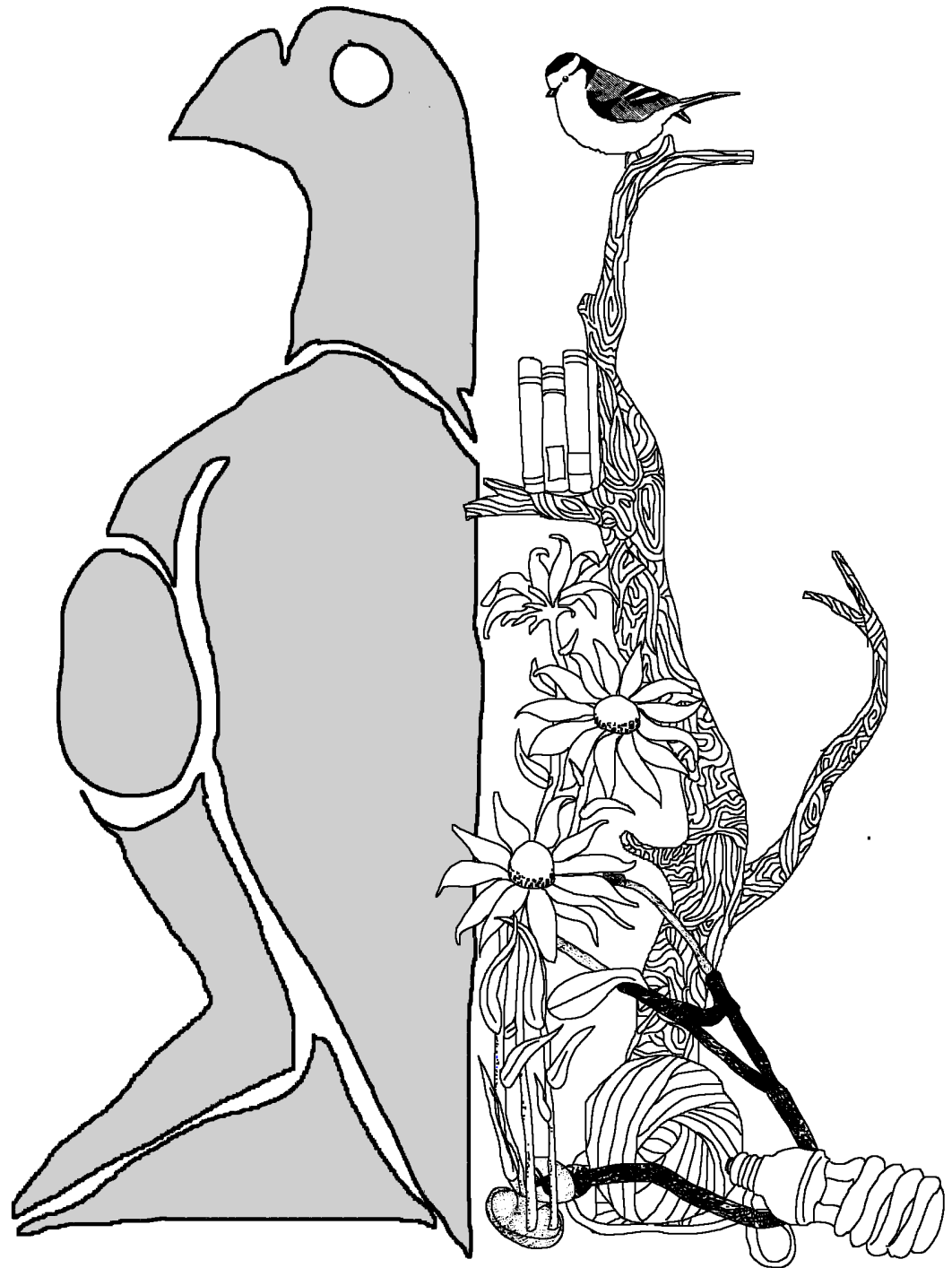


An "Alternative" Annual Report

Fighting the World's Fight. Vol. I, with God



Fighting the World's Fight, with God...

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Explanatory Note: On Fighting the World's Fight, with God

What does it mean to “fight the world’s fight?”

When I was an adolescent in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, I met a Buddhist monk with clear eyes and gentle manners and an American accent that I could hardly untangle but I would later learn was from “the South”. His name was Kittisaro and he greeted me kindly, and I heard he was a Rhodes Scholar, which stuck in my mind, and I left the room thinking “wow, that man was real” and then I forgot about him, more or less, for a good ten years. Like many other young people, I formally encountered the Rhodes Scholarships through a public presentation - in my case at the University of Cape Town. A man in a suit with shining eyes spoke passionately about how this was a scholarship for those who wanted to make the world not only better, but safer, more just, more equitable, less segregated, more wise. I briefly remembered Kittisaro, and that he too had been a Rhodes Scholar, and it made me trust the scholarship more. Despite my wariness of being affiliated with a man I understood to be a diamond-mongering-land-thieving- scoundrel, the idea of “fighting the world’s fight” continued to resonate. It motivated me in due course, to apply, to be welcomed into the community, to pass through Oxford deeply enriched, and then to leave, marked by encounters with others in whose eyes I saw the same passion and in whose actions I found great inspiration.

In 2009 when I came up the Trust had recently suffered a blow to its finances, and many people were rightly concerned. We discussed what to do about it often while I was there. All of us assumed a sense of responsibility towards its sustenance. We gave whatever and whenever we could - many of us (in particular from the not-so-wealthy-world) balancing these donations against other needs we saw more pressing: the education of extended family members, NGOs we were already committed to, development projects already underway, emergency relief for the natural disasters that struck that year, the needs of friends, and friends-of-friends. We all recognized our part in a global community, and we took that seriously: the Rhodes scholarship was an important brick in its construction (for some, perhaps, a whole room in the great monument of life) but it never stood alone. No man, (or woman, or entity) is an island, as Donne once wrote.

At the beginning of 2015 I returned to California after two years of fieldwork predominantly in Angola. My departmental mailbox was overflowing - almost entirely with solicitations from the Trust asking for my (non-existent) money. They were nice solicitations - beautifully done, and it was interesting to see who’d become rich and/or generous (special symbols for big/repeated donations) - but after a long period in a country where way too many children die of preventable diseases, the pamphlets made me feel sick to my stomach. Soon after, I received an email telling me that as South Africans we were losing the “boat race” of donations to the Trust, and I confess it tripped a switch and made me furious. I went for a run to cool off, but it didn't work, and on my return I sent an angry email to the rhodeslist (rhodes@maillist.ox.ac.uk) asking for a discussion of what it meant to “fight the world’s fight” and protesting the implicit measure of success with wealth.



“I would like to acknowledge the school teachers amongst us who year after year commit their energies to ensuring the stability and continuity of citizens across the world” I wrote in my original email. “I would like us to appreciate those who are on the front-lines of the ebola outbreak, who are giving their all addressing the wrenching power of ISIS, who are trying to get back the missing Nigerian students, or to get justice for those who were assassinated in Mexico or are working to address the ever-stronger reach of climate change. Who was there at Ferguson? Who in our community is currently in prison for standing against injustice? Where are the nurses and the spiritual teachers and the small-business entrepreneurs? We know who gave money, but we do not know this, and it troubles me.”

The response was overwhelming: more than 120 people replied, expressing support and offering to contribute to the curation of a publication that did something to profile those in our community who commit themselves each day to the world’s fight for reasons that go deeper than remuneration. There is nothing wrong with wealth of course: but it is not the *only* thing that should get public recognition and attention in a community like ours. A long and thought-provoking conversation ensued across the internet, and in time we settled on a plan: I would shepherd the first “Alternative Report” into existence, and in future, if others wanted to take it on as a rolling project, it could continue. What you read now is the result - if and how it moves forward is up to you.

What it might mean to “fight the world’s fight” is a question with as many answers as Rhodes Scholars, both living and dead and still to be born. Nonetheless, we needed a focus, and it emerged that I was not the only one who remembered Kittisaro. His was also not the only name to be suggested in the field of religious work, and slowly a question appeared from amongst the collective: we would like to know about the Rhodes Scholars who have chosen to work with God. How to define “working with God” of course was an immediate challenge: hundreds of us feel we work with God in different ways all of the time, but a “who is the most humble/religious/observant” discussion would not have taken us very far. We therefore decided to limit the pool of enquiry into those who took a vow of some kind to commit their lives to God, who explicitly saw their way of fighting the world’s fight as being shaped by or articulated through a religious conviction that was not only personal but also vocational.

In the interviews that followed, conducted both in person and over Skype by Carrie Ryan, Rosanna Nicol and myself, we offer insight into seven people, their lives, their paths, and the place of something greater than themselves in their commitment to the world. Paul Manning did elegant illustrations that we hope shift focus away from gloss and into substance: this is an intelligent, thoughtful community and despite the visual age in which we find ourselves, we hope you will find space and time to read. Originally we planned it as magazine, on completion it looks more like a little book. If anybody would like to develop it as such, do let us know, but if not we are quite content to have it live in the world in the .pdf format.

We tried very hard to find a representative sample of scholars, and succeeded only partially: this begs important questions that resonate with the #RhodesMustFall movement now coursing



through South Africa's tertiary education sector. All but one of those profiled are white, all but one (not the same one!) come from the global North, there is no Indian Rhodes Scholar in this group, no Barbadian, no Zambian, - and surely this is not because God figures less in these constituencies! Rather, now more than ever we are asked to think of how political economy shapes life choices, and shapes vocation. We are also forced to interrogate how the Internet links us unevenly: we could "find" those with digital footprints as never before, but we are aware that many members of our community choose not to plug in but quietly, and humbly, fight the world's fight without seeking (and perhaps explicitly avoiding) any form of community recognition - or at least not from this community, Rhodes Scholars, whatever that might mean. Nonetheless, the pool from which we drew is such that even with a sample size of seven, we gain insight into the lifeworlds of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism and we see how each of these faith traditions ask that the best in us be nurtured, to the betterment of all.

