DIOGENES

From Conflictual Systems to a Society of Peace: Nonviolence facing organized evil

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Abstract

This article is focused on the relation between peace and nonviolence. It claims that the main challenge for peace comes from the power of structural violence. This is the main form of evil in history. Today structural violence is at work in the political and economic global systems. They obey a logic of conflict. The exercise of nonviolence can avoid the tendency to transform the connection between violence, evil, dehumanization, and great organizational systems into a destiny. The dynamic that is needed to effect this is to move from the primacy of automatism in political and market power to the primacy of human consciousness. Experiences such as reconciliation, democratic growth, restorative justice, and harmonization with the natural world should be considered as the effects of this systemic translation to nonviolence.

The normalization of violence

How can we think the connection between peace and nonviolence in the global society? In explaining this connection, it is important to bear in mind that the main challenge to peace comes from the systemic power of violence. Today this power is concealed beneath the appearance of normality, modernity, and unavoidable necessity. What effectiveness can nonviolence have in a society that is dominated by global organizational systems such as the world market, bureaucracy, or technological webs?

First of all, we must consider the negative effect of the form of intellectual laziness that prevents a clear understanding of the sense of connection between peace and nonviolence. In our time, the development of consciousness about the value and the power of nonviolence is still hindered by some general preconceptions.

In particular, I shall consider two theses here: on the one hand, the idea that peace is only a goal, a difficult and remote ambition, and, on the other hand, the idea that nonviolence is beautiful and desirable but hardly ever practicable. Such a way of thinking involves an inability to see that wherever there is violence, evil is at work. The two are the same thing (Mancini 2012). For many people, violence seems inevitable, normal, and even useful, and from that perspective, they often

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think that political systems may, and in fact must, resort to violence when it is deemed necessary. Violence persists not only as a normal fact of human behavior, but also as a logic, namely the logic of politics. The sphere of politics is still conceived of within the *polemical paradigm* according to which, as Carl Schmitt asserts (Schmitt 2006), politics is essentially conflict and opposition to an enemy. Therefore, its natural purpose is to prove victorious, to conquer power, and to maintain it as long as possible. Hence the relentless succession of wars, terrorism, and persecution that we can see today.

It is important to underline that society's obsessive way of conforming to the logic of violence has been reinforced by the current global economic system, which is the expression of the collective acceptance of, and belief in, neoliberal dogma.

Due to the globalization of capitalism, our society perceives itself essentially as a market. However, with its current features, the global market is not the place of free enterprise and production of wealth. Rather, it is a generalized system of conflict conducted at the level of economic competition where everyone is against everyone else. Both the supremacy of purely selfish financial systems and the growth of the economic power and reach of criminal organizations are typical consequences of the radicalization of the conflict logic through which the nature of market is interpreted. Financial speculation on the world stock markets separates the economy from real society, from people and civil communities, from human needs and human rights, thus exposing the pursuit of the pure power of money as a purpose in itself without serving humankind.

The sovereignty of such a power radicalizes the typical blindness of the logic of conflict, blurring the boundaries between capitalism and criminal economies. There are in fact few differences between financial speculation and the economies of violence, such as the world trade in illegal drugs or the arms industry (Cohen 2012). The role of the global economic system is particularly significant because it is precisely due to this system that the logic of conflict is succeeding in its universalizing process. The multitude of people dying from hunger and poverty, or committing suicide for financial reasons are facts that bring home to us the high mortality rate generated by global capitalism. These factors account for one-third of all the causes of death in the world (Pogge 2002). In order to better understand the violent and conflict-oriented disposition of global capitalism, let us refer briefly to the critique of the sacrificial mechanism elaborated by René Girard (Girard 1977).

It is well-known that, for Girard, human societies were grounded over the centuries in a structure of the sacrifice of the expendable. This structure allowed the construction of the social order and of its hierarchies by channelling violence against a particular social or ethnic class that was considered to be undesirable. This mechanism of social stabilization was based on the application of institutionalized violence and implemented by sacrificing a scapegoat group, which served to avoid what was perceived to be a greater danger: the social conflict of all against all, an event which would have compromised the existence of the whole society itself. Nevertheless, now, with the worldwide extension of the capitalist system and its logic of global competition, it is necessary to revise Girard's explanatory scheme. What we can in fact observe today is the systemic worsening of the situation as we move towards the universalization of violence, in the direction of once again accepting conflict as the natural "climate" of society and as a normal form of social interaction.

