

**Transforming Violence: the compassionate response**

[compiled by the Rev. Cathy Harrington]

Alexander, B. (2010) *Is William Martinez Not Our Brother?* Ann Arbor; University of Michigan Press. (paperback)

As Michigan's prison population swelled from 3,000 in 1970 to more than 50,000 in 2008, Buzz Alexander's prison creative arts project played an important role in helping prisoners access their individual self-worth in spite of incarceration.

Arendt, H. (1964) *Eichmann in Jerusalem; a Report on the Banality of Evil*. London, England; Penguin Books.

Hired as a reporter for the New Yorker Magazine, Hannah Arendt was highly criticized for her reporting of the trial of Adolph Eichmann and her reference to the "banality of evil." Painting murderers as monsters justifies killing them.

Armstrong, K. (2010) *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*. Canada; Alfred Knopf

This book is a complement to the Charter for Compassion, a worldwide movement that began with Armstrong receiving the TED award vision for a better world. As Dewey demonstrated with an experiment to teach people to swim without water, becoming more compassionate is a result of experiential learning. If we hope to become a more compassionate society, we must practice compassion. It is alarming to read that our nation's young people are showing a huge deficit in the capacity for empathy.

Camus, A. (1957) *The Plague, The Fall, Exile and the Kingdom, and Selected Essays*. "Reflections on the Guillotine," pp. 609-656. (translation by Justin O'Brien) New York. Alfred Knopf.

Camus powerfully illustrates the ineffectiveness as well as the inhumanity of capital punishment in this essay.

Cantacuzino, M. (2015) *The Forgiveness Project: Stories for a Vengeful Age*. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

"Journalist Marina Cantacuzino set out to collect stories from victims and perpetrators who had chosen to resolve conflict through dialogue and restorative means. Examining themes of forgiveness, reconciliation and conflict transformation, this book brings together the personal testimonies of both survivors and perpetrators of crime and violence and asks the question whether forgiveness may have more currency than revenge in an age, which seems locked into the cycle of conflict. The introductory essay by Ms. Cantacuzino, founder and director of The Forgiveness Project, sets the stories in the larger

context of approaches to forgiveness, from both religious and secular viewpoints, concluding that in the reality of lived experience forgiveness has a quality 'as mysterious as love'."

Currie, E. (1998). *Crime and Punishment in America*. New York: Henry Holt & Company, LLC. (paperback)

The United States has built the largest prison system in the world and yet we are the most violent advanced industrialized society in existence. This paradoxical approach to fighting crime is examined thoroughly by Currie's analysis. He not only challenges the status quo, but offers viable restorative alternatives.

Durrenmatt, F. (2006) *The Pledge*. Chicago; University of Chicago Press. (paperback)

Written in the early fifties, the U of Chicago published three mystery stories by the Swedish author, translated by Joel Agee. "The Pledge" was made into a movie starring Jack Nicholson by abolitionist, Sean Penn in 2000. It made an impact on me personally because of its candid portrayal of how violence effects law enforcement and the people who try to seek justice and keep society safe.

Ellison, S. (2007) *Taking the War Out of Our Words; The Art of Powerful Non-Defensive Communication*. Oakland, CA: Wyatt-MacKenzie Publishing, Inc. (paperback)

Non-defensive communication doesn't come naturally, it seems. War vocabulary is imbedded in our language and our culture. Ellison work is common-sense and attainable if only it were taught in our schools.

Espada, M. (1996) *Imagine the Angels of Bread*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc. (paperback)

A stunning book of poetry that gives voice to the unspeakable pain caused by the violence human beings inflict on one another. A poem written to honor the poet, Demetria Martinez, who was arrested and tried for writing poetry allegedly illustrating her support of illegal immigrants is one of his most powerful. It's called, "Sing In the Voice of a God Even Atheists Can Hear."

Farley, W. (2005) *The Wounding and Healing of Desire: weaving heaven and earth*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press. (paperback)

Recovering oral tradition, Farley uses folk tales and music to reframe "images of sin and redemption into images of healing and power."

Garland, D. (2010) *Peculiar Institution; America's Death Penalty in an Age of Abolition*.

