
PERSPECTIVES
ON MARRIAGE

A Reader

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*Perspectives
on Marriage*

— A Reader —

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A Spirituality of Resistance for Marriage

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What should we make of the resurgent interest in spirituality? It is difficult to avoid bumping into it today. It has reached far into the popular consciousness of many people. Even in academic circles, new courses and degrees in spirituality are flourishing. At times, it seems we are in the midst of a great new awakening!

This essay starts with the premise that the current spirituality phenomenon is in need of careful examination. Is it an unqualified good, or is there a dark and dangerous side to it? Is it one more self-help process? A middle-class consumer luxury? Or could spirituality address questions of money, sex, drugs, justice, and lifestyle? The answer, of course, depends on the *meaning* of spirituality and the *form* or shape it takes.

In this previously unpublished essay, Kieran Scott proposes a meaning of spirituality as a form of cultural resistance. Competing world views (or gospels) are contrasted so as to illuminate the daily life choices we face. The essay concludes with the application of a spirituality of resistance to marriage and family life. The spiritual, as a prophetic form of resistance, can give the deepest and richest context to our covenantal relations.

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you characterize your own spirituality? What spiritual practices form a regular part of your life? What practices are missing?
2. How would you connect household economics to the economy of salvation?
3. What spiritual issues come to the fore in a young marriage? In midlife? In elderly life?
4. Does your local faith community foster a consumerism spirituality or is it a "community of resistance and solidarity"?
5. What (forgotten) spiritual practices have you recovered from your own religious tradition? From the religious traditions of others?
6. How could a spirituality of resistance invite an alternative set of attitudes and practices toward food shopping, purchasing a car, taking a vacation, or offering hospitality?

Tolerance is regarded as the *highest good* in contemporary U.S. culture. The sociologist Alan Wolfe (1998) found something close to a consensus in

this regard among the middle class. The U.S. style is averse to conflict. Wolfe suggests that most middle-class Americans have effectively added an 11th commandment to the biblical decalogue: "Thou shalt not judge thy neighbor." The prevailing stance and ethos seems to be "live and let live." This high valuing of tolerance is evident in middle-class attitudes toward religious belief, gender roles, immigration, multiculturalism, and race. The one notable exception is homosexuality. Still, the average American is nonjudgmental and unwilling to get pulled into ideological battles that might tear the country apart. They prefer what Wolfe calls "morality writ small" rather than the larger goals of social justice and equality.

We can take some comfort and encouragement from the high value we place on tolerance. Tolerance can be a virtue. It can be a strength in enabling us to navigate diversity and difference. This can be invaluable in our world today. Ask the people of Bosnia, Kosovo, or Northern Ireland. However, tolerance is a virtue among a cluster of virtues. The question I wish to address in this essay is: is it enough? Can tolerance be our highest good in married life? Can tolerance adequately respond to the all-consuming nature of a consumerist culture? Can it address questions of familial justice? Can it deal with fundamental issues of lifestyle? I believe the answer to all the above is negative. Tolerance alone, notes David Hollenbach (1999), cannot produce an adequate response to the cruel realities of urban poverty. We need, he believes, a stronger vision of the common good to address them. The times we live in may, in fact, call for a *form of intolerance*. The name I give to this form of life is a spirituality of resistance.

This essay will explore: (1) the meaning of spirituality as resistance; (2) two competing gospels: commodity form versus personal form; and (3) challenging and resisting the commodity form in marriage and family life.

SPIRITUALITY AS RESISTANCE

Spirituality is undergoing a widespread renaissance. The interest is phenomenal and touches multiple levels in our society. On the academic level, there has been a resurgence of interest in historical figures such as Julian of Norwich and Hildegard of Bingen. Among popular audiences, books on spirituality regularly hit the best-seller list. Every large bookstore has a wall that is stacked full of the most recent books on the new spirituality. TV audiences can tune in daily to Oprah, Suzie Orman, or Deepak Chopra for discussions on how to integrate the spiritual with love, sex, marriage, monetary success, and world peace. According to postmodern cultural critics, religion is fading, but spirituality is an inherent postmodern sensibility.

