

## Peacework: Resistance p.68 – end of chapter

### Breakout Rooms

- What stood out to you in this chapter?
- Key themes/quotes/passages?

### Overview of Chapter

#### Saying Yes

In second half of chapter, Nouwen argues that saying no to 'forces of death' is only meaningful if simultaneously we're 'in touch with the forces of life' (p.68). Frames this in terms of the importance of focusing on celebrating life.

Argues too much focus on combating death can be destructive and damaging, drawing one into darkness and despair, ultimately feeling powerless. Explains that if give death too much attention, end up falling victim to it.

Therefore, argues that best to 'not combat the demons directly' (pp.68-69) and instead, combat darkness by focusing on, and unearthing, light and life.

For Nouwen, important as making peace must be different to making war – it cannot be motivated by the same urgency, anger, fear, or need to overcome others. Indeed, asks how if one does not 'radiate' peace, how can it be expected that they will convince others?

#### Affirming Life

To enact peacemaking that radiates peace, Nouwen draws on Jesus' teaching of love for enemy = 'the test for peacemakers' (p.70), as one refuses to impose artificial, human-made distinctions.

Nouwen argues that affirming and nurturing life wherever it may be is essential, as life is vulnerable and need protecting. He speaks of how the 'search for this tender and vulnerable life is the mark of the true resister' (p.72).

These acts of hope, life, and love, are acts of resistance in proclaiming that 'life is stronger than death, love is stronger than fear, and hope is stronger than despair' (p.73).

#### Powers of Life

In reflecting on affirming life, Nouwen sees 3 aspects of life that differ to the powers of death.

Firstly, he talks of humility. For Nouwen, through connection with others we realise that we are not distinct but are rather inherently interconnected to all. Here, peace can be seen manifest in the small moments of sharing our common humanity.

Secondly, Nouwen speaks of compassion. Whilst noting that it is still important to work for structural peace and justice, he notes that compassion bears in mind the suffering of individuals emphasising the importance of keeping focus on people, making sure to not become too abstract when tackling the 'issues'; for 'We cannot love issues, but we can love people, and the love of people reveals to us the way to deal with issues' (p.78).

Lastly, Nouwen reflects on how joy, as the 'fruit of humility and compassion' (p.79) is a sign of working in the 'spirit of Jesus' (p.79). For Nouwen, there is 'no surer sign of a true peacemaker' (79). Joy overcomes the powers of death, such as sadness or bitterness, through 'participation in the divine joy' (p.79). Argues that 'Affirming life always brings joy' (p.80).

### **Spiritual Resistance**

Nouwen argues then that resistance is a spiritual task, when the no and the yes are joined. States that resistance is 'not based on our experience, skills, intelligence, or willpower, but on our faith in Christ who has already overcome the powers of evil and death' (p.82).

Argues that prayer and resistance are not opposed but rather sees resistance as constituting 'a form of prayer' (p.83). Describes resistance here as giving concrete, visible expression and witness to Jesus' message.

The other side of this, is that prayer and liturgy are not 'neutral event[s] without danger' (p.88). Rather, they have the power 'to condemn death' and lay the 'foundation for the Kingdom of God among us' (p.90).

As spiritual practice, resistance is not dependent upon "success" but 'on its own inherent integrity' (p.91) and 'our own spiritual authenticity' (p.91). Resistance = an invitation to conversion, a nonviolent way of sharing in our vulnerabilities.

However, drawing on example of Christ, Nouwen acknowledges that nonviolence is a 'great threat to those who wield power' as it 'suggests that there is another reality' (p.95). Means those who follow way of nonviolence treated as 'strangers to this world' (p.96). Therefore, as task where face much condemnation, need support and community to sustain resistance.

## Breakout Room Questions

- Nouwen argues that ‘Eve’s first mistake was to listen to the serpent and consider him worthy of response’. He argues that ‘Only the sinless Christ was able to overcome death’ and that it is ‘naïve to think that we have the strength to face death alone and survive’ (p.69). What do you make of Nouwen’s argument? What does it tell us about how to engage in peacemaking?
- What do you make of the claim that resistance is a form of prayer? How might this change how we resist?
- Do you agree that spiritual resistance should not be judged on outcomes or “success”? How might this impact peacemaking?

## Next Session

- To the end!