

**Religious Education in the Prophetic Voice:
The Pedagogy of Eileen Egan**
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Abstract

Eileen Egan was one of the leading U.S. Catholic peace activists of the past century. This paper will be an exploration of the life and lifescape of Egan and her implicit curriculum for a pedagogy of peace – a bringing forward with new attention and perspective the story of a life of unapplauded achievement. It will examine both the value of the content of her life as witness and the methodologies she employed in calling others to those same values. As such, I will frame Egan as a religious educator showing how -- using the metaphors of prophet, advocate, and exemplar - she honors the best of what it means to educate toward a world of peace and justice. I will end with “soundings” in her leadership style that might enable religious educators to contribute “to the good of all humanity.” What can we learn by listening to the prophetic voices among us that help us discover the integrity in our inheritance and our identity as people of faith? Egan’s life story and the moral vision and character of the Christian life it embodies is worthy of the same ministry of accompaniment that she embraced so selflessly in her own lifetime.

“I opened my eyes to World War I. War was actively opposed in our house.”¹ This early reminiscence, recounted in an interview conducted the year before her death, forms a frame for what would be Eileen Egan’s lifelong, uncompromised hatred of war and the tenacity and courage required to sustain her prophetic challenge to culture, society, and Church. In one of the many laudatory obituaries written about her in the fall of 2000, Patrick Jordan in *Commonweal* paid tribute to a woman who “was small of body, but brilliant of mind, one who spent a lifetime both actively serving the victims of war and promoting alternatives to armed conflict.”² In his review of her book *Peace Be with You*, published one year before her death, Lawrence Cunningham, a noted writer on spirituality, called Egan “one of the most remarkable Catholic women of our time,” a woman whose full and unwavering commitment to “peace-uncompromised” represented what he could only label a conversionary grace from God.³

Sympathy for the suffering person, respect for those whose lives are guided by conscience, a wariness of civil authorities -- these were the legacies from Egan’s childhood experiences in an Irish Catholic family living in Protestant Wales, then in young adulthood as an émigré transplanted to New York City. Egan would honor that legacy as she refused over the course of her life to permit her faith to be co-opted by nationalism, by patriotism, or, ultimately, by a war-sanctioning religious tradition she found corrupting of the message of Christ. But she loved the Church. With prophetic passion, she rooted the message of peace with a Catholic sensibility, working to ground an advocacy for peace in the mind of the Church, to critique Christian accommodation with nation and culture, and to permeate the Catholic consciousness and Catholic structures with the rich tradition and witness of Gospel nonviolence.

¹ Eileen Egan, audiotaped interview by Katherine Hennessy, 1 July 2000, NY, NY.

² Patrick Jordan, “Go in Peace: Remembering Eileen Egan,” *Commonweal*, 17 November 2000, 6.

³ Lawrence Cunningham, review of *Peace Be With You* by Eileen Egan, *Commonweal*, 21 April 2000, 32.

Living Out the Discipleship of Nonviolence

Egan worked and wrote for reform and renewal of a church in the United States that, until the 1960s, had been consistently unwavering in its support of public authorities in time of war. Immigrant Catholics saw in their compliance with government policies regarding war and peace a way to prove congruence with American life. The just war criteria, part of Church social teaching for centuries, gave the comfort that there was little difference between good Catholics and good citizens.⁴ After World War II, the fragmented “Catholic peace movement” would consist only of the few Catholic conscientious objectors and their supporters and members of the Catholic Worker community, many of whom had soon turned to works of charity and social justice reforms. During the nadir of the 1950s, “only a small scattering of Catholic individuals were keeping the peace witness alive.”⁵