Is this interest in spirituality just a passing fad? Is it good or bad? Is it a complement to marriage and family life or could it be a chief competitor? Does it offer (long-neglected) resources for the contemporary world or is it dangerous and illusionary? And why the sudden burst of interest in spirituality in the 1990s? What caused this eruption?

My interest here is the linkage between spirituality and the practice of a disciplined and responsible married life. Before we can move in this direction, however, some *historical* lessons need to be learned and some *current misconceived* spiritualities need unmasking.

The new spirituality wishes to address the novel situation of the present. There is a hunger, a quest beyond materiality. Vaclav Havel, president of the Czech Republic, noticed this rapid spiritual awakening and spread of religious feeling among young people in his country. "This is not an accidental phenomenon," he writes, "it is an inevitable one: the endless, unchanging wasteland of the herd life in a consumer society, its intellectual and spiritual vacuity, its moral sterility, necessarily causes young people to turn their attentions somewhere further and higher; it compels them to ask questions about the meaning of life, to look for a more meaningful system of values and standards, to seek, among the diffuse and fragmented world of frenzied consumerism for a point that will hold firm—all this awakens in them a longing for a genuine moral 'vanishing point,' for something purer and more authentic" (1990, pp. 184–185). The new literature on spirituality attempts to respond to these deep yearnings of contemporary men and women. The books and TV discussions explore these desires and sentiments that speak to ordinary human experience. Ironically, it is the very lack of attention of church officials, preachers, and liturgists to the concrete daily lives of people that sends them outside institutionalized religion to have their spiritual thirst quenched.

Spirituality today is seen as the great unifier. The vague all-inclusive meaning of the term is seen as an advantage. The driving force behind its reemergence is the desire for a unifying idea. Contemporary life is fragmented. Dualisms abound: body-soul, East-West, religious-secular, science-philosophy. There is a deeply felt need to overcome this fragmentation. The "new spirituality" holds the promise of healing the world's splits. Historically, however, the spiritual represented the opposite: the inner as opposed to the outer, and the nonmaterial as opposed to the material or body. While contemporary writers may not *intend* that meaning today, at the same time they cannot ignore it. A premature jump into unity may be an illusion. High-level generalities may be deceptive. And, vague all-inclusive meanings float into abstractions. This is one of the dangers in the current spirituality craze. It lends itself to a Disneyland or cafeteria-style choosing, a fuzzy concern and love for the whole world but for no one or place in particular. This is a rootless spirituality. This is the result of the divorce, in much of the current literature and popular discussions, of spirituality from religion. It leads to disastrous escapism. On the other hand, spirituality is in critical need of religion. Religion, with all its flaws, can act as a wise restraint upon our spiritual drive, and at the same time nourish us with centuries of (external) religious practices.

A second cautionary note, with regard to some forms of contemporary spirituality, is sounded by L. Gregory Jones (1997). Jones offers a scathing critique of popular spiritual works. Too often, he observes, popular spirituality is prone to present the spiritual journey as an individual quest tailored to the individual's privatized needs and desires. The individual is invited, like a

good tourist, to go on brief forays, sampling exotic "lands" of ideas, so as to discover the sacred in their midst. The journey, however, is without *telos*, except the ceaseless motion of self-discovery or self-invention. What it offers is "a synthetic substitute of vague, self-referential religiosity." "I am convinced," writes Jones, "that much contemporary spirituality is shaped by consumer impulses and captive to a therapeutic culture. It systematically avoids the disciplined practices necessary for engagement with God . . . [it] separates spirituality both from theological convictions and practices on the one hand, and social and political realities and commitment on the other" (p. 4). Jones acknowledges that the interest in popular spirituality reflects important yearnings and is a judgment on the failure of Christian communities. At the same time, he cautions us to be wary of "spirituality" as we nurture people in their often inchoate desires and yearnings. This can only be done, he claims, if we recognize the dramatic differences between Christian spiritual practices and a generic or consumerist spirituality. He identifies and explains five significant differences:

