

Conspiracies

BREATHING TOGETHER THE BREATH OF LIFE

FALL 2015 VOL. 4 NO. 1

# Conspiracies

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## STRANGERS ACROSS THE STREET AND ACROSS THE GLOBE

KERRY MALONEY

HDS CHAPLAIN AND DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

As this issue of *ConSpiracies* goes to press, we find ourselves mired, globally and locally, in an apparently endless cycle of interdependent violence. Whether it's the state-sponsored terrorism of oppressive regimes and the imperial powers of war, resulting in incalculable devastation and unprecedented numbers of refugees seeking safe haven; the terrorism committed by non-state actors in every country across the globe; the terrorism of the permanent anti-terror police state emerging everywhere; the terrorism of white supremacy and its myriad lethal expressions saturating daily life in the United States, not least in the criminal justice system; the terrorism of religious bigotry in countless forms, targeting especially Muslims and Jews; the terrorism of gender-based violence, especially in the war on women's moral agency, sexual health, and safety; the terrorism of gun violence in mass shootings and single assaults every day of the year in the United States; the economic terrorism inherent in the massive accumulation of wealth by the ever-shrinking elite at the expense of the ever-expanding poor; the ecological terrorism inflicted on the planet by our patterns of consumption and greed – violence weaves a web of destruction so firmly around us that it can threaten to snare us forever in nihilism. By the end of 2015, those of us in privileged classes, religious traditions, and ethnic groups in the United States and Western Europe have found ourselves—at last, like most of the rest of the world which has suffered for centuries under the daily brutality of colonialist terrorism without much notice or empathy from us—entangled enough in that web to have been threatened with the genuine terror of despair. And if it wasn't clear before, by now it has become abundantly apparent: the real war against terror turns out to be fought in the heart.

Hope demands ferocious spiritual and intellectual discipline. Practiced as a spiritual virtue, it can develop the soul's resilience; when assailed by trauma, something like healing may emerge, or when assailed by guilt, something like repentance may occur. Practiced as an intellectual commitment, hope can develop the mind's rigorous resistance; when confronted by propaganda, something like truth may break out, or when confronted by evil something like holiness may erupt. At Harvard Divinity School, we strive daily—even if with as much failure as success—to honor and to exercise the habits



Photos: Brian Tortora

## STRANGERS ACROSS THE STREET AND ACROSS THE GLOBE

KERRY MALONEY

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of mind and heart that might produce a hope stronger than despair, a love stronger than death. This issue of *ConSpiracies* provides a glimpse of those habits refracted through some writings, songs, prayers, and sermons offered this semester by a few members of the HDS community.

Every fall term on the last evening of classes, the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life hosts a multireligious service we call “Seasons of Light.” Featuring readings, prayers, and music from all the religious and spiritual communities represented at HDS, this annual ritual celebrates the sacred interplay of darkness and light honored by all the world’s great wisdom traditions. On December 1, 2015, unaware that we were gathered on the eve the San Bernardino massacre but acutely aware that we were at the end of a long season drenched in blood, HDS students bathed the open wounds of the year with mercy and faith. Sacred texts from sixteen traditions were proclaimed with humility and power; music from the global canon was created with artistry and grace; holy flames were kindled in honor of all the traditions represented, illumining the beautiful darkness that had fallen around us. And that night, hope triumphed over despair.

Before we extinguished our candles, Professor Dan McKanan sent us out into the night that would turn into the dawn of December 2 with this benediction: “As you step into the darkness outside, carry the light of one another’s traditions and the warmth of one another’s love. Let that light and that warmth be a beacon to strangers across the street and across the world, inviting them to teach you that there is no security in sameness, but only in the sharing of difference. Do not fear the dark or the cold, or even strive to overcome them, but instead welcome them into the dance of the seasons. Go in peace.”



Photos: Brian Tortora

## SURRENDER

SHEZA ATIQ  
MTS '17



*Sheza Atiq, MTS '17 offered this reflection at the HDS Wednesday Noon Service, hosted by the Muslim Council, on September 30, 2015.*

We live in a world that seems to love stories. While visiting a social enterprise in

India this summer, I learn that storytelling is integral to that group's fundraising efforts. Being able to paint a picture through words was essential to garner support for victims or for the disenfranchised because after all, everyone loves a good story.

Our Facebooks, our news and even our scholarship seem to have become a marathon of stories, a race of who tells the most poignant one in the most poignant words. And amidst such developments, we seem inadvertently to have begun to live our lives in the hopes of becoming a memorable story.

It is difficult then to recall the very act of existing. Our challenge is not perhaps in distinguishing fact from fiction but rather in remembering the everyday, the steady—perhaps even banal—reality of days that are passing and breaths left behind. And perhaps it is for this reason that we are gathered in these hallowed halls of divinity school; to reach out to an experience, a tradition, a phenomenon—whatever you wish to call it—that contains echoes of a truth and reality that we are forgetting how to detect.

Religion is undoubtedly a story in and of itself. It has been ever since it became part of our collective conscience. But beyond the collective, for the individual, it still remains a quiet hope for something more, for an enlightenment that can help us see some truths that go beyond the social structures we have become so embroiled in. To hearken us back to the very existence of our selves whilst pointing to a Presence far superior to it.

The Muslim community's presence here is meant to give you a taste of what such truth or harbingers of reality might look like for us. You have seen my peers instruct you in words, in

musical notes, in calls and even in movements, for these are all features of this tradition. And if we have spoken to you through symbols and through foreign vocabulary it is not because of a disjunction in language or geography or history but of our understanding of a Reality that surpasses our reach. It is a Reality we have come to know through a book of thirty sections and a one hundred fourteen chapters. But lest we—or any scholar really—try and explicate the meaning of these verses, we are reminded of our naiveté through the saying that one-third of the book can be represented by its briefest, three-versed chapter entitled “Ikhkhas” or “Sincerity.”

And so we can offer you little but traces of a faith that reminds us of the world and our own simplicity even as we confront the complex. In the Quran it is said that everything perishes save the face of your Lord, and we keep this in mind as students of this Divinity School. Some of us are here to pursue knowledge related to a 14-century-old tradition; some are here in search of God, in search of ourselves, or in search of nuggets of understanding. The pursuit of knowledge is undoubtedly a praised act; but our faith also commands us to recall that learning is an abyss where every step forward and every epiphany gained are merely matters of moving sideways on the rungs of a horizontal ladder.



Prayer rugs in Andover Chapel  
Photo: Kerry Maloney

# SURRENDER

**SHEZA ATIQ**  
MTS '17

We might delve into the densest philosophy of religion or manage the largest community center in the region, but lest we make the mistake of reveling in this journey we have attempted to set out on, our prides are silenced by our Prophet's injunction to have the faith of old women. Those very traditional grandmothers whose practice we are often too eager to leave behind.

Knowledge is a beautiful thing. It is what unites us here at HDS. But even at this School we have to recall that the pursuit of faith is never an indication of faith itself.