In the process of the interviews, we came to realize that God and Social Justice efforts writ large were never far apart from one another - and indeed, in every single case, inseparable. Given the particular expressions of the moment against structural inequality and violence, racism and the colonization of thought, fundamentalism of both religion and market forces, it seemed particularly important to give space ample space for reflections on social justice writ large, and it raises an important question as to the spirit - not the letter - of the scholarship. Through these profiles, we hope to give examples of ways that this spirit has been embodied through lifetimes of work, spiritual practice, and reflection, and we hope that they mark the beginning of a new kind of discussion that is closely aligned with the new spirit of our times.

In our interviews, it has been our privilege to engage with these fine, reflective human beings and for each of us to find sustenance and hope in their courage, and inspiration in their actions. We are aware that what we have presented here is only the tail of the friendly elephant fundamentally committed to Good that stands at the heart of Rhodes house and links all of us together in profound ways. We know that had others explored this elephant, they might have described the trunk, or perhaps the ears of it. We hope in time that this will happen. What we present here is humbly offered as a gift to the community. It has been a real privilege to work on.

Jess Auerbach

South-Africa-at-large and St. Antony's 2009



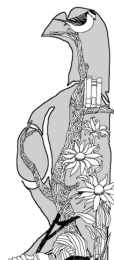
Kittisaro

(Tennessee and Worcester, 1974)

Interviewed by Jess Auerbach



When Harry Randolph Weinberg went to inform the Rhodes House Warden, Sir Edgar Williams, that he planned to take a leave of absence, put on hold his interdisciplinary thesis (on Aldous Huxley, science and mysticism), and go to study with a Buddhist monk in Thailand, he expected at least a reprimand. Originally from Tennessee, Weinberg was a young man who had found tremendous success both in academics and in wrestling. His undergraduate completed at Princeton, places reserved for him at several medical schools in the US, he had trusted for a long



time that hard work and accomplishment would lead to well-being. However, at Oxford, despite his many wonderful experiences, he became conscious of a deep feeling existential distress, and intensely curious about the causes of human suffering.

Weinberg's awareness of his internal distress lead him to seek out a "wise man" in the forests of Northeastern Thailand, and to find himself meeting the Warden and asking permission to leave. He assured the Warden that he would come back soon, asked him to hold his scholarship, did his best to demonstrate both passion for what lay ahead in Thailand and commitment to Oxford. Yet the Warden, a "shrewd judge of character" as Weinberg says in his most recent book (*Listening to the Heart: a Contemplative Journey to Engaged Buddhism*, North Atlantic Books 2014, co-authored with Thanissara) intuited otherwise. "Look Randy" he reports the Warden saying "you can come back and we'll keep your scholarship for you for two years. But I don't expect you to return, I can see you've found your vocation" (p9).

This blessing is one for which Kittisaro, as he is now known, expresses deep gratitude. He went on to be ordained as a monk in Thailand and trained in that role for some 15 years, working with a small group of Westerners who were to become some of the first to bring meditation practices into mainstream Occidental society. He explained that when he began his training, his approach to complexity in the world was to think his way through it, but that on meeting his Teacher in Thailand, Ajahn Chah, he was told that if he understood just one thing properly, he would understand everything, and to begin with the breath: "just keep it simple, keep it really, really simple, because if you try to understand everything you might find you understand nothing."

"I'm grateful to the Warden for that blessing" Kittisaro said

and I do feel that a very important part of fighting the world's fight [one of the stipulations of the Rhodes Scholarship] must take place through spiritual work. You know I think of Nelson Mandela, and the incredible blessing that he bestowed on South Africa and on the world. He must have gone through a deep spiritual transformation such that after 27 years in prison, when he might have just seethed with hatred, instead he was forgiving. He understood that reality is generated by how we receive our experiences, how we hold them. It was a powerful insight. He said that resentment is like drinking poison thinking it will kill your enemies. Mr. Mandela, the father of the new democratic nation, saw that external apartheid was a manifestation of internal apartheid, and that internal apartheid in all of us needs to be overcome.

There are many Buddhist teachings that address the apartheid of the heart, he elaborated, that show how envy and stinginess and hate prevent people from finding peace, and create an illusion of ownership.

I feel a big part of the fight we are facing now is the arrogance of ownership -- my possessions, my profit, my life -- and the belief that the way to stay healthy and secure is just to keep acquiring and consuming. When we objectify -- separate and set apart -- not only our enemies but even the earth, in thinking we own the land, the resources, the DNA patents, and life itself, we lose touch with our heart and soul, spiritual depth, and that inner sacred aware place where we know our kinship with all of life. Worshipping profit, we don't realize that we're destroying ourselves and any hope of living a sustainable peaceful life on this earth.

I feel an essential part of the spiritual work for all of us as seeming individuals is to carefully question the illusion of separateness that's perpetuated by the way we think, and concretized by our insatiable need for ownership. At the cusp of an evolution of consciousness, we're being called upon to awaken from a divided reality of separate entities to a unified awareness that is sensitive to the seamless interrelational web of life.

With the training of attention and careful contemplation, we start to look more deeply into the true nature of things, and realize that every so called thing, is actually changing, becoming otherwise in every moment, all appearing within the matrix of awareness. We might call it my body and my breath, but when we see for ourselves it's ephemeral nature, we realize that it's not stable and not a possession. Just as every in-breath turns to an out-breath, health turns into sickness, and the body ages and dies. In the words of my teacher Ajahn Chah, "looking for certainty in that which



is uncertain, we are bound to suffer." As the illusion of ownership is recognized, we begin to let go and open to a wider awareness that knows the profound ground of being that is the source of all manifestation. Just as all the seemingly separate waves in the ocean are easily perceived and apparent to the eyes, we might overlook that actually they all merge in the depths and are of one substance.

Our kinship with all of life on this planet is in jeopardy, because we are living in ways that are destroying our only home. As we focus on the breathing, we can experience every in-breath as a mysterious gift from the atmosphere, intimate and blessed with life force nourishing every cell. And then we breathe out what the body doesn't need, and that's what the trees breathe in. What the trees breathe out, we breathe in. We are not separate from our environment. This way of mindfulness and reflection leads us from a separative consciousness, blinded by assumptions, to one that is more unified and holistic.

I really like that quote from Einstein, where he was helping to console the relative of someone who died, and he said

"A human being is part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. The striving to free oneself from this delusion is the one issue of true religion. Not to nourish it but to try to overcome it is the way to reach the attainable measure of peace of mind." From *The New Quotable Einstein*, by Alice Calaprice, Princeton University Press, 2005, p206.)

Asked about the role of teachers in his growth and experience, Kittisaro said he'd always been somebody who honors the value of a good teacher. His first "guru, mentor" was his wrestling coach in Tennessee. He was a ferocious man at times, who taught Kittisaro and his other students to see the value of hard work. "He wanted to win and we wanted to win" Kittisaro explained,

and I remember one match that I just managed to win, the guy was really hard to beat, and straight after Coach said .go out there and show him everything you did to win, show him all the moves'. And I began to panic and said .Sir I just barely beat that guy and I have to fight him again in a tournament in two weeks' and Coach said .if they get better, you get better' and that was it.

Kittisaro reflects on many good teachers, saying their value lies in their willingness to test, to challenge, to push, to encourage, and if they're a really good teacher, to help raise you to a place of fullness, not subordinate, but not arrogant, capable but still learning.

At Worcester College, Oxford, Kittisaro rowed crew with a man from South Africa who became a very close friend. They lost contact for many years, but after leaving the monastic life after 15 years, and marrying Thanissara, who herself trained as a Buddhist nun in the same tradition, the couple were approached to teach in South Africa during the transition from apartheid to democracy. Near the beginning of this experience, they visited Gaborone, Botswana, where a man they stayed with laughed in a way that reminded Kittisaro of his old friend. He commented on this to their host, and by the next day had a phone number for a senior Anglo American executive now living in Johannesburg – Kittisaro's former crew member. This friend welcomed them with tremendous warmth, and it was he who secured a property for them in the Drakensberg Mountains, after they were invited to stay on in South Africa teaching Buddhism. "Without a bank account, without an Identity Book, and within just a few weeks we ended up as guardians of 52 acres of land in the wilderness in this country just coming out of apartheid." He continued:

Being in South Africa, it seemed like a beautiful symmetry. I'd had that blessing of the Rhodes Scholarship that allowed me to go to Oxford and get my life in perspective, and it all came from the resources that Cecil John Rhodes acquired in the mining industries in diamond and gold. So, it was a beautiful opportunity to give back and to be of service, and that is something that I've always really felt good about in these 20 years that we have been in South Africa. Even though our training was as Buddhist monastics specializing in meditation, we were stretched by the country in ways we didn't predict. We thought we were coming just to lead meditation, you know, but then we were in KwaZulu-Natal, and when we started opening up our hearts to the Zulu population we encountered all of these difficulties of poverty and sickness. They weren't interested in meditation, they just wanted to get enough money to get an education or a library or water, or fix a school that had no computers or find some proper medicines. We found ourselves just as human beings trying to respond. So the opportunity to serve was a gift that South Africa really gave back to us.



