

Dove Tales

Sustaining the Spirituality of Peacemaking

by John K. Stoner, Coordinator, Every Church A Peace Church

How do we sustain the spirit of resistance to oppression and engagement in peacemaking over the long haul? For Christians I believe that the spirituality of peacemaking is sustained through growth into the image of Jesus and the love of God. In the words of Jesus according to the Gospel of John, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (*John 20:21*). Jesus, the Human One (the son of man), taught and lived the practice of loving the neighbor, the enemy, and God. The image of Jesus is revealed most vividly in the love of enemies. That was the spirit and spirituality of Jesus. It can be ours as well.

A spirituality for the long haul may be thought of as a table with four legs. But before the four legs, first the whole thing, the table itself. "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven," said Jesus (*Matt. 5:44*). This was his teaching. It was his command. Nothing is more foundational to who Jesus was, what he did, what he taught, or to the table around which his followers are gathered. Love of enemies is the mark of Jesus, the image into which we are called to grow. To ignore or reject the love of enemies is to reject the Gospel image of Jesus, with his vision of the way to a transformed world and the spirituality which can lead us there.

Four sayings of Jesus constitute the four legs of this welcome table of sustainable spirituality. Implementing the practice of loving enemies, they are concepts and disciplines which according to Jesus, conform us to his image and show our kinship with our Father/Mother in heaven. It is important to say that this welcome table spirituality assumes a certain view of human nature, including all people who might for any reason be considered enemies.

In addition to four key teachings of Jesus, this short introduction to a spirituality for peacemakers draws upon and points to four books (plus one) to support the table. I want you to know of these wells from which some of us around the table have drunk along the way.

Growth and Change

First, Jesus' words, "You have heard that it was said, but I say unto you" (*Matthew 5*), establish a presumption for growth and change. Nothing is quite so deadly to the spiritual life as the notion that "I have achieved the truth and I certainly cannot be expected to grow or change." Jesus set a powerful and enduring presumption for growth and change when he, as the Human One (exemplary human), challenged both Scripture and tradition with his life and teachings.

To give substance to this radical characteristic of Jesus, I recommend two books. Reading them will nurture your growth in a spirituality of risk. I agree with this commendation by Charles Elliot of Cambridge University for Walter Wink's *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*: "This is the most important and exciting theological work to emerge in a generation. It will have a profound effect on Christian thinking well into the next century." The second book is Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer's *Jesus Against Christianity: Reclaiming the Missing Jesus*.

Justice and Disparity

Secondly, a spirituality for the long haul requires a way to think about justice and the disparity between the rich and the poor in our nation and world. There

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Spirituality for the Long Haul:

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IS ROOTED in Jesus' vision for the transformation of the individual and society.

IS COMMITTED to the power of nonviolence.

To read the full article by John Stoner with quotes, go to Peace and Justice Support Network web site: <http://peace.mennolink.org>

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can be no doubt that growing into the image of Jesus has much to do with adopting Jesus' attitude toward the poor and the outcast. Mark 8 records Jesus' encounter with a Gentile woman from Syrophenicia. She begs him to heal her daughter. The account continues: He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." The disturbing words of Jesus about dogs are thought to have expressed a common Jewish attitude toward Gentiles. Jesus may not have held the sentiment as his own, but used it to discern whether the woman would accept or acquiesce to it. She did not acquiesce, and the rest of the account turns on the Jesus' response to her response. "For saying that," says Jesus, "you, a Gentile, have a right and a claim, for asserting your selfhood, for this expression of female Gentile *chutzpah*, your daughter is healed." A spirituality of peacemaking shaped by Jesus' life and teachings will recognize the right of the poor, and affirm the strength of every human to assert their selfhood and improve their lot in life.

The Black freedom struggle in the United States was a daring, courageous, and insistent claim for the right of all people to the benefits of democracy. Just as Jesus affirmed the Syrophenician woman's assertion of her dignity and right, Christians in the United States must understand, affirm, and join the dignity and power of the African American freedom struggle. For a healthy spirituality the individual must connect with a community of struggle. The book I recommend on this spiritual challenge is Vincent Harding's *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (Vintage, 1981).

Transformation and Kingdom

Thirdly, a spirituality for the long haul is

rooted in Jesus' vision for the transformation of the individual and society. "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (*Matthew 7:10*). The reign, or kingship, of God is a corporate vision of society doing the will of God. The petition for the coming of God's kingdom is repeated in the petition for the doing of God's will. To envision the doing of God's will on earth is to envision radical transformation of individuals and society. In the face of much evidence to the contrary, it is not easy to continue to believe that this is happening and will happen.

