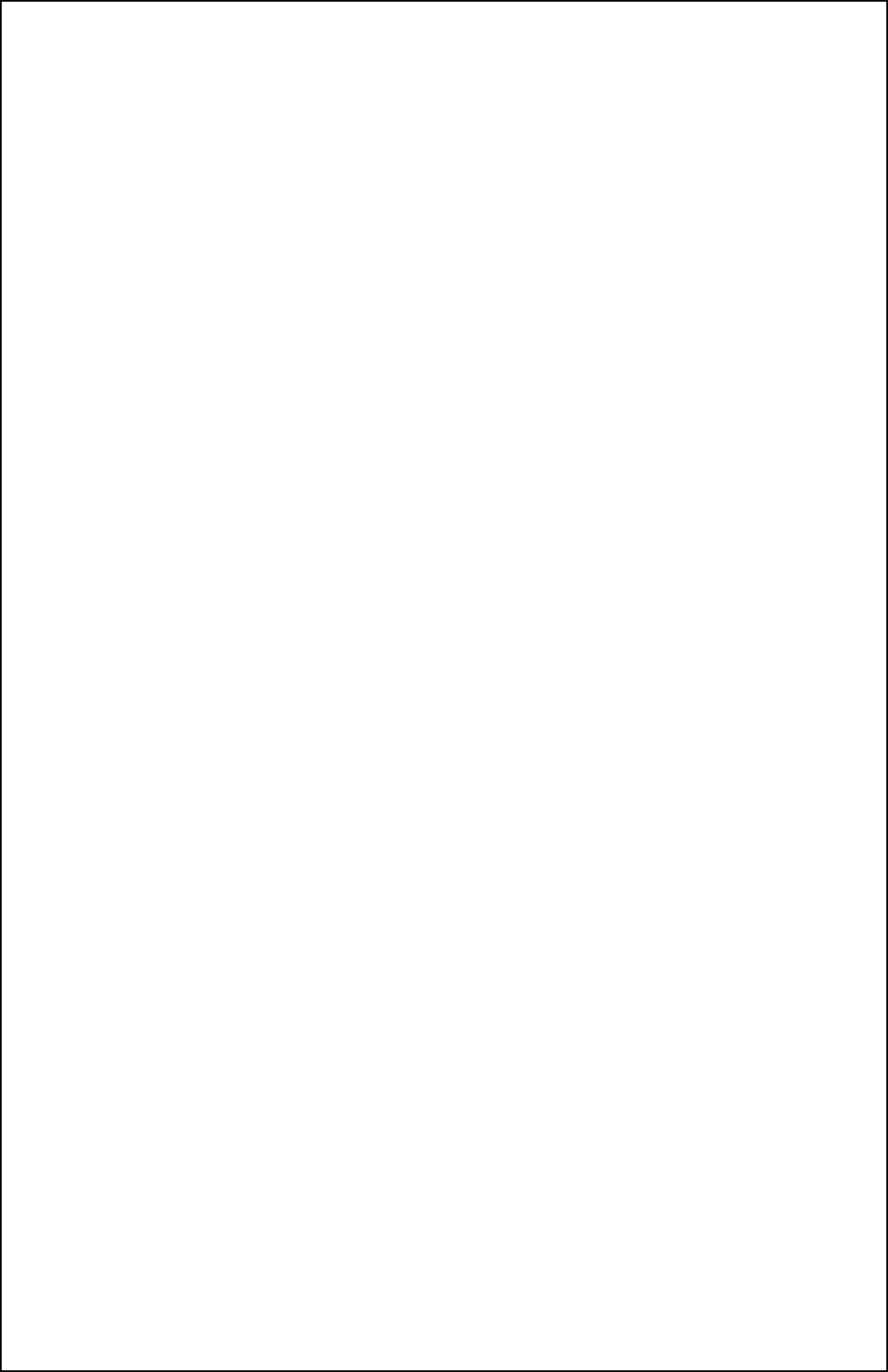


Conscience Behind Bars



Conscience Behind Bars

The Prison Letters of Norman Lowry

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John K. Stoner
www.1040forpeace.org

Dennis Rivers
www.HumanDevelopmentBooks.com

Editors

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Introduction

By Dennis Rivers

Is it possible to quietly and unobtrusively live an honorable life in the middle of a dishonorable society?

Whatever your answer to this question, I appeal to you not to answer it too quickly. I am convinced that if you live with the question for a while, you will come to see how impossible it is to turn away from the injustices of one's time, and not, by gradual degrees, become an accomplice to them. I doubt that anyone on earth actually wants this realization, but when it arrives, you can't send it back.

Norman Lowry's time in prison and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s time in the Birmingham jail are separated by half a century. Many things have changed in that half-century, but one thing is certainly the same: the struggle of a person to do the right thing when confronted with massacres and blatant violations of human rights and human dignity.

For Norman, the endless sacrificing of the young to the American gods of war, the endless bomb strikes, tortures, lies, evasions, and indifference to the casualties (on all sides), were finally more than he could bear. He broke the windows of a car belonging to a military recruiting station.

Norman Lowry is in prison today for breaking those windows. But to the readers of this book who are American citizens, I must say, *you and I are all also in prison today*. We are imprisoned in a country that can't stop killing. We are imprisoned in a country that can go to war for ten long years, and still not be able to give a reasonable explanation of why we are at war. So many lives shattered, and for nothing. The mind vomits as the same glib rationalizations are repeated year after

year, paraded behind manipulative appeals to “support the troops.” As Cindy Sheehan cried out in anguish, “for what noble cause did my son die?”

Confronted with such intractable moral dilemmas, such a tenacious addiction to violence, there is a tendency to withdraw into one’s private concerns, hoping to create around oneself a cocoon of emotional safety. Or perhaps withdraw into a world of meditative spiritual perfection, in which everything is perfect just as it is. I understand those feeling and impulses well because I have all of them myself. But as Dr. King reminds us, “our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” I am deeply convinced that we are called by life to engage with love the circumstances of our time, not to withdraw

We are living in a difficult time, a time in which there is intense pressure to be silent about the lies, waste, insanity, betrayal and sorrow of that process of socially organized mass murder we have grown accustomed to calling “war.” John Stoner and I are publishing this little book to help people who can no longer live the terrible silence. There is no single right way to live the life of conscience in a war-making culture, but seeing the life of conscience lived boldly, in the example of Norman Lowry, will, I believe, help each of us to be truer to the best that is within us.

Letter #1

First Jesus: Then I ‘Won’ the Draft Lottery, Joined the Army, and Left It

Dear friends,

Love has pitched his mansion
in the place of excrement;
for nothing can be sole or whole
that has not been rent. –W. B. Yeats

Nearly one year ago, a man named John Stoner entered into my life, bringing with him a ever-expanding group of inspirational and wise friends. His/their entrance into my life came at a most pivotal time, as the lion's share of my friends, and even my wise people (mentors), were choosing to distance themselves from me, due to my choice to include acts of civil disobedience in my protestations of our society's all too apparent love of extreme violence, racism, bigotry and poverty-production; thus landing me in prison.

When John asked me to consider writing a series of “letters from Prison,” I was humbled and wrote a rather general first installment; and began to seek God's wisdom and purpose in such an investment. As a man who aims to live in constant expectancy of our loving and merciful Creator's guidance and provision, it is my sole desire to simply get out of his way, allowing him to do in me what he will. This said, I will now seek to write what John calls my “Story and witness in a sustained and somewhat organized fashion for the help of others to better understand God's will and ways with us.”

As my “story and witness” is but a small part of our larger journey together, please feel freely invited to participate by sending me your insights and questions. Nothing brings me greater joy than to come to know God and my neighbor more fully!

An insightful young woman, Julie Miller, nobly wrote, regarding her life-changing encounter with Jesus:

“You can have my heart, though it isn't new.

It's been used and broken, and it only comes in blue,

It's been down a long, long road, and it got dirty on the way.

If I give it to you, will you make it clean and take the shame away?

Far beyond repair, nothing I could do.

I tried to fix it myself, but it was only worse when I got through.

But then you walked into my darkness, and spoke words so sweet.

And you held me like a child, 'til my frozen tears fell at your feet.

You can have my heart, if you don't mind broken things.

You can have my life, if you don't mind tears.

Well, I heard that you make “all things new,” so I'm bringing the pieces all to you.

If you want it, you can have my heart!

This is the way we all come to Jesus...an utter wreck; a complete mess! And, we become his mess, his wreck, his broken thing! He knows how to mend and to use such as we. That's just who he is, though it most often takes us many years to come to ease with this fact,

Though God says that, in Jesus, everyone and everything was reconciled to him prior to creation, my first conscious encounter with Jesus occurred in 1960, in the Sacramento Valley town of Lodi, California. I was seven years old at the time.

That day was so memorable because Jesus made me feel utterly safe. For quite some time, I simply basked in this awareness, as I realized (in retrospect) that it was he who had been with me on those same occasions in my short lifetime when I had actually felt safe.

My main thought, relative to this awareness of safety, was that I wanted to die and go to live with him. My life was simply too painful for me to even imagine continuing to live in a paradoxical world where my parents were pastors, who privately were most violent and abusive. Then there was the racism, the bigotry, the threat of war and of nuclear strikes, the random murders, the purposeful genocides of minorities and of foreign populaces who possessed something that our nation desired.

Jesus had other plans, plans that were much larger than my young mind could comprehend, plans that he said would be worth the investment, in spite of being much more costly. Besides, he assured me that he would walk with me each step of the way; that he would mold me and shape me, preparing me for each new chapter of our grand adventure together. Of course I wanted what he had to offer! He was the only one

who had kept me and made me feel safe!

Fifty-two years have passed since that momentous day in Lodi, California. Today I am more madly in love with God and with my neighbor than my feeble vocabulary can even begin to convey. By God's grace alone, I stand utterly content and reasonably happy in the magnificent love that has cost my all. You see, "God cannot pour his riches into hands already full" (Martha Snell Nicholson). Beneath the shroud that is my flesh are the massive scars, mostly won seeking to selfishly hold on to people and things and beliefs that previously took up the space in my self-centered/protective hands. Most fortunately, his "scars go deeper...it was love for you (and for me) that put them there" (Bill Gaither).

My thoughts have long been with those whom no one seems to want, to love, or to deal with; with those our society seems to so freely be willing to oppress, exploit, marginalize and even genocide. At four, I vividly recall the people in the white sheets, burning a cross in our yard...all because we invited our neighbors to come for dinner. Then there were the political assassinations of foreign leaders who would not cower to our nation's demands that they do as we bid them, and of young people who dared to register their neighbors to vote. There were the continual stream of unconstitutional wars; the escalation and usage of advanced conventional, chemical and nuclear weaponry systems; the assassinations of J.F.K., R.F.K, Malcolm X and Dr. King, etc.

In 1971, during the middle of my senior year in high school, I won the draft lottery (#23 of 150+ winning numbers). Though confused, I joined the U.S. Army, thinking it my Godly and patriotic duty to overlook my petty desire not to die young (like friends who had been dying in Vietnam, since 1965). On

my first day of boot camp, it was made perfectly clear to us that half of us would be going to Vietnam; that half of us who went to Vietnam would die there; that our job was to kill people; and, that we could feel free to rape any woman we found to be attractive, as long as we killed her when we were done having our way with her. Much to the chagrin of my family, friends and church community, I opted out of military service, began to voraciously research the public record and to protest (openly) against obvious oppressions.

“For me to live is Christ, to die is gain.”

Blessings,

Norm Lowry

Letter #2

Thirty One Years of “Normal Life” and “Living Hell”

Dear friends,

“The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places.” –Ernest Hemmingway

Christine Wyrzten sang a song that, long ago, deeply touched my heart. It simply said,

I've been through a fire that has deepened my desire to know the living God, more and more. It hasn't been much fun, but the work that it has done in my life has made it worth the hurt. You see, sometimes we need the hard times to bring us to our knees. Otherwise, we do as we please and we never heed him. But he always knows what's best; and it's when we are distressed that we really come to know and love God...as he is!

If it would interest you to know what life, to me, has felt like, consider reading James Herbert's book, *The Others*. His protagonist, Nicholas Dismas, is me! But beware, the book is a horror story that begins in hell...and I've only known one person who actually made it past the first few pages and went on to read the book, in its entirety. Amazingly, *The Others* is based on real-life occurrences.

Sorting out life's normal complexities is hard enough in and of itself. For those of us who have grown up in environments of extreme dysfunction (filled with addiction, violence, horrendous abuses, etc.), utter confusion and a “living hell” is a long-term reality. Thankfully, there is a loving God and plenty of available, compassionate help that can completely change our long-term paradigms and fill us with peace and hope!