Returning to the theme of teaching, Kittisaro said he used to laugh with his mining friend that he and Thanissara, too, were in the business of mining. “How’s that?” his friend once asked, and he explained

I'd say we're into mining the treasures of the heart! The great saints, like the Buddha, point to treasures within the human heart and mind. For example, wisdom and compassion, patience and truthfulness, and capacity to inquire and even turn suffering into a blessing, something that makes us more human... this way of reflecting gives the feeling of how a good teaching can transform us.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, when Kittisaro first went to the forest monastery in North-Eastern Thailand, his parents were somewhat alarmed. They made the journey to visit, and Kittisaro was struck by a teaching that Ajahn Chah, his instructor, gave to his father:

You know it was the 70s and there were the horrors of the Vietnam war, and the rumors of the killing fields in Cambodia were coming out, and there was the horrific bombing of Laos and reports of guerrilla activity. Our monastery was in the forest on the border right near there... my parents didn't know what a Buddhist monastery was all about, so they went all the way to northeast Thailand to see my Teacher, to check it out. He just had all this time for them. My father was worried, asking 'isn't it dangerous being here with these guerrillas?' Ajahn Chah said 'yes there are external dangers in this life', and then he gave this wonderful teaching to my dad.

He said 'but the real dangers lie within ... When you don't read the book of the heart, you might know a lot about these external threats, but you won't see how the desire, the aversion, and the confusion of your own mind continually rob you of well being. Inside the heart there are internal thieves and guerillas (and I guess nowadays they might call them terrorists) and our job is to get to know them so we are free from their destructive power.'

Ajahn Chah's wise teaching to my father is at the essence of our ongoing work. The obsession with acquiring and possession, this incessant wanting, this belief that if I just get rid of what I don't want then everything will be fine, this is delusion. What really will rob us is our own greed, hatred, and ignorance. We generate an apartheid against our inner being, and so we become refugees from our own radiant heart...

Kittisaro is now viewed as one of the most important teachers of Buddhism in the West, but reflecting on his role he again recalls a moment from his training: he and other Westerners working in the monastery were told they would become teachers, but to let the teaching arise naturally, to be first and foremost practitioners, and not to get “puffed up” in the role. “We were told that if we wanted to be something, then to be earthworms” he explained, laughing gently

an earthworm has no arms, it has no legs, it just keeps working by chewing through the earth, and we were to be like that, just chewing through all the stuff of our lives, aerating, just offering that for the welfare of others... so yes, at times I share, at times I teach, but I'm not under any grandiose illusions about what I do, I'm still learning, I still trip up, and thanks to the good teachers I've had I try to learn from that, to get up and begin again and remember that the failures, the difficulties, are what teach us patience and humility...

Towards the end of our discussion, I asked Kittisaro if there was anything else he'd like to share. He replied:

Mr. Mandela's life has been a huge inspiration for us (he and Thanissara), and his capacity to widen and to think beyond himself... You know when I started meditating I think I was pretty selfish, I mean I did have a sense of wanting to help others but it was really my accomplishments that drove me. When I began to realize that just winning is not a recipe for happiness, I ended up in Thailand. I got given an interesting name by Ajahn Chah and my Western teacher Ajahn Sumedho. The name Kittisaro means 'worthy of honor.' What's interesting is that in my early life I received a lot of honors, for example wrestling championships, valedictorian, Rhodes scholar, accomplishments like that, but the name didn't say getting honors, it said worthy of honor. There was a beautiful teaching just in the name. Whether other people notice or not is not the important thing, whether one gets credit for things or not is not ultimately important, because certainly there are times in life, and we've experienced this in South Africa, where you don't get honor. Instead you can be demonized or criticized or blamed for something you didn't even do, but to be worthy takes one back to reading the book of the heart. Here we learn to know what is truly praise-worthy, what is truly generous. We can investigate our illusions, like thinking I can really keep something ... how this can really diminish the joy of sharing, or reflect on the importance of compassion, generosity and wisdom. So I am grateful to have this name, it keeps pointing me in a good direction.



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Kittisaro and Thanissara now divide their time between the United States and South Africa, where they continue to run Dharmagiri Hermitage (dharma Giri.org). Their most recent book is *Listening to the Heart: A Contemplative Journey to Engaged Buddhism* (North Atlantic Books, 2014).



Rabbi Lisa Grushcow

(Quebec and Balliol, 1996)

Interviewed by Carrie Ryan



“Sure, I could say ‘inspirational,’ because she is that, but I was looking for one word to define Rabbi Lisa Grushcow,” Romy Shiller wrote, “and that word is ‘inclusive.’” Shiller, a member of Grushcow’s synagogue, successfully nominated her to be included in *The Jewish Daily Forward’s*



list of “American’s Most Inspiring Rabbis 2015. “I attended Rosh Hashanah services during which the rabbi walked through the congregation and able-bodied persons touched the Torah she was carrying. I cannot walk, so she actually bent over other people with the heavy Torah and let me touch it... Another time, I attended a lecture about healing the body. She made a point of including my caregiver in the discussion and gave her a seat with the group.” The first queer person to lead Temple Emanu-El Beth Sholom in Montreal, Rabbi Grushcow had to struggle to occupy her position and was then marked by a deep sense of what it meant to be excluded – its not surprising, then, that Rabbi Grushcow looks to engage and to include those on the fringes wherever she goes. After our talk, I sensed that she saw her role as Rabbi as a radical act of *being there* for people, through difficulties, through joys and everything in between. Thoughtfully, she continued reflecting on her religious role, saying,

What I think that religious traditions provide is a vocabulary about talking about being a part of something larger, it’s a vocabulary for talking about the life of the mind and the soul and the spirit as well as next day’s policy and that for many people, the reasons that they are involved in trying to do good are rooted in a deeper understanding of the world. Whatever that might mean to them. That it is actually an important job to help sustain that, to help nourish that, to hold them up when they are faltering, to help push people when they are doing well and say it is not all about you. To have a reminder of the fact that like, just because I am born here in this place and have these advantages, doesn’t mean that God likes me better.

I was curious about how Rabbi Grushcow understood her own path to becoming a rabbi, and she explained that while very rarely rabbis discuss the notion of a calling, since the role of a rabbi is seen as a teacher of the people instead of a mediator between the divine and the world, she did feel a ‘pull’ to this profession:

For me there were really just stages that had in part to do with the fact that the movement (Conservative) that I grew up in when I was ready for rabbinical school didn’t ordain gays and lesbians. And for me, kind of tied up with the process of coming out was re-directing my religious path a little bit. And for me that was a very spiritual process and it was at that point that it began to feel much more like a calling. When it became a difficult choice, or an inconvenient choice, was when it started to feel like much more of a pull.

Identifying as queer and discerning her own professional trajectory were deeply intertwined processes for Grushcow. Later, she developed a theology that inflected her struggle leaving the conservative movement and becoming a “refugee to the reform movement.”

And this was the first time that there was a door I couldn’t get through, that was still closed. And that no matter how meritorious or well-suited I was, that door just wasn’t opening because of who I was, and so that’s certainly, I think... made me more aware of the others for whom that was their experience. So that was one piece of it, and one piece of it was developing a theology and a spirituality that had to do with the Exodus narrative and with ideas of God connected to possibility and freedom and potential and leaving old places for open ones and the importance of leaving expected paths and finding ones way through the wilderness to use that metaphor, to use that really important spiritual vocabulary, for lack of a better word.

While Rabbi Grushcow recognizes that religion often serves the purpose of “comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable,” she wanted to highlight just how important for her the act of *presence* was in her role as this community leader. Though she often finds herself leading



services and serving as a public face for her own religion in interfaith conversations in her city, she found that the kind of presence that was most moving for her in her role as rabbi was *intimate* presence, being there for the 'long haul'.

I find what is often most moving is what goes on in a one to one level when hearing about what goes on in their lives. And to have the privilege of being there not at just one moment, not just at the good stuff and not just at the bad stuff, but a bit of each. And being there for the long haul in people's lives is, for me, really meaningful. You know I am thinking, the other day I went to put a mezuzah on the door of a woman who is one of my congregants. I offered to go to her house to do that. And this home was really significant to her because she had divorced around a year before and this was the first time she was really creating her own space and she kept saying, "God is with me in my house, in my home." And it was such a powerful thing for her. That was not what I brought, that was what she brought. But to be able to be with her in that, and in some way, I don't even know if being an agent is the right word, but just in some way help bring that to her, and help her establish, and re-establish, that sense of holiness is a big deal.

Rabbi Grushcow also saw her role as rabbi as one that needed to give a new voice to what religion could uniquely do in this changing world. "In this context in particular, some of the challenge has to do with that notion of showing that religion can take a different shape and it can speak to people and speak to their lives. There is something counter-cultural about that here. And there is something counter-cultural about just the fact of creating community that has different people in it, different ages, different incomes, different backgrounds." I then asked her how she understood religion's unique ability to bring together diverse people under the same roof. "There is a certain focus on shared humanity, right? Like whether it is being engaged in a certain project together, or in a prayer service together, or calling up a couple for a blessing because they are about to get married and then calling up a couple who have been married for 60 years." But unity was not all that religion could uniquely offer, Rabbi Grushcow suggested: religion could also compel us to aspire continually towards greater virtue.

I think those of us who are in religious communities who speak with a religious or a spiritual voice, that we have the potential to encourage and push people to be their best selves, and to have that awareness and responsibility to the world around us. And so, I may not be the person to take on a certain project, but there is something that I will say or something that I touch will help let someone take that on. And that I think is a very religious notion in some ways. There is this notion in Hebrew: the work is not yours to complete, but neither are you free to desist from it. So none of us can do everything, Moses doesn't make it to the promised land, but you hope that you are part of something that started before you and will continue after you and be bigger than you. That to me is kind of a very basic religious insight.