1. Contemporary popular spirituality has become a new commodity to consume in an increasingly commodified world. It plays right into the prevalent consumer mentality. People have (authentic) needs and desires. They are desperately searching for a new commodity that can satisfy the desires other commodities have failed to quench. Let them choose what they prefer: "the consumer is always right."
2. Contemporary spirituality celebrates the individuality over-against (external) other authority. The focus is almost exclusively on the self-sufficiency of one's interior life. It is a journey of self-knowledge and self-salvation. There is little sense of being part of something greater. It is the "triumph of the therapeutic" self. The individual becomes the ultimate authority for cultivating and evaluating spiritual progress. No external authority, institution, or official ministerial representative is necessary.
3. Contemporary spirituality has a syncretic approach to religious commitment. Everything is compounded—a little piece of Zen, a dash of animism, a sprinkling of Oriental mythologies, mixed with some elements of Jewish and Christian traditions. In this supermarket of spiritual selection, anything can be employed to meet individual needs.
4. Contemporary spirituality is lured by the idea to unite people around the world beyond political or institutional divisions. Social and political realities and commitments are not addressed. What really matters is the inner experiences of isolated individuals. The bifurcation of the spiritual and the political allows the spiritual to be a luxury consumer good. Massive suffering around the world will not be confronted.
5. Contemporary spirituality has severed itself from centuries of Christian practices. This gap between Christian practices and consumer spirituality is one of the reasons for the popularity of the "new spirituality," and yet one of its most dangerous elements. The Christian churches, however, have

done an abysmal job in sustaining the sort of practices and spiritual disciplines necessary for an authentic communal life.

Jones's incisive analysis insightfully sketches our contemporary drift or tour into misconceived spiritualities. The spiritual life, on the other hand, rooted in religious (Christian) traditions is "shaped by both the *absence* and the *presence* of God" (p. 6). We are called to repentance and conversion. There can be no self-knowledge without knowledge of God. We cannot save ourselves. Sin is self-deceptive, and all our life decisions are entangled in it. Christian spiritual practices teach us to become *detached* from those features of our world that separate us from God and free us to cling to the One who alone can satisfy our desires. They transform our desire from selfish acquisition into self-giving love.

Gabriel Moran and Maria Harris are in accord with these sentiments. Harris refers to spirituality as "our *way of being in the world in light of the Mystery at the core of the universe*" (1998, p. 109; emphasis added). Her choice of language is very instructive for us. Several elements stand out. Spirituality is conceived as:

1. *This Worldly*. It is not a flight from history or a disengagement from matter/body. Rather, today's spirituality is rooted in the concrete personal/communal/ecological relations that envelop our daily lives.
2. *Being*. Here spirituality breaks with a mere pragmatic or utilitarian approach to life. It broadens existence in the world beyond doing to being. It is not a commodity to give satisfaction.
3. *A Way*. Spirituality is connected to a "way" of life or a set of ways (or disciplines). This links it to an historical tradition, to a disciplined communal life.
4. *The Sacred*. This element stresses the sacred character of existence. We journey through life with a profound sense of the Mystery at the core of the universe. Notice the location of the sacred. The Holy One will be encountered in the depths (core) of all our relatedness.

This meaning and practice of spirituality as a daily lifestyle can have profound implications for marriage and family life. In the context of our mass culture, it is a countervailing force against the addiction of consumerism. This is a spiritual (way) life that makes decisions against the tide. It is a prophetic form of cultural resistance. It is a protest against a meaningless, self-centered, commodity-driven life. God is the Other who interrupts our lives and offers judgment on what we lack and need. Spirituality here is a shield or a defense against what destroys our integrity as persons. It allows us to say no to what destroys our dignity. It offers us a set of forms and teaches us a set of disciplines so that we will be able to resist evil. This language may seem peculiarly negative. However, if we look closely we will find a language of double negatives and thus a language of affirmation in the

real and concrete world. The protest (no) takes place within the context of a life affirming (yes) quest for justice and peace.

TWO COMPETING GOSPELS: COMMODITY FORM VERSUS PERSONAL FORM

In order for us to move a step closer to establish a firm linkage between spirituality and the daily lived experience of marriage, the issue must be placed in the context of time and place. We are at the dawn of a new millennium. The United States is the only remaining superpower in the world. The Dow Jones reaches toward twelve thousand. Sports-utility vehicles fly out of dealers' parking lots. Luxury homes are mushrooming throughout suburbia. Unemployment is at an all-time low, and the economy at an unprecedented high. By some standards, these are very good times to live in this place. And yet for all our success in the modern United States, there is a sense that something has gone terribly awry.