Eileen Egan must surely count as one of that remnant. Writing in a variety of publications, she challenged the reigning military triumphalism of her day. A remarkable essay “Peace and War,” appearing in a 1948 issue of *Integrity* (a now defunct Catholic lay journal), is an example of her revolutionary thinking and theology even at a time when the Allied victory was being freshly savored. This “Good War,” she argued, did not bring us peace. Regimes of terror, religious oppression, extinguishing of intellectual expression and cultural autonomy, millions of displaced persons, mass need and misery even in Western Europe - - “We have tried war once and found it wanting.”⁶ She went on to critique the impersonal methods of modern warfare “which lead inextricably to the destruction of the lives of innocent noncombatants, to the impoverishment of countries not just for the period of the war, but perhaps for generations.”⁷ The total-war-concept, essential to the waging of modern war, even if “just,” is the negation of all Christian values because it is the absolute opposite of active love. What is needed is a commitment to prayer, penance, and the works of mercy - - a Gospel commitment to nonviolence patterned on the examples of Jesus. These were the themes that would play out over her next fifty years of peace work.

The Formative Years

In *The Works of Peace* and in other essays and interviews, Egan traces some of the experiences in her early life which forged a lifelong commitment to international service and peacemaking - - and the temperament, perhaps, required for both. Born in Wales in late December 1911, she was the oldest of six children born to Jeremiah and Agnes Ahern Egan, Irish emigrants. The greater part of Egan’s childhood was spent in Cwmgwrach, Wales. As the only Catholics in their village, the Egan’s learned the sting of anti-Catholicism religious prejudice, where grammar school portrayals of villains in the “hateful Church of Rome” often received a corrective interpretation around the evening dinner table. “It developed after awhile that I found myself identifying with the person who was hunted and executed - - the beginning of a lifelong identification with the victim.”⁸ Her mother tempered what might have been an understandable defensiveness. “She was irenic,” Egan recalled. “She told us that these were Christians, too. And

⁴ Patricia McNeal, *American Catholic Peace Movement: 1928-1972* (New York: Arno Press, 1982), 2,10.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁶ Eileen Egan (Jerem O’Sullivan-Barra), “Peace and War,” *Integrity*, December 1948, 33.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸ Egan, *Works of Peace* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 3.

if what they believed about the Catholic Church were really true, then they'd be right to feel as they did. But it wasn't true." In countless interviews, Egan always attributed her early and deep-felt faith and commitment to justice to the enduring influence of her mother. "My mother felt empires were noxious. Ireland was only one example of the harm they could do; India was another. But she expressed her views with gentleness. She wanted Ireland to be free, but not by violence."⁹

In 1926 relatives in the United States successfully urged the Egan family to migrate. The family settled in Manhattan and into their new urban life. Egan graduated from Hunter College in 1935, the same year her mother died of cancer. (Her father had died five years previously.) She describes the following years as a "way of the cross for a bereft family of six children, a time to be endured. It was the pain of loss, the loss felt by a transplanted family."¹⁰ Eileen taught high school English and speech in New York City public schools to help support her family. She and her sister Mabel also made sporadic visits to Portugal during these years, where Eileen had a commitment from the National Catholic News Service to use her articles chronicling the plight of the growing body of refugees escaping fortress Europe.¹¹

She also began taking graduate course at the New School for Social Research where many scholars from Nazi Germany taught economics, sociology, and history - - the so-called University in Exile. Egan describes this time as a search for meaning in the social, economic, and political tides that were sweeping the human family. "I found myself becoming extremely critical of capitalism without, like many of my contemporaries, finding that Marxist-Lenin had any answers."¹² What revolted her, she wrote, was the unquestioned acceptance of violence in pursuit of what were stated as idealistic ends. "There had to be another answer, another solution that did not involve or justify taking human life."¹³

"Peace, Poverty, and Merciful Service" – Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker

By the early 1940's Egan had found an answer in the Catholic Worker movement. Cut to the quick by its impassioned but shocking assertion of neutrality on the issue of Spain's civil war, Egan saw in the Worker the abhorrence of war, the dignity of the human person assailed not only in violence but in the depersonalized systems of capitalism and communism, and the commitment to the works of mercy that had been deeply imbued in her by her mother. "The Catholic Worker seemed to be a door to my new future. It seemed my only option."¹⁴

By early 1943, when an uncle had come forward to help with the rearing of her three youngest siblings, she "was free as air." Resigning from all of her assignments, she went to Mott Street to inform Dorothy Day that she was ready to join the Worker. Egan delighted recounting her reception at that first meeting; the story appears frequently in her writings. "We talked of this and that, and Dorothy said, 'That would be fine. Come in every Wednesday and help us with the mail.' That was not what I meant and I took it as a rebuff. Someone who was with the Worker

⁹ George M. Anderson, "A Woman of Peace: An Interview with Eileen Egan," *America*, 10 February 1996, 22.