Rabbi Grushcow is a faith leader during a time when people's commitments to institutionalized religion are rapidly declining. Yet, though she struggles to keep the old structural paradigm of religious belonging and community afloat, she finds her role being called upon more now than ever. She chaffed that one day she wants to write a book called, "If religion is dead, why am I so busy?" So Rabbi Grushcow knows that there is still a great need and desire for religion and religious paradigms in people's lives, yet there is also a deep need to change how that gets structured in such an altered society. She thinks that the Rhodes community, with all of its manifold talents, would be a great place to think through some of these unique challenges for religion in the 21st century. She queries, and invites others to join her,

I am here for all kinds of people who don't practically help keep the lights on in the



institution that lets me be here. So how to kind of re-imagine what form all of this can take going forward? And how we can take all the stuff that's important ahead without being put off by the stuff that's peripherally important? So like, I gotta fix the leak in my roof or else I cant run my service, but religion is not about the leak in the roof.

As we were wrapping up our interview, I asked Rabbi Grushcow if she had any final thoughts. “The one thing I would say, you actually have to like people to do this work. That it’s one thing to fight the world’s fight in the abstract, but to do this work, and I am sure the same is true where you are, you have to actually like people. And you have to actually be interested in their stories, and have a curiosity about the world.” This was the brilliance of Rabbi Grushcow – the way she was able to make grand questions of the world fleshy, be totally attuned to particularity, and believe that a person is a world, just as much as a person is in the world. As people have become statistics and as terrors and joys mere ideas, her commitment to making issues *real* is now more than ever needed. Rabbi Grushcow left me with wise words to meditate on as she explained why her being a rabbi has helped her ground herself more deeply in the world:

Some of it is, I think, a kind of, not to be too fancy about it, but a spiritual practice to constantly remind yourself that you don't know somebody's story until you have heard it. And you don't know why they are acting the way they are acting until you learn a little more and working hard, and not always successfully, to give people the benefit of the doubt and to have some belief in people being, or wanting to be, good in the world. So there is a certain disposition there, which you could call religious, or you could not call religious... just a constant reminder that issues are not abstract.

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Rabbi Lisa Grushcow is currently the Senior Rabbi at Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom in Montreal. She is the author of *Writing the Wayward Wife: Rabbinic Interpretations of Sotah*, and the editor of *The Sacred Encounter: Jewish Perspectives on Sexuality*. For more information, see her biography here: <https://www.templemontreal.ca/about/clergy-and-administrative-staff/>



Kim Grose Moore

(New York and Jesus, 1990)

Interviewed by Jess Auerbach



For Kim Grose Moore (New York and Jesus, 1990) social justice activism and work with faith are impossible threads to separate. She grew up in a secular family and attended a K-8 school that was founded by a man who joined the March on Washington with Dr. King. The struggles of Civil Rights, Native American communities, Women's rights, Apartheid, and peace were the stuff of her curriculum from her earliest days. "The school was a place where we could experience the world that might be possible, the beloved community" she explained when we met in San José, California,



this May. It had a formative influence on her.

As a Rhodes Scholar, Moore read social anthropology. Her work there was both about Mozambican refugees in Tanzania, and about the process of re-veiling that was at the time being voluntarily undertaken by women in Iran and Egypt. Rather than continuing with the DPhil, though, Moore elected to return to the US, and soon became involved in organizing in California. “I think I’d always been somebody searching,” she said, “thinking, you know, what’s the broader meaning of my life? What’s my contribution?”

At Oxford, she had explored religious life more deeply than during her childhood and adolescence. A summer in Guatemala and El Salvador during her undergraduate training and at the height of both their civil wars introduced her to some radical American Mennonite and Evangelical Christian missionaries and Catholic priests, who shared with her the beauty and courage of liberation theology. She had returned to the USA wishing to become a Jesuit priest, until a few months later six highly regarded and well-known priests in El Salvador were killed, alongside their housekeepers - an event which helped spark world outrage against the military regime and placed tremendous pressure on the US to stop supporting it. At that point, however, Moore realized that - as well as not being the right gender - she was not cut out for martyrdom! At Oxford, though, she found comfort in both Christian and Jewish services but never felt entirely at home in either of them - despite these being her inherited paternal and maternal faith traditions respectively.

On her return to the USA, Moore worked first in educational reform and then for close to 15 years in the San Francisco Bay Area with the PICO National Network (www.piconetwork.org) - a network of 50 faith-based community organizing efforts across the country. Describing her realization that this was the way forward for her, she said she shadowed a community organizer whose job was to train and develop Church lay leaders in how to organize responses to failing schools, unsafe neighborhoods, lack of access to jobs and healthcare, and she sat there in the basement of St. Elizabeth’s Church in Oakland, and something opened for her and she realized that doing social and racial justice work *in communities that already were gathered around some central beliefs* was extremely powerful.

Over the next two decades, Moore learned “to speak Latino Catholic, Jewish, Black Baptist and Evangelical, Lutheran, Universalist and others” and engaged deeply with scripture and faith-practices in a wide variety of traditions. She also learned to build and lead powerful, multicultural, interfaith organizations that could respond to a variety of injustices at local, state, and national policy levels. Over the same period, physical pain had driven her to yoga and meditation, but for a long time the two things were very separate in her life. “I didn’t get into it (yoga) because of religion” she explained

but increasingly I realized it was good to have roots of my own, and I became more and more committed to Buddhism as a path towards freedom from suffering of all kinds - emotional, physical and spiritual. For years I’d thought of myself as a universalist, appreciating and finding the sacred in any tradition, but over the last few years I have really found the value in having a [religious] place that feels like home. Buddhism felt like my mother tongue in a way that other religions didn’t, and so it has become my spiritual home.

A year ago, Moore left PICO to focus on a more aligned spiritual path. She is completing an initial training program in Buddhist Chaplaincy and exploring options for further service and study. Currently she serves in a men’s state prison and with a hospice, and is also considering going back to graduate school to do the DPhil that first called to her at Oxford. Working on oneself, she feels, is a critical part of both faith practice and social justice work, and something she



finds very valuable.

Faith and social justice both make change on an internal and an external level. That's where, and how, transformation is possible, and it's what I understand to be the power of religion, of spiritual life. It allows us to accept the world both as it is, and as it's meant to be – to hold that tension, to be fine with it, to work with it. In Christian terms that's the Kingdom of Earth and the Kingdom of Heaven; in Buddhist terms it's holding the possibility that we *can* be free from suffering, and then being able to walk the path, to be fully present today. To keep walking and working towards transformation and liberation.

Moore described two experiences that have marked her profoundly. The first took place when, as a young organizer, she had helped a community in San Francisco to organize around the pending closure of a community-based healthcare clinic.

It was a clinic in a working class neighborhood that served about 2000 women and children; its closure was going to have devastating effects – primary care would be gone, OBGYN would be gone, what were all those people going to do without basic healthcare? So we organized, and we thought we'd won – we had the money from the city, everything seemed great. And suddenly we got a phone call saying there'd been a problem, and they were going to close it after all. I remember sitting in a church hall with a group of community leaders thinking we're done, there is nothing we can do, we've failed. And then this young girl spoke up – she was a senior in high school at the time, and she said "Okay, first we have to pray and then we have to have a funeral". That caught our imaginations, suddenly we had something to work with again! So the following Sunday, after mass, there was a procession from the Church to the Clinic, and the priest gave a eulogy, and all these TV cameras were there, and miracles happened and the money came through and they kept that clinic open. So it was a real lesson for me, to just be able to sit with uncertainty, with a feeling of failure, to be humble. Here I was the official organizer, and I thought we'd just won this great campaign, and then we hit a wall and I just couldn't see over it, I couldn't see any further. And I had to learn to just sit with that and trust that there were others with me who might know what to do, and to hear them. With the funeral, none of us really knew what we were doing, we didn't know we'd save the Clinic, but we all had to trust, and to be together. We were crying in community, we were exposing injustice, and we were doing it with a faith voice, and that changed the minds, the hearts, the spirits of people in power.

More recently I was in the prison where I help with meditation and mindfulness, and I was sharing a little with people in the group, of my own experiences of compassion and how so often the person for whom it's hardest to show compassion is oneself. I did this with the spirit of an offering to the group, because of course I know that for most of them there, the circumstances they are dealing with are so much more difficult, the mistakes much bigger. One of the prisoners then shared with the group his own story. He told us all how hard his struggle to forgive himself had been, and how he decided to write a letter to the mother of the person he'd killed. He didn't expect to ever hear from her, he just wanted to share with her his deepest apology, and what he'd learned from his process of reflection. And she wrote back to him, and she told him she'd forgiven him years ago – the challenge was now for him to forgive himself. That testimony feeds me, you know, somewhere so deep.

Moore's experiences at the intersection of faith and activism have led her to work with people who often have passionate commitments to very different interpretations of religious texts.



She described how working with PICO taught her to look for and find the common ground between people, and to accept that in some areas there might simply never be agreement, and to be at peace with that. “But there are teachings in the Bible that are quite frankly radical and revolutionary” she explained,

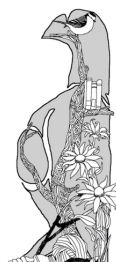
and when people can connect on that level, powerful things can happen. Think about mass incarceration, for example. There are white Pentecostal folk, white evangelical conservatives in Ohio and Florida and Missouri, sitting down and talking with Black Pentacostals, Black Baptists, where they are finding common ground because they have a core understanding of a literal Bible. With that they are able to talk about race and injustice and incarceration in a way that I as a liberal white progressive from San Francisco would never be able to do with a white conservative evangelical because what they have in common between them is the understanding of the Bible, its teachings on justice, and that's more important than anything else. So there are ways and places of connection that we can find, and I tend to look for these and allow myself to be inspired by them.