Jesus likened the kingdom of God to a mustard seed, which he calls the smallest of all seeds (*Mark 4*). This image was a radical disappointment to people who looked for God's apocalyptic violence to defeat the enemy and establish Israel's domination. We too often lose hope because we dislike this image and this method of transformation of self and society. We want big change, and we want it now.

One thing which sustains a spirituality of hope is to observe the doing of God's will and speaking of God's truth by people of no religion, or religions other than "Christianity." That is to say, if we will not rejoice in the doing of God's will where it is evident before our eyes, we are rejecting that in which God is rejoicing—never a good thing to do. The book which I recommend on this theme of transformation is *Joining Hands: Politics and Religion Together for Social Change* by Roger S. Gottlieb (Westview Press, 2002).

Power and Nonviolence

The fourth leg of a communal table of long-haul spirituality is a commitment to the power of nonviolence. The community of faith and the individuals in it must make a clear choice for nonviolent struggle as their form of power to effect the transformation of the world. Jesus made the question of nonviolence central to

worship and ethics when he asked in the synagogue, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" (*Mark 3*). Neither those who heard Jesus in the flesh ask that question, nor we who hear it today, have to turn to a book, tradition, or great philosophers for an answer. The answer is written in our hearts by our Creator. We are being conformed to the image of Jesus when we give the answer Jesus expected to this question, and shape our personal and social behavior, our institutions and our politics, accordingly.

The dynamic at work in nonviolence is the unconquerable power of redemptive suffering. Jesus affirmed the power of redemptive suffering in the experience of political execution when he said, "Whoever would follow me must take up their cross and come after me" (*Mark 8*). As a "no" to violence, nonviolence simply recognizes the truth spoken by Jesus, "They that live by the sword shall die by the sword." As a "yes" to transformation, nonviolence is the implementation of Jesus' words, "Love your enemies." To ignore either the "no" or the "yes" is to ensure personal spiritual decay and ultimate disaster for the corporate human experiment. No one has made this choice clearer, or more urgent, or more hopeful, than Jonathan Schell in his book *The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People* (Metropolitan Books, 2003).

The Syrophenician woman whom Jesus praised for her courageous words simply exercised her freedom to act in behalf of her interests and beliefs. To so act is to grow into the image of Jesus, the love of God, and a spirituality which sustains peacemaking over the long haul. To see our spirits flourish, let us embrace with Jesus a presumption for growth, the right of the poor, a vision for transformation, and the power of nonviolence.



Dove Tales is a biannual newsletter created by Peace and Justice Support Network to inspire creative thinking and action in our collective peace and justice work. Ideas, articles, and reports can be sent to the Editor. **PJSN Reference Committee:** Leo Hartshorn, Susan Mark Landis, Valerie Weidman, Dick Davis, Malinda Berry, Titus Peachey, Mark Frey, Yvonne Diaz Keeler, Andy Peifer Nissley, Sisay Desalegn, and Jorge Vielman. **Editor:** Leo Hartshorn, Minister of Peace and Justice, Mennonite Mission Network, 202 South Ann Street, Lancaster, PA 17602, 717-399-8353, LeoH@MennoniteMission.net. **Designer:** Cynthia Friesen, volunteer, Americus, Ga. **Web site:** <http://peace.mennonlink.org>.

Worship Resources

Theme: The Strength of an Eagle

Words are the preacher's and liturgist's tools for inscribing the new world of peace and justice we seek. In liturgy, prayer, and song we construct the language world our congregations inhabit, even if only for a short space of time. But, over the long haul, liturgy and prayer, sermon and song shape a community. The following litany, prayer, sermon starter, and songs can be used in a congregational worship setting to help initiate a spiritual practice of peace and justice making for the long haul. The image of the eagle in the litany, songs, and prayer reveals a God who allows us to face the difficulties of life, but who comes beneath us with outspread wings to sustain us with renewed strength. Consider creating your own prayers and litanies for congregational use to encourage endurance and hope in the work of building up a new world. Use these worship elements as part of a Sunday worship service, community service, or a special service for those who work in peace and justice. (Written by Leo Hartshorn)

Opening Song

The care the eagle gives her young—Hymnal: A Worship Book No. 590

A Litany for the Long Haul

Reader 1: God, sometimes we get tired of doing good, wearied with working for peace, standing up for justice, walking against the stream, running against the grain.

