

Stirrings



A Basilian Peace & Justice Newsletter

Summer 2018

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Humanae Vitae and the Formation of Conscience

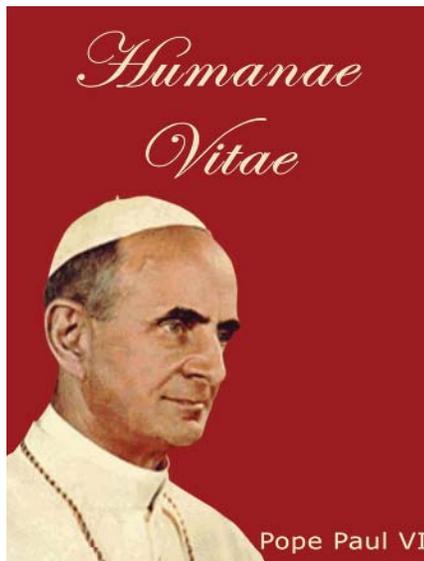
*Any moral decision, including regulation of birth,
must align, as well as one's conscience is able to discern,
with the dignity of the human person as a co-creator with God.*

By Warren Schmidt CSB

July 25, 2018 marked the 50th anniversary of Pope Paul VI's promulgation of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, "On the Regulation of Birth." *Humanae Vitae*'s final paragraph begins with a papal summons to promote, based on the encyclical, the vital "work of education, of progress, and of charity" (HV, 31).

However, I argue that disproportionate attention has been paid to paragraph 14 of *Humanae Vitae*, both by the encyclical's supporters and detractors. *Humanae Vitae* 14 condemns birth control methods other than those based on awareness of natural cycles of fertility as "intrinsically wrong," in other words evil by the object of the moral act, regardless of any subjective moral intention. Yet this condemnation of nonfertility awareness-based contraceptive methods is only part of *Humanae Vitae* 14, which excludes abortion and "direct sterilization, whether of the man or of the woman," as lawful means of birth regulation.

Humanae Vitae 14 follows from the central contention of *Humanae Vitae* 11, that "each and every marital act must of necessity retain its



intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life." Conversely, this encyclical's emphasis on the objective morality of various means of regulation of births denies neither the role of subjective elements in this or any moral decision, nor the primacy of the moral subject or decision-maker's conscience on the issue of birth control.

Humanae Vitae 16 distinguishes between natural methods dependent on awareness of fertility cycles, precursor methods to today's Natural Family Planning (NFP), and methods of birth control that artificially prevent sexual relations from being open to procreation. However, intrinsic human dignity and, arising from this, the primacy and formation of conscience are the primary foci of *Humanae Vitae*. The weighing of the objective morality of birth control methods based on their relative openness to procreation is a secondary focus of *Humanae Vitae*.

Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* briefly treats the issue of regulation of births (GS, 52). Yet *Gaudium et Spes*' discussion of birth regulation
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Humanae Vitae

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tion and marriage and family life more broadly must be read in continuity with the document's definition of conscience as "the most secret core and sanctuary of a person, [where one] is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths" (GS, 16).

In *Gaudium et Spes* and magisterial documents after it, including *Humanae Vitae*, all else is secondary to the dignity of the human person, and conscience, the echo of God's voice within us that allows us to discern and make moral decisions in keeping with our God-given dignity. *Humanae Vitae*, crucially, begins with an acknowledgement of the role of conscience in moral decision-making concerning the regulation of births (HV, 1). This would become the key hermeneutic to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops' September 27, 1968 pastoral guideline on *Humanae Vitae*, the Winnipeg Statement as well as to later documents like Pope John Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio* and Pope Francis' *Amoris Laetitia*.

As the fruit of three CCCB commissions—Theology, Religious Education, and Social Doctrine—the Winnipeg Statement, according to then-Bishop Alexander Carter, was designed neither as a defense or rebuttal of *Humanae Vitae*. The Winnipeg Statement also emphasizes the dignity of

the human person and the primacy of individual and social responsibility to form conscience (GS, 16; WS, 8-10), a position said to have been met "with satisfaction" by Pope Paul VI.