In spite of repeated dire predictions, marriage and family are not about to fade into oblivion. They remain the most fundamental form of civil association and an anchor in turbulent seas. Contemporary "cultural wars," however, revolve around marriage and family. Left and right wing remain devoted to a strong picture of family life. Family imagery permeates our deepest hopes, fears, and aspirations. In her writings, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead (1997) argues that our national debate on the family is being conducted in two separate languages. These languages are foreign to each other and speak past each other. The first is the official language, spoken by experts, academics, liberal politicians, and the media. The focus of this official debate is how to get both parents into full-time work and fund child care. The second is family language, spoken by ordinary middle-class families (and sometimes coopted by right-wing religious and political ideologues). The preoccupation of this grassroots conversation is how parents can raise their kids in a culture unfriendly to parents and children. The focus is on contemporary culture and how it has made it almost impossible for families to flourish. There is a pervasive fear that our children are succumbing to the dominant mores and adopting the values of an aggressively materialistic, individualistic, and consumerist culture. Families are clearly stressed, but simply getting more partners into the workforce so that we can buy more goods and services misses the factor of moral formation. It also creates further needs and expectations and traps us in a pressure-filled economic treadmill.

Jean Bethke Elshtain has some sympathy for this latter conversation. "Who do we serve?" she asks. "The current American answer seems to be neither family, nor friends, nor church, nor civic society. Where, then, are we putting our energies? What takes our time, occupies our attention, diverts our minds? If the available data affords an accurate representation of the complexities of the moment, it must be said that Americans are working longer and harder than they ever did to earn a living, to 'get ahead,' save

money, to buy goods, to live out one version of the American dream" (1998, p. 31). And after we have done all that, "there is nothing left to give." So we retreat to privacy and creature comforts.

The nature of the stark and fundamental choices confronting us in our daily lives in the United States is strikingly portrayed by John Kavanaugh in his book *Following Christ in a Consumer Society* (1981). In Kavanaugh's terms, our fundamental option is between two opposing forms of life, namely, the "commodity form" and the "personal form." Each represents a style of life, a formation system, a worldview, a way of journeying. They are, in effect, two competing gospels. "These gospels," he notes, "differ as radically as light and darkness, life and death, freedom and slavery, fidelity and unfaithfulness" (pp. 20-21). They serve as ultimate and competing hermeneutical lens on reality. One gospel reveals men and women as replaceable and marketable commodities; another gospel reveals persons as irreplaceable and unique free beings. One is a gospel of life; the other a culture of death.

The commodity form reveals the spiritual crisis at the heart of our social, political, and economic evils. It is aptly summed up in the bumper sticker: "I Shop, Therefore I Am." It is not things, material possessions, technology, or capitalism, in and of themselves, however, that are problematic. Rather, it is the idolatry of them and submission to them in terms of seeking meaning and fulfillment of our existence through them. The present consumer society in the United States runs on the producing, purchasing, and consuming of objects. But the formation and information system that is commodity culture does not just affect the way we shop. It affects the way we think and feel, the way we work and play, the way we relate to our spouses and children. It is "systemic." Its influence is felt in every dimension of our lives and provides, for some, their ultimate horizon of meaning. Marketing and consuming, then, become the standard of our final worth and ultimately reveal us to ourselves as things.

The commodity form is formation to a life of fragmented relatedness. The interior self is lost and this parallels the dissolution of mutuality and relationship. Free commitments and questioning are shut out. When we perceive ourselves and others as things, we invariably produce lives of manipulation, utility, domination, and violence. This personal and interpersonal breakdown is reflected in our lives through a flight from human vulnerability and channeling our desires into the amassing of possessions. In effect, the consumerist gospel offers a practically lived atheism. It embodies the most fundamental of human sins: idolatry.

