

Spring 2012

Reflections

Y A L E D I V I N I T Y S C H O O L

Seize the Day: Vocation, Calling, Work



COVER ART

Nalini Jayasuriya '84 M.A.R. is a Sri Lankan Christian artist internationally known as a painter, musician, sculptor, potter, broadcaster, writer, and lecturer.

Both the front-cover image, "They Who Hear, Follow," and the back-cover image, "Not My Will, But Thine," inspired by Biblical themes, are featured at the website of the Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven, CT (see OMSC.org/art). Jayasuriya was artist-in-residence at OMSC from 2001-03.

"Carl Jung has said that modern man does not understand how much his rationalism has destroyed his capacity to respond to the Numinous and to the development of his intuitive capacity so necessary to spiritual growth," she writes in *A Time for My Singing: Witness of a Life* (OMSC Publications, 2004).

"There is wonder in all the sacred expressions of the whole world – it is all momentous and worthy of respect, because it is witness to the precious emotion known as Belief that is as real as life itself."

See Editor's Column, page 80, for more on the art of Nalini Jayasuriya.

INTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHY

These images of working life over the last 150 years were featured in a Queens (NY) Museum of Art exhibition from 2010 called "Working Stiffs: Photography from the Permanent Collection."

The exhibit gathered some fifty photographs from the museum's collection that touch on the drama of everyday working-class life, here and abroad – the vast diversity of tasks at hand, the danger, drudgery, joy, grace, or courage involved.

Louise Weinberg, organizer of the show, says the photos speak to the human condition in a world busy modernizing itself, and reaction to the exhibit confirmed that.

"The images provided a window on the past, and it was fascinating to watch people's reactions," she says.

"They studied each photo, calling their friends over, getting into discussions. I think something was being communicated – a recognition of their own 9-to-5 or 24/7 lives, the commonality they felt with workers from 100 years ago, but also a sense of the foreignness or allure of some of the jobs."

Depicted by famous photographers such as Dorothea Lange or by unknown practitioners, the images include unsung tailors, shoe-shiners, trapeze artists – also farmer-monks (p. 4 here), skyscraper builders (p. 10), tea-makers (p. 24). Saluting the universality of work's daily ordeals and vocational dreams, the exhibit quotes Studs Terkel: "Work is about a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor; in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying."

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Seize the Day: Vocation, Calling, Work



From the Dean's Desk



Harold W. Attridge
The Reverend Henry L. Slack Dean of Yale Divinity School
& Lillian Claus Professor of New Testament

It is perhaps fitting that this issue of *Reflections* should be on the theme of vocation, since the imminent change in my own status – I am stepping down from the deanship to resume full-time teaching – has given me occasion to reflect on what I am now called to do.

The essays in this number offer a broad range of perspectives on the topic, ruminating about the various ways in which our Christian traditions have treated the theme. They also capture, in the reminiscences of theologians, pastors, writers, activists, alumni, and friends, the varied paths that people have taken to find their ways to meaningful engagement. Sometimes these paths have been guided by a clarion call to service. Just as often they have been discerned through a messy process of eliminating unsatisfactory alternatives.

These reflections, and the wonderful illustrations that editor Ray Waddle has chosen for the issue, remind us too of the social dimension of vocation. Our varied and sometimes strange paths to discipleship are not simply our own personal privilege, but part of a larger whole, the calling of the Church to its ministry in the service of light and truth, justice and peace.

Reading these articles, interviews, and poems gives me the opportunity to be thankful for the calling I stumbled into ten years ago, to lead, serve, and nurture this rich ecumenical community of faith and intellect. It has been a calling that I could not have clearly discerned in the Catholic schools of my youth, where “vocation,” as some of our essayists note, had a more restricted sense. It was a vocation, nonetheless, in every sense of that word. Supported

by many other women and men of profound faith and commitment to the service of the Church, I, and my wife Jan along with me, have found in the call to this place enrichment and joy that we could not have anticipated.

As I step down from the deanship, I hope that I correctly hear the call to return to a life of teaching and scholarship. That at least seems to be the way that the serendipitous process of vocational discernment is pointing. In any case, I look forward to continuing to work with our many colleagues and friends on the Quad and around the University to help our students discern their callings for many years to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Harold W. Attridge". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Harold W. Attridge
Dean

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Job and Vocation: Discerning the Difference

By Nora Tubbs Tisdale

Some time ago, I had an experience that startled me into a new awareness of the increasing divide that many in the church are experiencing between their jobs on the one hand and any sense of Christian calling on the other. While serving on the staff of a large New York City church, I attended a weekly gathering of young adults where the topic was the meaning of Christian vocation. What followed was revelatory.

The facilitator asked the fifty adults to get up out of their chairs and position themselves across the room in response to particular statements about work and our relationship to it.

The first statement was: *"I feel completely fulfilled and satisfied in my job."* In response, a few people went to one side of the room, indicating great satisfaction with their jobs. A few people went to the

A lot about the workplace has changed, causing people of all ages to question whether their jobs have much, if anything, to do with God anymore.

opposite side of the room – some amidst audible groans – signaling their complete dissatisfaction with their work. The majority positioned themselves somewhere on a continuum across the room, suggesting relative happiness or unhappiness with their employment.

The second statement was: *"The job I have now is close to what I feel is my ultimate vocation – my dream job."* Again, responses varied. Some indicated "yes," they were in their dream jobs. Some declared "no," they absolutely were not. Quite a few remained in the middle.

Then came the third statement: *"I feel close to God in my job; my daily work fulfills me spiritually."* When all the movement finally ceased, I realized

there was only one person in the entire room who was standing on the side that indicated complete agreement with that statement. And that one person was me!

Sadly, the vast majority of those young adults located themselves somewhere on the opposite side of the room. Some commented that the question itself had caught them off guard: work and spirituality were not something they ordinarily thought of putting together.

Historic Shift

Most troubling about that experience is how it illustrates the enormous shift I have witnessed in my own lifetime between how people in the church think about work and vocation, and the relationship between the two.

When I was in high school and college in the late 1960s and early 70s, there was a strong sense – in the Presbyterian Church at least – that "job" and "vocation" were almost synonymous terms, and part of the church's mission was helping young people discern their life's calling under God. Indeed, the Presbyterian Church had a number of vocational testing centers, often located at Presbyterian colleges, where young adults could meet with a counselor to discern what vocations would be most fitting with the gifts and interests God had given them. The vital assumption was that a person's job should have some connection with serving God, and a part of Christian discipleship was finding a job

that engaged one's God-given talents. There was an underlying assumption that once you discerned your vocation you pretty much stayed with it the rest of your life.

Three Trends

But a lot about the workplace has changed since then. These changes have caused people of all ages – and not just young adults – to question whether their jobs have much, if anything, to do with God

When I was in high school and college in the late 60s and early 70s, there was a strong sense that “job” and “vocation” were almost synonymous terms.

anymore. The struggles triggered by this historic recession have only intensified that sense of alienation or divide. Three trends, well underway before the 2008 financial crisis, come to mind that by now define the workplace horizon:

- The workplace has become a far more competitive and less kind place than it used to be, and old-fashioned values such as honesty, hard work, and dependability are no longer widely rewarded as they once were. Pursuit of the highest possible profit, in many instances, is the sole criteria for success. This ethic is celebrated on a TV show such as *The Apprentice*, where winners and losers are judged each week solely on the basis of which team produces more profit for the company, and where traditional loyalty, compassion, and a generous spirit are often trumped (literally) by aggressiveness, backstabbing, and the press toward the bottom line.

Not only do such work environments usually bring out the worst in human nature; they also fuel the pressure on those in management positions to do anything and everything they can to make it look like the bottom line is better even if it's not. Such work climates take their toll on individual workers: too many hours spent away from home and family, illnesses caused by work-related stress, and for some older workers, job loss – not because they failed to work hard and do well, but because it is cheaper to replace them with younger, less experienced people.

- The traditional notion that a person will work in the same job all her or his life sounds almost ludicrous today. Partly this is due to the pattern of corporate takeovers that has become routine in our economic culture, causing job layoffs and uncertainty even in prosperous times. A relative of mine, who works in the insurance industry, found himself

working for four different companies in four different jobs in the space of two years – with none of the changes initiated by him. “So far,” he told me at one point, “I’m one of the lucky ones, and have managed to land on my feet each time a turnover happens. But I figure my days are numbered. I’m trying to save up now for the tough times that are sure to come.”

- Finally, we need to acknowledge that for a large number of people in our land, holding out for a job that gives them great personal meaning and fulfillment is not a luxury they can afford. Necessity forces many people to take whatever work they can and be grateful for the paycheck. I spent several years volunteering at an outreach program of the church my husband pastored in New Jersey, doing in-take interviews with minimum-wage workers who came to us for scholarships and child-care assistance. When I asked them about their jobs, it quickly became apparent that for them the goal at work was not fulfillment; it was survival, a way of putting bread on the table and keeping a roof over their heads. These days their name is legion.

Callings from Scripture

In the face of these relentless pressures and patterns, I find two Biblical stories about calling helpful – the call of Samuel and the call of Jesus’ disciples. They don’t address all the messy issues raised about the workplace in our time, but they do speak to some basic Gospel truths we dare not forget as we ponder the relationship between work and vocation.

For starters, these two Biblical narratives remind us that while some of us may have jobs, all of us have a vocation: namely, to love, serve, and follow God. One reason I have always loved the story of the call of Samuel is because God’s call, God’s “vocation,” comes not to some older and wiser adult, but to a young boy who isn’t expecting God to talk to him at all.

The setting is the temple in Jerusalem, where the boy Samuel is sleeping before the Holy of Holies – that place behind the temple curtain where the Ark of the Covenant containing the Ten Commandments rests. Samuel is in the temple because his parents, Hannah and Elkanah, decided to dedicate him to God at an early age. They have sent him there to live and train for the priesthood under Eli, who is old and almost blind.

A lamp is burning low in the temple as Samuel sleeps, and suddenly he is awakened when he hears a voice calling, “Samuel, Samuel.” Thinking it must be old Eli calling him, Samuel rushes to where Eli is sleeping and says, “Here I am for you called me.”

But Eli says, “Son, I didn’t call you. Go back and lie down again.”

Three times during the night this voice awakens Samuel, three times he mistakenly thinks it is Eli calling and rushes to his bedside, until finally – after the third call – Eli wisely discerns that perhaps it is God who is calling the young man. He tells Samuel, “The next time you hear the voice, you are to respond: ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’” When Samuel hears the voice calling a fourth time, he replies as Eli had told him to do. It is then that God tells Samuel of the plans God has for his life, of the words God wants him to speak, of the things God wants him to do.

This story is a powerful reminder that no matter how young or old we are, or how important or unimportant we may feel, God has a vocation for

All of us have a vocation in Jesus Christ. And there’s absolutely no promise that following it will earn us a life free of pain or difficulty.

us. Our real worth lies in the fact that God knows us, loves us, calls us by name.

A similar dynamic is at work in the way Jesus begins calling his disciples. Who does Jesus call first to follow him? The wealthy and well-employed? Those most talented at turning a financial profit? No. He calls ordinary day laborers. A couple of brothers – Peter and Andrew – guys who fish with their dad for a living. To these he entrusts a vocation, a calling, saying, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” Follow me, and I will teach you to use those same God-given gifts and abilities you have been using in your daily work for even greater purposes – God’s purposes.

Vocation After Hours

There are a lot of people today who, like those fishermen of old, live out the heart of their Christian vocations not primarily through their jobs, but by following Jesus in spheres of service outside the workplace:

- A man I know, a Wall Street trader, finds deep meaning and joy as a junior high youth advisor on the weekends.
- A retiree I know, who spent many years in the business world, now uses his considerable gifts in finance and organizational management to help churches provide low-income housing.
- A young woman I know – a singer by profession – says her true passion comes through her volunteer work on behalf of environmental concerns.

One-quarter of working Americans say they often or always view their work as a mission from God, according to a Baylor University survey that examines relations between religion and work.

The latest Baylor Religion Survey, released last fall, showed direct connections between religious belief and work attitudes among Americans.

“It’s intriguing that our findings suggest faith beliefs can shape motivations and attitudes toward work, and yet so few churches promote discussions of work issues,” said Mitchell J. Neubert, a management professor in Baylor’s Hankamer School of Business.

“When churches do speak about those issues, few seem to speak positively about profit and starting a business, both of which are critical for vibrant local economies.”

Only 15 percent of respondents say their congregations encourage them to start a business.

The survey summary reported other findings:

- Individuals who attend religious services regularly and those who take a literal view of the Bible are more likely to attribute religious significance to their work.
- Women, African Americans, older workers and Southerners are more likely to attach religious meaning to work.
- More than a third say they pursue excellence in work because of their faith.
- Encouragement of business activity in secular life is most prominent in African American churches and in megachurches of 2,000 or more worshippers.
- American entrepreneurs pray and meditate more than non-entrepreneurs do. One-third pray several times a day or meditate, the survey says. “The differences (between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs) are modest but meaningful,” said Kevin D. Dougherty, a Baylor sociology professor. “It could be that the stress and struggle of new business ventures drive people to their knees.”

Source: www.baylor.edu/2011religionsurvey

- A relative who lost his own job in the recession and who currently delivers newspapers and pizzas to pay his bills recently told me that the past year has been one of the most meaningful of his life because of the joy he finds in his volunteer work for a nonprofit that provides transitional housing for recovering alcoholics.

Nevertheless, this primary vocation – the calling to love and serve and follow Christ – can also transform how we see our everyday jobs. Sometimes even the most boring and repetitive jobs can become an arena for Christian service if we are open to hearing the voice of God guiding and showing us how to use our gifts right where we are.

I think, for instance, of that young woman I know who turned her bartending job – a job she got in order to pay the bills when she moved to New Orleans soon after Hurricane Katrina – into a ministry for Christ as she simply listened, in an empathetic and compassionate way, to the painful stories people poured out to her.

I think of that business manager I know in New Jersey, who, despite the many thorny issues she must handle on a daily basis, has told me that her heart's greatest desire is to be the "Lydia" of her workplace – extending the grace of hospitality to all who enter there much like the remarkable woman in Acts 16.

A Clarifying Voice

To me one of the great gifts of the Christian life can be summed up this way: no matter where we find ourselves, we have a vocation that has been given to us by God, and confirmed for us in our baptisms. We are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ. And because that vocation is God-given, there is nothing this world – with all of its injustice, unfairness, and inequality – can do to take it away.

The stories of Samuel and the disciples offer another lesson: since God is the initiator of vocation, our primary responsibility is often simply to listen intently for God's call, and faithfully respond when it comes.

In his wonderful book *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (Wiley, 2000), Parker Palmer writes: "Vocation does not come from willfulness. It comes from listening. I must listen to my life and try to understand what it is truly about – quite apart from what I would like it to be about – or my life will never represent anything real in the world, no matter how earnest my intentions. That insight is hidden in the word vocation itself, which is rooted in the Latin for 'voice.' Vocation does not mean a goal that I pursue. It means a calling that I hear." (p. 4)

Palmer writes honestly about the fact that listening for and hearing God's voice is not always easy. During a dark and jobless period in his own life when, as he puts it, "I was approaching middle age at warp speed and had yet to find a vocational path that felt right," he spent a number of months praying and trying to listen to God – yet with no audible voice like that of Samuel coming in the night to guide him.

Finally in frustration he took his troubles to an older Quaker woman, well known for her thoughtfulness and candor. "Ruth," he said, "People keep telling me that 'way will open.' Well, I sit in the silence, I pray, I listen for my calling, but way is not opening. I've been trying to find my vocation for a long time, and I still don't have the foggiest idea of what I'm meant to do."

Ruth's reply, he writes, was a model of Quaker plain-speaking. "I'm a birthright Friend," she said somberly, "and in sixty-plus years of living, way has never opened in front of me." But then she spoke

A man I know, a Wall Street trader during the week, finds deep meaning and joy in being a junior high youth advisor on the weekends.

again – this time with a grin. "But a lot of way has closed behind me, and that's had the same guiding effect."

Discerning God's voice might not come with the clarity that it came to Samuel in the night. But it's often possible to look back and see that God sometimes uses even those situations that are the most devastating in our lives – disappointing jobs, disillusioning jobs, lost jobs – to open new vistas of vocation we had not yet even imagined.

No Guarantees

Finally, these Scripture passages remind a Christian that the vocation to follow Christ is the first and primary calling, and demands our highest allegiance – even if it sometimes means putting a job in jeopardy.

I have always loved that quotation of Frederick Buechner's: "Vocation is the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need." Yet the story of Samuel's call is a sobering reminder that vocation is not necessarily something that brings immediate joy and gladness to the heart or to the workplace. The call to Samuel was difficult and hard. God basically told this young boy to go to his mentor, his friend, his superior – the beloved priest Eli with whom he had lived since he was very small – and

tell Eli that the days of his priesthood were coming to an end because of the evil of his sons. No wonder Samuel lay awake all night pondering this word he had received in the darkness from God. No wonder he was afraid to go and tell Eli about his vision the next morning.

Ultimately, Samuel was faithful. He spoke the truth he had received from God – the whole truth – to Eli. Because Eli himself was a man of prayer, a man of God, he received it as a word from God.

No matter who we are or where we find ourselves, we have a vocation that has been given to us by God, and confirmed for us in our baptisms.

But there were no guarantees for Samuel. Just as there are no guarantees for any of us who would speak God's truth and risk allowing our vocations to subvert our jobs.

Prophet Irene

One of my vocational heroes is a woman named Irene Jenkins, whom I first met when I was on the faculty of Union Seminary in Virginia (now Union Presbyterian Seminary) and she was one of the custodians who cleaned my office. A middle-aged African American woman, Irene had had her share of troubles in life. Her husband had left her early on, and she had been the sole financial support of her two children, one of whom – a mentally disabled adult son – still lived with her.

Irene's job was, by the world's standards, menial labor. But with Irene, there was nothing menial about it. She often came into my office to empty trash cans and dust bookcases with a headset on, humming hymns as she worked. She frequently paused to tell me about a Bible passage she'd been reading, about the latest instance of God's goodness in her life, or about news at her Pentecostal church. Irene walked closely with God, and it showed.

When I got ready to leave Union for another teaching position, Irene arrived at my office door one day. "Sit down," she said in a voice I'd never heard her use before, "I have a word from the Lord for you." Irene proceeded to speak to me words she had received from God – difficult, challenging words, words I didn't altogether want to hear – but which proved over time to be absolutely true, and which I firmly believe were given to her, a prophet, just as surely as the words that were given to Samuel in the dark of night.

Knowing in her heart that she was a beloved child of God, a disciple of Jesus Christ, Irene was able to take an ordinary, unglamorous job and infuse it with all the joy, purpose, and dedication of a vocation. But knowing also that her ultimate allegiance belonged to the God who had called her, Irene did not shy away from speaking truth, even tough truths, that God gave her to speak.

All of us have a vocation in Jesus Christ. And there's absolutely no promise that following it will earn us a life free of pain or difficulty. Yet I love the words that conclude the story of Samuel: "As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him, and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord."

I'm guessing that for Samuel, the approbation of God, and the trust and respect of his people, were enough fulfillment to last a lifetime – and even beyond.

Nora Tubbs Tisdale is Clement-Muehl Professor of Homiletics at YDS. Her books include Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach (Westminster John Knox, 2010) and Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art (Augsburg Fortress, 1997).

COMMUTING
By Clemens Starck

Firs on the hillside:
mist drifts through them like smoke.
White mist, black trees ...
Headlights sweep the wet pavement.
Waiting at home
my son – he's ten, he wants to know
what we're here for.
Black firs. White mist.
Loose tools rattle in the back of the truck.
In twenty miles I ought to be able
to figure out something.



Methods and Mysteries of Calling:

Richard Bolles



Richard N. Bolles is a career expert, former Episcopal priest, and author of the book that remade the job-hunting and career-counseling world, What Color is Your Para-

chute? His approach is infused with motivational high spirits, practical strategies, and Christian hope. In the “Finding Your Mission in Life” appendix to the book, he writes about vocational potential in a brutal economy: “Unemployment becomes life transition, when we can’t find a job doing the same work we’ve always done. Since we have to rethink one thing, many of us elect to rethink everything. Something awakens within us. Call it yearning. Call it hope. We come to realize the dream we dreamed has never died. And we go back to get it. ... Now we have a chance to marry our work and our religious beliefs, to talk about Calling, and Vocation, and Mission in life – to think out why we are here, and what plans God has for us.” A new book, The Hunger for God, will be released next year.

REFLECTIONS: *It’s been forty years since **Parachute** was published. It’s been updated annually for decades. What have you learned about calling that you didn’t know when you first wrote the book?*

BOLLES: I’ve learned it isn’t what you see; it’s what you notice that counts, when you’re figuring out your mission and calling in life.

Now to explain: when I was younger – *much* younger – I thought that, to quote Paul, “I understood all mysteries and knowledge.” I had been a student of the Bible since my earliest teens, and memorized large portions of it. When I was in college (M.I.T. and Harvard), I belonged to the Student Christian Movement, where I became highly sensitive to social issues, and at the same time I belonged to the evangelical Intersarsity Christian Fellowship, where we had Scripture reading and

prayer groups, every night before dinner. When I heard there was a shortage of Christian ministers I abandoned my plans to be a chemical engineer, and after college enrolled in seminary, first as a student, then as an ordained minister, Fellow and Tutor. I felt I understood mission and calling, and never needed to learn another thing about it. My learning days were done.

Since then, I grew up, a little. I’ve learned something new every day about mission and calling that I didn’t know when I was first ordained or when I wrote the first edition of my book. So, how to summarize what I’ve learned? Well, Jesus healed that blind man, you recall, in two stages. After the first stage, the blind man, half-healed, said, “I see men as trees walking.” Jesus then went on to make the healing complete. I think a sense of our mission and calling comes in two stages, also. It begins for

many if not most of us with a spectacularly unclear definition of what our mission is, followed by the realization that that's okay: it's okay if we see our vocation only half-clearly – like trees walking – in the beginning. But mission, or at least our understanding of it, is a lifelong journey. It will become clearer and clearer to us, as we get older, *if* – I say, *if* – we continuously keep this truth before us: it's not what we *see*, but what we *notice*, that really counts.

In other words, we must define as a very part of our vocation this imperative to *notice* more, day by day: to notice more about how God works in this world. We must notice more, in our Scriptures, in our prayers, in the people we encounter, and of course in ourselves.

If we do *that* throughout the second stage of the healing of our blindness, we will see more and more clearly our vocation, our calling, the reason why each one of us, in particular, was put here on earth.

REFLECTIONS: Why is it often such a struggle to discern calling? Is that the way God planned it? Some people grasp their calling by, say, age eight; others never quite do. Must it be such a mystery?

BOLLES: Well, not so fast! Sometimes people do indeed *think* at age eight that they have identified their calling. But I am the man to whom many of these people turn, at age thirty or forty, and say, “You know, I'm no longer convinced that this is what I was supposed to do with my life.”

Okay, then. Why so desperate to define, or think they have defined, this at age eight or whatever? Well, here's a clue: when I am driving on a local highway, I am astonished at the people who ride hard on my bumper, even if I'm above the speed limit, then in frustration decide to go around me, then back again to our lane, seven feet in front of me, where they get pinned by other traffic. All that for just seven feet! I turn to my beloved wife and either she or I pronounces a diagnosis of that driver: *Hurry Sickness*. In a hurry, just to be in a hurry.

So here: I think some people, especially the young, are in a *hurry* to define their vocation early on, confidently, and permanently. We don't need to be envious of them. I already said I think defining our vocation is a two-stage journey. To those who have no clear vision about what their vocation is, for starters I say, “Don't beat yourself up by comparing yourself to these others. If you have no idea what your calling is, then just determine to *notice more*, day by day. Your vision will grow clearer. Just be patient.”

But now to the other part of your question: why must it be a mystery? And the second question, like

unto the first: why must it remain a mystery to some people, but not to others? Well, I think the universe is swathed in mystery, with a capital “M.” And if we think it is faith's job to remove all mystery – hence

Why do some people receive certain gifts, while others do not? Does God play favorites? We do not know. It is a mystery. And neither faith nor lack of faith can explain mysteries.

if “mystery persists,” that's proof we have a “lack of faith” – oh my! we are living in a fantasy world. Mystery always remains.

But we do have different mysteries. Every man and every woman chooses not merely what they will believe, but also *which* mysteries they are willing to live with.

The Christian, for example, chooses to live with the mystery of why we are born on a restless planet, with earthquakes, floods, and famine. And why we live in a world with so much suffering, why the good die young, why endless troubles afflict some people but not others, and why Jesus didn't return as soon as he prophesied he would, and so on.

