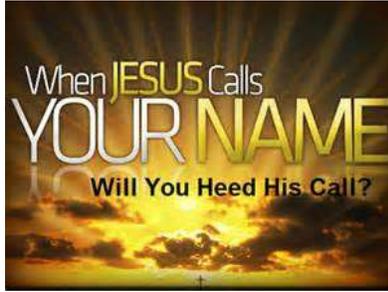


Christian Peacemaking and Eliminating the Nuclear Scandal IV *Come and Follow Me*



Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, and the hope of its children."

President Dwight D. Eisenhower

The most challenging thing about being a deacon and a Catholic Christian is the following of Jesus Christ. Of course, one would think that is what one has been doing all one's life as a believer. Not so fast! We know that following Jesus and believing in Jesus, as an intellectual assent, can be and often are different things. One has only to examine history and to look at how believers around the world often forget or do not know what it means to follow Jesus. We see this in various manifestations of all sorts of violence such as; racism, discrimination, oppression, brutality, killing and other infamies done in the name of Christ. There just seems to be a *disconnect* between faith, following Jesus or imitation of Jesus, and some vague ideology about Jesus that many mistakenly believe to be faith.



For any real progress in a person becoming a Christian peacemaker, and hence a Christian, requires some understanding of what it means to follow Jesus and how that understanding leads to an authentic Christian imitation of Jesus Christ, or what some refer to as *Christopraxis*. In the series reflecting on the historical Jesus studies I pointed out a number of aspects of Jesus' ministry, his crucifixion and resurrection that direct us to a praxis that reflects being the *icon of the servant Jesus Christ*. A brief review would be in order here, as well as a reflection on Old Testament revelation of God and its connection to the Christ event.



The experience of God for the Jewish people is focused on the central event of the liberation of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. God is revealed as the one who is there with and for the people; Yahweh is the champion of real human freedom and justice. It was this central experience that would be raised up again by the classical prophets of Israel who continually reminded the people that God is a God of social justice, mercy, and compassion; and the One who judges the king and the nation. Whenever Israel strayed from their covenant relationship with Yahweh the prophets would come to offer voice to the will of God for Israel to turn away from the idols of pagan practices, injustice, shedding innocent blood, and exploiting the poor.

*Instead of dealing with the timeless issues of being and becoming, of matter and form, of definitions and demonstrations, he is thrown into oration about widows and orphans, about the corruption of judges and affairs of the market place. **1***



These words of the renowned Jewish biblical theologian, Abraham Heschel, characterize the thrust of the message of the *classical prophets* of the Old Testament. Prophets were not much interested in speculative theological discussion. They were men sent with a message on behalf of Yahweh. However, prophets should not be understood as mere *voice boxes* for God. Prophets gave voice to the concerns of Yahweh through their own temperaments and creative modes of expression, often using poetry and lyric to communicate the great concerns of God.

In light of the *new evangelization* in the Catholic Church I thought it would be helpful for us to revisit the prophetic aspect of diaconal ministry.

In contemporary media many seem to portray prophets as *seers* of future events. There is some justification for such an understanding of the prophets. However, on closer examination they appear as men of *insight* rather than foresight. While it is certainly true that the prophets speak about future possibilities for the people, both positive and negative, their chief concern

was to tell the *truth* about the injustice and pain all around them. They *spoke truth to power*, pointing out the gross injustice of the social situations they confronted, often reinforced by religious practice that had separated itself from the demands of justice essential for faithfulness to the covenant between Israel and Yahweh.

The prophet is an iconoclast, challenging the apparently holy, revered, and awesome. Beliefs cherished as certainties, institutions endowed with supreme sanctity, he exposes as scandalous pretensions. 2

Remember the thundering words of the prophet Amos:

*I hate, and spurn you feasts,
I take no pleasure in your solemnities;
Your cereal offerings I will not accept,
nor consider your stall-fed peace offerings.
Away with your noisy songs!
I will not listen to the melodies of your harps.*

*But if you would offer me holocausts,
then let justice surge like water,
and goodness like an unfailing stream.*

Amos 5: 21-24

Prophets were the *gadflies* of their society for those who enacted unjust decrees and profited from the unjust situation. Prophets reveal the way God sees things to the people, especially to those in power, and reveal the very *pathos of God*. The prophet speaks to the suffering of God in those who are injured by the *social triage* structured into society by the wealthy and powerful and suffered by the poor and vulnerable. God will not have it! God will not stand by and watch lives destroyed by cruelty and injustice!

