

Transformational Journey

John F. Kennedy's Turning Toward Peace

by David T. Ratcliffe

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In 1963 President John Fitzgerald Kennedy gave the commencement address to the graduating class at American University. In his book, [The Improbable Triumvirate: John F. Kennedy, Pope John, Nikita Khrushchev](#), *Saturday Review* editor Norman Cousins summed up the significance of that remarkable speech: "At American University on June 10, 1963, President Kennedy proposed an end to the Cold War." Khrushchev called the American University Address "the greatest speech by any American President since Roosevelt." The speech is available in its entirety - in text, audio, and film - at: <http://ratical.org/JFK061063.html>. This is the real jubilee of 2013, not 22 November.

**Excerpt from President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, speaking at:
[Commencement Address at American University in Washington,](#)
June 10, 1963**

I have, therefore, chosen this time and place to discuss a topic on which ignorance too often abounds and the truth too rarely perceived – and that is the most important topic on earth: peace.

What kind of a peace do I mean and what kind of a peace do we seek? Not a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war. Not the peace of the grave or the security of the slave. I am talking about genuine peace – the kind of peace that makes life on earth worth living – the kind that enables men and nations to grow and to hope and to build a better life for their children – not merely peace for Americans but peace for all men and women – not merely peace in our time but peace in all time.

I speak of peace because of the new face of war. Total war makes no sense in an age where great powers can maintain large and relatively invulnerable nuclear forces and refuse to surrender without resort to those forces. It makes no sense in an age where a single nuclear weapon contains almost ten times the explosive force delivered by all the allied air forces in the Second World War. It makes no sense in an age when the deadly poisons produced by a nuclear exchange would be carried by wind and water and soil and seed to the far corners of the globe and to generations yet unborn.

Today the expenditure of billions of dollars every year on weapons acquired for the purpose of making sure we never need them is essential to the keeping of peace. But surely the acquisition of such idle stockpiles – which can only destroy and never create – is not the only, much less the most efficient, means of assuring peace.

I speak of peace, therefore, as the necessary rational end of rational men. I realize the pursuit of peace is not as dramatic as the pursuit of war – and frequently the words of the pursuers fall on deaf ears. But we have no more urgent task.

Excerpts continued [at the end](#)

I was eight when President Kennedy was killed. At home sick in bed that day, my father walked up the stairs, responding to my “Hi Dad” greeting in a voice I’d never heard before with, “President Kennedy’s been shot.” As for so many, something in him died that day. In 1977 a lawyer friend loaned me his copy of Arthur Schlesinger’s [A Thousand Days, John F. Kennedy In The White House](#). I’d never read dry biography like that before. By the time I was finished, a budding understanding had begun of what JFK was trying to do while he was President. That he was learning French in anticipation of meeting DeGaulle in early 1964, to establish a more thorough communication of ideas and meaning with the French President, was an example of the type of engagement with life John Kennedy expressed.

Consider the following statement, made by the President early in 1961 (*before* the Bay of Pigs disaster) to Richard Goodwin, formerly a speechwriter and assistant special counsel of JFK’s whom he had recently appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. Imagine any President of the United States before or since, expressing this degree of understanding concerning the interrelatedness and interdependence of all things.

We can’t embrace every tinhorn dictator who tells us he’s anti-Communist while he’s sitting on the necks of his own people. And the United States government is not the representative of private business. Do you know in Chile the American copper companies control about eighty percent of all the foreign exchange? We wouldn’t stand for that here. And there’s no reason they should stand for it. There’s a revolution going on down there, and I want to be on the right side of it. Hell, we are on the right side. But we have to let them know it, that things have changed.

[Remembering America: A Voice From the Sixties](#), Richard Goodwin (Harper and Row: NY, 1989), page 147.

I read many books on JFK’s life and death in the later seventies and eighties. In subsequent years, from [interviewing Fletcher Prouty in 1989](#), to the release and ferment created by Oliver Stone’s film [JFK in 1991](#), I wondered what might surface to clarify our obfuscated history. I briefly communicated with Jim Douglass in 2000 when he contacted me to purchase a copy of [Understanding Special Operations](#) and sent along a copy of his article, “[The Martin Luther King Conspiracy Exposed in Memphis](#)”. I was not aware of this trial then. I asked if I could reprint the article on ratical. He was pleased and gave his permission. Twelve years later this work has been updated with links to the original sources referenced throughout the [complete trial transcript](#).