The atheist chooses to live with the mystery of why there is so much beauty, music, wonder, and love in the world, when it doesn't seem called for by implacable evolution. Why our bodies sometimes run so well, why order sometimes arises out of chaos, why faith in the idea that we have a Creator seems to persist in the world down through history, why heavenly music evolves out of someone's little brain, why some people experience genuine miracles (for example, I actually died in 2002 but then came back, I know not why or how).

And, to our point here, why do some people receive certain gifts, certain insights, while others do not? Does God play favorites? We do not know. It is a mystery. And neither faith nor lack of faith can explain mysteries. Mystery is a part of life – sometimes irritating, sometimes baffling, sometimes spectacularly dazzling.

REFLECTIONS: Individuals seem to be more empowered than ever – more technology and knowledge at their disposal, more choices. Does that make discernment of vocation easier? More difficult?

BOLLES: Well, I like Jesus' answers to anything that he did give an answer to. And, to this subject of discernment of vocation, he said, “Except you become as little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven.” So that settles it, we must become like

little children. Therefore, if your technology and your knowledge make you more childlike, then I would think it makes discernment easier for people. But if because you have technology and knowledge, you become “more adult” – which usually means more serious, less trusting, more demanding of proof, more “sophisticated” – then I think it makes discernment more difficult. It all depends upon your heart, not on your technology or knowledge.

REFLECTIONS: Are people more alone in the adventure of discernment today? Some say churches used to be more active helping individuals clarify vocation.

BOLLES: I don't think it's an issue of what's happened to the subject of *vocation* in churches, but what's happened to the subject of *stewardship*. Re-read the Psalms. Re-read our Lord's teachings. They're full of the concept that the earth is the Lord's, and all that therein is. The earth is the Lord's, and we are appointed by Him stewards of whatever comes within our ken and province. That means we are stewards of everything in our life – of our body, our talents or gifts, our possessions, and the loved ones given into our care. That's a full definition of stewardship and it includes, therefore, vocation.

Is this taught in our churches? Generally speaking, No, no, and no. Instead, what we find taught these days is the narrowest conception of stewardship imaginable. In all too many cases, stewardship is restricted to the question of Offerings, and Pledges, and Tithes. Once a year.

And so to your question: were churches more active in the past in helping individuals clarify their vocation than they are now? Well, that depends on the church. Some churches teach a much richer concept of stewardship today than before. They teach about oil and energy, and going green. Other churches teach virtually nothing about stewardship – in its deepest definition – but I don't know that they ever did. So: it's a toss-up. But as individual churches on various streets in America struggle to survive, they tend to turn to a narrower and narrower teaching about stewardship – money, money, money. And this has made for a dumbing-down of the concept that vocation is a matter of defining how you are going to be steward, reporting to the Lord, of your brain, your body, your arms, feet, and heart.

REFLECTIONS: Why you? How did this subject (and this book) become your calling?

BOLLES: Well, boy do I wish I knew! The historical facts are simple: I was canon pastor of Grace Cathed-

ral, back in 1966-68, I was let go, due to a budget crunch, my boss the Dean of the Cathedral found me another job, working for ten Protestant denominations, which required me to visit all campuses in the nine western states, to see what help the various campus ministers on each campus needed. I found, over time, that they too were being let go, one by one, for the same reason I had been: budget crunch! I determined to help them, traveling some 68,000 miles (I kept a log) on a handsome travel budget, asking three questions wherever I went: one, “How do you change careers without going back to school?” Two, “How do you find a job if the traditional methods – resumes, agencies, and ads – don't turn up anything for you? What's plan B?” And then three, “If *you* don't know, who do you think *might* know?”

When I was done with these travels, I put my findings in a self-published book of 128 pages (typed by me in my office, copied by a local copy shop in San Francisco) on Dec. 1, 1970. Two years later, after selling 2,000 or so copies (at \$6.95 a copy) a publisher appeared (the late Phil Wood, owner of Ten Speed Press in Berkeley) who wanted to publish my little book commercially. I said he could if he'd let me revise, rewrite, and update it every year. He said yes, he published it, and shortly it leaped onto bestseller lists all over the country, staying on *The New York Times* list for over five years – until they reconfigured their lists. It is not just cosmetically updated but is dramatically rewritten and revised each year, by me, myself, and I. It has sold ten million copies to date, been translated into twenty-

We are appointed by God stewards of whatever comes within our ken and province. That means we are stewards of everything in our life – of our body, our talents, our possessions, and the loved ones given into our care.

two languages, used in twenty-six countries, is the bestselling job-hunting book in the history of the world, recognized by the Library of Congress as one of twenty-five books that have shaped people's lives down through the ages, and chosen by *Time* magazine (last summer) as one of the 100 best non-fiction works to appear since 1923.

Now, if somewhere in there, you see an answer to “Why you?” I'd love to hear it. I think we're back to our earlier subject of Mystery. And that's okay by me.



What Is Worth Doing?

By Stephen H. Phelps

The concept of vocation gives voice to a mystical hope, that the prime Worker might call us to our work and cooperate in it sensibly. The blaring horns of Western culture, however, have nearly drowned out the concept in noisy banalities. On one hand, the word vocation loses its meaning when used as a synonym for occupation or job. On the other, not a few who like to think their call was uttered by the Caller seem glib to assume it was given once and for all. Surely the churches' timid silence amid the violence of waste and war and wealth in America should chasten us clergy to question our own vocation.

Let us admit our predicament. Unlike unpaid prophets of old, we paid preachers often have it much harder hearing the Caller once we've got the call from the search committee. Rather than defining it as "what I do," let us think of vocation as a species of discernment ever subject to re-direction, and even to suspension.

At the first judicatory meeting following my ordination, a minister was being honored on news of his early retirement. He had a cancer to attend to. After warm words from many friends, he addressed the assembly. "If you believe that the sovereign God called you to your work," he said, "then you must accept that God can hang up on your call, too. I believe God has ended my call in order to speak with me in a new way."

This pastor's fierce sober-mindedness served as an invocation upon my ministry. The word thrilled me: vocation as a live wire bound to go dead when you are wanted on another line.

Call Waiting

Before I was twenty years old, the question, *What is worth doing?* laid an inexorable grip on my thoughts. It seemed alive. It vexed my choice of a college major. For more than a dozen years thereafter, my skills and interests brought me to no adequate answers.

At any point, I could have taken a good-paying job doing work which did not matter to me, but this seemed a devil's bargain. Rather than commit to such an occupation of my soul, I worked as a bicycle mechanic for a few years. I was good at it, but that did not quiet the question of worthy work. And that was the point – to not give up; to stay alert, through

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"No, my son, not this. And no, regrettable,
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further up."**

a distinct angst, to a hope which I could not account for, calling me beyond what I was doing.

If we define identity as the matrix of one's foremost commitments, mine was taking shape as a hunger after a fuller use of my freedom and intelligence than I was able to engage at that stage of my life, in that place where I lived, in that time in history. Understood this way, vocation is an inwardly sensible desire for a meaningful connection between self and society – between one's intelligence (that is, one's entire particular giftedness) and one's perception of what the times need. The divine timbre in vocation's voice resounds in the energies

of discovery, both of oneself and of others, and in the persistence of personal will for more discovery, when all seems unresponsive.

In practice, a large proportion of the workers of the world have no vocation to their daily work. Divine discovery in connection with society does not enter into their conception of the meaning of their labor. Fervently we might pray that any whose labors are so constrained by necessity may know vocation to marriage, parenthood, participation in a spiritual community or in civic life, or another form of society. Even so, every vocation is limited – or focused – by historical conditions, for you can't choose to do what your times don't need.

The Via Negativa

Still, this leaves a wide field for vocational discernment, since the times are always changing, and the freedom to choose an ill-paid path in hope of seeing a far country cannot be foreclosed. In my own case, after bicycles, I took jobs that involved more of my intelligence, yet they did not adequately answer to my desire for work worth doing. Today I think of all those jobs together as vocational training on the *via negativa*, the ancient spiritual path of discovery by negations. It was as if the Caller were saying, "No, my son, not this. And no, regrettably, not that either – but further in and further up."

In desiring vocation, a person becomes aware that her identity hangs on an adequate resolution of a paradoxical desire: she *must* apply the gift of her intelligence to meaningful purposes yet which she freely chooses. God knows, work is a necessity laid upon us by our bodies. This we share with all the animals. However, the divine image shimmers in the hunger for meaning from our hours. Together, these issue as the paradox in vocation: where one feels freed to cooperate with necessity in connecting one's self with society, a person has a vocation. For some, it seems the elements of need and choice and action all fall together in a joyful symphony. Very many, however, must discern their vocation in the breach – that is, in the absence of actual work which uses their intelligence well. In this breach is a still small voice in the concept of vocation, so hard to hear in these times.

What if the breach from meaningful work is viewed as a gift of the Holy Spirit? I receive a similar gift rather regularly during the writing of sermons. I notice that the words I am putting down seem labored or obvious or boring. I take it as a warning: *Do not proceed in this direction. Never mind that it is already 4:00 a.m. on Sunday. Stop! Wait! Listen! Another word must come.*

Obviously, the anxiety accompanying this crisis of the night has quite a different inflection from that of not having the right work. But the connection is too valuable to ignore. I put it this way. In the gift of God, my inward ear has become disciplined to the sound of the divine *Stop!*; and my will, to wait in silence.

Not just sermons but my pastorates, as well as the spaces between them, have borne the fruits of this vocational discipline. By means of it, my calling has been re-directed several times. Therefore, I commend to those feeling alienated from their work to consider whether that feeling can reveal a voice

One must practice inward hearing. To heed the voice that calls a stop, as well as the voice that sends one forth, a person needs spiritual discipline.

reminding and encouraging them, that if they do not bend too hastily to the present necessity, they will discover in their own intelligence a new gift connecting them with the need of others.

For this possibility to emerge, one must practice inward hearing. To heed the voice that calls a stop, as well as the voice that sends one forth, a person needs spiritual discipline. You need to know how to be at one with yourself, how to be alone at prayer and meditation, for it takes fortitude to bring nothing into emptiness. Why, even a little of the stuff that so easily occupies our minds instantly dissipates the energy of attention we need to see ourselves and to discern the gifts of the Spirit. *Wait upon the Lord!* Attention is vocation. Indeed, apart from attention, there is no vocation.

A person might feel great satisfaction with his work, but satisfaction is not the criterion of vocation. Rather, as we have been saying, it is desire for a voice, an inner hearing with the authority to release us from excessive attachment to our outer concerns, and the power to open us to a new thing at the right time.

"The Old Words Fail ..."

The ecclesiastical machines of the twentieth century all but ceased offering guidance and practice in such practical Christian life patterns as these. It is not a coincidence that a large part of Western culture abandoned churches where, in Bonhoeffer's words, "the old words fail ... and Christian life consists only of prayer and trying to do the right thing." Churches trekked into the deserts of our broken society with our own broken body, but lost the way to the well.

No wonder people stopped coming. Real food and drink were too scarce. But wherever a community is teaching and supporting practices that help the faithful know that “place in the soul which neither time, nor space, nor created thing can touch” (Meister Eckhart), it is there, on the *via negativa*, where the people can find the face of the future in Christ.

To renew this teaching from the heart of the theology of the cross, those who have wrestled with

Wait upon the Lord! Attention is vocation. Indeed, apart from attention, there is no vocation.

their vocation to the work of God’s church may use their own struggle as curriculum for learning how to listen for the Caller.

It is a rough consequence of the economic recession that churches have drastically reduced openings for pastoral positions and many recent seminary graduates have been waiting a long time for ordination. The process for receiving a call to a church has changed in these conditions, but they have not altered the meaning of vocation. Rather, the conditions shift the terms of call to a deeper level.

And that depth in church leaders is what the church needs most of all. Indeed, these difficult times may be preparing the church’s next servants to guide it into the reformation that must surely come now.

The Rev. Stephen H. Phelps ’73 B.A., ’86 M.Div. is Interim Senior Minister at The Riverside Church in New York City.

JOURNEYMAN’S WAGES

By Clemens Starck

To the waters of the Willamette I come
in nearly perfect weather,
Monday morning
traffic backed up at the bridge
a bad sign.

Be on the job at eight,
boots crunching in gravel;
cinch up the tool belt, string out the cords
to where we left off on Friday –
that stack of old
form lumber, that bucket of rusty bolts
and those two beat-up sawhorses
wait patiently for us.

Gil is still drunk, red-eyed, pretending he’s not
and threatening to quit;
Gordon is studying the prints.
Slab on grade, tilt-up panels, Glu-lams
and trusses ...

Boys, I’ve got an idea –
instead of a supermarket
why couldn’t this be a cathedral?

Extraordinary Days: A Life in the Making

By Mike Del Ponte

The question that dominated my early thoughts – “What do you want to be when you grow up?” – sounds naïve to me now when I reflect on my unconventional career path as an aspiring priest, marketer, peacekeeper in the West Bank, microfinance consultant, and now social entrepreneur.

As I child, I was sure I wanted to be quarterback of the San Francisco 49ers. In high school, a career in law, medicine, and eventually Congress looked realistic. Then, in college, after very intense discernment I felt I should become either a Catholic priest or a theology professor, a decision that led me to Yale Divinity School.

All these plans and predictions proved to be far off course from the work I do now as an entrepreneur and marketer. My idea of vocation changed and deepened, setting me on a path I wouldn't have dreamed possible a few year before.

When I made my childhood plans to become the 49ers' quarterback, I based my decision on one factor: my dad loved Joe Montana, the Niners' star QB

I've learned an important element about discernment: you can't do it simply with prayer and introspection. You have to go out and try stuff.

at the time. My dad and I spent many hours tossing the football around in the backyard and watching games on Sundays to cheer on Montana.

Then, when I was twelve, my father died of emphysema, and the first thing that came to mind when I heard the news was my career. In that moment, I told myself that I am now the man of the house and need to take care of my mom and sister. I wasn't even a teenager yet, but my plan was to get into a good college and make a lot of money, thinking money would solve any problems my family encountered.

So I executed on my plan – made my college applications as compelling as possible, took honors classes, jumped into varsity sports, leadership programs, and volunteer work. Finally, the day I was waiting for arrived. I was accepted into a private university on the East Coast, actually more than one. In my young mind, I was well on my way to getting a high-paying job, taking care of my mom and sister, and living a happy and fulfilled life.

Tuition Blues

There was just one problem. My family could not afford the high tuition. With the small amount of financial aid I was offered and the prospect of taking out a daunting amount of student loans, I realized that going to one of these schools was not an option after all. My plan was spoiled. After six years of hard work, everything was out the window. Discouraged and now unsure how I would fulfill my promise to provide for my family, I decided I would wrap up my time at high school and then go to a local community college.

One day, a few weeks after my disappointing realization about college, I decided to drive to the library to do homework. As I backed my car out of my driveway I saw a handful of letters in the mailbox. So I pulled the car over, grabbed the bundle of mail, and tossed it onto the passenger seat.

Seeing one letter addressed to me, I tore it open. “Congratulations, you have been selected as a Frank H. Buck Scholar,” it read. The Buck Scholarship, provided by a family foundation in Northern California, goes to a few students annually in the region between Berkeley and Sacramento. I had applied for it months before. But knowing how competitive

it is, I never dreamed I would be selected. When I got the news I was overwhelmed with joy and gratitude: I knew the scholarship covers tuition, travel, room and board, books, computers, study abroad, and other expenses for undergraduate and graduate studies. In other words, the Buck Scholarship suddenly made it possible for me to fulfill my plan of going to a school that would change my life. I was back on track, I thought.

Liberating News

When I got to Boston College for freshman orientation, we were told right away that, regardless of our majors, we could do “anything and everything” professionally. This news liberated me, shaking me out of my childhood goal of making money strictly to “take care” of my family. It launched me on a new path of serious vocational discernment, which as a result has given me a very fulfilling career and allowed me to have a positive impact on the world. Ironically, this path will most likely lead to more money than I would have ever made if I followed my more conventional plan.

At Boston College we were given many resources to help us discern vocation. There were retreats, courses, office hours, counseling, and endless conversations. I got clarity on the distinction between discerning vocation and finding a job: the former is about answering God’s call for your life, the latter is about deciding how you want to make money. When you ask people about their careers, they tell you what they do. When you ask them about their vocation, they describe what they were put on earth to do. Armed with this insight, I have been sustained on the journey ever since. But the process has not yielded one specific answer, like “you should be a

“What are you good at?” “What do you love to do?” “What does the world need?”

pediatrician for the rest of your life,” which is what most people expect. The conventional approach is to get locked into trying to answer the question “What career will I choose?” I have found that the more important question is “What is God calling me to do *now*?”

Two sets of vocational questions have helped me. I learned the first set from the Rev. Michael Himes, a theology professor at Boston College: “What are you good at?” “What do you love to do?” and “What does the world need?”

When I was at Boston College I became preoccupied with a new stirring: I believed I was being called to become a Catholic priest. This was around the time of intense coverage of the sexual abuse scandal. The American church already had a drastic

When you ask people about their careers, they tell you what they do. When you ask them about their vocation, they describe what they were put on earth to do.

shortage of priests, and the scandal only made this problem worse. I figured the world needed more bright, young, energetic, and moral priests, so I convinced myself that I was being called to become one. And I went to Yale Divinity School with this goal in mind.

But at YDS I concluded that the prospect of being a celibate priest and taking a vow of obedience were things that I neither loved nor would be good at. Similar discoveries came about with my second option, a theology professor. I did not love the endless hours of reading and writing, and I couldn’t say I was particularly good at academics. So I ruled out a scholarly vocation as well. That set of three discernment questions – “What are you good at?” “What do you love to do?” and “What does the world need?” – were serving me well as a test and guide. I recommend them to anyone.

Global Expedition

While at YDS I discovered another set of helpful vocational questions, which propelled me into a rich, unpredictable career marked by humanitarian work on four continents, meetings at the White House, coverage on CNN, and international awards. Those questions are “God, what do you want me to know?” and “God, what do you want me to do?” I ask these questions regularly in prayer and then record the answers in my journal. They help me refine my answers to that initial set of three questions.

I’ve learned another important element about discernment: you can’t do it simply with prayer and introspection. You have to go out and try stuff. Before matriculating at YDS, I spent a year exploring. I volunteered locally, started a nonprofit organization, worked a horribly boring office job, went on a ten-day silent Buddhist retreat, and served as a Christian Peacemaker in the West Bank, documenting human rights abuses, protecting Palestinian children, and protesting military occupation.

Between my first and second year at the Divinity School, I worked as a microfinance consultant in

Western Nepal, gathering data for a Yale Law School professor and providing strategic advice to NGOs in Nepal.

Using my discernment questions, I finally discovered my first true professional calling. At Yale I was meeting many aspiring social entrepreneurs – smart, young, passionate students who had ideas to change the world, but lacked the resources to get their ideas off the ground. This was just when social entrepreneurship, the idea of using business prin-

Career advice, job fairs, and resume critiques are ordinary tools that produce ordinary results. But if we are to build the kingdom of God, the key is to listen for God's calling and have the courage to follow.

ciples to solve social issues, was becoming more popular. Muhammad Yunus had just won the Nobel Prize for his microfinance initiatives with poor people, which inspired more young people to enter the field. I saw that these young social entrepreneurs needed funding, advice, and other crucial resources in order to have impact and success, and I found that I was good at connecting them with such resources and I really enjoyed the work.

So, still at YDS, I launched a pilot program for what later became Sparkseed, a global nonprofit organization investing in the world's most promising young social entrepreneurs. Sparkseed provides mentoring, consulting services, investments, convenings, and connections. The pilot proved successful.

Branching Out

After graduating, I moved back to California to run Sparkseed full-time. The first sixteen months were difficult. I did not take a salary and had to work side jobs to make ends meet, doing everything from project management consulting to bartending to pushing gurneys at a hospital.

Finally, Sparkseed reached an inflection point and became a leader in early-stage social entrepreneurship. The company was featured in *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *CNN*, *Inc. Magazine*, *Fast Company*, and *Financial Times*. In a very short time we helped launch fifteen social ventures and won an international Social Innovation Award for our work.

In 2010, I left my post as founder and CEO of Sparkseed to oversee its merger with Mobilize.org and pursue a marketing role at BranchOut, a Silicon

Valley tech startup. I was hired to create all of BranchOut's marketing programs, including branding, public relations, enterprise sales, college marketing, partnerships, and our CEO's thought-leadership efforts. I felt called to the position because I knew it would teach me how to build big companies that could improve millions of lives.

BranchOut proved to be the right place to learn. It grew from ten to fifty employees and from 10,000 to ten million users in one year. We also raised \$24 million in venture capital in a matter of months, a rare feat in the startup world. At BranchOut, I learned much about social media and marketing, as well as how to run a company. I was lucky to spend a lot of time with Rick Marini, BranchOut's founder and CEO, who is well-respected in Silicon Valley.

I've taken these lessons with me now that I've left BranchOut to start a new company that uses e-commerce to drive funding to lifesaving charitable efforts.

There are many Biblical examples of people who have gone on unconventional journeys to follow God's calling – Abraham, Moses, the disciples, Mary mother of Jesus. God called each person, and that person followed the Lord. Today we are faced with career advice, job fairs, and resume critiques. These ordinary tools produce ordinary results. But if we are to live extraordinary lives and build the kingdom of God, the key is to listen for God's calling and have the courage to follow.

Mike Del Ponte '08 M.A.R. is a social entrepreneur based in San Francisco. He blogs at www.mikedelponte.com.

A Vocation that Embraces All Others

Theologian Michael Himes of Boston College, on discernment:

"One vocation embraces all our other vocations: to be a human being. We are called to be as intelligent, as responsible, as free, as courageous, as imaginative, and as loving as we can possibly be. All of my other vocations, all of the many ways in which I live my life, must contribute to that one all-embracing demand, that one constant vocation to be fully, totally, absolutely as human as I can possibly be."

Source: Boston College Intersections Project

The Meaning of Calling in a Culture of Choice

By Edward P. Hahnenberg

(Adapted from Awakening Vocation: A Theology of Christian Call by Edward P. Hahnenberg, published by Liturgical Press, 2010, by publisher's permission; see www.litpress.org)

“Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”¹

Mary Oliver’s well-worn line continues to resonate. After all, is there a more pressing question? Is there one that cuts more quickly to the heart? One that so powerfully gathers up our hopes and dreams and directs them into the future?

For centuries, churches have used the language of vocation to capture this question. But today, the notion of vocation or calling is complicated in myriad ways. What does it mean “to feel called” or “to have a vocation” in a world where our churches seem disconnected from our everyday experiences, where work can be banal or impersonal or even complicit in injustice, where our careers change so many times, where so many marriages start so late and end too soon? Always the ideal remains – a life of loving, permanent commitment that sustains a life’s work in ways both fulfilling and of genuine service to others. But for many, this ideal exists more as a hope than a reality.

The Christian conception of vocation is further complicated by the way it is so often seen through the lens of our contemporary cultural default: *choice*.

A World of Seekers

Choice has become one of our most important ways of framing reality, shaping our approach to all aspects of our lives, including the spiritual dimension. Robert Wuthnow described this dynamic as a fundamental shift in American sensibility from religious “dwelling” to spiritual “seeking.”² If an earlier era located religion within stable institutions, inherited traditions, and clear group identities, then today spirituality has become a project for the individual, a search for bits of wisdom and insight that might be used to craft a coherent framework for life. Rather

than rest secure in the womb of organized religion, today we launch out on our own. We are seekers, on a quest, creating our own faith story.

The power of choice as a frame for the spiritual life challenges older assumptions about religious membership and participation. Indeed, the indi-

To put it bluntly, the trouble with making “me” the center of the dynamics of discernment is the fact that this “me” so often messes things up.

vidualism inherent in this paradigm and the superficiality of so much of what claims our attention in today’s spiritual marketplace have made the culture of religious choice an easy target. Critics accuse it of promoting a trivial, privatized, and self-absorbed spirituality – one that simply mimics our larger consumer culture.

It would be a mistake, however, to judge the paradigm of choice by its most shallow forms. It needs critique. But it cannot be written off. To do so would unfairly underestimate the motivations of the many spiritual seekers who are looking for purpose, orientation, and meaning in life. Their search – our search – cannot be dismissed as selfish. For many, the quest ends not in self-improvement, but extends outward in altruistic behavior, communal participation, and diverse forms of religious practice. Choice

can move religion beyond blind acceptance or passive membership. It can stress the personal nature of our relationship with God.

And yet, the weakness in all of this is the way in which the paradigm of choice can so easily short-circuit personal transformation. If religious traditions no longer provide the context for the spiritual life, instead serving only as resources for our own spiritual constructions, can they ever really challenge us? Can our faith ever call us beyond what we want or feel we need? In other words, the real issue is not choice, but conversion. It is precisely here that the ancient language of vocation can help.