¹⁰ Eileen Egan, "In New York Din, The Catholic Worker Called the Loudest," *National Catholic Reporter*, 26 February 1988, 12.

¹¹ We see here the beginnings of her use of the "power of the pen" to cull out the effects that economic, political, and military policies have on individual lives.

¹² Egan, unpublished autobiographical notes, 1986.

¹³ Egan, "New York Din," *National Catholic Reporter*, 12.

¹⁴ Hennessy, Egan Interview. The U.S. Catholic hierarchy at the time was an active supporter of Franco and opposed American arms shipments to the Loyalist government.

later told me that as Dorothy did not know me, that was an understandable response. To her, Dorothy had said, ‘Come and help us with the dishes.’”¹⁵

Although feeling deeply rejected at the time, Egan was to “be made known” to Dorothy Day during an intimate Christmas encounter later that same year. Egan had just completed her first Catholic Relief Service assignment in Guanajuato, Mexico, where refugees who had survived the massive deportations from Eastern Poland during the Hitler-Stalin pact had been resettled. She was able to make real to Dorothy “the anguish of countless men, women, and children forced to bear the cross of suffering in wars whose causes they did not understand.”¹⁶ Egan described poignantly what it meant to share Mass on the eve of a wartime Christmas with Dorothy Day, each woman taking courage that the message of peace embodied in the Incarnation was still being announced at altars throughout the world that night, both asking how “those who shared the one Bread to form one Body could face each other as enemies by orders of governments?”¹⁷

Thus began a lifelong association and a profound friendship formed on a shared vision that only an infusion of compassion through works of mercy could trump the works of war. Whenever Egan was in New York City, she would serve soup or give talks at the Friday night Discernment Meetings at Maryhouse, a shelter for homeless women founded by Day.¹⁸ She was a prolific contributor to the *Catholic Worker* and became its associate editor in 1964. In later years she took over the arranging of Day’s lecture tours and accompanied her on many of them. From Rome and the Vatican Council, to London and the beginning of Pax Christi and Amnesty International, to the 1976 Eucharistic Conference in Philadelphia, Egan embraced this “ministry of accompaniment” as both scribe and squire. The two were together in 1970 on an historic trip to Australia, where Egan had arranged a series of peace and justice seminars that gave impetus to mounting anti-war sentiment there, and she paved the way for Day to meet Mother Teresa in India during her return trip to the United States. Egan paid daily visits in 1973 during the ten days Day spent in prison in solidarity with Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers in California.

Egan would go on to write several biographic essays of Dorothy Day.¹⁹ With unabashed admiration, she credited Day, with her linkage of merciful service, poverty, and peace, with a revival of a Catholic commitment to nonviolence – putting flesh on the ancient maxim, “The

¹⁵ Egan, autobiographical notes, 2.

¹⁶ Egan, *Peace Be With You*, 277.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 278.

¹⁸ Egan was famous for the entourage of guests she would bring to these Friday night meetings. Jean Goss and Hildegard Goss-Mayr, leaders of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation whose training seminars in evangelical nonviolence were credited with contributing greatly to the peaceful overthrow of the Marcos regime in the Philippines in 1986, and Mairead Corrigan, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate of 1976, recognized for her Belfast mothers campaign against violence, were only some of Egan’s friends and associates whom she freely shared with the Worker community. (Patrick Jordan, interview by author, New York, New York, 25 February, 2003) Egan played a key role in the cross-fertilization of friendship and support that characterized leadership in the American Catholic peace movement in the Twentieth Century.