To cheerlead for *Humanae Vitae*'s position on non-NFP birth regulation methods, while vilifying the estimated 68% of sexually-active Catholics (U.S.) who use non-NFP methods and the many more, often in good if erring conscience, who do not view non-NFP contraception as morally wrong, misses *Humanae Vitae*'s foremost point: Any moral decision, including regulation of birth, must align, as well as one's conscience is able to discern, with the dignity of the human person as a co-creator with God. Blithe disregard for *Humanae Vitae*'s teaching, because it extends beyond the objective immorality of non-fertility-awareness-based birth control, also misses this point.

Fifty years after *Humanae Vitae*, the frequently reductionist and polemicized reception of this encyclical by both supporters and dissenters has failed to address the broad range of social problems the encyclical boldly anticipated. If movements like #MeToo are any indication, ostensibly-advanced societies still reduce the human person, particularly women, to objects of selfish pleasure to be overpowered. Polemic fails to educate; to form consciences. It fails the litmus test of progress in social justice and, most glaringly, of charity due our intrinsic and co-creative human dignity.

Warren is currently on graduate studies at the Institut Catholique de Paris.



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The World BEYOND War

The conference will take place in Toronto at OCAD University (Ontario College of Art and Design University), 100 McCaul St., Toronto

The conference will explore how the rule of law has been used both to restrain war and to legitimize it and how we can re-design systems to abolish the institution of war and uphold human and ecological justice.

Blue Scarf Peace Walk

AFTER THE CONFERENCE: Sunday, September 23, 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. Blue Scarf Peace Walk. Meet at Grange Park on Beverly St. just south of Dundas St. W.

Stirrings

A Peace & Justice Newsletter
A project of the Basilian Centre for Peace & Justice

Stirring: (noun) the act of moving or putting into motion, activity

Party's Over:

Why We Need to Abolish Political Parties

As Simone Weil observed decades ago, they're self-serving entities that elevate power and control above justice and the truth.

By Andrew Nikiforuk
(29 Jun 2018 | TheTyee.ca)

In 1943 Simone Weil, a French philosopher and mystic, concluded that political parties had become organizations dedicated to one purpose: “killing in all souls the sense of truth and justice.”

Although her radical essay calling for the abolition of political parties wasn't published until 1950, it remains the only polished political stone on a beach now smothered in plastic. The rightness of Weil's argument is about as obvious as the opioid crisis, the existential threat of climate change or the demise of global economic growth.

In the United States two political parties have now divided the nation with the kind of violent partisan rhetoric that erupted just before the Civil War. Across the Western world, political parties have turned parliaments into digital circuses, provoking waves of contempt among ordinary people.

As a consequence, social research and the daily news suggest that people are losing faith in democracies and looking for caudillos (dictators) to set things right. Declining voter turnout also indicates that people no longer regard political parties as legitimate instruments of democratic representation.

Canada reflects this dark reality too: every party here seems dedicated to breaking promises or thwarting the public interest with equanimity. It's difficult to tell any difference between Liberals, Tories and New Democrats because all serve power, or the elites that employ that power in a technological society.

Now to truly appreciate the brilliance of Weil's short essay, you need to know one or two things about her. Born in 1909 Weil lived among ordinary working people and donated most of her money earned by teaching Greek and philosophy to labour movements. In 1938 God captured her, but Weil rejected organized religion or any form of mass conformism. She wrote with the honesty of an unwashed prophet. She did not believe, for example, that morality progressed like a plane on a straight runway only to rise into the air. Love did not offer consolation, she wrote, but light.

She died in a British sanitarium of TB and starvation while dreaming of joining the resistance to Nazism in France. None of her incredibly important work saw the light of day until after her death. Weil's essay is based on her keen observations of life in Europe in the 1930s, a revolutionary period not unlike our own. Having watched one party after another betray the best interests of working people in Europe, Weil saw what just about any citizen could see today: that political parties seem designed to destroy any vestige of democracy as well as any opportunity for free thought.

Weil measured the performance of political parties against three critical things that matter in life: truth, justice and the public interest. She found that they dishonored all three principles because a party's essential character was anathema to such pursuits.