Resisting Self-Absorption

Vocation taps into the deep-seated sensibilities of the quest – integrity, identity, itinerary – but in a way that resists self-absorption. It acknowledges the importance of discernment and decision – the virtues of choice – but recognizes that our decisions come as a response to something or someone beyond. To speak of call is to acknowledge a caller, to see that God’s gracious initiative precedes all of our projects and our plans, that our individual journeys have a goal.

By and large, Protestants and Catholics have followed two different trajectories in talking about vocation. I met one of these trajectories at a young age, growing up as I did in a small Catholic town

A subtle shift in thinking took place: from vocation as faithfulness *within* one’s work, to vocation as faithfulness *through* one’s work, to vocation as faithfulness *to* one’s work. The Protestant work ethic was born.

in Northern Michigan. For all of us students at St. Mary’s School, it was clear: to “have a vocation” meant to be called to be a priest or a nun. Either you had a vocation, or you did not.

Alongside these religious vocations, there was a kind of secondary use of the word, one that I still associate with the guys who left our high school every afternoon and headed to the local community college. There they took classes in auto mechanics, electronics repair, and computer-aided drafting. They were in the “vocational program.” But as a Catholic, that seemed strange to me. “Vocations” were found in seminaries and convents, not community colleges.

If Catholics confined the category of vocation to a narrow set of religious roles, I later learned that

Protestants have for centuries embraced a much broader notion. Martin Luther famously expanded the language of priesthood beyond the clerical caste, reclaiming the Biblical notion of the “priesthood of all believers.” He made a similar move with vocation, arguing that it is not just the monk or the minister who is called. Every state of life and any type of work can be considered a calling, a true vocation. Why? Because every state of life and any type of work offers the opportunity to serve others. Monks claim to be following God. But, according to Luther’s polemic, what monks really do is flee from their neighbor. They abandon the particular place of responsibility in which and to which God has called them. For Luther, we meet our neighbor – and love our neighbor – precisely in and through our callings, whether we be a mother, a magistrate, or a milkmaid. By faithfully fulfilling the mundane tasks of family and work, we live a life of love and service to others, and thus respond to God’s call.

Birth of a Work Ethic

Given the richness of Luther’s vision, there is a sad irony that marks much of subsequent Protestant reflection on vocation. As the concept of calling passes from Luther, through John Calvin, to the English Puritans, the concept itself is transformed. Luther talked about vocation in terms of one’s state of life. Calvin emphasized more the idea of productive labor. The Puritans took this notion of work and ran with it. In the process, there is a subtle shift in thinking: from vocation as faithfulness *within* one’s work, to vocation as faithfulness *through* one’s work, to vocation as faithfulness *to* one’s work. Thus the Protestant work ethic was born.

In an unfortunate reversal, Luther’s attempt to highlight the sacredness of work led to a secularization of the concept of calling. We get to a point where we can talk with ease about “vocation” without ever mentioning God – as in my classmates sent off to the vocational program to learn how to repair carburetors or write computer code.

Over the centuries, Catholics may have restricted the notion of vocation to a few sacral roles, and Protestants may have reduced it to the secular realm of work; however, in more recent decades, theologians have recovered more fruitful ways to talk about God’s call. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), Catholics have embraced “the universal call to holiness” as the starting point for any treatment of vocation. Protestants have, in turn, offered rich theologies of work, sensitive to the profound ambiguities of today’s global economy. But some of the best reflection has turned away from the tendency

to talk about vocation in terms of general roles and responsibilities, and focused instead on the specific human being who is called.

We see this stress on the particularity of the person, for example, in two twentieth-century giants: the Reformed theologian Karl Barth and the Catholic Karl Rahner. Barth saw in Luther's theology of vocation a helpful stress on context. God meets us where we are, as we are. Our individual identities provide a first clue to our callings. Each of us is a unique creation placed by God in a particular time, at a particular place, and gifted with particular abilities,

Can our faith ever call us beyond what we want or feel we need? In other words, the real issue is not choice, but conversion. It is precisely here that the ancient language of vocation can help.

experiences, and associations. God calls me, and my response cannot but be a response that comes out of the way that I am made.³

In a very different vein, Karl Rahner also emphasized the uniqueness of the individual's call. As for Barth, so for Rahner, one's calling is wrapped up in one's particular identity. But for Rahner, this identity flows not just from creation but also from the gift of grace, the love of God that meets each of us – constitutes each of us – as a unique child of God. It is indeed true that God has called each of us by name.⁴

The Self, True and False

This emphasis on the particularity of the spiritual subject is not new to Christian tradition, but it has taken on a new centrality in our own day. It pervades theological reflection and popular consciousness. It is difficult to imagine an era more preoccupied with the unique story of the individual. From postmodern theologies to Facebook and Twitter, particularity is our passion.

Following Barth and Rahner, I find this emphasis helpful for thinking about vocation. There is a concern, however, that has to do with where we began: the challenge of choice.

To begin reflection on vocation with one's unique identity is to frame the question of vocational discernment in terms of harmony. Discerning one's call is a process of discovering harmony between who I am as a child of God and a particular path in life. The danger is that this process becomes reduced to a search for what will meet my tastes, my needs, my wants. The danger is that we begin to imagine

vocational discernment – as we imagine so much of our lives – along the model of consumer choice.

To put it bluntly, the trouble with making “me” the center of the dynamics of discernment is the fact that this “me” so often messes things up. If discernment asks that I seek harmony between who I am and a particular path forward, then it is crucially important to have an open and honest sense of myself before God. Resonance means little if the tuning fork is bent. Genuine vocational discernment demands of each of us an ever more clear recognition of our true selves, an acceptance and understanding of the unique child of God that each of us was graciously created to be.

What we are talking about is conversion – an ongoing process of transformation that frees us from attachment to a skewed sense of ourselves, our needs, and our plans. It is not just about “being me.” It is about becoming free to be me. And for that we need help. As Christians, we need immersion in a narrative and a community. We need those practices of prayer, fellowship, service, and solidarity that slowly chip away at that false sense of self that frustrates our response to God. We need others to help us know ourselves. For Christians, the quest that is so central to the spiritual life today is not a solitary search. It is a pilgrimage, a shared journey of discovery that comes as we struggle together to follow Christ. Through this discipleship we learn to discern.

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Notes

- 1 Mary Oliver, “The Summer Day,” in *New and Selected Poems* (Beacon Press, 1992), p. 94.
- 2 Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (University of California Press, 1998), p. 2.
- 3 Karl Barth, “Vocation,” in *Church Dogmatics*, III/4, translated by A. T. Mackay, et al. (T & T Clark, 1961), pp. 599-600.
- 4 Karl Rahner, “The Significance in Redemptive History of the Individual Member of the Church,” in *The Christian Commitment*, translated by Cecily Hastings (Sheed & Ward, 1963), pp. 57-58.



Listen for the Sound of the Genuine: Stephen Lewis



A Baptist minister, educator, and former banker, Stephen Lewis is the new president of The Fund for Theological Education, based in Atlanta. FTE identifies gifted young people from diverse backgrounds who seek vocations in ministry and teaching. In nearly sixty years, the organization has awarded more than 6,000 fellowships – about 100 a year – to fund individuals’ theological education or their exploration of ministerial calling. FTE also partners with congregations, last year training nearly 800 church leaders in “VocationCARE” practices to nurture young leaders. In 2011, FTE awarded some forty fellowships to minority students pursuing graduate study in religion, Bible, and theology – an effort to help new generations interpret and give birth to a changing church. (see www.fteleaders.org)

REFLECTIONS: Are the obstacles to religious vocation so different from a generation ago?

LEWIS: Several trends come to mind that identify these times. One is the tech revolution, which is reshaping community and the way we engage information and relationships. It has mitigated the way people traditionally meet face-to-face, yet it has given people new online access to others across the whole world in ways that a physical building couldn’t make possible.

There’s a larger public now that wants to know the relevance of religious institutions that seem to have had a heyday already. What does it mean to be community in a fast, techno, consumer-driven culture? That requires a different set of tools and skills.

Another trend is the wave of baby boomer retirements and the challenges that will come with the aging of congregations.

Young leaders must prepare for many expressions of church – rural setting, urban, suburban. As the research shows, most congregations see less

than one hundred members per week. Some are comprised of senior citizens – older, faithful people who need someone to care for them and bring new life, or help them merge with another church. Some are just looking for a chaplain as they ease into the twilight of their congregational life.

By contrast, there are also the large, big-box versions of churchgoing, with multiple resources for multiple constituencies and lots of amenities that reflect the searching, purchasing style of a consumer culture that hopes to find a reflection of its own values.

Making our way out of this recession, many churches are just trying to keep the lights on. But in every case what you find are institutions very much in need of quality leadership.

REFLECTIONS: Is it harder to lead churches today?

LEWIS: Congregations and denominations are not as strong as they were. We live in a post-Christian and pluralistic era. Of course, there are pockets where Christianity is still strong, but some pastors argue

that this is the last generation of Christians who grew up in the church and know the stories and the heritage. The new generations coming into the churches now are different: they don't have that memory. Reaching them requires new skills.

REFLECTIONS: How is your organization adapting to this changing scene?

LEWIS: We are working with a remarkable new generation. Among young people born in the early 1980s, the Millennials, a good number are committed to justice, peace, fairness – in short, the social gospel. That's the nature of this generation: a propensity to want to change the world and find purpose in their own lives. They're asking, "What does my faith have to do with the conditions of my community?" They place a high value on asking deeper questions of

People at church were seeing things in me that I couldn't see. Eventually, they told me: God has a hand on your life, and you have to trust that God will lead you.

life. They are seeking the intersection of faith and service, with a deep but not uncritical love of the church. Like I said, there's a deep need to change the world. Young church leaders may not know what that will look like, but they are bringing that passion to the way they read texts and analyze social conditions.

REFLECTIONS: The conventional wisdom says churches are in decline, and there's a growing "So What?" attitude about religion. How does it look from your position?

LEWIS: I hear boomers say young people aren't coming to church anymore. What many are really saying is the literal building is the place where church must happen. But maybe boomers have not developed the lens for seeing that young people today are creating their own communities – they just don't gather in the way boomers are accustomed. They might gather at a coffee house, or in someone's apartment or basement. But they *are* gathering. They are asking questions. They are trying to seriously explore what the beloved community can mean.

REFLECTIONS: In your own life, you moved from banker to ordained minister. Your calling changed?

LEWIS: Working in banking, there came a point when I thought, there's got to be more to life than climbing the corporate ladder. At church I was seeing how deeply people were engaging the questions of life and trying to change the community. I came to realize what mattered to me was, how could I make a difference in the world? And people at church were seeing things in me that I couldn't see. Eventually, they told me: God has a hand on your life, and you have to trust that God will lead you. I was twenty-four. What I realized was that I wanted to bring to the church environment some principles of leadership – mentoring, coaching, identifying one's growing edges and gifts – that I had experienced in corporate life.

REFLECTIONS: And you work now with church bodies on this elusive question of vocation. What can congregations do to nurture young leadership in their midst?

LEWIS: If God has called these congregations into being, then they should continuously think about carrying that calling into the future. They must think inter-generationally and recognize their own role in the congregation's calling and in a young person's calling.

There are many ways to step into that. Honor a young person's talent and presence. That might mean tapping that young person on the shoulder, asking him or her into the choir or to teach. It means the pastor carrying a list of young people that he or she calls regularly, or lay leaders having lunch with a student. It could mean inviting a young person to walk alongside an older leader to see the daily work that is done.

Whatever the practice, the message to the young person should be: we have seen gifts in you and we want to pray with you as you figure out what you want to do, and we invite you to consider whether congregational ministry might be what you are called to do.

We want churches to help young people keep in mind what Howard Thurman told students at a Spelman College address in 1980: "There is in you something that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself. Nobody like you has ever been born and no one like you will ever be born again – you are the only one."

Invite young people at church to try on the mantle of leadership: this should be in our DNA.

Everybody's Right to Vocational Dreams

By Phil Tom

The Reformation idea of the dignity of work was revolutionary. It made it possible to view all good work as a divine vocation. The question now is: are twenty-first century churches still in touch with this heritage? Are they willing to stand up for it?

Before John Calvin, society regarded work as a necessary evil to provide food, clothing, and shelter. Calvin, the founder of Presbyterianism, changed this grim understanding of labor. He understood work as a calling from God. He envisioned social conditions that would help build a better community free of sin and injustice – a means of glorifying God, the true goal of work. All work should be shrouded in fairness, dignity, just relations. Those who abused, exploited, or sought advantage of others were sinners.

The Reformation elevation of labor unleashed new economic and spiritual energies, inviting people to follow their vocational dreams and adopt practices of discernment to hear the call of God. But there's another side to this discovery. Because work connects all of us in the interdependent human economy, it implies that everyone has a role in either contributing to the dignity of everyone's labor – or eroding it. We cannot talk long about vocation without thinking about the millions of workers who languish in unjust conditions – their own

We cannot talk long about vocation without thinking about the millions of workers who languish in unjust conditions.

vocational hopes or accomplishments frustrated by unfair or illegal practices at work. We should be paying attention when, because of heartless social policy or inhuman conditions, labor becomes cruel and undignified.

Wage theft, for instance, afflicts many workers in this country, yet it gets little public notice. At the U.S.

Department of Labor, the Wage and Hour Division (WHD) handles wage theft cases, getting hundreds of calls every week from workers across the country who say that they have been exploited by their employers – not being paid for the hours they worked or for overtime, or just not getting paid at all. In a recent study of low-wage workers by the National Employment Law Project, they had on average 15 percent of their wages stolen by their employers – about \$2,500 per worker per year. WHD also gets calls from workers who say their employers have misclassified them as contractors rather than as employees so the bosses don't have to pay benefits and payroll taxes. Some of these workers did not realize they had been misclassified until they were injured on the job and learned they could not file a disability claim.

A Personal Stake

In my work I connect our Department of Labor worker-protection agencies with interfaith and ecumenical leaders and their organizations to tackle these trends of injustice. As a person of faith, I believe this fight for worker justice is the right thing to do. As a clergy member of the Presbyterian Church (USA), I believe work is a godly endeavor: it should contribute to the transformation of society. For Presbyterians, these two values of integrity and justice are at stake every day in the workplace.

This is especially true for the work of low-wage American workers, one of the most vulnerable groups exploited by dishonest employers and a down economy. These laborers are the folks who grow and harvest our food, who provide us with the

goods we want at the lowest prices, who serve us in the places we eat, who care for our parents and children, who clean our hotel rooms. These are the invisible ones at the bottom of the food chain in our global economy.

I come to this fight with personal memories: I grew up watching members of my own family work in sweatshops and in the restaurant industry. Sometimes they had to work seven days a week, earning less than minimum wage and receiving no overtime pay, no benefits like sick or vacation days. Because of these working conditions, their health and quality of life suffered. And the family suffered. Like many low-wage immigrant workers such as restaurant and domestic workers today, my family members did not have the chance to enjoy the fruits of their labors. They tolerated these conditions because they had limited vocational options. Their goal was simply to provide for their families as best they could.

I advocate for worker justice so that all workers today, especially low-wage workers, will have a life of health and hope for their families' future. That challenge is greater than ever in an economy where corporations drive down the cost of labor to increase

I come to this fight with personal memories: I grew up watching members of my own family work in sweatshops and in the restaurant industry.

their bottom line, look overseas for cheaper labor in a globalized market, and use technological advances to replace workers. Worker representation has weakened. Union strength is in serious decline: only 6.9 percent of private-sector jobs are now unionized. As faith communities, we should stand in solidarity with our vulnerable brothers and sisters and resist patterns of economic injustice.

A Faith-Labor Disconnect

Unfortunately this message often falls silent. Labor issues are rarely a priority in national church deliberations or in churches' legislative lobbying efforts. Nevertheless, these dire labor trends affect the churches themselves – workers are often parishioners or the children of parishioners. The issue finally is not just a matter of employee empowerment. It's a matter of human dignity – protecting people's rights, their assets, their retirement funds.

Who will stand up for the dignity of people's work? In the first half of the twentieth century, main-

line Protestants and Catholics were closely associated with the union movement and union membership. Many of their churches were working-class and blue-collar. But these congregations moved away from union sympathies as they moved into a middle-class/professional/managerial demographic in the

It would be difficult to imagine this today: a cadre of pastors signing up to work on a factory floor for weeks or months at a time.

prosperous latter decades of the century. When I was a student at McCormick Theological Seminary in the early 1970s, the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations was still in operation. In its heyday, this program at McCormick played a significant hands-on training role by exposing Presbyterian pastors to worker justice and labor issues, putting us to work on the assembly line during summer months. It would be difficult to imagine this today: a cadre of pastors signing up to work on a factory floor for weeks or months at a time! By now, in other words, the disconnect between faith communities and the labor movement is dramatic and severe. We have moved from the assembly line to the management side of life. And labor justice has suffered.

Two decades ago, theologian Matthew Fox offered a broader diagnosis of the damaged relationship between work and spirit. It's relevant today. In *The Reinvention of Work: A New Vision of Livelihood for Our Time* (HarperOne, 1995) he wrote: "Life and livelihood ought not to be separated but flow from the same source, which is Spirit, for both life and livelihood are about Spirit, ... living in depth, living with meaning, purpose, joy, and a sense of contributing to the greater community. A spirituality of work is about bringing life and livelihood back together. ... Jobs are to work as leaves are to a tree. If the tree is ailing, the leaves will fall. Fiddling with leaves is not going to cure an ailing tree; just as one cures an ailing tree by treating its roots, so we cure the crisis in work by treating the root meaning and purpose of work. ... With the industrial revolution work itself was revolutionized. ... Humans changed from producers to consumers. The worker became an assistant to a machine. We should not allow ourselves to be deceived that today's crisis in jobs is just about more jobs; it is not. The job crisis is a symptom of something much deeper: a crisis in our relationship to work, and a challenge put to our species today to reinvent it."

We hear a lot today about celebrations of up-from-the-bootstraps success stories. What about the dream of the beloved community? How do we learn again to stand up for each other?

Some people of faith are demonstrating passion for it, certainly. Congregations are working with their local or regional workers centers through ecumenical and interfaith coalitions such as Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ) and Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) California, or through community organizations like Jobs for Justice and the National People's Action. Some congregations challenge wage theft and misclassification issues, advocate better working conditions, support bills for a living wage, and persuade businesses to provide health benefits and family leave.

Scripture Speaks

These are not mere “secular” actions against economic abuses. Scripture itself speaks to the issue of exploitation of workers. In Isaiah 65:17-25, the prophet proclaims to Israel the hope of a new age where there will be true peace and security, the fruits and blessings of a full life. In Matthew 25:41-46, Jesus proclaims that the decisions made by humanity will help determine its destiny in the age to come. The criteria are whether individuals have performed acts of mercy and justice toward their fellow human beings.

As partners summoned by God to usher in God's new reign, we are called to work for peace and security that everyone can enjoy. When natural disaster strikes, churches respond with their hearts and pocketbooks. But where is the attention upon daily labor abuses that can lead to setbacks and disasters for whole families and communities? It's not necessary for an entire congregation to embrace this work. It just takes a couple of people to step forward and get started. If they organize well, others will see their efforts and join.

Let us find the courage of Isaiah and encourage each other until that day as the prophet proclaims: “For behold, I create a new heaven and new earth. ... They shall plant vineyards and eat them. They shall not plant and another eat, for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall enjoy the work of their hands.”

The Rev. Phil Tom is Director of the Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the U.S. Department of Labor. For some thirty years, he served in Presbyterian parishes in Chicago, St. Paul, and Indianapolis as well as in the denomination's national office in Louisville.

1880s As industrialization intensifies, many urban churches create neighborhood houses to minister to rural and immigrant people moving to cities for work.

1903 The Rev. Charles Stelzle is appointed to lead the Presbyterian Church's Workingman's Department. The task is to minister to working people during the nation's industrial transformation. It eventually become the Department of Church and Labor.

1910 As part of the department's work, Stelzle founds the Labor Temple in New York City, taking a dying congregation and focusing its attention on working-class people. The church grows and becomes a model for social-service congregations serving multi-ethnic neighborhoods daily. For more than forty years, the Labor Temple is known globally for reaching immigrant working people.

1945 The Labor Temple proves the need to educate pastors for modern working-class realities. The result: the Presbyterian Institute of Industrial Relations (PIIR), which becomes a key ministry of McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago.

1950s Presbyterian interest in international missions grows, coinciding with a surge of industrial economies in Asia. Missionaries assist Asian churches that minister to industrial workers. The urban industrial mission model is born.

1966 The urban industrial mission model is adapted by the World Council of Churches and called the Urban Industrial Mission Office, led by Presbyterian pastor George Todd.

1968 As part of the WCC's ministry, the Institute of the Church in an Urban Industrial Society (ICUIS) is formed at McCormick seminary to train pastors for urban industrial ministry globally. In 1970, McCormick's PIIR merges into ICUIS.

2000 McCormick seminary, the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, and the AFL-CIO start Seminary Summer, a ten-week internship for ministry students who work with labor unions and low-wage workers on economic justice.

The new century Church initiatives for labor reform include coalitions to mobilize consumer power, organize boycotts, and engage corporations to save lives and improve working conditions in the name of the gospel. One example: the Campaign for Fair Food, an effort of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and other organizations that partner with farmworkers from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to establish practices within the fast-food and grocery industries that ensure fair wages and human rights of tomato pickers who labor at the base of corporate supply chains.

Source: Presbyterian Resources for Worker Justice

Deborah the Prophet and the U.S. Economy

By Kim Bobo

In the Book of Judges, Deborah was a prophetess and judge at a time when the Israelites were experiencing political hopelessness, social upheaval, and spiritual waywardness.

They were seeking a new vision of society. They cried out to God. Their stories echo down to the twenty-first century. If ever we needed more prophets, more Deborahs, now is the time.

In Scripture a prophet wasn't a fortune-teller but someone who heard a message from God and passed it on. It was usually a message about remaining true to God and making sure the prosperity of society was shared by everyone.

Deborah was also a judge, a respected leader who heard community disputes and gave recommendations. People turned to Deborah for leadership. Despite the patriarchy of the time, she was called to be a prophet and a judge.

The Israelites were exploited by the Canaanites, but there seemed to be nothing they could do. The Canaanites were well-armed, well-organized, with

There is much to learn from Deborah about organizing and occupying.

900 fancy iron chariots. The Israelites were not much of an army – no fearsome weapons, just poor people upset about their condition.

Deborah called Barak, one of the Israelites' leading military men, and said, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you, 'Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking ten thousand from the tribe of Naph'tali and the tribe of Zeb'ulun. And I will draw out Sis'era, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand.' "

Barak was resistant. The odds of defeating such an army weren't good. Deborah had to bolster him, reminding him of the power of God. "Up!" she says.

"Does not the LORD go out before you?"

So Barak went to battle, with 10,000 men following him. The text only says that the Lord routed Sis'era and all his chariots. As scholars explain it, it was a stormy day and the field became mud. Sophisticated iron chariots are useless, in fact a handicap, in mud.

There is much to learn from the example of Deborah and her management of social, spiritual crisis – lessons for our own times and uncertainties. I see three lessons here for organizing and occupying:

Lesson One: Be a prophet in your community.

I bet there were people who told Deborah she couldn't be a prophet. She ignored them. A prophet tells the truth, condemns the wrong, and lifts forth an alternative vision. Our nation is in crisis, several crises. We need all of you to be Deborahs to articulate the emergency and propose a new direction.

We have an unemployment crisis. Nationwide unemployment has hovered at 9 percent.¹ Underemployment is at least another 7-8 percent.² These rates are significantly higher for people of color.

But both the unemployment and the underemployment figures disguise something else – the unfair distribution of pain in this economy. Poor people are hit disproportionately hard. Rich families, those with household incomes of more than \$150,000, have a combined unemployment and underemployment rate of 6 percent. The poorest families, those with household income below \$12,500, have a combined rate of 50 percent.³ The pain is not shared equally.

We have an income crisis. Even before the recession, we had an income crisis among U.S. workers. The

official minimum wage doesn't begin to support a family. Income for most workers has not kept up. Praise God for the Occupiers. They've gotten income disparity placed on the national agenda.

We have a benefits crisis. Growing numbers of workers don't have core family benefits – health care, pension, paid sick days. Every other industrialized nation offers these. They are no longer a priority in America.

We have a wage theft crisis. One-fourth of low-wage workers aren't paid even the minimum wage. Three-fourths of low-wage workers who work more than forty hours a week aren't paid the overtime premium the law says they deserve. Ten percent of tipped workers have their tips stolen by their employers. Whole sectors of workers are illegally designated as independent contractors and cheated of wages, taxes, and protections.

