



The Paths that Lead to Life: Theological Reflection on Counter-recruitment

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*“You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence.”*
Acts 2:28

My friend Bob gave me this metaphor: In the woods, in fields, in cities, there are often beaten paths that go to the usual places – which keep getting deeper and stronger with use.

Right now, the paths that are more well-beaten in our society often lead toward separation from each other, toward isolation, toward self-satisfaction, toward “bigger-than” and “me” mentalities. They often lead at the social level toward resource to violence, an overweening obsession with national security as opposed to human security, toward dehumanizing each other and writing off segments of the society.

There aren't many who will be the first to try a new path -- willing to be the first to make that path. But there are many more who will at least try a path that at least has been tried before. We may also find that there are old paths that lead to life and we have to uncover.

What if counter-recruitment organizing were seen as a way to invite people off the beaten path, to incite people to another path – not just countering military recruiters and their work, but inviting people to another way of living? Counter-recruitment at its best may responding to the deep yearnings in people's soul, for lives with meaning, that contribute to the betterment of society.

Affirmations and reflections:

God's presence is a creative force the flutters over the waters, who cries out that we are beloved, who is within each of our bodies, minds, and spirits. This force, this God, this Divine is at the center of all that exists. God had a dream of all creation – that kind of shalom community – where all life was valued and known intimately -- that kind of relationship between humans and creation, and humans and God – Eden is still God's dream.



ENCOUNTERING RECRUITMENT



God's intention for human life, according to Walter Wink, is to humanize us more, make us fully human. But institutions have realities that often fall away from God's intentions – the whole set of practices, assumptions, missions, and the culture of an institution. One name that scripture gives is to call them the “powers and principalities” – those institutions that have supreme importance in our lives and how they unfold – which often become an end in themselves, or fail to help us all thrive. “Failure to thrive”: This description given to some infants is applicable to many communities as well!

The military industrial complex is a power and a principality. Security itself is a good thing – we need safety, we need to be secure – all of humanity needs to be secure – but this basic need twists and goes awry in the service of the nation. We're in thrall to militarism, to the system, to the nation. Our relationship to the military industrial complex becomes idolatry — being committed to, dependent upon, looking to for security, and worshipping that which is not God.

We can all draw on God's presence (ultimate creativity, lovingkindness, generativity, deep Spirit and possibility) to become equipped to contend with the powers and principalities.

God's dream for us includes human wholeness, worth, dignity. But this dream is at odds with the stated goals of the government or the military-industrial complex, which always fall short of God's dream of shalom. The church also falls short. Church's role, and the role of the faithful – is prophetic witness as well as peacebuilding – a gradual nurturing of slow growth, a weaving and a knitting together.

Counter-recruitment is getting the way of military recruitment – but it's also recruiting *for* something else. It's about recruiting for another way of living.

Recruiting for the paths that lead to life – creating communities with deep soul and connection, places where you just want to rest and enjoy life. For communities that engage in mutual uplift instead of a common downshift.

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