Prophecy is the voice that God has lent to the silent agony, a voice to the plundered poor, to the profaned riches of the world. It is a form of living; a crossing point of God and human beings. God is raging in the prophets words. 3

The God of the prophets will not be silent! This God takes sides against such injustice and cruelty and calls those who perpetrate it to repent, right now! The prophets propose an alternative vision to society from the dominant vision that gave rise to and supports the unjust status quo. The biblical scholar, Walter Brueggemann, refers to the dominant definition of reality held by those in power as the royal consciousness. Such a consciousness tells everyone that all is well, that the only definition of things is the one they presently share in as a people. The prophets, on the other hand, have a prophetic consciousness that offers a vision of reality and society from God's point of view. It is not simply an alternative vision, it is God's alternative vision given expression through the words and actions of the prophets!



Prophecy, in the sense of the classical prophets, means pointing out the de-humanizing and destructive forces and realities in the present in the light of God's in-breaking and coming Kingdom. It often means speaking truth to power. It often means taking up the cross of inconvenient truths and revealing them to the people of our time so that the social, political and personal healing that is needed at the time can happen. Otherwise, we participate in a conspiracy of silence that affirms the unjust status quo. The result is often the perpetuation and legitimization of injustice and danger. A Christian peacemaker is called to a prophetic ministry of truth-telling so that attention can be directed toward helping to create a more just and peaceful world.

We see how this can be facilitated in the present by looking at the subversive nature of the parables of Jesus. The story of the servant Jesus Christ becomes the story of the deacon who surrenders to the call to embrace a kenotic lifestyle of creative obedience to the Lord in his ministry. To better appreciate this model of the deacon as a *living parable of the servant Jesus Christ*, and its implications for his ministry, it is important that we examine the function of the parables the early Church tells us Jesus told as found in the New Testament. The late theologian, Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., notes that not only did Jesus tell parables, he was a parable:

*Jesus told parables and is a parable—the living parable of the Father*⁴

Parables are not simply quaint stories that engage one's listeners; they are invitations to adopt the vision of the parables as one's own in a change of heart and accepting the Kingdom of God into the center of one's being! Parables have certain characteristics that distinguish them from other forms of storytelling.

- Jesus' parables enshrine a paradox.
- The parables turn around a scandalizing center.
- They are meant to break through our conventional ways of thinking and being.
- They utilize a familiar background of everyday events.
- There is a sense of urgency about one accepting the vision of the Reign of God offered by the parable right now!
- They are stories that call for conversion of heart and mind.
- They depend on their audience for impact.
- Many of them were probably told at table.

- They are stories of reversal that turn the world on its head—God’s ways are not always our ways!



Parables illuminate new ways of seeing and being in the world in the context of the present/future Reign of God that began with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and continues in the mission of the Church. The parables of Jesus generated joy and hope, as well as restlessness by those who heard them. Jesus took this parabolic life unto the cross and the resurrection which was a complete shock to people of his time. What this says about God and human beings is so radical that the Church itself finds a need to be constantly reforming itself to give expression to the radical nature of Christ event. The German theologian, Jurgen Moltmann puts it this way:

*If God’s being is manifest in the passion and the death of Jesus, through Jesus’ suffering and death for us and for our salvation, he is known by that faith which is called freedom. The God of freedom the true God, is therefore not recognized by his power and glory in the world and on the history of the world, but through his **helplessness and his death on the scandal of the cross of Jesus**. The gods of the power and riches of the world and world history belong to the other side of the cross, for it is in their name that Jesus was crucified. The God of freedom, the human God, no longer has godlike rulers as his political representatives. If the crucified one is Kyrios, then the Caesars must renounce the title.*

In the next article in this series we will examine the spirituality of the Christian peacemaker, especially as it applies to the deacon.

Notes

1 Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York), Harper and Row Publishers, 1962, p. xiv.

2 Heschel, p. 10.

3 Heschel, p. 5.

4 Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Crossroads, 1974)