¹⁹ See, for example, Eileen Egan, *Dorothy Day and the Permanent Revolution*; “The Final Word Is Love: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement,” *Cross-Currents*, Winter 1980-1981, 377-384; Egan, “House of Hospitality: Dorothy Day and the Permanent Revolution,” *The Way*, July 1982, 184-194; and Egan, “Dorothy Day: Pilgrim of Peace,” in *A Revolution of the Heart: Essays on the Catholic Worker*, ed. Patrick G. Coy, 69-114 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995). Egan’s personal accounts of her friendship and experiences with Day are often cited as “primary sources” in other biographic treatment of Day.

church abhors bloodshed.”²⁰ Throughout each chronicling, Egan raised up the prophetic witness of a “woman who saw her peace fellowship not as a special compartment of her life, but as the fruit and expression of a life lived in the light of the Incarnation.”²¹

“Works of Mercy, Works of Peace” – Catholic Relief Services

It was when she had, as she saw it, “been turned down by Dorothy” that a new avenue opened for Egan allowing her, paradoxically, to be the sacrament of the Catholic Worker, taking the works of mercy as far as possible into the midst of war. In 1943 Egan became the first lay person, first overseas staff representative, and first woman to join the newly formed Catholic Relief Services (CRS), a partnership that would last for four decades. As such, she became one of a limited staff who trod new ground in meeting the unprecedented needs of war refugees, seeing them as persons worthy of dignity and respect. “From the beginning, I saw CRS as an extension of my peace work,” she recounted in an interview.²² She would soon come to see in CRS work a reversing of the works of war - - works of mercy as a protest against the works of war.

Because of her fluency in Spanish, her first assignment with CRS found her in north central Mexico where, during that first year, she worked in the first displaced persons camp of World War II. For six months she recorded the personal testimonies of these desperate refugees and the hundreds of orphans whose parents had died on the trek from Siberia through India, Australia, and New Zealand to safe haven in Mexico. 1944 found her opening offices in Spain and Portugal. Her profiles of the experiences of the refugees she helped to find safety, sanctuary, and stability would later be used in CRS publicity and fundraising.²³

In what was to become an impressive model of inter-agency collaboration, Egan’s CRS assignment changed in 1946 to “make official” the link between CRS and the National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW) that she had been forging through informal, personal networking. Egan became a conduit connecting millions of Catholic women with the needs of post-war Europe - - needs Egan highlighted through articles, pamphlets, speaking engagements, and tours of resettlement camps.²⁴ She then prepared the administrative infrastructures to carry out over the next almost forty years millions of dollars of economic development projects and refugee relief from Hong Kong to India, from Korea to Uganda.

With Egan’s recommendation, one of the recipients of a NCCW gift was Mother Teresa and her Calcutta hostel. Later, encouraged by Egan to make her first visit outside India since her arrival there thirty-one years earlier, Mother Teresa addressed the 1960 NCCW convention in Las Vegas. Over 3000 delegates representing ten million Catholic women were introduced to this woman whom Egan saw as the voice of Asia’s need and Asia’s dignity.

During her long and rich experience with CRS, Egan would settle Palestinian refugees in Gaza and Chinese exiles in Hong Kong. Italy, Poland, France, Pakistan, India, and Vietnam

²⁰ Egan, “Dorothy Day: Pilgrim of Peace,” 84.

²¹ Egan, *Peace Be with You*, 262.

²² Hennessy, Egan Interview.

²³ See, for example, Eileen Egan, “The Bread of Life”, *Sign*, May 1946, 30-31.

²⁴ Eileen Egan, *Catholic Relief Services: The Beginning Years. For the Life of the World* (NY: Catholic Relief Services, 1988) 270-271.

would all receive both her passion and her organizational skills.²⁵ In each assignment Egan spread the story of CRS and its mission using the “power of the profile,” conveying the shattering impact of being torn from one’s home, ripped from one’s homeland, stripped of possessions, livelihood, and a future - - one story at a time. War refugees, she realized, could be victims of hatred, violence, and indifference.