And so we stand here before you and with you in an attempt to remember the simplicity we have forgotten and perhaps to look up from the stories we are attempting to create. Above all we are here to abide by the surrendering that is contained in the very term "Islam." A surrender to you and all things before us in the hopes of being taught the unfamiliar; a surrender to the silence within us in the hopes of quieting the mental narrator who is so eager to describe and instruct. And, above all, a surrender to God in hopes of a faith, a character, knowledge and life greater and beyond us all.

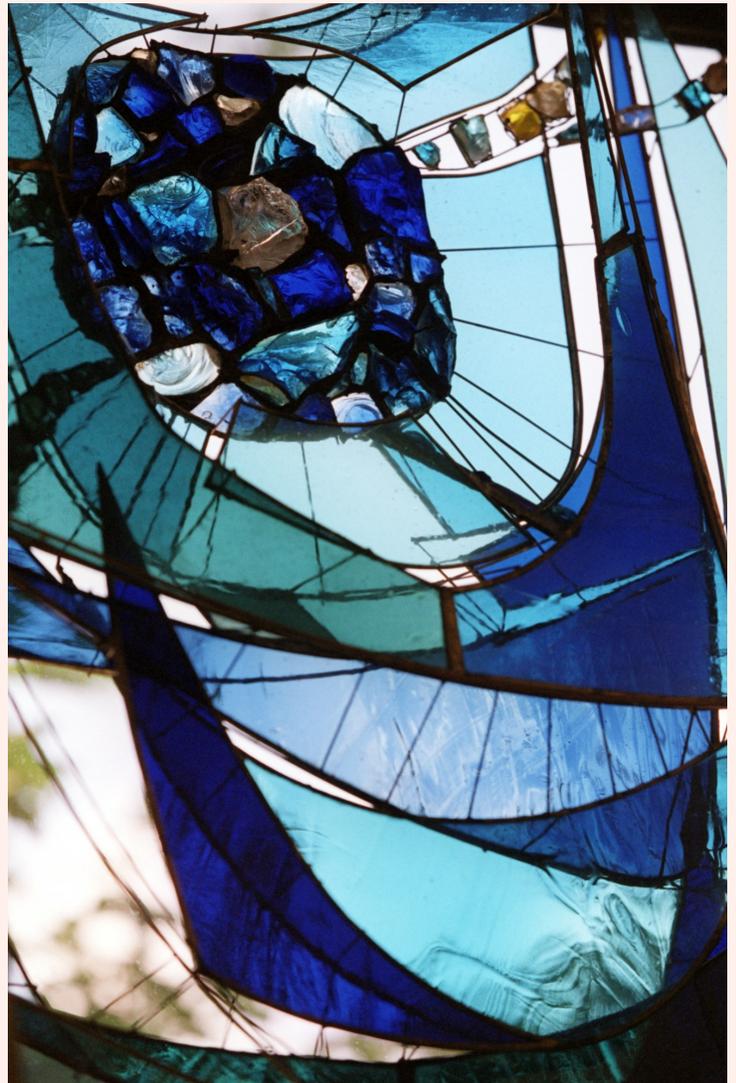


Photo: Office of Communications

# OUR KIDS CRY FROM OPEN GRAVES

SITRAKA ST. MICHAEL<sup>1</sup>  
MDIV '17

*The Gospel | Mark 10: 46-52*

Καὶ ἔρχονται εἰς Ἰεριχῶ. καὶ ἐκπορευομένου αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ Ἰεριχῶ καὶ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ ὄχλου ἱκανοῦ ὁ υἱὸς Τιμαίου Βαρτιμαῖος, τυφλὸς προσαίτης, ἐκάθητο παρὰ τὴν ὁδόν. καὶ ἀκούσας ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζαρηνὸς ἐστὶν ἤρξατο κρᾶζειν καὶ λέγειν, Υἱὲ Δαυὶδ Ἰησοῦ, ἐλέησόν με. καὶ ἐπετίμων αὐτῷ πολλοὶ ἵνα σιωπήσῃ· ὁ δὲ πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἔκραζεν, Υἱὲ Δαυὶδ, ἐλέησόν με. καὶ στὰς ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν, Φωνήσατε αὐτόν. καὶ φωνοῦσιν τὸν τυφλὸν λέγοντες αὐτῷ, Θάρσει, ἔγειρε, φωνεῖ σε. ὁ δὲ ἀποβαλὼν τὸ ἱμάτιον αὐτοῦ ἀναπηδήσας ἦλθεν πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν. καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν, Τί σοι θέλεις ποιήσω; ὁ δὲ τυφλὸς εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Ραββουνι, ἵνα ἀναβλέψω. καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Ὑπαγε, ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε. καὶ εὐθὺς ἀνέβλεμεν καὶ ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ.<sup>2</sup>

*Jesus and his disciples came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Sitraka have preached this sermon on two occasions: 1) on the Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost at St Stephen's Episcopal Church in the South End, Boston (October 25, 2015) and 2) at the HDS Episcopal/ Anglican Fellowship Eucharist in Andover Chapel at Harvard Divinity School (October 26, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Greek text available online at <https://www.academic-bible.com/en/online-bibles/greek-new-testament-ubs5/read-the-bible-text/bibelstelle/mark%2010/bibel/text/lesen/ch/3596f3ff045fe5e65b4d12213702593f/> (accessed on November 15, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Gospel text drawn from "The Lessons Appointed for Use on the Sunday Closest to October 26," available online at [http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB\\_RCL/Pentecost/BProp25\\_RCL.html](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp25_RCL.html) (accessed on October 15, 2015).

# OUR KIDS CRY FROM OPEN GRAVES

SITRAKA ST. MICHAEL<sup>1</sup>  
MDiv '17



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Sitraka received a scholarship to attend the Annual Meeting of the Union of Black Episcopalians for the first time in Baltimore this past July. Sitraka is pictured with Tristen—a native of Baltimore—during the Youth Eucharist. “Tristen is one of my kids. My first year @ HDS started in the shadow of Ferguson and ended with the wake of Baltimore. That has to mean something,” Sitraka said.

Please join me in the spirit of prayer.  
Loving God, you see everything.  
Precious Lord Jesus, you call everyone.  
Ferocious Holy Spirit, you set every heart on fire.  
Please open the heart of our hearts that we may see—see deeply.

As many of you know, I took the risk to accept an invitation to join 24 other Episcopalians on a Young Adult Pilgrimage to Ferguson two weeks ago. When people ask me why I decided to go or how it went, the least dishonest and most capacious response I have found is: “It was important.” And so, that is my message to you today. Ferguson was important. Ferguson is important. And, whether we like it or not, Ferguson will be important.

Ferguson was important because it was not a trip or a visit but a pilgrimage. The pilgrimage invited us to refrain from turning Ferguson into an anecdote and to allow it to become an experience. The pilgrimage invited us to ask Ferguson to break something in us and to remain within us. It was about seeing—seeing deeply.

Ferguson was important because we had to see the shadow that the birth defect of slavery continues to cast over the lives, minds, and hearts of members of our family who were not born in white skin.