According to Girard, the foundation of the sacrifice of others as the primary institution of human communities took place in the shift from the *all-against-all* pattern of social interaction*,* which is unsustainable and destructive, to the *all-against-one* pattern, which is fundamentally profitable for the majority of society, and hence, from an amoral point of view, for the society as a whole. But today we have reverted to an unprecedented version of the *all-against-all* scheme, due to the insertion of the logic of conflict into the everyday management of the global market.

Taking into consideration the role of dominant hierarchies, the current scheme could better be described as a *few-against-all-the-others* pattern. This type of order is quite successful at establishing itself without causing revolts because it dissembles and is culturally justified by the open apology of the *all-against-all* competition. Such a transformation enables what was previously unacceptable and required war to be sublimated and essentially continued at an economic level. In theory, there is no shooting in this sublimated form of conflict. People compete in the market and the losers are simply left to their own destiny. In this way, the difference between selective sacrifice and generalized conflict disappears. While in the past the sacrificial mechanism enabled total war to be avoided, today the two dynamics have blended into a single process, creating a world order that is both sacrificial of others and conflict-oriented at the same time. This change does not involve the disappearance of the scapegoat. On the contrary, this too is now universalized. The peoples of the world are reduced to quasi-biological entities of "populations" and, together with nature, act as global scapegoats.

From this point of view, the supremacy of the economic system over the political system can be explained not only in terms of the huge and malleable power of money which overwhelms the power of governments, but also in view of the fact that present-day economics actualizes conflict logic more radically than politics does. Political action was traditionally conceived and practised as an art of war by other means. But the globalized economy performs this function much better and can therefore absorb politics itself. Due to its logical coherence, pervasive power, and innovative nature, the economic system is far mightier than the political system. In comparison, the latter proves slow, ineffective, and contradictory because it still contains some of the alternative tendencies to conflict logic, which date back to when the dynamics of real democracy still had force. It is true that politics often proves itself to be ambivalent towards or complicit with a totalitarian economy; however, the more this type of economics is coherent within its own universal conflict logic, the more power it wields.

The dominant anthropological model

This way of understanding the nature of the political system and, more radically, the economic system, is grounded in a counterfeit representation of human identity. In this regard, we can speak of a *prevailing anthropological model*. By this, I mean the combination of a vision of man and a global logic which, on the one hand, calls for behavior based on certain established or imposed social norms, and, on the other hand, establishes an institutional system governed by these co-ordinates. I refer to stock markets and banks, as well as parliaments, the body of positive law, schools, universities, hospitals, armed forces, and so on.

When a society holds the conviction that man is made "by nature" to be of a certain disposition – for example that he is aggressive, selfish, and untrustworthy – it tends to produce precisely that type of man. The present anthropological model is based on the idea of a selfish and competitive man. Consequently, institutions, hegemonic oligarchies, and the masses take their stance according to the ideology of *homo oeconomicus*, an entity who is allergic to peace by definition.

The anthropological structure contrived from this model rests on three foundations which are at the same time three determining factors in denying peace. The first is grounded in a global culture that breeds and perpetuates the forgetfulness of what it is to be human. When we say that peace is a gift, often there is no awareness of the link through which a gift only becomes so if its recipient accepts it. While the essential humanity of humankind remains absent, in the sense that the people of the world are neither awake nor open to a way of life which is appropriate for their dignity, the world remains in the disorder of violence. Whenever humankind is unmindful of itself, this not only leads to groping around in the dark and taking erroneous steps, but of operating in a way that

is contrary to what is right. Ignorance of the true anthropology of the human causes perversion and self-destruction. Learning how *to see* humankind is like discovering reality for the first time. It is like stepping outside of the world of the known and the apparently obvious, governed by its fatal mythologies, to enter it once again with a completely renewed vision. And it means becoming aware that at all times there has only ever been one ideology, although with a thousand variants: the ideology of violence. Emmanuel Lévinas wrote: "Violence is to be found in any action in which one acts as if one were to act alone" (1990: 6). This denunciation of the inherent attraction of violence for humans reveals the fervid delusions of a humankind unaware of its true self.