In retrospect, I would not change one thing about my life, as

today I am absolutely content and reasonably happy! I know who I am and for what I was designed! I do it out of who (or more appropriately, whose) I am! As Lord Byron aptly posed, “I doubt sometimes whether a quiet and unagitated life would have suited me—yet sometimes I long for it.” Oh, the joy of living contentedly within God's paradox!

After opting out of military service (12/71) and setting off on my quest for honest answers and lasting solutions, it only took me 31 years to find the life of utter peace within God's paradox which my heart had so longed for. For the wounded, who are blind and deaf to actual truth-filled reality, it takes time to sort out the lies, to discover and come to appreciate that “success is the journey, not the destination.”

18 years + 31 years = 49 formative years...EEK!

For perspective, Jesus reminds us of another friend, Moses, who spent 40 years in an adoptive home, another 40 years in the desert, herding sheep, trying to sort out the first 40 years, and 40 years walking in circles, trying to rescue his birth-people, most of whom did not truly wish to be rescued, then died, seemingly not getting to enjoy his promised reward. Many, many years later, Jesus and a few more friends took a hike up a mountain. Jesus' friends got to see Jesus honor faithful Moses with a personalized welcome into his promised reward. Jesus always makes the wait worth-while—that's just who he is!

My next 31 years (12/71-7/1/02) were filled with normal life experiences: employment (a career in metal fabrication), pastoral internship, marriage, Bible college, travel, pastoral ministry/ordination ministry to the marginalized (homeless, addicts, prisoners, refugees, etc.), business ownership (auto parts/automotive machining—destroyed in shopping center fire,

remodeling/roofing), 5 lovely children (3 died, more on this later), divorce, adopted a son, grandchildren, continuing education (psychology, physiology, physics, computer science/security, literature, communication, music, art). Spaced throughout was successively intense personal counseling (sexual abuse, codependence issues, relational flaws/self-protective issues and mechanisms, death/grief, separation and divorce issues/support).

These years brought much joy, much sorrow, and sadly much loss—the greatest share of which was unnecessary, though consequences of what we chose in “the fall.” How I thank Jesus for being willing to walk through it all, with me!

On July 2, 2002 I woke up with an awareness that a lifelong prayer had been answered...I was completely ready to abandon myself (unconditionally) to God...so I did just that! Absolute peace and contentment became mine on that day!

One week later I followed God's leading into full-time engagement with his marginalized ones, which led to employment in rescue mission ministry—first in Portland, Oregon; later in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Thus began my last step of preparation (unbeknownst to me) for my life's main calling....

Lord,
if like a fragile flower,
torn petal by petal,
my life must continue to tear,
let there be fragrance!

—Ruth Harms Calkin

Blessings, Norm Lowry

Letter #3

Shall the “Unclean” be “Unloved?”

“Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’” – Jesus, Matthew 9.

A few weeks ago, John Stoner, a dear friend and personal mentor, sent me a most intriguing book –Richard Beck’s *Unclean: Meditations of Purity, Hospitality, and Morality*. In it, Mr. Beck presents a clean, concise, discussion of how “disgust” influences and often controls our choices to distance or to exclude certain things or people from our lives. He wrote the book in the context of Jesus’ discussion with the Pharisees (Matthew 9) which ended with Jesus’ statement, “I desire mercy more than sacrifice.” I found Mr. Beck’s *Unclean* to be second, in genre, only to William Glasser’s *Control Theory* (later rewritten and released as *Choice Theory*, for the lay reader).

In my years of walking with and working among the homeless and marginalized, I found “disgust” to be quite pervasive both among mission staff and volunteers. It was hard (if not impossible) for many to touch some of our friends (clients), let alone to consider taking a sick or drunk friend (who was vomiting and had diarrhea) and helping them to shower and to don fresh clothing.

My mission years remain among the richest and most prized of my life’s treasures. It was during these years that I discovered and learned to mine the deepest and most fulfilling of human loves. While it is my commitment to choose to love all (the

best as well as the worst) , I am most fond of the ones who are most marginalized – the homeless, the addicts, the criminals, the refugees, the minorities, the homosexuals, the prostitutes, the crippled, the deformed...! Besides, I am only able to choose to love (anyone) because God first chose to love the most unlovely person I have ever known...me!

The manner in which God chooses to work in our lives never ceases to amaze me. I possessed no designs on working in rescue missions, though I was a regular volunteer. Over the years, I had observed a good number of the street people who were experiencing significant life change, due to their participation in the Portland, Oregon rescue mission's life change and recovery program. Upon further investigation, I found their offerings of intense-issues therapy, Biblical life management and life-skills to be what I, too, needed...So I entered and completed their two-year life-change program; an absolute gift from God! While in their program, I worked as a program supervisor; then as the assistant to the chaplains. Upon completion, I chose to stay on as the operation supervisor. Two years later, I moved to Lancaster, PA's Water Street Rescue Mission, where I interned with the men's ministry director and later accepted a position as learning center coordinator and part-time chaplain– more of God's richness!

Here's a bit of irony – my mission supervisors were most nervous with regard to my nonviolent stance, my choices of activism on behalf of the downtrodden, and with the amount of time I chose to invest with the poor.

As 2008 was drawing to a close, God began to burden me that it was time to prepare for my life's next chapter; to ready

myself to step into my life's main calling, which he had begun to reveal to me 1976. The thought of letting go of my life's most fulfilling and rewarding work; and especially of losing daily access to those of whom I had grown most fond was immensely grief-producing, to be sure!

Yet, my heart was enlivened, as I recalled the wounds of my all-time favorite author, Martha Snell Nicholson, who had taught me (during the dark, grief-filled) days of my children's deaths and of my divorce from my once best friend) these precious words,

“I do not hold my broken dreams
And cling to them and weep
Beseeching God to mend them now.
I give them back to him from whom they came
And a secret joy lightens all my days
And long, sweet nights I dream
Of how it fares with them in heaven.
I fill my little day with little tasks.
I give the best I have to him who asks.
Years that are full more quickly pass.
Someday
The stars will shine
The flowers bloom
And all the winds blow sweet.
Someday,
In heaven's golden dawning
Will tender angels give them back to me
My broken dreams

Unbroken then
All loveliness
Complete!”

– “Broken Dreams” by Martha Snell Nicholson

Blessings...

Norman

Letter #4

My Life Calling Becoming Clear: Living Repentance

Dear friends,

“I would give nothing for your religion if I can’t see it. A light is meant to shine, not talk.” – Unknown

During my first year in Bible College (1975-6), one of the respected former world leaders in the church denomination of my birth, came to preach a series of sermons, during a special emphasis week. On one particular day, as the scripture was read, God literally etched into my heart these words (which he let me know would be the basis for my life’s great calling, which at the time frightened me):

“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?”

Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! Oh, that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! For they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: But they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, sayeth the Lord.” –Jeremiah 8:20-9:3 (KJG)

My spiritual advisor, Gideon B. Williamson, a most wise man in his late seventies, responded to my relative query, ‘ Norman,

it was my joy to oversee the ordination of your father, who has not allowed God to empty him of self, so as to be able to walk into his calling. You are not your father; you will choose differently, it is quite evident to us that you were not called to normal pastoral ministry. When your dead flesh is finally buried in Christ (which is his work and not yours), his choice of ministry for you will simply and freely flow through you. You are confused now, though this will not always be so. As you allow God to change you understand and gladly embrace the fact that ministry is all about him. Yet he loves us so much that he chooses to minister in partnership with us. As much as you are able, relax and enjoy your ride with him...It's going to be very long and painful!'

After his release from the Soviet Gulag (prison), dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn immigrated to the United States. After a relatively short stay, he chose to return to his homeland. One public statement basically said, 'I came to the United States because of your freedom. Though you are free outside, you are slaves on the inside. In time, my people will be free on the outside (also), while you will soon be slaves on the outside, as you are enslaved inside.'

He went on to describe the United States as 'a system of violence backed by lies and of lies backed by more violence.' The American populace (for the most part) laughed at the utter absurdity of such an opinion. Sadly, the same laughter was the response to similar statements made by retiring presidents Wilson and Eisenhower (among the many concerned others), both of whom provided plenty of supporting evidence.

My forty plus year search of the public record reveals a literal horror story, to which the American public (in the main) has chosen apathetic blindness and deafness, which sadly seems to

include the lion's share of those who claim Jesus' precious name. With Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn I say, "Let the lie enter the world; even dominate the world; but not through me!"

In 2008, the year that long-term Comptroller General David M. Walker (head of the U.S. Government Accountability Office; the official checks and balances system between the president and congress), after ten plus years of warning, officially informed the U.S. public that the United States had 'crossed the proverbial Rubicon' (fiscally); that U.S. debt commitments had outstripped U.S. ability to ever pay. The United States was now officially in default...fiscally bankrupt! Then President Bush, on National Television, informed the world that the United States could no longer guarantee interest on its debt (let alone make payments on the debt, itself). (Note: Neither statement has anything to do with what the public generally thinks of as national debt – which represents the U.S. deficit-spending-which remains payable).

The peoples of the world know what this all means, though the people of the United States continue to live under the illusion that fiscal recovery is "right around the corner"...sigh! (But, don't believe me...do your own homework...maybe God is still big enough to have a solution that does not entail consequential fiscal collapse and destruction!)

It was at this time that God asked me to publically step into my life's great calling; the calling for which I was designed. He was asking me to: 1. Simply live out a prayer of repentance – 'to humble myself, to pray, to seek God's will, to repent of my culpability for our country's sin, to have my sins forgiven, and to have my heart healed'....No matter what anyone else does or does not do! And, 2. Simply step into the next step of prophetic worship – 'To live and die with the poor,' as public

witness that God still sees worship (the language he taught us to speak). As ‘loving (not just doing) mercy, doing (out of the love of mercy) justice (which is righteousness) and walking humbly and upright before God.’

God did not call me to be a prophet (that I know of); just a witness, in the vein of Jeremiah. Like Jeremiah, God has promised me nothing but himself as my reward (which to me is the grandest reward). I get no “points” for stepping into my calling; I’m simply seeking to follow God’s leading into what he tells me is the next right thing to do.

In answer to his leading, my first public steps were:

- To begin to divest myself, in preparation to remove myself from the ‘protective umbrellas’ of institutional religion and government.
- To engage in worldwide independent press forums (fiscal, political, military, advanced weaponry, justice, prisons, environment etc.).
- To make apology and ask forgiveness for U.S. oppression of other societies and countries, as well as of our own citizenry – also in the worldwide independent press.
- To submit articles for publication in the worldwide independent press.

Note: You may access my writings by entering, “Norm Lowry” into your favored internet search engine. Today, I will

close off with a favored tribute to our gracious creator and passionate lover of all mankind –

“Life goes by; so much is past
Most things change but some things last
So many days just slip away
Mellowing there –like yesterday!
The things I’ve done; the things I’ve seen
Melt into a lifetime of dream
And I’ve become what I’ve been through
I am so glad I’ve been there with you!
The day will come that I’m so old
One more day will be like gold
And all the days I ever knew
Are measured by my life with you!
My mind forgets a million things
Places, dates, and names of Kings
Only one memory stays new
The day I gave my life to you!”

– Unknown

Blessings,

Norman

Letter #5

Civil Disobedience and Imprisonment (Part 1 of 2)

Dear friends,

“To say no to evil is perfect revolution”

– Mohandas K. Gandhi

On the main, to the systems (Institutional religion, government), I have simply broken the law (on three occasions) and was justly punished. To me, it was calm, calculated, and well-planned revolution: “perfect revolution”! Every part of my process was volitional and served a special purpose.

- My 52-year, personal relationship with our own creator laid the foundation for my actions. In loving imitation, I chose to lay my life aside on behalf of others – unconditionally!
- My 52 plus years of voraciously searching and studying the Holy Scriptures provided perspective –That God is all about loving mercy-filled, relationships with everyone and doesn’t seem to be all that impressed with our institutionalization of his body (the church). Man’s 40,000 denominations and sects of Christianity seems indication enough that our designs are mostly about illicit power and control (idolatry); and thus are not mostly about love. My relative choice was to remove myself from the illusory protections of the umbrella of institutional religion. With Gandhi I say, “I love the Christian Jesus and I hate the Christian church.”
- My 40 plus years of voraciously searching the public record provided more perspective – you may read my

opinions and published articles online, by simply inserting “Norm Lowry” into your favored search engine. Then, if you are brave enough, do your own relative homework (I expect none to simply believe what I say). My relative choices:

1. To publicly renounce my United States citizenship, I love the people but am no longer willing to cosign what we do.
2. To publicly declare a state of nonviolent war against all mechanisms of the extreme violence, racism, bigotry, and – poverty – production of the United States of America. We have been the most blessed culture in the history of mankind yet have chosen to become its most monstrous.
3. To publicly amp-up my protestations to include purposeful nonviolent acts of civil disobedience (and their consequential imprisonment). By loving God and my neighbor enough to say “no” to laws that protect the tyranny of our society’s extreme violence, racism, bigotry, and poverty – production, I am simply seeking ‘to humble myself, to pray, to seek God’s will, to repent of my culpability in the sins of my birth culture, to have my sins forgiven, and to have my land healed!...No matter what anyone else may choose! Additionally, I am simply choosing to side with the ones of whom I am most fond – those whom we marginalize, abuse, oppress, reject, make poor, genocide, etc.! For the balance of my life, it is my intention to live among, and then to die with, these precious ones!