The personal form of life, as revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, calls for a massive personal resistance to the values of the commodity form. Kavanaugh describes it as "a mode of perceiving and valuing men and women as irreplaceable persons whose fundamental identities are fulfilled in covenantal relationship." This gospel is countercultural. It offers a model of humanity that is personalistic, liberating, and ultimately exalting of human life. It is captured in Martin Buber's term *I-Thou* (1958), and in his statement: "All real living is meeting" (p. 11). Pope John Paul II has reiterated this theme through-

out his papacy. In his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* (1979) he warned us in the West of the danger in achieving high economic success and productivity. We might fall into a form of unfreedom: a slavery to consumerism itself. "Humans," he writes, "cannot relinquish themselves or the place in the visible world that belongs to them; they cannot become slaves to things, the slaves of economic systems, the slaves of production, the slaves of their own production" (p. 25). Our vocation is to *negate* the negations, and to *affirm* a deeper communal life in justice and peace.

For Kavanaugh, the commodity form and the personal form stand in opposition to each other on every level. They elicit from us, whether we are conscious of it or not, a final and totalized allegiance. Each presents itself as the ultimate explanatory principle of life. Consequently, we are faced with a conscious choice. The choice is: what god to believe in. The implications for marriage and family are monumental.

CHALLENGING AND RESISTING THE COMMODITY FORM IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

The practicing Christian should look like a Martian. This metaphor suggested by Kavanaugh (1981) indicates the sense of otherness or foreignness that characterizes a Christian style of life. He or she will never feel fully at home in a commodity culture. And, if we do, something is drastically wrong. "Christians are called up," notes Jean Bethke Elshtain, "not to conform to the world's ways but to challenge them. If the world dictates that men and women are most human when they are buying and consuming, why should Christians follow suit?" (1998, p. 32). Are we not called to be signs of contradiction amidst the distorted values of the present moment? The Christian way places us in a *dialectical* relation with the economic, political, and institutional forms of contemporary culture. It is profoundly countercultural.

Marriage and family life can be a living testimony to this swimming against the tide. As a pivotal social form it can be a base for resistance to the commodity form. It can provide a zone of freedom where the deepest experiences of fidelity, trust, self-acceptance, intimacy, and selfless love can occur. When married couples and parents embody these qualities of personhood, they can be the most primal and resilient support for resistance to dehumanization. Thus understood, marriage and family is a modern parable, a cultural protest and a subversive force that undermines the gods of consumerism.

However, married couples and families need protective shields if they are to live as a counterforce. If they are to fully respond to this prophetic call, they must put on a set of practices rooted in the wisdom of religious traditions and modeled in the corporate life of a people. In Christian communities, these practices of spiritual disciplines teach. They are a form of divine pedagogy. The pedagogy shows us how to do two things: (1) they teach us how to become *detached* from things that clutter our lives and, consequently, leave no room for God, and (2) they teach us how to *transform* our desire so that our

restless hearts will find human fulfillment in the Holy One. In other words, they offer an alternative way.

As a way of highlighting these disciplines, I will take the framework proposed by John Kavanaugh in some later writings (1984) and fill it with some of my own commentary and insights. Kavanaugh examines five areas of our lives where the economic gospel of our culture tries to establish its hegemony. In each of these areas, he counterposes spiritual practices as a living alternative to the cultural tyranny of consumerism. The framework and dialectic proposed is very instructive for marriage and family life today. The five areas and their counterpoints are:

1. the loss of *interiority* and (the unmarketability of) solitude
2. the loss of *solidarity* and the resistance of *covenantal life*
3. systematically legitimated *injustice* and *social commitment*
4. craving *consumption* and *simplicity* of life
5. the flight from *vulnerability* and (the counter-economics of) *compassion*.

On the one side, we have the wounds of consumerism; on the other side, the healing power of grace. Both are frequently intertwined on our marriages. It is the spiritual disciplines, however, that teach us how to resist evil in the daily routine of our family lives. Let us briefly examine the five areas and their interplay with spiritual practices.

THE LOSS OF INTERIORITY AND (THE UNMARKETABILITY) OF SOLITUDE

As a formation system, commodity culture cultivates a false inner self. Buying becomes our most interior experience. The self is now available for purchase. Our identities collapse into possessions and appearances. We *are* how we look, what we eat, and the way we buy. Economics becomes the gauge of our personhood. But basically this is a spiritual phenomenon. We are taught to fear who we are in solitary. We live by pretense and external appearance. Image is everything.

Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran (1997), however, direct us back to the basic question: "And what is a person?" "A person," they reply, "is one who listens inwardly and responds outwardly" (p. 61). Two characteristics stand out here. The first reminds us that as persons we possess characteristics for interiority and inwardness: an inner life. The second is: one cannot be a person alone. Relationality is necessary for personhood. The first characteristic is the focus of our attention here.

Harris and Moran write about education as a process of formation of the inner life. People are nourished, they note, by three deep springs: silence, listening, and Sabbath. These three forms are critical to the recovery and transformation of the self. *Silence* is a discipline learned by setting aside regular periods of time in which to move away from distraction and noise. It is the

art of "centering down" where other forms of knowing become possible. It is an art absent in many homes today. The primary concern of parents in the United States today is time: loss of time with their children. This loss is also felt in the absence of zones of quiet and periods of silence in households.

The second nurturing spring is *listening*. Silence is for the sake of listening. A person listens inwardly as a condition for outward response. This art of listening demands attention to the voices of wisdom in our heritage, to the cries of the wounded in our midst, and to the calls for re-creation. Profound silence can break through the psychic and emotional numbness that conspicuous consumption fosters.

Sabbath is the third component in educating the inner life. It remains a central practice in both Jewish and Christian traditions. Sabbath begins as a cessation of labor. It is a "covenantal work stoppage" (Brueggemann cited in Harris and Moran 1997, p. 66). "Remember the sabbath day" is a reminder that our world is not a place of endless productivity, ambition, and stress. Couples and families need freeing from the burdens of labor periodically. They need rest for renewal.

These three springs of living water are prayer forms. They extricate us from patterns of behavior that have become normative in commodity culture. They center us in ourselves as persons and free us for engagement in the other arenas of life. Prayer may be perceived as lacking pragmatics, as a waste of time, as self-deception. On the contrary, it is an exercise in self-revelation, an act of economic resistance, and a radical alternative to the commercial imperative of our culture. It is a social and political act, and profoundly countercultural. Every couple and family needs it at the center of their daily lives.

THE LOSS OF SOLIDARITY AND THE RESISTANCE OF COVENANTAL LIFE

Cultural commentators in recent decades have raised the issue of the need for a new public philosophy in the United States. There is a weak sense of the common good. Private rights triumph over public purpose. The basic operating principle in our social, economic, and political structures is competition rather than cooperation, individualism rather than solidarity, self-sufficiency instead of interdependence. Most middle-class Americans live in neighborhoods that isolate them, not only from themselves, but from people of different socioeconomic backgrounds. They hunker down, as Robert Bellah and colleagues (1985) note, in "lifestyle enclaves" and find their identities in interaction with other persons with similar patterns of appearance, consumption, and leisure. It's a form of Club Med writ large. It pits the suburbs against the city, upstate against downstate, the middle class against the very poor, and frequently white against people of color. Authentic communities are hard to find. Rugged individualism holds sway. The economic myths that drive the engine of our culture have massive influence on our relationships. Our passions and desires are directed into things. We buy ourselves to death. What

we experience in return is fragmentation, loss of solidarity, and the painful absence of covenantal intimacies in our lives.

Martin Buber (1966) writes: the first injunction in life is to begin with oneself. The second is not to be preoccupied with oneself. The key, he observed, is "To begin with oneself, but not to end with oneself; to start from oneself, but not to aim at oneself; to comprehend oneself, but not to be preoccupied with oneself" (pp. 31-32). This advice, penned some fifty years ago, is wisdom in an age of narcissism. I-Thou is potentially subversive. Friendship, family intimacy, and community are powerful forms of cultural resistance. They are countervalues. They represent a protest for the riches of a shared life.

Covenantal relations, then, carry within their very identities the seeds of prophetic resistance. Only in these relations can our truth be known and our personhood emerge. These relationships, however, take time. We cannot dignify one another or be fully present to one another if our calendars are bursting with activities and we are busy racing around with no time to pause. A committed relationship, on the other hand, is a courageous act of economic disengagement. Kavanaugh advises, "If we spend one half hour a day more in relationship talking with a community friend, walking for a while with our spouse, 'wasting time' with our children, speaking the truth to a brother or sister, we will find ourselves empowered to resist much of the institutionalized craving of our acculturated appetites" (1984, p. 608). Couples and families need less busyness and more presence in the rhythm of their lives.

