Seismic Shifts, Religious Reflections

by Mary E. Hunt

I do not recall a time in the United States when the moral compass spun so wildly and landed each time on true north as surely as in late June 2015. Such opportunities do not appear often; this is one to grab with gusto. The backlash started immediately. But in the brief interval between rejoicing and rolling up sleeves to get at the next items on the justice agenda, I offer five observations that reflect the religious dynamics.

A racist terrorist murdered nine African American Christians engaged in Bible study in Charleston, South Carolina, and their families offered them forgiveness. I trust even the most pious were taken aback by the strong show of faith by people who had every right to condemn.

It was edifying to hear their clear articulation of beliefs, morally starting to realize the depth of their conviction such that it surfaced spontaneously in their hour of deepest despair.

Whether one agreed with their instinct to forgive or not, the people of Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church took the moral bar up a large notch. Love trumps hate; love triumphs over death. Really? Really, at least in Charleston this time for the entire world to see.

Then the Supreme Court opined on Fair Housing, a ruling that gets at tricky questions. Discrimination may be unintended, but it can still be illegal. If actions cause discrimination, intent is not the issue, they ruled. Injustice is injustice. Subtle though this was, and hardly as anticipated or glizzy as other decisions this season, the Court helped people see that what happens to others is consequential no matter how it happens. There is an ethics lesson here that transcends religious traditions.

Health Care was next up with a decisive call by the justices to provide federal support even in states that do not have exchanges. Their ruling was generous, as is the law, toward those whose resources cannot stretch to pay for health insurance. But that was the whole point of the Affordable Care Act, to make health care a right not a privilege. Other developed democracies do that routinely and have done so for decades. But for U.S. citizens to begin to internalize this right, and what it means to love the neighbor enough to share in the cost of keeping her/him alive and well, shows moral growth. (continued on page 2)
WATER Welcomes Summer 2015 Staff

WATER is delighted to welcome new colleagues for the summer, Mara Lemanskey, who is soon to graduate from Tufts University, and Mary Grace Steigerwald, a junior at Southern Methodist University, who are interning with WATER through July 2015. Rachel Bundang, a visiting scholar from Convent of the Sacred Heart in San Francisco, is writing new course material in the office during the month of July. Join us in welcoming these wonderful women to the community!

From left: Rachel Bundang; Mara Lemanskey; 2014-15 staff associate Cathy Juskey of Loreto Volunteer Program; Mary Grace Steigerwald; and 2014-15 staff associate Kate Stoitzus of Memorieful Voluntary Service.

Seismic Shift (continued from page 1)

Then came the mix-up. The ruling, a hard fought but unmistakable acknowledgment that there is only one kind of marriage now. People who love as same-sex couples are as entitled to marry as those whose love takes a heterosexual form. Suddenly, the White House was bathed in colors: major corporations heralded their support for “love means love,” and an infinite variety of people cheered the judicial confirmation of a long evolving social change. There was something breathtaking about it, especially given that certain religions, notoriously institutional Roman Catholicism, for example, have harmed so many people over love.

The ruling was a rebuke to that entire way of thinking even if it has no power to change religious practice. Discrimination in jobs, housing, and against trans people needs attention. This decision confirmed a sea change that cannot be turned back. There is justice. And then, as if enough good things had not happened for those of us uncustomed to seeing change we appreciate, President Barack Obama took to the pulpit to eulogize the Rev. Clementa Pinckney who was killed in the racist shooting at the Charleston church.

The President spoke words for the ages, a sermon that echoed around the world in its moral clarity, emotional quality, spiritual brilliance, and strategic importance. His resonant singing of “Amazing Grace” capped the address that sent civil justice work into high gear for the whole country, a common project too long postponed.

The events at the end of June did not admit of any single religious perspective. But one by one and in the aggregate they softened a coarse moral climate and soothed a divided country by lifting up our best instincts to the level of policy. Alleluia.

Mary E. Hunt is co-founder and co-director of WATER.