My protestations and subsequent imprisonments (for broader disclosure, please feel free to visit – my blog site –

www.normanlowry.blogspot.com or the Tucson AZ-based website and blog site for “The Nuclear Resister”):

Note: All actions took place in the United States military recruiting office – near the city mall – Lancaster PA.

1. April 16, 2009 – I chose to break the windows of three vehicles used by the military recruiters, for which I received 3-23 months in the Lancaster County Prison. At my sentencing, I was released on parole, as I have accepted the invitation of my mentors to reconsider my use of civil disobedience in my protestations. I agreed to a time-frame of a minimum three months, both to listen to my mentors and to all for suitable, relative discussion.

Note: on January 13, 2010, at my meeting with my parole officer, I gave my notification of my decision to cease participation with parole/probation; that, after considering all that my mentors had asked of me, I remained firm in the belief that my choice of civil disobedience in my protestations was, indeed, the correct and only morally responsible choice.

2. January 15, 2010 – I chose to trespass, asking recruiters and clients to consider disassociation with the U.S. military, for which I received 6-12 months in the Lancaster County Prison; to be served, concurrently, with the balance of the first sentence.
3. August 1, 2011 – I chose to willfully trespass against a “No Trespass” order (from my 1/15/10) and to sit in front of the main entryway, thus impeding entry/exit traffic, for which I received the state legislative maximum sentence of 1-7 years in the state correctional system (because I refused to guarantee that I would no longer use purposeful acts of

civil disobedience in future protestations). It is my intention to serve the entire 7 years, as I cannot “in good conscience” participate with the demands of a system which I believe to be utterly corrupt.

On June 7, 2012, I was transferred from the Lancaster County Prison to the PA state prison System’s Camp Hill location, for classification. As I write this, I am less than one week away from completing my first full year of my current sentence. All total, I have served nearly 35 of the last 40 months, behind bars. Though prison is an absolute sewer and a privately constructed hell for those whom we would like to ignore (or imagine that they don’t exist), I have no regrets for my choices that brought me here! I am most honored to invest my life with my fellow inmates, who are but a small sampling of the untold millions we oppress worldwide...each and every day!

“Every day, they pass me by,
I can see it in their eyes.
Empty people without care,
headed who knows where.
On they go through private pain,
living fear to fear.
Laughter hides their silent cries,
only Jesus hears.
We are called to be his light,
in a world where wrong seems right.
What could be too great a cost,
for sharing life with one who’s lost?
Through his love, we too can share,

all the pain they bear.
They must hear the words of life,
only we can share.
People need the Lord!
People need the Lord!
At the end of broken dreams,
He's the open door.
People need the Lord; people need the Lord.
When will we realize,
that we must give our lives
'cause people need the Lord!"

Blessings,

Norm

Letter #6

Prisoner of Conscience (Part 2 of 2)

Dear friends,

“You can kill us but you cannot hurt us”

– Justin Martyr

Genuinely conscience driven success is always accompanied by a fair amount of human loneliness. Sound wisdom always demands a counting of such inherent costs, prior to initiating the risk-filled steps needed to achieve the desired level of success.

Prison is a most lonely place, humanly speaking! It is an utter sewer; a privately constructed hell, filled to overflowing, with the battered and bruised humanity; most of who cannot even begin to imagine finding release from its vice-like grasp.

My choice to seek entry into the sewer and hell was not some shallow, spur of the moment decision. And even after making the decision to do so, knowing it to be the only decision that would leave me with any dignity and intact integrity, I knew that it was not a process to rush into without ample preparation.

Fear of pain, of possible suffering or abuse were non-issues, as I have faced plenty of those demons. Concern over what others would think of me caused me no anxiety, as long ago I pretty much ceased being a crowd follower or a people pleaser. At issue was the fact that I was going to have to face the emptiness of human loneliness; the inherent lack of readily available intimacy –filled human interaction that I had painstakingly learned to engage in and enjoy in the world outside of the prison environment. From my many years of

interactions with former inmates and from extensive reading of case studies, I had a fairly good concept of what awaited me and simply knew that I need to insure my readiness to face and to engage this sure eventuality.

For relative wisdom, I went to God, to my wise people (mentors, who ironically all chose to distance themselves from me, as my process moved forward) and to contemplativeness (Morton, Nouwen, Deer, Mother Teresa, the Berrigans, St. France, St. Catherine, Gandhi, Dr. King, Rachel Corrie...)

From God, I learned: 1. To base my identity only in what he thinks of me, 2. To seek Christ –likeness as my only quality standard, 3. To value and practice “searching and fearless” self-evaluation and 4. To be totally accountable, to God and wise others, for all thoughts, actions, feelings and physiology.

From my wise people (mentors), I learned: 1. The value of being transparent and vulnerable (allowing others, even my enemies, to speak into my life), 2. How to define, create, and operate within a safe, healing environment, 3. The value of active participation in relational conflict resolution, based in the honest evaluation of what is in the best interest of others and, 4. That we must hold loosely to all relationships; allowing others to leave us, just as freely as they accepted our invitation to enter our lives.

From contemplatives, I learned the practical aspect of what I learned from God – that the quiet of solitude allows us to know God (to know that we are perfectly loved and are invited to love, in return) ; which always drives us back to our neighbor (both friend and foe); which always drives us back to God: true and available, eternal intimacy.

Properly prepared and armed (with God's absolute peace, utter contentment, and promise of reasonable happiness), I engaged and have never looked back. As with all other moments of my crazy life, God designed this moment for me and, human loneliness notwithstanding (and there are often dark days of human loneliness), I am right where I desire to be...no regrets!

In the first chapter of my investment as a prisoner of conscience (mostly served in the Lancaster PA County Prison), I was surrounded by many of the precious ones with whom I had worked with during my days at Lancaster's Water Street Rescue Mission. These reconnections were most inspiring and provided continuing sustenance during the times when the human loneliness and abuse of inmates was so pervasive. The loss of regular contact with family, friends, and mentors was more than made up for by God's unexpected gifting of Jack and Felice Cohen- Joppa, editors of the activist support periodical, "The Nuclear Resister." This serendipitous contact was accompanied by letters of encouragement and inspiration from all corners of the world – including, new friends and mentors from the Lancaster area's faith/peace community. Who is the One against whom not even the gates of hell can prevail?

Chapter two of my investment as a prisoner of conscience (within the state prison system) is already proving to be more oppressive – most evident in its passive-aggression. It will be most interesting to see God's loving plan for this chapter, as it continues to unfold. The inherent human loneliness is more pervasive yet his utter peace and contentment remains and is as sure as he is steadfast!

“God gave me a gift of laughter and a heart held high;
knowing what life would bring me, by and by-
Seeing my roses wither, one by one,
Hearing my life’s song falter, scarce begun,
Watching me walk in sorrow, that is why
He gave the gift of laughter; “this heart held high”

– Martha Snell Nicholson

Blessings,

Norm

Letter #7

My Prayer for Radical Faith

Dear friends,

“Cupitor incredibilium” – (One who desires the incredible)

As a young child, my oldest daughter participated in a play entitled, “Arch the Angel,” about the arch angel who oversaw the guardian angels of the earth’s children. In one scene, Arch’s assistant, fascinated by the ever-increasing number of sparkling lights emanating from the surface of the earth, asked Arch just what they were. Out of a sense of great awe, Arch asked his assistant to fold his wings, to sit with him on the edge of a cloud, and began to sing, “They are wonderful beings, filled with delight. Made in God’s image, they’re shining so bright. They know a song that will never be ours. They are the redeemed ones; just look how they shine.”

Today I want to talk about my prayer for radical faith.

It is likely that when most of us think about having radical faith, we are thinking of “getting.” That’s me! As “one who desires the incredible,” I have a great need to be amazed! And, who better than God is able to amaze us! I, too, want to “get.” I want to “get” out of his way...So that he can have his way with me; so that he can “get” from me according to his design – an intimate friend, with whom he can share his glory. Surely, this sounds arrogant....because it is...which is why I pray for him to “get” me out of the way. I want my arrogance to utterly disappear so that God can utterly have his way with me...period!

From a young age, I have been absolutely aware that I was really screwed up. So I prayed, from seven years forward, that God would do whatever it might take to free me from whatever it was that had me bound so tightly; that was keeping me away from the freedom and peace that my young heart ached for! This prayer remains my prayer, to this day.

In his speech, “the Weight of Glory,” C.S. Lewis proposed that for God to share his glory with us likely meant that we would share beauty – he with us and we with him. What an amazing thought! What he described as being the “weight” of such an exchange was the inherent value of likewise sharing God’s beauty in us with others and they with us. This, too, is an amazing thought; a thought which carries with it an enormous responsibility – that of valuing each other’s inherent, Godly beauty so much that we would purposefully do nothing to diminish it. These thoughts nearly burn my brain out, when I attempt to wrap my mind around their implications.

The closest I’ve ever been able to come to getting these ideas sorted out was actually an experience, rather than an intellectual exercise. While in college, my wife and I were driving home from class, when my wife noticed a monstrous rainbow that seemed to be emanating from the crest of the hill above us. She asked if I thought it possible to drive up into it. As we were driving my old, international scout that day, I kicked it into 4- wheel drive and we drove smack dab into the middle of the most intense colors imaginable. For maybe 45 minutes, we walked around bathed in absolute beauty –violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange, red – and every hue in between. We went home, utterly spellbound.

Years later, my now ex-wife called to ask what I thought of, whenever my thoughts turned to her. It blew her away when I

mentioned our walk in the rainbow. She was expecting that I thought badly of her. After moving past the self-protective mask of my relative grief, my choice in our divorce had been to seek only to judge myself; that it would have been an utter waste of time and energy, for me, to demean even the memory of my one-time best friend. The “weight” of sharing personal beauty with each other was simply too precious to demean, just because the dream we had once shared had been shattered!

My prayer for “radical faith” is a prayer whose sole aim is to unselfishly come to share such “weight” with God and with others. It remains most frighteningly incredible to think that our creator desires a return to such intimacy with we who long ago walked from it to explore self-love and the consequential destruction that self-centeredness inherently produces. But desire it he does and it is my desire to desire what he desires.....no matter the cost!

A favored song echoes my prayer for “radical faith,” to God:

“I’m not trying to find just some new frame of mind
That will change my whole point of view
For I’ve been through it all;
Deep inside, nothing’s changed....I’m not new.
I’m not seeking a gift or emotional lift
But one thing, I’m longing to do
Is to lift up my cup
And let you fill it up with just you.
More of you! More of You!
I’ve had all but what I need
Is just more of you!
Of things I’ve had my fill

And yet I hunger still.
Empty and bare, Lord, hear my prayer
For more of you!"

– Bill and Gloria Geither

One of God's most amazing promises to us is that, one day, when we've passed from this life, into his eternity, he will give to us what we have most desired. Until that day we have his temporal version of his promise..."We are blessed when we hunger and thirst after righteousness...because we will be filled." This is my heart's deepest and most sincere desire...

Blessings,

Norm Lowry

Letter #8

To Confront and Not to Judge

Dear friends,

“Heaven has nothing to offer the mercenary soul” – C.S. Lewis

Sometimes it’s hard being me; not that I’m complaining. I’m simply stating a fact. From a young age, I’ve perpetually desired all that God has for me. As I’m the most selfishly stubborn, screwed up person imaginable (to me), asking God to turn me into the most loving person imaginable seems quite absurd. Yet this is what I most desire, so I pray willingly to pay the price...Anything he asks...which most generally involves pain and suffering. My resultant prayer has become that I will simply learn to suffer well, as I grow in Christ Jesus. (1 Peter 4:1)

In 2008, as God began to ask me to more directly confront our society’s increasingly great love of extreme violence, racism, bigotry and poverty-production, I felt no small amount of human trepidation (not to be confused with torment –based fear). At each new juncture, he has continued to teach me how to confront without judging; no small or easy task, to be sure. At its core, his request was not that I would mainly confront the ‘dark’ world (those who do not claim his name as theirs), but rather the ‘light’ world (those who do claim his name as theirs); for their direct participation in or apathy toward these horrors.

