



*A Spirit of Justice*

## Editor's Reflections

For some folks, the relationship between spirituality and justice doesn't quite seem to add up. One is considered passive, the other active. Or the first is concerned with me, while the second addresses us or them. If this issue of *Hungryhearts* has anything to offer, it is a recognition of God's new math, in which justice and spirituality are not simply compatible, but whole only as they are one with the other.

I say "new math," but it is both biblical and traditional. When Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" in Luke's Gospel (10:27), he wasn't exactly breaking new ground. But where faithful Jews would understand the connection between Leviticus and Deuteronomy texts implicitly, Jesus did us a great service by melding them together explicitly. And he would not be the last.

Six hundred years later, an Egyptian monk named Dorotheos of Gaza took addition and went into geometry. As Roberta Bondi puts it in her book *To Pray and to Love*, Dorotheos suggests that we imagine a spoked wheel, that is, a circle, with a point in the center and lines stretching from the center to the circumference of the circle. The farther the lines go out from the center, the farther apart they are from each other; the closer the lines are to the center, the closer they are to each other. Dorotheos says that we should consider the lines stretching between center and circle as our human lives, the circle as the world, and the center of the circle as God. The closer we come to one another, the closer we are to God. The closer we are to God, the closer we are to one another.



But this new math of spirituality and justice does not stop there. Several months ago the well-known educator Parker Palmer spoke during a celebration surrounding the life of Thomas Merton (both men exemplars of this not-so-new math). Palmer, the Quaker author of such powerful books as *The Active Life* and *Let Your Life Speak*, spoke largely on vocation, but of particular relevance to this issue of *Hungryhearts* was his summation of the relationship between spirituality and justice as a Moebius strip. To that point I had willingly referred to this relationship as a dialectical one, that is, two separate but equal intertwining threads that build off one another (like DNA). The Moebius strip did me one better. This mathematical concept, determined by, among others, A. F. Moebius (1790-1868) is best

visualized by using a strip of paper, giving it one-half turn, then taping the ends together. While the act of simply taping two ends of the paper-strip together leads to a ring, the turn creates quite the twist, making a *one-sided* strip of paper (take a pencil, draw a line beginning at one point and continue along the strip of paper and you'll see it). And so it is with spirituality and justice, that there are not two sides to this relationship, but only one, that seamlessly winds one into the other. (Thank you to Alexander Bogomolny at [www.cut-the-knot.org/do\\_you\\_know/moebius.shtml](http://www.cut-the-knot.org/do_you_know/moebius.shtml) for the use of this graphic and information.)



This new math is really not so new at all, and as our authors observe, this seamless relationship of justice and spirituality is taking place on personal and corporate levels in our denomination, a mark of the faithful that is older than the prophet Micah, who summed it up so well: How can any follower of the Holy One of Israel do justice and love kindness *unless* they also walk humbly with our God?

Indeed, God *has* told us what is good.

Peace,  
Steve

**ABOUT THE COVER:** *It has been suggested that green twigs were a medieval symbol for justice, particularly regarding the transfer of land. The former landowner would present the twig to the new one, indicating legal ownership.*

Spiritual formation is the activity of the Holy Spirit which molds our lives into the likeness of Jesus Christ. This likeness is one of deep intimacy with God and genuine compassion for all of creation. The Spirit works not only in the lives of individuals but also in the church, shaping it into the Body of Christ. We cooperate with this work of the Spirit through certain practices that make us more open and responsive to the Spirit's touch, disciplines such as sabbath keeping, works of compassion and justice, discernment, worship, hospitality, spiritual friendships, and contemplative silence.

Office of Spiritual Formation, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

# Peacemaking: The Path to Becoming Children of God

by Erin Thomas

It was on the eve of the invasion of Iraq that I began to comprehend peacemaking as spiritual practice. Before this moment, I had always considered myself a peace-loving person. I soon learned how little I knew about being a peacemaker.

Howard Rice, author of *Reformed Spirituality*, says, “Activism without roots becomes raw anger,” and anyone who has seen the contorted face of one excessively supporting or protesting a war has seen that raw anger. “You must put together a healthy inner life built on prayer, scripture, and community, and then balance it with social action.” For most of my life my “social action” has been largely impotent, more talk than walk, lacking enough personal conviction to carry my heart into action. I found God’s timing of San Francisco Theological Seminary’s “Companions Retreat,” *Do Justice, Love Kindness, and Walk Humbly with God: Transformation of Self and Society*, and Rice’s leadership there, to be perfect. Only when one is dangling over a precipice, knowing that the utter desolation of yet another war lies below, can one begin to ask, “Is there another way to bring about peace?” and perhaps more importantly, “How can I be involved?”

Walter Wink, in his well-known book, *The Powers That Be*, reveals Jesus’ remarkable “Third Way” of nonviolent action and offers a new way to consider the question “What would Jesus do?” For this Third Way requires not that we be *disengaged* from the violent world around us, but rather so intimately engaged that even our enemies can be redeemed.<sup>2</sup> I read Wink’s book six years ago and found its concepts so far above me spiritually that I could not grasp them for my everyday life. But now I see that God has been working in quiet, unseen ways, because now when I read Wink his concepts are not so out of reach. One simply needs to see peacemaking as part and parcel of following Jesus, to understand it as spiritual practice. And a good spiritual practice requires not only discipline, but also prayer.

## Peacemaking as Spiritual Practice

Jesus was the great teacher regarding prayer in practicing nonviolence, and a primary lesson was in the art of “retreating”: renewing oneself before “going into the crowds again.” After feeding the five thousand, “he dismissed the crowd and went up to the mountain to pray” (Matthew 14:23, Mark 6:46). When the frenzied crowds pressed all around him, Jesus responded by going away in a boat (Mark 3:9). On the eve of his own death, Jesus went into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, to talk with God and find his Third Way to the cross. Jesus does not make it easy for us. He shows us that we must learn to be counterintuitive to truly follow the Third Way. “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...” (Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:28), is not what we want to hear, especially if we feel that enemies are all around us — including in the highest courts and offices in the land.

Jesus’ intercessory prayer for his disciples and the believers in John 17 is one of the most poignant prayers ever prayed. It gives us instruction from our Savior, teacher and friend, who wants the best for us as we do God’s work in the world. “I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15). And before that, “I am praying for them, not for the world” (John 17:9). Jesus understood that it is only as we remain steeped in God’s Word and the knowledge of the promised Holy Spirit that we are able to contribute to the cause of peace and the kingdom of God on earth.

The spiritual practices offered at *Companions* were beautiful reminders of the variety of devotional methods that are available to us, and the depth of practice that is possible even among people of varying ages and backgrounds. Spiritual practices can be so simple and basic that we can easily dismiss them as ineffectual when in fact, they can be just the doorway we need to step through into God’s presence.