Now with Douglass’s work, [JFK and The Unspeakable - Why He Died and Why It Matters](#), we have an outstanding sourcebook weaving together *many* threads leading to *the* seminal event of post-WWII America. [Speaking after the book’s release at Powell’s Bookstore in Portland, June 2008](#), Douglass recounted how he sought to make the story as clear as possible by summarizing it in about 5 sentences. The following excerpt from the talk (14:45-16:50 minutes) includes a segment from the Preface (page ix), the last portion quoted here:

Thanks to the truth-telling of many, many witnesses who have risked their lives; thanks to a recent flood of documents, through the [JFK Records Act](#) – hundreds of thousands of documents are now available on the Kennedy assassination as a result of that law, passed as a result of [Oliver Stone’s film](#) and the appeal at the end of it – thanks to all of that the truth is available. Not only can the conspiracy that most Americans have thought was

likely now be seen in detail. Not only can we know what happened in Dallas. More important than filling in the crime scene, we can know the larger historical context of the assassination: *why* President Kennedy was murdered. We can know the liberating truth. The story of *why* JFK was gunned down is the subject of this book. I have told the story chronologically point-by-point through a sea of witnesses. In brief that story is:

On our behalf (he was President of the United States so he did it on our behalf), at the height of the Cold War, John F. Kennedy risked committing the greatest crime in history, starting a nuclear war.

Before we knew it, he turned toward peace with the enemy who almost committed that crime with him (Nikita Khrushchev).

For turning to peace with his enemy (and ours), Kennedy was murdered by a power we cannot easily describe. Its unspeakable reality can be traced, suggested, recognized, and pondered. That is one purpose of this book. The other is to describe Kennedy's turning.

I hope that, by following the story of JFK's encounter with the unspeakable, we'll be willing to encounter it too.

"The Unspeakable" is a term [Thomas Merton](#) coined at the heart of the sixties after JFK's assassination—in the midst of the escalating Vietnam War, the nuclear arms race, and the further assassinations of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy. In each of those soul-shaking events Merton sensed an evil whose depth and deceit seemed to go beyond the capacity of words to describe.

"One of the awful facts of our age," Merton wrote in 1965, "is the evidence that [the world] is stricken indeed, stricken to the very core of its being by the presence of the Unspeakable." The Vietnam War, the race to a global war, and the interlocking murders of John Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy were all signs of the Unspeakable. It remains deeply present in our world. As Merton warned, "Those who are at present so eager to be reconciled with the world at any price must take care not to be reconciled with it under this particular aspect: *as the nest of the Unspeakable*. This is what too few are willing to see."^[4]

When we become more deeply human, as Merton understood the process, the wellspring of our compassion moves us to confront the Unspeakable. Merton was pointing to a kind of systemic evil that defies speech. For Merton, the Unspeakable was, at bottom, a void: "It is the void that contradicts everything that is spoken even before the words are said; the void that gets into the language of public and official declarations at the very moment when they are pronounced, and makes them ring dead with the hollowness of the abyss. It is the void out of which Eichmann drew the punctilious exactitude of his obedience . . ."^[5]

In our Cold War history, the Unspeakable was the void in our government's covert-action doctrine of "plausible deniability," sanctioned by the June 18, 1948, National Security Council directive NSC 10/2.^[6] Under the direction of Allen Dulles, the CIA interpreted "plausible deniability" as a green light to assassinate national leaders, overthrow governments, and lie to cover up any trace of accountability—all for the sake of promoting U.S. interests and maintaining our nuclear-backed dominance over the Soviet Union and other nations.^[7]

—Jim Douglass, *JFK and The Unspeakable – Why He Died and Why It Matters*, p. xv-xvi
[Orbis Books, 2008](#), (hardcover) [Simon & Schuster 2010](#) (softcover)

4. Thomas Merton, [Raids on the Unspeakable](#) (New York: New Directions, 1966), p.5 (Merton's emphasis).

5. Merton, [Raids on the Unspeakable](#), p. 4.

6. Peter Grose, [Gentleman Spy: The Life of Allen Dulles](#) (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), p. 293.