To claim the American religion (like its host society) tends to participate in, cosign, or is apathetic toward extreme violence, racism, bigotry and poverty-production is to state that American religion is idolatrous and is thus mercenary. This

seems to be a harsh statement yet it is one I'll stand on. Remember, God has asked me to confront and not to judge, and there is a vast difference.

To judge is to belittle; an arrogant stance, in which I would be thinking myself to be more noble or righteous than another. This is simply not the case, as I truly do not see myself as being better than anyone; though maybe equal or worse.

To confront (without judgment) is to lift up; to love. Jesus regularly modeled his love in this manner. It made the powers that be (the judges) most nervous. The judges finally got tired of Jesus and killed him.

Jesus knew how to love people! He cared enough about others to embrace them – right where they were. Without judging, he lovingly confronted the discrepancies between what people said and how they chose to live out what they said. In his book, Unclean, Richard Beck described Jesus' love as "the will to embrace." He cited the relative insight of Miroslav Volf (Exclusion and Embrace), who describes its "critical feature" by saying that "... The will to give ourselves to others and 'welcome' them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, is prior to any judgment about others, except that of identifying them in their humanity. The will to embrace precedes any 'truth' about others and any construction of their 'justice.' This will is absolutely indiscriminate and strictly immutable; it transcends the moral mapping of the social world into 'good' and 'evil.'"

Many years ago God began to teach me that his "will to embrace" lay in his choice to "love mercy" (an attitude of true spiritual worship), which literally means 'loving to reach across, from a place of equal footing'! He chose to limit himself to our own level, in order to model his mercy-filled

love for us. To do this was so important to him that he chose to “despise the shame” of his required transcendence to our level. There is nothing in his model which cosigns our self-perceived right to think of another as being less than we. In fact, inherent in his model was his choice to freely serve everyone (friends or foe) equally; as ‘before the foundation of the world, he chose to reconcile everyone and everything to himself.’ In God’s economy, there is no place for our petty disgust and loathing. They are simply parts of our fallenness and are in no way parts of our new life in Jesus! He lovingly invites us to deal with this fact, as he has already and eternally dealt with it. To choose not to do so, is to ‘choose to live in a coffin with our own old self’ (Paul the Apostle).

Our society stands on a most precarious threshold! If we do not soon change our ways, which can only occur with a change of heart, we have already doomed ourselves to the reaping of the inherent consequences of our sown choices. Yet, arrogantly and in the main, we seem content to continue to ignore what we are doing to other societies, as well as to our own neighbors, either by direct participation in or apathy toward our society’s love of extreme violence, racism, bigotry, and poverty-production.

If we understood and truly cared about the value of our neighbor, we would never again seek to purposefully take advantage of another human being! Those in the ‘dark’ world by virtue of their not claiming Jesus’ name as theirs, have valid reason, though no valid excuse for their choices to purposefully offend another. But for we in the ‘light’ world, who do claim Jesus’ name as ours, there is neither valid reason nor valid excuse for our choices to purposefully offend another!

Blessings, Norm

Letter #9

Volitional Blindness and Deafness do not Absolve Us

Dear friends,

“Cominus Surdis” – (We preach to the deaf).

Jesus often used the prophetic statement, “You have been given eyes to see yet you choose to be blind and ears to hear yet you choose to be deaf.” These are hard words, to be sure! Contemplative Henri Nouwen expanded on these hard words by explaining that the root of the Latin word for deaf is ‘surdus,’ from which comes our word absurd. Thus, he explains, to be given ears to hear yet to choose to be deaf is to be absurd!

Most westerners, especially in the United States of America, would not take too kindly to being labeled as being absurd. And yet every single day, certain truth is made visible to our citizenry, which chooses to blind itself to this exposed truth. Likewise, the inherent wisdom of this visible truth shouts out this truth to ears that are purposefully made deaf to this truth. I’d call these occurrences most absurd!

The truth of which I am speaking is the truth held within the public record of our society...not to mention the truth held within the various holy writings. From my now forty plus years of voraciously searching the public record (as with my fifty-two plus years of searching the holy writings), I can experientially confirm the cultural absurdity, the volitional blindness and deafness to exposed truth. To speak too pointedly of the inherent truth of our public record (as with that of the holy writings) is most definitely an exercise of “preaching to the deaf.”

Culturally, we have been taught that our own society and nation have been built upon the principles of the Christ of God. While it is true that there have been those who have built their lives and their communities on these righteous principles, the public record shows that those persons and their respective communities have, in fact, been among the smaller and less greed or power-driven segments of our larger society. Of course, this statement is often written off as being mere heresy, by those who have heard, from someone whom they like to listen to, speak differently. Yet, I've taken the time to do my homework and will stand by my statements. It is not my way to ask or require that anyone take my word on any subject as being gospel. It is my way to ask that everyone do their own relative homework.

So where does this leave us? It leaves us with a volitionally and selectively deaf public majority (sadly, including the seeming majority of those who claim Jesus' precious name as theirs) who choose to see, hear, and consequently "write off" genuine conspiracy as being mere conspiracy theory. By doing this, the masses can effectively, though illicitly, anesthetize themselves, for yet one more day against the all too real atrocities our society perpetrates against most other world societies, as well as against our own neighbors. Yet, volitional blindness and deafness do not absolve us of personal culpability.

In articles published in the world's independent press (e.g. –a day of reckoning, for the U.S.A; I murder 200, 000 plus people....every day; civil disobedience, imprisonment and my search for justice; reflections on what I choose to live by, etc.), I have chronicled my public record findings, publicly admitted culpability and asked forgiveness for my part in my society's sins and crimes against humanity.

While I feel no need to outline my findings in this letter, you may read my writings on the internet. What I do feel the need to do is to speak of the dire consequences of our society's volitional blindness, deafness and relative apathy, that lie at our very doorstep. They are immeasurably serious and will imminently exact a retribution much greater than most would even be willing to consider...sigh!

It was Edmund Burke who aptly stated, "All it takes for evil to prevail is for good men to do nothing."

Blessings,

Norm

Letter #10

Isaiah's Call to Be and See the Meek

Dear friends,

“The spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord has anointed me to preach the good tidings to the meek; he has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound....”Isaiah 61:1

Several months prior to my transfer from the Lancaster County Prison to the Pennsylvania State Prison, Jesus began to impress upon me that it was time to begin preparing for a transition into a completely new chapter of life. While this new chapter would include an increased freedom of mobility, he made it pointedly clear that it would also include increased oppression (which would steadily reveal itself over the course of my involvement in the system).

Jesus' preparation was to lead me deeply into Isaiah 58-61, a long cherished passage of scripture, which he personally emphasized and modeled as he publicly revealed himself in his local synagogue, at a pivotal point in his early ministry.

Using the concept of what many term to be “the Holy Fast,” Jesus began asking me to allow him to free me, at a deeper level, from my selfish love of ‘getting,’ so that he could more freely use me as a vessel of his giving. In order for him to be able to shine his light more brightly through me, he needed for me to allow him to remove from my heart the next level of self-protective strongholds against his love of mercy. His

desire for me was that I would allow him to make me meek; one fit to “inherit the earth.”

Isaiah describes the meek one (this one fit to “inherit the earth”) as being “the repairer of the breach” and “the restorer of the path to dwell in”. One memorable teacher from my past, who used the word meek as an acrostic, put it this way, “one who is meek is: 1. A man or woman of might under restraint (humility); 2. Emotionally stable, 3. Educable, and 4. Kind”.

Isaiah’s relative encouragement to the one who would be meek is that “the Lord’s hand is not too short to save; his ear is not so heavy that it cannot hear”...or, in other words...The Lord is always available to the serious; though not to the merely curious.

To the serious, Isaiah defined this ‘Holy Fast’ as being “repentance;” not just as an action but as a way of life. This way of life was to be a life of ‘washing hands stained with blood, cleansing fingers that like to touch sin, freeing the tongue that loves to lie, voicing a call for justice, speaking truth, living and preaching the way of peace, becoming sound of mind, bowing/ kneeling in intercession, living as the hope of salvation...! God’s relative promise was that “the redeemer will come” (that he would personally show up) and that “light will rise in the darkness” (that hope would prevail)!

Jesus has now had me in Isaiah 58-61 for nearly six months. What a rich, albeit painful, experience of demolition and reconstruction in my heart it has been, and continues to be! My only awareness is that he is preparing space there to facilitate his workings in the next chapter of my life with him. I am his and I am waiting only on him....

“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud , and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.”

-Isaiah 61:10-11

Blessings,

Norm

Letter #11

Waiting on God, finding Intimacy, Hope, Dignity

Dear friends,

“Be still and know that I am God: I am will be exalted among the heathen; I will be exalted in the earth.”

– Psalm 46:10

Being still before God; finding and enjoying solitude with him, is all about intimacy. Our loving creator desires oneness with us and invites us to share it with him, according to our desire. If we desire his all, it is ours! In the end; in his eternity, he will give us, fully perfected, all that our hearts have truly desired.

“Waiting on God,” is an amazing component of this life of intimacy into which our creator and grand heart- lover invites us. For an interesting perspective; using a *Strong Concordance* of the KJV Bible, make a list of all references for the word “wait” and take a contemplative adventure through that list.

Our world is so full of business and our society so non-relational that, even in the world that we call “church,” genuine intimacy with God (which always manifests itself as genuine intimacy with others), seems a most scarce commodity. One may readily see the common institution intimacies – the loves of forms, functions, creeds, theologies, doctrines, programs, classes, books, Bibles, music, conferences, sermons, teachings, etc. But how often do we see hearts that live only to beat with the beat of Jesus’ heart – the heart that is aflame with the fire of God’s spirit –the heart that passionately burns with love for the heart of God and of our neighbors?

My heart's deepest, most ardent desire is to be utterly consumed by the eternal fire of intimacy with God intimacy that will show me how to love my neighbor as I love myself. There seems no one less deserving than I, for I came to God with nothing but ugliness – “the chief among sinners.” Yet he says that his love includes me! So, I'm in! All the way in!

Intimacy with God speaks in extremes, because it is extreme; as extreme as God is eternal! Intimacy with God often hurts, most severely, as it burns away our sacred idols; our favorite sins. Yet, intimacy with God also provides unquenchable hope, such as was expressed by the author of Psalm 103: 2-3:

“Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits

He forgives all your sins; and heals all your diseases

He redeems your life from the pit; and crowns you with love and compassion

He satisfies your desire for good things; so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.”

As I write this letter, I am “waiting on God,” savoring an extended time of stillness and silence (solitude) before him, as he continues to unfold for me his plan for my life's current chapter. So far, he has simply asked me to look around me, at the obvious pain-filled despair of my fellow inmates. He's asking me to be his conduit of love to them, out of which may flow his dignity.

Dignity is huge! A favored author from India, Rohinton Mistry, appropriately asserts that “A life without dignity is worthless!” God valued dignity so greatly that he provided for its security within his body (the church), in his gift of hospitality. “Hospitality” is about selfhood. It is the space

where the dignity of every human being is vouchsafed, embraced, and protected deep within the “heart of the church” (Richard Beck, *Unclean*). What an immense honor it is to be able to affirm God’s priceless dignity, in the lives of those whom together we love, here in this sewer and privately constructed hell called prison.

“In this quiet hour overcome with emotion
At what I’ve been given, just because I asked
How can I quite tell you, what I feel for my Jesus
And for what he’s done for me, just because I asked
Oh, I can’t stop singing, I feel like bursting
And I can’t keep it...I can’t keep it to myself
For his spirit is moving in me,
 and he’s filled me and made me new
For a love has bound me, that no strength can sever
He will leave me...never! Just because I asked!”

– Richard Roberts

Blessings,

Norm

Letter #12

Christmas: Gifts Manufactured by Slaves

Dear Friends,

“Who has believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: He has no form or comeliness; and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” Isaiah 53:1-5

As I write this letter (mid-August) talk here in the prison is already turning to ‘the holidays,’ and, especially to ‘the Christmas time.’ Though there is some anticipation of uplift, most of the talk seems shallow, at best....pretty much normal for our culture. Long ago, I chose to cease all but peripheral participation in most of our holidays, except to enjoy an extra day or two off, from a busy work schedule. It was my manner to offer to work on the holidays, that my coworkers might take the opportunity to be with family, for their chosen celebrations. Don’t get me wrong; I do enjoy a good celebration; I’m simply quite choosy as to what or how I celebrate.

The Christmas holiday is one of the hardest and most confusing holidays of our culture, to me. We choose to celebrate this one who came to set all slaves free by

exchanging gifts with friends and loved ones. Ironically, the overwhelming majority of these gifts are manufactured by slaves.

