

Jean Goss (1912-1991) and Hildegard Goss-Mayr, dedicated to active evangelical non-violence: their commitment, impact and influence

by Chomé Étienne in *Actes du colloque du MIR*, June 2023

Jean Goss died on 3 April 1991, just as he was about to fly to Madagascar to give a course on active non-violence. His spirit was still very much alive, in the midst of this group led by his wife, Hildegard Mayr. At the age of 93, she will be joining us at this symposium with an audiovisual message that will be presented to us tomorrow: a chiselled, hard-hitting speech that gets to the heart of the matter with human warmth and firm clarity. The plan of this presentation honours their pedagogy organized in concentric circles: we are first to be ourselves touched and set in motion; then to take into account people who are around you, even the most hostile, so to make allies of them, touching people's consciences and lighting a fire inside their hearts; and finally, to mobilise more and more people until we reach a critical mass of citizens and influential people capable of leading societal change with greater precision and justice.

It seems to me that their first contribution to the world was to marry, in an alliance entirely dedicated to evangelical non-violence¹. Jean and Hildegard were like fire and air married to water and earth! Annick Moreau remembers: "He was an enthusiastic, hard-driving railroad unionist; she, the caring intellectual, non-violence made woman. Hildegard's intelligence gave her a capacity for analysis, and she irradiated caring and serenity. I believe that the worldwide training courses they carried out together were tremendously well received, because they were two dissimilar yet complementary people. Jean brings audacity, energy, infectious enthusiasm, sometimes even explosive energy: the strength of a direct language and the weakness at times of an impulsiveness that's hard to channel². He's a humble, simple man who travels by train, not a yes-man or a staunch churchgoer. Hildegard is calm, detached and wise, with a structure provided by intelligence³, analysis of concrete situations and the ability to draw up projects. With each other, what a beautiful firework display, with bouquets of all colors. One without the other, there's danger of explosion or damp squib...

Jean certainly had a fighting spirit: at the start of the Second World War, he quickly distinguished himself on the battlefields, killing many "Boche". Covered in commendations, he was awarded the Croix de Guerre⁴. However, in the space of one night, his pugnacity was profoundly converted and his great bravery redirected: "In the middle of the world war, in 1940, shortly before being taken prisoner, I suddenly woke up as if I were out of my mind. An immense force of peace and joy gently invaded me. I was so happy I could scream, full of confidence, certainty and peace that were absolutely incomprehensible, given that I was in the middle of a war"⁵. Jean experiences an intense inner light, which resonates with the experience of the prophet Jeremiah: "...like a fire burning in my

¹ Kaspar Mayr, Hildegard's father, after taking part in the Battle of Verdun on the German side, made an explicit choice of non-violence. He founded the Austrian branch of the MIR and became international secretary of IFOR. This is how Hildegard became involved with the international secretariat in Vienna since her youth.

² On learning of his death, Brazilian Bishop Fragozo wrote: "Jean always had the ardor of a prophet. He was an impulsive man" (Hildegard Goss-Mayr & Jo Hanssens, *Jean Goss. Mystique et militant de la non-violence*, Fidélité, 2010, p. 75; this book is shortened in this article to *Mystique et militant...*).

³ She was awarded the gold medal for her doctorate in philosophy in Vienna in 1953.

⁴ He sent it back to the Minister of Defense in 1948, with a letter where he chose his words to open consciences to conscientious objection (cf. in particular *Mystique et militant...*, *op. cit.*, p. 50; Hildegard Goss-Mayr, *Wie Feinde Freunde werden: mein Leben mit Jean Goss für Gewaltlosigkeit, Gerechtigkeit und Versöhnung*, Verlag Herder, 1996, translated into French: *Oser le combat non-violent: aux côtés de Jean Goss*, Cerf, 1998, p. 29).