Egan’s travels with CRS gave her firsthand experience with the effects of modern warfare, waged not just against armies but against whole populations now bearing the “collateral damage” of unspeakable human suffering and unspeakable human loss. In what was to become a key pillar of her own developing theology of peace, she saw in war what she called the reversal of the works of mercy:

In point of fact, every one of the corporal works of mercy is literally reversed in total war. Rather than shelter the shelterless, we destroy the shelter of man; rather than feed the hungry, we make the children of man hungry for generations by uprooting them and scorching and mining their fruitful fields; rather than cloth the naked, we raze the productive plants that make the cloth that cover them; rather than ransom the captive, we make a captive of every member of the enemy nation we can lay our hands on; rather than heal the sick, we hasten their death by blockading their supplies of goods and medicines. And to make the unspeakable cycle complete, we unbury the dead.²⁶

In 1978 Egan retired from full-time active service with CRS. In 1996, CRS honored her by creating the annual Eileen Egan Journalism Awards to recognize the vital contribution of Catholic journalists who have worked to raise awareness of the causes of suffering and to promote social justice in the developing world.

“Under the Judgment of Love” – Vatican II and Peace

In 1965, in an example of mutual support, Dorothy Day and Eileen Egan joined to move their prophetic voices to the “public square” that is St. Peter’s. The nature of modern warfare was forcing the Church to examine war as a politically rational tool in a new light. Egan had removed herself from the CRS payroll for a period to be part of a lobby for peace at the Second Vatican Council’s final sessions scheduled to include deliberations on peace and war.

A draft of “Schema XIII – On Making Lasting Peace,” to be included in the document that would come to be known as the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, had been leaked, and the American pacifist community was horrified to learn that it included a statement to the effect that, in time of war, the presumption of justice was to be with one’s own government. Some U.S. Catholics and their bishops were arguing that America’s nuclear deterrent was the foundation for international stability and the *sine qua non* of the defense of the United States. The challenge, as Egan described it: finding a way to let the Council bishops know that there was another strand of opinion in U.S. Catholicism which supported a commitment to Gospel nonviolence, the right of conscientious objection, the end to the arms race, and the repudiation of nuclear weapons and all warfare in the nuclear age.²⁷

²⁵ Eileen Egan recounted her work with refugees in two histories: *CRS: The Beginning Years. For the Life of the World and For Whom There Is No Room: Scenes From the Refugee World* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995)

²⁶ Eileen Egan (Jerem O’Sullivan-Barra), “Without Mercy,” *Integrity*, June 1954, 21.

²⁷ Egan, “Dorothy Day: Pilgrim of Peace”, 96-99.

To prepare to influence the Council in its deliberations, Egan edited a special edition of the *Catholic Worker* on the subject of war and peace. Egan wrote the lead editorial, "We Are All Under Judgment." The traditional just war doctrine was no longer morally adequate in the nuclear age, she argued.

The message of Christians, with its personal God and personal Savior, has always glorified the individual person, unique, irreplaceable, infinitely loved. The judgment that we all face is the simple one of how we have treated our neighbor.... We are all under the judgment of love. If all of us, lay and clerical alike, must meet that same judgment, we should look with terror at any human activity which makes it impossible to perform the works of mercy.... Now, when we can resort to violence only at the risk of destroying ourselves, we must make a witness, both as individual Christians and as a Church, to be a loving, reconciling community.²⁸

The eight-page issue was airmailed to all Catholic bishops in anticipation of deliberations.

At the Council, Egan made daily personal contact with cardinals and bishops. On December 6, 1965, the *Pastoral Constitution* was approved. In it the Council confirmed that national defense is the only possible rationale for force, which is only legitimate when used as a last resort and when restrained by the principles of proportionality and noncombatant immunity. Included in the document (Section 80) was a ringing denunciation of any attack on population centers with weapons of mass destruction as a "crime against God and man" that "merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation." The Vatican Council singled out blind obedience for censure and called the arms race a "treacherous trap for humanity."²⁹ The Council also clearly spelled out in Section 79 the right of Catholics to be recognized as conscientious objectors provided they accept some other form of service to the human community.