People: They that wait upon God will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings as eagles. They will run and not be weary. They will walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:31).

Reader 2: Yes, God, but it seems like we are all alone in our concerns about violence, sexism, racism, oppression, injustice.

People: Jesus said, "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20)

Reader 3: God, though the way seems tough and it sometimes feels like we are alone, empower us for the work of following a nonviolent God, a crucified Christ, a lifegiving Spirit. Keep us walking in the way of Christ's just peace, running toward the goal of God's new world, and flying to unimagined places of the Spirit.

People: Let us run with patience the race that is set before us—looking unto Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith... (Hebrews 12:2)

Hymn

They that wait upon the Lord—Hymnal: A Worship Book No. 584

Prayer

God, like a mother eagle, you care for your children, even as you push us from the nests of our comfort, privilege, and safety. We do not comprehend why we have been shoved out into a world so full of danger, destruction, and distraction. Sometimes our wings are not strong enough to hold us up against the winds of indifference, the storms of evil, the gale forces of violence. We grow weary and faint flapping our wings and seeing little flight toward justice, little movement toward peace, little relief from the hawks that would keep our world a dangerous place. Come underneath us, God of faith and flight, and spread your healing wings that we may learn to soar on Spirit wings toward the new world just over the hills. Amen.

Sermon starter

Title: I bore you on eagle's wings—Exodus 19:4

God, like a mother eagle,...

- 1...frees those entrapped, enslaved, and in trouble.
- 2...bears us up when we are oppressed or weary.
- 3...brings us underneath the warm wings of God's presence.

Closing hymn

And I will raise you up—Hymnal: A Worship Book No. 596

Mennonite Advocacy: Why are we here?

Susan Mark Landis, peace advocate, Mennonite Church USA Office of the Executive Director

March 2002 I began work in a new position, peace advocate. This denominational job has three parts:

- ✦ lead and organize prophetic witness and peace and justice advocacy on behalf of Mennonite Church USA,
- ✦ coordinate interdenominational relationships concerning peace and justice issues,
- ✦ network and provide a structure for accountability for Mennonite Church USA program agencies and the Executive Board offices around peace and justice issues.

The Executive Board funds this half-time position. I work closely with peace staff from Christian Peacemaker Teams and Mennonite Central Committee and am co-staff for PJSN with Leo Hartshorn, lead staff.

Rationale for Mennonite advocacy

When Mennonite Church USA reorganized in 2001, leadership created a Peace Advocate office under the office of the Executive Director's. As our Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective states, this office seeks to help Mennonites follow the biblical agenda of "being ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20), calling the nations (and all persons and institutions) to move toward justice, peace, and compassion for all people. In so doing, we seek the welfare of the city to which God has sent us. (Jer. 29:7)"

Speaking prophetically to government is not an easy task, but one our Mennonite sisters and brothers around the world beg of us. Perhaps the most poetic request comes from the Colombian Mennonite church. Colombia is torn apart by violence and poverty, made worse by weapons supplied by the United States and edible crop fumigation paid for with U.S. tax dollars. The following words from the church both haunt and state eloquently the purpose of the Peace Advocate office:

"Christians may often witness to the state, asking it to act according to higher values or to standards which, while less than what God expects of the church, may bring the state closer to doing the will of God. Christians are responsible to witness to governments not only because of their citizenship in a particular country, but also in order to reflect Christ's compassion for all people and to proclaim Christ's lordship over all human institutions."

—Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, article 23, comment 2.

Why has God placed Mennonites in the United States, the most powerful country in the world?

God has given Anabaptist people wisdom that we are compelled to share with our leaders. The Peace Advocate office, working closely with the Mennonite Central Committee Washington Office, Christian Peacemaker Teams, and our many overseas workers, provides guidance and tools to help make this sharing timely and accurate. With our limited time and resources, we tend to choose issues for which we have a unique voice, those that are traditionally of interest to Mennonites (war, just distribution of resources, pro-life) or relate directly to our Mennonite sisters and brothers overseas, and those for which we have unique experience (environmental issues from our farm backgrounds, correctional issues because we developed the Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program, etc.).

Recent work

The **war on Iraq** has dominated Mennonite peace and justice work for over a year. At various crisis points, Leo Hartshorn, other Mennonite peace staff, and I prepared worship, study, and action materials for the PJSN web site. At peak times, users viewed 2,000 pages daily. **Christian Citizenship Sunday** worship and study materials posted to the site in June 2003 encourage congregations to continue to struggle through the issues that surfaced since September 11, 2001, and because of the war. "*Life in the Superpower: Then and Now*" materials include sample sermons

on the relationship of church to state, writings, and discussion questions for small group study.