W-CC Gathers for Annual Meeting

by Mary E. Hunt and Cathy Juskey

Women-Church Convergence is a coalition of autonomous Catholic-rooted groups working to build social and ecclesial structures with

In order to do so, the Convergence set up monthly conference calls for education and strategizing. The groups planned a conversation as part of the upcoming Women’s Ordination Worldwide Conference in Philadelphia in September.

WATER’s monthly Contemplative Prayer/Meditation session is a shared meditation and silence followed by discussion of the month’s topic. Scheduled dates for 2015 are: January 17; February 14; March 15; April 20; May 18; and June 22.

WATER has also begun hosting a monthly Reclaim Your Name discussion on the history of Catholic women’s ordination. The next discussion will be: “Church, Church, Church.”

Be Creative, Make Change

The Feminist Liberation Theologians’ Network Gathering will be held at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meetings November 20, 2015 in Atlanta, Georgia from 4 to 6 p.m. on Feminist liberation theologies and the arts.

Presenters include:

Katie Cannon, Union Presbyterian Seminary: “Antecedents of Womanist Artistic Expressions”

Cynthia Kittredge, Seminar of the Southwest: “Poetry as Biblical Interpretation: A Lot of the Way the Trees Were Walking”

Monica Maher, Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences in Ecuador: “Feminist Liberation Theologies Within the Museums of Quito, Ecuador”

Elizabeth Ursice, Mesa Community College: “Making Things Rite: The Importance of Ritual in Feminist Liberation Theologies”

All are welcome. RSVP to Mary E. Hunt at 301-589-2509 or mhunt@hrs.com.

Upcoming Programs

Our series of WATERtalks features conversations with feminist activists and theologians for an open dialogue of ideas, research, and experiences. The 2015-2016 line-up promises a broad array of speakers for new learning:

Sandy Boucher on September 9, Kelly Brown Douglas on November 11, Beverly Lanzetta on December 9, Grace Kao on January 13, Joanna Brooks on February 10, and Joan Chittister on June 8. All WATERtalks run from 1 to 2 p.m. ET on their selected dates.

Catholic Lesbian/Queer Women’s Discussion series will feature Deb Myers and Nickie Valdez on September 13 and Michelle Scheidt on November 15 at 11:30 a.m. ET.

WATER’s monthly Contemplative Prayer/Meditation session is a shared meditation and silence followed by discussion of the month’s topic. Scheduled dates for 2015 are: September 14 with Mary E. Hunt, October 12 with Judy Bond, November 9 with Janet Bohren, and December 7 with Kate Stoitzus, all at 7:30 p.m. ET.

RSVP is required for all events to join by phone or in person at the Silver Spring, MD office. Register for free upcoming talks on our website or email watersstaff@hrs.com.

Summer Ritual: Harvest Blessing

by Dionn L. Neu

The first harvest is celebrated in August (and in February in the Southern Hemisphere) when fruits and vegetables are plentiful. This is a time to honor what we have, especially abundance, just as generations before us did, and if we honor Earth, those after us will. Festivals of proximity, farmers markets, and county fairs mark the wealth of Earth.

Place symbols of the summer harvest — wheat, corn, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, peaches, basil, mint, other herbs, bread, and lemonade — in front of you or in the center of a circle.

Reflective Action

Take a piece of basil or mint; rub it with your fingers and smell its wonderful scent.

Blessing the Summer Harvest

Blessed are you, Providence of the Cosmos, for the gifts of abundant summer gardens. Bless us with creative energy for justice. And bring us peace.

Blessing Bread

Blessed are you, Life-giving Bread, for the wheat that we reap to make new bread. Bless the fruits of our labor. And bring us peace.

Blessing Drink

Blessed are you, Joyful Holy Wisdom, for quenching our thirst to refresh us. Bless us with a firm and daring spirit. And bring us peace!

Take Action

Buy fruits and vegetables from your neighborhood farmers market.

Invite friends to share a picnic in a park.

Plant an herb garden.

Try to go vegan or eat less meat one day a week.

Volunteer at a neighborhood shelter to share with people who are experiencing lack of stable food, housing, or finances.

© Dionn L. Neu is co-founder and co-director of WATER. A full version of this ritual is available on our website.