Some of [Garland's] eminently readable prose reminds me of Alexis de Tocqueville's nineteenth-century narrative about his visit to America; it has the

objective, thought-provoking quality of an astute observer rather than that of an interested participant in American politics...In his view, an important reason Americans retain capital punishment is their fascination with death. While neither the glamour nor the gore that used to attend public executions remains today, he observes, capital cases still generate extensive commentary about victims' deaths and potential deaths of defendants. Great works of literature, like best-selling paperbacks, attract readers by discussing killings and revenge. Garland suggests that the popularity of the mystery story is part of the culture that keeps capital punishment alive...While he has studiously avoided stating conclusions about the morality, wisdom, or constitutionality of capital punishment, Garland's empirical analysis speaks to all three...I commend *Peculiar Institution* to participants in the political process. --John Paul Stevens (New York Review of Books )

Gilligan, J. (1997) *Violence: reflections on a national epidemic*. New York: Vintage Books. (paperback)

Gilligan's powerful portraits of men who have committed horrific crimes (men he calls the "walking dead") offers the reader the rare opportunity to open their minds and hearts to a compassionate response. Violence reaps violence.

Girard, R. (1989) *The Scapegoat*. Baltimore; The John Hopkins University Press. (paperback)

Girard finds illuminating parallels within mythology regarding the need for scapegoating from the Oedipus story to the crucifixion of Jesus. As noted by artist Robert Priseman, it is not a coincidence that our modern lethal injection table resembles the shape of a cross.

Girard, R. (1979) *Violence and the Sacred*. Baltimore; The John Hopkins University Press. (paperback)

A must read for anyone interested in understanding the imbedded links to violence in society, especially the premeditated ritual killing by the state.

Hibbert, G. (2009) *Five Minutes of Heaven*. UK, Ireland. (Film) Director, Oliver Herschbiegel.

*The story of former UVF member Alistair Little. Twenty-five years after Little killed Joe Griffen's brother, the media arrange an auspicious meeting between the two.*

This film accomplishes two things; first, it reveals the problem of exploitation by the media; and second, it addresses the need for reconciliation (I hate the word, "forgiveness" and realistically demonstrates just what is needed before this can happen.

Kegan, R. (1982) *The Evolving Self*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. (paperback)

For me this is the “bible” of developmental psychology. Kegan integrate meaning-making and social development, both essential for understanding the nature of healing, compassion, and social transformation.

Kegan, R. & Lahey, L. *Immunity to Change; how to overcome it and unlock the potential in yourself and your organization*. Boston: Harvard University Press.

This text outlines obstacles to change that have more to do with levels of learning than with character or integrity, good or bad. Unconscious behavior versus malicious intent, and the good news is that with developmental psychology, there is always hope for improvement.

Lederach, J. (2005) *The Moral Imagination; the art and soul of peace building*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Lederach uses four powerful stories to illustrate the potential of transforming the cycles of violence. The creative art of peacemaking requires the willingness to be fully present in the very messy nature of conflict transformation.

Means, J. (2000) *Trauma & Evil: healing the wounded soul*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress (paperback)

McCullough, M. (2008) *Beyond Revenge: the evolution of the forgiveness instinct*. San Francisco. Jossey-Bass.

McCullough offers a reasoned study of forgiveness as a natural result of evolution thereby rescuing it from the sentimental or religious by “debunking the misconception that forgiveness should be likened to an antidote or cure for revenge.”

Mezirow, J. (2000) *Learning As Transformation*. San Francisco; Jossey-Bass.

Prejean, H. (1994) *Dead Man Walking*. New York; Vintage Books (paperback)

Sister Helen didn't expect to find herself as the spiritual director of a murderer on death row. Her candid telling of this difficult journey has forced the ritual executions by the state into public view. No one can read this book or watch this movie without questioning our assumptions regarding capital punishment.

Priseman, R. (2009) *No Human Way to Kill*. London; University of Essex; Seabrook Press.