Seeing that true nature means recognizing it as the basis for the universal community of all people, as the quality and value of our way of being, and as the wellspring of history. First of all, true humankind is the community where both the uniqueness of individuals and the communion of all individuals collectively count. Uniqueness enables communion and communion allows personal uniqueness to flourish. Conversely, the particularism of exclusive identities – including religious identities – plunges human beings into isolation. When the inter-personal bond is internalized as the kernel of our individual subjectivity, then we can really see the essence of humankind. Moreover, humankind becomes itself in the process of humanization. This is not only a matter of education of individuals, it also related to our common path through the world. In this sense, I am referring to the emergence of humankind as history or historical process. The species-consciousness must take into account the evolution of the whole human family, and the development and possible fulfilment of its dignity in history. Through this awareness, every individual can develop their sense of responsibility toward a common history.

Now let us consider the second cause of the dominance exercised by false dealing and the conflict system that continues to stifle contemporary society today. While the first cause consists of failing to recognize the proper existence of human beings, the second involves being oblivious to the true destiny of humankind. Thus, we betray the vocation for happiness that is inherent to our dignity. When men disown or disbelieve this vocation, when they reduce themselves to embracing absurd and deplorable satisfactions, then they can neither grant nor share the gift of peace. After all, the concepts of peace and happiness both reveal, albeit from different angles, the same harmony of life when it is really new and unblemished by evil. This harmony extends to all humankind, to nature, and, for those who have a religious faith, to divine reality as well.

We must reflect on the fact that happiness is easily perceived as something illusive, or as an expression of selfishness, hedonism, or amoral vitalism. In general, people are not aware that happiness is something completely different from good fortune, privilege, or a transitory mood. Happiness derives from harmony in every relationship, it is the result of sharing, compassion, sensibility, justice, and good; that overflowing of good that is at the very core of the meaning of the word "*Shalom*" (Mancini 2005: 268). Peace, for its part, is the experience of and path taken by those who have learned that the gift of life has to be appreciated, intensified, and shared through justice considered as brotherhood and sisterhood.

Another way in which the positive tension typical of the vocation for happiness is neutralized in individuals and in communities is through the belief that happiness is essentially a goal to be pursued; either, paradoxically, a backward-looking goal, related to childhood, enshrined in an unrecoverable golden age of our individual past, or a future goal, that lies so far ahead that one ends up questioning its very realizability. People who are misled by such preconceptions cannot read their own present life-condition. In fact, everybody is likely to establish close relationships, or to have the experience of loving someone.

Do such affective bonds not rather mean that we are happy simply because the beloved person exists? Only by recognizing the value of inter-subjective relations can we give up relegating happiness to the status of a life goal that remains out of reach. Yet, in the meantime, if the longing for,

and adhesion to the pursuit of happiness dies out, people become wicked, barren, and insincere. And in this way, they cause the installation of mass unhappiness. Only those who dedicate themselves to caring about justice and peace – in name of the happiness inherent in living with love – can change the world.

The third cause of the dominance exercised by the conflictual system is the most complex of all: it is the dynamism of the social construction of unhappiness. This perverse effect occurs due to the docility that exists in face of the logic of violence. The latter avails itself of the power of automatisms in the organizational systems of modern society: for example, in state bureaucracies, and, above all, in the global capitalist market and the current system of international relations. Modernity is defined as the historical age in which the different spheres of social experience became self-governing, namely science, politics, law, and economics. But this age has revealed itself to be the age of dominance exercised by the automatisms of these organizational systems. Consciousness, will, freedom, responsibility, the ability to change, historical creativity, the faculty of nonviolence: all these highly human characteristics become insignificant. Here we can see the visible effect of the loss of awareness of our true human nature.