Thou Shalt Not Steal. Deborah would have told unethical employers to stop stealing. But Deborah's not here. You are. Find the workers center* nearest you and volunteer (see www.iwj.org).

We have an immigration crisis. We have twelve million undocumented workers with no path to citizenship. These include young immigrant students – our future innovators and leaders – who are denied schooling. Instead of facing the issues, we blame immigrants for the unemployment rate and budget crisis.

We have an organizing crisis. As a nation, we officially say we believe all workers should have the right to organize. But, across the board, workers believe that if they organize, they will be fired. Whether or not that actually happens, workers believe it. Enough workers are fired for organizing to confirm it.

Lesson Two: Push others forward and then stand with them. It is not enough for us personally to protest what is wrong. We must organize others to get involved. We must call them to act on their values.

People are busy in their own lives. They don't think they can make a difference. Deborah's job – your job – is to encourage everyone around you to lead in ways they can.

We certainly have a role in challenging those in power, but we have equally important roles in pressing those around us to use their gifts, their leadership. Most of us tend to minimize what we've got to offer. A little affirming can get people to act.

I work with denominational leaders – bishops and others. Critical events unfold right in their midst, yet religious leaders often hold back. When the historic labor protests in Madison, WI, happened last year, we called the bishops and judicatory leaders: "Would you go pray with the workers? Would you issue a statement?" One by one, leaders agreed to help. Each time one did, we sent the news release around and made it easier for the next one to say something.

Most of us have reasons for not stepping forth – we're a new parent, we're just a student, we don't know enough, we're not tenured, we're writing a book ... All of us need a little pushing to get out of our busyness and use our talents. But we need someone to stand with us.

I have a dear friend who began her career as an intern with me. When some workers called who hadn't been paid and wanted to do an emergency meeting, and I couldn't attend, I sent her. She'd never facilitated a large meeting, let alone one in

Your senators and representatives aren't hanging out with unemployed people. You can change that.

multiple languages. She'd never helped workers recover unpaid wages. She was nervous. As preparation, we talked through the main points of the meeting. We talked through the options. She went and helped workers recover thousands of dollars in unpaid wages. And she went on to become a fabulous organizer.

There are many good, law-abiding, ethical employers who pay people fairly and treat people well. Interfaith Worker Justice is beginning to push them to do more – denounce wage theft, publicly challenge those who don't.

Speaking up is important. Standing with others who speak is at least as important. We can't do it alone. We need everyone using their gifts. Some may need only your word of encouragement.

Lesson Three: Use what you've got. Don't lament what you don't have. Focus on what resources and power we do have. The Israelites didn't have the iron chariots of the Canaanites, but they had people.

We don't have the resources of Wall Street, but young people of Occupy Wall Street have focused the nation's attention on the disparity in this society. "Occupying" is really similar to "being present." We in the religious community know the power of pastoral presence. When someone dies, we are present

* Worker Centers help low-wage, non-union workers organize for better wages, benefits, and workplace dignity.

with the family. In times of hurt, we are present with those who suffer. Occupying is being present in the community to its pain.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a twenty-six-year-old pastor when Rosa Parks refused to sit in the back of the bus. He had young children. He was new to Montgomery. His church's leadership wasn't all that supportive of him stepping into a dangerous civil rights crisis. It really wasn't a good time. But Dr. King stepped up. The black community didn't have political power, but it had economic power as bus riders and consumers. The bus boycott captured the imagination and sparked a movement.

We may not have the iron chariots, but they get stuck in the mud. We've got people. We have church buildings. We've got creativity, flash mobs, tweets. We've got power we haven't begun to tap. Deborah used what she had. You must too.

Is there a way you might help? For those who are unemployed, you could:

- **organize a jobs club in your congregation.** Hundreds have formed and IWJ is supporting them. If you know of one, please let me know about it; contact me at KBobo@iwj.org.
- **organize a meeting with your congressional representative.** Your senators and representatives aren't hanging out with unemployed people. You can change that. Use your opportunities and organize unemployed people to meet regularly with legislators. Occupy – be present in – their offices. Visit one a day. Make it a crisis for the legislators so they can't ignore you.
- **organize a workers' rights education session in your congregation.** Many people do not know their rights or know how to recover unpaid wages.
- **ask contractors about payment.** If you hire anyone to clean, mow the grass, or do repairs around your house or congregation, ask how workers are paid.
- **stand up against wage theft.** It is all around you, and you can change that. When you are having dinner out, ask your wait staff if they'll get the tip. If you can't find out, pay it in cash. Occupy restaurants or hotels or other places of business that steal workers wages. Offer your pastoral presence.

Some of the best Deborahs in the nation are young people. Three young people run our workers center in Northwest Arkansas. They can barely rent a car. Yet they are leading the fight against wage theft there. Recently, a restaurant worker came to the center who hadn't been paid. These young people organized folks to write on the restaurant's Facebook page wall asking why it didn't pay its workers. The restaurant immediately changed its policy and compensated the workers.

Last year, they organized a mayoral forum on wage theft that resulted in new citywide approaches to combating the practice. They have arranged to do a weekly radio show in Spanish on worker rights.

These three young people are using their gifts in Fayetteville. They are Deborahs there. You can be the Deborahs here – helping unemployed people, supporting immigrants, standing with workers. Don't waste energy on what you lack. Focus on what you have – people, some with great gifts as speakers, writers, tweeters, researchers.

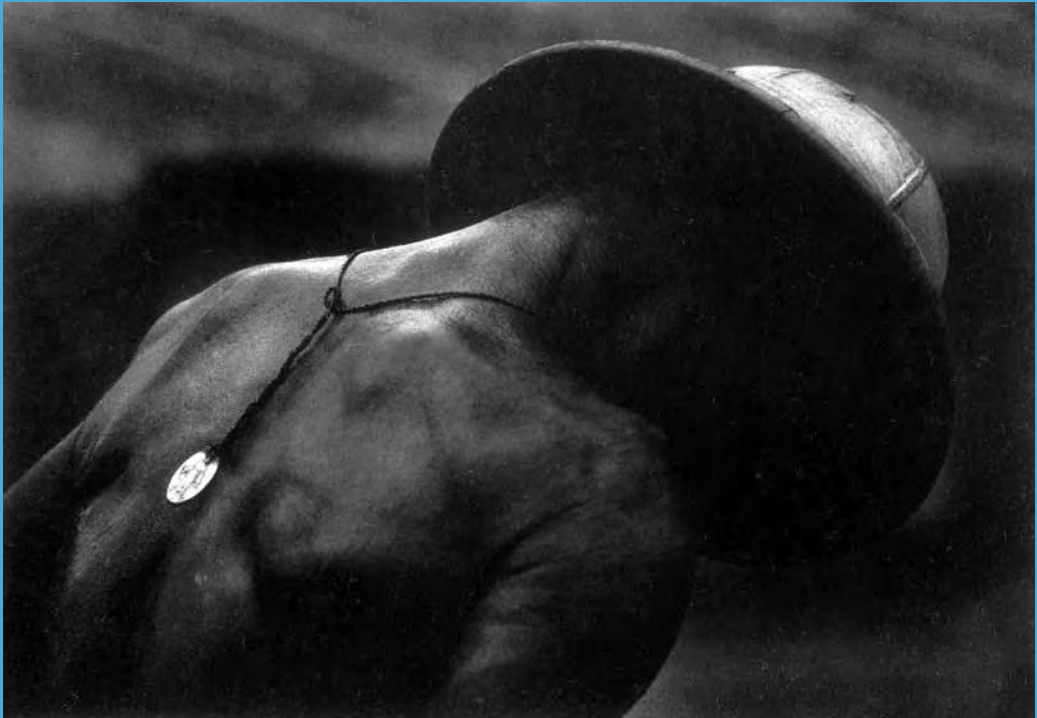
Most everyone knows the David and Goliath story – the little guy overcoming the big guy. It's interesting that almost nobody knows the Deborah story – the prophet and judge telling the truth, pushing leaders to fight for liberation, inspiring the ragtag army to defeat the military power.

I love the David and Goliath imagery, but I love the lessons from Deborah too. Women and men of courage, prophetesses – thank you for your courage. We have some battles ahead.

Kim Bobo is Executive Director of Interfaith Worker Justice (www.IWJ.org) in Chicago. It is the nation's largest network of people of faith engaging locally and nationally to improve wages, benefits, and conditions for workers, especially in the low-wage economy. In 2009, she was named one of Utne Reader's "Fifty Visionaries Who are Changing Your World." This article is adapted from a sermon at Vanderbilt Divinity School last fall.

Notes

- 1 The Bureau of Labor Statistics at the Department of Labor (www.bls.gov) tracks unemployment figures.
- 2 The Economic Policy Institute (www.economytrack.org) provides regular updates on these statistics.
- 3 These figures come from a report, *Labor Underutilization Impacts of the Great Recession of 2007-2009: Variations in Labor Underutilization Problems Across Age, Gender, Race-Ethnic, Educational Attainment and Occupational Groups in the U.S., 2009 Fourth Quarter*, prepared by The Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University (see www.northeastern.edu/clms).
- 4 These figures come from *Broken Laws, Unprotected Workers*, which reports on the largest survey ever conducted of wage theft among low-wage workers. This report and others are produced by the National Employment Law Project (see www.nelp.org).



So Far So Good: The Mid-Degree Consult

By William Goettler

My office at the edge of the Yale Divinity Quad is crowded this morning. An anxious second-year Master of Divinity student sits surrounded by the group that she has invited to join her for the mid-degree consultation.

Each guest is important to the student's efforts to discern her vocational path. To her left is her college chaplain, who made a side trip to Connecticut to be here while visiting the Northeast from the Midwest. To her right is her academic advisor, a Yale New Testament professor. Across the room sits the director of the community agency where the student is now interning. Finally, on a small table, a laptop computer via Skype connects us to a denominational committee person a thousand miles away, a person the student doesn't know well but who is important in her ordination process.

I begin the meeting with a prayer, and then proceed with open-ended questions about the student's divinity school experience thus far. Everyone begins to relax. The conversation begins to flow.

A Changing Culture

I've been part of these conversations involving every second-year M.Div. student at YDS for five years now, developing a model for student self-reflection that meets both the Association of Theological Schools' assessment requirements and the Yale faculty's expectations for strong vocational and academic advising. I've been able to see how such a process shapes the students' quest for purposeful work in a new century that is upending traditional patterns of vocation and calling.

Divinity schools and seminaries have long provided an important place – a safe place – to ask serious questions about faith and life within the framework of intellectual pursuit and vocational possibility. But conditions have changed in the culture of church life and theological education. Until recently, a student's time of personal and theological wandering within Master of Divinity degree studies led

dependably to a well-defined career path: students left their seminary years ready to enter either parish ministry in a mainline Protestant denomination or begin a teaching career. A few in every class forged less predictable routes, entering fields like social work or journalism or business.

But in the last couple of decades, there are far fewer full-time parishes, and far fewer full-time teaching positions, awaiting seminary graduates. At the same time, more and more students no longer fit neatly into denominational boxes. Fewer are willing to rely on either the existing support structures or the fallback professions of previous genera-

Ministry students today generally feel very alone in the process of figuring out their calling.

tions. It's not unusual that the ordination committee member Skyping into our morning meeting is the one least engaged with the student's growth until now. Were he the only participant in this mid-degree consultation, there wouldn't be much to talk about.

At this point in her life, the student in my office is only now finding her voice, trying out ideas. This morning, she listens carefully to the responses offered by her chaplain, internship supervisor, academic advisor, and ordination committee member. Together, they reflect on coursework completed, ministry experiences hoped for, and the challenges still ahead.

Those who know her best report that she is an able scholar who shows the kinds of pastoral gifts that the church longs for. But this morning she admits to weariness with denominational require-

ments and a wariness about a life within the institutional church. Hearing affirmation about both her gifts and her questions, she wonders aloud where else those abilities might lead her. Suggestions are made about various possible career paths, from campus-based ministry to new models of church development. The student is feeling pushed a bit, and emotions rise. "Don't talk to me about what I will do," she exclaims. "Talk to me about who I will be."

Doubts and Discoveries

So we do. We talk together about what formation means as a person of faith and as a religious professional within society. The wise souls gathered here care not just for the church but also for this woman's story as sojourner who longs to find her place. Her portfolio, a collection of personal reflective essays she has written as a YDS student, guides the conversation now. We talk about the discoveries, the doubts, the places of strength and points of vulnerability arising during these years of study and praxis.

No conclusions are reached, though moments of insight emerge. Most of all, this student halfway through divinity school finds that she is being taken seriously as a scholar, as a person of faith, and as one whose vocational discoveries matter. There is

The wise souls gathered here care not just for the church but also for this woman's story as sojourner who longs to find her place.

no unspoken agenda to move her toward or away from ordination, no insistence that she fill one professional role or another.

Rather, at the core of this conversation is the beginning of a personal theology of work: what does it mean to take seriously the gifts with which you have been blessed and the sense of call that you believe yourself to be hearing?

Simply naming these questions is an important act. Addressing them with a student at such a pivotal point in her life, surrounded not by peers but by teachers, ministry models, and figures in authority, is a profound step in her theological sojourn.

The story of the student in my office is redefining theological education these days. Bright and motivated students arrive at divinity school eager to find their calling. They are comfortable locating the work of vocational discernment in the language of faith. They long for holy direction. Yet they are not quite convinced that direction will be found through their work with denominational committees. If the

student feels a denominational commitment at all, it is often mingled with anxiety that she is virtually unknown by those who are important to the ordination procedure.

It is true that they are doing theological study because someone has sent them this way. A pastor or a campus minister, a youth group leader or a professor has encouraged them to see that they are capable of graduate work in religion and that the endeavor is a promising venue for deep reflection and vocational exploration.

But ministry students today generally feel very alone in the process of figuring out their calling. There was a time when the important conversation that followed such periods of private self-discovery was entirely the responsibility of ordination committees. Divinity students returned home to meet with ordained clergy who listened to their struggles and gave direction for their future. Bishops and ordination committees were the overseers of such discernment and postulancy or candidacy, with an eye toward ordination.

Longing for Mentors

Those committees still control the ordination process for students who come to them, but they have become far less available in recent years for the work of advice and nurture, with members overwhelmed by the complexity or uncertain prospects of their own church contexts. Students lucky enough to land meetings with ordination committees seldom hear encouragement on vocational questions. Over and over again, I hear instead of diffident denominational liaisons and unworkable systems. Though many students are still enrolled in such processes, others are not so engaged. This is a serious disconnect. For almost every professional degree student, the opportunity to participate in structured vocational advising is an important part of theological education.

It is little wonder that students long for mentors, for wise counsel in the midst of such self-searching. Yet it is hard to see how the institutional picture will change in the near future, since the state of the institutional, post-denominational church has become even more complex and vocational opportunities appear to remain limited.

The decision to spend so much group time with each student is time-consuming and labor-intensive; I convene about forty such meetings during the academic year. But this Yale model for assessment and discernment is compelling — an integration of faith and intellect, personal story, meaningful vocational direction, and academic discipline. Interestingly, it is

a model that is drawing interest from other schools of theological education.

It seems increasingly clear that the work of discernment must now find a home in the life of theological schools. Perhaps it should always have belonged here. Indeed, formational discussion is always mutually beneficial. YDS faculty regularly tell me that such rich conversations with students inform their own teaching. Assessment runs both ways.

And the benefits of vocational nurture are dramatic. As the conversation in my office draws to a close, a few tears have been shed, some dreams shared, and some hard edges acknowledged. Everyone in the room leaves enriched by the experience. A professor is reflecting anew on the nature of teaching the Biblical text. A college chaplain is already framing new questions for exploring issues of faith with younger students. An internship supervisor has gained perspective on the importance of that

They long for holy direction. Yet they are not quite convinced that direction will be found through their work with denominational committees.

placement experience in the life of a seminarian. And a student enters the second half of her degree program aware not only that she has companions and supporters in the journey, but that her direction is worthy, her questions important, and her calling perhaps even holy.

William Goettler is Assistant Dean for Assessment and Ministerial Studies at YDS. An ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA), he has been co-pastor at First Presbyterian Church in New Haven since 1988. His writing has appeared in the Feasting on the Word lectionary series, Christian Century, and other publications.

More than 74,000 students are enrolled in theological education in North America, bringing a menu of vocational goals that mirrors the flux of a changing society.

A head-count enrollment of 74,193 in the U.S. and Canada is reported by the Association of Theological Schools. That number continues a trend of slight annual decreases since 2006. The percentage of women and minority enrollments, meanwhile, has been steady or increasing. Other demographic trends reflect transformations in church and culture, according to Yale Divinity School officials.

“What we see today is a blending of traditional students, mainline ministers, social reformers, young idealists, joint-degree students, 45-and-up students coming from other careers and now wanting to do something more meaningful with their lives,” says Anna Ramirez ’93 M.Div., Associate Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid.

“When I came here in the early 90s, it was mostly Protestants who wanted to be pulpit pastors and Catholics who wanted to do nonprofit or Ph.D. work. After 9/11 there was a shift – a new flood of applicants – 9/11 widows, young people who were shocked at what happened, others who were questioning their own values.

“Today a new world order is underway. Young people are traveling the world, bringing a sense of an interconnected, global view of Christianity. We have students working in Malaysia, Russia, China. We have faculty working on economics, environment, the nature of faith in a globalized era. Christianity is a different thing now.”

A shifting denominational and economic scene is stirring many students to pursue approaches and identities that combine theological education with other professional disciplines, says YDS Dean Harold Attridge.

Traditional ministry opportunities are in a state of flux as some denominations face a declining number of full-time local-parish positions on offer. Other graduates are becoming teachers, either in public or private schools. More are pursuing joint degrees (for instance, with Yale School of Law, or Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, or Yale School of Management), or are bringing a previous professional credential or career experience to theological studies in hopes of combining them after graduation.

“In my ten years here as dean, we’ve seen a certain trajectory of students doing other professional work,” he says. “And we’re seeing an increasingly younger student body, one that is open to a variety of ministries in order to put their theological education to significant use in a shifting scene.”

Right Where I'm Supposed to Be: Thoughts on Vocation

The endeavor to find the vocational path is a monumental Biblical theme, a real-life day-to-day adventure, a perennial mystery. Yale Divinity School alumni and students here share some of their own experiences and intimations in the pursuit of calling. Their testimonies demonstrate the uniqueness of each case, but they also share one bright thread: the conviction that their stories, no matter how surprising the twists and turns, are somehow guided by the divine.

The Open Road

By Samuel Blair '01 M.Div.

After I graduated from YDS I was called to an assistant pastor position right away. It seemed ideal: it was a church I knew well, where I wanted to live, doing what I wanted to do.

However, very soon I ran into problems. I began to feel marginalized and rudderless, with no outlet within the church to hear me out. I was scared and angry, and wondered if I had mistaken God's calling for my own desires.

I think this is one of the most common fears we have as ministers – that we somehow get the calling wrong. When that happens, it's hard to discern whether to endure as a test of faith or jump ship.

I think this is one of the most common fears we have as ministers – that we somehow get the calling wrong.

Christ does call us to endure through difficulty and hardship, but endurance isn't everything. I think too often we can be shortsighted, thinking God calls to a certain path and only by persevering on that path are we being faithful to God.

I think God's paths are often much more open than we think. Thomas Merton, for example, felt called to the monastic life. Yet I also get the impression that the specifics of that call were merely circumstantial. He was flexible and looked for what

God was calling him to do *that day*, not projecting a certain path that extended for years down the line. Reading his journals you can see that every day his calling was reinforced by his own experience and desire simply to be with God, which is what he saw as his true calling.

I think sometimes we try too hard to hold on to things that are already lost, losing track of the focus of the call – to serve and live in God's grace – because we get so preoccupied with *how* that happens.

Looking back now I can see that I was called to be there, but it was to show me that I was called to do something other than what I intended. Had my calling been wrong? Absolutely not. God put me there for that purpose for that time. I could not be doing what I am doing now if I hadn't been there. My calling changed. Awareness and acceptance of that change made all the difference.

The Rev. Samuel Blair is Director of Spiritual and Bereavement Services at Gateway Hospice in Pittsburgh, PA.

A Sojourn from Sunday to Monday

By Kat Banakis '03 B.A., '09 M.Div.

I'll admit: Mondays suck, but isn't that a universal truth? We're snatched too soon from our weekend selves and must return to our weekday roles, always a day too early. I go from being Rev. Kat at church to Kat the fundraising software trainer. Yet in both situations I'm a priest in Christ's church. I'm building relationships and attending to people in distress and trying to move towards hope in the unseen.

My life of dueling Sunday and Monday roles started when I had a few years between graduation from YDS and my eventual ordination, and I found a much needed j-o-b at a nonprofit. The economy had tanked, and no church was hiring non-ordained people, full-time with benefits.

I called my much younger sister to bemoan my horrible fate in not being employed in a church. She gave an auditory eye roll, then said without an ounce of compassion, “You just have to change your understanding of who you consider your church to be. You go to your office every single day. Be their pastor.”

I tried to object, but she just waited silently until I realized the insanity of what I was assuming – that I couldn’t do ministry where I was. Sometimes I hate having a sister who’s a brilliant and blatant evangelical.

In my new weekday role I had the honor of “communicating the austerity budget to the staff” (read: informing everyone that they weren’t getting a raise, that we’d have to cut shared costs, and that each department’s expenditures were getting hacked to pieces). Worse, the budgeting process had been pretty opaque before, so none of the managers knew what their expenditures had been or how things were allocated. Super.

Whether I succeeded or failed, you’d have to ask my colleagues, but what I tried to do was approach the task as ministry. I asked myself, “What would be the most loving and honoring way to handle this with my colleagues?” I opened up the financial records and walked through what each category meant with each manager and gave them access to all past and current expenses. Budgeting became a very public, very shared project. The money and the time were ours, together, and so were the solutions.

I prayed for my co-workers each morning as I swam laps, mentally going around the office cubicle-by-cubicle. They became the community I was given to love.

It was so incremental that I almost didn’t realize what was happening: I began to hear my call differently, as that of a tentmaker-worker-priest. Multi-vocational. I was living out the authority we’re all given in baptism to be ministers in the world, whichever day of the week it is.

These days I am ordained and on staff at a church, and I work full-time for a software company. It’s a great life for both me and the communities I serve too (I think). I have the freedom to speak openly from the pulpit about workplace challenges. My day job, meanwhile, has an employee with an unorthodox management style.

Every week, I always wish I had an extra day of living in my Sunday church self on Monday. But the drama of calling keeps showing me new ways to define my workload and my ministry.

Kat Banakis' forthcoming book of practical theology for adults in their twenties and thirties is called Bubble Girl: An Irreverent Journey of Faith (Chalice Press). She lives and works in the Chicago area.

The Music of the Search

By Michael Peppard '03 M.A.R., '09 Ph.D.

Since early childhood, I have never really imagined my life without consistent immersion in two things: music and Christianity. I acquired some other skills, explored more practical career possibilities, and knew that a music-filled Christian life could be had in abundance while doing virtually any job for my “living.” But by the time I arrived at YDS in 2001, I planned to study toward a career as either a Biblical scholar or a choral conductor. (Not exactly high-percentage choices!)

Matriculating as a YDS student through the Institute of Sacred Music, I immediately discovered that I was never, ever, in a hundred years of study, going to be a professional musician. Seriously, have you met the musicians at the ISM? They have already won international competitions before they arrive. So before the leftover sandwiches from orientation weekend had even been finished, the decision was made. I scheduled a meeting with not-yet Dean Harold Attridge and said (here I paraphrase), “Hi, I’m new here. What should I do to become a New Testament scholar?” My memory of his answer goes blank after he listed the fifth language I should learn “as soon as possible.”

Maybe another way to get at my vocation was to ask, What was distinctively, weirdly “me” about me?

Now in looking back on what led me toward that first week at YDS, I realize that from early college to my mid-twenties, I had been asking myself a series of questions. *What do I think are my gifts?* It seemed that I could communicate effectively. People were not confused when I spoke. Sometimes they even asked me to say more. Usually I was a good moderator: I enjoyed figuring out where people agreed and where not,

and why so and why not. (My Dad thought I would make a good lawyer based on these gifts. Sorry, Dad.) Teaching was a natural response to these gifts, and I taught high school before coming to YDS. *What do I wish were my “gifts,” but I can’t seem to acquire them, even with great effort?* Baseball – curve balls stymied me. Basketball – I’m 6’5” and awful. I injure myself and others. Pilot – my vision was 20/200. Engineering – I hated computer programming. Piano – my left hand wouldn’t obey. Guitar – again, the left hand. So, I concluded, the world of ideas remained the best fit for me.