We began with an introduction to the many dimensions of prayer, both personal and corporate. Breath prayers, sung prayers from Taizé, and spoken prayers formed the framework from which we created our own prayers. One could say the retreat was one long, continuous prayer: silence at breakfast, walking the labyrinth in the morning, prayer cards by lunchtime, afternoons with the stations of the cross, *lectio divina* (sacred reading)\* at twilight, corporate worship after supper, and silence and rest at close of day. Each activity was an invitation, a gracious and gentle offer to willingly open up and commune with God. I found each of them a luxury, a reveling of sorts in the momentary pleasure of pure time — time without demands and without deadlines.



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\*See page 12 for one model of this ancient method of prayer.

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Erin Thomas has lived in San Diego since 1985 and is a member of Rancho Bernardo Community Presbyterian Church (San Diego Presbytery). She is a communications consultant and a part-time seminary student at the southern campus of San Francisco Theological Seminary.

Every activity presented was helpful towards my experience of peacemaking, but prayer and *lectio divina* time were the most powerful. I saw that only when we are grounded internally, quieted in our inner selves, can we begin to communicate any peace to the outside world. The challenge is to go to — and dwell in — that quietness every day; prayer and meditation are the best places to start. Henri Nouwen, the noted author on the spiritual life, called prayer “a new dwelling place,”<sup>3</sup> and unless we consciously bring the quiet and the inner groundedness of the mountain along with us, we will come down from the mountaintop experience only to sink in the world’s chaos.

## Peacemaking as Social Action

So how do we behave as Christians in the world? Do we detach from the world, or do we find ways to actively and thoughtfully engage *with* the world as a mark of our faithfulness to God? Rice says, “A great calling is also a great responsibility. If you are a follower of Christ, the Prince of Peace, you cannot easily ignore the call to be a peacemaker.” In order to practice nonviolence, we must first engage ourselves in an “inner reconciliation” as Rice puts it. This is to embody nonviolence, to cloak ourselves in it like the baptismal robes of the early church, wearing the peace of Christ right next to our skin. To turn world systems inside out, we must first be turned inside out, beginning with our spiritual life. Indeed, as Nouwen writes in *The Road to Peace*

**[O]ur participation in church life, our worship, and personal prayer life are merely outer manifestations of a much more profound life journey ... [I]f our prayer life doesn’t push us to work towards nuclear disarmament, to resist war ... then we aren’t listening closely enough to the Spirit.<sup>4</sup>**

But in doing our “work” we must be careful not to become “pious,” in the negative sense of the word. Jesus cautions us in Matthew 6 not to boast about our goodness or make loud celebrations so that others will see our good works, but to do them so God will be glorified. We can too easily “lord” our peacemaking — or our vegetarianism, recycling, organic foods, or electric cars — over others until they no longer see peace in us, but instead a strong desire to force the world to “be like us.” That is not what Jesus challenged us to do. In the Sermon on the Mount he said, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they are the children of God.” What a beautiful description of pure love. To be children of God is to be hopeful, to be calm in the midst of the storm, to persevere when all seems lost, to not despair or give up believing that God’s redemptive work is active all over the world — among starving people, our own neighbors, and even ourselves. For Jesus told us, “I have said this to you, so that in me you may

have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!” (John 16:33). Too many times, I have despaired after reading the daily headlines and seeing the evil manifested in the world.

Joyce Hollyday, United Church of Christ minister, writer, and long-time peace activist, writes in her powerful book *“Then Shall Your Light Rise”* of Yvonne Dilling, a church worker who travels to Honduras in the midst of terrible conflict. The nature of the war at that time and place continually required the Salvadoran people to move their refugee camps from one location to another. The community always knew whether someone was there to help them for a lifetime or a short time, for the ones who were there short term were the ones who cried and despaired over what they saw. Dilling soon learned that whenever the people set up a new camp, they formed three committees: for construction, education, and a *comité de alegría*, a committee of joy. They knew that if they lost their ability to celebrate the joy of living, the joy of family, and the joy of a relationship with God, that they would lose everything.<sup>5</sup> While even Jesus had moments of anger when people’s hearts were hardened against the truth, he used nonviolence, not anger, to direct social change.

But is peace the same as nonviolence? Almost. Both share a state of freedom — one from civil disturbance and the other from violence. When we experience the freedom we have in Christ, we can experience peace, which is precisely why Nouwen urged peacemakers to be people of prayer. “Prayer is the center of Christian life. It is living with God, here and now.”<sup>6</sup> In the same way, we must be conscious of helping our congregations create this kind of ongoing, infusing discipline, so they will have the roots that keep activism from becoming anger as they move out in

the world. Until we understand the *who* of social action we will not understand the *why*. When we see that our love of Christ and our desire to be like him creates a natural outflow of love towards others and not a desire to “get points in heaven,” then we will move much closer to the ideal of being children of God. A balance of prayer, Scripture, community and social action is a simple recipe towards a more textured, meaningful, and holy life. But even those who spent many hours working at it, like Nouwen, have sensed that they have fallen short of fully living out that calling. They admit to being human, and in that humanness, stumbling. The challenge is to keep the gains and the losses in perspective, in balance with the larger goal, so that we can be ardent followers of Jesus Christ in the world. We never completely “arrive,” as all on the spiritual journey learn, but spiritual leaders need to help guide each individual, as well as the whole faith community, to find their place in the larger work of peacemaking in the world.



## Peacemaking As Individuals In Community

As Nouwen counseled, individual prayer is the place to start, but cannot be the end of the practices necessary to be a peacemaker. As I experienced in our *lectio* time on retreat, being in prayer together, being in the Word together, simply *being* together, is as necessary for peacemaking as breathing is for life. Like a group of square dancers, a strong and healthy faith community is continually coming together in groups (large and small) for prayer, study and worship, and then continually going away to rest awhile to reflect and renew and listen for God's word for each of us. Just like the ocean tides, that rhythmic ebb and flow needs to be built into the life of the community and its individuals or all will be diminished — and the cause of Christ, the cause of justice and peace, will suffer for it.

We must be attentive to both sides of our involvement, what the theologian and peace proponent Robert McAfee Brown called “assurances and demands.” Scripture gives us the assurance that God loves us, while at the same time demands that we go out and love our neighbor (especially the unlovable) as ourselves and even love our enemies — especially those impossibly unlovable ones who threaten us. It is not just *reciting* the Pledge of Allegiance; it is then acting to make sure that liberty and justice *for all* is attained.<sup>7</sup>

McAfee Brown says it well when he states, “...from the beginning we are part of a community and it is only as we live within community that our individuality can mature and more clearly define who we are.”<sup>8</sup> That intertwining of individual convictions and collective action is being addressed in many faith communities with the addition of a trained spiritual director. With a spiritual director, we can enter into a relationship with a fellow sojourner who can help us to discern God's will for our lives and find a way to live out that will in the world. I discerned my call to ministry with my spiritual director, and she continues to affirm and inform my journey with scripture, wisdom and encouragement.