⁵ "He is reborn from above, from the risen Christ. An immense love overflows him in every dimension of his being. All his faculties are as if 'invigorated' by this force of unheard love" (Alfred Bour, *Actes du Colloque Jean Goss du 30 octobre 1993*, MIR, 1995, p. 13 and 89; *Mystique et militant...*, *op. cit.*, p. 109; *Oser...*, *op. cit.*, p. 17). This language of Love, which he lives as a language of fire, is beyond the expressible.

heart" (Jeremiah 20:9). Yes, a fire had been kindled in him, and it would stay kindled for the rest of his life. Jean will never be the same: strictly speaking, there is a before and an after to that night of fire! His own burning bush was the encounter with "a Father who loves all men, even to the point of giving his life for them"⁶. From then on, Jean was tuned in to this "other sun" (to quote Olivier Clément's beautiful phrase) which made him a prophetic witness, still in the midst of his limitations and failings⁷.

Ever since this encounter, he has been totally caught up in God's crazy love for him and for each person. This deeply moving experience, which also reminds us of Paul on his way to Damascus, gave him a very firm theological starting point: every human being is sacred, to be respected absolutely. And so, I will simply not kill him; period. What's more, even if he's an SS man, a Nazi, I'll honor the sacred in him, by going to him, with the conviction that he has a conscience that can recognize the truth. Imprisoned for five years in Germany, Jean put this into practice, as illustrated by the famous episode where he went to find their torturing guardian to question him, taking the great risk of being killed⁸!

This demonstrates the fundamental approach of Jean and Hildegard Goss-Mayr: go and find the other person, and hope that through this exchange, the truth will come out. In such an encounter, it's not just me and the other person. We're not alone. Between the two of us, there's the Truth that's going to make its way in peoples' consciences. My role is to tell the truth with courage, whatever it costs me. I don't own it, it doesn't belong to me. But neither do you own it, nor does it belong to you⁹. Truth is like a sacred space between the two of us, and it will take us on a journey together from our subjective truths to the depolarized "truth of the situation". The sword may be sharp, but the sword of truth is also sharp! Here's a striking example: while Monsignor Romero was reluctant to denounce the injustices in his country, Goss came to him by simplifying everything, in other words, by going straight to the point. He says: "Monsignor, there's only one thing for you to do, and that's to tell the simple truth that everyone knows, but no one dares to say, for fear of being eliminated. If you tell the truth, of course you'll be killed, but only after you've told the truth." And that's what happened.

The Goss-Mayr couple had a considerable influence on the churches in Latin America, actively collaborating in the creation of non-violent liberation movements. Archbishop Helder Camara, when he heard his message, acknowledged that he really understood non-violence. Many others quoted him regularly, including Bishops Leónidas Proaño and Antônio Batista Fragoso, and priests such as Freddy Kunz. Throughout the 60s, in close collaboration with Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, the Goss-Mayrs were heavily involved in the creation of the *Servicio Paz y Justicia* (SERPAJ), and made this possible by many years of accompaniment and support for these committed groups¹⁰. They worked in the

⁶ "...A love that surpasses all, an inner voice that gives a mission for all of life" (Jean Toulat, *Actes...*, *op. cit.*, 89). "A witness with a heart of fire" (Alfred Bour, *Mystique et militant...*, p. 121, where we find a link with Blaise Pascal exclaiming "Fire! Fire! Fire! God of Abraham..." (*Mystique et militant...*, p. 123). See also Alfred Bour's interview with Jean: *Jean Goss, témoin de la non-violence*, MIR, 1993, p. 10.

⁷ His impulsiveness led sometimes to vehemence. He was capable of being over provocative and saying uncanonical things like: "The Church is a whore who pisses in my plate, yet she's my mother and I love her".

⁸ "I'm discovering how God respects and loves man. The other person is me. This other person goes all the way to the Nazi, to the SS, to our guard. And that's how it all began for me. For me, non-violence means absolute respect for the human person, for Man" (*Mystique et militant...*, p. 122) "Man is sacred! He is the highest value in the world. God gave his life to save this man" (Josef Freise, *Mystique et militant...*, p. 103, who points out that this common basis for all is the foundation of a humanism that brings us together + p. 110) + *Actes*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁹ Each of us is "worthy enough to be confronted with the truth that we ourselves have recognized, trusting that God will be able to change our hearts and minds" (*Oser...*, *op. cit.*, p. 32-33).