But below the surface of the "technical" functioning of impersonal systems that organize societal life – which, at first glance, can seem not only guiltless, but also useful and necessary – we can glimpse the real danger, i.e., the particular presence of evil in history. I do not want to equate these systems with evil. Rather, I would underline that evil always works in a systematic way and tends to build its own inverted order of the world, one which is particularly favored where automatic processes exist. For this reason, evil spreads more easily wherever organizational systems cause human beings to be passive, unaware, and without responsibility. This can be the case of religious, political, or economic structures. Insofar as these systems put their organization above freedom, they tend to become instruments of the destructive work of evil.

This therefore brings us to the political entanglement that derives from our current anthropological structure, which is grounded in the forgetting of what it means to be human, in blind adaptation to unhappiness, and in the dominance of systemic automatisms. The world is without peace because the progress of humankind's collective consciousness, which began with the birth of the United Nations after the Second World War, has stopped. At the time of the UN's inception, an attempt was made to generate the wisdom of this collective consciousness at constitutional, juridical, and political levels. There was hope that a democratic government for the world human community could be built by installing instruments for fighting tendencies towards war, nationalism, racism, and any form of false dealing. However, first the choice of the international community to put trust in the balance of terror between the United States of America and the Soviet Union, and then the spreading of capitalism as the undisputed supreme foundation for civilization, have reshaped the world order without any care for true human nature, freedom, justice, or peace.

Peace as the form of society

The redemption of the human community should take place through the renewal of the path towards humanization, which was greatly enhanced with the creation of the United Nations, when restoring human dignity and repelling war were perceived as a due and urgent change from the previous imperatives driving nation-states and peoples. This change was anticipated as marking a sociological and ethical turning point in human interactions, as well as a political and juridical transformation of the social and political landscape of the world to be realized through the joint effort of peoples and states.

This new hope of the post-war world proved unfortunately to be stillborn. But it is imperative that we revive it in our age. By this I mean the awakening of intercultural consciousness that

will rebuild a set of international rules aimed at developing democracy. Here, I am referring to a democracy that is interested in human dignity and the common good, where these are put above the claims of the market and any oligarchy or dominant power. This commitment is actually the only choice capable of returning to humanity its faculty of self-determination, which is taken away when those who follow the logic of violence prevail and install violence as the informative logic organizing society.

I started this article recalling preconceptions about peace, when it is reduced to a vague and almost impossible goal, and I mentioned the preconceptions about nonviolence when it is seen as an insufficient and almost useless means to achieving peace. What are the real meanings of peace and nonviolence then? And what is the meaning of their relation? If peace is exclusively perceived as a goal, this loss in meaning paves the way for any number of misunderstandings about the means, methods, and concrete paths through which to achieve it. The rulers who have forced upon their peoples the tragedy of war have always declared that their aim was peace. Even today, all over the world, the recurring justification of governments for maintaining and increasing ludicrously high military budgets is that it is the only way to obtain peace. It is not unusual that, instead of projecting the goal of peace as far in the future, peace is identified by such governments as an already-attained goal but which is unstable and which consequently must be safeguarded by increasing weaponry and strengthening the armed forces. This rhetorical strategy is generally more effective in countries where there is a relatively peaceful situation and a certain wealth, because it appeals to the fear of losing something that has been gained.

It is true that peace is a goal, the aim of human aspiration to a true life. But this is only a half-truth. Indeed, such an assertion ends up being a true statement framed in a misleading context. Peace is first and foremost eternally present within mankind, but in the form of a seed, the core of the potential harmony within every relationship, but as such it must be cultivated – day after day, through consistent means and methods and certainly not with weapons and armies.

At the same time, what is lacking here is the idea that peace, rather than being simply a goal achievable through this or that technique, is essentially a gift of life. Religions tend to see peace as a gift of God. However, we can also see it as something that derives from the human yearning for communion and justice, where both aspects are required by life itself for the latter to be fully appreciated and enjoyed. The process of recalling the status of peace as a gift must be taken seriously and not regarded as some spiritualistic rhetorical strategy. It helps to remember that nobody can *produce* peace and act, therefore, as if he or she were its owner. Rather, peace requires us *to embrace* the opportunity of a good life and to open ourselves up to service, co-operation, and the responsibility of being part of the harmony of the world in all its relations: among human beings, with nature, with life, with God. As Mohandas Gandhi stated (Gandhi 2010: 403–408), the right approach of a man towards peace is not that of an author or an owner, but that of a trustee who serves the cause of the common good that is greater than the sum of all individual efforts.