I am passionate about helping people discern their spiritual gifts so they can use them for the community. When people are using their gifts, they are present to the spirit of Christ within them. I have witnessed people in ministry using their gifts well, and also witnessed the opposite, and there is a huge difference. Nouwen believes that our peacemaking needs to come from Christ or it will not be legitimate, instead bound up with our own demands and desires from the world. Or in McAfee Brown words, “...we will always bring to an issue of justice or injustice much accumulated baggage...”<sup>9</sup> Spiritual practices can facilitate this process from hindrance to help.

## Peacemaking As a Way of Life

Both Hollyday and Nouwen actively lived in faith communities set among the “least of these.” The Sojourners community in Washington, D.C. and *L'Arche* in Toronto are two well-known ministries because of these noted authors. The *Taizé* community in France is another example of a faith community devoted to peace, actively living out nonviolence in their surrounding regions, and also committed to teaching peacemaking to their constituents, most particularly young people.

Our own Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Peacemaking Conference for 2003 was yet another sacred space where a passion for peace was nurtured, in this case by teaching children of all ages how to respond nonviolently. As such sparks are fanned into flame via ongoing workshops, Bible studies, or mission trips near and far, peacemakers will be raised up in communities and the passing of peace will continue in the world.

For all the evil that is present these days, we need to be the counterbalance, we need to offer the Third Way in the response we give to evil, in the way we live, and the way we teach others what we have learned. We also need to offer people new ways to respond.

I have both observed and experienced that a person awakening to the injustices of the world, the reality that love and

the Golden Rule are not everyone's guide, initially responds with anger — pure, raw, unadulterated anger. Anger that soon evolves into a kind of righteous indignation that may burn brightly and bluster loudly, but is actually the most ineffective kind of energy being expended today. Witness the political talk shows that flourish today. We feel unable to change the system and so we have

created a system where we can complain loudly and publicly. Our so-called “free speech” does nothing to end poverty or world hunger, but much to continue our anger and violence. We first have to admit our compliance in that evil (especially compliance by silence) and then decide what we will do about it. And honest, humble prayer keeps us as individuals in that process of discernment.

So, how do we help others, and ourselves, avoid despair when we think about all the destruction, avarice and greed that are driving much of the national agenda? How do we help them “put those feelings somewhere?” We can offer that counterbalance, including programs of social action that will channel that “raw anger” into healing and wholeness. It is easy to be angry, but it takes energy and effort to remain angry — energy and effort that could be used to create new systems and programs of healing.

One such program is Micah 6 ([www.micah6.org](http://www.micah6.org)) based on the Micah 6:8 verse that undergirded our retreat. This ministry has resources and study materials for churches to prepare

*...from the beginning we are part of a community and it is only as we live within community that our individuality can mature and more clearly define who we are.*

Robert McAfee Brown

and equip themselves to be “Micah 6 churches,” creating ministries that reach out to surrounding communities with Christ’s love and caring. The Micah 6 experiment seems to be working as the participating churches report back that people’s lives are being transformed and new ministries are springing up every day, a hopeful testimony to possibilities and the power of “What if...?”

### Peacemaking As Personal Mission

“Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me...” the well-known song says, and its simple teaching can serve as a continuous challenge for each of us. As God would have it, my peacemaking efforts began in December of 2002, a full two months before the retreat, from a very personal, internal perspective, and the ripple effect continues to this day. That month I was consumed by rage from years of injustice and violence done to me over my lifetime, and my very human response was to drink in the hopes of gaining peace. But peace was not to be found there, and as my internal life fell apart, my external actions began to affect others. I am not alone in finding that our nasty responses to co-workers take their toll, until finally, the continuous stress begins to master us, even as we attempt to master the world. The violence against others becomes violence against ourselves and we suddenly awaken to our part in the cycle.

My first true effort at peacemaking was to make peace with myself. First, I had to stop drinking to drown my past hurts and choose instead to take them humbly to God in prayer. This served to quiet the violent demons that had taken over my rational mind and bring the love, hope and caring that I was born with back into my life. The transformation has been miraculous. Peacemakers cannot hope to make peace or even teach peace to others until they have begun to learn it for themselves — until they become like little children and run back to the peace of their Creator, who gave it to them in the first place.

### Peacemaking As Lifelong Learning

Soon after the *Companions* retreat, as the United States invaded Iraq, I was given the opportunity to attend the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Peacemaking Conference in Montreat, North Carolina as a Theological Student Worker. It seemed that God had me on a new spiritual path, quite unexpectedly. In my essay to the selection committee, I mentioned my participation in *Companions* and added a personal observation:

*I chose Peacemaking as I sense that God is calling me to find my own “Third Way” in life and in ministry — now and in the future. As someone who has experienced physical violence firsthand, I want to find practical ways to actively counteract the violence in our society and help find balance. The latest U.S. involvement in the Middle East urges me to find new creative solutions on being a peacemaker and teaching them to others. This is a very new practice for me but I realize that to be nonviolent does not always mean “anti-war,” and as Walter Wink says, neither do we need to be passive doormats to be like Jesus and live in love.*

### Books by Walter Wink

*The Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of the Man.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2001.

*Peace Is The Way: Writings on Nonviolence from the Fellowship of Reconciliation.* Edited by Walter Wink. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000.

*The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium.* NY: Doubleday, 1999.

*Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.

#### The Powers Trilogy

*Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

*Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.

*Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

*The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium.* NY: Doubleday, 1999. This a compilation/condensation of the *Powers* trilogy, mostly the third volume.

### Books by Joyce Hollyday

*Then Shall Your Light Rise: Spiritual Formation and Social Witness.* Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997.

*Clothed with the Sun: Biblical Women, Social Justice, and Us.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994.

*Turning Toward Home: A Sojourn of Hope.* NY: Harper & Row, 1989.

At Montreat, I lived for a week with nine other seminar-ians of all ages and ethnicities from around the country, along with two supervising pastors. It was an incredibly rich experience of “living out” the concept of peacemaking. We not only roomed and ate breakfast together in a three-story house, but we also worked as a team helping with all the behind-the-scenes support tasks for the conference. For a southern California native used to the dry, mild, desert-like climate of San Diego, the hot, humid weather was enough to test my newfound understanding of peacemaking. I found that high humidity not only sapped my energy, but made me a little more impatient than usual, a little less willing to yield to others. So the weather became my personal Jericho during a week of long days filled with running

errands, making kids' activity packets, and delivering other seminar materials to classrooms that were almost always at the end of a long, steep road.

Every morning over breakfast, the TSWs (our nickname) would have a Bible study together and receive a new "watchword" or theological question to ponder during the day. Then we would negotiate the daily tasks by offering ourselves up to a new experience, working with someone we had just met, or being willing to carry one more heavy load wearing a sweaty smile. Sharing morning plenary sessions and worship time with 500 other peacemakers from around the world, we witnessed the Winks sharing their stories of Jesus' Third Way, and of peacemakers who used nonviolent means to right the wrongs of injustice and overthrow such brutal dictatorships as the Pinochet regime in Chile.