7. William Blum, [Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions since World War II](#) (Monroe, Me.: Common Courage Press, 1995).

In 2009 Jim gave the Keynote Address at the 2009 [Coalition on Political Assassinations Conference](#) in Dallas, [The Hope in Confronting the Unspeakable in the Assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy](#). With 81 footnotes, this presentation provides a detailed summation of elements explored in Douglass' *JFK and The Unspeakable*. Published by Orbis Books in 2008, [Orbis Books in 2008](#) (hardcover), the book referenced here is the [Simon & Schuster 2010](#) (softcover) edition.

Near the end of the Keynote, Douglass poses the central question of his talk: "So how can the why of his murder give us hope? Where do we find hope when a peacemaking president is assassinated by his own national security state? How do we get hope from that?" He follows this with the essence of the transforming nature of the story of John Kennedy's turning towards peace.

The why of the event that brings us together tonight encircles the earth . . . Because John Kennedy chose peace on earth at the height of the Cold War, he was executed. But because he turned toward peace, in spite of the consequences to himself, humanity is still alive and struggling. That is hopeful. Especially if we understand what he went through and what he has given to us as his vision.

At a certain point in his presidency, John Kennedy turned a corner and he didn't look back. I believe that decisive turn toward his final purpose in life, resulting in his death, happened in the darkness of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Although Kennedy was already in conflict with his national security managers, the missile crisis was the breaking point.

At that most critical moment for us all, he turned from any remaining control that his security managers had over him toward a deeper ethic, a deeper vision in which the fate of the earth became his priority. Without losing sight of our own best hopes in this country, he began to home in, with his new partner, Nikita Khrushchev, on the hope of peace for *everyone* on this earth – Russians, Americans, Cubans, Vietnamese, Indonesians, everyone on this earth – no exceptions. He made that commitment to life at the cost of his own. What a transforming story that is.

One of the most remarkable dimensions of this transforming story is [the secret correspondence between Nikita Khrushchev and John Kennedy](#). Khrushchev initiated this private channel of direct communication between himself and the U.S. President when he [wrote JFK a 26-page letter dated September 29, 1961](#) during the Berlin Crisis. In it, the leader of Communist state, an avowed atheist, invoked the biblical analogy of Noah's Ark to express their common concern for peace in the nuclear age.

I often think how necessary it is for men who are vested with trust and great power to be inspired with the understanding of what seems to be an obvious truism, which is that we live on one planet and it is not in man's power—at least in the foreseeable future—to change that. In a certain sense there is an analogy here—I like this comparison—with Noah's Ark where both the "clean" and the "unclean" found sanctuary. But regardless of who lists himself with the "clean" and who is considered to be "unclean," they are all equally interested in one thing and that is that the Ark should successfully continue its cruise. And we have no other alternative: either we should live in peace and cooperation so that the Ark maintains its buoyancy, or else it sinks. Therefore we must display concern for all of mankind, not to mention our own advantages, and find every possibility leading to peaceful solutions of problems.

While annotating this transcript, I discovered that the entire *Foreign Relations of the United States*, [FRUS] of the [Kennedy](#), [Johnson](#), and [Nixon-Ford](#) Administrations – 172 volumes total – are online at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments>. The [Kennedy-Khrushchev Exchanges: Document List \(FRUS, 1961-1963, Volume VI, Kennedy-Khrushchev Exchanges\)](#) contains 120 communications, of which 21 make up the secret letters between JFK and Khrushchev. The [President's first letter responding to the Chairman](#) acknowledged the fitting analogy of Noah's Ark to their mutual dilemma.

I like very much your analogy of Noah's Ark, with both the "clean" and the "unclean" determined that it stay afloat. Whatever our differences, our collaboration to keep the peace is as urgent—if not more urgent—than our collaboration to win the last world war. The possibilities of another war destroying everything your system and our system have built up over the years—if not the very systems themselves—are too great to permit our ideological differences to blind us to the deepening dangers of such a struggle.