By bringing together the two meanings mentioned above, we see that peace is the gift of a seed with the potential to germinate in present society in order to reach the light and generate a new society, completely transformed and humanized. To further clarify the status of peace, it is perhaps helpful to borrow the concept of *form* from the classical philosophical language of the European tradition. I make the following assumption: *peace is the form of society*. Here, "form" means both the unifying, generative principle of a certain reality, and the essence which gives reality its true identity, constitution, and structure. At the same time, form is the meaning of something and emerges when this meaning is realized in an unknown harmony compared to what remains amorphous. From this point of view, peace, as the form of society, is, on the one hand, its essential potential or its as yet unrealized identity, and, on the other hand, the aim that must be pursued in

order to avoid dehumanization. The more humanized a society is, the closer it comes to a peaceful (and "peace full") form of coexistence.

If peace is not only form as ultimate goal, but also as seed and generative principle, it can be applied as a criterion by which to evaluate, day by day, the validity of feelings, logics, actions, and institutions. Therefore, the responsibility of choosing the appropriate means and methods to make this journey becomes inescapable. At this point emerges the inherent value of nonviolence. The word itself has several meanings. Nonviolence is both an inner attitude and a passion, as well as a way of being and behaving. Furthermore, it is a method, in other words a path, as the etymology of the term "method" suggests. As a method of political action, nonviolence is the dynamism that propels forward the development of the generative principle of a peaceful society. Consequently, nonviolence must be considered not only as the way for an everyday translation of peace into a society, but also as the specific energy that allows such a development and realization. If peace is the form of society, nonviolence is the gentle force for social transformation. The relationship between peace and nonviolence is therefore indissoluble: there is no peace without nonviolence, and there is no nonviolence without peace as a generative principle, criterion, and aim. Yet the evil processes of global modernization try systematically to challenge this essential bond.

The systemic effectiveness of nonviolence

Comparing this analysis with the power of organizational systems and the weight of their violence can soon give us the impression of a fatal impotence of the human consciousness. This in turns leads to the idea that the historical paths to nonviolence are closed. However, it would be deeply wrong to rely on this impression alone. The power of violence is always that of disintegrating, disjointing, and crippling the lives of people and of society. But the consequences of this power are always vain, frustrating, and unsustainable.

In point of fact, consciousness of the truly human emerges every time from the depths of history, thanks to those who do not renounce their freedom. Therefore, nonviolence remains "the point of the deepest tension for the subversion of an inadequate society," as stated by the main Italian philosopher of nonviolence, Aldo Capitini (Capitini 1980: 6). The human future in history lies in the choice of acting in a creative rather than a destructive way, in the ability to cooperate rather than mutually destroy ourselves, in our freedom to build coexistence on trust rather than suspicion, in subscribing to liberating logics rather than oppressive "modernizations," with compassion prevailing over indifference and hate. Yet the idea of nonviolence as an individual witness persists, or in the best-case scenario, it refers to the direct action of social movements in pursuit of a specific aim. More rarely do we think that non-violence can build a *systemic answer* to change the great structures which reduce individuals in society to a lonely crowd and cancel out the democratic life of institutions.

What can nonviolent action do in the face of an overwhelming global political system and the globalized market? Today these are both conceived as versions of the global institution of conflict and according to the fundamental and universal ideology of violence. Such a contrast can seem totally disproportionate and weighted in favor of the power of violent systems. A practice of nonviolence would therefore seem to be a rare exception, and the exclusive preserve of moral elites. Nevertheless, the great difficulty of qualitative change and social learning must not be thought of as the consequence of an immeasurable distance between the power of systemic processes and the marginal force of nonviolent action. Such a reading would prevent us from appreciating the critical and generative power of non-violence.