SYSTEMATICALLY LEGITIMATED INJUSTICE AND SOCIAL COMMITMENT

Commodity culture makes things of us all. And we become as helpless as the things we worship. This reification of life spills over into a utilitarian disposition toward work, an instrumentalist attitude in our social commerce, and an objectification of our sexual partners. This depersonalization is intrinsically related to injustice. Violence and injustice fundamentally "thingify" the other: the poor, the homeless, the imprisoned, the unemployed, the undocumented immigrant, the ethnic minority, the gay. Our culture remains mired in these social deaths. The systematizing of these prejudices, in all of their subtle—and not so subtle—institutional, political, and interpersonal forms, is the real culture of death. Are we naive enough to believe there is no relationship between our divorce culture and our commodity culture in the United States? No connection between domestic violence and market economy? No link between mass advertising and hoarding more and more possessions?

Walter Brueggemann (1986) writes, "Justice is to sort out what belongs to whom, and to return it to them. . . . the work of liberation, redemption, salvation is the work of giving things back" (p. 5). This is the other side that completes our personhood. The inner life must be expressed in outward activity. In fact, the deeper the inwardness, the wider the external effect. This is the paradox at the heart of the Christian (as well as Jewish and Muslim) religion. Justice is not some bleeding-heart liberal program. It is a constituent

element of faith and love. The issues of economic injustice, hunger, homelessness, and powerlessness are the very flesh of faith. Judgment will be rendered on how we have responded to the other.

Social commitments are an alternative way of life. In a culture where human value is measured by beauty, wealth, gender, or race, social commitment shatters all of that. Our convictions must be given concrete expression. We must act. We must resist the plague (Camus).

In our marriages and families, justice begins with fidelity to our relationships. We are partners with our spouses, our children, our dogs and our cats, and the earth. All require responsive justice. Domestic violence must be negated. Familial structures need reshaping away from dominant and subordinate roles toward mutuality and collaboration. Commitments must be honored to ensure family stability. And justice in the family is inextricably connected to the struggle to repair a wounded world.

CRAVING CONSUMPTION AND SIMPLICITY OF LIFE

The story of commodity culture is the story of creating false needs. As a total formation system, it stimulates desires, cultivates needs, and inflates expectations. Our sense of belonging and well-being is increasingly defined by access to goods and services. The market has become ubiquitous, affecting our way of life, and burdening us with what early Quakers called "cumber." Our spent energy goes in circles: we crave, we accumulate, we secure, we maintain, and finally, we discard. Jean Bethke Elshtain writes, "We cannot offer the gift of self to one another if we ourselves are entirely consumed by consumption—wholly given over to a relentless fast-paced life in which the more we earn, the more we need to earn . . . on and on without any apparent oasis in sight" (1998, p. 34). "Can we," she asks, "glimpse an alternative?"

Voluntary simplicity is such an alternative. Simplicity is the desire for faithful living. It is as Sharon Daloz Parks (1997, p. 50) notes, "an orientation to life that can, over time, foster a sense of right proportion and right relation" in our households and the whole earth community. We *choose* to "travel light," not because of guilt, some trendy asceticism, or frugality, but because we value persons over things. The practice of simplicity is a lifestyle choice that touches every aspect of our lives—food, money, time, property, goods, and services. It is not simply a question of "cutting back" on these gifts, but rather the proper integration of them into our lives. Craving consumption chokes off fullness of life. Simplicity, on the other hand, is learning to say no to what crowds out God and our fellow travelers. It is a lifestyle form of resistance.

The implications for marriage and family are simply profound. "When we live simply," John Kavanaugh (1984, p. 610) writes, "we have more time for solitude, more time to savor and appreciate the things that we actually have. We are less cluttered by assaults from the media. We have more time for each other, more time to 'waste' in relationships, more time to appropriate our lives together in family and community. When we live more simply, we

are more able to respond to the problems of injustice in the world—not only by sharing what we do not need, but also by time for greater availability in service and social action." Cutting back, then, on television viewing, on luxury purchasing, on excessive alcohol consumption, on working hours simply leaves more room for others and for God.