The opportunity for Khrushchev and Kennedy to communicate directly through such an unmediated channel afforded each man the chance to begin to know each other as a human being he could respect. As Douglass writes in the Preface, "Respect means recognizing and acknowledging our enemies' part of the truth, whether or not that makes life more difficult for us. Recognizing his enemies' truths made life much more difficult, and finally impossible, for Kennedy—leaving us with the responsibility of recognizing the painfully obvious truth of Kennedy's death."

In his [1961] New Year's Eve letter to Clare Boothe Luce, Merton said he thought the next year would be momentous. "Though 'all manner of things shall be well,'" he wrote, "we cannot help but be aware, on the threshold of 1962, that we have enormous responsibilities and tasks of which we are perhaps no longer capable. Our sudden, unbalanced, top-heavy rush into technological mastery," Merton saw, had now made us servants of our own weapons of war. "Our weapons dictate what we are to do. They force us into awful corners. They give us our living, they sustain our economy, they bolster up our politicians, they sell our mass media, in short we live by them. But if they continue to rule us we will also most surely die by them."^[68]

JFK and The Unspeakable, p. 18

68. Thomas Merton, [Cold War Letters](#) (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2006), p. 65.

In the summer of 1962 while sailing with friends and discussing the recently published novel, [Seven Days In May](#), that described a military takeover in the United States, President Kennedy "discussed the possibility of such a military takeover very calmly:"

"It's possible. It could happen in this country, but the conditions would have to be just right. If, for example, the country had a young President, and he had a Bay of Pigs, there would be a certain uneasiness. Maybe the military would do a little criticizing behind his back, but this would be written off as the usual military dissatisfaction with civilian control. Then if there were another Bay of Pigs, the reaction of the country would be, 'Is he too young and inexperienced?' The military would almost feel that it was their patriotic obligation to stand ready to preserve the integrity of the nation, and only God knows just what segment of democracy they would be defending if they overthrew the elected establishment."

As if steeling himself for the final challenge, he continued, “Then, if there were a third Bay of Pigs, it could happen.”

Pausing long enough for all of us to assess the significance of his comment, he concluded with an old Navy phrase, “But it won’t happen on my watch.”

The above is from Paul B. Fay Jr.’s *The Pleasure of His Company* (p. 163), a recounting of Fay’s friendship with JFK that began in 1942 when the two men met in a PT boat training camp. Douglass explores the import of President Kennedy’s thinking regarding giving himself three Bay of Pigs -type events [before seeing just such a coup in the United States](#).

In a letter written to his friend W. H. Ferry in January 1962, Merton assessed Kennedy’s character at that point in a negative, insightful way: “I have little confidence in Kennedy, I think he cannot fully measure up to the magnitude of his task, and lacks creative imagination and the deeper kind of sensitivity that is needed. Too much the *Time* and *Life* mentality, than which I can imagine nothing further, in reality, from, say, Lincoln. What is needed is really not shrewdness or craft, but what the politicians don’t have: depth, humanity and a certain totality of self-forgetfulness and compassion, not just for individuals but for man as a whole: a deeper kind of dedication. Maybe Kennedy will break through into that some day by miracle. But such people are before long marked out for assassination.”^[3]

JFK and The Unspeakable, p. xiv-xv

3. From Thomas Merton’s January 18, 1962, letter to W. H. Ferry, in [Letters from Tom: A Selection of Letters from Father Thomas Merton, Monk of Gethsemani, to W. H. Ferry, 1961-1968](#), edited by W. H. Ferry (Scarsdale, N.Y.: Fort Hill Press, 1983), p. 15.