To Weil all political parties possess three dangerous traits: they work as machines to “generate collective passions;” they strive to exert pressure



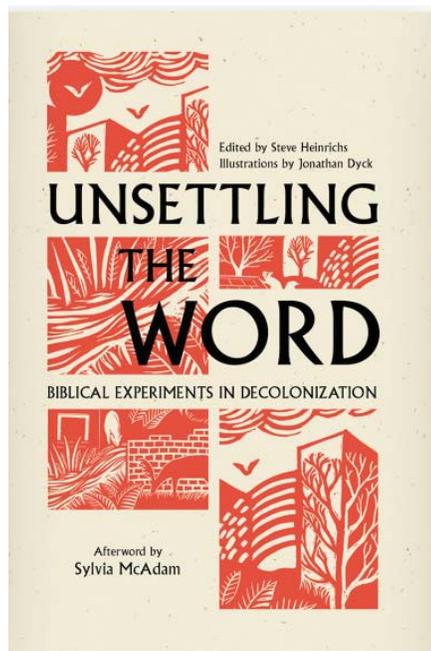
upon the minds of their members with propaganda; and they have but one goal — to promote their own growth “without limits.” As such every party becomes a means to an end and that end can only be totalitarian in nature. Weil, then, regarded political parties as self-augmenting and self-serving entities primarily concerned about gaining and securing power.

Today we'd recognize many of these characteristics in the constant campaigning, the rigorous branding and the ruthless employment of techniques to engineer votes either through Facebook or data miners like Cambridge Analytica.

Weil observed that when a person joined a political party, they gave up any pretense of being interested in truth, justice and the public interest.

Just imagine an MP or candidate, she asked, making the following fantastical declaration prior to an election: “Whenever I shall have to examine any political or social issue, I swear I will absolutely forget that I am the member of a certain political group; my sole concern will be to ascertain what should be done in order to best serve the public interest and justice.” Any Canadian politicians caught making such a declaration today would be demoted, belittled, slandered or expelled from their party.

Andrew Nikiforuk is an award winning journalist who has been writing about the energy industry for two decades and is a contributing editor to The Tyee.



Biblical Experiments in Decolonization

For generations, the Bible has been employed by settler colonial societies as a weapon to dispossess Indigenous and racialized peoples of their lands, cultures, and spiritualities. Given this devastating legacy, many want nothing to do with it. But is it possible for the exploited and their allies to reclaim the Bible from the dominant powers? Can we make it an instrument for justice in the cause of the oppressed? Even a nonviolent weapon towards decolonization?

In *Unsettling the Word*, 60 Indigenous and Settler authors come together to wrestle with the Scriptures, re-reading them and re-imagining the ancient text for the sake of reparative futures.

Created by Mennonite Church Canada's Indigenous-Settler Relations program, *Unsettling the Word*, is intended to nurture courageous conversations with the Bible, our current settler colonial contexts, and the Church's call to costly peacemaking.

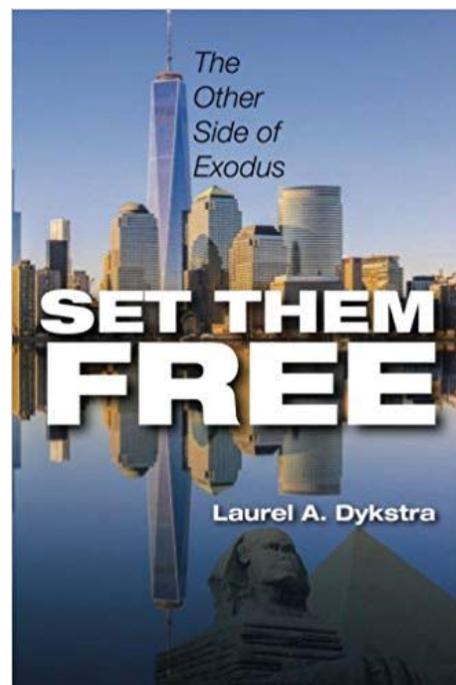
To order *Unsettling the Word* please visit: commonword.ca

The Other Side of Exodus

Exodus is a beautiful and powerful book. A primary theme is that God sides with the oppressed and marginalized. But Exodus is a heritage from which people of privilege should not be cut off. *Set Them Free*, is a liberation reading of the book of Exodus from a first-world perspective. This means that rather than identifying with the Israelites, I take stock of my immense privilege under corporate capitalism and identify with the Egyptian oppressors. The first half of Exodus is set in Egypt, so more accurately, this book is a first-world reading of Exodus 1-15... True liberation for the privileged is hard and it will feel like loss. Indeed it will be about loss, but it is loss of what was never ours.