The morning sessions reminded me that whenever I am in community, I hear stories — stories that deepen my understanding and challenge me to change. These were important stories of The Babylonian Myth<sup>10</sup> and its violent affect on our modern culture; stories of angry people transformed into peacemakers; stories of entire lives lived for the cause of nonviolence; and stories of lives, much like my own, just beginning to be transformed. I am learning that peacemaking is an ongoing journey and that the work we choose to undertake will only be a part of that bigger story. Sometimes the journey embraces all the hours in a single day, toiling for justice in the hot sun. For others it is a lifetime of peace work, like that of a Martin Luther King Jr., Henri Nouwen, or Mother Theresa, furthering the cause of Christ right where they live.

As TSWs, we had the privilege of eating lunch every day with one of the conference leaders and asking them questions. I asked the Winks if it was time for another Bar-men Declaration, and Walter replied, "No, for another declaration is merely words, not deeds." We need to take action, he said. "We should not use a declaration to absolve us of our own ineffectiveness." His words convicted me.

Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, an Arab Palestinian and Lutheran pastor from Bethlehem tries to bring peace and beauty to his part of the world by bringing art and music to children instead of guns and violence. His International Center of Bethlehem brings art, music, theology and culture together in a kind of cultural exchange. Mitri is mindful that he is one man in one location who cannot change the world, but can greatly influence his neighborhood. He encouraged us to use our gifts in our own backyards, for when we try to take on the biggest issues, we can become overwhelmed and discouraged and then nothing really changes. For a man living in one of the most violent places on earth, his spirit was happy and upbeat, and yet realistic about the time it takes to create true change. "It is easy to talk about peace," he told us, "but hard to do justice."

In one of our breakfast discussions, our question for the

day was, "How do we do justice with each other?" We felt it was by making choices, by treasuring freedom, and by allowing each their own opinions. This was not easy, we learned several days later, as we tried to integrate several newly arriving students into our routine. We learned that peacemaking is not about being happy all the time, but rather appreciating truth and trying to offer love and kindness when you are tired and not feeling very loving and kind. We learned to listen to each other and to confront others with love. "This is hard," Vanessa said with sorrow in her voice, as we TSWs struggled to resolve a conflict. Several of us nodded in agreement, appreciating Gandhi's wisdom when he said, "You cannot go from flight to nonviolence in one step. You need to work out your own rage first before you can move to nonviolence."

In the midst of this learning experience, I realized that I can easily *talk* about being a peacemaker, but actually *doing* it is another level of commitment. I must put myself into peace-seeking situations and go to the difficult places, both within myself and in my community. I must make the commitment to be willing to be in "messy places" in order to make a difference. As the great poet Goethe once wrote, "Until one is committed, there is always hesitancy — the chance to draw back — always ineffectiveness." I sense that most peacemakers know exactly what the poet meant. As one preparing for the Ministry of Word and Sacrament, I am aware that I will be preaching the Gospel in the context of a very violent world, and that I must be committed to bringing Jesus' message of peacemaking forward to my congregation in that context. The bigger challenge is to first embody it with authenticity in my own life.

I took home many memories of praying with others not like myself, of hearing what is possible when people make peacemaking their life's work, and the change that can happen when a church body makes a commitment to supporting peacemakers all over the world. At the closing worship, I heard the encouraging words of Margaret Mead, "All it takes is a small group of committed people to change the world. Indeed, that's all that ever has."

### *Peacemaking As Experience to Be Shared*

Most recently, my journey has lead me back home to my church in Rancho Bernardo, north of San Diego, where I lead a Bible study for college-age girls. We began with a traditional book study, but soon became restless with the familiar material. We wanted to learn how to be Christ to the world, to take our faith into our community and make a difference. These young women have already been to Russia and Mexico on mission trips, bringing the Good News through drama and music to high school kids, and building modest homes from scratch for a poor community. These were women already acting on their convictions, and when I shared Joyce Hollyday's book, "*Then Shall Your Light Rise*" with them, they loved it.



Now, our discussions center around how they can use their schooling, their training, and their faith in a career that may very well be in a non-profit organization or ministry.

Our conversations have been rich and meaningful and many times have lasted much longer than the scheduled ninety minutes. I shared material from *Hungryhearts*, along with information about non-profits started by traditional entrepreneurs attempting to change the world. I offer up the concept of micro loans and why they have been so successful in third world countries, and attempt to guide their idealistic outrage about big business and the destruction of the earth into positive dialogue about what they can do to turn the tide. We talk about the wealth of our church and how much is being done to help others in our surrounding community and around the world through missions. And we open and close each session in prayer.

These are young women who have been given much and are aware of their responsibility to do something with it for the Kingdom. They are dedicated small group leaders for our high school ministry, and devote extra hours to calling and meeting with their kids to nurture them in the faith and teach them the value of relationships. They are constantly seeking to use their faith in important ways.

As we near the end of the study, based on Isaiah 58:6-12, we are looking for ways to use our new understanding of social justice and witness to participate in a local ministry. Perhaps we could help a downtown "ladle ministry" feed the homeless. Or assist poor families to find housing through Interfaith Services. Because we meet on Sunday nights, we have started bringing dinner so we can break bread together as we talk. These young women are teaching me lessons of love and peace, what it means to actively follow Jesus, and the importance of passing on your experiences to the next generation. They have kept my faith fresh and new, ripe with the possibility that, if committed to peace in partnership with God, we just may see a change in our lifetime.

*"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God."* May we forever seek ways to be worthy of that call. ☪

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Howard Rice are from the February 23, 2003 session at the *Companions Retreat*, Mater Dolorosa, Sierra Madre, CA.

<sup>2</sup> Wink, Walter. *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium*. NY: Doubleday, 1999, p. 98-111.

<sup>3</sup> Nouwen, Henri J.M. *The Road to Peace: Writings on Peace and Justice*, John Dear, Ed. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., from the foreword by John Dear, p. xxviii.

<sup>5</sup> Hollyday, Joyce, *Then Shall Your Light Shine: Spiritual Formation and Social Witness*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997, p. 91-92.

<sup>6</sup> Nouwen, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> McAfee Brown, Robert, *Speaking of Christianity: Practical Compassion, Social Justice and Other Wonders*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997, p.18.

## A PRAYER FOR RENEWAL

Lord, my spirit has been wounded, heal me.  
My heart aches from the undoing, renew me.  
My body is weary from everyday life, strengthen me.  
My soul is dry and parched, revive me.  
My joyous laughter has been squelched, restore me.  
My faith in mankind has been shaken, return me to you.  
My love for others is so distant, bring me back to them.  
Grant me your peace, Lord, that I may know you are near.  
Take away my fear about the future, and remind me that  
you, my Creator, have me in the palm of your hand.  
Be with me in the days ahead as I walk into the unknown,  
believing that your love and mighty healing is greater  
than any affliction I bear.  
Love me, Lord, into healing places, into your grace  
and let me rest in you.

AMEN

Erin Thomas  
*Jeremiah 29:11-14*

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.31.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.53.