As articulated both in his talk and with much more detail in *JFK and The Unspeakable*, there were many more than just three “Bay of Pigs” – comprising the escalating list of conflicts between President Kennedy and his national security state – before he was assassinated. A list of these conflicts includes the following:

1. 1961: [negotiated peace with the Communists for a neutralist government in Laos](#);
2. April 1961: [Bay of Pigs](#) and JFK’s response: “[I want] to splinter the CIA in a thousand pieces and scatter it to the winds.”
3. 1961-63: Kennedy-Hammarskjöld-UN vision [kept the Congo together and independent](#);
4. April 1962: [conflict with big steel industrialists](#);
5. October 1962: [Cuban Missile Crisis](#);
6. 1961-63: [Diplomatic opening to Third World leadership of President Sukarno](#);
7. May 6, 1963: [Presidential order NSAM #239 to pursue both a nuclear test ban and a policy of general and complete disarmament](#);
8. **June 10, 1963: [American University Address](#)** – the Real JFK Jubilee – not Nov 22;
9. Summer 1963: [Nuclear Test Ban Treaty](#);
10. Fall 1963: beginning of [back-channel dialogue with Fidel Castro](#);
11. Fall 1963: JFK’s [decision to sell wheat to the Russians](#);
12. October 11, 1963: [Presidential order NSAM #263 to withdraw U.S. troops from Vietnam by 1965](#);
13. November 1963: [Khrushchev decides to accept JFK’s invitation for a joint expedition to the moon](#).

In his American University Address President John Kennedy proposed nothing less than an end to the Cold War. As Douglass writes in *JFK and The Unspeakable*, “It had become clear to

America's power brokers that the president of their national security state was struggling with his Communist opponent not so much over who would win the Cold War as on how to end it." (p. 175) In [his farewell address](#), 3 days before JFK's inauguration, President Eisenhower warned Americans that

"we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes."

President Kennedy's repeatedly challenging the imperatives of the Pentagon, the CIA, and the military-industrial-intelligence complex was a clear and hopeful response to Eisenhower's warning. This is one reason there was such a universal outpouring of grief throughout much of the world when he was assassinated. His turning towards peace with increased vigor and resolve after staring into the abyss with the enemy Nikita Khrushchev, during the Cuban Missile Crisis was treasonous to the entrenched monied interests standing behind the institutions of government representing those interests. The President's actions, culminating in his efforts to end the Cold War was seen as heretical – as would be the case for a President today vis-a-vis the War on Terror – by the political theology of violence we were then and are now still thrall to as a society. Douglass fine tunes this point in the Preface:

John Kennedy's story is our story, although a titanic effort has been made to keep it from us. That story, like the struggle it embodies, is as current today as it was in 1963. The theology of redemptive violence still reigns. The Cold War has been followed by its twin, the War on Terror. We are engaged in another apocalyptic struggle against an enemy seen as absolute evil. Terrorism has replaced Communism as the enemy. We are told we can be safe only through the threat of escalating violence. Once again, anything goes in a fight against evil: preemptive attacks, torture, undermining governments, assassinations, whatever it takes to gain the end of victory over an enemy portrayed as irredeemably evil. Yet the redemptive means John Kennedy turned to, in a similar struggle, was dialogue with the enemy. When the enemy is seen as human, everything changes.

That reconciling method of dialogue—where mutual respect overcomes fear, and thus war—is again regarded as heretical in our dominant political theology. As a result, seeking truth in our opponents instead of victory over them can lead, as it did in the case of Kennedy, to one's isolation and death as a traitor. (pp. ix-x)

Paradoxically, all of us in this society are involved in an ongoing denial of the transformation of our most esteemed national values – including liberty and justice for all – that have been replaced by a national security state structure that began to take root in the 1940s and that led directly to the assassination of a President endeavoring to move the world away from war and towards peace. Consider how our failure to confront the Unspeakable caused this to manifest. How compassion is our source of nonviolent social transformation. And how understanding and sharing with others the transforming story of a President who turned towards peace and gave his life as witness to a new, more peaceful humanity, can help move our own collective story in the twenty-first century away from a spiral of violence that can only end in omnicidal oblivion and towards a process of

peace-making. Such movement serving Life's interests is not only for the future of our species, but for all life exploring itself – and the unknown possibilities of existence – on this planet. These ideas set the frame of the book at the end of its Introduction.