This book is also a feminist project. It looks at the intersecting forms of dominion at work in empire, particularly through the stories of women, known and hidden, in the text and in our modern context. To compare Exodus to our present situation, the book moves back and forth between close readings of the text and readings of the modern world.

From the Introduction of Set Them Free by Laurel Dykstra, an Anglican priest and community-based biblical teacher, preacher, scholar living in Vancouver, BC Canada.



How Does One Become an Ally?

In Mexico our One World group met with a Jesuit priest working with base communities - studying the liberating stories of the Bible with the poor and discerning how the stories relate to their own liberation. He challenged us to be a travelling base community ourselves - hard to do when you are not really oppressed yourself. Reading Laurel Dykstra's book, *Set Them Free*, I realized that my place in the Exodus story is with the Egyptians! One role model in the story, who becomes an ally, is Pharaoh's daughter.

Working with Indigenous peoples, as a member of the Christian Peacemaker Teams in Canada and the United States, I have become very aware that I am in fact a colonial settler and that our Bible has been often misused to justify the marginalization of the Indigenous. *Unsettling the Word*, created by the Mennonite Church, provides a re-reading of the Bible's stories which challenges us to re-think our role as allies working for the needed reconciliation with the First Nations. Jennifer Henry's contribution to *Unsettling the Word* in "I Chose Miriam" puts us in the heart of Pharaoh's daughter.

Bob Holmes CSB

I Chose Miriam

By Jennifer Henry

You don't usually think of this as my story. You don't even know my name. And that's okay, if the story is about Miriam—her courage, her leadership, her voice. But my guess is that she is overlooked too, for the men—her hero brother and my villain father. Since I began to open my eyes, open my ears, I have been turned upside down with what it means to share DNA with those who commit genocide.

There are two things I can't deny. My ancestors sought to destroy Indigenous peoples—out of racial superiority, out of missionary zeal, out of lust for the land, out of illusions of purity. My ancestors. My own father, Pharaoh. My own blood. And I benefit from this terrible legacy. I have privilege I cannot disown. It would be easy to try to do so. I am not the Crown or a man in a man's world—what power do I really have? But my lineage, my colour, is royal. I want for little and my comfort comes from what my Settler ancestors have taken from Indigenous peoples—land, resources, labour. Any child of mine would be safe.

When I met Miriam at the river's edge it was one of those moments where I had to make a choice—to collude with my father or strive to ally with the women, Miriam and her mother and Shiprah, Puah, who dared defy him. The story says I took pity. I hope it wasn't that. Yet victim and saviour are narratives so engrained that it could have been. What I hope is that it was simply a human response to injustice—and, most importantly, a saying yes to Miriam, who opened a path forward.

There was, of course, nothing simple about it. It was a “No” in the face of genocide. I think I did what I could to stand with one girl, to support one boy, to ally with one family. I recognize that it didn't shake the foundations of my own privilege. And my mind and heart can never, should never, forget the many others, that the genocide goes on. I wasn't brave enough to stand up to all of that.

Looking back I wondered if my decision was the right one. Yes by Miriam's brilliance Moses spent his early days in his own family, his culture and language. But then the only way to ensure his survival was to bring him into my world. To assimilate him.

I should tell you – it would be unfair if I didn't – that I was childless. Did this seem like a solution to soften my own grief, to fill my own emptiness? Did my own needs



Jonathan Dyck

make me unable to see more systemic possibilities? Did I do what was right for me and call it allyship? Was it the right step in a wrong world or the wrong step in a world that could have been made more right?

I don't regret responding to Miriam, taking her lead, living in that moment by her cue, and not that of my father. It was a small but important rejection of the empire's dictates. And perhaps, I used my privilege the best I could. I couldn't do everything, yet I could respond in that moment, in solidarity, and I could begin – a little – to counter the terrible injustices. It felt subversive to draw from the empire's resources to support a mother's care for her child – a child the empire would have destroyed. No revolution, no Jubilee, but a small symbol, a small conspiracy of hope.