<sup>10</sup> The Babylonian Myth is used by Wink to show that the roots of violence are deep, with current effect not only in entertainment, but also in government policies. There are several versions of the myth, which dates back to before the 12th century, at its core suggesting that evil and violence existed before the establishment of humankind. Through the lens of this myth, violence is seen not as an evil but as good. The Genesis story, Wink suggests, was written in response to the Babylonian Myth, as it speaks of God who declared creation good from the outset.

# Spiritual Formation and Social Justice

by Jane T. MacColl

In the fall of 2002, three people had occasion to speak of their frustrations at what seemed to them to be a disconnection between spiritual formation and social justice: people engaged in the one seemed disinterested in the other. How could this be? How could we move toward social justice effectively if we were not grounded in and by spiritual formation? And what does our relationship with God mean if it does not emerge in seeking justice?

A subcommittee of the Spiritual Formation Network of New Covenant Presbytery (southeast Texas) was asked to look into the matter. They focused on the following:

- the perceptions of what each group did;
- what is thought to help and to hinder the functioning of spiritual formation and social justice (as separate entities); and
- how might these two groups interact to the benefit of both?

The mission, focus, and organizational structure of both spiritual formation and social justice in the presbytery were thoroughly reviewed. It was noted that each group felt itself to be basic to the Christian life, but experienced its function as peripheral to the primary attention of New Covenant Presbyterians.

Meetings were held with input from a variety of people: those with primary interest in social action, some with expertise in programs to develop a congregation's commitment to social action, some with a primary interest in spiritual formation. Parameters were established and possible options were proposed. One picture offered was a "yin-yang" relationship between these two aspects of Christian vocation.

Any program sponsored by the Spiritual Formation Network was to be grounded in our commitment to spiritual formation. What we developed should focus on the connection between these two merging streams of Christian faith. Whatever we developed was open to "re-forming" based on input from participants. We would be committed and open to welcoming participants, and creative in our inviting. Periodically, we would evaluate the wisdom of continuing whatever we developed.

At the present time we meet monthly; an example of our time is described below.

## *Spiritual Formation/Social Justice Connection -*

A Presbytery of New Covenant contemplative small group

for persons involved in social justice ministries

by Marguerite (Meg) D. Scott, DASD

The email appeared the day after Christmas, "We are leaving the denomination." I was shocked to read the brief announcement from two friends who had been on the front lines of social justice movements in the presbytery and the denomination. In a phone conversation the next day I learned that this couple's decision did not rest solely on their concerns about inclusivity in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), but that they were not experiencing sufficient spiritual nurture in their lives and activities. This sounded an alarm of concern for me about spiritual nurture for those involved in social justice endeavors and ministries in our presbytery.

There was a new small group forming under the Presbytery of New Covenant's Spiritual Formation Network to explore the connection of spiritual formation and social justice. Discussion about social justice and the need for spiritual nurture highlighted the reality that people whom Christ calls to challenge unjust systems often find exhaustion and despair prowling nearby; only through Grace may one receive the peace and joy beyond human control that keeps the prowlers from becoming partners. A working definition of social justice as efforts for systemic change helped to differentiate social justice from helping ministries. As we discussed the need for spiritual nurture, those involved in social justice reported an underlying

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Jane T. MacColl is a Minister of Word and Sacrament (Honorably Retired) and retired Marriage and Family therapist now living in Texas. She currently serves on the Ecclesiastical Affairs Committee and Spiritual Formation Group of New Covenant Presbytery. Marguerite D. Scott, MSW, DASD is an elder on the Session of St. Philip Presbyterian Church, Houston TX. A spiritual director trained at San Francisco Theological Seminary who now leads spiritual life retreats and teaches spiritual practices, Meg is past-convenor of the Presbytery of New Covenant Spiritual Formation Network. She can be reached at [megdscott@earthlink.net](mailto:megdscott@earthlink.net) or 281-440-6510.

awareness of anger, despair, spiritual dryness, and mean-spirited judgments both in intra-personal and interpersonal experiences. The need to offer time and opportunity for spiritual renewal in short sessions was obvious.

I sought out the leadership of the group and offered to lead one of the meetings. Trained as a spiritual director at San Francisco Theological Seminary, I have experience facilitating small groups using a variety of contemplative formats. I offered to lead one of the meetings of the Spiritual Formation/Social Justice Connection, the small group focusing on the concern for spiritual nurture, in its early stages of meeting monthly. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the contemplative format for the two-hour meeting and the willingness of the participants worked together. We left the meeting calmer and more energized than when we had begun.

A contemplative format for the meeting was adopted. In 2003, the SF/SJC group met monthly at the Presbyterian Center to offer two hours of contemplative listening time for anyone involved in social justice. At the heart of the small group meeting is a process that fosters hearing our own openings and obstacles to God's presence in our ministries, listening for God's nudging and invitation, and being sensitive to how this is taking place in others as well.

After several months of meetings two participants described their experiences:

**God calls me to contemplative action and particularly to eco-justice concerns. In the Spiritual Formation/Social Justice Connection contemplative meeting, the silence helps me release some of my personal agendas and the scripture meditation creates space for the Spirit to move. I delight in hearing other people's experiences as well as sharing my own. Many times I leave less attached to tiredness and negativity while feeling more thankful and awe-filled.**

Another wrote,

**I usually have two social justice concerns on which I focus. So to take time to stop "doing" and to be open to the Holy Spirit's guidance through scripture and examen questions is a source of renewal for me. Participating in the Spiritual Formation/Social Justice Connection meeting is like going to the well. I leave the gathering with increased calm, but also energy for going forward.**

The contemplative model now used in the SF/SJC meeting is an adaptation of the San Francisco Theological Seminary Youth Ministry and Spirituality Project model for adults in Youth Ministry. The specifics of that model for encouraging and spiritually nourishing adults involved in congregational youth ministry activities are available by

contacting [www.ymsp.org](http://www.ymsp.org). Since the SF/SJC group is seeking to hold space for the spiritual nurture of individuals going out into social justice ministries and not for working together as a group in a community, the time spent in the sacred reading of Scripture, *lectio divina*, practiced individually rather than as a group (see page 12). To be clear about how the meeting unfolds with the intention of being open to God's guidance here is a sample from a recent meeting.

The SF/SJC group meets from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. once a month in the chapel of the presbytery office. Anyone involved in social justice is invited to participate. Some bring their lunch, and others their art supplies. There are handouts of the meeting format, the SF/SJC Guidelines, and the individual *lectio divina* process. At the appointed time those gathered become quiet and the facilitator lights the candle for the opening ritual for recognizing God saying, "God is our home, Christ make us one, Holy Spirit come, Thy will be done." Then those assembled join in the opening words chosen for that month, for example, "Life is a gift to be received with gratitude and a task to be pursued with courage. [We are] free to seek life within the purpose of God: to develop and protect the resources of nature for the common welfare, to work for justice and peace in society, and in other ways to use his creative powers for the fulfillment of human life" (Confession of 1967). The facilitator then reads aloud the SF/SJC Guidelines to review the group's contract:

### *The Spiritual Formation/Social Justice Connection Guidelines*

- We have an unwavering commitment to confidentiality. We can trust that what is said in our group will go no farther. One may talk about one's own experience out of the group, but not another's.
- This group is assembled for the purpose of exploring spiritual nurture/renewal and to receive God's guidance concerning our call(s) in social justice.
- Our major activity is grateful listening.
- We will use "I" statements rather than "you" statements when stating our observations. This is not the place for extended discussions, solving problems, rescuing, deciding, debating, or interfering with another's contribution.
- We will respect each member's personal theology, political beliefs, and opinions. We will not attempt to convince others of the correctness of our beliefs.
- We will be non-judgmental and non-self-righteous in our relationship with each other.
- We will pray for each other and our calls and ministries in social justice.