THE FLIGHT FROM VULNERABILITY AND (THE COUNTERECONOMICS OF) COMPASSION

Two economies operate in our world and are inextricably intertwined in our lives: the market economy and the gift economy. Both are necessary, potentially complementary but frequently conflictual. The market or cash economy consumes us in our work. This is the world of buying and selling, of supply and demand. It exists to produce abundance—more cars and computers, better medicine and services. These are valuable elements in our social life. We lose our equilibrium, however, when we allow market forces to control our lives and preoccupy our attention. This is the face of the commodity form. It distracts our attention from other vital arenas of life. We flee from the cries of the poor, the suffering of the dispossessed, the plight of the wretched of the earth. We become numb and anesthetized to vulnerability.

The gift economy also encircles us in our daily lives, even if it is less obvious at times. It operates according to different rules. For Christians, Jesus of Nazareth is the paradigm of the gift economy. The Christian gift economy holds that in giving we are enriched. It is a schooling in how to give oneself away. We volunteer our time, we engage in social outreach, we work pro bono, we serve on a citizen's committee. This economy also seeks abundance, fullness of life. What is given enriches both the giver and the receiver. Evelyn and James Whitehead note: "In our families and friendships, in public service and generative care, we experience an exchange in which giving is not losing" (1998, 10). We discover that it is in giving our lives away that we receive our life back in abundance.

Marriage is a meeting place of the cash and gift economies. The two intersect and overlap in the daily routine of family life. However, vigilance is required. We must work hard to prevent the market from dominating and consuming our lifestyle. We must resist the collapse of the two into one. This will allow us to be open to vulnerability. It will foster compassion and call us to engage in the work of repairing our broken world.

Marriage is a covenant of love, care, and compassion. In the midst of these godly works, we must resist the ungodly. The resistance, however, takes place within the larger context of a life-affirming yes. Home is a place where we find anchor and where we craft the disciplines to live a life of integrity. These spiritual disciplines allow us to (1) affirm the goodness of marriage and family, (2) negate the intolerable evil that threatens to destroy it, and (3) affirm a deeper communal life together in justice and peace. A spirituality of resistance calls us to reclaim this center in our lives. And at this center, our hearts will find rest and be at home in the mystery.

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CHAPTER 35

Spirituality and Lifestyle

Evelyn Eaton Whitehead

James D. Whitehead



When some people think about their future marriage, their fantasy is not one of "erotic flourishing" in a household with a beloved partner, but this: having in the marriage household all the things they could not afford in the parental household. If this statement is true, it means that the fantasy of marriage is not a relational one at all but a consumerist one, not one of loving but one of having.

There is much in the following essay that may seem to some readers as, to use the authors' own words, "illusory or naive." Here the Whiteheads deal with the sort of attitudes or sense of things that comes from the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. The authors use the word *spirituality* to name the attitudes they describe. Not everyone understands the meaning of this term. The best way of understanding it is this: not thoughts about God but rather a way of living that shows what a person stands for. This can be positive or negative. Some people live out the motto: "Never give a sucker a break" or "Grab all the gusto you can get." Living out either motto gives us a negative dehumanized kind of spirit. Living out the kind of loving stance toward the world and its people that Jesus showed us gives us a very different kind of spirit. You understand a person's spirituality when you stand next to a coffin and ask: what was this person all about; what did this person stand for in his or her life?

One student who read this essay, a young woman, found its proposals so "far out" that she called the authors "religious fanatics." Seen against the depiction of family life found in TV sitcoms, the essay is indeed "far out." However, the authors are proposing that a particular couple have a definite kind of "agency," that is, the power to bring into their home a particular set of values and attitudes that become spelled out in deeds: in ways of speaking to one another; in ways of eating; in the kinds of issues that come up around the dinner table; in the sorts of people invited to gather around that table; in the patterns of prayer or of not praying.

No matter how you see these particular patterns, *there will be patterns of speaking and doing* that will characterize the household. What will they be? Will they be patterns of consumerism, of racism, of sexism, of homophobia, of greed, of hate. Will our attitudes be formed by sitcoms or will there be an alternate set of attitudes? Will the conviction that we are for more than ourselves be basic in our household, or will our conviction be "look out for number one"?