

A Revolution of Hope: Occupy Advent and the Vatican

by Alex Mikulich, Ph.D.

We live in a moment of economic, social, moral, and spiritual impasse. Wondrous technological achievements fail to assuage our possessive individualism, fail to end extreme poverty, fail to cultivate life-giving connections between the rich and poor peoples of the earth, and fail to nurture our universal rootedness in the earth's ecosystems.

Scandals in nearly every major societal institution erode public trust and any sense of our shared responsibility for each other. Technological prowess advanced through wars and multiple capitalist practices fail to care for the most vulnerable among us as they wreak ecological devastation and threaten the very existence of our planet.

Left to our own idolatry, the result is more of the same—insatiable consumer desire, increasing cynicism, politics and economics driven by the self-interest of the powerful against the common good, and the “pre-sumptive” resort to violence as the solution to conflict.

In this time of global and national decline, economically, socially, and morally, how do we take up the spiritual task of waiting this Advent? For what or whom do we hope in this season of longing?

As I prepare for Advent in this time of impasse, I suggest reflection upon the unlikely congruence of two divergent resources: the Occupy movement and the Vatican's recent statement on global financial reform, “Toward Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of Global Public Authority” which is available online here.

In the words of the Pontifical Council of Justice and

Peace, the authoritative office within the Vatican with the highest responsibility for Catholic social teaching, “the gap between ethical training and technical preparation needs to be filled by highlighting in a particular way the perpetual synergy between the two levels of practical doing (praxis) and of boundless human striving (poiesis).”[1]

That is a theologically sophisticated way of emphasizing the need both to integrate spirituality and ethics, individually and collectively, and restore the primacy of spirituality and ethics over capitalism and finance.

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How do we begin this work in Advent?

The Occupy movement practices a way of waiting and listening I find instructive for this Advent in this moment of societal breakdown. Each word and phrase spoken by every speaker is repeated, chorus-like, by the group. It is a way Occupiers slow down the pace of conversation to attend and listen to each other's voices. It is also a way that Occupiers give priority to voices of those previously unheard or marginalized. As they listen to each other, Occupiers seek to hear the voices of those who have not spoken

or have not been heard. An example of this practice may be found on YouTube here (“Angela Davis addresses the Occupy Movement,” October 30, 2011).

I am struck by the wisdom of this Occupy practice for Advent in the way that it calls us to wait and listen, wait and attend, wait and be with one another in the midst of societal breakdown. It is a way of attending to what the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace calls the depths of “human striv-



ing” for enduring goods of love, peace, and justice.

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Both the Occupy movement through this practice and the Vatican through its recent statement on global financial reform compel us to reflect on the need for a contemplative orientation that listens and embodies the cries of the oppressed, and their cries for freedom, for work, for liberation, and for new life in God.

Advent calls us to the spiritual labor of waiting and listening to each other, to those who are in any way oppressed, and to our deepest longings for love, connection, new life, and God.

Yet such waiting as re-orientation to the truly good is no easy task, for it demands “anguish and suffering,” as the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace puts it, as we struggle for love and justice in the midst of societal sinfulness and decline.[2]

This spiritual labor of waiting and listening, I suggest, invites people of faith to open ourselves to our shared vulnerability with all people and to our loss of meaning and empty imagination in

the midst of societal moral and spiritual decline.

Precisely at this seeming “deadendness,” abandonment, and emptiness, I wonder if God might be calling us to experience transformed desire, personally and collectively, for new vision, love, courage, and hope that renews life across the face of the earth. Might there be a miracle of transformation in the midst of emptiness and poverty? [3]

As the contemplative Constance FitzGerald suggests, the miracle is that contemplative cries from people and the earth are “no longer silent and invisible, but rather prophetic and revolutionary.”[3]

This is where the Occupy movement and the Vatican most closely converge. Both call us to wait and listen. If we attend and listen to the groans within ourselves, from peoples everywhere, and the from the earth, we may yet hear the cry of new life and a new creation. When will we groan with all peoples and the earth for God? In waiting and listening to these groans, may we find the Spirit yearning within us for the manager where the revolution of hope and love is born.

Alex Mikulich, Ph. D. is an Assistant Professor at Loyola University New Orleans and is on staff with the Jesuit Social Research Institute. His reflection is reprinted with permission from the JustSouth Newsletter, Number 18, November 2011.

Notes

[1] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, “Toward Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of Global Public Authority,” in *Origins: Catholic Documentary Service* (Vol 41, Number 22, November 3, 2011), p. 349.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Constance FitzGerald, OCD, “The Desire for God and the Transformative Power of Contemplation,” in Mary Heather MacKinnon, Moni McIntyre, and Mary Ellen Sheehan, ed., *Light Burdens Heavy Blessings: Challenges of Church and Culture in a Post Vatican II Era*. Quincy, Illinois: Franciscan Press, (2000): 203-222, 208.

The Occupy Movement is a grassroots led movement against corporate irresponsibility and greed and the policies and practice that support them. The movement began on Septemeber 17, 2011 in New York City and in less than a month spread to 95 cities. In early December there were nearly 500 Occupy organizers the world over. For more information go to occupytogether.com