As the interview came to its end, I asked Moore if she had anything else she'd like to offer.

Let me just say that in terms of the Rhodes Trust I do wish – and I wish this of Stanford too [a few miles away from our discussion, where I am based, and where she did her undergraduate training] that I do wish that there was a stronger debate around what it means to be an intellectual leader. How does the older generation guide these emerging intellectuals around purpose and meaning, asking them .what is the purpose of you being here? What meaning are you going to bring to your life? How is that life going to be a meaningful, a purposeful life?’ I think we need to challenge students more deeply to engage with some of these questions that are inherently spiritual. You don't have to call them spiritual of course – call them humanistic if you want to – but young people need to look at why they are here, think about what they will take pride in at the end of it all. That has to go beyond ego and money and status. I wish Stanford would do better at that, I wish Oxford would do better, I wish the Rhodes Trust would do better. The intellectual is important, but society needs responses to value-driven questions, too. I love engaging young people and giving them the space to work out what they already know and believe, and then really challenging them to say .Why? What do I really believe? How do I think change happens? What can my contribution really be?’

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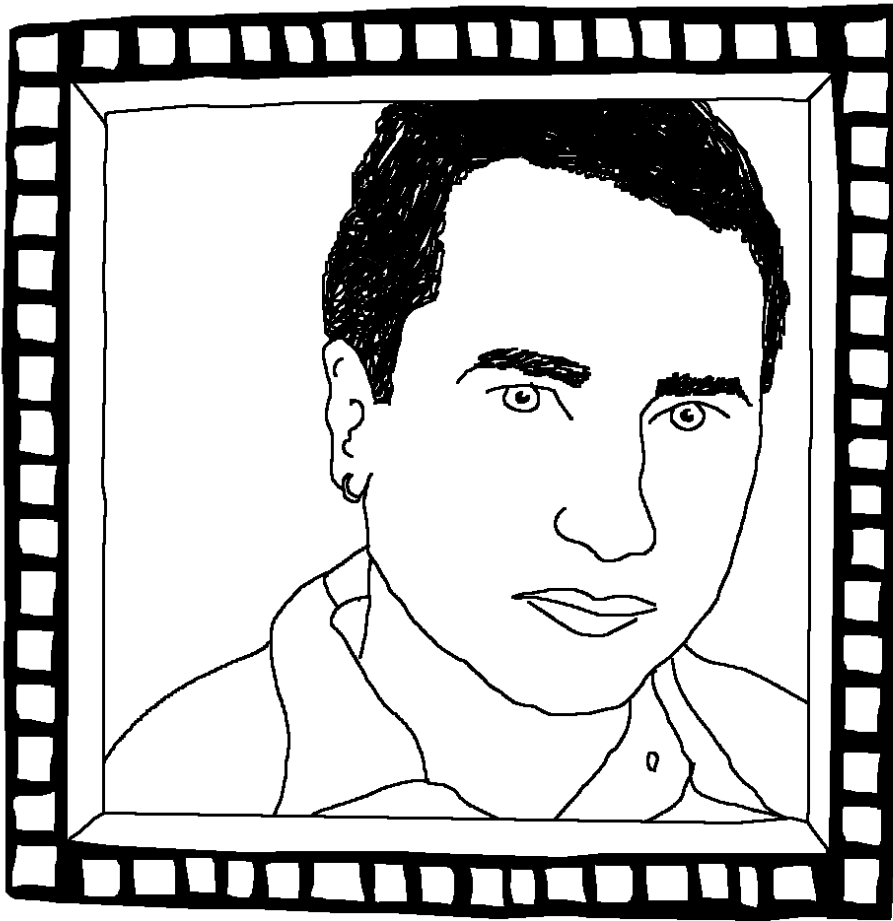
Kim Grose Moore currently lives and works in San José, California, where she continues to be engaged with PICO (www.piconetwork.org) as well as several other organizations.



Eboo Patel

(Illinois and Lady Margaret Hall, 2008)

Interviewed by Carrie Ryan



Founder and leader of the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), Eboo Patel does not just professionally champion religious pluralism, he has also made it into a life philosophy. Time and again, throughout our interview, Eboo hesitated to pass judgments on anything outside his own purview of experience. Instead, he talked about how constantly his own presumptions of 'ought' and 'good' were challenged by people's diverse contributions to the world, and how consistently



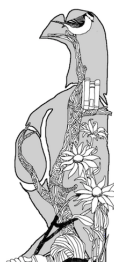
diversity had opened him ever more to the richness and beauty of life.

For example, Eboo Patel told me that his doctoral thesis at Oxford had radical personal implications for him: as he studied an Ismaili community in London, he realized he “actually believed what his research community was saying” and began to commit himself more deeply to his religious faith that the people he studied modeled so well. Upon hearing this, I applauded him for taking his research so seriously, for letting what he was seeing impact him personally, especially at Oxford where research still seems to have such a voyeuristic, objective distance to it. He kindly refuted both my praise and my summation of Oxford’s research approach. Instead, he said that his approach to his research was just one way of doing things, *his* way of doing things, and certainly shouldn’t be championed as *the* way of doing things. “What I would rather say is that I happen to be the kind of person whose research was intimately tied up with my own identity and vocation,” he said. “That happens to be the kind of person I am. That happens to have value for me. I can see lots of other ways of going about things that have value for other people. By the way, when I was 23, I would never have been able to make that statement.” I then asked him why his younger self couldn’t come to that conclusion. “Because, um, when I was 23, I wanted the paradigms by which I lived to be the paradigms by which others lived. And now, and in no small part because of my experience at Oxford, I know there are lots of ways to be in the world, and there’s lots of ways to make an impact... what I am increasingly fascinated by, is just how radically different all these ways of being are, and how radically different all these contributions can be.” In our interview, Eboo taught me to slow my judgments, be quick to celebrate other’s diversity, and in this he taught me to be a better pluralist, a posture so necessary in our religiously fractured world.

After graduating from the University of Illinois, Eboo went on to teach at an under-resourced high school before heading to Oxford. He mentions that these beginnings made him less “troubled as other people were about whether the next move I made was going to be a step up the status ladder.” Eboo did not seem preoccupied by the climb to the top; in fact, he mentioned a pattern he picked up in college that released him from this incessant competition – after his last final of the semester, he would pack up his bags and head out on a long road trip. “The way that I saw it was, I got straight As in college, and now I can do whatever the fuck I want for the summer,” he said. “And so that pattern, which by the way has been one of the great benefits of my life, like, go earn your cultural capital and then you know its there, you can always fall back on that.” It was this combination between a laid-back Eboo, the road-trip guy, and a driven Eboo, the man that ran a very successful organization, that made him so alluring: how could someone balance accomplishing so much while remaining so humble and down to earth? Importantly, I came to understand, Eboo had a keen sense of what he could *not* do – an insight seemingly rare in an economy that confounds skill-awareness with self-knowledge – and he paired it with a strong instinct of what he could accomplish; he seemed to deeply know that he was not everything, but that he was something, and that something was important.

You know what the secret to a lot of my life is, Carrie? And this is like straight up truth. I am not good at lots of things. That is the secret of my life... Like, the highest I ever went in Math was pre-calculus in which I got a 64.7% in high school and tearfully begged my teacher to give me a C. Like I am really not good at lots of things. So why is that the secret of my life? Because, like, huge options that other elite people normally take, they weren’t options for me! I couldn’t even consider them. Do you have any idea how liberating that is?

And while he knew he wouldn’t become an elite mathematician, he did learn exactly what he could contribute while at Oxford: encouraging interfaith relationships, work which he began to call his “passion”. Though Eboo went on to establish the now successful Interfaith Youth Core, he did



not see its success as the product of an easy equation of passion plus hustle; instead, he was quick to acknowledge just how much luck allowed him to make IFYC what it is today, revealing his humble outlook about his ability to act on, and within, the world.

So I think part of this is that, you know I developed a deep passion for interfaith work at Oxford. And Oxford gave me the time and space and resources to be able to do that, there's no doubt about that. I developed my commitment for the type of Muslim I am at Oxford, and – and I think that I have just been incredibly fortunate that my passion and my skill set almost totally align. And that – look, its not like I wrote in blood when I finished at Oxford, I will start Interfaith Youth Core, I will run IFYC even if I starve. Right? At the end of the day, a set of fortunate things had to happen for this place to go from idea to reality. And so, I am sure that my passion and my commitment and my skill set saw this through a set of difficult and thin times, but – you know, if we hadn't gotten x grant, a Ford grant in June 2002, if I hadn't gotten an Ashoka fellowship two years later, uh, you know, if Ron Kinnamon hadn't read an article about us in the Chicago Tribune, wrote me an email, took me out to lunch and became our first board chair, like if a bunch of things hadn't happened that actually made this organization flourish, I don't, you know, we may be having a very different conversation right now...I think a second part was I developed a genuine passion for something and I made a genuine commitment to it and I probably am not ready to starve for it, but I am ready to make some sacrifices, you know... so, passion, skills, commitment, luck, hustle, its just, somehow all that shit just works out.

Eboo's acknowledgement of his own passion was enchanting; for many, passion is desired, but seems a thing that's elusive or nonexistent. I wondered aloud with Eboo if passion was merely a rarity, or if it was something everyone had but that took a lot of meditative listening to come upon, contemplative practices so at odds with our societal push simply 'to do' and 'to do big'. I told Eboo that oftentimes our conversations in the Rhodes community require us to think about 'big impact'; I also mentioned that many of the scholars I spoke to who found a passion that was smaller in scale seemed to feel like less of a Rhodes Scholar. Knowing that IFYC was both a public organization that scanned large, but also one that promoted the importance of intimate religious relationships, I asked him for his thoughts on this greater push towards influence. Though he was balanced in his response, Eboo did mention that what was most important was not doing something big, but merely doing something *well* at all – living a life of craft.

