

Peacework: Resistance pp.48-68

Breakout Rooms

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

Overview of Chapter

Chapter begins with Nouwen reflecting on upbringing in Holland and witnessing atrocities of the Holocaust. Questions 'Why did those who pray, sing hymns, and go to church not resist the powers of evil so visible in their own land?' p.48.

Aks himself the question: 'Does my prayer, my communion with the God of life, become visible in acts of resistance against the power of death surrounding me?' or will children now, ask the same questions of him in the future p.49.

From this, concludes that 'Being a peacemaker today requires that my prayer becomes visible in concrete actions. Without such actions my prayer remains the pious expression of a fearful mind that has abdicated responsibility for the future' p.50.

Resistance

Argues that resistance must be central to the 'daily life of the peacemaker' p.50. For Nouwen, resistance 'means saying "No" to all the forces of death, wherever they may be and... saying "Yes" to all of life in whatever form we encounter it' p.50.

Argues that 'more than ever before in history, we are surrounded by the powers of death' p.51. Impacts all aspects of life. States that met with apathy and despair, but less seldom with saying no. Speaks of how if true followers of Jesus 'who chose to die on a cross in total disarmament, how can I not be a man of peace?' p.53. By remaining passive, 'Nonresistance makes us accomplices...' p.53.

Nouwen speaks of our 'all-pervasive fascination with death that is an integral part of our daily lives' p.55, and how death holds its grip on us in 'more subtle ways'. Argues that saying no means refuting the more obvious displays of death, such as nuclear weapons, as well as the 'more intimate' and 'less spectacular ways in which we play our death games' p.55.

Saying "No"

Nouwen breaks down resistance to death through several concrete practices. The first of these is confronting entertainment. Nouwen argues that we are often

entertained through images of death and destruction, feeding our 'fascination with death and violence' p.57. Through this we become desensitized and death becomes an 'unreal act' p.57.

Speaks of death games appearing in ways we make judgements against others, through caricature and stereotype. Creates "enemies" and "monsters" in our minds, and therefore offers a rationale for violence and aggression. He argues that 'long before we start a war... we have already killed our enemies mentally' p.59 through dehumanization, which renders relationship impossible. Furthermore, this form of judgement means that we place ourselves as morally superior in regards to the other, and therefore become blind to our own weaknesses and sinfulness.

This leads Nouwen to then talk about the importance of confronting the 'powers of death' which 'our innermost selves... in the way we think and feel about ourselves' p.62. He speaks of this in terms of 'spiritual suicide' and self-loathing p.63 when we struggle to accept and affirm ourselves. This is tied to having true faith and trust in God, to trust that we are both loved and forgiven and are worthy of such.

Argues that this wide reach of saying no is necessary to 'develop a spirituality of peacemaking' in which 'we cannot limit ourselves to one mode of resistance' p.64. Argues that if we 'feed... imagination with violent scenes, give bad names to ... fellow human beings, or nurture inner disgust...' we 'cannot be witness to life for very long' pp.64-65. Relates this to temptation to hold on to 'the certainty of death over the uncertainty of life' which is everchanging and requires trust and 'surrender to the mystery of the unpredictable' p.65.

Breakout Room Questions

- Nouwen argues that we 'should not be distracted by arguments as to whether peace starts within or without' p.56. What do you make of his claim? Where do you see peace as starting?
- How far do you agree with Nouwen's statement that 'Peace work is a spectrum stretching from the hidden corners of our innermost selves to the most complex international deliberations. Our resistance against the powers of death must therefore be as deep and wide as peace itself?' p.56.
- What do you make of the ways in which Nouwen suggests we should confront the powers of death, through eschewing violent entertainment, non-judgement, and self-love?

- How do you understand Nouwen's claim that 'The world... is indeed Satan's territory' and therefore, 'saying "No" to death' is 'an urgent spiritual task'? pp.67-68.

Next Session

Resistance pp.68 to end of chapter