# OUR KIDS CRY FROM OPEN GRAVES

SITRAKA ST. MICHAEL<sup>1</sup>

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Ferguson was important because we had to walk toward, see, and touch Canfield Green—the place in the middle of the road where Michael Brown's body fell forward, bled to death, and laid dead for four and a half hours after Darren Wilson had shot him. Abandoned, alone, forsaken, and surrounded by the police.

As my mother, godmother, and writing saint, Toni Morrison, has once said about the difficulty of writing while raising two sons as a single mother: "All important things are hard."

Ferguson was important because it was hard. Ferguson was going to be hard because it was going to be important.

You see, doing something important involves a healthy dose of risk, especially when the opportunity to see something else or live differently is at hand—which is precisely the way Jesus's passing through Jericho felt to Bartimaeus.

I LOVE Bartimaeus. What a man Bartimaeus was. What a risk-loving, entrepreneurial, and audacious beggar he was. And what an important thing he was on to. The chance to see and live differently was at hand.

When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say what we often say in our Prayers of the People: "Lord, have mercy."

And then, the past, the present, the people, norms—what we, here at HDS, may call culture—come in and shut him down. Dial it down.

Turn it off.

This is not the time. Don't bring this up now.

Well... Bartimaeus dissents.

When you are tired of being blind, tired of being tired, or, as some #blacklivesmatter activists we met in Ferguson say, sick and tired of being sick and tired, or if you just want to see something beyond what you usually see, then shutting up, shrinking back, dialing it down is not a risk you want to take. Bartimaeus concurs.

During the 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act, Congressman John Lewis gave a fabulous piece of advice to younger generations: "Make a little noise."

Make a little noise.

And Bartimaeus did make a little noise.

Rebuked, stung, criticized, he kept making a little noise. He dared to do what almost everyone around him told him not to do. And the Greek tells us that he cried out even more loudly and said: "Jesus, have mercy on me."

And I LOVE this part of the story.

See what happens after he makes a little noise: Jesus stops.

Jesus stands still.

# OUR KIDS CRY FROM OPEN GRAVES

SITRAKA ST. MICHAEL<sup>1</sup>  
MDiv '17

See what someone who is blind but neither deaf nor mute, someone without sight but good of hearing and with a voice can do when they use their voice to respond to what they have heard. They may cause Jesus to stop and stand still.

A similar kind of pause happens when you walk toward or drive through Canfield Green where the memorial to Michael Brown's killing is erected. But it's a little different because the road stops you. The memorial has a way to arrest you, to cry out to you. The holy innocents who dwell among the dozens of teddy bears, candles, baseball caps that dot the yellow line on Canfield Drive refuse to dial it down. They make a little noise. It's almost as if they want to be seen, called, and touched by Jesus.

We, right here, are the body of Christ.

This, right here, is the Church.

Yours, right here, are the eyes through which Jesus can see; the body through which Jesus can stop, stand still, and listen; the hand through which Jesus can touch, embrace, and comfort; the lips through which Jesus can smile, call, and ask: "What do you want me to do for you?"

Think about it: what would have happened if Jesus had not heard, seen, or called Bartimaeus?

Surely, Bartimaeus would not have been healed.

But think about what a refusal to hear, see, and call Bartimaeus might have said about who Jesus was and what he could do.

If Jesus had not heard Bartimaeus, he might have been deaf. If Jesus had not seen Bartimaeus, he might have been blind. If Jesus had not called Bartimaeus, he might have been mute.

Jesus has hearing.

Jesus has sight.

Jesus has voice.

And so do we.

The Jesus we hear about in the healing scenes in the *Gospel of Mark* cannot demonstrate, use, or perform his healing powers unless someone wants him or asks him to, unless someone makes a little noise.

Note the question that Jesus asks Bartimaeus after he heard, saw, and called him.

The question is not: How can I help you?

It is: What do you want me to do for you?

What do you want me to do for you?

It is not a yes/ no question.

Jesus does not wonder whether he can do something.

He knows he can. And he wonders what he can do.

Surely, we cannot do everything to address the residues of slavery and anti-black prejudice in our laws, in our

# OUR KIDS CRY FROM OPEN GRAVES

SITRAKA ST. MICHAEL<sup>1</sup>  
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neighborhoods, in our school districts, in our legislatures, in our courts, in our offices, in our parishes and dioceses, in our hearts, in our minds, and in our eyes. And surely, we can do something. We can make a little noise.

In closing, let me share with you what I heard when I asked Michael Brown and all the holy innocents who abide at Canfield Green as well as their mothers what they want me to do for them.

There were many, many things I heard.

An important and difficult call I heard that I want to share with you is to slow the descent of our black kids, and especially of our black sons, down into the open graves of systematic police profiling and mass incarceration.

*Get in the way of the open graves, Sitraka. They want to devour us.*

I really heard that call in the deepest and most unfettered chambers of my soul.

Open graves continue to claim the lives of God's kids, the lives of our kids, the lives of my kids.

And while we cannot necessarily close the voracious, open grave, we can make a little noise; we can refuse to be silenced; we can cry out. Maybe we can catch and protect some of God's kids, our kids, my kids from the voracious and insatiable hunger of the demons of slavery.

Michael Brown invited me to see the remnants of slavery in my heart, in my mind, in my Church, in my laws, and in my world. Our kids are crying out from the open graves of residual slavery. I invite you to use your voices, to make a little noise, to open our eyes and SEE the remnants of slavery that continue to claim the lives of Jesus's precious, holy innocents.

Our shared illusion that slavery has disappeared will tell me to keep quiet and look the other way—just as our forebears were told to look the other way and keep quiet in the face of lynchings, whippings, and gratuitous violence. Our deeply ingrained habits of anti-black prejudice will tell me to dial it down just like that irresistible and destructive urge we have to subscribe to the deadly narrative that “things have changed.”

Surely, slavery is no longer an institution. And it has not gone away.

Someone in Ferguson told us we all live in the PTSD of slavery as long as we are in America—in this American skin, in this American dream, in this American nightmare, in this American life.

Jesus is not mute. What right do we have to remain silent when every mother who happens to live in skin we call “black” fears for the life of their sons daily? Imagine that and believe it. Those of you who have children: Imagine waking up every morning and fearing for your child's life, every single morning. That is not a lie. That is a daily reality for every single mother with a black son.

Jesus is not deaf. What right do we have to dismiss and ignore the cries of our kids who simply do not want to die or end up in jail before they turn 18?

Jesus is NOT blind. What right do we, as people who follow him and eat his flesh and blood, have to pretend we don't see the residues of slavery?

# OUR KIDS CRY FROM OPEN GRAVES

SITRAKA ST. MICHAEL<sup>1</sup>

MDiv '17

When the pilgrims and I went to church in Ferguson, I met a beautiful child of God. His name is Caleb. I carried, held, nursed, kissed, and prayed for him because I caught a glimpse of God's love for me and for all of us in his immense, eternal eyes. But as I was praying for him, this fear, the terror that he might not be all he can be flooded my heart.