I wake up everyday, and I run a forty person nonprofit and write a book every 4 or 5 years and you know we are helping to create a field of research and practice called interfaith studies and I am like, this is me! This is who I am! It is who I am by passion, by temperament, by skill set. I understand this. I get it in my bones. Does that make sense? And I just feel like that is so fortunate! Like there are other people who get pastoral care in their bones. Or they get teaching in their bones. And, or they get trying cases in their bones. And I don't. That's not me. I am built differently. And I think there is great worth in all of these things. I really do. Unless you are actively hurting people, I just think that there is, there is great worth in... in finding your fit and doing it well. I think there is great work in craft. Right? I talk a lot about craft recently. And it is basically finding what you do and doing it with fluidity and beauty. And I think that you can find that, you can do that across fields. You can do that in really big ways, like running presidential campaigns, and you can do that in really small ways, like hospice care, you know? And the people I admire most, honestly, are the people who find their craft and do it and could give a fuck about being big... They found... note that I am not saying passion. Its not just about passion, its also about excellence, its also about beauty, its also about, like, finding something and doing it really, really, really well. I have mad respect for craft.



Part of having a craft requires that you make a commitment to a certain way of being in the world. I already knew that Eboo was a man of commitments, since he has been known to say "life is about the things you choose to commit to." Given this, I wanted to pick his brain about an issue that reared its head amidst many circles I found myself in at Oxford: how do you make a commitment to something amidst so many choices? For a man who practices faith but who also champions a pluralist public, I wanted to pose a particular question about religious commitment. I queried: for those raised in a religious pluralist society, without deep roots in any one tradition, how would you guide those seeking a spiritual life but who are bereft of a history in any one tradition? In other words, how do you commit amongst so many compelling choices?

I just think all of us have different processes and different proclivities. And its not like, there are some people when they are presented with the creed of Islam at the age of 19, they see the truth and beauty in it and commit immediately and never look back and that is not me. I had to like, do research in this community for two years and slowly come to the sense of, boy, I really admire these people, boy I realize that they do what they do because they believe in a particular creed. Boy, I want a little bit of that in my life. Boy, this is actually in my blood. I am actually, at least by heritage, a part of this community. Right? Like I had to go through my own process. I had my own proclivities, you know what I mean?

For a man who works to support interfaith relationships in the United States, who believes deeply in pluralism, I knew Eboo had also to believe deeply in the power of religion to mold and shape people's lives, as well as the country's. I asked him how he understood religion's unique contribution to America's public space and he commented that it has created robust social services for our nation. He also suggested that religion encourages people, like very few other vehicles do, to address "difficult matters of the human condition."

What I think is remarkable about religion in its American form, is its contribution to civil society and social capital... of America's 28 hundred schools, probably a 1000 were funded by religious communities... That same kind of formula works for social service agencies, for hospitals, for refugee resettlement, there is just a massive civic contribution that religious communities make that I just think, our society literally relies on that... our state relies on the civic infrastructure provided by religious communities. That's number one. And that's the concrete and I think most people just have no concept of that. I think people are like, oh yeah, religious motivations play an important role in social movements, look at King, Ghandi and, yes that's important, but there are even more basic and everyday ways in which religious communities and motivations and social capital and narratives make a massive contribution which we ought to pay attention to... The second thing is, as Paul Tillich said, religion is basically about ultimate concerns. And um, um, it... it requires us to pay attention to... difficult matters of the human condition. Death, creation, pain, evil, suffering... and its not so much that it explains those things away, but it allows human beings to process, digest, metabolize those things, find meaning in them. And I just think that's hugely valuable. And there are plenty of human beings that don't and that's fine, but for those of us who do, and there are large quantities of us who do, I just think it is hugely, hugely valuable.

Finally, I asked Eboo if there was anything else he would like to contribute. He seemed to jump at the chance to give advice to a younger Rhodes crowd. His words sought to remind scholars to remember the opportunity they had been given with the Rhodes Scholarship and to use it to pursue a passion boldly.

If I were in front of a Rhodes group right now, of Rhodes Scholars your age, the point I



would emphasize is: don't ever forget that you have earned boat loads of cultural capital that, unless you commit a felony, will stay safely in your bank account and you can leverage it for risk. You can leverage it for risk. And there probably is no easier time, if you have a big idea right now – it's a good time to take that risk. If you don't, don't panic... I mean there is nothing written that says you have to develop your passion at age 23 at Oxford. I got super lucky! That's when I developed it. So I don't think the tragedy is not finding your passion then, I think the tragedy is, if you find your passion then and you are too scared to commit to it, or too scared to take the initial risk. I think that that would be something of a tragedy.

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Eboo Patel, founder and current president of the Interfaith Youth Core, speaks about interfaith issues everywhere from global forums to college campuses. He is the author of *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, in the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation* (Beacon Press, 2013) and *Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, and the Promise of America* (Beacon Press, 2013). For more information, see also: <http://www.ifyc.org/the-interfaith-story>



Fanie Du Toit

(Paul Roos, 1991)

Interviewed by Rosanna Nicol



I spoke with Dr. Fanie du Toit on a Wednesday in July. It was early in the morning for me, and late afternoon in Cape Town where he runs the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, and his young son joined us on the Skype call. We had had some challenges finding a time that worked for the conversation, and Fanie displayed great commitment to seeing it happen. I couldn't resist asking *why? Why were you so committed to this interview?* He responded:



I think the values of the Rhodes are what make it unique: what it intends to do, not merely as funding for study. I don't mean this in a purist sense of "how it's written in the will" but how it's been interpreted as a progressive set of values. It is not just a "glorious exit visa" out of South Africa, which is how it was viewed. When I won the scholarship in the 1990s, Mandela had just been released from prison and there was much uncertainty about the future of the country. Many white South Africans wanted this "exit visa." But the Rhodes is rather a call to come back and make a difference. I support any initiative that seeks to expand on and embody those values.

Also, let a thousand flowers bloom: if you feel it, then make it known. I'm out-of-touch with the current day-to-day of the scholarship and if a younger generation feels this Alternative Rhodes initiative is important, I support that.

I asked Fanie to describe his current work with the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR). It was born out of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Fanie is the second Director and has been involved since its inception. The first Director had run the research department of the TRC. The IJR was founded as a space to consider these questions of reconciliation and justice on African soil.

A key concept for us is the quest for justice, not only in a judicial sense of the word, but a forward-looking justice: in terms of being served with dignity, in terms of living conditions. We didn't foresee the extent South Africa would remain an unfinished project in this respect. There is gross inequality here and White identity is in the spotlight - how do we live with that framework? These are some of the areas in which the Institute works. I see these questions as an opportunity. We also work measuring public opinion and with other governments seeking to learn from the South African experience. We're now working all over the continent.

Fanie shared a beautiful anecdote of his journey to this work:

I was finishing my DPhil at Keble (I had done a Masters at Christ Church beforehand) and was thinking I should go to London and test my luck. Desmond Tutu came to speak. He absolutely mesmerized me and the other blasé students (Michael Jackson, Margaret Thatcher, Mikhail Gorbachev had all been recent speakers). He drew a full house and a standing ovation. I wrote a note to thank him, introducing myself as an Afrikaner from the Dutch Reform tradition. He wrote back an extended post card in my language, in Afrikaans, saying, "young people like you should come back to help build this nation". He signed it "your friend." I had been watching South Africa transform from afar; there would be voting with Mandela on the ballot in the upcoming election, it seemed like an adventure awaited there. I was studying theology at the time and got a job as a university chaplain at Stellenbosch University. I also felt I needed to go back and see to what degree I was the same guy I had been before Oxford. I was drawn to working on the intersection between white and black; I left the church not long after and started working with the IJR when it was getting going in 1999.

Some of the questions that drew me to this Alternative Rhodes project are around how to thrive in a culture that celebrates accumulating wealth. I asked Fanie for some of his thoughts. How do you experience living in a culture that celebrates accumulating wealth?

I don't want to be disingenuous - the economy in South Africa is built on gold and diamonds and extracting wealth from the land; Rhodes' company was the biggest in the world, based right here in Cape Town. But celebrating wealth in the face of poverty is another question, and the balance is off here. There is a measure of self-satisfaction among



the well-connected where success is measured by wealth and the poor are forgotten. There's a sense that if you've made it you drive a smart car, have left the townships. In this crass body language, if you're not participating, you've failed. Whereas the social project should be about equality. I don't say "go and live in a squatter camp with the poor," that would be disingenuous of me. But the balance now is wrong and it's magnified in our society with its sudden upward mobility.

What was your experience of the Rhodes?

I met my first Black peers in Oxford - it was the first opportunity I had to mix with Black South Africans. It was time of great creative thinking. I remember the Russians saying the same – for those of us coming from repressive societies it was a time of high idealism. The world has changed a lot since 9/11 and the US's response: idealism, liberalism, they took a major blow. The Rhodes was a visionary time to dream new dreams, for that I am always grateful.

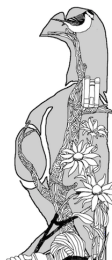
During your time at Oxford, did you ever speak in terms of “fighting the world’s fight?”

Those sentiments were present. I'm not sure those terms were used, but the Rhodes compels to think large. My scholarship experience helped me in that regard, acknowledging that may not be the case for everyone. But that sentiment was appropriate. It lifted me beyond my parochial self.