Through the years; my brothers and sisters of the faith (sadly, including my wise ones/mentors) have advised me that I'm overreacting; that there's always been, and always will be , unfairness and inequity. Meanwhile, our public runs to vendors who promise to 'save us money' and this, 'helps us live better!' For more years than I wish to recount, this was my thinking too! Our thinking was all it took to provide co-signature for our now slave-based economy.

As I began to experience a heart-change (and subsequently, a head change) regarding such matters, judgment was not my aim. Our consequences are judgment enough. My aim was to adequately answer this question for me, in and with his life; and simply asked me to imitate him....! To live and die with them, or on their behalf." So, in a nutshell, that's exactly what I am doing.

The Jesus of Christmas said that he came to "make all things new." When I was an angry young man; with clenched fist; railing at God, I couldn't imagine such a thing as this...though I surely desired it! Today, I absolutely believe it. I will die, before I will raise my fist in anger. I love enough to confront, without judging; save to judge myself. This has freed me, as an act of Godly repentance, to be "dead" to myself, that I might invest the balance of my life living with, and dying on behalf of, those I helped to enslave.

My last three Christmases, invested with a token few of Americas millions of slaves behind bars, have been the richest of my life. My praying for you is that you will know Christmases as rich!

“Jesus, Jesus....precious one you are
all men shall praise you; “King of every heart!”

Blessings,

Norm

Letter #13

More on Christmas: Has the “American Dream” and its Elections Trumped God’s Word in Jesus for You?

Dear friends,

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness; and the darkness could not comprehend it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came from a witness, to bear witness of the light that all men through him might believe. He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light.

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world did not know him. He came unto his own, and his own did not receive him. But as many as received him, to them he gave power to become the sons of God, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.” John 1:1-14

What are you doing with this Jesus of Christmas? And, what are you going to allow this Jesus of Christmas to do with you?

These have long been important questions! Yet, our society’s long-term apathy has allowed us to “put off” serious consideration, as we have marched off after the “American

Dream” or its counterpart, the “name it and claim it” God. Those days are coming to a rapid conclusion....much more so than most will likely even allow themselves to consider.

We have just gone through another national election cycle, which is always good for a round of illusions, aiding our already apathetic minds in focusing elsewhere, while yet another rug is being pulled out from under us...sigh!

From my years of studying the public record (and of the holy writings), my offered perspective is this: Any agenda other than that of our loving creator and of his son (this word become flesh) is merely a waste of time; now, more than ever before. As the U.S. citizenry sorts out the perceived meaning of its national elections, the dark world is unleashing the next segment of its own agenda and diabolical plan, which includes: 1. Much increased perplexity; 2. Much increased Satanic illusion, and 3. Much greatly increased destruction – on a scale few would wish to even consider. And, to top this all off, the likely ‘first beast,’ of Revelation 13, has offered his ‘miraculous’ assistance to sort it all out.

The questions remain: What are you going to do with the Jesus of Christmas? And what are you going to allow the Jesus of Christmas to do with you?

Blessings,

Norm

Letter #14

Parole and Why I Refuse It

Dear friends,

For those imprisoned the parole system is highly valued, as it provides opportunity for early release. Most see themselves as having little to no freedom in prison, as freedom to them is an external—something that will make them happier; something that will remove their pain. I am in prison because I am free. Freedom to me is an internal; a gift only given by our loving creator, a rock on which to stand firm in spite of inherent pain and inconvenience. As such, the parole system has nothing of value to offer me. It is simply a part of the problem; a mechanism of systematic violence, racism, bigotry and poverty-production; a tyranny which love obligates me to hate and to say “no” to.

Throughout the course of my amped-up protestations, release from incarceration has been solely dependent upon my willingness to acquiesce to the courts demand that I agree to cease acts of chosen civil disobedience in my protestations. As a matter of conscience, this will never occur, as I consider it to be my obligation to break any law which protects the obvious tyranny of a government which is supposed to be the servant of its constituency and not its enslaver. Parole remains my available ticket for early release from incarceration and has been available to me since my sentencing date, now nearly 5 months past.

This past week, I was invited to my first official parole meeting; a pre-parole interview. In this interview I asked to sign a letter of intent to max out my sentence, of which I have

nearly six years remaining. After reviewing my offence (trespass) and my out date (8/1/18), the interviewer was stunned though curious, at my choice. As he was simply curious, I told him that I was simply not interested in co-signing any system that sought to enslave my fellow man. He scheduled a parole board hearing stating that my petition would be accepted should the board be unable to assist me in changing my mind.

My parole board interview occurred the following day. As I am a nonviolent offender, I was interviewed by only one board member. She was most interested in discussion, which included questioning about my ‘different’ faith in Jesus and in its inherent hope for humanity. She was particularly interested in finding out how I could see good in others, when conditions and demographics obviously support my reason for my chosen actions. As with my judges, my interviewer stated her belief that actions such as mine seldom seem to change things, and thus I would be wise to reconsider return to “normal” society. She said that she was touched by my seemingly serious affection for the oppressed, the marginalized. It is my prayer that this is genuine, in her heart! She asked for my bottom line statement. I told her that I love Jesus, her, her children, and future generations of her children enough to stand against fear – for love – as a picture of how Jesus intends for life to be; that I’d rather invest the balance of my life with those whom we enslave, than to aid in the process of enslavement. She said that my petition would be granted by the board yet that I could apply for parole at any time that I should choose to become a part of the “normal” society again. I reassured her that my conscience and my grand love for God and for others would never allow for this to be. She thanked me and warmly shook hands; wishing me well.

My escort guard was quite talkative after our meeting and wished me well. As with my interviewer, I assured him of my continued prayers for him and for his precious ones. Between him and my fellow inmates awaiting hearings, a five-plus hour process, Jesus opened the door to some quality dialogue. Sharing Jesus' love and concern is such a joy! It is my continuing prayer that others may find hope in Jesus, as I am finding hope in him continually.

Upon returning to my block, my free times and meal times were filled with discussions, as the buzz of my choice to forego parole; to remain here with those I claim to love; of who I am most fond, was most perplexing to them. Many told me that they think me nuts yet many told me "thanks" for my stand and for listening to my "spiritual people" who are inspiring me to care. What joy it is to watch God work in the lives of those who have come to believe that there is no hope....how I praise him!!!

Parole is and will remain a non-option, to me. I love God and my fellow man too much to change my mind. Prison, as with other forms of oppression and enslavement, will never be something I like. Prison is a sewer; a privately constructed hell for those whom we chose not to value and thus, marginalize, oppress, abuse, impoverish, etc. It is the place to put people; out of sight; out of mind! I will never like or love prison but I will love and like those imprisoned. Neither prison nor any other illicit device of the Satan or man is capable of taking my freedom from me, my freedom is a gift of our loving God...period! Because I am free, I can live in this sewer; this hell, loving those enslaved here, rather than using my freedom on the outside of prison to be a part of a society of slave makers/owners.

A couple days ago, one of my spiritual wise people (Daniel), asked me what would happen if the parole people were to simply make my sentence disappear and release me from prison. My answer – “I would ask Jesus.” Before entering prison, Jesus asked me to move from my comfortable, middle to upper middle income neighborhood, into the poor part of town. He then asked me to come to prison. Maybe he would lead me to live on a Native American Reservation, or in some other type of refugee camp, or on the streets. Wherever he would choose to lead me I would gladly go; following in his footsteps. Jesus, who created and owns all that exists, purposefully made himself poor, that he might “reach across” (mercy) to those who were the lowest and poorest, in the eyes of their neighbor. How could I do less? “I am crucified with Christ...”

Blessings,

Norman

Letter #15

Frederic Douglas, Jeremiah, and Norman Lowry on their Respective Nations

Dear friends,

“At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument is needed. Oh! Had I the ability and could reach the nation’s ear, I would to-day pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm and stern rebuke. For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crime against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced...your celebrations are a sham; your boasted liberty an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity, your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless. Your denunciation of tyranny, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are to him (the slave) mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety and hypocrisy – a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on earth guilty of practices more shocking, and bloody than are the people of the United States at this hour.”

These words, inflammatory to many, were spoken by ex-slave Frederick Douglas, who was invited to speak at the 1852 National 4th of July celebration by the president of the United States. In spite of his words, Mr. Douglas held to his hope that

America would be able to face and to conquer the slavery issue. To him, the whole racism issue included immigrant's rights and those of all other chose constitutional protections were being denied.

Today, 160 years later, Frederick Douglass would weep, if he were to see the country for which he had so much hope; as I weep! Sure, the United States has made some strides, yet most have proven to be mere facades....sigh!

Most of the civil rights laws of the 1950's and 60's have been dumbed-down or nullified; the so- called "war on drug" laws have demonized the minorities, imprisoned them disproportionately and made them poor; they have also multiplied the "blue collar" prison population 8+ times within the last 40 years, in spite of the fact that "blue collar" crime has declined over the same period; "white collar" crime continues to constitute 80% of all U.S. crime, yet "white collar" offenders continue to fill less than 20% of all U.S. prison bed space, most of the remaining Native American treaties have been either nullified or brutally trampled upon (during my lifetime) causing 50% of all Native American children to go to bed hungry.... every night. More than 90% of all domestic manufacturing jobs have been eliminated over the past 40 years; 80% of all U.S. corporations have off-shored; the U.S. economy has become an unstable economy, based on consumer spending – an economy where 90% of the products purchased are made by slaves; 70+% of all U.S. tax revenue dollars are assigned to making war...I often wonder how it is that everyone is not weeping!

The" U.S. military- industrial complex"(So named by outgoing president Dwight D. Eisenhower, in his retirement speech), the real controllers of the United States of America, will gladly

give away token crusts of bread, plates of food, tanks of gas, etc.; anything to pacify an apathetic public, as they lull them into enslavement. Most citizens don't even know that their written policy is called "full spectrum domination" and applies not only to those against whom we war but also against our own citizenry...sigh!

Often, even my spiritual advisors and mentors have ridiculed my voracious searching of the public record (congressional record, G.A.O. spreadsheets and demographics, CIA/military and related intelligence files, justice/prison system records etc....) Maybe they, like most Americans, simply didn't want to know the truth. Maybe the lies of ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX, NBC, etc., are simply more to their liking. Admittedly, the public record can frighten even the most stout of heart. Take for example the 1969 congressional record; "1970 Military Spending Bill." The U.S. congress gave their military \$10,000,000.00 to develop a new bio-weapon – "the acquired immune deficiency syndrome," yes....that AIDS! Related records show that the targets of this new Bio-weapon were Sub-Saharan Africa, S.E. Asia, the U.S. gay and African American communities, etc...sigh! It seems to have worked quite well....what is the current death count? 50,000,000 human genocided and counting? Are you weeping yet? If not, there is still hope –the U.S. military's newest citizen financed bio-weapon, called H5N1 (Human Avian Genetic Mutant Strain), has so far killed everyone on whom it has been tested U.S. military intelligence reports speculate that they may be able to genocide up to 5,000,000,000 humans with this one...sigh! If this doesn't cause you to weep, you're likely heartless; or maybe you're simply one of those "Christians" who still believe that "we can sack the world and dream of Jesus!"

The prophet Jeremiah called the people of his day “A horror” and “a hissing” and “an everlasting reproach.” If you were to make a list of all reasons that all Bible prophets gave for allowing consequential destruction of his beloved Israel/ Judah, we here in the United States of America would find that we are guilty of them all...and then some! If Jeremiah’s people were “a horror,” and “an everlasting reproach,” what might we be?

Are we going to repent and plead to God for mercy or are we, too, going to continue our blind apathetic march toward our consequential destruction; to our extinction?

I love you, among all of the people of the world! I love the best and I love the worst; I love the abused and I love the abuser – enough to take the lead – by giving up all that I am and all that I have; to repent, to seek God’s will, and to expend myself on behalf of those whom we marginalize, abuse, reject, imprison, genocide, etc.

Blessings,

Norm

Letter #16

I Chose to Remove Myself from the Perceived Protective Umbrella of Institutional Religion

Dear Friends,

“Action from principle the performance of right, changes things and relations. It is essentially revolutionary and does not consist wholly within anything which is. It is not only divided states, it is divided families; as, it divides the individual, separating the diabolical from the divine.”

—Henry David Thoreau

The reason I have chosen my particular blend of actions is that I chose to give up fear. I chose to face death head-on, thus gaining life – the abundant life promised by Jesus. It’s nice not being afraid. It’s nice not being deluded in the lie that humanity is somehow becoming more humane, more intelligent, more considerate of one another! It’s nice being able to face the truth that the farther down the path of civilization we go the more diabolical men seem to become. It’s nice being freeabsolutely free!

With fear gone, I become free – free to face my kinship with humanity; free to love, free to serve; free to give myself away on behalf of others; free to dissent; free to suffer –to suffer well; free to die to self; free to die for a worthy cause....