*I want to stop being afraid for our black kids.*

*I want black children, parents, grandparents, godparents, aunts, uncles, and families to live without terror.*

Hear Michael Brown's cry from the open grave. See Caleb's eyes in the cradle. Say something to our future children who have yet to be born and ask: "What do you want me to do for you?"

We are not deaf.

We are not mute.

Maybe we don't have to remain blind.

Maybe we can see residues of slavery—see deeply.

Let's go and get to it. AMEN.



A shrine on the spot of Michael Brown's murder  
Photo: Sitraka St. Michael

## ON LOVE AND GOOD DEEDS IN A TIME OF CHAOS

**MICHAEL GOETZ**

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT, ANNUAL GIVING AND ALUMNI RELATIONS



*Michael Goetz delivered this reflection at Morning Prayers in Memorial Church on November 19, 2015.*

*Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings,*

*having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.*

*<sup>23</sup> Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:21-25*

This has been a difficult week. I'm typically a buoyant, positive person, but I will be honest with those of you gathered here this morning that I have struggled a bit to maintain my usual optimism over the course of the last several days because the world has felt a little grim – certainly in the wake of the unfathomable acts of violence in Paris and Beirut, but also as college campuses across the country have grappled publicly with questions of inclusion and exclusion; free and protected speech; safe zones versus comfortable zones. The many tense headlines and news alerts on these assorted topics were fresh in my mind and still “ping-ing” my iPhone when I arrived at work on Monday morning, only to be followed up by a bomb scare of our own here at Harvard by the middle of the day. My intuition from the start was that this was a hoax, and yet it unsettled me. It unsettled all of us, especially in this foreboding week.

But this was just one of many weeks (good and bad) that I have had in seven-and-a-half years in the Development office at Harvard Divinity School. I am one of the University's many foot soldiers in our mighty campaign effort to raise funds for Harvard and meaningfully connect alumni with the University and its respective schools. It is a unique and interesting role where I am often sent *out* in order to plug others back *in*. I meet with alumni and friends

in some really fabulous cities across the country, all of whom wish to know what is happening back here and to tell me what they did when they were here. Cambridge tends to follow people through life in an interesting way. This is, of course, so much more than a beautiful yard or a vibrant square (though it is both of those things). It is a place of formation, of learning, of striving, of achieving; of conflict, of failure, of misunderstanding – of life lived *together* in a unique and purposeful way. The being *together* is the part that I hear about from alums near and far – how this meaningfully changed them, and their suggestions for how we can make sure this still happens. ...and there is no shortage of suggestions.

In fact, I was en route back from meeting with some HDS alums in one of those fabulous cities – Cleveland! – when word of the Paris attacks spread across news tickers, smart phone screens, and social media feeds on Friday afternoon and evening. Earlier in the day, I had caught up on some of the news of student protests around race, diversity and inclusion from Yale to Missouri to really quite a lot of other campuses...and I found myself sullen. I was dour because I believe in what we do in higher education – I believe that higher learning can profoundly change people (it profoundly changed me)...but how can this happen if not everyone feels valued and included? I believe in what higher education can offer the world – the power of understanding...but are we making any progress if so much knowledge can't seem to help us overcome such intractable conflict and devastating violence?

But here's where ancient wisdom enters in and, for me at least, offers centering relief to the modern day's chaos. “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess,” the Letter to the Hebrews proclaims. “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds...” *This applies.* Our work is to remain together in pursuit of understanding, however flummoxed or daunting the world may feel. *That* is the hope we profess. What we can do, as the passage suggests, is “spur one another on toward love and good deeds,” as we refuse to “give up on meeting

## ON LOVE AND GOOD DEEDS IN A TIME OF CHAOS

**MICHAEL GOETZ**

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT, ANNUAL GIVING AND ALUMNI RELATIONS

together,” even or especially in the midst of our own challenging conversations or moments of shared crisis. Not merely in some superficial way of being friendly and nice on the surface, but in a way that is real and honest to where we as individuals and as a campus community find ourselves. As I think on the stories that I have heard from alumni over these several years, it occurs to me that it was often in those moments that the transformational work of Harvard takes place, and perhaps even how Harvard is transformed.

I still believe in higher education. I believe very much in Harvard. ...and I believe that those of us gathered here today can be together...and go forth...and spur one another on.

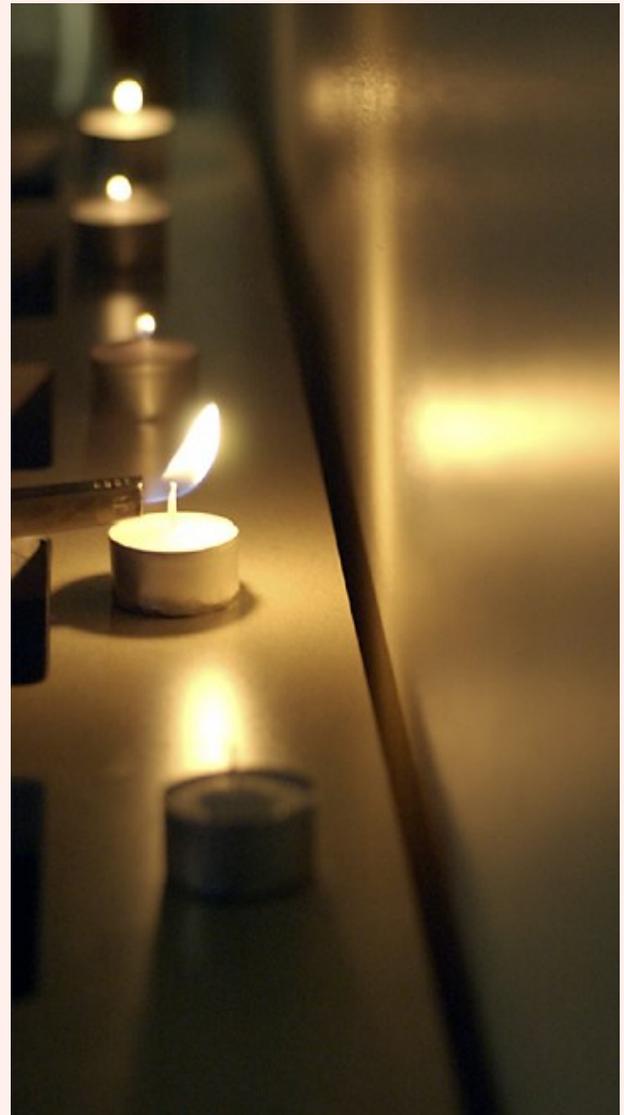


Photo: Kristie Welsh

## MEASURING THE IMMEASURABLE

**PHIL GARRITY**  
MDiv '18

*Phil Garrity, MDiv '18 worked for [Partners In Health](#) in Boston from 2011 to 2013 after having volunteered with *Socios En Salud*, PIH's sister organization in Peru. In August 2012, Garrity was unexpectedly diagnosed with osteosarcoma, an aggressive and rare bone cancer, and began an eight-month treatment program that included surgery and chemotherapy. As he transformed from a servant of the sick to a patient himself, he learned to value an under-appreciated aspect of service, which he terms "non-doing."*



Photo: David Young  
Phil Garrity at age 22, in a small town outside of Cusco, Peru.