Thank you, Fanie, for taking the time! It was such a gift having this conversation.

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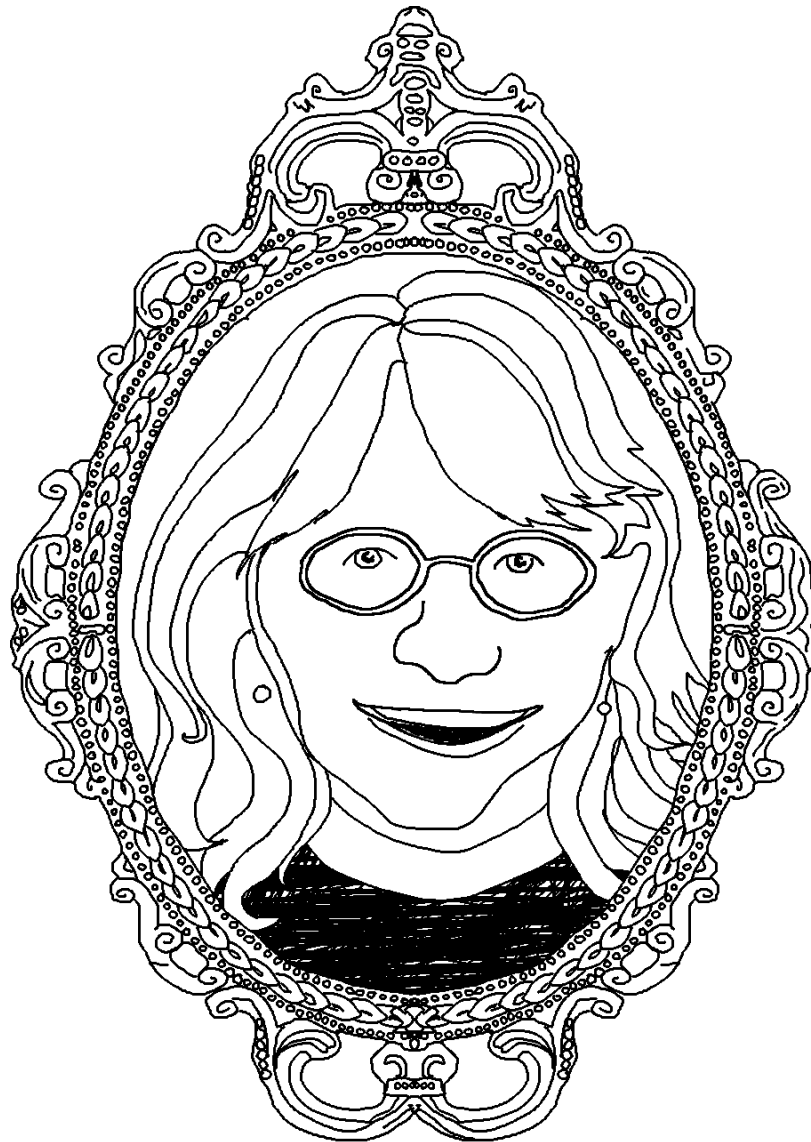
Dr. Fanie du Toit is the Executive Director of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in Cape Town, South Africa. He has edited three books: *Learning to Live Together – Practices of Social Reconciliation* (IJR 2003); *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Ten Years On* (co-edited with Charles Villa-Vicencio, David Philip, 2006), *In the Balance – South Africans debate reconciliation* (co-edited with Erik Doxtader, Jacana Media, 2011). He has also written many journal articles and essays, book chapters and media pieces. See www.ijr.org.za



Rev. Debra Slade

(Prairies and Magdalen, 1981)

Interviewed by Jess Auerbach



The moment that Debra Slade clearly heard her call to ministry took place in a maximum-security prison in New York in 2002. She was with a nun, Sister Elaine Roulet, who had spent most of her life assisting the female inmates of the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. Once a week, Slade assisted Roulet with a religious service, visited with the inmates, and made moldable stained glass coverings for the barred windows. Together they ministered in a hospital where chronically ill female prisoners with long sentences were sent to receive treatment and, in many cases, to die. A woman in her 30s with multiple sclerosis who could hardly speak and was very ill, was sobbing. Sister Elaine held the woman's hand, and told her she loved her, and in that moment Slade knew



what she had to do, and she has done so ever since. “ It was just a brief moment in a prison hospital when nobody was watching or caring when I heard God call me to be a chaplain. I saw the difference that one person could make, and said I wanted to do that too. ”

A “little girl from the Canadian prairies” as Slade put it; she had received the Rhodes Scholarship with astonishment and awe. It opened her to things she could never have imagined, expanded her horizons, introduced her to fellow students who hoped to be President or Prime Minister, to anti-apartheid activists from South Africa, and to her future husband, who also studied law at Oxford. She loved the Magdalen College Evensong service in Latin “so peaceful, so moving,” and describes how she would sit in the chapel and be moved by the music. Raised Anglican, when she finished high school, the priesthood was still closed to women, though she said had it been open to women then, she might have found her path more quickly.

After Oxford, she taught law at the University of Chicago and at Columbia University. She liked the law, but it made her realize that “no amount of money was enough on its own, I had to do something that had a mission, a purpose”. A personal experience of illness first pushed her in the direction of activism, where, for fifteen years, she campaigned vigorously to “change the way [her] illness was perceived” from one that was originally thought of as psychosomatic to one that was considered legitimate by the medical community. She and a medical doctor got the medical literature changed, and through Congressional advocacy secured research funding at the NIH. Their work helped to increase the number of female doctors specializing in a once-male-only field of urology. She also had two children, and remained active in St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church in Ridgefield, Connecticut where she and her husband Peter chose to raise their daughters Laura and Emma. And then there was that one day when Sister Elaine Roulet came to address the congregation. Roulet’s accounts of her work in a woman’s prison first pulled Slade in, and for years her family hosted the children of female inmates in their home, and were actively involved in the support of prison-affected families.

Over time, however, Slade realized that she wanted to do more in ministry, and resolved to train as a chaplain, which remains her great passion. She went back to university, and completed a Master’s in Divinity at Yale Divinity School, with a Diploma in Anglican Studies, and after doing the required clinical training, became a Board Certified Chaplain in 2008. She was ordained an Episcopal priest in 2010, and completed her certification to be a Clinical Pastoral Education Supervisor in 2015. When her children were still in school, it was not always easy to juggle all her commitments. These qualifications, however, she explains, are necessary for the work she does, which currently allows her to both train chaplains, and continue in her role as chaplain and Director of Spiritual Care at Norwalk Hospital, a position she has held since 2011. On the weekends, she serves St. Francis Episcopal Church, in Stamford, Connecticut as its assisting priest and Vicar. It is rewarding work, she explained, speaking of it always in terms of her privilege: “To be with people in the most intense, often harrowing moments of their life is so meaningful -- to be present with them, to offer support, it is what I feel as a child of God I have to do.”

A chaplaincy residency in pediatrics changed the way Slade saw the world -- ministering with heroic children, courageous parents, standing alongside as people made what were often the most difficult decisions that can confront human beings, after terrible accidents, or in the face of chronic illness. The most powerful part of her work, though, has been ministering with patients and their families at the end of their lives.

I used to think it was pretty black and white” she said “if one’s quality of life was poor, then I questioned whether it was worth going on. But I have seen such love, from patients and families, such incredible devotion, and it’s changed how I think about all these things. It has expanded my understanding of what it means to be human. I am a changed person



because of knowing and walking with them.

She described being asked to support a priest friend, the Rev. Kathie Adams-Shepherd at Trinity Episcopal Church, Newtown after the shootings that took place there in December 2012.

Ministering there that weekend was a privilege, and was one of the hardest things I've ever done. But through such profound grief, people reached out to each other, and gathered in churches to seek comfort and find hope. It brought to the fore some of the important issues we have in America -- gun violence, and mental illness, and because I am a minister, I am able to talk about these things with parishioners at my church, and involve them in conversations about how we can best care for each other.

On training chaplains, she goes on:

Teaching chaplains in an interfaith context has taught me that most everything comes down to individual relationships. The students who take clinical pastoral education are very diverse; and many of them come from opposite sides of the theological spectrum. Regularly, my class will have a seminarian who is gay, and also a seminarian from a conservative faith tradition for whom homosexuality is considered a sin. And it's when the students develop a meaningful relationship with each other, by really getting to know each other, how each other thinks and why, that their misconceptions start to change, openness to difference begins. So helping to build tolerance, acceptance, and improving understanding is what I like to think I do on a daily basis. I'd like to see that goal extended to fighting the world's fight, solving the world's problems. So much good can come out of just getting people together in one room, really listening to them, and understanding what gives them joy, and what causes brokenness. That's what's really important. I have to believe in that.

Interviewing Slade was deeply moving. When she spoke of her patients, students, friends and colleagues, it pulled straight at the heart. She said she knew the ministry is not what everybody expects of a Rhodes Scholar, but that her life has been full of purpose, of meaning. "it's been a true vocation" she said, citing a quote from Frederick Buechner: 'Vocation is the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need.' "I've been lucky to find that, I wouldn't change any of it" she explained.

When asked if she'd like to write a book about some of her experiences, for the first time in our discussions her face became genuinely puzzled.

A book? But hardly anyone reads anymore, and who would want to read it? You know it's funny you should say it though, because what I've really been thinking about is creating apps for the phone and tablets. People these days live through their phones, and even when they are facing the end of their lives, that would be a more helpful place to put all types of end-of-life resources. I'd like to make an app for people and their families who are facing the end of their lives, and also an app for chaplains that would have information about what different faith traditions and cultures believe about dying, and what spiritual support they would find most helpful. It would include choices of possible prayers to say, include soothing music to play, all to be used at the bedside. Something free and easily accessible, something that could really help people, that's what I'm thinking about.