Then each participant is invited to share in the “check-in” for recognizing each other. Three minutes is allotted for each person. This is an opportunity for contemplative listening, rather than active dialogue. Next is the “community check-in,” a time to recognize our brokenness and our gifts in community. Participants may speak about perceived joys and frustrations in their particular social justice group/community. Again, contemplative listening and holding each in prayerful space is the process. After a moment of silence the group focuses on “the Practice of Attending to God,” using a daily lectionary passage for the *lectio divina*; the facilitator keeps time. After twenty minutes any one may share their experience. Some do, others pass. Again there is no dialogue, just contemplative listening.

Following this time of sacred reading, the process moves to attending to each person’s call or sense of mission using examen questions. In the January 2004 meeting the questions were: “Considering this last month in social justice endeavors what has spiritually nurtured me? What has spiritually drained me? Where can or do I sense the hand of God moving in either of these?” Participants ponder the questions silently and some speak their responses. Prayerful listening continues, and intercessory prayer begins.

In preparing to return to the world, time is spent in what we term “planning or engaging in our call” with a question about social justice, that is, efforts for systemic change. For example, “What may God be stirring within me about social justice or a particular area of social justice?” Some speak their responses aloud, while others are silent. The time ends with a closing prayer as we offer our efforts and ourselves to God. The next meeting time is confirmed and the meeting adjourns.

Through the months of gathering for contemplative listening, the participants have shared vital insights received as to their on-going efforts and ministries in social justice. These have ranged from deep knowing and encouragement to step forward, clear urging to hold still and increase self-care, and times of sensing that the only right action was waiting for God. Among the comments shared:

- Social justice is a way of life, not an issue;
- Oppression comes out in different forms;
- Take a tiny little part and nudge it;
- I need to know how I participate in evil;
- It is time to name and claim how we are called to social justice and to empower others to see their life through a new lens;
- Since God found a way in Christ, I need to be more consumed with God than with human struggle;
- I seek faith and trust that God will find ways;
- Refocus from numbers and fear to being leaven of the Spirit.

Grateful to the Holy Spirit for the time and opportunity to be spiritually nurtured, the Spiritual Formation/Social Justice Connection group of New Covenant Presbytery continues to meet. We ask for your prayers as we seek to be open to receive God’s love, nurture, and guidance. 

The Spiritual Formation Network of the Presbytery of New Covenant formed in August 1998. The SFN Mission Statement is: We are a community of people drawn together by our desire for our lives to be molded into the image of Jesus Christ through the movement of the Holy Spirit. We seek to cooperate with the work of the Spirit through certain practices which make us more attentive, receptive and responsive to God’s touch.

The current emphases of the SFN are

- To provide a resource network of spiritual directors. The spiritual directors have developed an informational brochure, a list of how to locate a spiritual director, a list of spiritual directors accountable to this presbytery, and information about First Steps into Spiritual Direction.
- To provide contemplative retreats. Silent retreats are offered several times a year at High Island Retreat Center on Bolivar Peninsula and at Villa de Matel Ruah Center in Houston.
- To provide educational opportunities focused on spiritual direction and the spiritual disciplines. Workshops and presentations are provided by the SFN and by request for local congregations.
- To provide quality materials regarding spiritual direction and the spiritual disciplines in the Resource Center of the presbytery.
- To continue to develop the High Island Retreat Center into a site for individual and group contemplative retreats.

Spiritual formation is practicing disciplines that can open us to the activity of the Holy Spirit that molds our lives into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Spiritual disciplines include:

- |                          |                         |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Contemplation          | • Service               |
| • Contemplative Silence  | • Sabbath Keeping       |
| • Fasting                | • Spiritual Direction   |
| • Hospitality            | • Spiritual Discernment |
| • Prayer                 | • Works of Compassion   |
| • Meditation             | and Justice             |
| • Immersion in Scripture | • Worship               |

Open steering committee meetings are held several times a year for the purpose of discernment and planning for the SFN. The SFN is part of Connectional Ministries in the presbytery.

Contact Carrie Walker [[cwalker@pbyofnewcovenant.org](mailto:cwalker@pbyofnewcovenant.org) or (800) 444-1278] at the Presbytery of New Covenant to be notified of SFN meetings, to schedule individual or small group retreats at High Island Retreat Center, and to receive spiritual direction information.

# Lectio Divina (Holy Reading) with Written Text

(For individual use)

*Lectio Divina* is the most traditional way of cultivating friendship with Christ. It is a way of listening to the texts of scripture as if we were in conversation with Christ and he were suggesting the topics of conversation.

## Prior to *Lectio*: Silence

Goal: To prepare for God's message to you by allowing yourself to experience God whom is present in all of life.

Method: Shift your awareness to focus on input from each of your different senses; on your entire body, noting areas of tension and calm; on the breathing of God; and on the heartbeat of God.

Share with God an image or feeling that names where you are right now.

## 1. *Lectio* – reading/listening

(Read and listen to the passage two times)

Goal: To listen for God's message to you in this passage.

Method: With the intention of listening to God's address to you, let yourself be drawn to the word or phrase from the reading that grabs, strikes, nudges, calls, resonates, stirs, calms, or unnerves you, the word or phrase that most addresses your sensations, imagination, feelings, thoughts.

Share with God the word or phrase from the reading that most affects you.

## 2. *Meditatio* - meditation

(Read and listen, again, to the passage)

Goal: To receive the essence of God's message to you.

Method: Open yourself again to the reading by repeating the word or phrase that came to you during the *Lectio* phase. Allow yourself to receive feelings, thoughts, images, and sensations that invite you to deeper meaning in your relationship with God, yourself, others, society, and nature/creation.

Share with God the word or phrase that names the feeling, thought, image, sensation, or desire that stirs in you.

## 3. *Oratio* – prayer

Goal: To respond to God.

Method: Express to God your thoughts, feelings, and desires about the meaning that has emerged for you (e.g. give thanks and praise, ask for help, surrender, etc.) Journal, if useful.

Share silently with God.

## 4. *Contemplatio* – contemplation

Goal: To rest with God in what has arisen. Rest in the word, phrase, image, thought, feeling, or sensation as you would rest in a hammock. Let it hold you. Be still.

Method: Opening your whole being to absorb what God has stirred in you.

This is the "Amen" of the reading. So be it!

## Post-Lectio

Goal: To express and incarnate your experience. What insight or action step comes from this *Lectio Divina*? What is the invitation from I Am for incarnational witness?