First of all, its critical power emerges in its capability of revealing an alternative social logic to the ideology of violence. It can thus provide a reasonable point of reference allowing us to judge

any harmful logic or behavior. Such judgements prove themselves to be, by their very nature, acts of freedom, irreducible to falsehood, idiocy, and evil. The worst thing for violent systems, due to their constant need for assent, is for the freedom that emerges from nonviolence and critical thought to show itself to be irreducible, to take the floor, to call things by their name, and to force collective consciousness to ask itself: what is really normal for humankind, violence or nonviolence?

Whatever attempts are made to eradicate human freedom, it continually resurrects itself and nobody in history has ever been able to wipe it out completely. Our consciousness can awake and rise despite all the forces which seek to destroy it. It is not only a matter of discernment. There is a generative force of nonviolence which reflects its deepest efficacy. If we want to turn the negative term "nonviolence" into a positive term, I believe the most appropriate word would be "liberating love." By this expression, I mean the specific force which implies subscribing to good, passion, consciousness, comprehension, dedication, and compassion.

We can recognize its typical fruit in the liberation of individuals and communities from evil, from falsehood, and from any sort of oppression. Liberating love has no boundaries. It concerns individuals, interpersonal relations, international relations, the relationship with the natural world, and faith in God. It is the force for the gestation of a society of persons, instead of idols, persecutors, and victims (Zambrano 1996). The specific efficacy of nonviolence as liberating love consists in its capacity for humanizing individuals and generating harmonious ties among human beings, between humankind and nature, and also between man and God. The effect of such a "virtue" or specific energy gives a new form to life in all its dimensions. As long as we refuse the way of nonviolence, we remain stuck in a life that is unformed, senseless, and casual, or we remain imprisoned in oppressive forms that stifle life itself.

Conversely, when we embrace the force of nonviolence, both personal existence and social coexistence are transformed and take on an adequate, even poetic form that enriches every sphere of human experience. To understand this essential implication, we must take into account that nonviolence is not a generic term. It indicates a specific energy, a way of being, as well as an inspiration and a logic which proves to be a method of action and an emendation of the organizational forms of social life.

Nonviolence as a method and, more precisely, as a political method, becomes effective when we place the issue of justice at the core of every social context. Here I mean the justice which gives rights back to those who were denied their rights and duties back to those who shirked their duties. Consequently, those who follow such a method are able to find the ethical and political choices, the juridical measures, the economic actions, the educational processes, and the most appropriate forms of dialogue to build the best answer to situations of oppression, war, and injustice.

We are sometimes led to believe that acts of nonviolent politics are always and only acts of non-collaboration, civil disobedience, and remonstrance such as boycotts, strikes, hunger-strikes, marches, petitions, sit-ins, and other symbolic gestures. But, in addition to that, the passion and logic of nonviolence can inspire many specific transpositions and generate alternative organizational forms concerning the political system, the economy, the educational system and culture. To the extent that one person experiences and develops them, these forms of new social life can then attract many other people towards this renewal and give concrete form to caring for the common good. In this perspective, we understand that only the path of nonviolence can disturb the symbiotic relationship between violence, evil, dehumanization, and global organizational systems, and prevent them from becoming an inescapable destiny. Even organizational rationality, which is often inhuman, can be transformed into a reasonableness which leads to the conditions of social life being arranged according to human dignity.

As a consequence, organizational dynamics move from the tendency to automatize everything for the self-reproduction of power and wealth to the tendency to bring into effect a justice which

restores human rights. Every historical experience of liberation from violence, every example of democratic development, social learning, reconciliation, and harmonization with nature, is the real fruit of systemic transformation through nonviolence. It is important to make clear that in this case the term "systemic" takes on a different meaning. In politics or in an economics conceived within the old paradigm of conflict, "systemic" means automatic, global, and inexorable. Here instead it means consistent with human dignity, with the common good, and with harmony with the natural world. And in all respects, it always refers to something which is relative, revisable, oriented to the service of humankind, and never aimed at usurping its freedom and responsibility.

How we can foster such systemic efficacy of nonviolence? To answer this crucial question we must consider that the essential device for the supremacy of impersonal systems consists in the inversion of means and goals. More precisely, it has to do with rendering absolute the means for achieving any goal. These means are found in money and become the goal, the absolute value, and even the actual "subject" of society. Everything else then becomes secondary. As long as individuals, communities, and institutions continue to function according to this perverse logic, there can be no positive change in the historical situation and no action through nonviolence.