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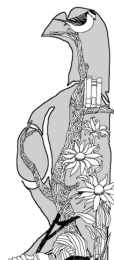
Rev. Tom Ward

(Mississippi and Christ Church, 1967)

Interviewed by Carrie Ryan



It is one thing to engage in intellectual inquiry and debate about what is good and right, and it is another thing altogether to let those engagements *transform* you – to turn seemingly abstract conversations into immediate practice, to let your life speak what you know. My hour long conversation with Tom Ward, an Episcopalian priest and now avid Contemplative, was an insight into how religious practice can help one activate and practically engage the inklings of one’s moral conscience, and how this continual spiritual reckoning, practiced through honest examination, can



breed a renewal of self and world. During the interview, Tom was brutally honest about his own shortcomings. He was quietly confident about his declarations of faith. And he time and again revealed the importance of taking questions seriously – for him, the experience of love, the possibility of peace, and the pursuit of justice depended on it. I left our conversation allured by his practice of spiritual self-appraisal: I turned to myself and asked anew, what difficult truths am I ignoring, and at what cost? Though this kind of introspection is painful, Tom, as a model and guide, inspired me with his faith to see the radical fruits of such labor: he believed deeply this was the necessary work of being good humans. “I used to say and still do that many people’s prayer, when we go to church, is .O Lord, help me hold my life together as it is now,” Tom said. “And what God says is, .You must *die*... And rise again.”

Tom “came up in the church” in a racially segregated Meridian, Mississippi, and from an early age experienced the Gospel as one of the most significant vehicles for social and political change during the Civil Rights Movement. Raised in the Episcopal faith, a tradition he described as a “counter-cultural environment to bible-belt fundamentalism,” Tom witnessed his clergy combat racial injustice with “redemptive and courageous love”: “all of them had the grace and the courage to tell their people they were wrong about racial issues *and love them anyway*.” This kind of radical leadership, preached by Jesus in the Beatitudes (“love your enemies”) and championed by Martin Luther King Jr., adopted love and inclusion as its posture, a committed approach to community that, in Tom’s experience, bred slow, but deep change. Tom saw his church take on a deeper commitment to racial justice through these priests’ persistence; he also watched his father transform from a “self-made man” into a man “with a heart” for the most devalued in his community.

Tom went to Sewanee: The University of the South, initially attracted to it for its Episcopalian identity. There, Tom went “through a conversion” experience while studying English, falling in love with the beauty of the written word. He also, as President of the Order of Gownsmen - the University’s then student government, sought to outlaw the University’s mandatory chapel. Going to mandatory chapel, for Tom, seemed to be sending the message that church was about showing up for the administration more so than showing up for God. With fraternity brothers reading newspapers during services, the chapel had become a mockery; Tom fought to make the chapel a place where faith could be taken seriously again. Already, he was forming an idea that faith could not be cultivated through mere attendance. There needed to be a hunger, an openness to what the Gospel could do in your life.

Tom was named a Rhodes Scholar his senior year. In the fall after graduation, Tom sailed to England with his fellow, all-male classmates. But the waters to Oxford were not in the least bit smooth: these young scholars faced the internal and social debates about their decision to study in England and, thus, to forgo fighting in the Vietnam War. The opulence of Oxford alone can offend, but it in juxtaposition to egregious and unjust deaths occurring in Vietnam made this privileged studentship a particularly difficult pill to swallow.

The war was an issue from the moment we arrived in Oxford, but our situation shifted markedly after we got there. I would have to do some digging to rend the chronology accurately, but during our first year student deferments were eliminated and a lottery was instituted. Some of us got a low number, which meant that we would probably be drafted; others, numbers that covered the spectrum. My Rhodes peers did everything from taking up a commission through ROTC to renouncing their citizenship to applying for a deferment as a conscientious objector and other options.

Tom asked himself where he stood on these issues, and what this then meant for his time in



Oxford. Remembering his own questioning at Oxford about whether or not to apply for conscientious objector, a status reserved typically for the religiously observant, Tom reflected,

Anyway, I knew I could make any case because when you go to Oxford, you could write an essay about anything. The question, of course, is whether you believe it or not. What do you really believe? What are you willing to live for? And what are you willing to die for?

Tom's experience at Oxford during the war spiraled him into deeper questioning – his positioning caused him such strife, his queries so unrelenting, that he became permanently marked by this unknowing. He also became evermore aware of the falsity of the Rhodes as a marker of 'excellence and extraordinariness' tout court. "Still, hmm, my conscience, as I look back on it, I give great thanks for it. It derailed me from what I call the 'Tom Ward Self Glorification project.'" Tom Ward now more deeply understood he was a man in need of transformation; he, like everyone else, was "broken." Prestige and success no longer carried with it an alluring appeal; Tom did not want to accumulate more to redeem himself from his misgivings, he understood that he needed to "die to self," atone for wrong-doings and build up again on more solid ground.

After Oxford, Tom returned to Meridian and taught English at a nearby community college, where Brown vs. Board of Education had just been implemented, and taught the first-ever integrated classes and basketball teams. During this time, navigating the difficult waters of a changing South, Tom went through discernment for the priesthood and decided to go to Seminary to see if he really did want to be a priest. Within his first year, Tom became convinced he was to be a priest after "God sent me my wife." "I do believe God sent me my wife," he said, "and it was convicting to me of what direction I had chosen to go, it was confirming of my search for my vocation, that I was deeply called to the priesthood." Though his calling became clear to him in this time, and for him was God-given, Tom reflected that his discernment process, and his eventual placement, had also to do with his ability to interview well and his ability to seem like an attractive candidate. In other words, he attributes part of his success in the church to his privileged profile.

So, that's how, that's, so my discernment, so there was no issue, so that's my discernment process. There was no issue back with the institution. Again, because I was a child of privilege, they weren't going to turn me down. So getting the church's approval once I offered myself – and that's a problem, again. And it's a problem for you, and it's a problem for anyone – not just with the Rhodes Scholar thing - but anyone with the kind of background you and I have. You can walk into a room for an interview and you'll get it. And that's been true all my life, I interview well. I get jobs I'm not supposed to have, and, but at a certain point you have to say, what's worth living for, what's worth dying for, again it keeps recurring. Again, what is your life about? So that's that question... One of the temptations for Rhodes Scholar types is all of us are good at interviewing (laughs). And how do you stay true, to use the biblical language, to what is in your heart. Who God made you to be?

Tom did not take his acceptance and future placement in the Church – both human affirmations – as sufficient evidence that he was on the right path. Just because he could do any given role well, he realized, it certainly did not mean he was supposed to do it. Instead, he wanted to know a deeper call, a call from God, to discover and follow his truth path: he wanted a pure sense of identity and purpose, outside of his accolades and his ability to persuade.

Tom was invited to lead a big Episcopalian church in Nashville. During his tenure, the church grew considerably in population and endowment. Yet though his time there would have been deemed successful by any institutional metric, Tom couldn't help but wonder if he and his people were taking the Gospel seriously enough.



What I have trouble with is the parish, we were making, we were standing there staying those powerful words and everybody in the room knew we didn't mean them. And I got where I couldn't do it anymore... We would do the sacramental act and we would never see the people again. People would... when I would do pre-marital instruction, you know the premise is you are going to be part of the body of Christ here, and we would never, they would say all the right things. They would tell me what I wanted to hear. They would tell me what I had to hear in order to get the service. You know? It's a pretty place, it's a nice organ, nice music, pretty buildings, stained glass, all that good stuff. I got where, again, the outward and visible was there, and the inward and invisible was not there, what happened to me was that I asked for and got a sabbatical.

Tom sought out silence and intention at a Benedictine monastery, where Parker Palmer was stationed. While there, he realized the importance of contemplative prayer for himself, which for him was a centering activity that helped him “turn inwards” and, through this, better connect outwardly. Finding a source of great renewal, Tom brought contemplative prayer to his parish church and saw that many were then driven to work on social injustices locally with greater fervor. After his tenure at this church, he returned to Sewanee: The University of the South as the University Chaplain, and while there he spent the summers leading and participating in contemplative prayer retreats. Now, Tom works to bring contemplative prayer throughout the country. For him, the practice is so radically transforming, he works excitedly to bring its revelation to others. Thinking about contemplation, Tom remarked,

God has a sense of humor – I am raised to be a success, and this is not designed for success in the world's terms. Contemplation is, is - I believe in what I am doing, I wouldn't change what I am doing in the least, I retired early at 60 to do this, I am continuing to do it, it is what I do... I am into spiritual formation. I am into inviting God to change our lives.

Tom's humility and life-long self-correction woke me up again to how I can heal today and how I can become a force for love in the future. But it was Tom's insistence that this kind of work requires a commitment to practice, a practice grounded in faith that was most moving: we need help to heal, we need a practice to foster courage, we need a source of renewal to enable us to do all that there is needed to do. Working always to be challenged by his environment, trying not to fall back on privilege or positions of power but rather on radical and redemptive love, Tom yearns for God in his life, yearns to be whole and to make whole the world. So how, as an Episcopalian priest and a Contemplative, does Tom understand his injunction to ‘fight the world's fight’? And how does he ‘fight’?

So, the world's fight? The battle continues. And its, its for the heart! You know? And the fruits of the spirit come out of one's relationship with God. And that's what my contemplation is - I am called to act, but I cannot continue to do that without being completely grounded in a life of prayer.

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Tom Ward lives in Sewanee, TN, and works with Contemplative Outreach Ltd. to foster contemplative practices nation-wide. For more information, see:

<http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/>



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Thank You.