*Garrity wrote the following reflection, which he read aloud to Partners In Health staff on May 15, 2013, the day his medical team declared him cancer-free, as a message of thanks for their accompaniment throughout his journey.*

Over the past two years volunteering and working for PIH, I've been lucky enough to take part in a movement to integrate data-driven quality improvement into our operations. Much of my team's work involves distilling an often nebulous web of people and activities down into a

conceptual framework that reflects what is actually happening on the ground. We map out work protocols and data flows, we select process and outcome indicators, we create systems to collect, analyze, and visualize the information—all to gauge three simple but key aspects of our programs: What are we doing? How well are we doing it? How can we make it better?

But without drowning in the details, I'll synthesize all this by saying that much of our work and my role here at PIH continues to place particular emphasis (as it rightly should) on an intrinsic part of serving the poor: the doing. My mind is often focused on what protocols our staff are implementing, how many home visits our community health workers have completed this month, how often our HIV patients have been seen in clinic. You may preoccupy yourself with such questions as how many letters have been sent, web pages designed, meetings scheduled, donors courted, supplies procured, services delivered, money raised. And, logically, we can't know what's being done unless we measure it. Because, as one MEQ site leader once remarked, "If it's not documented, it didn't happen."

But this is where we reach a dilemma. To simply measure the value and quality of our work by the numbers, the performance levels, or the concrete investments of time, energy, and resources seems to neglect another invaluable, but often hidden, dimension of this work: the non-doing. This concept may baffle those of us more accustomed to the rational side of life, for so much of our culture values and rewards the practical and pragmatic, the logical and analytical. The idea of "non-doing" is easily equated to "not doing anything"—nothing more than a futile exercise and utter waste of time. But allow me to reflect on a few personal experiences that have transformed this irrational concept into a mysterious truth, one that I've come to find resonates less with my mind and perhaps more with my spirit.

I'm drawn back to my time volunteering with a local

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nonprofit in Cusco, Peru, in the months preceding my internship with Socios En Salud. A few days each week, I'd help out at a nursing home for the destitute run by an order of kind yet stern nuns who led by rigid example and hardly ever by word. Feigning competence, I'd be handed a pot and ladle and I would feed the ancianos; handed a bottle of ointment, I'd rub it on their itchy legs; handed a pair of clippers, I'd trim their overgrown toenails—all of this often done in total silence, even lathering and shaving the old men's faces, eight of whom were blind. Their quiet gratitude for something so simple and seemingly trivial astounded me then and perhaps more so today as I look back and wonder what it all meant.

At the time, I was beginning to delve into questions that would serve me well in Lima and later in Boston: what were we really trying to achieve here? What were our goals and how close or far were we from reaching them? The long hours of just sitting with these old people, hearing their stories, tending to them in what small ways I could—it seemed nice enough, but was it doing anything of real value, at least as I understood it then? My mind would drift to hypotheticals somewhere beyond the confines of that small, quiet refuge. Shouldn't I be saving children from starvation, protecting refugees from mortal danger, pulling this country out of poverty and into the 21st century? After all, I had come here to rescue people from their lot, to save helpless victims from suffering and injustice. This place seemed so stagnant, these people so quiet and inert. What was I doing here?

I felt that I had failed to be the protector, the helper, the healer—not for an entire country, but even for this one feeble man.

Early one morning, we found a frail old man had fallen and broken his hip in the middle of the night. His groans and whimpers suggested he had been without pain relief for hours, and he needed to get to the hospital. We

placed him on a wooden board, loaded him into the church's van, and were off. I rode alongside him, anxious yet keenly aware of my inability to do much of anything for the poor man. Once there, it pained me to see him relegated to a corner of a busy emergency room where he simply had to wait his turn to be seen. Hours went by and I sat near him, wallowing in the helplessness that I now shared with him. What could I do? I felt that I had failed to be the protector, the helper, the healer—not for an entire country, but even for this one feeble man.

Our driver, a seasoned caretaker from the nursing home, came in with some bread and juice for the man, who silently accepted the gift and began nibbling away, partly concealed underneath the sheets draped over his stretcher. I sat and watched him intently with a mixture of exhaustion and pity as he littered himself with crumbs and peered out at me, eyes gleaming. It was then that something miraculous happened: the old man broke his bread roll in half and stretched out his hand toward mine. An acute sense of surprise and embarrassment came over me, and at first I refused his offer, insisting that he eat it, for surely he needed it more than I. But my feeble attempts to decline the gift were wholeheartedly dismissed as he pushed the bread into my hand, motioning me to eat. And so I did, me looking bewildered and humbled, he looking quite pleased to share his meal with a near stranger.

Moments like these continue to deepen my understanding of what it means to embrace the non-doing. It's come to mean being brave enough to disarm myself, to set aside my intellectual firepower and self-protective shields, and to enter into another's chaos—not to do for them, but to simply be with them. It takes courage to sit in that silence, often empty-handed, and humbly accept the lesson that that feeble man so beautifully demonstrated that day: that I am as much the patient as he is the healer. That he is not a broken machine idly waiting to be fixed by the "non-broken," the "privileged," the "fortunate" among us. I

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believe that those we intend to serve have bread to offer us every day—humble reminders that we are co-creators in the promotion of life, gentle invitations to discard our pity and crawl down into the pit with another. In these precious moments, we're able to see our shared vulnerability as humans and to simply open ourselves to it, perhaps without much of any real hope of fixing anything in that moment or hour or day.

Beyond all of the things we do to act in service for the poor—delivering medical supplies, building health systems, strengthening human capacity—I've come to believe that there is something far more powerful in simply being in service with those in need. We might consider this other dimension of our work a ministry of presence—one that underlies and encapsulates all of our tangible efforts to console, to palliate, to rebuild in the face of disease and distress. I would argue that this is our strategic advantage among those in the vast arena of development work: that we do not walk away when things appear impractical, unfeasible, or futile. We stay, to perhaps accept defeat again and again, if only to show the world that the people we serve are worth more than the steps they may gain or lose on their path to a more dignified life. That we ourselves are worth more than our successes or failures on our path to building a more just world.

Our collective attempts to concretize an abstract world—to understand the mechanics of material privation, to design interventions and harness resources that achieve a positive and quantifiable effect on the lives of the poor—can create the illusion that fixing is our only aim.

I see more clearly now how all my dissecting questions obscured the real meaning in those quiet gestures at the nursing home. Our collective attempts to concretize an abstract world—to understand the mechanics of material privation, to design interventions and harness resources that achieve a positive and quantifiable effect on the lives of the poor—can create the illusion that fixing is our only aim, that we must constantly be doing if we are to succeed. We can believe that if we can't show progress, then none has been

made. And so we easily fall into the trap of making systems and machines out of countries, communities, and individuals—broken devices that only we can fix.