Method: Write, draw, or create an expression of your experience and your response to it.

Share silently with God.

One may choose to share briefly with the group and be held in contemplative silence. ☩

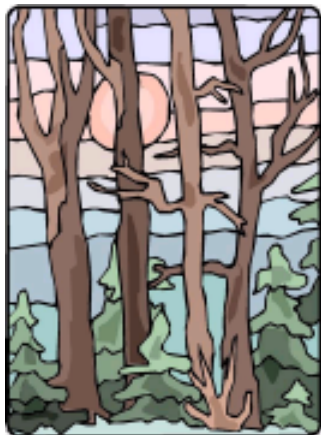
*Prepared by Meg Scott, DASD. Adapted from handout by Maria Tattu Bowen and Mary Rose Bumpus. SFTS, DASD Training, 1/99; and from The Method of Centering Prayer by Thomas Keating, Contemplative Outreach, LTD.*



For other models of individual and group *lectio divina*, as well as examen and other spiritual disciplines, see the Office of Spiritual Formation's new resource, "**Lord,**

**Teach Us to Pray.**" It is available through Presbyterian Distribution Services by calling (800) 524-2612 and asking for item #70-440-04-001. The cost is \$10 plus shipping and handling.

Bookmarkers with the method of *lectio divina* printed on them are also available from PDS. Call and ask for item #70-440-03-005 (English) or #70-440-03-006 (Spanish). The cost for each bookmarker is 25¢ plus shipping and handling.

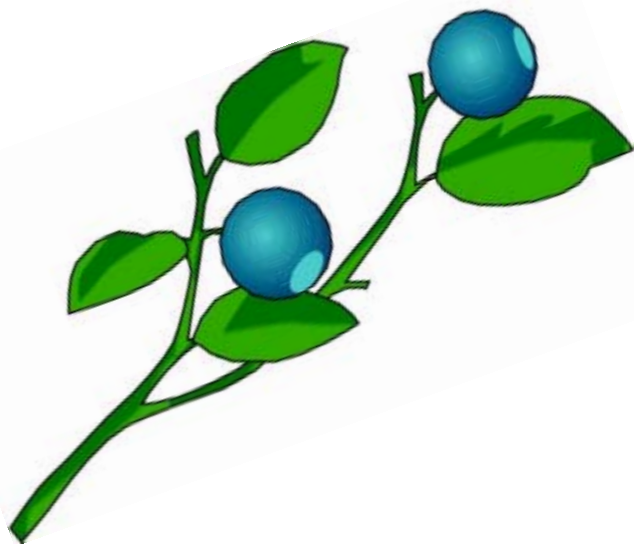


The Theology, Spirituality and Worship Committee of the Presbytery of the Cascades (Oregon) has established *Touchpoints*, an occasional paper providing Presbyterians in their area with the opportunity to share their reflections and creative responses to the Word of God. The editor, Shirley Bennett Tormey, notes that the mission of *Touchpoints* is grounded in

our Directory for Worship (*Book of Order* W-5.3002): She writes, “Through thoughtful study and prayerful meditation upon Scripture, the invitation is extended to seek touchpoints and explore relationships between Scripture and life, to enter imaginatively into the world and events portrayed in the Bible for the purpose of participating in what God does and promises there, and wrestle with the challenges and demands of the gospel.”

For more information on *Touchpoints*, contact:  
 The Theology, Spirituality, and Worship Committee  
 Presbytery of the Cascades  
 P.O. Box 1145  
 Phoenix OR 97535-1145  
 Phone (541) 535-7313

What is your presbytery or congregation doing to promote the relationship between spirituality and justice, theology, worship, or other central missions of the Christ’s church? Send a note to *Hungryhearts* to share *your* good news ([sshusset@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:sshusset@ctr.pcusa.org)), or the presbyteries of New Covenant or Cascades to learn more about their ministries.



## Presbyterian and Contemplative?

Growing up as a Presbyterian in New Jersey, if you had asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would not have answered, “contemplative.” As a Presbyterian, that was a foreign word, a bygone leftover from our pre-Reformation days. Now, when people ask me what I want to do, I re-phrase the question and tell them what I *want* to be.

For the past 5 years, I have changed how I want to be, and as a result, how I do what I do. Since the fall of 1999, I have become a spiritual director, retreat/workshop leader, and an Associate of the Dominican Order, and above all, I have become contemplative.

As this lifestyle change continues to develop, my desire to be contemplative grows. With that growth, however, is an awareness that I am not the only Presbyterian who feels this way. My desire is to be contemplative with other Presbyterians. If you share this desire, I would be blessed and grateful to hear from you.

Richard Rife  
 Waterville First Presbyterian Church  
 611 Farnsworth Rd  
 Waterville, OH 43566  
 (419) 878-2806  
[soccerrev@juno.com](mailto:soccerrev@juno.com)

If you would like to know more about living a contemplative lifestyle, contact Steve Shussett at the Office of Spiritual Formation: [sshusset@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:sshusset@ctr.pcusa.org)

## 2004 Spiritual Formation Dinner Richmond, Virginia

Join us on Wednesday, June 30th from 5:30-7:30 p.m. at the Richmond Marriot for the sixth annual Spiritual Formation Dinner. This year we are pleased to welcome Marjorie Thompson, Presbyterian Minister of Word and Sacrament and author of the widely-acclaimed book *Soul Feast*. She currently serves as the spiritual director and writer for the Upper Room’s *Companions in Christ* project. Use your General Assembly registration form to purchase tickets, or go to the ticket booth in the Richmond Convention Center.



## Give Us a Word

### ***Embracing the World: Praying for Justice and Peace***

Jane E. Vennard

San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003.

Reviewed by Karen Ball

As a spiritual director, I often listen to directees talk about prayer — how and why it is or isn't happening, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, new ways of prayer, or what it means to have prayers answered. However, I have seldom been asked something as specific as, "How do I pray for justice and peace?" Since the onset of the war in Iraq, that is changing. Many of my directees (and I) now look at justice and peace prayers as particularly important.

Jane Vennard has written this book to address some of these issues, and present a framework for praying for justice and peace. It arose out of a class she taught at Iliff School of Theology, where she is senior adjunct faculty in prayer and spirituality. Vennard modeled the course on a circular process of prayer that included intercession, action, renewal, and transformation. In testing out the model, she later added discernment at the center of the circle. Her book covers these five forms of prayer.

Many people, both in direction and not, are afraid of prayer, fearing that they may say something "wrong" or that they will anger or disappoint God. Vennard wisely points out that "When we cry out our anger in prayer, God hears, recognizes, and honors the rage in our hearts but will not let us remain there. When we are naked in our honesty, God will guide us to more gentle forms of prayer." In guiding our directees in prayer, we may see and hear a great deal of anger regarding the world situation. If we hear, recognize, and honor that rage, we give our directees the freedom to develop honesty in their prayer.