¹⁰ Hildegard testifies: "I'll never forget the day I was arrested in Sao Paulo, along with Adolfo Esquivel, where we were subjected to psychological torture. When we got out of prison, some workers who were involved in the non-violent struggle embraced me and said: 'Now, Hildegard, you're really one of us, because you've shared our suffering'. This solidarity, if we take it seriously, also leads us to the cross, but a cross that liberates. As it liberated them in Latin America, this cross will liberate us too; one day, our Churches in Europe will let themselves be

shadows, very happy that the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Adolfo Pérez Esquivel (rather than to themselves): this prize protected Adolfo Pérez Esquivel and gave greater strength to their joint action campaigns.

Jean Goss also practiced this art of personal contact with the religious authorities in Rome, as early as 1950. He had heard of Alfredo Ottaviani, who, in his 1947 thesis, asserted that, in the face of nuclear peril, "war must be totally forbidden" and the theory of a just war called into question. The aggiornamento was also stimulated by the hope offered by the new international bodies: the UN was going to do better than the League of Nations. Enthused by this new wind blowing, Jean wanted to meet Ottaviani. He wrote to him three times, but received no reply. He decided to go to Rome without an invitation. On March 21, 1950, he was refused entry. Deceiving the guards, he climbed the majestic staircase four steps at a time. Overtaken in the corridors, he shouted out his layman's right to express himself, until Ottaviani came out of his office. Jean finally spent 2 hours with him, touching him to tears. The prelate, who was to become a cardinal in 1953, confirmed Jean in his vocation to bear witness and shake consciences, while also urging him not to cause scandal. This is what the Goss couple did throughout the Second Vatican Council, between 1961 and 1965, maintaining the pastoral priority of meeting the bishops face-to-face¹¹, not front to front, but conscience to conscience. In Rome, with Lanza del Vasto and others, they fasted and set up a lobby in the service of peace, bringing all their expertise to the Council Fathers¹². *Gaudium et Spes* thus made room for conscientious objection. Disarmament and non-violence began to be accepted categories and even operative concepts. Traditional ways of thinking about self-defence were changing. The challenge was to give shape to the new possibilities that were emerging, to give flesh to what was gropingly taking shape in post-war history and on the various continents, to put into words the embryonic experiences being lived out everywhere in the wake of Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

Wherever they went, Jean and Hildegard brought new vocabulary, new words to shake up traditional patterns and build new ones¹³. On every continent, they spread the new reading of the Gospel of turning the cheek, which had emerged in the 50s. Until then, over the course of almost two millennia, turning the cheek had sounded like a call not to resist: to renounce one's own rights and patiently bear injustice out of love for the enemy¹⁴. Now, more and more pastors are discovering another

liberated by it, by giving themselves to the struggle for Justice" (*Luttes non-violentes, luttes de libération, in Cahiers de la Réconciliation, n° 2, 1987, p. 21*).

¹¹ Here's an inspiring example that explicitly seeks to extend the spirit and manner of Jean Goss: Bruno Eliat has taken up his pilgrim's staff, seeking audience with Belgian bishops, one after the other, to bear witness to what active evangelical non-violence is capable of.

¹² The American Dorothy Day of the *Catholic Worker* and several women from L'Arche, fasted in Rome for 10 days. Lanza del Vasto fasted for 40 days in a monastery near the Vatican, with the intention that the Church should clearly condemn nuclear weapons and the doctrine of nuclear deterrence. *Gaudium et Spes* takes a serious look at the subject, in over 50 sentences; cf. paragraphs 80 (Total war), 81 (The arms race) and 82 (Towards the absolute proscription of war).