The American peace lobby rejoiced at the Council's call for an "evaluation of war with an entirely new attitude." They applauded the one solemn and absolute anathema of the Council - the wholesale condemnation of indiscriminate war. As Egan was to recount several times in her self-effacing style, "Whether the witness of prayer and fasting or the mailing of the *Catholic Worker* to the world's bishops had any effect on the final outcome can never be assessed or known. What is important is that it occurred, and that it took place as lay action."³⁰

In her theology of peace Egan would often write of the task of discipleship in helping the Church live out its call and potential to be the reconciling community for humankind. She referred to the actions at the Council as an example of the call acknowledged, the potential fulfilled. "Vatican II gave the bishops of the world the opportunity to show themselves as defenders of the Earthly City as well as of the City of God. It was a time of *kairos*, a graced time when the fathers of the universal church demonstrated their love and concern for the fate of humankind."³¹

²⁸Eileen Egan, "We Are All Under Judgment," *Catholic Worker*, July-August 1965, 6, 8.

²⁹ Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 990-991.

³⁰ Egan, "Dorothy Day: Pilgrim of Peace," 102.

³¹ Egan, *Peace Be With You*, 180.

“Loving Disagreement” – U.S. Catholics and Peace

The failure of the Council to condemn unequivocally the possession of nuclear weapons - and the preparation for war that possession implies - continued to be a point of impassioned, lifelong concern for Egan. It would be the subject of theological reflection in the 1983 U.S. Bishops' pastoral *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*. Egan's own work, her 1980 essay "The Beatitudes, the Works of Mercy, and Pacifism" was referenced in the Pastoral, the only work by a woman so cited. In her essay Egan had argued that war reverses the Incarnation, obliterating by bombs and blockades the recognition of Christ in the face of the homeless and hungry. She went on to ask:

If Christians turn away from the works of mercy, how can they call with confidence on the mercy of God? If, as Jesus makes clear in the Beatitude, the merciful are happy because their poor mercy is a shadow of the limitless mercy they need from their Creator, is it not a supremely perilous enterprise to interrupt the works of mercy? When the works of war reverse and make a hideous travesty of the works of mercy, how can Christians justify taking part in them?³²

When the Pastoral was released, Egan applauded its endorsement of pacifism and active nonviolence as legitimate and authentic expressions of Christian citizenship. But she used the Quaker term "loving disagreement" to express her opposition to the bishops' conditional acceptance of a nuclear deterrent as morally acceptable when maintained as an arms balance. And she rejected the notion that pluralism at the level of moral theory or moral rightness concerning matters of war and peace was possible. She found little comfort in the Bishops' endorsement of vocational pacifism and would continue to work for an institutionalized expression of that commitment throughout her life.

“Jesus in Distressing Disguise” – Mother Teresa, the Countersign

Another prophetic witness Egan brought to bear comes in the theological portrait she would draw of Mother Teresa. Her association with Mother Teresa had begun in 1955 on a CRS mission to Calcutta. At that time Mother Teresa and her work were not universally known. Against much local opposition, she had just opened her first home for the dying. She took Egan on a tour where, Egan often recounted later, much to her shame she had turned away in instinctual revulsion from the "rows of pallets with the wasted bodies and the suppurating sores."³³ For Egan, the eventual reframing of that experience came from Mother Teresa herself. Often quoted, it was to become another of the cornerstones of Egan's developing theology of peace. "Our work," said Mother Teresa, "calls us to see Jesus in everyone. He has told us that he

³² Eileen Egan, "The Beatitudes, the Works of Mercy, and Pacifism," in *War or Peace? The Search for New Answers*, ed. Thomas A. Shannon, 169-187 (New York: Orbis, 1980), 175. This would be a continued theme in Egan's writing. See, for example, "War: Reversing the Works of Mercy," *Pax Christi USA*, Winter 1991, 4-7, 37 which earned an award from the American Catholic Press Association for best analysis of the Gulf War. In *Peace Be With You*, Egan updates each "work of mercy" with contemporary examples from "the works of war" – the continued economic sanctions against Iraq and the Rwandan civil war, for example—which have obliterated mercy. (Egan, *Peace Be With You*, 137-150)

³³ Egan, *Peace Be with You*, 149.

is the hungry one. He is the thirst one. He is the naked one. He is the one who is suffering. These are the treasures. They are Jesus. Each one is Jesus in his distressing disguise.”³⁴