On the contrary, the experience of nonviolence overcomes this perverse logic because, first of all, it places the connection between means and goals in the right order. Furthermore, it returns human subjectivity to those who must face the problem of this connection, i.e., individuals, communities, and institutions. While a dominating organization is completely consistent with a logic wherein money is the father of all means and the king of any goal, a humanized and democratic organization can exist only if it is based on the social adoption of the logic of nonviolence.

The holders of power of dominating systems, on the one hand, and those who rebel against them through violence, on the other, both maintain a view that misinterprets the real connection between means and goals (although for different reasons). Wherever the awakening of human consciousness takes place, the true connection between means and goals clearly emerges. Such an awakening generates the *spirituality of nonviolence*. By this term, I do not mean necessarily a religious notion. Rather, I mean the discovery of the invisible but real relationship with the origin of life and with the source of good, no matter how it is considered or what it is called (God, the divine, love, truth, nature, the tradition of dedication in previous generations). Those who experience this relationship receive, as a gift, the power of vision: they see human dignity in everybody, they see the value of nature, and they see a society which is freed from violence, even if this kind of society has not yet manifested itself. Those who have such a view can recognize the real subjects and goals of social life. Individuals and the whole of humankind are, at the same time, the subject of the action and the ends to be honoured. Among these ends, we must also include the life of nature as we are responsible for its harmony.

Consequently, the means and methods of action must be consistent with such a vision. This is true both for people and their institutions. At this point, money and power not only lose a lot of their relevance, but must also be brought back to the status of means of service – an effective economy for instance, but where the economics underpinning it itself must become the art of freeing individuals and peoples from poverty, precariousness, and humiliation. In turn, power must return to the status of a democratic means required by a civil community in order to exercise its common responsibility for its own history and to give the proper order to common life without degenerating into domination.

Education and community

What I have discussed so far still remains very far from the ordinary reality of modern society, but the work of those who have discovered the spirituality of nonviolence and its specific energy has

not stopped. We must understand the essential factors, generated by this spirituality, which can give historical force to the processes of liberation and transformation. So now, let us ask ourselves whether the force of nonviolence can establish itself within the great structures of social mediation. Obviously, what is necessary is the action in every social system of subjects who can translate the method and the spirit of nonviolence into the social fabric in the most appropriate ways.

These subjects are likely to be not so much individuals as they are movements which manifest the lucidity of human consciousness and become so important that they bring about a change in political parties, in trade unions, in parliaments, in companies, and, in general, in the web of institutions that exist on a national, international, and global scale. Bringing about such a change is undoubtedly a long and hard path to follow. Yet not only is it essential, but it is also already being undertaken. Therefore, the point is not whether or not it is possible, but rather how we can develop it further.

In this perspective, two fundamental and fruitful factors should be recognized which can give historical force to nonviolence, namely educational processes and the communitarian fabric of society. It is well-known that human individuals can only fully become persons and express their dignity through a learning process which sharpens their awareness. During that process, everybody has to find the way to face their own worst impulses and feelings. Here I mean those internal reactive forces which, even if legitimate in themselves, can lead to violent behaviour. When they align with ideologies of domination and war, we then have to struggle with an emotional-cultural complex which twists societal life: evil becomes "normal" and the forces capable of liberating humankind are repressed. The quality of our action depends on the type of person we are or have become and this is largely related to the quality of the educational chances we have had.

Nonviolence is the light and breath both of human education and collective learning in a society. Turning points, discoveries, and spiritual enlightenments can happen only in the intimate relationship between an individual and his or her source of radical good. However, when they do occur, these events will bear fruit in social life too. But in order to share the path of personal spirituality to such an extent that it becomes communal, we need educational action that can train people and give them the opportunities and the means to learn how to live in this light. Education is a pre-condition for moving from individual witness to the experience of many people. In point of fact, all the great masters of nonviolence were at the same time great educators. I would underline here two reasons for the fertility of caring educational provision in the perspective of liberating humankind from the power of alienating organizational systems.