¹³ Jean Goss, Hildegard Goss-Mayr & le MIR, *Une autre révolution : violence des non-violents*, Cerf, 1969, as well as Jean Goss, Hildegard Goss-Mayr & Jean Lasserre, *Une révolution pour tous les hommes*, Centre d'Information pour l'ouverture au tiers-monde, 1969 and Gérard Houver, *Jean et Hildegard Goss : la non-violence, c'est la vie*, Cerf, 1981.

¹⁴ For over 16 centuries, there have been dozens of different interpretations of this pericope, but ALL of them follow the same pattern of non-resistance. I can affirm this after a lengthy *Auslegungsgeschichte* of the pericope Mt 5:38-42 (historical study of its interpretation) and an in-depth exegesis in my book *Tends l'autre joue, ne rends pas coup sur coup*. Mt 5, 38-42, *non-violence active et Tradition*, Éd. Lumen Vitae, 2008, and in my doctoral thesis: *La non-violence évangélique et le défi de la sortie de la violence*, published at the Université Catholique de Louvain, 2017. I place the beginning of this new interpretation precisely here: Lanza del Vasto returned from a stay at Gandhi's ashram to found the Communauté de l'Arche with his wife Chanterelle and a few friends on June 24, 1948. In 1951, he wrote *Commentaire de l'Évangile*, which for the first time in the French-speaking world provided this new understanding of the outstretched cheek. In this respect, the 50's were years of effervescent renewal for many pastors in France and the USA (around Martin Luther King).

interpretation: "You have been told, 'Eye *against* eye and tooth *against* tooth'. I say, do not *antistènai*" (Mt 5:38-39a); ἀντιστῆναι / *antistènai* is a term coming from a military context: two army fronts stand up against each other, in a confrontational face-off. I'm telling you not to play the villain's game, not to let him trap you in this confrontation. I say resist, but without retaliating, without returning blow for blow, without using the same weapons as the one who hurts you (cf. the TOB note), without copying his behavior, without getting trapped by the dreaded gears of retaliation, which creates a "downward spiral engendering the very thing it intends to fight", as Lanza del Vasto pointed out¹⁵. The dynamics of conflict are as slippery as a heavily tilted soap-board, on which violence irresistibly drags us towards the underworld, reducing us to an ever more blinding riposte.

This is followed in Mt 5:39b-41 by three incisive examples that subtly mix our rights with abuse of power: turning the cheek, giving up the cloak and taking a thousand steps. Each time, Jesus proposes a disconcerting initiative that turns the unjust system against itself, undermining it from within. It has always been clear that the Crucified One is not inviting us to counter-violence, but it is also becoming clear that he is not inviting us to passivity either. He shows us a third way, which lies in inventing an initiative that is both capable of stopping the logic of domination and of creating alternatives. The challenge of the turned cheek is to unlock our potential for creativity, capable of opening up alternatives to the slippery slope of violence. This new understanding of Christ's call has paved the way for a theological paradigm shift from a theology of just war to a theology of just peace¹⁶. In the concrete context of a non-violent campaign, Jean and Hildegard were very careful to intervene not in reaction to ongoing violence but in a context that preceded the moment before the conflict turned violent: they had the strategic intelligence to know the right time and the right place and with whom to act before the conflict degenerated. The further away a crowd can be from the soapboard of violence, the more room there is for manoeuvre to escape the inevitable spiral towards armed confrontation.

Let's look at their main resource: the training session in which they passed on operational concepts, tools and a well-constructed methodology¹⁷, with a view to achieving a collective mobilisation capable of overturning an injustice. The link between the personal dimension and a collective dynamic of commitment is extremely rich¹⁸. First, each participant experiences an inner journey of