Delegates at Atlanta 2003 debated and passed three resolutions, on access to health care, abortion, and immigration. All three may be viewed on the Mennonite Church USA web site (www.MennoniteUSA.org). Congregational follow-up materials for the immigration statement were distributed in Atlanta and are available on the PJSN web site; the others will be available over the next months. The Peace Advocate office provides staff support for denominational work on resolutions.

A year ago you helped collect more than 17,000 Mennonite signatures on a letter to President Bush calling for alternatives to war with Iraq—and made an impact beyond that issue! Leaders of the Nuclear Reduction/Disarmament Initiative (NR/DI), a national interfaith effort that enables people of faith to work to end the nuclear danger, are hoping 20,000 Mennonites will sign the “Urgent Call”—a statement calling for immediate steps toward nuclear disarmament. The Mennonite names would be part of the larger goals of obtaining 10 million signatures by the end of 2003 and making nuclear disarmament a major issue in the 2004 presidential election. Jim Schrag, Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA; Ron Mathies, Executive Director of MCC; Jose Ortiz, Executive Director of MCC U.S.; J. Daryl Byler, MCC Washington Office director and I have already signed the “Urgent Call.”

Please encourage members of your congregation to sign the “Urgent Call”. To read and add your name to the “Urgent Call” visit www.nrdi.org or call (202)885-8648. Worship materials are available on the PJSN web site. (See “Remembering Hiroshima and Nagasaki.”)

While a Peace Advocate staff position may be new to Mennonite Church USA, we trace the biblical tradition back to the midwives who refused to kill the Israelite babies. Standing for the poor and oppressed is not a new concept among God’s people or Mennonites.

“One cannot level one’s moral lance at every evil in the universe. There are just too many of them. But you can do something, and the difference between doing something and doing nothing is everything.”

—Daniel Berrigan

Peace Advocate Announcements

- ✧ Especially during times of national tension, encourage someone from your congregation to check the PJSN web site (<http://peace.MennoLink.org>) frequently and subscribe to the MennoLink peace.news list (information on the web site). Mennonite peace staff and volunteers work as quickly as possible to create worship materials and compile information for your congregational prayer and action. Please e-mail Susan Mark Landis worship resources you are willing to share with others. Take advantage of technology!
- ✧ The Student Aid Fund for Nonregistrants (SAFNR) helps replace potential government grants and loans lost by students who for reasons of Christian conscience choose not to register with the U.S. Selective Service System. The monies of this non-budget fund were totally depleted last year. Information and applications are available on the PJSN web site (<http://peace.MennoLink.org>). Send contributions, inquiries, and prayers to:
Mennonite Church USA Executive Board
Student Aid Fund for Nonregistrants
PO Box 1245
Elkhart, IN 46515-1245
- ✧ Do you have trouble finding what you want on the PJSN web site? No wonder—it’s HUGE! Use the search engine (upper right corner). Put in the Bible verse for your next sermon or Sunday school lesson for additional background. Use the Bulletin Boards to share your local happenings or recommend resources. See photographs of our resources and members of the PJSN Reference Council. Take some time and enjoy learning to know the site. You’ll find unexpected treasures—as do the thousands of people from outside Mennonite Church USA who visit each week.
- ✧ Mennonite peace conversations took place twice this spring—once just before the war on Iraq began, another soon after it ended. Hundreds of participants dialed an 800 number to listen to Mennonite peace leaders connect current events with their lives of faith and spend time together in prayer. Look forward to more of these phone calls; find out about them on the PJSN web site. In the meantime, you may listen to the March and May phone calls on the web site: <http://peace.mennolink.org/callin.html>.
- ✧ Frustrated because you don’t have easy access to the internet? You’re invited to call Susan Mark Landis (330-683-6844) and she’ll mail you (with a stamp) a hard copy of any advocacy materials on the PJSN web site.

When the Saints go Marchin'

Peace and Justice Support Network 2003 Gathering



Iris de Leon-Hartshorn and Ruby Sales leading Bible study.



Rosemarie and Vincent Harding, keynote speakers, making a presentation on the Southern Freedom movement.



Above: A group of participants creating a tableau of a biblical story. **Top right:** John Powell praying for Andy Peifer Nisley, new member of PJSN Reference Committee. **Bottom right:** Music group, "Revelation 7:9," leading in worship and song.



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