For almost ten years I chose to carry on the conversation of peace; of justice; of equality; of equity; and to be an active participant in the world of organized protest. Next, I chose to engage in making apologies (the world over) for my culpability for my country’s abuses of humanity; and expanded my dialog

to include public forum and writing articles in the worlds independent press.

My next choice was most hard, as it involved facing up to a cultural taboo – I – chose to remove myself from the perceived protection of the umbrella of institutional religion. One cannot read the Biblical account of Jesus in imitation of his father, openly and boldly confronting these issues; asking the preacher and teachers of his day to do the same –or to accept the inherent consequences of failing to do so. For doing this, he paid with his life; scapegoated by the preachers and teachers; feared by the civil Caesars, who chose to crucify him.

40,000+ denominations and sects of Christendom each vie for our affection, telling us why their slant on Jesus and love is the truest, purest, finest... yet 80% of all American Christendom cosign war, torture, violence, racism, bigotry, poverty – production (by survey – both secular and Christian). How is it that 1 of 6 children in our society go to bed hungry each night (the same as in third world nations)? How is it that we're willing to allow fiscal/political sanctions/policies (withholding food, water and medical care) to genocide 100,000 plus humans every single day worldwide (1000 + children, each, in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc.)? What makes it okay for minorities to be unemployed at 2-3 times white unemployment? How are we okay allowing our federal government to spend \$0.70 of every tax revenue dollar on war making? What do we have to tell ourselves to make it okay to buy slave-made consumer products? Where is the loving Jesus that your institution teaches, who sets your sect apart from the others? I remain utterly thankful for every honest adherent to Jesus' Church who chooses to operate within institutional religion yet I'm done with its "let's preach the gospel with words and little action" crowd...period! Jesus said, "I will build my church

(not institution) and the gates of hell won't prevail against it." My choice is to live in hell, attending to the disillusioned souls here, who feel damned because we, as institutional religion, excluded them; by placating "the system that fills prison beds with the petty criminals, while the master criminals are set free to run the country" (Howard Zinn)...sigh!

Amazingly, the seemingly most popular Bible study here in prison is taught by a civil servant who works for a large, advanced military weaponry corporation. I have chosen non-participation with all prison-offered religious offerings. I will gladly serve my cruel, tyrannical warders but I will not placate a system that invites men of violence to preach their gospel of lies and war....

My next choice was also hard; also a cultural taboo. I chose to renounce my United States citizenship and to declare a perpetual state of nonviolent war against all mechanisms of the extreme violence, racism, bigotry, and poverty production perpetrated and practiced by our own society. The concept of nation or state, and its henchman government, is something we are born into and grow up into, prior to our days of cognitive awareness. We grow up cherishing these systems, as if they are our sources; our providers; our sustainers. Yet, as God told the prophet Samuel, choice of a king (statism or nationalism) over God is to choose enslavement to the king (state or nation), with its over- taxation, perpetual greed-driven wars and sanctions, loss of children to the system, etc. (I Samuel 8). "We bow down before the sun and moon, but it is only because something in us unregenerate finds satisfaction in such an attitude, not because there is anything inherently reverential in the institution worshiped." (Randolph Bourne)

Many people have told me that my choices of action cannot stop the problems; that I am simply wasting my time and effort, yet my choices or actions have stopped the problems in me. “To say no to evil is perfect revolution” (Gandhi). Since my first imprisonment for civil disobedience in protest (April 16, 2009), more than 200, 000,000 humans have been genocided due to U.S. fiscal, military and political policies and sanctions. By virtue of my 56+ years of citizenship, I share in responsibility for all of those brutal and utterly needless murders, yet I am no longer complicit in them –nor will I choose to be...even again!

No matter who you are or what you believe I love you; I absolutely adore you; I believe in you! This is only possible due to God’s great, first love of us, in Jesus the Christ. Before the foundation of the world, Jesus died for us; the righteous for the unrighteous thus reconciling everything and everyone to God – as if we’d never chosen to abandon him in the first place. Please join me in self –death (in and through Jesus), that together we might share life with our fellow human beings; and not death!

“If they come for the innocents and don’t walk over my dead body, then cursed be my religion.”

Blessings,

Norman

Letter #17

Aloneness and Intimacy with God; Reality and Relationships

Dear friends,

“We are born and someday we’ll die...to some degree alone, what if our aloneness isn’t a tragedy? What if our aloneness is what allows us to speak the truth without being afraid? What if our aloneness is what allows us to adventure; to experience the world as a dynamic presence – as a changeable, interactive thing?”

– Rachel Corrie

Our culture is said to be the most schizophrenic, paranoid, lonely society in the history of mankind. It seems to be a fair statement. Being a relationally dysfunctional culture, our thinking surely tends to be disjointed; we tend to be wary of most everything and everybody; and because we are a thing – based culture we have among the highest rates of depression, suicide, and psychological issues in the world. Strikingly, within the American Christian culture the statistics are relatively the same and, many years, the divorce rate is higher...sigh!

God is a God of love, not of fear, and has since the dawn of creation, offered deep intimacy to everyone –on an equal basis. Shared intimacy is something that must be nurtured. It is not something that just occurs; it must be nurtured! As the initial thrill of the romantic component begins to fade (due to its being based in self-service and ego gratification), the real work of intimacy (the conflict resolution) must begin. The process is the same, whether the intimacy is with God or with another human. Only our cultural viewpoint seems to be one that says

that true love is effortless; if it involves effort, it cannot be true or genuine! So when the ethereal high of romance begins to ebb, we tend to look for another God or person; one who will satisfy us without our having to even think of having to participate –except as it will satisfy us.

“Unsatisfying relationships are an epidemic in our society and are the cause of all problems; whether between us and God or us and another person. Disconnectedness is always the source of the problem.” In the field of human relationships, William Glasser, the genius behind “reality therapy” has much to say on this subject and as a leader in his field is a man worth listening to. His work confirms what God has spoken about man’s dysfunctional ways of relating, since man chose to pursue self, over pursuit of God. At the deepest level, our disconnectedness with God is the source of all relational disconnectedness.

Intimacy with God (as with humans) is quite simple; though simple does not imply easy, as time alone with God and conflict resolution in our relationship with him are necessary components. With human relationships we have another physical being to interact with, so time alone with another person, at least during the romantic stage, is a fairly simple matter. We are not taught much about being alone with God. We do not tend to see God as being real, in the sense that we see another human as being real. So we content ourselves with trying to develop a love of the Bible or with other tangibles of institutional religion; all things we can touch and see. Yet God is real; more real than anything we think of real; more real than our skin or our breath.

My first personal encounter with God occurred nearly 53 years ago, when I was seven. God came into my room and we talked. God came because my heart ached and called out for

help. As a child I hadn't yet been tainted by the lies of those who would teach that God no longer chooses to talk with us, directly. Sadly, later I bought this lie, for a good many years. Today I have no concern for what others may think, regarding my personal intimacy with God. God not only talks; God also laughs and sings and dances and gets excited about all things relational. To God, all of creation is relational. Amazingly and contrary to common perception, God is not just a he. God is also a she. All words for God's spirit (essence) in the Hebrew language are feminine nouns which, in the New Testament were neutered, as they seemed to intimidate the paternalistic translators, among all others who saw themselves as the religious elite.

Of a truth, in and of myself, I have no reason to believe myself to be special enough for God to take his time with me. Without God, I am a vicious, vile, ruthless sinner; the worst of sinners. God just happens to love sinners. If I am allowed intimacy with God, surely you will be a shoo-in.

The Scripture is quite clear when it says that 'God will be found by the one who genuinely and wholeheartedly seeks for God.' It also says that 'the fool will not err in their search for God.' Jesus said that 'children can lead us to God.' God's simple invitation: "Be still and know that I am God...."

Beside unbelief, we don't seem to want to be still, waiting for God. We don't mind being still while waiting all Thanksgiving night for good Christmas bargains, or for our favorite meal to cook, or for our birthday party; for our human lover....Maybe we don't really want God?

Over the years many people have asked me for proof of my intimacy with God. What I offer seldom seems to be proof enough, yet I offer the same to you. In my past, I hated most

everyone; today, I hate no one. In fact, I would freely give my life for the best or worst persons alive...no questions asked. In my past, I was a heartless, ruthless man; today I live to serve both God and man; particularly those considered to be the least of the least; those labeled as worthless. In my past, I cosigned the violence of war; today, I choose nonviolence and would gladly destroy any weapon of war, though no person. In my past, I was given to our cultural apathy and thus cosigned our society's mechanisms of violence, racism, bigotry and poverty-production; today, I am utterly intent on investing the balance of my life with the victims of those crimes; whether in prison, the ghetto, the reservation or refugee camp; though never again with the slave makers. I will do whatever God asks of me—no matter the cost.

It is in my alone time that I have discovered the reality behind such admonitions as, "Oh taste and see that the LORD is good." God is tangible; as our faith is tangible; as "substance" and "evidence" prove existence. It is in my alone time that I have discovered the grandeur of such truths as "the heavens are telling the glories of God and the wonders of his love." God is revealed as living and vibrant, in all of creation. It is in my alone time that I have more fully come to see, hear, smell, taste and touch the fruit of God's existence—his love, joy, peace, etc. God is patiently waiting for each of us to come "boldly" into their majestic presence—for intimacy, deep and full and utterly satisfying intimacy.

It is in my alone time that God teaches me true and lasting conflict resolution, necessary to having, maintaining and keeping intimately satisfying relationships with both God and other humans. He is teaching me the skills needed to become a person "who is jealous of none; who is a fount of mercy; who is without egotism; who is selfless; who treats alike cold and

heat; happiness and misery; who is ever forgiving; who is always contented; whose resolutions are firm; who has dedicated mind and soul to God; who causes no dread; who is not afraid of others; who is free from exaltation, sorrow and fear; who is pure; who is versed in action yet remains unaffected by it; who renounces all fruit, good and bad; who treats friend and foe alike; who is untouched by respect or disrespect; who is not puffed up by praise; who does not go under when people speak ill of him; who loves silence and solitude; and who has a disciplined reason.” (Gandhi)

How did I come to find this satisfaction in being alone, both with myself and with God? It all started with my learning a most hard lesson, described most aptly by my favorite author/poet/writer:

“Empty Hands” by Martha Snell Nicholson

“One by one he took them from me;
all those things I valued most
until I was empty handed;
every glittering toy was lost.
And I walked life’s highway grieving,
in my rags and poverty
‘til I heard his voice inviting,
“lift your empty hands to me.”
So I raised my hands to heaven
and he filled me with a store
Of his own transcendent riches,
‘til they could contain no more.
Then at last I comprehended,

with my stupid mind and dull
That God could not pour his riches
into hands already full!”

Blessings,

Norman

Letter #18

Meditation On Great Suffering and the Way of Love

Dear friends,

“Since Jesus went through everything you're going through and more, learn to think like him. Think of your sufferings as a weaning from that old sinful habit of always expecting to get your own way. Then you'll be able to live out your days free to pursue what God wants instead of being tyrannized by what you want.” I Peter 4:1 (The Message)

A man named Henry Miller very perceptively said, “The whole meaning of life is contained in the word suffering.” Today, it is my belief that if we live in the fullness of his design for us, God created us to be the crown of his creation, the highest showpiece of his infinite glory and beauty; fitting and most beautiful and eternal companion; formed in the very image of all that is love. Yet, like the Satan, we gave it all up to pursue self, for the sake of self, alone.

It has perpetually baffled me that, after making our choice to pursue self (as opposed to God), we all go through our moments of blame, like Adam blaming Eve and Eve blaming the Satan. We like to blame them all, plus our parents, etc. We seem to love to imitate the words “in Adam,” meaning that it's Adam's fault or responsibility that we chose to pursue self over God. We content ourselves with overlooking the fact that besides being a man's name, “Adam” simply means mankind, humanity. Thus, the larger context of “in Adam” seems to be God's awareness that all humanity will abuse our nearly limitless freedom by choosing to pursue self over God.

In choosing to pursue self over God, we chose to become the bride to unspeakable horror, rather than to be wed to God...hence suffering! Returning to the pursuit of God, through Jesus the Christ, is a return to "perfect love," which removes the horror (torment) though not the suffering. Suffering seems to be, in the finite world, a contortion of what pain must have been in the infinite world of creation—a sensory stimulus gone mad. C. S. Lewis stated this well as a simple function of physics. "If the first humans had placed and kept their hand in the fire, their hand would have been burned. Perfection would have excluded this possibility through innocent awareness—the first people might have enjoyed the warmth of fire but would not have left their hand in the fire to be burned. Thus, in the finite world of sin, our pain (suffering) would be a pathway to peace, a roadway back to God and to his original design for us."