When the world stops moving so busily around me, the lazy Saturday afternoons of life, what do I find myself wanting to do? This question ultimately helped the most. After going out to parties in college, I would come home, pour a nightcap, go to my bedroom, and practice reading the Greek New Testament. A few years later, on weekend afternoons I would sit in the early Christianity section of the bookstore for hours. I even have a scrap-paper list of “goals” from 1999 that includes “memorize the Psalms.” So maybe another way to get at my vocation was to ask, *What was distinctively, weirdly “me” about me?*

These days I get to use the gifts I isolated and refined at Yale: I try to activate imaginations, frame better questions, and spur critical thought about Christian faith and practice without oversimplifying a complex world. And every day, there still is music.

Michael Peppard is Assistant Professor (New Testament and Early Christianity) in the Department of Theology at Fordham University in New York City.

Who Knew?

By Judith Allison '05 M.Div.

As I give thanks as a Berkeley Divinity School/YDS graduate at age sixty-seven, “who knew” it was God drawing me forth across the decades?

Fifty years ago, I got no help with discernment. Longing to study medicine, I was allowed only to study nursing. Later, drawn again (as a cradle Canadian Anglican, by “who knew?”) into graduate study, I became a clinical psychologist and eventually moved to the U.S.

In truth, I heard a voice in my ear and a tap on my shoulder: “get out of your chair!”

Pursuing my doctorate, now a single parent, a conventional Episcopalian – did I grasp God’s plan? I only knew I must apply His gifts. Twenty years after clinical practice, always involved with church, yearning to serve more, I started Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). And in truth, I heard a voice in my ear, one day in my private-practice office, and a tap on my shoulder: “get out of your chair!” Then with

nudges, questions, requests – “why not seminary?” And the formal process began.

With intensive spiritual direction and the guidance of a fine CPE supervisor, I yielded finally to the Holy Spirit. “Who knew?”

I visited five seminaries. I almost did not pick Berkeley at Yale ... presuppositions, you know.

Today I give thanks daily for Berkeley/YDS and suggest the following:

- 1) seek the Lord’s Word and action in every moment of your life: live your life in prayer.
- 2) ask every morning: “Lord, surprise me” and observe!
- 3) you will never have enough information to “make the perfect choice” – let go and let God. The hazard for Yalies is to live too much in your heads. Only God is perfect.
- 4) look back, examine your earliest interests: seek your authentic selves. You cannot copy the saints. Be true to your better selves in humble recognition that your path will not be straight ... except in God’s eyes.
- 5) in this economy, expect to be worker-priests, worker-pastors. Prepare yourselves in lay ministries where you are, and you will enrich and be enriched. We know the institutional church must yield to out-in-the-community worker-ministers, lay and ordained, as we recapture Jesus’ injunction: “go out into the world and make disciples of all nations.” We can no longer wait for people to find us. That was never Jesus’ intention.

The Rev. Judith Allison is Associate Rector for Pastoral Care at St. Bartholomew’s Episcopal Church in Poway, CA.

Through a Glass, Diligently

By Kyle Brooks '05 B.A., '08 M.A., M.Div. third year

My grandfather, a Pentecostal minister, would often say to me in my younger days, “God doesn’t call the qualified; God qualifies the called.” I have assiduously worked to discern just where I should be headed and what I should do when I arrive there.

At times, I have hoped that calling would strike in a fashion as dramatic as the revelatory events of the Pauline conversion on the road to Damascus. Yet there would be no flashing lights or ethereal voices stopping me in my tracks and altering my life’s course. On the contrary, the pursuit of my calling has been more piecemeal, a vision viewed through a glass, darkly.

Perhaps it is truer to say that we slowly unlearn our expectations and begin to see what has been before us all along. In any event, though I discerned a call to ministry some years ago, I had little idea what

Perhaps it is truer to say we slowly unlearn our expectations and begin to see what has been there all along.

that might look like. As a preacher’s kid, I was all too familiar with the oft-unsavory aspects of parish ministry. I knew I was meant to preach, but I was reluctant, for fear of embodying the trappings. I felt an urgency to minister, but in what spaces, to whom, and by what means? The answers would not come immediately. After my undergraduate years, I took small steps forward. I was an associate minister for a campus ministry (the Black Church at Yale), eventually serving as the pastor for two years.

Simultaneously, I was working in the nonprofit sector, working with New Haven middle and high school students, before obtaining an M.A. in Urban Education Studies.

In the fall of 2008, I became a biology instructor at Wilbur Cross High School, not realizing that mere blocks away, Yale Divinity School was awaiting me. Something years in the making was snowballing. Just over three years later, soon now to graduate from YDS, I found myself in the office of the dean of Vanderbilt Divinity School, facing a semicircle of religion professors who asked how my varied experiences informed my desire to pursue a Ph.D. in homiletics and liturgics. This fall, I plan to show them exactly how.

My time at YDS has been a critical part of my discovery that my ministerial calling is deeply academic. At YDS, I encountered instructors who not only saw my promise, but also demonstrated profoundly pastoral care through their words and deeds. They did for me what I hope to do for future students: encourage ministerial, academic, and personal development. The words of a song from my youth return to me: “I want to walk worthy, my calling to fulfill, if you order my steps, Lord, then I’ll do your blessed will.” God’s leading is the qualification, and I am doing my best to diligently follow.

After graduation, Kyle Brooks will pursue a Ph.D. in Homiletics and Liturgics at Vanderbilt University.

Shadow and Silhouette

By Stephanie Wong M.Div. second year

I remember being a little girl, perhaps six or seven years old, and wanting desperately to get away from myself so I could get a look at my shadow. I had been told the story of Peter Pan, who lost his and had to have it sewn back on. If only I could see my shadow as the sun did, at a distance and without me in the way! But of course, no amount of running or jumping on that sunny afternoon would make my shadow come off.

I’ve matured, but sometimes I catch myself trying to approach my vocation in the same unrealistic way. I imagine that it would be great to see my calling as God does, without me in the way. If only I could step far enough aside, the divine perspective would reveal a clear outline on the sun-bleached sidewalk.

For example, when I came to YDS, I was certain that God saw the vocation of a nun for me. I began the M.Div. program with intention to start the formal formation process with a local order of Catholic sisters, who I had come to know well as an undergrad in St. Louis and whose national headquarters are

CALLING

By J. Barrie Shepherd

Both less and more than family and good friends,
still you belong there at the high moments and low,
included in the laughter and the tears, all the embraces,
gestures of delight and consolation across the years,
even participating in remembering, noting the absences,
the gaps among the circled chairs, the ones
who couldn't make it for whatever reason, glad or sad.

Yet, for all the long and hard-earned familiarities,
you are also set apart. You have a role to play,
a place to fill, a dimension toward which it is your duty
and your privilege to focus everyone's attention.
Your task to speak the words and open up the silences that unite,
lend shape and texture, and at least a glimpse of the beyond,
within these joyful/painful moments crammed with here and now.

If you can do it, if you can evoke and hold together
both this world and the next, if you can somehow embody,
even for the instant of a handclasp or a prayer,
that sheer intensity of presence that fills all absence
with new hope, then they may realize they have a pastor,
then you may even touch the fringes of the garment of the Master.

near Yale in Hamden. The Apostles are a wonderful group of women, and I wanted so much to be one of them, thinking of discernment through a Platonic framework: I wanted to be an instantiation of the Form of an Apostle of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Coming to YDS, however, showed me that discernment has got to involve one's whole self. I had been ignoring a great deal of anxiety – an inner frustration and lack of peace that I have since learned to recognize as God's way of telling me when I am somehow mistaken and pursuing something at odds with who God wants me to be.

I found myself crying inexplicably a lot during my first semester, and it was crushing then to realize that, for all my hopeful projections and certitudes, I didn't actually want to be a sister. Just as the sun wouldn't create a shadow for me unless I were there to cast it, God wouldn't give me the vocation of a sister merely because I thought that was the outline God ought to be drawing.

Discernment has got to involve one's whole self. I had been ignoring a great deal of anxiety ...

As I approach the end of my second year at YDS, I'm glad to have become, like Peter Pan with his newly attached shadow, more reconciled to my vocation. I can perceive it now as I move and see it adjust along with me. I'm working part-time at a local inner-city Catholic middle school for my internship, serving as a chaplain while preaching, leading a

group of middle-school peer ministers to clarify their own sense of service, and mentoring students in the afternoon study hall. Although I never would have thought I'd enjoy this ministry so much, I am thrilled to be returning next year as an employee at the school to help teach the religion classes and organize the students' afternoon mentoring program. When I am there, talking and laughing with the students and other teachers, I can see out of the corner of my eye that God is drawing for me a beautiful vocational silhouette.

Stephanie Wong received a B.A. in English Literature and Religious Studies from Washington University in St. Louis and plans to graduate from YDS in 2013.

Go Without Fear

By Zack Mabe '03 M.Div., '05 S.T.M.

I first experienced a calling in college. After months of prayerful discernment, I chose to do "the straight track": college, seminary, ordination, and parish ministry. Ordained at age twenty-five, I found myself wondering if I had done it all too fast. Soon, though, I realized I had done it all according to the timing of my calling, and it was just right.

Sometimes, the world of ministry has been a little scary – whether because I felt I was being judged for my age, or because of the uncertainties of this economy, or any other reason of the moment. Most of the time, however, the world of ministry has been amazing: full of wonder and awe, humbling, exciting. I find my sense of call being renewed and reinvigorated annually, monthly, even daily. We are a people of love and hope, not a people of fear. So I would say to a young person starting out: Rise! Go for it! Do not base your response to your calling on fear of the economy or anything else, but on hope and love.

The best way to summarize the wonder of God's call is to describe Ash Wednesday at our church. Every year on Good Friday, we distribute blank paper and invite the congregation to write down prayers, thoughts, concerns, celebrations, etc. We invite people to place those sheets of paper at the foot of the cross. Our Bible Study group then takes up those papers, along with our palms from Palm Sunday, and we have a prayer service where we burn them together and make ashes. On Ash Wednesday the next year, all are invited to come forward and receive the ash that is made from our palms and our prayer requests. For me, it feels like an entire year's journey in discipleship – ups, downs, joys, risks, blessings, mistakes, laughter, sweat, tears, and lots of prayer – rubbed on my forehead in a humbling reminder that I belong to God.

During that service, we also set aside time for extended silence ... The whole experience takes me to a profound place that I find difficult to articulate. I feel blessed to be able to share my faith with my church family on such a sacred day. It reminds me I am right where I am supposed to be.

The Rev. Zack Mabe is pastor of Terryville Congregational Church, UCC, in Terryville, CT. He is currently a Doctor of Ministry student at Hartford Seminary.

Community Banquet

By Jared Gilbert M.Div. third year

Growing up in a Pentecostal evangelical church, I learned that a calling was a critical part of being a Christian. Fulfilling a call to evangelize the world was almost as important as getting saved. In that trembling church in the cornfields of Indiana, mythologies of calling were rooted in the ecstatic encounters with the God of St. Paul, Charles Finney, and the heroes of evangelicalism.

But this intensely individualistic notion of call never quite made sense to me. It seemed to leave out the community, or leave it behind.

A neighbor and I used to organize a weekly dinner party in my Brooklyn neighborhood. "Tuesday Night Dinner" was simple: one person hosted and provided dinner while guests brought wine to share. Invitations were offered friend-to-friend – the only requirement for joining was residence in the neighborhood. The dinners gathered a diverse group who often had little more in common than being a friend of a friend of a friend, but shared an interest in community-building over a meal. Professional networking and small talk were rare as conversations turned to sharing life stories, troubles, thrills, sex, religion, politics – more like talking to close friends than a roomful of neighbors.

Our loose neighborly network flourished, and I discovered that those kinds of person-to-person interactions were more important and more theological than most that I experienced in church. These people were too creative, too queer, too political, or too smart for the churches I knew. Congregational life seemed to have nothing to offer or gain from these neighbors who were filling vital roles in the community. Can the church not accommodate these outlier identities? I felt called to build a new church among them. I was called into a community, rather than called out or apart. My calling to start a church was revealed in this network of neighbors.

For me, calling is a collective act. It involves a whole community. My faith and ministry are inextricably connected to the communities I am part of, religious or not. While I reject the mythology of calling that I learned as a child, the idea that everyone is called has stuck with me. Whether in rural Indiana or in the streets of Brooklyn, the Gospel is social change. This Gospel requires that everyone be called, from the private equity investor or young artist, to the out-of-work parent or elderly neighbor without a retirement plan. Contrary to the notion that God has "called out" an individual for some extraordinary purpose, in the pursuit of justice there are no holy orders – only different tools of power to enact the Gospel.

Fulfilling my calling is crucial to my neighbor fulfilling her calling, and her calling is essential to fulfilling that of her neighbor, so that one who is called is a part of a flourishing network. My calling is to build a church within that network that enacts the Gospel to create social change.

After graduation this spring, Jared Gilbert will work with the United Church of Christ to start a congregation in Brooklyn.

Hang On and Enjoy the Ride

By Steve McKinley '67 B.D.

When I entered YDS in the fall of 1964 I had a clear sense not only of my basic Christian baptismal vocation but also of a particular vocation: God's call to parish ministry. When I graduated three years later the sense of call was just as strong, and by then I knew enough about parish ministry (or so I thought) that

I could envision the rest of my life. I knew what I would be doing, and had a clear expectation of where I would be doing it.

Good for a laugh, huh?

I spent thirty-eight years as a parish pastor, and in those thirty-eight years I was called upon to do all kinds of things I never imagined, in places I never would have expected to be, using tools that didn't even exist when I started out. I logged my first years as a pastor prior to the arrival of Microsoft and Apple,

back in the age of the typewriter, the mimeograph, the film strip, and the flannel board. I learned to do ministry in a church that no longer exists. Fortunately my education made it possible to change along

I learned to do ministry in a church that no longer exists. Fortunately my education made it possible to change along with the church.



with the church. There have been days when I have missed the church I used to know, but that is as pointless as missing the hair I used to have on the top of my head. I love the church of today even more than I loved the church of yesterday.

The gospel call to the church is unchanging, but the shape of ministry molded around that gospel call is constantly in evolution.

Keep flexible, be prepared to be surprised, and be willing to change and move in unanticipated directions. None of us can predict what the church will look like thirty years from now. We don't know if the denominational structures we have known will still be relevant. We don't know if full-time ordained leadership will be the norm or an exception.

But we do know that the call of God will be there, and I can testify that today as I carry out a different kind of ministry with seminary interns, I sense the presence of the call as powerfully as I ever have, and am grateful to have had the life God has given me. If you're just getting started ... hang on and enjoy the ride!

Steve McKinley is an associate in the Contextual Learning Department at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN.

Treasure Hunt

By Luanne Panarotti M.Div. second year

After preaching for the first time in 2007, I immediately called my sister-in-law to share my delight and astonishment at the opportunity, which seemed to come out of the blue. She was not even remotely surprised.

"When you were young, we all thought you were going to be a nun," she chuckled. "You were the only kid we knew who actually *liked* going to church!" And I did: I loved the ritual, the liturgy that was at once familiar and yet full of mystery. Recently, though, I came upon a drawing I had done in my third-grade catechism class, of a priest celebrating the mass – and "he" looked remarkably like me.

I didn't want to be a nun. I wanted to be a priest.

Though I didn't recognize it as such until fairly recently, the call to ministry has had a hold on me for as long as I can remember. By the time I was nineteen, I relented: I changed denominations, switched majors, and was looking toward seminary. Following college, I decided to postpone plans for grad school, not feeling quite ready. I worked in publishing. Became a cheese buyer. Coordinated continuing education classes. Led ecology field programs for school groups. Wrote about organic gardening.

Somehow, the brief postponement turned into decades, and seminary seemed a thing of the past – until the day our new pastor asked if I would like to preach a sermon. Suddenly, I was on the journey again – or had I never disembarked from it?

I guess the difference between a call and all the other demands and inclinations and hankerings in our lives is that a call is tenacious. We may be fickle, but God's claim on us is constant. You can spend time slicing wheels of Parmigiano-Reggiano, writing brochure copy, or wading into streams to identify macro-invertebrates. Heck, you can even board a boat bound for Tarshish if you're more nautically inclined. It might buy you some time and teach you some valuable lessons – but I believe you can't escape the call without sacrificing who you were meant to be.

It seems that at the very core of every ministry should be the goal of helping those in the communities we serve to discern and follow *their* calls: to see that who they are and what they have to offer is the stuff of kingdom-building. Too many of us live with the notion that a call is a booming supernatural pronouncement to a select few, some sky-rending, scroll-eating, knock-you-off-your-donkey experience. Then it comes instead as a series of gently whispered clues along some life-long treasure hunt. Take care not to overlook it.

Luanne Panarotti is a second-year M.Div. student, ordination-track in The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Profit Motives

By Inese Radzins '93 M.Div., '95 S.T.M.

"When one is virtuous, one has the impression that one does the opposite of what one would naturally do."
– Simone Weil

As a professor of theology I often hear the word *vocation*, especially in connection with the current economic crisis. My students are asking important questions about their future: what is the economic feasibility of pursuing an advanced theological degree, what social capital does this degree *actually* possess, and what *real* value might theological education provide? These are all important questions. But they are not for me the only ones to ask.

When I talk with students about vocation, I often suggest that they engage in a process of "transvaluing" their inherited values. I ask them to begin by considering how their questions are formulated by a particular socio-economic and political system. The recent Occupy movements have shown us the way that our society is deeply rooted in a capitalist economy – one that teaches us to value in terms of quantity, having, profiting. How much is something – my home, my degree, my profession, or my retirement account – worth? What can I get for it?

The poet, hospice chaplain, musician, or therapist serving veterans of the Iraq war show us another way of living.

How much is something – my home, my degree, my profession, or my retirement account – worth? What can I get for it?

The young Marx provocatively asked if there is any possibility of thinking and living otherwise than through the rubric of *having*. Theology, at its best, can offer this different form of engagement.

My own vocation as a theological educator was forged at YDS in the mid-1990s. In courses with professors such as Shawn Copeland, Louis Dupre, Serene Jones, and Katherine Tanner, I learned a kind of "transvaluation of values": that what matters is not necessarily calculable in terms of our normative social values. Profitability and instrumentality are not the only way of measuring life. Reading the works of Toni Morrison, Plotinus, Gutierrez, Cusa, and Schüssler Fiorenza, I learned a different way of thinking. It emphasized the importance of poetry, music, mystery, relationship, justice, and love in forging a creative engagement with life. In offering other forms of valuation it taught me to see the world differently and to understand that not all things in life are *valuable* in terms of our current capitalist ethos.

For me, a theological vocation is rooted in the possibility of questioning, rather than simply adopting, the normative structures of our everyday world. Rather than measuring in terms of profit we might consider living, as Audreya Lorde suggests, by addressing human needs. A transvaluation of values places these human needs – material, creative, spiritual – at the center of life. The poet, hospice chaplain, musician, therapist serving Iraqi veterans, or advocate for the homeless show us this *other* way of living. Their vocations are rooted in a form of creative production that understands the need to give and, at times, to give something up, to *lose* oneself. As such, they think in terms of needs met and relationships built. What if vocation were also thought in terms of these other – somewhat less profitable – values?

Inese Radzins is Assistant Professor of Theology at Pacific School of Religion and Graduate Theological Union, in Berkeley, CA.

When I Least Expect It

By Lyvonne Briggs M.Div. third year

For many people, the term "discernment" invokes a notion of quality. A discerning clientele expects luxury service with attention to details. A discerning eye can spot flaws in a priceless gem. But what about a discerning spirit? I've learned it is not so much attached to "quality" as it is rooted in "productivity."

Jesus charged His disciples to be productive and sustain an intimate relationship with Him. Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) In order to answer my call, I had to know where I was going. And I couldn't know where I was going until I knew where I was. And I was called to abide – continue, remain, persist – in Christ. I knew I was called to preach good news and proclaim freedom.

When you are doing what you are called to do, there is a synergy of time and talent. You are in your element, in the zone. Some of us have witnessed it in the lives of Howard Thurman and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Many of us have gleaned these potent moments in the acts of pioneering minister Jarena Lee and activist Pauli Murray. But what about your own life and journey?

Discernment is a process. You gain clarity through experience, instead of relying solely on book knowledge. Identify your passions, the issues that burden your heart. Ask trusted friends and family what strengths they see in you. How we view ourselves is sometimes quite different from how others see us.

Discernment is intentional. Carve out daily quiet time to pray and meditate. Sure, you could commune with the Divine when it's convenient, but how much more glorious when it's offered as a sacrifice. I sense God's fingerprint on my life, particularly when the seeds of opportunities bloom so suddenly that there is no denying God's watering activity. In the midst of a blossoming entertainment career, I was planted by God in a relationship with a YDS librarian. An email led to a campus visit, which led to my subsequent application and admission. God's plans for my life unfold when I am least expecting them, while remaining expectant.

As I prepare to answer the call to ministry through pastoring, scholarship, and advocacy work, I am grateful that I listened to God's nudging. Hearing the call is labor-intensive, but the fruit it will bear is worth the toil. Take this time to slow down, reflect, and talk to people you trust as sounding boards, encouragers, and truth-tellers. Your life's journey, grander than you could ever imagine, awaits.

Graduating from YDS this spring, Lyvonne Briggs plans to seek ordination with the American Baptist Churches USA, pursue a Ph.D. in homiletics, and relocate to the South.

Nothing if Not Flexible

By Anna Wallich '77 B.A., '81 M.Div.

"Ministry is where need and passion meet," my counselor said many years ago when I was struggling with the meaning of "real" ministry in my life, or rather the lack of it. I am one of those YDS alums who has never been ordained or worked for pay in a church setting, and yet I consider my adult life to have been filled with ministry and opportunity.

God is nothing if not flexible and creative, taking me at my teenaged word when I responded to God's call and promised to spend the rest of my life in service to God. I had been suddenly and severely ill during my senior year of high school, and through this experience I came to believe that the meaning of my life would not be found in chronic overachieving academia but in a life of compassion and generosity. I went straight from college to YDS, hoping to become a pastor. But after significant doctrinal differences surfaced with my denomination, I instead became a clinical social worker.

Be creative alongside God, and take a broad view of the meaning of ministry. God gives us many chances ...

Life didn't go as planned in other ways as well, and yet throughout my years of work as a psychotherapist, raising three children after my divorce, volunteering, teaching Title One Reading, and becoming a Stephen Minister and Team Coordinator at my church, I was always known as someone who ministered to men and women who were in need of some pastoral care.

Theological understandings change, but the values of faith-filled reflection and service to the world remain foundational. I may never have been a paid "minister," but in hindsight I would consider all my adult years to reflect the original meaning of the words, "service to God."

Life may take you places you didn't imagine, so find ways to allow your particular passion to meet the human needs you will find everywhere. Be creative alongside God, and take a broad view of the meaning of ministry. God gives us many chances – I'm now in my late fifties and finishing up a Th.M. in Pastoral Care, finding work in "real" ministry as a Spiritual Director in my new parish. In the end, though, it's not the place or the title or the job that makes the difference; it's the gift of knowing that you have been a blessing to others in their circumstances, just as others have been a blessing to you.

Anna Wallich lives and works in the greater Manchester, NH, area.

A Story of Her Own

By Sabrina Moran M.A.R. second year

My best friend was interested in art, so I bought watercolors and paintbrushes. We sat around after kindergarten, in makeshift smocks, painting and talking about how we would fill the museums with our work one day. When she developed a curiosity for poetry in late primary school, I perfected my rhyme scheme and tagged along. Later, my friends joined the town soccer team, so I laced up cleats. And when my teachers told me I had a knack for mathematics, I obliged them as they dissolved my summer to send me away to a special school for future engineers.

My paintings are pedestrian. My poems lack passion. I'm too non-aggressive to succeed in contact sports. My soul died at engineering school while I stayed up late stabilizing bridge models and perfecting my robot.

Everyone ends up somewhere, but only those with vision end up somewhere they intend. What is it that I am actually called to do, and why can't I see it?

I could spend my entire life this way – ungrounded and unpurposed, tossed to and fro, with no established sense of self – but I believe it is my responsibility to discern what it is that I am called to be, so that I might be an effective steward of the gifts I have been given. This knowledge is bound up in vision and calling.

In Os Guinness' *The Call*, he writes, "Calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service." It is a two-fold beckoning. First, God calls us to Godself: we are called primarily to know and love God. Secondly, God calls each of us to serve in unique ways. This secondary call, Guinness explains, frequently consumes us, supplanting our desire for the primary call as we attempt to establish our identities apart from God.

For me, the greatest challenge in discerning vocation has not been a mis-ordered prioritizing of my calls. It's that I scarcely attend reflectively to my secondary call at all. I allow other people to tell me what I am passionate about and where I should go. When I do that, I forfeit my own call.

If I have no vision, people will give me theirs. But I want what God has for me, and that demands I spend more time reflecting upon vocation on my own, learning who I am uniquely, in light of my primary call – to serve God in all that I do.