But real solidarity, true compassion, as I've come to discover through lived experience these past eight months, is grounded in something far deeper than our displays of technical prowess or standard notions of progress. It evades our attempts to capture its value with metrics and analytics, and perhaps for good reason. I believe it's revealed through an earnest and humble kind of love, one that neither feigns strength nor fears weakness. It can simply sit with another in the silence, not feeling frantic to fill it with words or deeds. It has the courage to look into the darkness of our finitude—both of our bodies and of our ambitions—which we all face, not just the sick. It can trust in the value of non-doing, of simply being present.

And so I say all of this as a hopeful reminder for each of us to restore a balance between what we do and who we are, being careful to not forget the unconditional value of the latter. Because at our core we are radical love, we are goodness, we are justice—a core that cannot be marred or diluted by all the apathy, cynicism, and resistance the world might throw at it, a world of practicality that tries to convince us that our efforts to transform it will inevitably fall short, that our gestures of good will are in vain, that we have not done enough today. It is from this core of being that we are able to infuse what we do with the goodness that we are—to make possible real healing, both visible and invisible, that often can't be measured.

I thank all of you for helping me to live out this truth and for being who you are, far beyond what you do.

*Note: This essay has previously appeared in the following publications: Partners In Health on [www.pih.org](http://www.pih.org) on July 12, 2013 ; Huffington Post Online, Impact Blog, on July 15, 2013; Poverty/Privilege: A Reader for Writers (Oxford Press) on Dec 22, 2014.*

## INTERROGATING GOD: STUDYING TORTURE, PRACTICING EUCHARIST

**MARISA EGERSTROM**

MDIV '16, PHD CANDIDATE IN AMERICAN STUDIES

Each fall, the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life hosts the lunchtime series “Practicing Divinity” in which HDS students share their expertise, research, and wisdom with a particular spiritual practice. In the fall of 2015, three students made presentations in this series. Listen:



to Marisa Egerstrom’s September 17 talk “Interrogating God, Practicing Eucharist.” Her related article, [“The Gospel of Guantánamo.”](#) was published in the Summer/Autumn 2015 issue of the Harvard Divinity Bulletin. Marisa is completing a PhD in American Studies, writing a dissertation titled “Torture and American Sovereignty: The Rhetoric of a Modern Empire: 1945-2012,” while finishing the MDiv in preparation for ordination to the Episcopal priesthood.



Photo: Katelynn Carver

## QUESTIONING THE NATURE OF OUR HUMANITY

SAHAR SHAHID  
MDiv '17

Sahar Shahid offered this meditation at Morning Prayers in Memorial Church on December 1, 2015. In the 2015-16 academic year, Sahar is serving as one of the field education interns at Memorial Church, focusing her work on multireligious engagement on the University campus. She is also the president of the HDS student government, the HDS Student Association.

This past month has been one of extreme loss. The world as it stands is no stranger to the loss of human life, yet the reaction to certain human lives was more pronounced than others these past few weeks. Yes, technically the media did cover the tragic events that took place in Africa, Lebanon, France and Syria; however, it was Paris that invoked the hashtag “Pray for Paris.” It was about Paris that we shared the many news updates we ran across. It was the French flag that was deemed worthy of being transformed into a filter by Facebook for its users to show solidarity, to stand with their fellow humans, to value human life, and to express their empathy for the loved ones left behind with a lifetime marked with the pain of loss.



Sahar speaks with Professor Ann Braude before Seasons of Light 2015  
Photo: Brian Tortora

Yet, it would seem that we have internalized our empathy, in which our humanity is inherent, as a commodity. Empathy is defined as “the psychological identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another” and humanity refers to “the quality or condition of being human.”<sup>1</sup> The “Pray for Paris” display indicates that our understanding of *another* leans towards *another human being whom we see as similar to us*. Us in the West, that is. However, as the most recent act of domestic terrorism on Planned Parenthood demonstrates, there is even a deep divide in empathy within our Western borders. If being human is all-encompassing, then how can we justify attributing our selective empathy as characteristic of our humanity? The condition of being human—to be made up of flesh and blood, slave to the pangs of hunger and the agony of pain, in need of shelter from the elements, and capable of an endless bounty to love and be loved—how is that *dissimilar* to being human from one geographic location to another?

The late American writer, filmmaker, teacher, and political activist Susan Sontag states in her work *Regarding the Pain of Others* that “innocence” of “un-humanity” is a badge of ignorance or “emotional immaturity.” The Paris filter, or even others like it, fall short in administering the empathy they seek to convey. None of them is nuanced and complex enough to capture the humanity, dignity, and compassion which the terrorized and murdered around the globe deserve. It is even more imperative to note that these filters allow for a passive and, most often, an unsophisticated support system. It is simply a tool that conveys more of the toxic “us-versus-them” state of mind.

*Surat al-Nisa*, the chapter on women in the Qur’an, deals mostly with women’s rights in various capacities. Interestingly, the first part is actually legislative in nature, as is the section dealing with war and peace and how Muslims should act in these situations. Overall, this *surah* is among the most important and fundamental for *fiqh*, Islamic jurisprudence. In the very first

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verse, Allah (SWT) says, “O mankind! Reverence your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate... (4:2). This verse indicates the kinship of all human beings, as they are created from the same *soul* and *mate*. Ultimately, it is a Divine imperative to recognize one’s responsibility to *all* human beings.”<sup>ii</sup>

So let’s invite ourselves to reflect on the nature of our empathy—essentially, our humanity. Does the visual and/or verbal solidarity we communicate justifiably reflect the valuing of *all* human life? I urge us to question the depth of our knowledge about the history of these areas of tragedy currently being given a presence on every form of media outlet imaginable. Doing the right thing does not always mean it will be the easy thing to do. Breaking away from herd mentality requires diligence on our part and, above all, courage to question. So, let’s check ourselves, and inquire: What do we truly know about the humans who occupy and have occupied these current areas of turmoil? How much of what we believe is due to the regurgitations presented to us in the form of an “expert” or what our community, family, or friends are expounding upon?

In short, we perceive ourselves as the civilized and the ultimate arbitrators of justice, per contra, if we are acquainted with our history we know that *who* is “civilized” and *what* is “just” is relative. We must remember that the Western civility we cling to stands on the shoulders of fallen civilizations. This past Sunday, the Boston *Herald* published an article titled “Why Won’t Muslims Call Out Murderous Jihadists?” The piece claims that most Muslims in Boston are silent about acts of terrorism and therefore that they agree with such acts. We must ask ourselves if it is civilized or just when we continue to question and demand of the average Muslim that *they* condemn such violence? Or if *Islam* is an instigator of violence? Change the key terms with any other religion and its followers; does the credibility of such questions still stand? If someone we know had a family member who committed a crime, would we mark them or ourselves as guilty by “association”? Would we support a justice system if it demanded such a thing? Religious violence is deeply embedded in the history of this world, our world. I urge us to dig deeper and investigate the agents of violence who are visible and especially those who are not.

Let’s take responsibility for the recumbent support we are pedaling consciously or unconsciously. At a recent dinner, the new Harvard Muslim Chaplain Taymullah Abdur-Rahman drove home a very necessary message that our social-network-consumed generation is in need of hearing. He quoted Albert Einstein: “A ship is always safe at the shore, but that is *not* what it is built for.” He spoke of our tendency toward inactivity when it comes to social justice work. We delude ourselves into believing that our words are enough or, in this instance, that our Facebook filters are.