The first reason concerns the faculty of promoting the concept of freedom as essentially freedom from evil. A basic core component of the educational process is the effort that has to be made in the internal struggle between good and evil, and between creative tendencies and destructive impulses. Right at this level we can experience how nonviolence is the only force whose victory does not humiliate anyone. Rather, it leads to the liberation of people, communities, and living beings. When somebody is able to avoid surrendering to the evil in his or her heart, mind, and soul, he or she becomes the only suitable subject to contribute to the awakening of the whole human community and to break the spell exercised by the logic of violence. Of course, such a personal maturation requires that everybody listen to their own soul and let it rise in all its freedom. In this way, one can learn to support the weight of suffering rather than inflicting pain on others.

Gandhi clearly shows how this care for the soul must be exercised from childhood: "It will not be denied that a child, before it begins to write its alphabet and to gain worldly knowledge, should know what the soul is, what truth is, what love is, what powers are latent in the soul. It should be an essential part of real education that a child should learn, that in the struggle of life, it can easily conquer hate by love, untruth by truth, violence by self-suffering" (Gandhi 1951: 220). Only the individuals who are profoundly free can generate social liberation on a social, cultural, political,

and economic plane. Being able to process the evil inside ourselves involves being part of a rebirth that cannot be invented; it requires educational care as maieutic action (Dolci 1981). Such a maieutics not only releases the best forces within us, it also transforms the energy of negative impulses and moves it in the direction of good (Buber 1980).

The second reason for the fertility of education lies in the nature of the institutions which are dedicated to the authentic education of persons. They are the only forms of organization whose operating principle is led by the conscience of educators. The organizational dimension is kept at the service of people because they are identified as its priority aim. In these institutions, the organization is for people and not the contrary. From this point of view, there is an essential homology between education and nonviolence: both ensure the right connection between goals and means. Family, school, university, and educational associations are life worlds which must respond to every human being's right to education. States must strive to provide this educational answer to everybody with the highest quality possible. Therefore, collective effort in this direction fosters the concrete translation processes for the systemic efficacy of nonviolence.

Moreover, the educational relationship is not just one between two individuals – i.e., the educator and his or her disciple – in the context of a public or private institution. Educational processes take place as dynamics of renewal and dialogue between generations in the context of concrete communities which are linked by the same tradition and by a specific form of everyday life. A civil community located in a certain territory is a great mediator between the individual and society, on the one hand, and between the individual and the state, on the other hand. The concrete community, whether a town, a district, or a region, is the intermediate subject that can offer individuals a place of rootedness, recognition, and participation in democracy.

In Italy, Adriano Olivetti pointed out that democracy could not develop outside of the communitarian fabric of both society and its economic structure (Olivetti 1945; Cadeddu 2011). He had realized that the real alternative to the supremacy of great organizational systems over the existence of individuals and peoples could be found in a democracy based on a web of open and responsible communities. From his perspective, Gandhi highlights the principle of *Swadeshi*, according to which only communitarian care for the whole society can build a nonviolent and pacific form of coexistence on a national, international, and global scale (Gandhi 2010: 371–373).

A concrete community can withstand the impact of the power of alienating impersonal systems first of all because it meets the primary human need for rootedness and recognition. Furthermore, in the communitarian space, each person's fulfilment of their moral and social responsibility towards others is tangible, concrete, and verifiable. We must therefore keep in mind that mass culture and propaganda lose a lot of their influence when individuals live in a communitarian culture which is vital and creative. By this I mean a culture through which the members of a community have the means to read social reality critically and to keep moral consciousness awake. It is clear that the democratic and nonviolent nature of these communities must be grounded both in collective care of the common good and in the spirit of hospitality and cosmopolitanism, rather than in sectarian and xenophobic forms of local community.

Today, spirituality, education, and open communities are successful forces for reopening the road to the free democratization of nations and of world society. In an historical context where the main trends of public life seem to end up in the smothering interaction between obedience to the global market system and populist, fundamentalist, or neo-fascist reactions, the historical responsibility of the actors of nonviolence is great but it is neither unbearable nor doomed to failure. As we take this road in depth, peace emerges not only as the most adequate form of society, but also as the light in which the real essence of humankind reveals itself. Nonviolence is the only loving force which is able to lead us to this revelation.

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