There is so much more I could have done, could do, so much more to be done. It is hard to even imagine a world where Miriam and I live as equals in resources, safety, and opportunity. But it has to be possible. I am nowhere near where I want to be. Narratives of superiority are hard to dislodge from blood and bone, but every day, I want to risk, with greater courage, to be part of a radically transformed world.

In the end, when you tell this story, I hope you focus not on the men alone, but on Miriam. Her courage and wisdom opened possibilities towards life when death was at every turn. You need not remember me, but if you do, what's most important is that I chose Miriam. However imperfect, that was a choice for life.

Inspired by Laurel Dykstra's **Set Them Free: The Other Side of Exodus**

Jennifer is the Executive Director of KAIROS Canada

Healing Our Image of God

By Marcus Borg

The images of God matter. They matter because they shape how we see the character of God. I want to talk about two primary images or metaphors for God's character that have dominated the Jewish and Christian traditions throughout their long history, reaching back into biblical times. Both are alive in the contemporary church. But they are so different from each other that they virtually produce two different religions, both using the same language.

The first of these models or ways of imaging God's character sees God as lawgiver and judge who also loves us. This is the image I grew up with and the one I suspect that many of you grew up with. It is also the the most common or visible image of God within the Christian church today. As lawgiver, God gave us the Ten Commandments and other laws about how to live. God told us what is expected of us.

As judge, God was also the enforcer of the law; there would be a judgment someday. And God also loved us. Because we weren't very good at keeping God's law, God provided an alternative means of satisfying God's law. In Old Testament times this was accomplished through Temple sacrifice as a way of atoning for disobedience. In New Testament times, God sent Jesus to be the



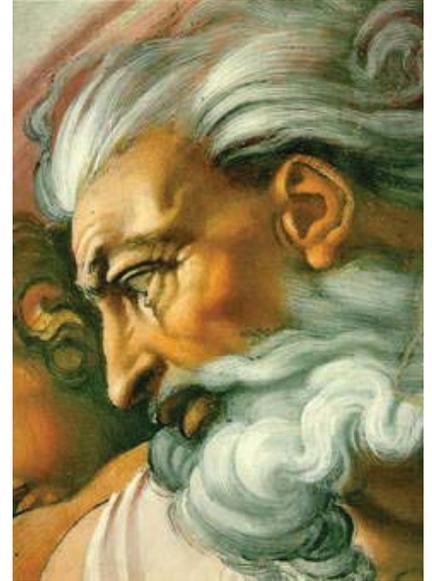
sacrifice, to die for our sins, thus making our forgiveness possible.

God did love us, but it was a conditional love. Namely, God would accept us if we were good enough, if our repentance was earnest enough, if we believed in Jesus. The dynamic of sin, guilt, and forgiveness and doing or believing what we needed to were central components of the Christian life. I have since learned to call this model of God the *monarchical model of God*. This *monarchical model* takes its name from the biblical metaphor of God as lord and king.

This way of imaging God's character has several effects on the Christian life. It suggests that the Christian life is about measuring up which leads to an in-group and out-group distinction. There are those that measure up and those who don't. Ultimately the *monarchical God* is God of Vengeance; the most common Christian vision of the second coming is as "divine ethnic cleansing." This is the God who focuses our attention on our own salvation.

There is another image of God, another primary model for imaging God's character in the biblical tradition as well as in the postbiblical Christian tradition. I call this one the *divine-lover model*. It is deeply rooted in the biblical tradition. It occurs frequently in the Hebrew Bible (see especially Isaiah 43 and Song of Songs). The image of God as lover is also widespread in the New Testament (see especially John 3).

As lover, God is compassionate. This is God's character. In the Bible compassion is related to the word for "womb." To say that God is compassionate is to say that God is like a like a womb, life-giving,



nourishing, with the feelings that a mother has for children of her womb. And feelings from the womb aren't simply soft. They can become fierce, as when the children of a mother's womb are threatened or badly treated.