Priseman's twelve renditions of modern execution methods stand alone as a powerful statement against the death penalty on their own. By adding essays from a death row inmate, the mother of murdered child, a retired warden who oversaw 89 executions, and a world-renowned human rights scholar, Priseman has created a compelling argument for a universal abolition of the death penalty.

Rakha, N. (2009) *The Crying Tree*. New York; Random House. (paperback)

A powerful novel (based on a true story) of a mother's endurance and the human capacity for forgiveness.

Naseem Rakha: In 2003, I met a woman during a peace rally in my small town of Silverton, Oregon. She had just visited an inmate on San Quentin's death row an inmate who, twenty-one years earlier, had been convicted of killing her daughter. For years, she had lived for this man's death, believing that his execution would end the pain of her loss. What she found, however, was that after ten years of waiting and hating, she had to give it up. She wrote the man and told him she forgave him. That arc, from the most desperate kind of anguish to reconciliation and even love stunned me, and compelled me to explore this journey through *The Crying Tree*.

Redekop, V. (2002) *From Violence to Blessing*. Ottawa, Canada. Novalis, St. Paul University. (paperback)

I read this book for a class on conflict analysis and it caught me by surprise. Redekop's understanding of violence is informed by Rene Girard's work and from a strong sense of vocation to help us overcome deep-seated patterns of violence.

Sarat, A. (2001) *When the State Kills: capital punishment and the American Condition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Sarat exposes the reality of state killing and its place in popular American culture.

Sharp, S. (2005) *Hidden Victims: the effects of the death penalty on families of the accused*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press. (paperback)

Shore, B. (1996). *Culture in mind: Cognition, culture, and the problem of meaning*. New York: Oxford University Press. (paperback)

In trying to understand ritualistic state-sanctioned murder, Brad Shore's exploration of cognitive and psychological anthropology provides answers. Within these answers lie compassionate alternatives. Shore writes:

People die and murder, nurture and protect, go to any extreme, in behalf of their conception of the real. More to the point, perhaps, they live out the

details of their daily lives in terms of what they conceive to be real: not just rocks and mountains and storms at sea, but friendship, love, respect are known as false or real. Indeed, we institute such intersubjective realities, even give them embodiment in the layout of the village, in the forms of address, in ritual and myth. (Introduction, xv)

Schwartz, R. (1997) *The Curse of Cain; the violent legacy of monotheism*. Chicago; University of Chicago Press. (paperback)

This book about violence that locates the origins of violence in identity formation. Schwartz argues that, "Violence is not only what we do to the Other. It is prior to that. Violence is the very construction of the Other...Identity formation are themselves and act of violence." (p. 5)

Walker, A. (2010) *Hard Times Require Furious Dancing*. Novato, CA. New World Library.

Poetry, like music and art, bring healing to the deepest wounds; the wounds we tried to forget, the wounds no one could understand, the wounds we didn't even know we had. The cover of Alice Walker's latest book offers a glimpse of this life-affirming volume of poetry. Jack Kornfield says it best, "Alice Walker's new poems are a lifeboat in a storm, warm soup in the mouth, a rumba in the streets of the heart."

Wiesel, E. (2008) *The Night Trilogy: Night, Dawn, Day*. New York. Hill & Wang. (paperback)

Wiesel's trilogy offers meditations on mankind's attraction to violence and on the temptation of self-destruction.

Young, W. (2007) *The Shack; where tragedy confronts eternity*. Newbury Park, CA. Windblown Media.

A self-published novel about forgiveness. It's universal popularity in spite of its unconventional theology warrants a closer look. From Wikipedia:

*The Shack was the #1 Paperback trade fiction seller on the New York Times best sellers list from June 2008 to early 2010. The title of the book is a metaphor for "the house you build out of your own pain", as Young explained in a telephone interview." He also states to radio host talk show Drew Marshall that *The Shack* "is a metaphor for the places you get stuck, you get hurt, you get damaged...the thing where shame or hurt is centered."*

Zaki, J. (2011) *Scientific American Mind; "What Me Care?"* New York; Division of Nature America, Inc.

New findings report a decline in empathy in young people in the last three decades. Zaki finds a connection between social isolation and a severe drop in the number of people who read, falling below 50% in the last ten years.

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