Fundamentally, as humans inextricably tied to humankind, it is of the utmost urgency that we not only *think* but also *act*. The time is upon us to learn the art of *action*. Neither our words, nor displays of solidarity through a hazy flag coating over our pictures, provides warmth to the Syrian refugees (who are not migrants as some would allege) who have been and are like ants fleeing an anthill. If we have been detached and remain so from this *human* crisis, then let us allow the insurmountable human loss incurred by the people of Africa, Lebanon, France, and Syria help to shape our understanding of the enemy that terrorizes them *all*. Let’s scale the physical and mental borders of geography, politics, and race which force or allow us to value one human life over another. Let’s take the commodity out of our humanity and abandon being bystanders of calamities. Empathy begins in the heart and the completion of its metamorphosis into humanity, eventually, requires the benevolence of action. Thus the only self-inquiry that remains for us all is, what is the nature of *my* humanity?

## REMEMBERING OUR BELOVED DEAD

In early November, many at HDS ritually remembered their beloved dead in observance of el Dia de los Muertos (the Mexican Day of the Dead), the Christian feast of All Saints and the memorial of All Souls, and the Celtic observance of Samhain. [Listen](#) to Jiaying Ding, MDiv '18 sing the ancient antiphon "In paradisum," from the Latin liturgy of the Western Christian church.

In paradisum deducant te Angeli;  
in tuo adventu suscipiant te martyres,  
et perducant te in civitatem sanctam Ierusalem.  
Chorus angelorum te suscipiat,  
et cum Lazaro quondam paupere æternam habeas requiem.

Into paradise may the angels lead you.  
At your coming may the martyrs receive you,  
and bring you into the holy city Jerusalem.  
May the choirs of angels welcome you,  
and with Lazarus who once was poor may you have peace everlasting.



At the [Center for the Study of World Religions](#), Melissa Coles, MDiv '17 erected a community altar for el Dia de los Muertos, upon which HDS students, faculty, and staff were invited to place mementos of their deceased relatives and friends along with sweets for the spirits to enjoy.



Photo: Melissa Coles

And at the Wednesday Noon Service on October 28, 2015, the United Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ students led the HDS community in a service in honor of All Saints and All Souls.

## SINGING THE LORD'S SONG IN A STRANGE LAND: FIELDNOTES FROM A YEAR OF STUDENT HOSPITAL CHAPLAINCY

SOPHIA LUFKIN  
MDiv '17



What matters most, at the end? Is it that we've taken all our risks, chased all our dreams? To be able to say, "I live my life without regrets?" This is a reflection on taking my risk, on chasing my dream. This is a reflection on my first year of student fieldwork as a hospital chaplain.

In our lives we all cycle between growth and consolidation, and after the past year of growth, I am pausing to reflect and consolidate. Two years ago, I was finishing an art history degree that could have landed me a plum museum job, but now I am in my second year at divinity school, pursuing a different path. In my fieldwork over the past year, I have learned to be a spiritual companion to patients and their families, through placements at two hospitals. One year ago, I packed my bags and moved from New York to Cambridge, journeying away from the art world where I had made my home. I was both thrilled and petrified.

When I enrolled in HDS last fall, and began my work, I was exhilarated by the gift of working in pastoral care, which I had so long wished to do. And yet here was a strange and different place! Working in the hospital brought me fulfillment and blessings, but also gave me tremendous helpings of self-doubt. I worried about how smart it was to leave the career path I had been on for so long. I wondered whether my internal call to pastoral care was going to hold water in the real world. As my boyfriend had pointed out, it was one thing to give advice and a listening ear to family and friends, and quite another to support dying strangers in a hospital.

But if I wanted to try this out, I had to push on. I found wisdom in André Gide, who reminds us that we can't "discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time."<sup>1</sup> Over the course of the year, I felt both deeply at home and also profoundly lost. My listener's ear and my yearning for connection helped me forge deep relationships with patients, who were grateful for my presence and companionship. Yet in other ways, I

felt unsure. I felt a pit of dread in my stomach. I struggled. I hid in the office. I was consumed by self-doubt. Who was I to do this work?

I finally found myself in the words of Psalm 137: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" That clicked for me. I was certainly in a new and strange land. My "Lord's song" was the passion and energy I brought to my work. I had sung the Lord's song in my work with art history, seeing how people expressed what mattered to them through their material world. I knew how to sing the Lord's song in my personal life. But did I know how to sing it with patients and families in crisis? The answer was yes, if gradually. With the gentle encouragement of my mentors, I learned how. Did I know how to sing it with patients from other religious traditions? With the intuition and sensitivity gleaned from my multifaith community at HDS, I learned how. And most importantly, would the trust I hold in the beauty of this world give me a voice to speak and connect, even when my throat felt tight, and my heart felt tired?

In his 2011 Yale commencement speech, Tom Hanks addressed the doubts we feel as we teeter between faith and fear, between being brave and curling back into bed. He urges us to choose faith: to "move forward, ever forward." During my struggles with self-doubt, I took up this cry and found strength despite my fears. And to my surprise, I found not only hurt and suffering in the hospital, but also tenderness and strength.

I thought I had left art behind, but the truth is I only found more intense beauty in the hospital. I found it in the graceful calm of a woman who says, "Let's go," as she went home to die with the support of hospice. I found it in the heavy tears of a young man holding his wife's hand as she breathed with a respirator. And I found it in the prayers and support of my fellow students in the chaplaincy department as we each, in turn, took our overnight on-call shifts.

# SINGING THE LORD'S SONG IN A STRANGE LAND: FIELDNOTES FROM A YEAR OF STUDENT HOSPITAL CHAPLAINCY

SOPHIA LUFKIN  
MDiv '17

Pastor Jaco Hamman calls us to develop a deep space within our hearts, a roomy space that can “hold the questions, the tensions, and the paradoxes that we have within us.”<sup>2</sup> Hamman’s words are a call to action. They reassure me of the importance of preparation, self-care, and reflection in this work. I love the idea that we can find within ourselves depth and roominess, a place to hold the weight of the work that we do, whatever that work is.

This was a hard year. At my worst, I badly wanted to quit. I wanted to flee, to return to the comforts of a quiet, anonymous life. But just when I was feeling the most down, most insecure and vulnerable in my work—that was the time I resolved myself to push through day by day.<sup>3</sup> And over the course of the year, my confidence grew even as my doubts remained. I met new patients, and developed deeply intense relationships. And yet through the last days of my placement, I remained terrified—awed by the promise, and exhausted by the weight of pastoral care.

