies some use or abuse of power; as such it will be a manifestation of care or control. Care is power used positively; control is power used negatively.
When either care or control is effectively channelled, a force for good or evil is revealed. The consequence will be injury or health, depending on how the force is used or abused. When care defines the force that is used, community cannot be far behind; when control takes over, the possibility of community is devalued and undermined.

With this in mind, we can complete our chart to include the use and abuse of power in the forms of care and control:

VIOLENCE = any force that inflicts unjust injury = negative use of power = control = destructive of

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[2] Father Gerald Brown/CMSM, "Ministry of Religious in Violent Times," <u>Origins</u> 24 (1994), 197.

community

NON-VIOLENCE = any force that enables health = positive use of power = care = constructive of community

Gerry used the "power" or "force" of his ideas as well as his office, challenging the members of CMSM to use their power and the force of their office to invite religious men through the U.S.A. to "eradicate violence from the hearts of our brothers and sisters." However, to do this in a way that will be healthy for them, for our environments and our structures, this "eradication" must be grounded in the spirituality of non-violence. Else, our efforts may only add to the violence with the result that we will descend further into chaos. If we tolerate violence to eradicate violence or if we remain ideologically blinded as to its use at whatever level vis-a-vis another level, again we only will add to the violence; we will become as destructive as the evil we seek to eliminate. This conclusion brings me to the third level of my reflection: the spirituality of non-violence.

3. A Spirituality of Non-Violence

Just as I developed an analysis of violence in three parts, I see a spirituality of non-violence in a tripartate way. This involves a definition, an understanding of its dynamics, and how it can be manifest in this culture. In developing a "spirituality of non-violence," I presume we will attempt this from a Christian perspective. However, this can be easier said than done

a. A Definition of Non-Violence

Recently I read a book on Jesus' "non-violence." I couldn't figure out why I felt something was missing in the author's analysis. Many times he referred to Jesus, his attitudes and/or his actions as "non-violent." But he didn't go deeper to the source of his non-violence or how it got expressed and why it was so threatening to so many. He named the thinking and the behavior but didn't analyze it at a deeper level. I finally realized the source of my disappointment: the author never discussed power and its positive (ie, caring) exercise by Jesus in an environment oriented to exercise it negatively via control. Whether it be his own disciples searching for greater "influence" (one over the other), the religious leaders, or the people seeking a Messiah, one cannot consider the Jesus of history and the cause of his death (which defined his spirituality) without considering how he used power in an environment of competing interests attempting to control.

b. The Dynamics of Non-Violence

At this point I ask readers to recall my earlier reflections related to the "Dynamics of Violence" in the section where I offered "terms" around violence. Therein I discussed the theory of Rene Girard and its further refinement by Gil Bailie. When applied to Jesus, his spirituality broke through all the powers of death when the competing forces of the Roman and Jewish authorities conspired to scapegoat him. Their efforts proved powerless in the face of the resurrection. In his willingness to empty himself (via negativa [the renunciation of control as the abuse of power]) he rose in order to become fully engaged with all creation (via positiva [the manifestation of care as the healing use of power]) to all creation.

In our society violence escalates because the force of control and other forms of violence are being used to address its force. In the face of urban violence the solution is capital punishment and/or the creation of ever more prisons. In the face of the deficit, we will give tax breaks to the highest income people. In the past, the only way to end violence was to get a scapegoat and to celebrate its removal from the lives of both contesting parties by surrounding its killing in the myth of sacred violence. But now violence to end violence has proved bankrupt, and we are running out of scapegoats.

In a very poignant section, Gil Bailie declares that the end of sacred or sanctioned (= made holy) violence will only come through the gospel:

> The only kind of violence that can end violence effective is sacred violence, and, over time, the gospel revelation gradually destroys the ability to sacralize violence. Sacred violence is at the heart of primitive religion, and vestiges of it are at the heart of all "the kingdoms of this world." It is the sacred violence hidden at the core of archaic religion, therefore, that screens us from the apocalypse. The amalgam of religious awe and violence that primitive religion exists to hallow made it possible for archaic societies to endow certain acts of violence with religious significance and thereby to put an end to the relentless reciprocity into which all violence otherwise tends to collapse. . . .Ultimately, there are only two alternatives to apocalyptic violence: the sacred violence and scapegoating of conventional culture and religion, on the one hand, and forgiveness and the renunciation of violence and vengeance, on the other. That the former is now impossible, and that the latter seems hardly less so, doesn't change the facts.[3]

If Bailie's "either-or" scenario is correct, the only viable alternative to the violence we find destroying the soul of this nation is non-violence itself. Building on our definition of violence as a "force that inflicts injury," I see

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[3] Gil Bailie, <u>Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads</u> (New York: Crossroads, 1995), 24-25.

non-violence as a countervailing "force that enables healing" in relationships. As I look more deeply into its main elements I find an apophatic or "emptying" dimension and a kataphatic or "engaging" dimension.

The apophatic or emptying elements are found in the idea of renunciation (of control) and forgiveness (of violence). While this apophatic dimension of the spirituality of non-violence can be a very constructive force, it is not enough to effectively challenge the culture of violence that surrounds us. A kataphatic dimension or "engaging" dimension is needed as well. The Jesus of the gospels shows precisely how the two can be blended.