The Unspeakable is not far away. It is not somewhere out there, identical with a government that became foreign to us. The emptiness of the void, the vacuum of responsibility and compassion, is in ourselves. Our citizen denial provides the ground for the government's doctrine of "plausible deniability." John F. Kennedy's assassination is rooted in our denial of our nation's crimes in World War II that began the Cold War and the nuclear arms race. As a growing precedent to JFK's assassination by his own national security state, we U.S. citizens supported our government when it destroyed whole cities (Hamburg, Dresden, Tokyo, Hiroshima, Nagasaki), when it protected our Cold War security by world-destructive weapons, and when it carried out the covert murders of foreign leaders with "plausible deniability" in a way that was obvious to critical observers. By avoiding our responsibility for the escalating crimes of state done for our security, we who failed to confront the Unspeakable opened the door to JFK's assassination and its cover-up. The unspeakable is not far away.

It was Thomas Merton's compassion as a human being that drew him into his own encounter with the Unspeakable. I love what Merton wrote about compassion in *The Sign of Jonas*: "It is in the desert of compassion that the thirsty land turns into springs of water, that the poor possess all things."^[9]

Compassion is our source of nonviolent social transformation. A profoundly human compassion was Merton's wellspring for his encounter with the Unspeakable in the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and nuclear annihilation. Merton's understanding and encouragement sustained many of us through those years, especially in our resistance to the Vietnam War. As Merton's own opposition deepened to the evil of that war, he went on a pilgrimage to the East for a more profound encounter. He was electrocuted by a fan at a conference center in Bangkok on December 10, 1968, the conclusion of his journey into a deeper, more compassionate humanity.

"The human being" was Jesus' name for himself, literally "the son of the man," in Greek *ho huios tou anthrōpou*.^[10] Jesus' self-identification signified a new, compassionate humanity willing to love our enemies and walk the way of the cross. Jesus told his disciples again and again about "the human being," meaning a personal and collective humanity that he identified with himself. Against his followers' protests, he told them repeatedly that the human being must suffer. The human being must be rejected by the ruling powers, must be killed, and will rise again.^[11] This is the glory of humanity. As he put it in John's Gospel, "The hour has come for the human being to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24).

What Jesus was all about, what we as human beings are all about in our deepest nature, is giving our lives for one another. By bearing that witness of martyrdom, he taught, we will come to know what humanity really is in its glory, on earth as it is in heaven. A martyr is therefore a living witness to our new humanity.

Was John F. Kennedy a martyr, one who in spite of contradictions gave his life as witness to a new, more peaceful humanity?

That question never occurred to me when Kennedy died. Nor did it arise in my mind until more than three decades later. Now that I know more about JFK's journey, the question is there: Did a president of the United States, while in command of total nuclear war, detach himself enough from its power to give his life for peace?

From researching JFK's story, I know much more today than I did during his life about his struggle to find a more hopeful way than the Cold War policies that were about to incinerate the United States, the Soviet Union, and much of the world. I know now why he became so dangerous to those who believed in and profited from those policies.

But how much of his future was John Kennedy willing to risk?

Kennedy was not naïve. He knew the forces he was up against. Is it even conceivable that a man with such power in his hands could have laid it down and turned toward an end to the Cold War, in the knowledge he would then be, in Merton's phrase, marked out for assassination?

Let the reader decide.

I will tell the story as truthfully as I can. I have come to see it as a transforming story, one that can help move our own collective story in the twenty-first century from a spiral of violence to a way of peace. My methodology is from Gandhi. This is an experiment in truth. Its particular truth is a journey into darkness. If we go as far as we can into the darkness, regardless of the consequences, I believe a midnight truth will free us from our bondage to violence and bring us to the light of peace.

Whether or not JFK was a martyr, his story could never have been told without the testimony of risk-taking witnesses to the truth. Even if their lives were not taken—and some were—they were all martyrs in the root meaning of the word, witnesses to the truth.

The belief behind this book is that truth is the most powerful force on earth, what Gandhi called *satyagraha*, "truth-force" or "soul-force." By his experiments in truth Gandhi turned theology on its head, saying "truth is God." We all see a part of the truth and can seek it more deeply. Its other side is compassion, our response to suffering.