As lover, God is not only compassionate, but also passionate about social justice. We often misunderstand what the word "justice" means or we understand it poorly. We sometimes think that justice has to do with punishment, with people getting what is coming to them for what they have done wrong. When we think that way, then we think that the opposite of justice is mercy. But in the Bible, the opposite of justice is injustice. Justice and injustice have to do with the way societies are structured, with the way political and economic systems are put together. God's justice is about social justice. God's justice is about the equitable distribution of God's earth, and a passion for God's justice sets you against all those systems designed by people in their own narrow self-interest to benefit the few at the expense of the many. Thus both a passion for justice and a passion for the environment flow out of imaging God as lover.

Edited from *Days of Awe and Wonder: How to be a Christian in the 21st Century*.



Punish or Reconcile?



By Richard Rohr ofm

Almost all religion and cultures that I know of have believed in one way or another that sin and evil are to be punished and that retribution is to be demanded of the sinner in this world—and usually the next world, too. Such retributive justice is a dualistic system of reward and punishment, good guys and bad guys, and makes perfect sense to the ego. I call it the economy of merit or “meritocracy.” This system seems to be the best that prisons, courtrooms, wars, and even most of the church (which should know better) appear equipped to do.

Jesus, many mystics, and other wisdom traditions—such as the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous—show that sin and failure are, in fact, an opportunity for the transformation and enlightenment of the offender. Mere counting and ledger-keeping is not the way of the Gospel. Our best self wants to restore relationships, and not just blame or punish. This is the “economy of grace.”

The trouble is that we defined God as “punisher in chief” instead

of Healer, Forgiver, and Reconciler and so the retribution model was legitimized all the way down!

What humanity really needs is an honest exposure of the truth and accountability for what has happened. Only then can human beings move ahead with dignity. Hurt needs to be spoken and heard. It does not just go away on its own. This can then lead

evolution of consciousness, even consciousness of where the Gospel is leading us?

As any good therapist will tell you, you cannot heal what you do not acknowledge. What you do not consciously acknowledge will remain in control from within, festering and destroying you and those around you. In the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus teaches, “If you bring forth that which is within you, it will save you. If you do not bring it forth, it will destroy you”

Only mutual apology, healing, and forgiveness offer a sustainable future for humanity. Otherwise, we are controlled by the past, individually and corporately. We all need to apologize, and we all need to forgive or this human project will surely self-destruct. No wonder that almost two-thirds of



to “restorative justice,” which is what the prophets invariably promise to the people of Israel (e.g., Ezekiel 16:53; Isaiah 57:17-19) and is exemplified in Jesus’ story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) and throughout his healing ministry. We lose that and we lose the Gospel itself.

The aim of restorative justice is to return the person to a useful position in the community. Thus, there can be healing on both sides. Such justice is a mystery that only makes sense to the soul. It is a direct corollary of our “economy of grace” and yet the term restorative justice only entered our vocabulary in the last few decades. How can we deny that there is an

Jesus’ teaching is directly or indirectly about forgiveness. Otherwise, history devolves into taking sides, bitterness, holding grudges, and the violence that inevitably follows. As others have said, “Forgiveness is to let go of our hope for a different past.” Reality is what it is, and such acceptance leads to great freedom, as long as there is also both accountability and healing forgiveness.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, A Spring Within Us: A Book of Daily Meditations (CAC Publishing: 2016), 194; and Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps (Franciscan Media: 2011), 38-39.