My theology of chaplaincy is a ministry of presence and a ministry of companionship. In her work *Being with Dying*, Joan Halifax writes that giving love and care to the dying is, paradoxically, a radical “affirmation of life” in the face of death.<sup>4</sup> Her words speak to me here, as I have struggled with the value of the work and care I provide. In moments of doubt, I have often wondered: Is this not a Sisyphean task? Every day there will be new sick people in the hospital, more people who need care. If one patient dies or goes home, another will replace her the next day. It is never-ending. Frustrated and overwhelmed, I asked myself: Is it worth it? I brought this question to my supervisor last winter. It was a challenge—I was trying to give myself an out, to prove to myself that it didn’t make a difference whether I stuck with this work or not. I was at a low point. I wanted to succumb to my fears and close off my heart to the work. But my mentor wisely turned it back at me and asked: “If you can give care to even one person, if you can help make the difference between a good death and a bad death... is it not all worth it?” It took several more months of ruminating before I saw that she was right. This is

not the kind of work you can easily scale. It is not “efficient” work that can be truly charted, graphed, or quantified. Instead, it requires a one-on-one approach, with deep and quiet attention. If we take it seriously, it requires us to bring a fresh and open heart to each new person. That’s a tall order—but it’s exactly why pastoral care is so special.

We may wonder: what is the point of affirming life in the face of death? Yet this tension is what makes hospital chaplaincy such a radical approach to illness. As I sat with patients, I marveled at how the sickest people often seemed to me the most radiantly alive. Patients close to death nearly always turned to love: to their family, friends, or faith. They affirmed their own life in the face of death. And yet in many cases, these are the ones on whom society has given up. To affirm those lives—what could be more powerful work?

We all find our work and calling in different arenas of life. We all bring the energy and delight of the Lord’s song—however we interpret that—to whatever work that may be. It doesn’t matter where we bring it, but rather that we bring it at all. And so I pray that we all may find the courage to lose sight of the shore, for a little while. May we all learn to sing our songs in strange land, in places that nonetheless need our songs badly. And most importantly, may we all cultivate the courage to keep coming back.

<sup>1</sup> André Gide, *The Counterfeiters*, trans. Dorothy Bussy (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 353.

<sup>2</sup> Joanne Lindstrom, “Considerations for Cross-Cultural Placements,” in Matthew Floding, ed., *Welcome to Theological Field Education!* (Herndon: Alban Press, 2011), 165.

<sup>3</sup> Not unlike the way Deb Richardson-Moore describes in her profound memoir, *The Weight of Mercy: A Novice Pastor on the City Streets* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2012), especially p. 182–83.

<sup>4</sup> Joan Halifax, *Being with Dying* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2008), xii.

## THE OUTSTRETCHED HAND

### INGRID NORTON MTS '16



*Ingrid Norton offered this reflection at the HDS Wednesday Noon Service hosted by the HDS Humanists on September 23, 2015.*

My name is Ingrid Norton. I'm one of the leaders of HDS Humanists. Our group exists to explore, interrogate, and celebrate the secular worldview.

Members of our group call themselves atheists and agnostics; free spirits, skeptics, and freethinkers. One of our goals is to honor the capaciousness of the secular worldview. In addition to identifying with secular humanism members of our group also count themselves Buddhist, Jewish, Unitarian. We share a commitment to reflecting on the ways that finitude imparts beauty, poignancy, and meaning to our connections with one another. The word "secular" comes from the Latin *saecularis* meaning temporal, of this world.

Today is the autumn equinox, when the hours of the day's light are exactly equal to those of darkness. In the weeks ahead, the hours of darkness will overcrowd the daylight until the winter solstice—also the end of finals period—on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December, when the minutes of light increase again, when we turn the year's hourglass over. As we gather here together, savoring the fleeting light and warmth and starting to feel the chill of autumn, it seemed appropriate to think about, and to honor, the different cycles of time that encompass our lives.

On the cover of your bulletin today, there's an image from la Cueva de los Manos—the Cave of Hands—in Argentina. These paintings were made in the Mesolithic era, some 12,000 years ago, when giant ground sloths still roamed Patagonia. The paintings depict mostly left hands, which suggests that the artists applied the paint with their right, holding pipes made of bone. Red hand stencils also adorn the walls of the Chauvet cave in France, and the paintings there are some 32,000 thousand years old. Many of the techniques of cave art—the perspectival shifts, the startling outlines of hands, symbols, and animals—endured and were transmitted across continents over the course of some twenty millennia, a period more than four times as long as written history.

Fifteen hundred generations stretch between us and those handprints on the cave walls. As human beings we are part of an extraordinary epic, and I want to remind you all, and myself, of the depth of time we reach into when we speak of humanity. To embrace a secular worldview is to move between different scales of time: we are part of deep lineages that stretch back beyond our comprehension. The impermanence of our own lives can seem staggering, foregrounded by the cycles of rot and renewal we are all part of. Though we may walk in trails carved by glaciers, the present moment is fleeting, irretrievable, and precious; the future unguaranteed and unknowable.

This heightens our sense of life and adds savor to the moments we share. Think of the store of beauty we can access through memory; think of the nape of a lover's neck or a beautiful, long-ago walk through a park. It can also make it hard to endure mistakes we've made and long to revisit. Think of the look of pain on a loved one's face; of heartbreak, illness, injustice, and bereavement. The weight of time imparts significance and urgency to what we make of the present moment, to the consolation and love we have the power to offer one another. I think of the hands of our ancestors touching those chill walls, hands long ago withered to dust and bone, unseen for millennia, but that are still recognizable to us today.

## THE OUTSTRETCHED HAND

INGRID NORTON  
MTS '16

Perhaps the outstretched hand is all.

I invite you to think about time as the medium from which we make the art of our lives. I invite you to think about what it means to locate all the attributes of divinity we study here *within* the human form and within this temporal world. And most of all, I invite you to contemplate and to revere the fingerprints we leave on one another's imaginations.



Divinity Chapel chandelier  
Photo: Tony Rinaldi

## THE ONE SELF

*At December's Seasons of Light service, sacred texts from sixteen religious traditions represented at HDS were proclaimed. Shrestha Singh, MDiv '17, chose to proclaim this passage from the Katha Upanishad (5:13-15).*

She, the highest Person, who is awake in us while we are asleep, shaping one lovely sight after another, that indeed is the Bright, that is Brahman, that alone is called the Immortal. All worlds are contained in it, and no one goes beyond. This is that.

As the one fire, after it has entered the world, though one, becomes different according to whatever it burns, thus the one Self within all things becomes different, according to whatever it enters, and exists also without.

As the one air, after it has entered the world, though one, becomes different according to whatever it enters, thus the one Self within all things becomes different, according to whatever it enters, and exists also without.

As the sun, the eye of the whole world, is not contaminated by the external impurities seen by the eyes, thus the one Self within all things is never contaminated by the misery of the world, being herself without.

There is one ruler, the Self within all things, who makes the one form manifold. The wise who perceive her within their Self, to them belongs eternal happiness. [...]

"This is that"—so they think, although the highest bliss can't be described.

How then can I understand it? Has it its own light, or does it reflect light?

The sun does not shine there, nor the moon and the stars, nor these lightnings, and much less this fire. When she shines, everything shines after her; by her light all this is lighted.



Rangoli, Seasons of Light 2015  
Photo: Tony Rinaldi

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