The story of JFK and the Unspeakable is drawn from the suffering and compassion of many witnesses who saw the truth and spoke it. In living out the truth, we are liberated from the Unspeakable.

9. Thomas Merton, [*The Sign of Jonas*](#) (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1953), p. 334.
10. As biblical scholars John L. McKenzie and Walter Wink have pointed out, the excessively literal translation "the son of the man" for Jesus' Aramaic phrase was as meaningless in Greek as it is in English. The Aramaic idiom Jesus uses eighty-two times in the Gospels to identify himself, *bar nasha*, means humanity, personally and collectively. What he says about himself as "the human being," he says also about humanity. His story is meant to be our story. See John L. McKenzie, [*The New Testament without Illusion*](#) (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1980), pp. 114-24; James W. Douglass, [*The Nonviolent Coming of God*](#) (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), pp. 29-59; and Walter Wink, [*The Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of the Man*](#) (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).
11. Mark 9:31; 10:32-34; Matthew 17:22-23; 20: 17-19; Luke 9:22; 9:44; 18:31-33.

“The next book will hopefully be on Malcolm and Martin and the final one on Robert Kennedy. It’s the same story four times over. John Kennedy is in some ways the most amazing story to me. Because Malcolm and Martin were prophets. And Robert Kennedy was of course changed profoundly by the death of his brother and moved in a new direction. But John Kennedy was actually President of the United States. And to discover – what I didn’t know at all when he was alive – that he was turning, turning really in a Biblical sense, so profoundly in the direction of peace-making that his national security state found it necessary, from the standpoint of the powers-that-be, to assassinate him – that was to me – and is – astounding. That’s to me the major lesson of what I learned. It’s not the depth of evil that killed him, which is very great. It is that he had the courage, in a position that became more and more and more isolated during his presidency, he had the courage to stand against the most powerful state in history and particularly at its most critical moment. That’s what I found hard to believe.”

—Jim Douglass [at Elliot Bay Books](#), Seattle, May 6, 2008

“A democracy within a national security state cannot survive. [President Truman’s] decision to base our security on nuclear weapons created the contradiction of a democracy ruled by the dictates of the Pentagon. A democratic national security state is a contradiction in terms.

“The insecure basis of our security then became weapons that could destroy the planet. To protect the security of that illusory means of security, which was absolute destructive power, we now needed a ruling elite of national security managers with an authority above that of our elected representatives.”

—Jim Douglass, [Keynote Address](#), COPA Conference, 20 November 2009

Continued

**Excerpts from President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, speaking at:
[Commencement Address at American University in Washington,](#)
June 10, 1963**

Some say that it is useless to speak of peace or world law or world disarmament – and that it will be useless until the leaders of the Soviet Union adopt a more enlightened attitude. I hope they do. I believe we can help them do it. But I also believe that we must re-examine our own attitudes – as individuals and as a Nation – for our attitude is as essential as theirs. And every graduate of this school, every thoughtful citizen who despairs of war and wishes to bring peace, should begin by looking inward – by examining his own attitude towards the possibilities of peace, towards the Soviet Union, towards the course of the Cold War and towards freedom and peace here at home.

First: examine our attitude towards peace itself. Too many of us think it is impossible. Too many think it is unreal. But that is a dangerous, defeatist belief. It leads to the conclusion that war is inevitable – that mankind is doomed – that we are gripped by forces we cannot control.

We need not accept that view. Our problems are man-made – therefore, they can be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings. Man's reason and spirit have often solved the seemingly unsolvable – and we believe they can do it again.

I am not referring to the absolute, infinite concept of universal peace and good will of which some fantasies and fanatics dream. I do not deny the value of hopes and dreams but we merely invite discouragement and incredulity by making that our only and immediate goal.

Let us focus instead on a more practical, more attainable peace – based not on a sudden revolution in human nature but on a gradual evolution in human institutions – on a series of concrete actions and effective agreements which are in the interest of all concerned. There is no single, simple key to this peace – no grand or magic formula to be adopted by one or two powers. Genuine peace must be the product of many nations, the sum of many acts. It must be dynamic, not static, changing to meet the challenge of each new generation. For peace is a process – a way of solving problems.