This seems to be the essence of I Peter 4:1. The applicable question seems not so much will we suffer, but rather, will we allow Jesus example to teach us how to suffer well. In life, everyone is given a measure of suffering; some more than others; not always fairly distributed (the nature of sin and its consequences). We are not asked to like the pain involved but we are invited to accept each 'tribulation as a friend.' In a day of mass overuse of pain medications, this concept seems quite absurd to most. But then most will not choose deep intimacy in relationship with Jesus, as the cost of deep intimacy seems too dear. God has never removed his offer of deep personal intimacy with us. To some, such an offer seems too good to be true, as our society doesn't tend to be relational, let alone intimate. Others have bought the modern, institutional religious teaching that God no longer speaks directly to the individual, so they try to find intimacy through loving the Bible, creeds, through doctrines, institutions, etc. Still others

who desire such intimacy fall into two main categories: those who are willing to pay the inherent price to become intimate, and those who are not willing to pay its price.

At one time Jesus had 140 disciples who said they wanted to pay the price for deep intimacy. He sent them out to preach the gospel of the kingdom; 70 pairs, endowing them with power to cast out devils, heal the sick, raise the dead, etc. They returned to Jesus pumped and primed for the next step, the grander adventure. Jesus next step was to ask them to abandon all houses, lands, businesses, families, etc. to follow him on his journey to the cross. Never once did he intimate that these precious ones, places and things would be left unattended. He simply asked them to consider that which was more expedient – deep intimacy, relationship out of which the miraculous could and would flow. They chose to return to those people and things that owned their hearts. Jesus looked at the remaining twelve, focusing on Peter, and asked, “Will you leave too?” Peter, awed and inspired by offered intimacy replied, “Where would we go? It is you who possesses the words that give life.” The twelve saw this and were not about to let their lifetime hope of deep intimacy with God pass them by. They knew that to walk with Jesus meant that their families, lands and businesses would somehow be sustained. They did not know exactly how this could or would be so, but they knew that it would be so!

Paradoxically, Jesus would later ask the twelve to follow him to their own crosses; the ultimate sacrifice of self, based in found and experienced intimacy. One would choose at least temporary escape. Eleven would and did choose to give up their lives, their entire beings (in this world) to grow in this offered intimacy with God. Ironically, Jesus would look Peter (among the others) in the eyes many more times, testing his

mettle. In one particular time he likely shocked and perplexed Peter, as he said something like “while others see through earthly eyes just what they want to see, you see things that don't die...upon this rock, this kind of sight, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.”

Jesus' offer of great intimacy, intimacy of unfathomable depth remains still today. He invites everyone, asking us to choose how much of this intimacy—of God—we want. His word says that we will get what we choose: “Whatever you tie up in this life will be tied up in the next.” This is an old rabbinical tradition, having to do with relational intimacy. As one rabbi explained, “Those whose deepest desire is for great depth of intimacy with their rabbi, will walk so close to him that whatever he walks through will get on them.” Jesus is not proud, as we are proud. He says “Whosoever will may come.” But to those who want it all, he says, “If anyone will come after me (all the way into limitless intimacy), let that one deny himself/herself—every day—then pick up your cross (which I've designed and prepared just for you) and follow me.” He was asking us to die, as he died—a slow, agonizing, purposeful death—a process filled with much suffering!

Jesus' walk to the cross was spiritual, for sure. He transcended eternity and chose to limit himself to our level, so that he could offer us his utterly undeserved grace, love and mercy. He was offering everyone a way back to the intimacy that was originally ours, at creation. But Jesus' death was political! He offered no illusion as to who he was. He told everyone just who he was... God become man. He showed everyone his credentials... he healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, extended minimal food into a buffet, turned water into wine... he even did the ultimate... he walked up to the dead and spoke life back into them. To the preacher and teachers he said, “I'm

your creator!” To the Caesars he said, “I’m the king of kings; the top dog, Mr. Big, the Eternal God. The local caesars killed Jesus because he was a political threat. Sure, they had no idea what they were doing, they were simply attempting to save their own necks. The same with the preachers and teachers. They weren’t interested in yet another “messiah” figure causing them political problems, taking away their perceived power. Jesus’ death was political! Yet his resurrection was all encompassing; it showed that nothing could thwart him or his plans. He was and forever will be...our loving creator and God; passionately and endlessly existing to have intimacy with his creation, all of his creation, though he has special plans for “his bride.”

It is my deepest desire to have and to experience all that Jesus offers. The cross he chooses for each of us is different yet always means death to self. Which Always means suffering. I came to Jesus as a broken man. It’s how we all come to him. After walking with him for nearly 53 years I’m still a broken man, with an embarrassingly ugly history behind me. It’s been the suffering that has shaped and molded me. As I get closer to my ultimate death to self, my entrance into Jesus’ perfect eternity, the suffering of each new moment on his chosen cross for me becomes more intense, more severe. Rather than seeing this as a hindrance, these days I see it as a necessity; as an indication of his great love for me. He wouldn’t ask the unnecessary or something he hasn’t endured on my behalf. He is tenderly wooing me deeper into his love, his light, his glory. He wants to do the same with you. Will you allow this to be?

“We are now broken things. But remember who he has used broken things: the broken pitchers of Gideon’s little army, the broken roof through which the paralyzed man was lowered to

be healed, the broken alabaster box which shed its fragrance abroad and the broken body of our savior.

Let us ask him to take our broken hearts and to press upon them further suffering to give us a poignant realization of the suffering of the world. Let us ask him to show us the endless, hopeless river of lost souls. This will break our hearts anew, but when it happens, God can use us at last.”

– Martha Snell Nicholson.

Blessings,

Norman

Letter #19

U.S. Prisons, Facts, Figures and Why I'm Here

Dear friends,

“I would rather a thousand times be a free man in jail than to be a sycophant and coward in the streets.”

–Eugene V. Debs

For anyone truly interested in understanding the reasons behind my choices of actions which have led me to prison, please consider reading two great books; *The People's History of the United States of America* by Howard Zinn and *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander. Both are written from the public record, by people willing to put their lives on the line, for the right reasons. Howard Zinn's book is the sought after history text for both high schools and colleges, by independent thinkers. Michelle Alexander's book is an updated work on former United States attorney general Ramsey Clark's premises of gross corruption within the so-called criminal justice and prison systems. I did my homework, prior to reading these two monumental works. If you deeply care about your fellow man, you will be deeply affected and moved by reading them.

Amazingly, during my nearly 3 ½ years of conscience driven imprisonment, the ability to leave, in short order, remains my option. All I have to do is to promise not to break the law in my protests. Our society seems to love smooth operations; even if smooth operation covers up tyranny- unconstitutional wars, nuclear extension, fiscal-military-political policy/sanction-driven genocide of 200,000+ humans... every day, corrupt justice, racism/bigotry, mass impoverishment of humanity, etc. Our societal love of smooth operation is its way

of diabolically making it okay to be apathetically blind to the inhumanity of tyranny and deaf to the screams of the victims of tyranny. I will not be apathetic – deaf; blind; indifferent! To me, it is an obligation of love for God and humanity that drives me to pour sand into the well-oiled gears of our society's smooth operation. Our own society's machinery may lock me behind bars, doors and walls; and may in time silence or kill me (as it daily silences and kills humans), yet my voice (among the many) will still be heard; no one, nor any society, nor it's evil mechanisms can hurt me....period! Yet we've had this discussion from many different angles. Today, I wish to discuss what prison is like. Fasten your seat belts.

Though prison does have its miniscule, token rehabilitation component (for public pacification) prison is simply and purely a purposefully integral part of our society's love of extreme violence, racism, bigotry, and poverty-production. Prison is a mechanism of murder, both, figuratively and literally. I've personally observed it all: murder, rape, brutal beatings, torture, racism, gender-ethnic-religious based bigotry and I've heard excuses from all levels –wardens, assistant wardens, supervisors, gang task force personnel, inmate support groups, Justice and Mercy Inc., the PA Prison Society, the apathetic public, preachers and teachers...and sadly, from inmates ...sigh!

During my 33 months of total incarceration in the Lancaster County Prison, representatives from justice and Mercy Inc. and the PA Prison Society were sent to me as a result of my choices to personally confront said issues. I remain thankful for the small steps they were willing to take, yet finally cut off direct communication with them, for their blatant refusals to interview the 20-30+ inmate witnesses to severe extreme issues (also ignored by prison staff supervisors, up through and

including the wardens). I was told by high-placed officials of both agencies that they needed to only take smaller steps. From prison staff and supervisor persons, I received threats of beatings and death. Ironically, as prison staff and supervisory staff read my statements and related writings, many returned for quality conversations and even friendship. Their main fears had been criminal prosecution. As they found out that my confrontations were based in love and respect for both inmates and their dignity and integrity, rather than for retribution in an utterly broken justice system, opportunities for quality relationships opened up. (Note: I will witness against none in the a U.S. criminal court, no matter the infraction; simply because the system is irretrievably broken, due to its purposeful, greed-driven corruption).

Many tell me that I am somewhat naïve or blind to the perceived fact that most, if not all inmates deserve or need to be imprisoned. To me, this is merely media-based, political deception. Demographically, 30% of all inmates have been extorted into accepting plea bargains for crimes which they did not commit. Blue collar crime has declined over the last 40 years, yet blue collar prison bed population has increased 8+ times, in that same 40 years. Blue collar offenders fill 80%+ of all U.S. prison beds, yet commit less than 20% of all U.S. crime. White collar offenders commit 80%+ of all U.S. crime, yet fill less than 20% of its prison bed space. As Howard Zinn says, we imprison the petty criminals and leave the master criminals free to run the country! Americans watch the T.V. crime shows and go to bed with a feeling of safety and well-being. You are being purposefully lied to, my friends...by the very ones who want to pacify you long enough to steal you blind and then who will simply leave you to die....sigh! (Note: the USA houses in excess of 25% of the world's domestic prison population; all in a country whose population base is

less than 4.5% of the world's total population).

The state prison system has proven itself to be little different from the county prison system. We have more freedom of movement and a few more semblances of outside life, yet it is still a part of America's mechanism of murder; fueled by our society's love of extreme violation, racism, bigotry and poverty-production....

If God's Israel and Judah did not escape his warnings to remember his house, his desires, while they took care of their own, will we not reap the consequences which his prophet decreed from them and God's word of consequence was this: "You plant much and reap little; you eat and drink yet you are not filled; you put on clothes yet cannot seem to get warm; you earn money and keep it in a bag filled with holes; you expected much yet it amounted too little; and what little made it home with you, I simply blew away" (Haggai).

Blessings,

Norman

Letter #20

Driven from the Barren Existence of Church Back to Humanity and then To God

Dear friends,

“Many waters cannot quench love; floods cannot drown it.”
–Song of Songs 8:7

Love is amazing! God is love’s source and essence.

Without God, there would be no love.

Fear is love’s antithesis; God is neither fear’s source nor its essence. The Satan’s and man’s pursuit of self over God is fear’s source and essence

There is no fear in love! Neither is there love in fear. Yet love can exist in the dwelling place of fear.

Prison is a dwelling place of fear. In fact, prisons came into being because of fear and remain in operation because of fear. It is because of love that I have no fear, as I have nothing within me willing to give torment the time of day. I’m not here to ask that anyone to seek to change anything on the outside. If drugs are their issue (low level drug offense brings 80% of all inmates to prison), I don’t ask them to stop using. Likewise, if murder is their issue, I don’t ask them to stop murdering. What I am here to do (which stems from who I am in Christ Jesus) is to model the life of love; of God, in front of them. There is no shortage of people of those who come with inquiries. Most are simply curious yet some are serious. The curious ones come, most often trying to convince me that I should engage in the institutional church offerings of the prison. Most seem to be

looking for the “vending machine” God, the ‘instant gratification God; the ‘name it and claim it’ God; the ‘I want to change painlessly effortlessly and with no consequences’ God, they seem shocked when I tell them that I don’t know those gods. The serious ones come to hang around; they poke and prod, testing my mettle; they turn on the fire, testing my temper. They ask a lot of questions and reveal their demons, to see if they can scare me away. When I don’t seem to flinch or budge, many try to see if they can scare me away. When I don’t seem to flinch or budge, many begin to pour out their aching and broken hearts, searching for answers. They are most often shocked when I tell them that I can introduce them to the answer (Jesus); that I am simply capable of walking along side of them, in quality relationships, as they come to know the answer (Jesus) on a personal and intimate basis. Most think that I’m going to invite them to church, which most have tried, sadly, to their distaste. Few have been offered quality relationships and again ask lots of questions. Regularly, these questions open the door, and together we take a few steps, exploring quality relationship, which regularly includes discussion of the life available in Jesus – the most quality of life.