Sabrina Moran is a graduating M.A.R. student in Philosophy of Religion, with plans to teach elementary science before continuing on with Ph.D. work in Theory of Mind.

Broker of Beauty, Steward of Mystery

By Richard F. Collman '69 M.Div.

I just finished participation through singing, writing, and delivering program commentary in a choral and hymn festival at a Benedictine abbey in Eastern South Dakota. There, since 1999, I have been an oblate, a person formally associated with a monastery seeking to live in harmony with the Rule of Benedict. A background in theology, music, liturgy, parish ministry, and ecumenical relationships has defined my own calling as a Methodist minister for nearly fifty years.

When I entered YDS in 1965, I knew I wanted to be a United Methodist minister but also express my faith through music too. With this dual vocation, I felt called to reform the church from within. Great social causes were the order of that day – civil rights, Vietnam, the emergence of house churches. In the middle of all this, when the interior spiritual life was hardly mentioned at all, YDS taught me much about how to think and how to approach parish ministry, and allowed me to take courses in the School of Music and count them toward the theology degree. I remain grateful to YDS for helping me nourish these interests. Ultimately, I would spend twenty years as a parish minister and twenty years as a minister of music working to renew the church through liturgy and music. Today, I call myself a minister-musician, a broker of beauty and a steward of mystery.

What have I learned? First, as the mainline church declines, it needs to continue to reach out more ecumenically to other Christians in common social causes. One example would be the work of evangelicals and liberals together on contemporary issues, as Jim Wallis has demonstrated. The church of the post-World War II boom that I grew up in is no more. I feel those denominational empire-building days

Doors will open. Trust the future. You are called to be a hinge of history in a reformation we cannot yet articulate.

are over: we are historically returning to something more normal for Christianity, perhaps a smaller but more vital and countercultural stance, if American churches can recover from their cultural captivity.

Second, the church will take on new forms of expression as its influence fades in the U.S. and Europe but expands in Africa, South America, and elsewhere. Though we have been slow about it, world liturgies and world music have come into our hymnals and music in the West.

Third, I have been forced to become much more open and far less judgmental, exercising more love and charity toward different stances in faith and musical expression as I age.

What advice would I offer a young person starting out today? Pay attention to the nudges and urges within, since these may be God speaking to you. Honor these and act upon them whenever possible.

Be nourished in your tradition. Honor and respect it, but be hospitable to all other expressions of faith, diverse as they may be. God speaks through them as well as through your own background.

Always engage in contemplation that stirs both critical reflection and action. Think, and write, and do. Ministry is much harder these days. But you are gifted and blessed, whatever the obstacles. Doors will open. Trust the future. You are called to be a hinge of history in a reformation we cannot yet articulate.

Richard Collman, retired, lives in Northfield, MN, where he plays organ in a nearby Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregation, teaches college courses to seniors in the Cannon Valley Elder Collegium, and remains active in the local arts scene promoting music among all ages.

Tell Me Why

By Callista Isabelle '05 M.Div.

As I write this, I'm beginning my third week in a new call as a college chaplain. I am surrounded by moving boxes and just getting to know hundreds of new names. "Tell me why," people say, as they inquire about my leaving a place and people I love and moving to an unfamiliar place to serve a new group of people. Well, how exactly do I explain a deep sense of call?

My understanding of vocation is evolving. It has been shaped by my parents' farm work ethic, Luther's theology, supportive mentors, mountain-top moments, and professional failures.

I understand my vocation to be, at least in part, to nurture other people's understanding of their own vocations. I count this as a privilege. It is also tender ground on which to walk. There's a fine line between affirming the gifts someone has and pressuring one to use these in a certain way.

Like me, you may remember someone nudging your own sense of vocation forward in helpful ways. When I was a freshman, my college chaplain gently suggested, "You might consider seminary." I replied, baffled, "What's seminary?" Fifteen years later, this chaplain remains a mentor, and the conversation continues.

There's a lot at stake here. What is the right path? If we don't follow it, will our lives be ruined? If we don't find the *one* thing we're convinced must be planned for us, are we a lost cause?

Such questions weigh heavy on the shoulders, hearts, and minds of the college students I serve. The questions are especially burdensome if the answers seem already decided for them by someone else, or if they are genuinely confused about present and future. I spend a lot of time reassuring young adults that God loves them first, and calls them to vocations (plural) second.

For those of us serving as pastors, priests, teachers, or chaplains, we may need to remind ourselves (and each other) of this more often.

The Rev. Callista Isabelle is College Chaplain at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, PA, and a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



Good Work is Our Gift to the Future:

Joan Chittister



*Joan Chittister is an author, speaker, and Benedictine nun based in Erie, PA. Her many books show readers a way forward in life with resilience. A recent work, *The Monastery of the Heart* (BlueBridge, 2011) turns to the value of the Rule of Benedict for the twenty-first century. Her new book, due out this spring, is *Following the Path: The Search for a Life of Passion, Purpose, and Joy* (Image).*

REFLECTIONS: Much of your writing has focused on the purpose of life and calling. What are you arguing in the new book?

JOAN CHITTISTER: In an older generation, there was one great life decision to confront: what are you going to do with yourself? But I say there now are three decisions to face. One is the familiar one: what am I going to do with my life? But the second one comes in mid-life and asks: who am I? In the 1940s and 50s, people started to ask this question about their work: does my achievement to this point really represent who I am? Is that me? Am I finished? Should I be doing something else now?

So the third decision relates to what we still today call retirement: how do you want to spend it? We'll spend about one-third of our lives there. This is a question about legacy, capstone. Do you want to drift during those years or do you want to realize that that twenty or thirty years are for you to take?

We're in an opportune moment. We must try to get such questions into the conversation. Right now, what do young people hear from the adults? They hear, "You want to study art? There's no money in art. I didn't send you to Yale just to study art!"

REFLECTIONS: Did your own sense of vocation evolve slowly? Was there a moment of epiphany?

CHITTISTER: I know this might sound strange, but I knew at age three that I wanted to be a sister. My father had died just before I was three, and my

mother took me to the funeral home. The family was horrified that I would be exposed to death like that. But my mother told them that I had a right to grieve just as she did. I was amazed to see two strange figures standing at the casket. I asked my mother about them. She told me they were nuns – holy people who will stay there through the night until the angels come to take Daddy to God. I decided I wanted to do that!

So I went to Catholic schools – and I don't have any horror stories about the sisters that apparently some people do. They were loving. They laughed. They played with us. They were human, oh yes, but valiant. And I see now that there was a little femi-

Watching those nuns, I saw competent, capable women at work. I didn't see that anywhere else in my life. And so that vocation was a great fit for me. I entered the monastery at sixteen.

nist in me at that time: watching those nuns, I saw competent, capable women at work. I didn't see that anywhere else in my life. And so that vocation was a great fit for me. I entered the monastery at sixteen.

REFLECTIONS: Writing emerged as your gift, a calling within your religious vocation. By now, you've written some forty books. In *The Monastery of the Heart*, you summarize Benedictine principles you

live by. It sounds like you have lived with these ideas for decades. Why did you decide to write it now?

CHITTISTER: No question it's a book for now. My argument is that the twenty-first century needs a sixth-century philosophy, the Rule of Benedict. It's an approach that has endured. The situation we find ourselves in today proves the need for people to look at another philosophy of life and see if it will work better than what we go by now.

REFLECTIONS: You're not advocating that everybody join the monastery. Can monastic wisdom translate into the secular life of society and politics?

CHITTISTER: Oh yes! Look at the pillars of life that the Rule spells out – peace, hospitality, stewardship, community, good work, prayer, holy leisure. Remove just one or two pillars, and don't be surprised if your own endurance is threatened. We're in a position much like the thirteenth or sixteen century – society gets shaky, and major institutions collapse, because the culture's values are losing the spiritual spine that holds them together.

Take something obvious like peace. As a nation, we've really been at war since 1941. We are eating up our resources. We are eating up the insides of the human soul. You can't have external peace without internal peace. If people are at war inside of themselves, they can't offer much to the bigger world that is outside themselves.

The Rule says we are to give to those who need it and take only what we need. Yet the culture has raised individualism to pathological levels. To the ego, there's never enough. We need to learn

If people are at war inside of themselves, they can't offer much to the bigger world that is outside themselves.

"enoughness" and declare: I have enough. There's always a community element to the Rule: there are other people to think about.

REFLECTIONS: You say that "good work," in Benedictine terms, is labor that "continues the co-creation of the world." How does that apply to the twenty-first century economy?

CHITTISTER: Benedictines support ourselves. We believe work means earning your bread, making real things. You don't get it by making profits on sub-prime mortgages, loans you know are bad. Good work is a path toward self-fulfillment, but there's

always a spiritual function, a community function. Good work, no matter what sort of work it is, helps make the world a more humane place, touching the hurting places of humanity. Good work is also our gift to the future. It's what we leave behind. It's our share of the holy-making enterprise that is work.

REFLECTIONS: With all the evidence of social crisis, what gives you hope?

CHITTISTER: Something wonderful is going on in the U.S. – it's always been there, and I've always believed in it – the formation of "communities of communities." We are a nation of intentional communities, people who come forward to organize for a specific cause or passion. It's who we are. Now, such movements and communities start with great enthusiasm, but as time goes by it becomes difficult for groups to sustain that passion. What they need is a spiritual spine in order to endure – something greater, more eternal than the particular cause. I think the pillars of the Rule can provide that.

REFLECTIONS: Your new organization, Monasteries of the Heart, encourages local activism – prison work, discussion groups, environmental advocacy, non-violent resistance such as solidarity with Occupy Wall Street. People can join at www.monasteriesoftheheart.org. How is it going? Is it more than a website?

CHITTISTER: There are now more than 4,000 members in Monasteries of the Heart. They create intentional local groups, each defining its own issue or action to take. Everywhere I am seeing these little pockets of flame, a passion for changing the world. We're all looking for a way out of the current despair. The culture has been too long in dollar signs and too little in signs of the heart. I'm trying to start a conversation that gives a sense of serenity and courage as we go – a movement that springs out of contemplative foundations that can sustain energy, hope, and action too. As my mother would say, don't be good for nothing!

DECIDING THE COURSE
MY EDUCATION SHOULD TAKE
By Clemens Starck

Maybe I already know
as much as I'm destined to know, for this lifetime,
about small-engine repair.
And also about plumbing.
For that matter, I wouldn't mind
drinking a beer
to celebrate
an end to plumbing, and an end to small-engine repair.

Why not study ethnobotany,
or practice juggling?
I could learn to read Chinese, and start in
on the ten thousand poems extant
of Lu You.

It's unlikely I'll take up blacksmithing,
or become a backhoe operator.

For the time being
I think I'll just concentrate
on finding the words
for the mist that rises from the fields in the morning,
or the moon
as seen once from Joel's truck
on the way home from a job in Corvallis.

God the Employer

By Miroslav Volf

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If you walk into any large bookstore and look through the section on spirituality and work, you'll see that the main theme of most books is how to harness spiritual energies in order to succeed.

New Age “theologians” will tell a willing reader how to thrive, even beat the competition. In contrast, Christian theologians, especially in mainline denominations, have often tried to distance God from mundane success and instead concentrated on God’s demands on us. God’s demands are extraordinarily important if faith is not to idle in some crucial regards, especially in today’s climate in which we seem to be plagued by high-profile scandals in many spheres of life, from industry to journalism, science, politics, academics, and, most appallingly for Christians, ministry.

Theology of Success and Failure

But fundamentally, God is not a demander; God is a giver. That is what the tradition of blessing as revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures brings to expression. God’s generosity holds true not just in the realm of salvation, when the well-being of our souls is at stake. It also holds true in the realm of creation and therefore in the realm of everyday activities. If God is the source of our being, then we do all our work in the power that comes from God. God gives, and therefore we exist and can work. God gives, and therefore we can succeed in our work.

Our endeavors are at times misguided and need to be corrected, such as when we want to succeed at the others’ expense. We may inappropriately desire that God act in our favor, as in athletic contests. (The team God helped would be cheating!) But none of our endeavors and concerns are too small for God. God wants to empower us to succeed. God is the power of our being and therefore also the power of our succeeding. Moreover, our mundane work is

part of our service to God. It is God who sustains us; it is God who gives us power and creativity; and it is ultimately God for whom we work. Hence it is quite appropriate to ask God to bless our endeavors.

In asking God to help us succeed, though, are we not abdicating some of our own responsibility? We would be if receiving God’s blessing meant that God did things that otherwise we would have to do. But

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that’s not the case. When God blesses, God does not create finished products; God works through human means to achieve God’s ends. With regard to our success in work, we pray not so much for God to miraculously bring about a desired result but to make us willing, capable, and effective instruments in God’s hands – which is what we were created to be in the first place.

Another way in which faith makes a difference in our work is with regard to our inevitable failures. None of us like to admit to failures. We design our lives to keep failure at bay and, when failure strikes, to make it invisible. As a result, it is difficult for us to think of ourselves as having failed. Yet when we work, we are always in danger of some sort of failure, and we are often deeply troubled by the failures we experience. We need help not only to succeed but also after we have failed.

Breakdowns occur in spite of our precautions. We fall sick at a critical time, get injured at work, and so on. We fail to achieve our goals in spite of our best efforts. We work hard and nonetheless get a bad grade, get fired from a job, or lose a big deal to a competitor. It's even tougher when we do the right thing, and precisely because of that, fail. Then there is the failure that lies within success itself. We have climbed to the top, and we still feel deeply dissatisfied. In a finite, fragile, and highly competitive world, failure is always a threat.

When people fail and things break down, they often turn to faith. A critic may object: if you come to God in your failure, don't you reduce God to a

Some types of work may be ambiguous. Is it morally permissible to produce assault weapons or sex toys?

servant of your need? If in success God functions as a divine performance-enhancing drug, doesn't God function in failure as a divine Band-Aid? But if God is concerned about us, God will both empower us to succeed (as well as define for us what success means) and help us when we fail.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, along with the tradition of God's blessing, there is the tradition of God's *deliverance* (see Exod 14:10-13, Ps 65:5, Isa 51:6-8). At the heart of the tradition of deliverance, we find, maybe surprisingly, the problem of human work. Liberation from slave labor in Egypt was the defining act of God's redemption for the people of Israel. Cruel taskmasters oppressed the people of Israel, and God redeemed them. So to a large extent, the exodus of the children of Abraham and Sarah from Egypt is redemption from bad work.

Kant in the Cubicle

Consider, first, our frequent failure in spite of integrity. How does faith make a difference? God promises that if we do what is right, ultimately we cannot fail to achieve happiness or to succeed in the most comprehensive sense of that term. We are often puzzled as to why we should do what is morally good – and not just for the sake of a benefit we get from it – when those who do evil often thrive. Immanuel Kant's response was that it makes sense for people to do good for the sake of the good itself only if the world is set up in such a way that you don't have to act immorally in order to be ultimately happy. He concluded that only God can be the source of such a world; only God can ensure that virtuous living and happiness ultimately match.

Second, even when we fail, whether we have done our best or were unable to do our best, God gives us a sense of worth beyond our successes and failures. True, work is part and parcel of our identity. Who we are is shaped in part by the kind of work we do and the kind of workers we are. But we are more, much more, than our work because we are the beloved children of God both in success and in failure. God does not love us because of our success, and God does not cease to love us when we fail. When it comes to our sense of dignity, God's love trumps everything else.

Finally, God delivers us from the melancholy emptiness that sometimes accompanies our very success. We've achieved what we wanted – we have gotten the corner office – and we still feel empty. Melancholy inevitably sets in when we forget that we are made to find satisfaction in the infinite God and not in any finite object. It also sets in if we work just for ourselves and don't see our work as a service to the community and as part of God's ongoing engagement with creation.

What to Do?

How does faith guide what we should do? Applied to work broadly conceived, the question has a moral side (what kind of work is morally permissible and commendable?) as well as a personal side (into what should we pour our energies, and how should we employ our talents?).

We may not be particularly attracted to being garbage collectors, but from a moral standpoint, it's a fine kind of work as well as a communal necessity. Other types of work, however, are morally unacceptable. Even if I could earn a ton of money, I should never be a hired killer. Even if I deem a cause good I may not become a terrorist to further it. But there are some types of work that may be ambiguous. Is it morally permissible to produce, market, and sell assault weapons or sex toys? Is it morally permissible to work in an industry that excessively pollutes the environment?

Maybe even more important is discernment *within* morally acceptable types of work. Recall an important distinction that is often made in just war theory between the just resort to war (*ius ad bellum*) and the just conduct of war (*ius in bello*). According to proponents of just war theory, a nation can have a just cause for war and yet conduct the war unjustly. The same applies to all our work, not just the work of waging war. Within a type of work that is morally acceptable, we still need to decide what is ethical and what is not, and act accordingly. The larger setting within which we work – whether that

is a company, an industry, or the whole market – will exert pressure on us to achieve success as measured by its standards. And yet, if we don't want to hang our faith on the coat rack at the entrance of our workplace, we will have to let faith have the final word as to what we should or should not do.

Finally, a properly functioning faith nudges us to go beyond what is morally permissible and do what is morally *excellent*. Some years ago at a black-tie cocktail party, I was talking to a person who introduced himself to me as a Harvard graduate. We were chatting, so I asked him what he did. He responded, "You will laugh when I tell you what I do." I said, "Well, try me." He replied, "I'm making urinals." I said, "Well, most men need them ..." And he responded, "I'm designing and producing flush-free urinals." What an extraordinary thing to do! Water is becoming a very scarce resource, and he was helping save a lot of it, in fact some 40,000 gallons per urinal per year! This person's work was morally excellent, not just morally permissible.

Some Christians keep God out of the moral dimension of their work lives. They believe that God saves souls and directs private morality, that God even enhances performance and heals wounds. God seems detached, though, from the moral decisions we face in our more public lives. When we limit God to the private sphere rather than letting God shape our entire lives, a prophetic faith fails to do some of its most important work.

God's Work Crew

What then is the relationship of God to the meaning of our work? Our work can find its ultimate meaning when, in working for ourselves and for community, we work for God. There are four major ways in which God relates to this. First, God is, in a sense, our *employer*. As we strive to satisfy our own needs and contribute to the well-being of the community, we work for God, we serve God. Here God gives us tasks to do in the world – commands us to have dominion over the world (Gen 1) or to "keep and till" the garden (Gen 2) – and we do what God commands.

Second, we can think of our work as not just fulfilling God's commands but achieving God's *purposes* in the world. In Matthew's Gospel, when describing the judgment of the nations, Jesus says to the sheep at his right, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing,

I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me" (Matt 2:34-36). Whatever the "sheep" did to the least members of Jesus' family, they did it to him. God loves creation and all creatures, and when we care for their well-being, we work for God's purposes and in this way also for God.

Third, in our work we *cooperate* with God. Consider the second account of creation in which, in the form of a story, God's original purpose with humanity is laid bare (Gen 2:4-25). It starts with the statement that there was no vegetation on earth after God created it. Two reasons are given for this: first, God had not yet let rain fall on the ground, and second, human beings were not around to till it. Only when human beings come onto the scene and start working can God's work of creation be completed. God creates, God preserves, God's blessing is enacted, God transforms the world in anticipation of the world to come – and in all that, God makes us God's own co-workers. We work with God, and God works through us. We make decisions in boardrooms, we flip hamburgers at McDonald's, we clean houses, we drive buses, we publish books and deliver lectures – and by doing that, we work with God and God works through us. No greater dignity could be assigned to our work.

Work and the World to Come

Finally, God makes sure that none of what is true, good, and beautiful in our work will be lost. In God, everything that we have done in cooperation with God will be preserved. In the world to come, our work will not disappear. We ourselves will be followed by our works, as it says in the Book of Revelation (14:13). That makes sense if our identity partly resides in our work and its achievements. Even in the world to come, I could not meet Gutenberg and not think of the printing press, or meet Einstein and not think of his theory of relativity, or meet Paul and not think of the Epistle to the Romans. The results of our work – the cumulative results of generations of workers across the globe – will also be preserved in the world to come. They may be preserved just in God's memory, or they may be preserved as actual building blocks of that new world.

The work of each one of us is, then, a small contribution to the grand tapestry of life, which God is weaving as God created the world, is redeeming the world, and will consummate the world. This is the ultimate meaning of our work.

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Called by Name in Tumultuous Times

By Marcia Clark Myers

I remember painfully the time when my father lost his job. Dad was instrumental in the computerization of machines. After years of success and achievement, his position was eliminated in a downsizing. He was unemployed at age sixty. Dad understood himself as “the provider” and never wanted my stepmother to work. When he lost his paycheck, he lost himself. He felt no longer valued. I remember him sitting with me in our porch swing, lamenting feelings of despair, failure, worthlessness. I had never seen my father like that. It went on a long time.

After more than a year of searching and rejection, Dad was asked to teach at a well-known university. He soon thrived working with young students. He took them on field trips to factories and shared his learning from a lifetime of work. He said, “I am making one-third as much money and having three times as much fun. I wish I had done this years ago!” He had found his vocation.

“What Is There For Me Now?”

The current harsh economy has caused many people to struggle with vocation in painful new ways. Fewer positions and higher levels of student debt are obstacles to employment in one’s chosen field. Some worry that such economic conditions threaten even the possibility of pursuing one’s calling.

However, today’s tumultuous times may inspire more people to do serious reflection about their core life commitments, and live into them. People are asking, “What is really important?” and “Why am I here?” I think of new graduates eager to enter the work force, but who are in economic limbo; or first-generation college students who made the sacrifice to get an education, but who are still cooking at a fast-food restaurant; many who feel deeply committed to live out their calling in a particular field but are hindered by educational debt; fifty-five-year-olds who have lost high-paying jobs, pensions, and homes; mature adults wondering about purpose at mid-life

or in retirement; thousands of young people coming back from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with injured bodies and spirits, their lives blown apart in

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a moment. From a hospital bed they wonder, “What is there for me now? Why did I survive?” These are vocational questions.

We are in a time ripe for rediscovering the meaning of vocation. Human beings yearn deeply to find that place. But what is vocation? Church people tend to equate vocation with church service as a priest, minister, educator, mission worker, or member of a religious order. For Reformed Christians, vocation has a broader scope: it is something each baptized person has and discerns continually throughout life. In baptism we are called by name and commissioned for God’s special purpose. The rest of our lives is the unfolding of that vocation.

The church has a unique responsibility to walk with Christians of all ages as they explore their life commitments and purpose. It is especially important to do so with youth and young adults as they

choose values, career, and life partners. Over the last decade church institutions have given a good deal of energy to helping young people explore vocation, especially focusing on church-related work and the goal of strengthening the pool of seminary candidates. (A notable one is the Programs for the

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Theological Exploration of Vocation, funded by the Lilly Endowment in partnerships with denominations and church-related educational institutions.) We must also not overlook the benefits of vocational exploration to those who do not go to seminary and whose ministries will be lived out in social work, teaching, health care, and more.

Walking Side by Side

I believe that the convergence of such programs with today's economic uncertainty invites the church to strengthen its ministry to help individuals claim their Christian vocation. Church members and leaders need to walk alongside persons in vocational discernment. That may occur in congregations, on campuses, or other settings, and draw upon assistance and expertise from many sources. The Office of Vocation is one, but we also serve to connect individuals with vocational resources available on our college and seminary campuses, our camps and conference centers, church organizations, and in our presbyteries. These are God's people in our pews and at our doorstep, called and gifted for God's work, who need support as they adapt to their real-life conditions and seek a way to serve. If we don't help people understand their identity as children of God with a life of purpose and resilience, who will shape their life direction and what will the message be?

In its 2005 strategic planning, the General Assembly Mission Council of the Presbyterian Church (USA) identified Christian vocation as a priority. We have sponsored "Pathways" vocation events involving hundreds of high school youth and youth workers; a series of events for college students will be held this spring. Some seventy people now participate in the Young Adult Volunteer Program, doing a year of service in the U.S. and abroad – for instance, border ministry in Arizona, urban ministry in Chicago, justice ministry in Nashville, educational ministries in Guatemala, Northern Ireland, or Kenya

while living in intentional community and committing to the work of discernment.

For Such a Time as This

For those called to pastoral ministry, we established For Such a Time as This, a small-church residency program that matches underserved rural or inner-city churches with new graduates gifted and waiting to serve. Somewhat akin to Teach for America, this initiative aims to nurture new pastoral leaders and deepen the community impact of small congregations. Residents are supported by mentors in learning groups that meet monthly during their two-year pastoral term. They are also offered debt assistance to remove some of the barriers they face as they respond to the call to missional service.