On the one hand we hear Jesus say in Matthew, that, when violence is used, we are to "turn the other cheek." However, when Jesus actually <u>was struck</u> on the one cheek he didn't implement his own stated strategy. Instead, John's gospel tells us, Jesus did not turn his other cheek to the perpetrator which would have invited more violence. Instead he <u>engaged</u> him, holding him accountable for his actions: "why did you strike me?"

c. The Manifestation of Non-Violence in Our Culture

In the third section wherein I discussed the "terms" of violence, I noted how we are tempted to consider it from various ideological perspectives. These ideologies often consciously or unconsciously reinforce attitudes which justify the violence from the perspective of the perpetrator. For instance, many of us are shocked when a black kid from the inner city kills another kid for a certain kind of tennis shoe or team jacket. Yet we never consider the prior "force" on Madison Avenue that determined this kind of shoe or jacket would be the target of mimetic desire. Again we consider the physical and individual act of violence without considering its institutionalized origin.

If we consider violence from the vantage of a wider range of victims, we can only conclude, with Pope John Paul II, that the form of capitalism which defines this nation and its dealings with its own people and other beyond our borders is "savage" or violent in its essence. In this sense our form of post-industrial, post-technological, information-age capitalism not only thrives on the survival of the fittest; it keeps from participation and even scapegoats those upon whom it thrives.

When I consider the implications of this systemically and religiously sanctioned violence (insofar as church leaders only go so far in their analysis of the "abuses" of the system), I find great help in the insight that gave rise to the spirituality of Francis of Assisi.

At a time many consider to be the emergence of capitalism, the son of the merchant Bernadone, Francis, began to recognize its violent face. He not only grew up in a household which made profit more important than anything else (including himself insofar as his Father seemed to consider it more important to be in France getting cloth than being home when he was born), he saw the Pope and Emperor continually battling each other for more and more land. He saw his townsfolk overthrow both and then fight for more turf. This they all did through violence, and all of it was done in the name of the true religion. In this feudal age, even monasteries seemed to have armies protecting their interests. Francis had seen force used in too many ways that had inflicted injury on too many creatures.

Seeking a response to the all-pervasive violence around him, Francis turned to the victims as well as to the gospel. He chose not only not to be part of his society's violent ways, but to try to create an alternative way of life that might undermine the system of violence itself. He expressed his way of non-violent resistance to the system by attacking it at its "capitalist" roots. Thus he said to his brothers who would have him model his way of life on the other ways of violence built on power and property: "My brothers, let us not acquire property, lest we have to take up arms to protect it."[4]

In this simple statement of Francis I find a universal way we can non-violently challenge the underlying violence of our own economic system. Its three parts speak to members of CMSM: 1) my brothers, 2) let us not acquire property, 3) lest we have to take up arms to protect it. Considered backwards we find that: 3) all violence in the world, 2) arises from inequity in property arrangements, and 3) in dynamics which undermine community.

Before the reader thinks "I would expect such a statement from a Franciscan like Crosby," let me be clear. I am not saying we should "not acquire property" in the literal sense. (After all, part of my ministry of corporate responsibility is sustained through investments!) What I am saying is that, any effort to challenge a culture of violence without seriously addressing the savagery inherent in the political economy itself will be futile. Furthermore, we cannot take an approach that justifies more arms or violence as a way to address the prior violence. On the one hand, this demands an "emptying" of the control forms of violence we have inherited. On the other it invites us to "engage" our popes and presidents, our sultans and our systems, with the via negativa of emptying of control and the via positiva of becoming engaged in care. And, as we engage the violence with such non-violence, only to receive more violence, we can use these occasions to move further into our "emptying" by giving up our need to control. Emptied of control, we will be freer to become a positive force engaged in creative ways that will liberate rather than reinforce the oppression.

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[4] This saying of Francis is found in two of the earliest sources of his life: <u>Anonymous of Perugia</u> and <u>The Legend of the Three Companions</u>.

A Personal Testimony

Lest this material be considered too theoretical, I'd like to conclude my reflections by suggesting some things that have helped me in my ongoing effort to become more non-violent:

1. Respect myself for who I am and respect others for who they are; give up the need to control others and respectfully don't let others control me.

2. In all interchanges that may have elements of conflict, follow the fourfold path: show up, pay attention, speak your truth, give up the need to control the outcome.[5]

3. Be aware of the ways I get "my back up" when my power, possessions, and prestige may be threatened. What do I do to protect them and my boundaries? What makes me defensive?

4. Be aware of my fears and what I do consciously and unconsciously when they arise. Understand how they can keep me from risking.

5. Ask myself if I have any hard feelings in my heart toward anyone. If I do, seek reconciliation by means of asking forgiveness or offering repentance. Be open to others when they seek reconciliation with me.

6. Be grateful and appreciative at the little acts of nonviolence; rejoice and be glad in the promotion of peace.

7. Seek to become a mystic/contemplative in prayer; it will sustain and authenticate the prophetic/challenges involved in resistance.

8. Realizing that all reconciliation must be based on justice, find creative ways to challenge the institutions, isms, and ideologies that sustain injustice. Don't just denounce; seek alternatives.

9. Develop ways of thinking that de-center myself from myself and put me in greater solidarity with the victims of violence, including the earth.

10. Try to live according to the six principles of Pax Christi's "Vow of Nonviolence;" promote it in all my preaching.

11. Ask myself: "Do I really care" about those with whom I differ, whom I challenge, who challenge me.

12. Be aware of the sources of my anger when it is destructive (ie, projection, blaming, scapegoating).

13. Nourish and be nourished by communities of nonviolence and resistance.

14. Find at least one cause that I am willing to sacrifice for; engage in a campaign worthy of the cause.

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[5] I am unaware of the original source for this maxim. I first heard it quoted in Kansas in November, 1992. It was attributed to a "feminist" theologian in Berkeley, CA. More recently I saw the "basic principles" (= "show up or choose to be present, pay attention to what has heart and meaning, tell the truth without blame or judgment, and be open, rather than attached to the outcome") in Angeles Arrien, "Four Ways to Wisdom," *The Phoenix* 15 (1995), 1.