With such a peace, there will still be quarrels and conflicting interests, as there are within families and nations. World peace, like community peace, does not require that each man love his neighbor – it requires only that they live together in mutual tolerance, submitting their disputes to a just and peaceful settlement. And history teaches us that enmities between nations, as between individuals, do not last forever. However fixed our likes and dislikes may seem, the tide of time and events will often bring surprising changes in the relations between nations and neighbors.

So let us persevere. Peace need not be impracticable, and war need not be inevitable. By defining our goal more clearly, by making it seem more manageable and less remote, we can help all people to see it, to draw hope from it, and to move irresistibly towards it.

And Second: Let us re-examine our attitude toward the Soviet Union. It is discouraging to think that their leaders may actually believe what their propagandists write. It is discouraging to read a recent authoritative Soviet text on Military Strategy and find, on page after page, wholly baseless and incredible claims – such as the allegation that “American imperialist circles are preparing to unleash different types of war . . . that there is a very real threat of a preventative war being unleashed by American imperialists against the Soviet Union” . . . [and that] the political aims” – and I quote – “of the American imperialists are to enslave economically and politically the European and other capitalist countries . . . [and] to achieve world domination . . . by means of aggressive war.”

Truly, as it was written long ago: “The wicked flee when no man pursueth.” Yet it is sad to read these Soviet statements – to realize the extent of the gulf between us. But it is also a warning – a warning to the American people not to fall into the same trap as the Soviets, not to see only a distorted and desperate view of the other side, not to see conflict as inevitable, accommodation as impossible, and communication as nothing more than an exchange of threats.

No government or social system is so evil that its people must be considered as lacking in virtue. As Americans, we find communism profoundly repugnant as a negation of personal freedom and dignity. But we can still hail the Russian people for their many achievements –

in science and space, in economic and industrial growth, in culture, in acts of courage.

Among the many traits the peoples of our two countries have in common, none is stronger than our mutual abhorrence of war. Almost unique among the major world powers, we have never been at war with each other. And no nation in the history of battle ever suffered more than the Soviet Union in the Second World War. At least 20 million lost their lives. Countless millions of homes and families were burned or sacked. A third of the nation's territory, including two thirds of its industrial base, was turned into a wasteland – a loss equivalent to the destruction of this country east of Chicago.

Today, should total war ever break out again – no matter how – our two countries will be the primary target. It is an ironic but accurate fact that the two strongest powers are the two in the most danger of devastation. All we have built, all we have worked for, would be destroyed in the first 24 hours. And even in the Cold War, which brings burdens and dangers to so many countries, including this Nation's closest allies – our two countries bear the heaviest burdens. For we are both devoting massive sums of money to weapons that could be better devoted to combat ignorance, poverty, and disease. We are both caught up in a vicious and dangerous cycle with suspicion on one side breeding suspicion on the other, and new weapons begetting counter-weapons.

In short, both the United States and its allies, and the Soviet Union and its allies, have a mutually deep interest in a just and genuine peace and in halting the arms race. Agreements to this end are in the interests of the Soviet Union as well as ours – and even the most hostile nations can be relied upon to accept and keep those treaty obligations, and only those treaty obligations, which are in their own interest.

So, let us not be blind to our differences – but let us also direct attention to our common interests and the means by which those differences can be resolved. And if we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's futures. And we are all mortal.

“It's that everything [in the Cold War in 1962-1963] was totally out of control and then, through a kind of incredible process where these two men were communicating secretly with each other over the year previous [Sep 1962-63], and smuggling letters back and forth to each other, in the midst of this conflict, they were beginning to trust each other.... It's a remarkable process. And it's all beneath the surface. But so are all the things that count as Merton understood.... And that's why I have some hopes that if we are willing to go deeply enough into the darkness – and Kennedy was, and Khrushchev was – anything can happen for the good. But if we don't go into the darkness it doesn't happen.”

—[Jim Douglass at Elliot Bay Books](#), Seattle, May 6, 2008

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