Both residents and their parishioners are experiencing God's call powerfully. Michael Wood, resident pastor in Pontotoc, MS, has said: "This is kind of the Conestoga wagon thing. If you really think you've got guts and you've been called by God, let's find out." Sara Bramlett, an elder in the church, said: "Yes, we are alive. Yes, we do have a future. Yes, God is still at work in our church. There is more we can do."

In the PC(USA) Office of Vocation, our work is based on the assumption that each of us has a calling to serve God faithfully in gratitude and hope. Vocation is not necessarily about church work but embraces a variety of paths to transform the world in the name of Christ. The crisis of our times reminds us that we live in a broken and fearful world, and it provokes us to examine our commitments and discern what God would have us do with what we have been given.

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Vocation of the Young, Vocation to the Young

By Christine Housel

Looking at the topic of vocation among young people today from a global perspective is complex. Young people from the south and from the north have different issues. Each culture and context brings with it many differences, calling for different responses. It's my privilege to work with students from almost 100 countries, and it is my continuing challenge to discover, appreciate, and engage these distinctions while working together with young people to find what they have in common so that we fulfill our mission as a global community that helps young people reach their leadership potential and discover their own unique vocations.

I meet many young people all around the world who are motivated to find and make meaning out of life, stand for justice, and serve others. Many in the particular community I work within are motivated in this journey by their Christian faith.

At the same time, we observe major shifts in our world and church, unfolding rapidly and posing many challenges and threats to the flourishing of young people, and threatening the church itself.

I will focus here on a few trends that I see as common to young people around the world and hint at the way churches and communities need to evolve in order to attract and support young people. To fulfill our role as church, as educators, and as friends to young people, we must have the courage and energy to meet these changes, and engage young people themselves, understanding their perspectives, embracing their contributions, and involving them more fully. My core assertion is that we must partner with young people in new ways and create space in our midst and in ourselves for them, giving them more room to initiate projects, supporting and mentoring them, and giving them more decision-making roles within our institutions and common spaces if we want young people present, active, and flourishing.

Trend #1: We have only begun to grasp the impact of the internet on the formation of people, ideas, and movements. Images are beginning to replace words as primary. And the words and images and the ideas they carry are fast and brief. A role reversal is underway: instead of adults guiding young people through the information and ideas

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and people that will form their character, the young people are pioneering the ground while most older people struggle to keep up or even refuse to engage this new reality.

On the one hand, the internet levels the playing field, allowing every voice space and any voice to come to the fore, thereby challenging systems of power. It gives people in remote places access to new information, and it gives people easy access to “friends” around the world. On the other hand, of course, the internet gives uncontrolled access to

images and information, some of which is unhealthy and degrading. Genuine community is taking place in this space, yet arguably it can have the effect of reducing some young people's ability to interact with ideas and people with the depth and complexity that they deserve.

Like it or not, adults and churches need to get into this space, learn from the young people, and at the same time guide young people through it. To grapple with its implications, younger and older people must engage a dialogue and discern together.

Fast and Furious

Trend #2: Globalization over the past decade is influencing educational trends. Educational systems and institutions have become increasingly privatized and commercialized in both developing and developed countries, with a correlating increase in school fees for many. There is pressure to finish school faster. Many students must work while studying.

Education is becoming fiercely commodified: most students are encouraged to study narrowly defined subjects that reflect the current needs of the job market. Globally, there are more students in institutions of higher education, but critical thinking and character formation are often not regarded as important goals.

Many students are worried about their future. One young adult from Asia said to me recently that students feel that the elders in their country are stealing their future, refusing to share power, opportunities, and money with them. Students find they have less time to involve themselves in church activities, social movements, and civic action. There is less time, and less of a vision for, community-building and reflection. There is much competition for their limited time; they have far more extra-

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curricular activities to choose from. And often they make their choices for pragmatic reasons primarily – they will join if it will somehow boost their resume when looking for a job.

Reaching out to these students, we should listen to their struggles. Increasingly it is a countercultural act to create spaces that will allow for deeper engagement with other people and ideas.

Churches Left Behind

Trend #3: An obvious and disturbing trend is that young people are leaving the churches. It is not because they are uninterested in God, spirituality, or tradition. Somehow they no longer find the churches a viable space to find and express their spirituality and need for meaningful engagement with others. They will not stay with an institution simply out of habit or loyalty if they do not see meaning in it. Some denizens of the 1960s generation interpret this as simply a new version of their own experience of rebelling against authority and adults. But this

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is a mistake and will lead to ineffective outreach. Young people now have a different relationship with institutions. The institution itself is not a primary category in their lives. There is no need to rebel. They will simply not participate if they do not find something, and someone, that connects with their own personal realities.

There are notable exceptions. For example, many Orthodox young people are deeply connected to their institution, the church, as a defining part of their identity and spirituality. Yet the challenge of attracting their personal, vibrant commitment is much the same.

The participation of young people in the ecumenical movement, committed to visible expressions of Christian unity, is declining as well. The concept of denomination does not hold the same place in their identity as it did when the modern ecumenical movement began a century ago. There is not the immediate interest and felt need. We need new approaches that help young people see why work for Christian unity is important and relevant.

This decline might be related also to current approaches to leadership formation in both the churches and ecumenical movement. Notably more young people participate in the evangelical and Pentecostal churches than in the historic churches. I have heard it said that evangelical churches invest more in young people and put young people in recognized positions of responsibility, alongside more experienced adults, whereas the historic churches and ecumenical movement create internships, with the implied message that they will be given responsibility and leadership when they grow up, when their time comes.

There is much at work in our world that objectifies and dehumanizes people, making it difficult to find genuine community – more so, I would argue, than in past generations. We are all called to work hard in the opposite direction.

Young people today are concerned about justice, as young people always are. They are looking for spirituality and faith that is relevant to their lives. They will not respond to leadership that is patronizing, arrogant, or disconnected. The blessing of their insistence and their impatience is this: if we rise to the challenge, we will have more people sitting in the pews who are there with purpose. If the churches are declining in their role and relevance, perhaps the young people's call for authenticity is a key to stirring transformation in twenty-first century society and individuals.

Agents of Change

As always, young people need education, formation, and input from adults. They know they do not have all the answers, and they will accept such input when the approach is made in a spirit of accompaniment and listening – when they are given meaningful roles in the community, space to explore their own ideas, and appreciation, and when the adults admit they do not have all the answers either and express vulnerability in their own lives.

The challenges in the church and the world are too fundamental today for any group to handle in isolation. Inter-generational approaches are now not only desirable but necessary. Young people understand themselves as agents of change, and they will respond and participate with older adults, and within institutional structures, when the adults and institutions make space to include young people as real partners.

It is when we are building this kind of authentic community, which ultimately reflects the deep connection, love, and interdependence of the Triune God, that young people, and all people, will have the motivation, freedom, and trust to listen for their calling and find their vocation.

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THE MERTON PRAYER

By Thomas Merton

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always though
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.



Where You Stand Determines What You See

By Tim Ahrens

As a young man, I heard theologian Robert McAfee Brown present three guidelines for making an effective prophetic witness. He was speaking at a forum at Macalester College in St. Paul, MN, five years after the Vietnam War. Brown implored us to be aware that we were privileged and educated young men and women. But what we did with the education and privileges would make a world of difference.

He said, “Stand up and speak out on behalf of the poor and those who need your voice in this world. Remember that: 1) where you stand will determine what you will see; 2) whom you stand with will determine what you hear; and 3) what you see and hear will determine what you say and how you act.”

As a preacher of the gospel, I’ve been called by Christ to prophetic witness on behalf of those who are poor, forgotten, and forsaken, and I have used Dr. Brown’s guidelines throughout my life. I have found myself standing with poor and working-class people in many places over the years. In Fall 1984, I helped organize Yale Divinity School students and faculty to stand outside the gates on the picket lines with clerical workers seeking fair wages and benefits. Most recently, in February 2011, I found myself outside the gates again – this time outside

lature. Swept into office in November 2010, Gov. John Kasich and supporters sought to abolish a thirty-five-year collective bargaining agreement for all unionized state employees. Although 70 percent of Ohioans supported the right to collective bargaining, the attack on public-sector employees had begun.

Against this hostile legislation came daily protests on the statehouse lawn and in the capital’s atrium and rotunda. Tens of thousands of people showed up. As a religious leader in Ohio, I joined the protests – listening carefully, reading the legislation carefully, and in time speaking publicly.

Questioning the Spirit of the Times

On March 8, 2011 as the governor gave his State of the State address, I addressed more than 5,000 Ohioans outside the statehouse. Our messages, the governor’s and mine, were demonstrably different. The governor stands with the rich and speaks for policies that are anti-union, making no apologies for where he stands and for whom he speaks. I was there to challenge his understanding of collective bargaining and speak up for a different idea of the collective spirit of faith in our state. On that clear cold March day I said:

What I love about Ohioans is that we work out our problems. We come together and work together and face the tough times. We find a way through. That is what collective bargaining is all about. It is not about

Where you stand and with whom you speak will determine what you say on these and other issues.

the Ohio statehouse with thousands of firefighters, public school teachers, police, and nurses. More than 360,000 state workers were about to lose their rights to collective bargaining, and I organized other pastors, rabbis, and imams to speak out on their behalf.

The assault on Ohio’s public employees’ rights came from the newly elected governor and legis-

greed, as some people say. It is about fairness and equity. It is all about working things out for the good of all people. It means making sacrifices on both sides and finding a way forward. And it works. It has worked for Ohio for a long time. This is not the time to throw out what works in a state where over half a million people are out of work.

What has changed in the spirit of Ohio? Where have moderation and the collective spirit of doing the right thing gone?

Mr. Kasich, you need to listen to the people of Ohio. Listen and you will hear the voices of the men and women who teach our children, protect our streets, and put out the fires in our burning buildings. They give their lives to us. They risk their lives for us. Their instruments are tuned to service and praise of God.

Listen to them. They are the deacons in our churches. They are the “mitzvoh” in our synagogues. They are prayer partners in our mosques. There are hundreds of thousands in this symphony of protest! As we hear them cry we know that the citizens of this fine state also hear them. Students in our high schools, colleges and universities are clicking-on their computer-search engines and their searches are taking them out of Ohio. Even though their teachers want them to stay, they have begun to lose hope and look elsewhere to find work as future teachers, firefighters, and police.

Listen, Mr. Kasich. We have faith, too. We are out here. We will not go away. We are standing out here with the statue of a former Republican governor and president, William McKinley. If you won't listen to us, listen to him. At the base of his statue it reads: “Let us ever remember that our interest is in concord, not conflict, and that our real eminence rests in the victories of peace, not those of war. Our earnest prayer is that God will graciously vouchsafe prosperity, happiness, and peace to all our neighbors, and like blessings to all the peoples and powers of earth.”

In the end, the people of Ohio turned out in record numbers to defeat Issue #2 by a vote of 61-39 percent. The very next day, conservative leaders gathered to begin their next challenge to workers in Ohio – “the right to work” initiative.

Labor and economic questions are ever-pressing on us in Ohio. The over-employed work long hours in six- and seven-day work weeks with little or no additional compensation. The under-employed scramble to piece together two and three jobs with no benefits and no perks. Many of the unemployed are churning through savings, others are sinking into debt, but all are struggling to survive as unemployment payments end. We count over 500,000

Ohioans in this category. If we are not addressing these issues from our pulpits and bemahts, I believe we are not faithful and true to God and God's people.

As the senior minister of a large downtown congregation in Ohio's capital city, I am often in the midst of justice issues of our day. The death penalty, gun violence in our schools and on our streets, health care, fair housing, taxes, public education and labor issues are all critical concerns. Where you stand and with whom you speak will determine what you say on these and other issues.

A Theology of Work

Where we stand and with whom we stand are foundational guidelines. But our ground of being is found in God. For me, each morning begins by turning my life over to the care of God. Prayer is my constant guide.

Daily prayer coupled with Holy Scripture direct my steps into the heart of God. Scripture has always been my guiding light. I believe with my Pilgrim forbearers: “more light and truth are always breaking forth from God's holy word.” Light and truth have often guided my steps for justice with the words of Micah 6:8, Amos 5, Luke 4:14-21, and John 21:15-19. They have sustained me.

Ten years into my ministry, I happened to read an interview with theologian and poet Howard Thurman. He was asked if he had any regrets. He said, “My only regret is that I wasted the first ten years

Others have inspired me. The late William Sloane Coffin used to tell the story of coming on a street fight and asking, “Is this a private fight or can anyone jump in?”

of my ministry saying nothing to anyone because I was afraid. Like the women in Mark's Easter story, I was silent because I was fearful. Fear will cause us to be silent in the face of that we know is wrong.” I decided that day: I would dedicate my ministry to speaking the truth in love.

Others have inspired me. The late William Sloane Coffin, one of my mentors and heroes, used to tell the story of coming on a street fight and asking, “Is this a private fight or can anyone jump in?” I find that those who are taking advantage of the poor don't want anyone to know about it and certainly don't want people to organize and jump in. But that is what it takes to change an injustice into something fair and right.

As a pastor, I am always challenged to balance pastoral care, worship leadership, and church administration with peace-and-justice work. Believe me: I spend twenty times more hours in church meetings than speaking out at statehouse rallies. Even now, I am writing this in the pre-dawn hours so I can go to hospitals and nursing homes once the sun has risen.

Prophetic ministry is personally demanding; I believe that's why so few embrace it. My predecessor the Rev. Dr. Washington Gladden once said, "Speaking out for workers and the voiceless poor is the hardest work I do. It takes a lot out of me every time I speak. But, when I see them without any one to speak on their behalf, I feel called by God to raise my voice." Bill Coffin once said, "Whenever I preach prophetically, I clear off my schedule the following week to make pastoral calls on angry members." How true.

Some would say the church has no role to play on issues dealing with labor and employers. I could not disagree more. When it comes to the assault on laborers, I feel strongly that I must speak out. I am undaunted in this. As I serve the church of the late Rev. Dr. Gladden, a prophet of the social gospel, his words delivered on the statehouse steps 100 years before me ring true in my heart. He said: "... The labor question is in part an economic question, and all economic questions are fundamentally religious questions. (In fact), there are no purely spiritual interests, since spiritual forces all incarnate themselves in the facts of everyday life, and can only be known as they are there manifested. ... There is indeed danger that the Church will make mistakes in dealing with such questions, but that the greatest of all mistakes is in ignoring them. ... There are no

I would recommend to every pastor, priest, rabbi, and imam that your job description requires you to preach and teach on social justice issues.

souls that are more in need of saving than the souls getting entangled in the materialisms that undervalue manhood; and there are no people who need moral guidance more than those who are grappling with the manifold phases of the labor question."

I would recommend to every pastor, priest, rabbi, and imam that your job description requires you to preach and teach on social justice issues. The scriptures in every tradition call leaders and members to stand up on behalf of the poor, forsaken, and forgotten children of God. God calls us to be prophetic witnesses.

The late German theologian Dorothee Soelle, working with themes from Sigmund Freud, wrote a little book many years ago called *To Love and to Work* (Fortress, 1984). She wrote: "My book is an attempt to affirm our being created and becoming creators, being liberated and becoming agents of liberation, being loved and becoming lovers." (p. 157) She believed work is not a divine curse (as some interpreters of Genesis would have us believe), but a means of human freedom. Now we need to find a way for grace and love to help us become more human in our times.

May you find a place to stand with the poor and the forgotten. May you hear their stories and respond to their pain. May you answer God's call and be bold in speaking the truth in love so that others may love and work.

The Rev. Tim Ahrens '85 M.Div. is senior minister of First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, in Columbus, OH. He received YDS's William Sloane Coffin Award for Peace and Justice in 2008. See his blog at www.socialgospelrising.com.

DOMESTIQUE

By Heather McHugh

Surfaces to scrape or wipe,
a screwdriver to be applied
to slime-encrusted soles, the spattered

hallways, wadded bedding – and
in quantities astounding (in the corners,
under furniture, behind the curtains)

fluff and dander spread by curs
the breeder called nonshedding ...
It's a dog's life I myself must lead,

day in, day out – with never a Sunday edition –
while they lie around on their couches like poets,
and study the human condition.



Tension, Heartbreak, and Vocation: Parker J. Palmer



*“Let your life speak,” Quaker wisdom says. It took several years for Parker Palmer – teacher, writer, retreat leader, mentor – to grasp its meaning. Rather than making noble but futile attempts to emulate one’s heroes and their virtues, he says, one must be attentive to one’s own soul, to one’s “deeper and truer life waiting to be acknowledged.” Palmer’s writings have explored the importance of “leading from within,” the aims of education, the dynamics of community and social change, and his own vocational struggles and breakthroughs. Palmer is founder of the Center for Courage & Renewal, which promotes vocational vitality and professional and public integrity. His latest book is *Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit* (Wiley, 2011).*

REFLECTIONS: Your own vocational arc has an unconventional shape. What were you learning along the way?

PALMER: I learned that you can make countercultural vocational decisions without disappearing from the face of the earth! I started doing that at a fairly young age. My mentors in college and grad school groomed me to be an academic, a professor, or a young college dean or president. But I had other ideas, ideas shaped by my own inner imperatives and by the rapid social change going on in the 1960s. In 1970, after I got my Ph.D. in sociology from Berkeley, I decided not to go after a professorship but to become a community organizer and work on race relations and community stability in Washington, D.C. I did that work for five years, until I burned out. I didn’t really understand my own limitations and potentials when I took on that job.

So I went on sabbatical at Pendle Hill, a Quaker living-learning community near Philadelphia, thinking I’d be there for a year of rest, reflection, and

renewal. But I was invited to stay on as dean of studies, so I stayed for another decade, a transformational decade for me.* At Pendle Hill, I learned about the Quaker tradition that joins the inner and the outer, as in spirituality and social change. I started understanding the importance of holding tensions of that sort in every aspect of my life. I think human creativity comes in part from the energy – and the demand – generated by creative tension-holding.

REFLECTIONS: You’ve written much about these tensions and contradictions, the urgency of admitting them, living with them.

PALMER: These days I’m particularly focused on what it means to be an actor in a tragic world – “tragic” in the classical sense of being permanently flawed. How do we learn how to stand and act in the eternal “tragic gap” – the gap between the way things are

* Pendle Hill is a Quaker adult study center in Wallingford, PA, founded in 1930 by such Quaker luminaries as Douglas Steere and Rufus Jones. Palmer was there from 1974-85 as a student, dean, teacher, and writer-in-residence.

and the way we know they could and should be? How do we stand and act there without flipping out either on the side of too much of “what is” – which leads to corrosive cynicism – or too much “what might be” – which leads to irrelevant idealism? If we want to live nonviolent lives, we must learn to live in the tragic gap, faithfully holding the tension between reality and possibility, without letting cynicism or idealism take us out of the action.

Idealism is important, but it needs to be tempered by acceptance of life’s tragic dimension. Look at all the messianic hopes around the election of President Obama. After he’d been in office for just a few months, and revealed his feet of clay, some of his supporters started saying, “I’m getting off this train.” I regard that as an educational failure. We don’t educate the heart to embrace the limits of history and the human self – to say nothing of the limitations on the power of the President of the United States.

REFLECTIONS: What is the educated heart?

PALMER: We can educate the heart by exposing it to tension-inducing ideas, relationships, and experiences – expose it in situations where we can reflect together and mentor each other on how best to hold these tensions, and on what happens within us and around us when we do not hold them well. In this way, we can help make the heart supple rather than brittle, so it breaks *open* instead of *apart* under the stresses of life. When the heart breaks apart, it breaks into a thousand pieces. But it can also break

We can help make the heart supple rather than brittle, so it breaks open instead of apart under the stresses of life.

open onto larger capacity, become more open to holding the pain of the world. Many of us have experienced this in our personal lives when someone dear to us dies, and we slowly awaken to the fact that this heartbreaking loss has not destroyed us, but opened us to greater compassion and a larger understanding of life. Creative tension-holding is a human capacity that can be transferred from personal to public life. But we need forms of education that cultivate supple hearts as well as supple minds.

REFLECTIONS: How does a tension-holding education affect the work of vocational discernment?

PALMER: When I was in my teens, white males especially had a well-marked societal path for choice-making and identity formation – which meant that

people who were not white and male had “paths” as well, largely marked by roadblocks. It was racist, sexist, and classist, but everyone had a “map,” and not very many deviated from its well-trod paths.

But as this society has opened up to diversity and lost its cultural consensus around “who goes where” – all of which I regard as a good thing – it’s become harder for people, especially young people, to know where they “belong.” Today the answer to that question must come from within, not without. Answering it requires a lot of skill at discernment – which means holding the tensions of confusion and ambiguity until they open us to something new.

In my judgment, our educational and religious institutions have not done a good job of keeping up with this sort of cultural change and giving young people the tools for discernment. Education keeps up with technological change pretty well, and it cer-

Education rarely takes students to those deep places where discernment can be taught and learned.

tainly knows how to play the “job training” card in a shaky economy. But, except for the best liberal arts programs, which are increasingly rare, it rarely takes students to those deep places where discernment can be taught and learned. As for religious institutions, the churches I know best (those in the mainline Protestant tradition in which I grew up) have been so busy trying to survive, or sometimes self-destructing around marginal theological issues, that they have not had the time, energy, or capacity to serve these needs in young people either.

REFLECTIONS: Can you build that into a curriculum?

PALMER: Absolutely. I know this because I’ve seen it done. Let me refer again to the liberal arts tradition – called “liberal” because it was seen as the kind of education suited for a free or liberated people. The aim was to teach people to think on their feet in the midst of confusing situations, bringing both mind and heart to bear on the convoluted challenges of real life. A liberal education helps people embrace complexity, contradiction, and paradox for the sake of opening their hearts and minds to a better way. It helps them enter unmapped, alien territory – where fearful people say, “Warning! Do not enter! There be dragons!” – and find the courage to explore “otherness” without being paralyzed by fear. Fear of that which is “other” than us is one of our biggest problems today. At every level of life – from personal to

political – our creativity is being shut down because we are so vulnerable to fear. And there are so many forces out there working hard to manipulate our fear to keep us shut down, in line, and under control.

REFLECTIONS: Your new book turns to politics, to your worries and hopes about democracy. How does it relate to individual “habits of the heart”?

PALMER: We need to remember that American democracy was called into existence by “We the People.” Politics is not something that happens “out there,” totally under the control of people with power and money who are beyond our reach. Politics begins “right here,” between me and my friends, me and my neighbors, me and my colleagues, me and my fellow parishioners. But every time we refuse to talk to each other across our lines of difference in ways that make creative use of those tensions, “We the People” squander our power, creating a void that non-democratic powers (like corporate money) are eager to fill.

REFLECTIONS: National polls say we trust each other less and less. Is that your impression?

PALMER: Unfortunately, a lot of the political “news” we get is more like caricatures of reality than what’s really going on in our lives – caricatures that portray our problems on such a vast scale and at such a fast pace that we end up with a sense that there’s nothing we can do. The media does a great job of disempowering people. When I visit with people about these things and ask them questions that are national in scope, I get gloomy answers which include low levels of mutual trust. But when I ask people what’s going on in their neighborhoods,

We can grow into our highest aspirations only if we understand that the tension between what is and what could and should be are not to be feared but embraced as sources of vital energy for new life.

the picture I get is much more positive. Now it’s a human-scale picture, which makes it possible to think “We the People” again.

American democracy was designed by the Founders on the premise that tension is a good thing – an engine of social order, not the enemy of social order. The Founders, for example, gave us three branches of government designed to hold issues in tension over a long period of time. It’s

vexing and slow, but it gives us chance after chance to evolve better answers over time.

But that system doesn’t work unless individuals have that same tension-holding capacity in themselves. Fortunately, we do – but we need to find ways to expand and extend it. Anyone who has raised a teenager knows about tension-holding! The parent who has known a child since birth has a sense of that child’s potential, even while watching the teenage version of that child make bad choices and sometimes go off the rails. A good parent learns to hold these poles in tension with each other, knowing that something creative might emerge if we embrace rather than fear the tension.

A good citizen needs the same habit of the heart. We know the potentials of this country, and we know how far we have fallen short. “We the People” have the constant task of helping this country grow into its highest aspirations. We can do that only if we understand that the tension between what is and what could and should be – and the tensions between us – are not to be feared but embraced as sources of vital energy for new life.

“I LIVE MY LIFE IN WIDENING CIRCLES”

By Rainer Maria Rilke

I live my life in widening circles
that reach out across the world.
I may not complete this last one
but I will give myself to it.

I circle around God, around the primordial tower.
I’ve been circling for thousands of years
and I still don’t know: am I a falcon,
a storm, or a great song?