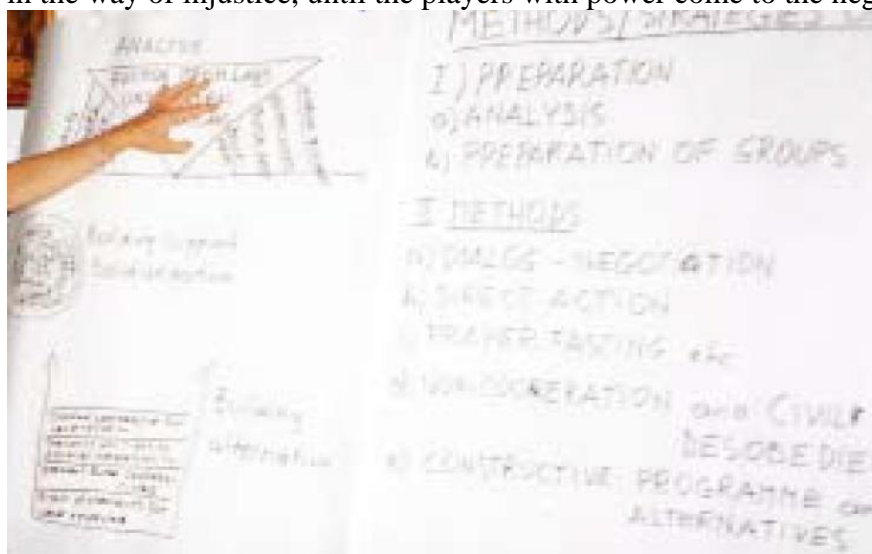
¹⁵ The first to be seized was Tolstoy. His experience of the Burning Bush came in 1883, when he read Mt 5:38. "Suddenly, for the first time, I understood this verse immediately and simply. Everything that hid the truth from me fell away, and the truth stood before me in all its splendor. ... And I understood that Christ said only what he said. For Tolstoy, [this simple truth becomes] the centerpiece, from which all the seemingly scattered fragments of the Gospel come together to form a single, luminous, coherent whole, [...] the key that opens everything, but only when you are willing to press it into the lock", when you take it seriously, both privately and collectively, and begin to apply it to the letter. Tolstoy understood that this gospel commandment could be "more subversive than the gun", and he drew lessons from it on issues such as military service, conscientious objection and the death penalty, making him on these points a prophet a century ahead of the conscience of his time. Cf. *The Kingdom of Heaven is Within You*. In 1909, a year before his death, he received a letter from a certain Gandhi, and they had time to share their precious pearl through correspondence.

¹⁶ The first bishops to dare make an official statement on just peace rather than just war were the Germans, on September 27, 2000.

¹⁷ Their methodology can be found in their book *Évangile et luttes pour la paix : séminaire d'entraînement à la non-violence évangélique et ses méthodes d'engagement*, Les Bergers et les Mages, 1989, in particular the 5 stages of non-violent dialogue (presented here: <https://etiennechome.site/les-5-etapes-du-dialogue-non-violent/>). Drawing from this treasure, Isabelle Serck and her husband Bruno Eliat developed the wheel for changing one's outlook. They went on to create *Sortir de la violence*, with Arianne and Benoît Thiran. Alfred Bour, who so often co-hosted Hildegard Mayr's sessions, has left us he most accomplished retracing of their sessions: a comprehensive pedagogical manual entitled *Oser la non-violence active: Une force au service de la paix*, published in Rwanda in 1998. The Fiches du MIR (Lyon MIR group around Alfred) are also extremely valuable. These very practical resources show that non-violence is much more than a concept, it's a precise path...

¹⁸ This point of view was confirmed by the various people I consulted for this symposium. I had the pleasure of meeting Hildegard and Jean personally, before the latter's death.

awareness of his or her own violence and is faced with the challenge of a profound conversion: violence is first and foremost a false and illusory security, an idol that deceives mankind. In addition, the group is invited to analyse concrete situations, using the resources provided during the session. These training courses have enabled thousands of people to put into words and techniques a call that they sensed only dimly, and which has thus become clearer and more incarnate in their lives¹⁹. In the training courses I give in the wake of the Goss courses, I present a six-step process²⁰. 1) Define the injustice precisely: go back to its roots and name it clearly (don't limit yourself to the violence that is clearly visible, at the top of the tree; unearth the most hidden structural violence). 2) Report the problem rigorously, depersonalizing and objectifying it. 3) Analyse the injustice: identify the pillars that hold the injustice together (like an inverted pyramid, which is only held together at the top by these pillars. We have to break down the pillars, starting with the most fragile and the ones most within our reach). 4) Prepare for action: set specific objectives that are clear, precise, limited and possible, and prioritise them. 5) Put the defined strategy into action, implement the dialogues and widen the circles of support for the cause. 6) Support the dialogue with operations that put obstacles in the way of injustice, until the players with power come to the negotiating table.



