

Mr. Louis Campana

Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Promoting Gandhian Values outside India-2008

Born: 17th July, 1946

7 Years in Roman Catholic Seminary of Thones, France (no degree)

3 Years (Bachelor degree) in Philosophy and Bible Theology with University of Strasbourg (France)

In 1970, after reading Lanza del Vasto's book on Vinoba Bhave ("Vinoba on the new pilgrimage"), Mr. Louis Campana joined Lanza del Vasto (Shantidas) in the Community of the Ark, in France. Lanza del Vasto was himself a disciple of Gandhiji, whom he met in 1937 in India, and Gandhiji had asked him to promote non-violence in Europe. Another name for the Community of the Ark is the "Order of the Western Gandhians" and the Community is based on the values of Ahimsa and Satyagraha. Mr. Campana stayed in the Community for 8 years (1970 - 1978), during which period he was initiated into non-violent demonstrations and fasts organized to protest against French nuclear tests and against the extension of a military camp in Larzac in the centre of France.

He lived in the Community and experienced full autonomy, as recommended by Gandhiji, studying Gandhian philosophy and Metaphysics with Shantidas (Plato, Aristotle, Saint Thomas Aquinas). He also became a farmer at the same time and a manager of the agricultural production of the Community.

In 1978, he joined the Community of Theophany, affiliated to the Community of the Ark, and created the Mosaic Association, whose mission was to receive and to take care of the "Social Handicapped" people (drug addicts, alcoholics, prostitutes, the homeless). The Community welcomed between 700 and 1000 people every year.

In 1999, Mr. Campana made his first trip to India and produced a documentary film "The Gandhian legacy today in India" (52 minutes), which was broadcast by two French national TV channels.

In 2001, Mr. Campana created the Shanti Association to promote Gandhian thought through video documentaries and articles. He participated in an eight day street fast with a temperature of minus 10 degrees Centigrade organized by activists of the Community of the Ark, Pax Christi and Quakers in front of the United Nations Assembly in New York against the threat of war against Iraq, and produced a documentary on it: "War is not the solution, it is the problem - The meaning of Fasting".

He participated in the World Forum in 2004 in Mumbai and met with many Gandhian activists from all over the world. He visited the Anandwan Community, met with Baba Amte and his sons, and produced a documentary on the Anandwan Community: "Anandwan, the joyful forest, or another world is possible" (59 minutes), in French and English.

During 2004-05, he participated in various civil disobedience actions against GMO (genetically modified organisms) with Jose Bove and other French activists: uprooting of transgenic corn, and this was followed by lawsuits and voluntary appearances during the legal proceedings. He produced the documentary "Civil disobedience: The breathing of democracy" (52 minutes) on the struggle against genetically modified organisms. In 2005, Mr. Campana participated in the Congress for Peace and Non-violence in Wardha and wrote the philosophical journal "Between wandering. and evidence" inspired by his travels around the world.

During 2003-07 he directed and wrote in "News of the Ark", the world published bi-weekly magazine of various Communities of the Ark. He is an active member of CANVA, the Commission of the Community for Co-ordination of Non-violent action.

After his proposal to Mr. Ravindra Varma and Mr. Joseph Siby, he led various study visits with French activists to the Institute of Gandhian Studies to prepare for the 2008 Congress on Peace and Nonviolence. In 2007, Mr. Campana produced the documentary film: "Outraged Africa, broken Africa, but liberated Africa?" (52 minutes) on non-violent activists in Burkina Faso. He also participated in the Janadesh March organized by Ekta Parishad and led by Shri P.Y. Rajagopal between Gwalior and Delhi. He created the Shanti Orissa Burkina Association, a non-profit organization designed to help poor villages of Burkina according to Gandhian principles, and to support landless tribal Communities in Orissa in their efforts to gain autonomy, along with a project of Gandhian education for 500 children.

In January 2008, he co-organised, with the Institute of Gandhian Studies in Wardha, the Congress for Peace and Non-violence, supported by Nobel Peace Prize Adolfo Perez Esquivel. The Congress gathered 150 scholars and non-violence activists from all over the world. The main objective of non-violent movements is to plan future common actions on a large scale: training programs on non-violent strategy, organization of resistant movements against globalization, finding non-violent solutions to the problems of poverty and exclusion, etc. During the last 40 years, Mr. Campana has remained faithful to the message of Peace and Non-violence, also by living a simple life.

Since meeting Shantidas, Mr. Louis Campana has always followed the path of Gandhian principles. His actions and activities have led to a better knowledge and appreciation of Gandhi's thought and life in France, and through the creation of various non-profit organizations and their activities, he has considerably extended the scope of non-violent activism and Gandhian thought in Europe. In France, the impact of his work has been very important in the non-violent milieu, where he could federate various French organizations under a single Gandhian banner. Through the production of his documentaries, many non-violent struggles and situations of precarious Communities abroad (especially in Burkina Faso and in India) have gained world wide attention, which has enabled them to get support and help from many people and organizations in France. Mr. Campana believes in the advancement of mankind through the spiritual value of nonviolence. Through the organization of the Congress on Peace and Non-violence in Wardha, in January 2008, many non-violent organizations could meet and initiate links between them. Thanks to the funding of their trip and participation in the Congress by Gandhi 2008 International, the organizations coming from non-Western countries, like Mexico, Senegal, Cameroon, Mali etc. could go to Wardha and will now be active members of the world network of organizations working for Peace.

Mr. Louis Campana's work and actions now act as a model for many young people willing to establish long term mechanisms of Gandhi a non-violent resistance against repressive power and authorities. They now have the model of how they can create their own organizations or initiate international events, until they become leading activists in their own field of action. Many people have also been inspired by Mr. Louis Campana's articles and reflections in the News of the Ark and are now initiating movements and actions in favour of non-violence and Peace.