Blessed are the Nathans

By Anne Howard

I'm looking for Nathan. I'm looking across the landscape of emerging leaders from our divinity and theological schools, seeking the Nathans, but finding instead batches of temple priests more focused on burying Uriah than confronting David.*

Don't get me wrong. We need those priests. We need caring pastors and imaginative liturgists, lay and ordained faith leaders to enliven our community worship, accompany our life journeys, and encompass our joys and griefs. But we need our pastors and priests to be courageous as well as comforting. We need leaders of faith communities who are not afraid to discern the signs of the times and speak and act with courage about what they see.

I'm not talking about hoary-bearded prophets of doom, placard in hand, ranting in high decibels on street corners. Nor am I talking about the righteous steely-eyed voice of blame, the finger-pointing axe-grinder who climbs into the pulpit to cause groans from the rapidly emptying pews. I'm talking about leaders with a vocation to inspire their congregations to embrace a public faith. A vocation to lead is something quite different from a vocation to care for the congregation's private life and personal needs.

* II Samuel 12 – Nathan said to David: “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.” Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, “As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.” Nathan said to David, “You are the man.”

“Looking for Nathan” has become something of a mantra at The Beatitudes Society as we work to identify and equip leaders to grow faith communities for the sake of justice and the common good. The Beatitudes Society's new yearlong Beatitudes Fellowship, launching this fall, assembles a select group of entrepreneurial faith leaders who will gather quarterly for customized workshops tailored to their particular ministry. They will work alongside their peers on leadership skills, including strategic planning, communication, spiritual practices, community-building, and learning to discern what a ministry needs, from the tangible (people, money, time) to the intangible (faith, hope, courage).

Embracing the Entrepreneurial

We are looking for that pastor, lay or ordained, with a vocation to lead – someone who has a bold vision for corporate worship, spiritual formation, and social justice, with a commitment to hold all three in creative tension. We are looking for entrepreneurial faith leaders who want to take that bold vision from a good idea to a tangible project that connects their congregation with the world beyond their church doors.

In our search for these “Nathans,” I find I need to explain the use of the word “entrepreneurial.” We use the word because we are looking for leaders who want to start something new in order to grow their congregations, not simply maintain them. Yet “entrepreneurial” has little resonance with many of my church colleagues. As one colleague said to me, “Entrepreneurial sounds just too bold for the church. We're not like that.”

But we need to be “like that.” We need bold faith leaders for tough times. Across the world, this

new century has been marked by unceasing wars, unprecedented climate disasters, and increasing wealth disparity. Across the country, local and federal budgets are shredding safety nets for the poor, incentives for the middle class, and protections for the environment. In tough times we need bold faith leaders to proclaim the active compassion and justice at the heart of all the great religions.

“Where Are the Religious Voices?”

As a neighbor said to me a short while ago: “It’s amazing that it took kids camping on Wall Street to come up with the 1 percent-99 percent slogan. That phrase alone gets my attention. But where are you people? Where are the religious voices? Why aren’t they talking about wealth and poverty and income disparity? Jesus did a lot of that, didn’t he?”

Yes, he did. And so, yes, in this era when too few rich “kings” own way too many “lambs,” we need new Nathans to say, in effect, “You are the man.” The point is not to blame the infamous “1 percent” but to help us see a way forward together, confess our complicity in the status quo, acknowledge the planet’s suffering, and embrace our responsibility to be agents of change, stewards of creation, and neighbors to one another. We need leaders with Nathan’s quiet audacity to weave a winsome story about a lamb and a rich man and a poor man. With that single story, Nathan portrayed the 1 percent-99 percent reality of his day, and named the consequences of that injustice.

Over coffee awhile back, a friend of mine, something of a cynic, made a napkin drawing. It was not a pretty picture. Across the top of the folded paper square he drew a few boxes. “These boxes,” he said, “represent those who wield power in our country: energy, finance, manufacturing.” Below that, he listed the entities used by the power-wielders to broker their power: K Street lobbyists, the media,

I hear too many young faith leaders talk about the need to “keep a low profile” in order to make it through the ordination process, to get a job, keep a job, and keep paying off their student debt.

PR firms, attorneys. Off to the side, he drew the politicians, linking them to the power at the top and the brokers right below “to do their bidding.” And then, on the bottom of the napkin, he drew a row of stick people, saying “These are the people who are trying to keep a roof over their heads, supper on the table, body and soul together.”

Above the row of stick people he drew a row of circles. “These are the churches and synagogues and mosques and service clubs and local agencies, applying the Band-Aids to the wounds inflicted on the people at the bottom by the power structures at the top. The church stands for abstention from change and an investment in the status quo. Where’s the voice speaking truth to power in this picture? Where’s the moral compass?”

I carry his question with me, as I look across a new generation of faith leaders and seek those with a vocation to lead, those prophetic leaders who can discern the reality of God in the world and help us shape creative responses to that reality. We need those individuals described by Walter Brueggemann: “poets who bring the world to voice outside of settled convention.”

Settle Not for Status Quo

We need them, but I’m not sure we want them. Nor do our institutions invest in them. We live inside our settled conventions, from our local pews to our national denominations to our theological schools. We might not want to know what that world out there is saying, or what we might say and do in response.

William Sloane Coffin had something to say about this: “Most church boats don’t like to be rocked; they prefer to lie at anchor rather than go places in stormy seas. But that’s because we Christians view the Church as the object of our love instead of the subject and instrument of God’s. Faith cannot be passive; it has to go forth – to assault the conscience, excite the imagination. Faith fans the flames of creativity altogether as much as it banks the fires of sin.” (*Credo*, Westminster John Knox, 2004, pp. 140-141)

Dare we risk the faith that fans the flames of creativity? Dare we invite that kind of leadership into our churches and our schools? Do we make room for that kind of innovation in our seminary curricula? Or are we content for our faith leaders to tend to the personal and the private, for churches to be first-aid dispensaries and hospices?

I hear a widespread acceptance about the notion that religion is marginalized in the culture today. In a recent Patheos.com interview, Daniel Aleshire of the Association of Theological Schools said the culture no longer looks for “a significant kind of leadership” from religion. Religion has been marginalized, he said, “it has been shifted from being a culture-forming value to being a personal-forming value.”

But a quick look at the headlines would say religion does play a significant role in society today. Conservative Christians in this election year are in-

fluencing public debate and ballot box results. On battlefields and in town squares across the Middle East, religion fiercely affects culture. So a question we might ask right now is which *kind* of religion molds culture today – only the most extreme version, or the loudest version, or the most literal version, or the version most aligned with cultural norms?

I can see, from my neighbor and my coffee companion and the church at large, that prophetic religion – the kind expressed in the beatitudes of Jesus – is indeed on the sidelines. Imagine if Christianity were known for the beatitudes.*

In these sayings recorded in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus gives us not a picture of a world beyond this one, marked by blessings and rewards, but rather a lens with which to see *this* world: Jesus points to a God who is always doing something new in our time, a God who engages this world with healing mercy, endless compassion, and liberating justice. The beatitudes were offered to the early church as both encouraging comfort about the presence of God in the midst of suffering and as a stirring manifesto for a way of life that ran radically counter to the prevailing ethos of the Roman Empire.

So do we want a Christianity known for the beatitudes? Do we want faith leaders who provide both encouraging comfort and stirring manifesto? Do we want a faith that challenges the status quo and engages the people in real transformational work for human thriving?

* Matthew 5:1-12: When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

The answers we give to these questions guide our churches and leadership development. In a recent blog entitled "Seminary Is Not the Problem – the Church Is," author Brian McLaren said, "Seminary training isn't supposed to be about preparation for a nice, cushy desk job. Neither is it supposed to be about preparation for decades of chaplaincy to congregations that want to be tended and serviced, not served and led."

I have seen too many young faith leaders dampen their own desire to serve and to lead because they believe the church wants to be tended and serviced. I hear them talk about the need to "keep a low profile" in order to make it through the ordination process, to get a job, keep a job, and keep paying off their student debt.

Fresh Voices

But I also hear the conviction of the new preacher (at a recent Beatitudes Society Prophetic Preaching Workshop) who says her model for preaching is Martin Luther King, Jr "because of his ability to communicate a cohesive sense of the gospel and how it compels the complacent to take action without resorting to proof-texting or brow-beating. Dr. King's sermons are full of vibrant hope that elicits the strongest, best parts of our human nature while telling the truth about the worst parts of our human experience – calling us into the truth of our baptismal vocations."

That hope, and that image of vocation, could, if we wanted, transform our churches, our schools, our leaders, our basic understanding of faith. William Sloane Coffin's description of this vocation gives us our charge and our challenge:

"We are called on not to mirror but to challenge culture, not to sustain but to upend the status quo, and if that to some sounds overly bold, isn't it true that God is always beckoning us toward horizons we aren't sure we want to reach?" (*Credo*, p. 146)

Anne Howard, an Episcopal priest, is Executive Director of The Beatitudes Society (www.BeatitudesSociety.org) and the author of *Claiming the Beatitudes: Nine Stories from a New Generation* (Alban, 2009).



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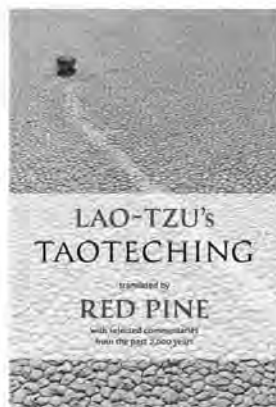
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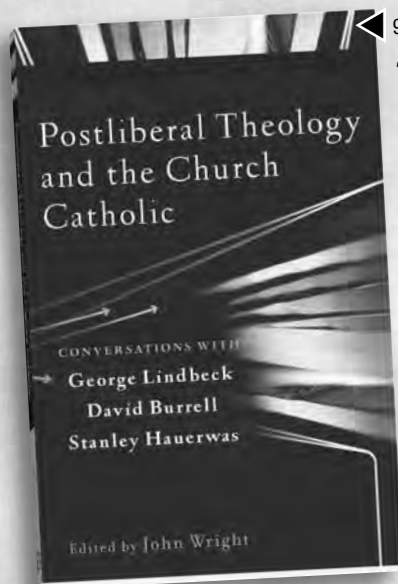
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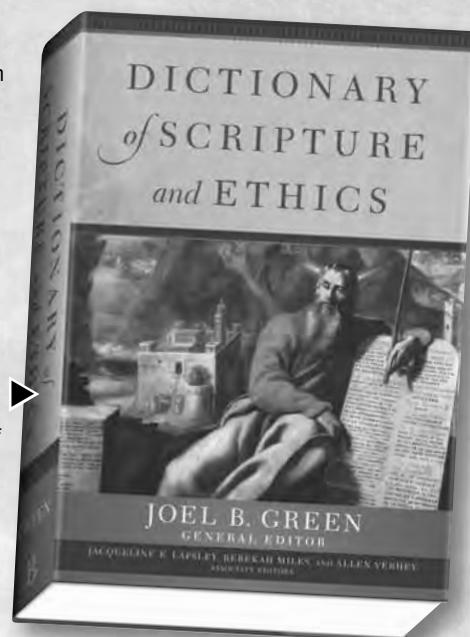
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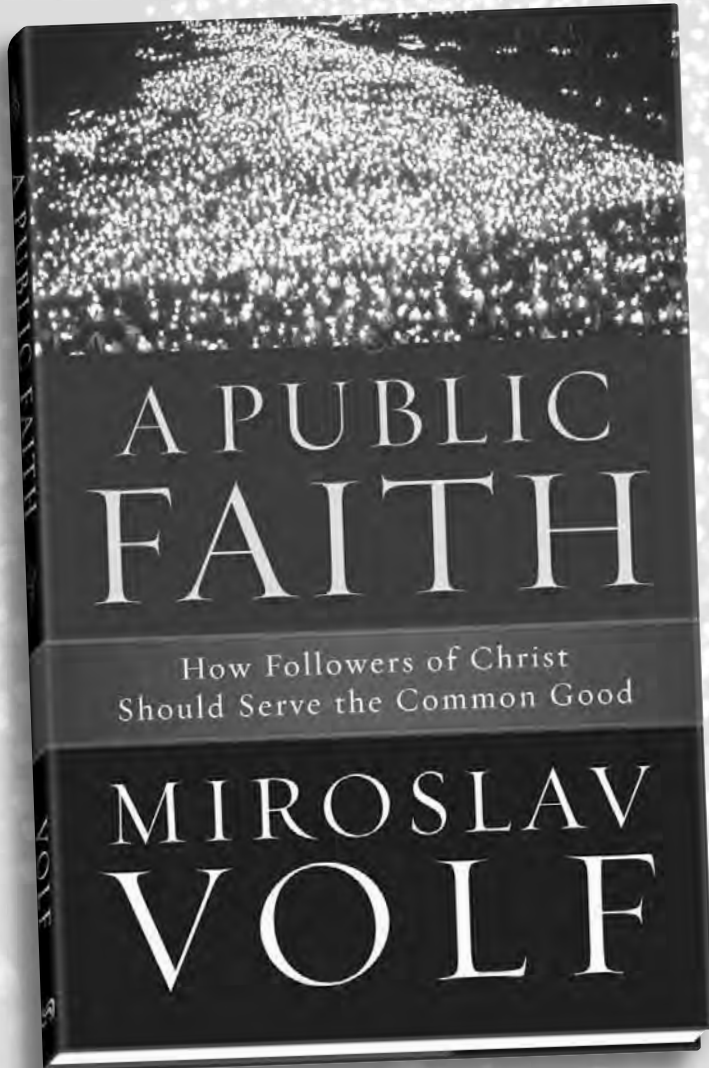
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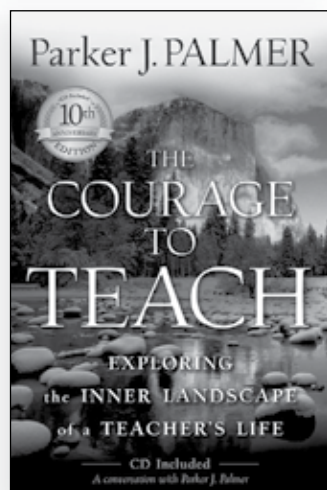
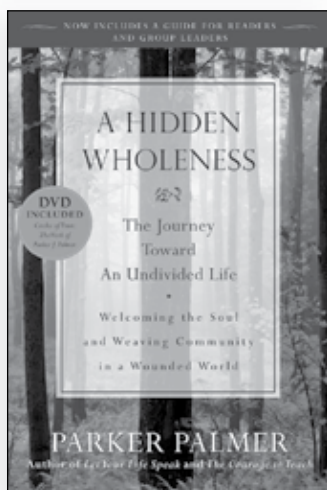
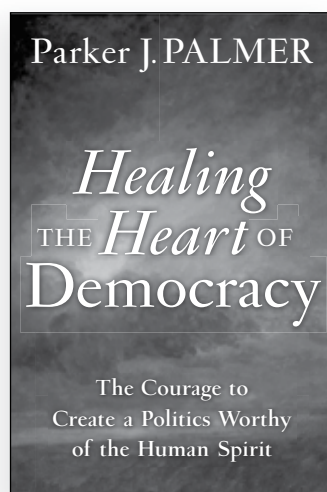
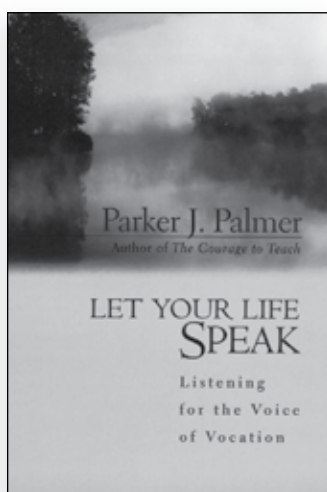
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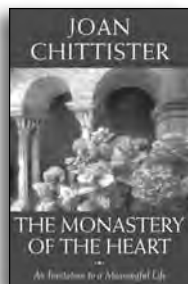
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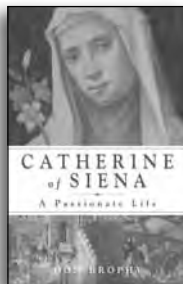
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Summer 2012 Course Listings

Week 1, morning

June 11-15, 9:00-11:30 am

- Preaching From the Lectionary
David Bartlett and Robert Wilson
- Testifying in the Shadow of Empire:
the Hebrew Scriptures, Postcolonial
Criticism and the Contemporary
Church
Carolyn Sharp
- Reading the Bible through Literature,
Music and Art
Maggi Dawn
- Musical Skills and Vocal Development
for Parish Ministry
Patrick Evans

Week 1, afternoon

June 11-15, 1:30-4:00 pm

- The Book of Revelation
Harry Attridge
- Renewing Congregational Song
Patrick Evans
- The Bible Through Art & Artifact
Julie Faith Parker
- The Historical David: Fact or Fiction?
Joel Baden

Week 2, morning

June 18-22, 9:00-11:30 am

- The Great Awakening: Context and Text
Ken Minkema & Adriaan Neele
- The Virtues of a Marketplace Theology
Ted Malloch
- The Courage to Be: An Introduction to
the Theology of Howard Thurman
and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Jerry Streets
- What's Christian about Harry Potter?
Danielle Tumminio
- Practical Liturgy
Maggi Dawn
- Composition for Church Musicians
Dan Locklair

Week 2, afternoon

June 18-22, 1:30-4:00 pm

- Religion and the Arab Revolutions
Sallama Shaker
- The Economy and Christian Ethics
Fred Simmons
- Complicated Issues in Death,
Dying and Grief
Jan Holton
- Augustine's Confessions
Christopher Beeley
- Writing Workshop
Ray Waddle
- Icon Writing Workshop
(9:00am-4:00pm)
Vladislav Andrejev

For further information about Summer Study contact Joanne Van Vlack at joanne.vanvlack@yale.edu or (203) 432-6550. Language courses will be offered May 22-July 3 in elementary biblical Hebrew, elementary New Testament Greek, and ecclesiastical Latin. Additional information about language courses is available through the Registrar's Office by contacting Lisa Huck at lisabeth.huck@yale.edu or (203) 432-5312.

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From the Editor: The Galaxy Within Us

By Ray Waddle



Sri Lankan-born artist Nalini Marcia Jayasuriya is an Asian Christian nurtured by a Buddhist culture, a woman receptive to the world's many modes of spiritual inquiry. The result is not confusion or ambivalence but confidence and generosity, a distinctive

sensibility at work in her art, illuminating the power of vocation and calling.

She once wrote:

As Time spread lighted wings and flew over all the world, the Voice spoke, and I heard, as I stood listening on the Seashore of the world:

"Go," the Voice ordered.

"Do not walk in the footprints you see. Make your own footprints in the Sand. This will be your Covenant and your Reward."

That notion of the sea – the shoreline's calming eternal cadences – speaks to her Asian island identity and her transnational Christian mysticism. "The Sea flows in my veins," she declares. "The Sea breathes in me. In this timeless spaceless power I live and live again. ... *Murti*, the Asian concept of ceaseless Becoming, is the Sea."

She is unafraid of any tension between the spiritual styles of East and West. Her art, its colorful flow and simplicity, is often a fusion of traditions. She has made a vocation of pursuing the world's secret beauty and its savior God, sharing her responses and inviting ours.

"The needs of all people are the same," she writes in *A Time for My Singing: Witness of a Life*, published in 2004 by the Overseas Ministries Study Center, based in New Haven, CT.

"They need protection from fear and a hope for blessing. There is a galaxy within us – an unpredictable portion of our being, beyond the constraints of the rational and the reasonable that can surprise the world with profound expressions of faith."

A Time for My Singing features not only an impressionistic memoir of her international life as musician, lecturer, and artist, but also her paintings, mostly on Biblical themes. A gallery of her work can also be seen at [OMSC.org/art](http://omsc.org/art). (Her book can be purchased at <http://secure.omsc.org/node/137> for \$19.95) This *Reflections* reproduces two of her works that speak to the theme of calling and decision.

There is a special affection for Jayasuriya at OMSC, where she was artist-in-residence from 2001-03.

"In an age when our cultural image makers manifest an almost pathological preoccupation with the terrible, the dysfunctional, and the tragic, relying as they do for their very livelihood on the human fascination with shocking spectacle, Nalini offers us, through her art, the gift of peace," writes OMSC executive director Jonathan Bonk in the preface to *A Time for My Singing*.

Affection for her extends down the street at Yale Divinity School, where she earned an M.A.R. in 1984. Her YDS friend and professor John Cook, now Professor Emeritus of Religion and the Arts, characterizes her work: "Out of her own culture, shaped by Buddhist forms, she finds a way to tell the Christian story."

In an essay in the book, Cook writes: "It is remarkable that underneath the multicultural life she has lived is a deep, mystical, steadfast sense of being that resides in all that she does."

Encountering her work in recent months, I am struck by a spirit of serenity and resolve in her images, the drama of endeavor for redemption. Her themes – Annunciation, Magi, Last Supper, Gethsemane, Emmaus Road – clear an interior space where the numinous might pay a visit. They create a zone where the soul's dreams might breathe, a still point where it is possible once again to *listen*.

Contemporary anxieties or impulses that quaintly reduce religion to psychological need can make that internal place harder to find and inhabit.

"Hovering between the elemental and the sublime, man searches the pathless way to freedom – will he ever find it?" Jayasuriya asks. "Will he ever silence his mind well enough to know himself?"

That quiet interior space, pursued in her art, has traditionally been known as the staging ground for hearing the divine call and discerning vocational identity.

The subject of vocation, embraced from many angles in this Spring *Reflections* issue, can quickly widen onto a vast number of debates. Competing definitions of vocation have been promoted or challenged for centuries. Worries resound that modern spirituality is confused about the meaning of calling. Questions from the economy lurk close by: are the distant forces of a globalized marketplace putting vocational dreams out of the reach of millions, or creating new ones?

Yet as the writers and poets testify here, the notion of vocation proves resilient, a mysterious source of gospel renewal. Nalini Jayasuriya, now residing again in Sri Lanka, is witness to that glittering gift of the spirit.

"Art imitates, sublimates, and exalts life," she writes in *A Time For My Singing*, "freeing the vision from anecdote and offering its radiant peace to all who would receive it."

We at *Reflections* thank the many voices assembled here for their particular insights and arguments. A special thanks goes to YDS Dean Harold Attridge, who steps down this semester after ten remarkable years as head of a dynamic divinity school and as publisher of this magazine of theological and ethical inquiry. As he resumes full-time teaching and research at YDS, we are grateful for the strong editorial instincts and sponsorship he has lent us.

CREDITS

ARTWORK

Images from the exhibition "Working Stiffs: Photography from the Permanent Collection" (April-December 2010) at Queens (NY) Museum of Art, used by permission of Queens Museum of Art (www.queensmuseum.org)

Nalini Marcia Jayasuriya, used by permission of the artist (www.OMSC.org/art)

POETRY

Heather McHugh has translated Euripides' *Cyclops* and is the author of the book of essays *Broken English: Poetry and Partiality* (Wesleyan, 1993). Her poetry includes *Hinge and Sign: Poems, 1968-1993* (Wesleyan, 1994) and *Eyeshot* (Wesleyan, 2003)

"Domestique" from *Upgraded to Serious*. Copyright 2009 by Heather McHugh. Reprinted with permission of Copper Canyon Press.

Thomas Merton (1915-1968) was a Roman Catholic writer, spiritual mentor, and Trappist Monk at Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky. His many books include *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New Directions, 1961), *The Seven Storey Mountain* (Harcourt Brace, 1948), and *Mystics and Zen Masters* (Farrar Straus Giroux, 1967).

"The Merton Prayer" from *Thoughts in Solitude* Copyright © 1956, 1958 by The Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani. Used by permission of Farrar Straus Giroux.

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926), born in Prague, is known as one of the great German-language poets of the twentieth century. His poetry includes the *Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus*. Prose works include *Letters to a Young Poet* and *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*.

"Ich lebe mein Leben .../I live my life in widening circles ..." from *Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God* by Rainer Maria Rilke, translated by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy, translation copyright © 1996 by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy. Used by permission of Riverhead Books, an imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

J. Barrie Shepherd '64 B.D., '65 M.A. retired in 2000 as minister at First Presbyterian Church in New York City and resides in Wallingford PA. His newest book, *Faces By the Wayside: Persons Who Encountered Jesus on the Road – A Month of Daily Meditations for Advent, Lent, and Other Seasons of the Soul* (Cascade Books) was published in January. He was a Beecher Lecturer at YDS in 2003.

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Clemens Starck is a poet who in his working life has been a carpenter, construction foreman, merchant seaman, ranch hand, and Wall Street reporter. His poetry includes *Journeyman's Wages* (Story Line Press, 2005), *Studying Russian on Company Time* (Silverfish Review Press, 1999) and *Rembrandt, Chainsaw* (Wood Works, 2011).

"Commuting" and "Journeyman's Wages" from *Journeyman's Wages*, and "Deciding the Course My Education Should Take" from *China Basin*. Copyright © 2002 and 2005 by Clemens Starck. Reprinted by the poet's permission.



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