The Goss-Mayr emphasised that the heart of any campaign of non-violent action is and always will be dialogue. The whole process serves this objective: to make dialogue unavoidable. On the one hand, there is the firm and determined struggle for a fairer legal framework (it is through a change in bargaining power that those who don't care because they have power and/or take advantage of their gains/position of strength will eventually come to the negotiating table) and, on the other hand, the gentle approach to people: taking the time to show them the benefits of making the necessary changes without violence. The strategy of non-violence is the art of waging war on injustice without waging war on the group that benefits most from it. The challenge is to prevent the oppressors from being the executioners and to prevent the oppressed from being the victims: neither capitulating to oppression nor excluding the oppressor from the process that will lead to peace, putting into practice profound respect for people so that no one is locked into his or her worst and everyone feels encouraged to bring their best to the process. This requires the ability not to reduce the other person to the level of enemy. Instead, we need to take the time to put ourselves in the other person's shoes and understand him or her completely: identify his/her parts of truth, rephrase them in my own words and say that I agree with them. By doing this, we will bring to the centre what we have in common, together we will increase the base we share, the platform that brings us together. Achieving this breadth of vision and heart certainly draws on much deeper resources than just applying techniques-recipes. As the reflex in conflict is to oppose (spontaneously, we make the other more monstrous, horrible and intolerable than he/she is), the right choice is not to take his/her positions as more rigid than they are

¹⁹ This is in particular Alain Cleysac's testimony.

²⁰ In my sessions, I present these steps using the acronym D-I-A-P-O-S. See my article *Réussir une mobilisation collective est un art qui s'apprend*, available at <https://etiennechome.site/df/>.

and not to take his/her thoughts as dumber than they are! We create new destinies and move towards new paths all the better if we manage to broaden our own outlook with a view to enhancing the other, by spotting positive developments and focusing on them. We can even be visionaries, by being ahead of the game, by seeing the other person going further ahead than he or she is now...

Methodically, the strategy of opening consciences and winning hearts proceeds in concentric circles: Jean and Hildegard give training sessions to several groups of key players in civil society, including the Vital Forces of the Church; from there, ever wider networks are formed, capable of creating a force for non-violent action that will carry weight and become a key player on the political chessboard, until it reaches a decisive critical mass of mobilised citizens. This strategy proved fruitful in the non-violent revolution in the Philippines, where "*People Power*" drove the dictator Marcos from power on 25 February 1986 without bloodshed. Up to two million people took to the streets and squares of Manila. What could the tanks, deployed but completely blocked by this human tide, do? Images still show us today how a nun, with her nun's veil and a rosary in her hand, offers flowers to a soldier at the top of his tank, with the deep conviction that he can understand and rally to the just cause. His conscience is not reduced to a pay cheque! Such a revolution had been years in the making. And throughout February, in a tent on Manila's main square, *Tent City*, groups prayed 24 hours a day and fasted. People were on hand to explain to passers-by the situation and the issues involved in the non-violent actions under way, and invited them to lend their support. A non-violent campaign can succeed thanks to good preparatory work²¹.