Vennard affirms those who deny having a prayer life (and I have a few directees that do), who understand their relationship to God through their actions. She reminds us that action is prayer when it is motivated by love and dedicated to God. But activity can also be an excuse for not taking time to be quiet and listen to God. My own pastor once told me that too many opportunities to do good things are not a gift from God, but from Satan. That is why we need prayers for renewal and transformation. I was pleased to see Vennard give as much attention to creative forms of renewal — such as knitting, writing, or laughing — as to the more traditional forms of meditation or centering prayer.

The only part of this book that caused me concern was

the chapter on discernment. Although there are several disclaimers about there not being one "Will of God," she gives too many examples of God's "will" being what the person really didn't want to do, including her own journey to seminary. She calls discernment "a mutual endeavor in which God helps us find a new direction. . . ." My own experience is that often I discern that I am already on the right path and don't need to take off in a new direction. I agree when she says, "God actually wants what we want." Too often directees get caught in a trap of not doing anything because they cannot "discern" the one thing that God wants them to do.

A particularly nice feature of the book is the invitation to prayer at the end of each chapter, with ways for the reader to apply what was discussed. Throughout the book, Vennard reminds us that prayer does not take us out of the world, but draws us more fully into it. She gives us a good model for both living and praying in the world.

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Karen Ball is a writer, spiritual director, retreat leader, and strategic marketing director for a national engineering firm. This review is reprinted by permission from *Presence: The Journal of Spiritual Directors International*. **Please do not copy without their permission.** For more information about SDI or to subscribe to *Presence*, call (425) 455-1565, go to [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org), or write: Spiritual Directors International, PO Box 3584, Bellevue, WA 98009-3584, or [office@sdiworld.org](mailto:office@sdiworld.org). Jane Vennard's book *Praying with Body and Soul* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1998) was reviewed in the Winter 1999 issue of *Hungryhearts*.

In order to find God, we do not have to leave the world, and to plunge into some kind of mystical void. On the contrary, Christ is looking at us through the eyes of all those whom we meet. Once we recognize his universal presence, all our acts of practical service to others become acts of prayer.

Kallistos Ware,  
*The Orthodox Way*, p. 120.

## **Credo**

William Sloane Coffin

Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004

Reviewed by Leon Howell

The noted preacher and social-justice advocate William Sloane Coffin is also a master of the written word. He crafts phrases, sentences and paragraphs that provoke, inspire, amuse or convict. Try this: “I love the recklessness of faith; first you leap, and then you grow wings.” Or this: “Fundamentalists forget that love demands discernment as well as obedience.” And this: “There is no smaller package in the world than a man wrapped up in himself.” One more: “The Eucharist quenches my thirst for hope.” These and many more memorable sayings appear in *Credo*, a verbal and spiritual feast from Coffin’s fertile mind and rich life.

This is not a book to read in one sitting. It can be entered on any page. As in Dag Hammarskjöld’s *Markings*, the thoughts—about 750 in all?—rise from the page to be pondered, debated, savored and meditated upon. Here is a paragraph-length sample:

**Socrates had it wrong; it is not the unexamined but finally the uncommitted life that is not worth living. Descartes too was mistaken; “Cognito ergo sum”—I think therefore I am? Nonsense. “Amo ergo sum”? I love therefore I am. Or, as St. Paul with unconscious eloquence wrote, “Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” I believe that. I believe it is better not to live than not to love.**

Coffin finds the best translation of “credo” to be, “I have given my heart to.” And he affirms, “However imperfectly, I have given my heart to the teaching and example of Christ.” Just how thoroughly that is true may surprise some readers who know Coffin primarily for his political stances. In fact, he is a consummate evangelist. He conveys a faith of joy, risk, freedom, empowerment, and engagement. As novelist and former Roman Catholic priest James Carroll puts it in an eloquent foreword, *Credo* derives its power from Coffin’s “convictions that God exists and that God’s existence matters.”

A life of remarkable breadth and depth provides the ingredients for Coffin’s word magic. He was born to privilege and grew up during the Great Depression. He trained in Paris to be a concert pianist. During military service in World War II, he was a liaison officer with the French and Russian forces, and was General George S. Patton’s Russian interpreter. After the war he served in the CIA. He gained national notoriety for his social activism during his 18 years as chaplain at Yale University, participated in the dangerous Freedom Rides during the civil rights movement, and protested the Vietnam War (and he faced criminal charges with Dr. Benjamin Spock for supporting resistance to the draft). He became the model for Rev. Sloan, the minister in the comic strip *Doodlesbury*. After ten years as senior pastor at New York’s Riverside Church, he headed SANE-Freeze, focused on ending the nuclear threat.

For more than a decade Coffin has journeyed from his base in tiny, postcard-lovely Stafford, Vermont, to teach, speak, confer, agitate, marry, bury, and console. In September Yale Divinity School established the annual William Sloane Coffin Peace and Justice Award. When Coffin returned to preach at Riverside Church in October, UN General Secretary Kofi Annan made a special visit to hear him. When the Children’s Defense Fund’s Marian Wright Edelman honored him with a dinner in Washington in November, Andrew Young, Bill Moyers, and Cora Weiss were among those who testified to his influence. He was the subject of a *New Yorker* profile in the December 1 “Talk of the Town” section.

*Credo* has a special poignancy. As Coffin, 79, states in the preface, his “years appear to be hastening to their end.” A terminal heart condition does not leave him long to live. He still husbands his energy to go forth and speak from time to time, and to be honored, but his condition did not allow him to compile this book. So Westminster John Knox Press editor Stephanie Egnotovich read through “a lifetime of sermons and my unpublished speeches” to excerpt *Credo*’s contents.

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Leon Howell is a writer based in Washington D.C. This review, “Summing Up,” is reprinted by permission from the December 27, 2003, issue of the *Christian Century*. Subscriptions: \$49/yr. from P.O. Box 378, Mt. Morris, IL 61054. 1-800-208-4097. Please do not copy without their permission.

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*Editor* Steve Shussett  
*Circulation* Cathy Duncan  
*Mailing Address* 100 Witherspoon Street  
Louisville KY 40202-1396  
*Toll free* 888-728-7228, ext. 5306  
*Direct dial* 502-569-5306  
*Website* [www.pcusa.org/spiritualformation](http://www.pcusa.org/spiritualformation)

**The Office of Spiritual Formation**

*Administrative Assistant*  
Cathy Duncan [CDuncan@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:CDuncan@ctr.pcusa.org)  
*Associate for Spiritual Formation*  
Kris Haig [KHaig@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:KHaig@ctr.pcusa.org)  
*Associate for Spiritual Formation*  
Steve Shussett [SShussett@ctr.pcusa.org](mailto:SShussett@ctr.pcusa.org)

*A Spirit of Justice*

Peacemaking: The Path to Becoming Children of God <i>Erin Thomas</i>	3
Spiritual Formation and Social Justice <i>Jane T. MacColl</i>	9
Spiritual Formation/Social Justice Connection <i>Marguerite D. Scott</i>	9
Presbyterian and Contemplative? <i>Richard Rife</i>	13
Book Reviews	14