For too many years, we have lived under the illusion that all we had to do was to show some 3, 4, or 5 step plan of salvation and, if they accepted the Jesus of our particular plan, everything would simply turn out rosy. Sadly, the resultant discipleship process often had no personalized relational component to it, either with Jesus or with us. Most often, people were invited to our institutional church where it was hoped that discipleship would occur. Today, our churches are full of people who have relationships with church – the Bible, theology, doctrine, Sunday school, prayer meetings, etc. How many of us intimately know Jesus? How many of us intimately

know each other? This is a huge issue – lots of people knowing Jesus and others, without seeming to have a clue how to become intimate with Jesus and others. Our churches have become worlds of strangers!

It was the emptiness; this barren existence of church; this intimacy-less world of strangers, that drove me back to humanity, to learn intimacy with man. It is the world of developing deep intimacy with others that drives me back to God – for greater depth. We cannot truly have one without the other!

It would be impossible for me to describe my deep intimacy with God, because it's mine. All I can do is to encourage you to get alone and not to leave the aloneness until God shows up, Ironically, God is already there. It is we who are invited to allow God's spirit to draw us into their heart of love, where God will reveal to us exactly who we are and who we were designed to be. Deep intimacy with God is something made available to us when we invite Jesus into our lives. It is we who get to choose the depth, as before the foundation of the world. God chose to give us all of who God is. "God will be found by those who genuinely seek God...."

With regard to human intimacy, I am able to share what I've learned. God is its source; and the one who desires the deepest human intimacy will first know it with God. The Holy Spirit gives guidance each step of the way. First, I was led back to the scripture, where I mostly read, listening to God's wisdom – which always comes through Jesus' eyes. Second, I was led to a community of other intimacy seekers – the Portland Rescue Mission (Portland, Oregon). Together, we followed the Holy Spirit's leading into greater intimacy with each other, which in turn led to developing greater intimacy without clientele. With

Holy Spirit guidance we switched from “rules-based” ministry to “grace-based” ministry creating a “safe, healing environment.” We simply disposed of the rules which made our jobs easier, yet which were a hindrance to effective, intimate, relational ministry. Third, the Holy Spirit led me back to the teachings of William Glasser, whose “reality therapy” is based in accepting personal responsibility for all life and relational issues and relationships. Fourth, the Holy Spirit has led me to form quality, intimate relationships with spiritual mentors. Each occasion of change in mentors occasioned greater relational growth. Fifth, the Holy Spirit has led me to broaden my practical, personal, and ministry intimacy relationships, by leading me to Lancaster, PA’s Water Street Rescue Mission (for three years), then on to my investment here in prison. As I walk with others here, in quality relationship, we are both given new opportunities for growth and the serious ones will come to know, through experience of intimacy, this one who alone can free them from their chosen bondages; changing them from the inside out!

My most valued practical tools, gained along the way are:

1. God’s word, including the Apocryphal and Deutero Canonical books. With Holy Spirit guidance I read through the many, varied translations, seeking to see the whole of scripture through the eyes of Jesus. I seek to study only what the Holy Spirit leads me to; setting aside everything I might think I already know
2. Control Theory by William Glasser (reissued as Choice Theory, for the lay reader).
3. Books recommended by spiritual mentors. These stretch my brain and heart.

4. The six principles of “a safe, healing environment,” which were formulated during my time with the Portland rescue mission.

A safe, healing environment is one in which:

- -Attention and effort are given to fostering personal choice and responsibility for growth and life through relationship. (...Not where attention and effort are given to maintaining conformity to rules and external performance)
- -People seek and experience personal forgiveness, reconciliation, and redemption through difficult circumstance (...Not where people hold secrets from one another and harbor resentments through difficult circumstances).
- -People can give full, authentic expression both to their successes in life and faith and to their failures and the consequent effect of those choices... (...not where people speak only of their successes, what they accomplish, what they are achieving and fear being exposed for their weaknesses and failures).
- -People are encouraged to accept personal responsibility for their growth, bringing them to complete and personal responsibility for all life choices. (...Not where people do only what they are told to do, do nothing at all, or do what they want regardless of what others think or say).
- -People practice complete accountability, without receiving judgment or receiving or being shown partiality which in turn brings healing, change, and inner transformation. (...Not where people do only what is observed and on the surface, according to the direction of the authority over

them, bringing internal stagnation and external conformity)

- -People embrace the weakness and brokenness existing in each of us, all of us being equally sinful before a Holy God. (...Not where people are concerned only with the righteous, justness, and fairness of what is due)

—Charles Romanic

“Go after a life of love as if your whole life depended on it...because it does.” – 1 Corinthians 14:1 (The Message)

Blessings,

Norman

Letter #21

My Journey of Nonviolent Love and Activism With Christians and Muslims

Dear friends,

“For two thousand years the world has been squabbling over the dead body of Christ. The Christians themselves will admit that God sent his son, a living Christ, to redeem the world. He didn’t send a corpse to fight over. In effect, however, that is what the Christian world has done. It has welcomed every excuse to fight in the name of Christ who came to bring peace on earth. There can be no end of this repetitious pattern until each and every one of us becomes as Christ, until belief and devotion transforms our words into deeds and thus make myth reality,” –Henry Miller

A few weeks prior to my 2009 imprisonment, while stopping at a local restaurant for lunch, two mothers sat at an outside table, selling Girl Scout cookies. After declining their offer, they asked if I would be willing to buy one or more boxes to be sent to soldiers fighting in Iraq. Again declining, I was asked why I would choose not to support our troops. My reply was that I chose not to support anything military. To which one woman replied, “My brother is a career special forces soldier, you’d better hope that he doesn’t come home and blow your house up!” As I ate my lunch that day, I did so under a thick cloud of sadness. I prayed for this woman and for her family. I wished that she could have looked into my heart, to see that it had not been all that long since I have begun my internal transformation from her basic premise and position to that of nonviolence. She was still angry when I exited the restaurant.

A week or two prior, I stopped by a kiosk to have a cap embroidered with the words, “we will not be silent,” in Arabic. The owner asked what it was that I would not be silent about. My reply, “I am sorry for the awful destructiveness to the peoples of the world, caused by America’s love of extreme violence, racism, bigotry, and poverty-production.” This started a dialogue that was the basis for a still-growing friendship. My friend is a Muslim cleric; a Turkish immigrant. At first, his family and friends cautioned him to be careful of discussion with me, as I might be a C.I.A, or Homeland Security plant. This caused me to weep. In time, he told me that God showed him that I was safe; genuine.

What a stark contrast in responses. People of our own culture seem all too ready to go to violence, out of ignorance, while people of the more relational cultures continue to look for relational solutions to conflict, in spite of seemingly overwhelming odds. Ironically both scenarios (more so the negative ones) have been duplicated many times over, on my journey of nonviolent love and activism.

“Men talk about Holy Wars...there are none, war is the trade of unholy savages and barbarians...I believe that. Nations have been pitted against nations long enough in hatred, strife and warfare. I believe there ought to be a bond of unity between all of these nations. I believe that the human race consists of one great family. I love the people of this country. But I don’t hate a human being because he happens to be born in some other country. Why should I? Like myself, he is the image of his creator. I would infinitely rather serve him and love him than to hate him and kill him...” (Eugene V. Debs)

What powerful words! Would that we would all choose to give up our petty insecurities and our ignorance, that we could see

others for what they truly are – our precious sisters and brothers!

Our culture seems intent to buy the wholesale lie that there is some extremist Muslim plot against us. Among the so-called Christian community, this lie is magnified. And yet, it is a lie! Sure, there are such Muslim extremism, their own records bear this out. Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda are, and always have been, a part of the C.I.A. The average American would rather believe the lie, while the more informed peoples of the world know the truth and shake their heads, in disbelief. Demographically, less than 3% of all Americans intimately know a Muslim, less have taken the time to read the Koran. This is sad. Most sadly, I've had spiritual mentors distance or leave relationship with me, simply because I remained firm on my request that they read the Koran before we continue our dialogue on the world of Islam.

It is hard to watch the effects of our society's apathy. Sadly, it affects the prison population, as well. A good many of my fellow inmates and staff, especially those among minorities, are aware that the system is absolutely corrupt; based in violence, racism, bigotry, and poverty-production. Yet choose to believe that there is little that they can do or seem to content themselves to play the system for what they can get out of it. Sadly, the bulk of all discussions regarding war and military seem to revolve around fascination with the possibilities of being able to interact with advanced weaponry and with the prospect of being given a free ride to get away with killing another human being...sigh! This one most assuredly causes me to shudder and drives me back to God for wisdom.

“I am opposed to killing...I am opposed to war. I am perfectly willing on that account to be branded as a traitor. And if it is a crime under the American Law to be opposed to bloodshed, I am perfectly willing to be branded as a criminal and to end my days in a prison cell....(Eugene V. Debs)

Blessings,

Norman

Letter #22

Concluding Question: In My Truth-telling, is there Doom and Gloom or Hope and Love?

Dear friends,

“[It is] a movement that is an integral part of rescuing this country from its old, expensive patters of elitism, racism, and violence...the first problem for all of us, men and women, is not to learn, but to unlearn. We are filled with the popular wisdom of several centuries just past, and we are terrified to give it up. Patriotism means obedience; age means wisdom, woman mean submission, black means inferior. These are preconceptions imbedded so deeply in our thinking that we mostly may now know that they are there.” (Gloria Steinem)

A sad fact of our culture revolves around our society’s gross misconception that all correct and valuable knowledge and wisdom is “the province of white males.” While it is likely that most will judge this negative assessment to be simply not true, this would be a judgment based in gross ignorance. The public record proves otherwise. It must be remembered that most Americans, especially most fundamentalist and dominionist Christians (by survey) believe that the constitution of the United States of America was/is a great and beneficent document. Most caring Americans do not know that it labeled blacks a being merely 60% human (and then 40% animal) and it gave any white male the right to own a black human (man, woman, or child) and gave them unlimited latitude as to their treatment. How can such a document be called good, no matter what else it might contain? Nor do they know that it only applied to propertied white men (who owned \$300.00 or more in real estate) and to no minority or woman. Thus, it only

applied to roughly 15% of the population. Nor do they know that uniform commercial code usurped most of its meat, by the early 1920's; and that the three patriot acts and two homeland security laws usurped what few scraps may have remained in existence (read 'em and weep). Yet still we daily hear of the U.S. constitution and of some great impact it is having on some vital component of our society. Sadly, it's all a monstrous lie! Yet, I never ask anyone to believe what I say. Do your own homework; then you decide for yourself.

Quite regularly, I am asked if I have a death wish. This one perplexes me, somewhat, though I do realize that my revelations have caused them some discomfort. I've actually had people tell me they know there is truth in what I'm saying but they don't like having their peace disturbed...sigh! Quite frankly, I have a gigantic, hope filled, life wish! Our creator desires for us to return to love and to genuine concern for each other. There is no limit to our Creator's desire to bring us healing, which includes healing for all we have polluted and destroyed. Others ask how it is that I'm willing to be the purveyor of such "doom and gloom." This one greatly perplexes me! How is doing one's homework and telling the truth an issue of "doom and gloom?" Especially when the truth-telling includes hope, based solely in the love of our creator, redeemer and grand lover of our hearts?

The bottom line with me is this: Though most of you who are reading this believe that the United States of America is still alive. I believe that she has died and has simply not, as yet, been buried. Besides, like the Biblical prophets (who had meticulously done their homework), I too trust, absolutely, in God's perpetual wishes for resurrection. It is God's desire to raise the dead to new life... period!

Resurrection only occurs with genuine repentance, which only occurs when we deal in reality, rather than in make-believe. Only when we acknowledge the truth, can we turn away from our evil ways and seek God's desire for us.....which is always for life in abundance. Maybe it's not too late for the U.S. to be resurrected...this is my hope, to be sure! Yet here's the hard part, for me- in the mid-1990s God opened my eyes to see his warrior angels amassing in our streets. They were simply standing guard, with their swords sheathed. For the last few years they continue to amass; now, with their fiery swords drawn. At first, I wondered if they were here to destroy. God showed me that they were here holding back our imminent destruction, at the hands of our own military. He has also led me, repeatedly, back to his admonition to Habakkuk."...Keep your eyes open, for I'm going to do something that you would not believe, if you hadn't seen it."

When I first came to prison (2009) for my amped up protestations, my longest term spiritual mentor came to visit. He told me that he believed me to be insane. My response to him was this, "If I am insane, I am surely pathetic." A good number of others have since concurred with his assessment of me. My response remains the same. We all get to choose what we believe. I have not changed my mind, regarding what I believe. This is too serious a matter to play with...

Blessings,

Norm