Another field of mission for the Goss-Mayrs was the Communist world. During the Cold War, they stimulated numerous dialogues in Eastern Europe, notably around the events in Prague in 1968 and in Poland, with the priest Popieluszko. His assassination did not stop the Solidarnosc movement because it did not fall into the trap set by the Soviet leaders, who expected violence from the Polish trade union and even sought to provoke it, in order to legitimise the sending of tanks to the border, tasked with crushing the rebellion. After General Jaruzelski's show of force in December 1981, the official press of the Polish People's Republic labelled Lech Walesa and the Solidarnosc activists as terrorists, but nobody was fooled about the origin of the terror. And the whole art of the resistance was to fight indirectly, avoiding the mistakes of the 1956 Budapest uprising: improvised, spontaneous, in broad daylight²², like a pot of earth breaking against a pot of iron... For many long years in the underground world of Czechoslovakia and Poland, it was necessary to organise civil society, build citizens' power and create solidarity, without ever offering the slightest pretext to justify the intervention of the forces of law and order of the *pax sovietica*²³. All this discreet work was orchestrated with the total and constant support of John Paul II, who played a leading role.

²¹ Hildegard had contacted Martin Luther King, having been interested in the training sessions he was organizing to prepare future African-American demonstrators to deal with police provocation and abuse, both verbal and physical.

²² The mistake of falling into the trap of violence is all the easier to demonstrate on a strategic level, when the relationship between the weak and the strong is unbalanced. "If totalitarian power is perfectly armed to crush any violent revolt, it finds itself largely helpless to deal with the non-violent resistance of an entire people who have freed themselves from fear. [...] Thus, non-violence, which doctrinaire minds profess to play into the hands of totalitarian regimes, is in fact the most appropriate way to fighting them" (Jean-Marie Muller who made this comment in 1985, which was echoed in several books including *La nouvelle donne de la paix*, 1992, and *Vers une culture de non-violence*, 1999).

²³ In his book *Spirale de violence*, in 1970, Dom Helder Camara distinguishes three types of violence and underlines how they are interlinked: "You will see that, everywhere, injustices are violence. And we can, and must say that they are everywhere the first of all forms of violence: violence n° 1. This violence installed, this violence n° 1 attracts violence n° 2 (the one committed by those who revolt). And when violence n° 2 tries to confront violence n° 1, the authorities feel obliged to save or re-establish public order, even if this requires the use of strong means: this is violence n° 3". In Madagascar, for example, Didier Ratsiraka's regime was quite happy, for many years, under the pretext of re-establishing public order and national security, to crush attempts to fight for greater justice, as long as these took the form of riots. It was in May 1990 that the struggle reached a turning point: "The popular movement took to the streets and squares of the major cities, in vast peaceful demonstrations. The regime

With their great ability to adapt to very different contexts, depending on the issues of the day, this Franco-Austrian couple (already international within themselves) extended their field of action to the whole world, tirelessly leading thousands of conferences and training sessions in non-violence, in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa. They reached hundreds of thousands of people and had a real influence on the history of several countries²⁴. Hildegard showed that the East-West and North-South axes are linked and form a cross: the violence of the world is to be found there and also, in its midst, the forces of liberation springing from our human solidarity.

The Goss-Mayr couple's insistence on the power of goodness is open to criticism by advocates of a realistic and responsible policy, whose priority is to not fall into the error of passivity: since passivity is precisely the breeding ground for violence, they emphasize the need for political and military mediation to limit war in the midst of the complex and horrific situations of this violent world. In truth, the couple's charisma is not doctrinal, in their published books; it is prophetic²⁵, practical, bringing us back to the essentials, to the fire and breath of the Spirit, which draws our consciences out of the thick fog of apparent fatality, shaking them when this fog blinds them and accustoms them to the unacceptable. This couple was faithful to the Spirit of Jesus, whose priority is to lay bare God's intention at the root of the commandments. In the six antitheses ("It has been said to you:...; I say to you:... ", in Mt 5:21-48), Jesus goes to the root of the law and gives its fundamental meaning. For him, fulfilling the law means making it stand upright, by establishing it definitively according to his own intention. He radically interprets the law, not by abrogating it but by transforming it in its spirit: this takes place upstream/under the letter of the law, which is thus radicalised, intensified, interiorised, updated and unified by the double commandment of love²⁶. Following in Christ's footsteps, the Goss systematically refocus us on the rightness of giving priority to what is essential: opening our eyes to the false beliefs we hold about the virtues of our just and holy wars.

