



Beacons of Transformation and Renewals

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"I appeal to you; therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may discern what the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect is." Romans 12:1-2 (NRSV)

I have been living a fascinating paradox. My ministry requires me to travel regularly throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, visiting Partners, providing pastoral care and follow-up with mission personnel, and advocating for justice, peace, and reconciliation. COVID-19 placed me behind closed walls, as I am particularly vulnerable to it due to my asthma condition. Because of that, I kept myself quarantined, working from home, and connecting to the outside world through the Internet. In that stage of stillness, I have found the opportunity to connect and witness processes where people continue placing their bodies in danger for the common good. I followed the news regarding a Puerto Rican social leader, who was arrested, for defending the right to food during the COVID-19 pandemic. I witnessed the love and dedication of a group of farmers in Paraguay, who brought their products to market for distribution and used in the popular community pots in Asunción, the capital of that South American country. I acknowledged the work of an ecumenical religious leader who risked his own life and health to move dozens of families from the immigrant and refugee camps in Tijuana, Mexico, to protect them from the onslaught of the virus. It is the cry of thousands of young people around the U.S., bringing a powerful message to those in authority to overcome racism and systemic injustice, because "black lives matter."

The shared biblical text invites us to affirm the centrality of the subject as reason and motive for our struggles. According to Paul, it is our practice that comes from the pure love that puts us into a "giving of the body, a presentation of the living sacrifice." Out of our real human experience and felt needs, we are called to confront ideological speculation of structural injustice and neoliberalism. A second element comes from "resisting our conformity to this world and the

renewal of our minds." It implies knowing the system, gathering information, and revealing the real agendas to pursue a change for the Common Good. A third element is based on that "good, pleasant and perfect will." It is simply not enough to denounce those who profit at the expense of the well-being of all. It is also necessary to give way to social projects that raise the ethical character of our societies. It is imperative to build, facilitate, understand, and strengthen the human and ecological development of our communities around the world.

I am called by my faith towards anti-racism. I will be traveling this path the rest of my life. There will be times for me to sit and listen, and times for me to stand and educate. I am committed to making this world a safer and more just place for every Black person. I still have much to learn, and a long way to go. Let's unpack this.

I keep checking on the right time to travel again, always caring for my neighbor and me. When it happens, I want to be ready to face new times beyond COVID-19. Times inspired by the fullness of life, beyond nostalgic dreams back into a said "normality." It is time to move forward and to seek transformation and renewal.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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