Peacemaking

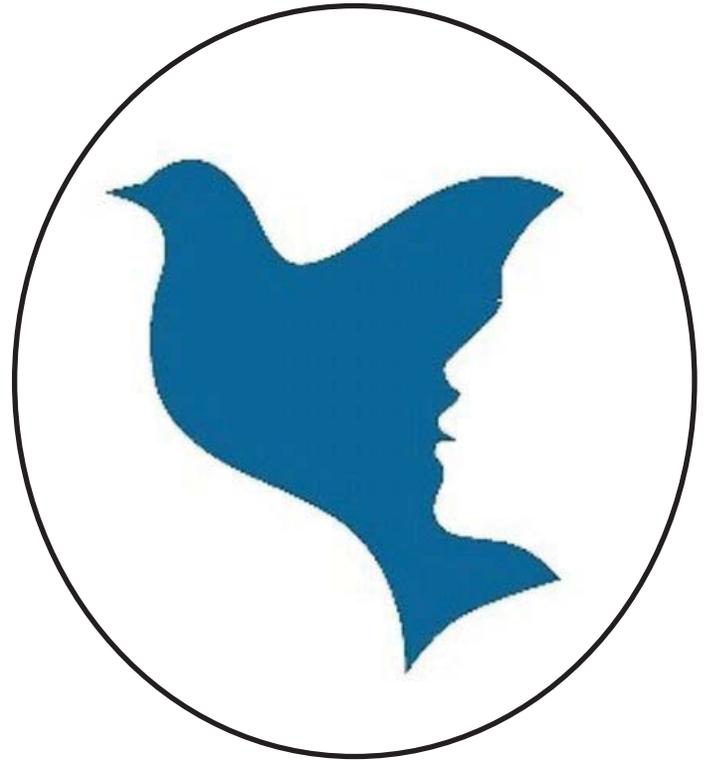
By Shane Clairborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove and Enuma Okoro

Peace is not about the absence of conflict; it's also about the presence of justice. Martin Luther King Jr. even distinguished between "the devil's peace" and God's true peace. A counterfeit peace exists when people are pacified or distracted or so beat up and tired of fighting that all seems calm. But true peace does not exist until there is justice, restoration, forgiveness. Peacemaking doesn't mean passivity. It's an act of interrupting injustice without mirroring injustice, the act of disarming evil without destroying the evildoer, the act of finding a third way that is neither fight nor flight but careful, arduous pursuit of reconciliation and justice. It's about a revolution of love that is big enough to set both the oppressed and the oppressor free.

Peace is about being able to recognize in the face of the oppressed our own faces, and in the hands of the oppressors our own hands. Peace, like most beautiful things, begins small. Matthew 18 gives us a clear process for approaching someone who has hurt or offended us; first we are to talk directly with them, not at them or around them. Most communities that have been around for a while (like a few decades or centuries) identify "straight talk," or creating an environment where people do not avoid conflict but speak honestly to one another, as one of the core values of healthy community. Straight talk is countercultural in a world that prefers politeness to honesty. In his rule St. Benedict of Nursia speaks passionately about the deadly poison of "murmuring," the negativity and dissension that can infect community and rot the fabric of love.

Peacemaking begins with what we can change – ourselves. But it doesn't end there. We are to be peacemakers in a world riddled with violence. That means interrupting violence with imagination, on our streets and in our world. This peace that is "not like any way the empire brings peace" is rooted in the nonviolence of the cross, where we see a Savior who loves his enemies so much he died for them.

Peace is often not our instinct, which is why it must be cultivated and grown in us. Even Jesus' key disciple, Peter, picks up his sword when the soldiers approach. Jesus' response is brilliant: he scolds Peter, and then heals the wounded persecutor, only to be dragged away and hung on a Roman cross. If ever there were a case for "just war"



or justified violence to protect the innocent, Peter had it. Yet Jesus rebukes his logic of the sword.

The early Christians said, "When Jesus disarmed Peter, he disarmed every Christian." For hundreds of years, Christians were never seen carrying swords, and they followed the way of the Prince of Peace even unto death, loving their enemies and blessing those who cursed them. It doesn't look like a good strategy for running an empire, but it is the narrow way that leads to life. Undoubtedly, it doesn't always seem to "work." As we look at history, and even as we read Scriptures, there seems to be evidence that violence has worked at times and failed at times. In the end, the question is: Which looks most like Jesus? For we are called not just to be successful but to be faithful to the way of the cross, even unto death. The way of the cross did not seem to work on Friday, but the promise is that Sunday is coming. In the end, Love wins.

This can be hard to remember as we go about our lives. But the transfiguration reminds us how the disciples' eyes were opened to the reality of Jesus' power even before the resurrection. If we have eyes to see, the lightning that flashes from east to west in the nonviolent coming of God can illuminate the world wherever we are. "If you are willing," one of the desert fathers said, "you can become all flame."

From *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*, published by Zondervan Media Company.