At the crossroads of horizontal humanism and vertical trust in God, at the centre of the cross, Jean and Hildegard sought all their lives to bring together faith and politics, the purity of the Gospel and its translation into the very concrete, by combining permanent firmness of the truth²⁷ AND sincere love of people, ahimsa and satyagraha, to use the words of Gandhi, who warned us so much about the pitfalls of separating good ends from violent means. At Hildegard's 90th birthday, still long after Jean's death, as she continued her work of transmission as a trainer of trainers, she was told: "You are a midwife of the new world in God". This prophetic couple prepared the way, like John the Baptist: their commitments were leaven in the dough of the late twentieth century, influencing the evolution of the Church²⁸. Jean and Hildegard lived and showed concrete ways of renewing humanity by living

in power was bewildered by these new-style crowd movements, in which church people ostensibly took part, sometimes to lead moments of prayer. These are no longer the riots of the past, which could be broken up fairly quickly by the intervention of the troops" (*La Non-violence évangélique*, in *Cahiers de la Réconciliation*, 1995).

²⁴ It's probably in Africa that their results are least convincing. Rather than dreaming up grandiose changes, Gandhi taught them the art of small steps. For example, start by organizing and nurturing small groups committed to breaking with banalized practices (such as parental educational violence and business corruption). Non-violence takes shape from these first steps.

²⁵ "Jean entered my life like a prophet" (Sister Ancilla, former abbess of the Clarisses monastery in Kabinda, DRC, *Mystique et militant...*, p. 116).

²⁶ Cf. Étienne Chomé, *Tends l'autre joue, ne rends pas coup pour coup*, op. cit. pp. 7-8.

²⁷ "*Firmeza permanente*" is the Brazilian term for non-violent commitment. While Jean-Marie Muller criticized the addition of the word "active", finding it redundant, Jean and Hildegard spoke of "active evangelical non-violence", a formula that underlines the importance in Christian circles of putting non-violence into acts: making it happen in actions. Let truth be in action!

²⁸ "Pope François' message for Peace Day on January 1, 2017, which is the first official document of the Catholic Church using non-violence as its main theme, is undoubtedly also partly the fruit of Jean & Hildegard's work: their method of spreading non-violence in the Church, made up of personal meetings with bishops or members of the curia, has been continued by others. And when I realized that the 3 'non-Catholic brothers' that Pope François quotes at the end of *Fratelli Tutti* are 3 witnesses to non-violence (Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu and

together more in peace, because it was more just. Jean would say after a conference: "If just one person here has received the flame of evangelical non-violence, I haven't wasted my time", he who was "a spiritual father to a good number of people"²⁹. Their impact went far beyond the people they directly awakened. During my frequent visits to Africa, even deep in the Congolese equatorial forest, I was impressed to hear people talking about Jean who had never met him. From "that voice which was his own but which nevertheless came from elsewhere (Jean was indwelt by the Spirit of God, who spoke through him)"³⁰, the torch is passed on and the fire burns among a multitude³¹.

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Jean & Hildegard Goss-Mayr:



Gandhi), I said to myself that their action and witness continue to bear fruit in the Church (and through the Church in the world)" (Alain Cleyssac writing to me about the impact and influence of the Goss, May 2023).

²⁹ Hildegard Goss-Mayr, *Vers une Église de non-violence*, in *Mystique et militant...*, p. 100.

³⁰ The phrase was coined by Jean-Denis Renaud, a member of Lanza del Vasto's Communauté de l'Arche; cf. *Mystique et militant...*, p. 102.

³¹ Reference to the final scene in the Quebec film *Pay It Forward / Un monde meilleur*: spurred on by his teacher, a young man does good to 3 people and asks them to do the same to 3 others, and so on. And at the end of the film, we see a huge crowd of hands reaching out to light up the night with their lit candles.