In 1960, Egan’s role as “shepherdess” for Mother Teresa continued post-NCCW Las Vegas Convention. She orchestrated a New York City grand tour, cementing ties among CRS, the United Nations World Health Organization, and the Missionaries of Charity (prompting a steady increase in the flow of funds and medicine to Calcutta, Bengal, all of India, and eventually to other areas outside of India where the sisters worked) and arranging a friendship-forging meeting with Dorothy Day at Maryhouse. “How alike these two visionaries were,” Egan wrote. “Mother Teresa served the dying of the scourged city, seeing each one as Jesus in distressing disguise. Dorothy Day reminded Christians that Jesus likened salvation to how we act toward him in his disguise of frail, ordinary humanity.”³⁵

Egan was in Rome with Mother Teresa when she applied to the Vatican for recognition of the Missionaries of Charity as a Society of Pontifical Right. Egan was at her side when Mother Teresa was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1979 and was instrumental in the founding of the Co-Workers of Mother Teresa, a lay ecumenical movement sharing the vision of Mother Teresa to work with the poor, defending human life and human dignity.

Egan authored four books on the writings and spirituality of Mother Teresa, three with her sister Kathleen. (Her biography of Mother Teresa, *Such a Vision of the Street*, won the coveted Christopher Book Award in 1985.) In these works and in other articles and short biographies of Mother Teresa, Egan spoke often of her as a countersign, “one who offered the hope that the world was not condemned, that a world created out of love and redeemed by love might also be purified by love.”³⁶ In her writings Egan was always quick to name and confront both the vulnerabilities and criticisms of Mother Teresa. Raising up the vision and values of Mother Teresa should never result in an adulatory “Mother Teresa-ism” which puts her in an otherworldly category of saintliness, she cautioned. Responding to critics who charged that “palliative charity” alone would never change the unjust structures behind the poverty, suffering, and death that made it necessary, Egan argued that Mother Teresa’s revolutionary love does serve as an accusatory finger, a finger pointing the way toward “structures that do not marginalized, that do not ignore, that do not produce refugees.”³⁷

Organizing for Peace

Another marker in Egan’s lifelong commitment to peace would surely be her role in the founding of the American Pax Association and Pax Christi USA. Trying to spread the message of peace with a Catholic sensibility and “wanting to ground an advocacy for peace in the mind of the Church,” Egan early on had found inspiration in the British Pax Christi Society, founded in 1936. The principal purpose of the group was to “inform Catholics about issues such as conscientious objection and to bring Catholic teaching to bear on the new questions raised by nuclear weapons.”³⁸ Pax focused its energies on lobbying for peace within the institutional church

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 296-297.

³⁶ Eileen Egan, *Such a Vision of the Street: Mother Teresa - - The Spirit and the Work* (Garden City: NY, Image Books, 1985, 1986), 471, 481.

³⁷ Ibid., 242.

³⁸ Gerald Vanderhaar, “A History Worth Celebrating,” *Pax Christi USA*, Spring-Summer 1992, 4.

rather than on reform of political structures, even as it affirmed the individual as the one called to respond to church teachings on war and peace.

In 1971, the British Pax Society merged with Pax Christi, a Catholic peace organization that was founded in France in 1945. Egan and Gordon Zahn gave the organizational energy shaping the transition from American Pax to a Pax Christi affiliate in the United States. Seeking the help of episcopal moderators to establish peacemaking as a priority for U.S. Catholic Church, they saw the new group as a broad-based one that would include both pacifists and more moderate Catholics and peace activists. Its goal was to educate and convert individual Catholics to a stance for peace and to persuade the hierarchy to broaden and deepen the public peace witness of the Church.

Egan had embraced early on the term “gospel nonviolence” to describe her stance, seeing in it the call to both the active struggle against evil by nonviolent means and the active rebuilding of the world that the word “pacifist” might veil.³⁹ She and Thomas Merton carried on a rich personal correspondence in the mid-1960s, weighing the use of the word “pacifist” in the Pax movement. Both agreed that it had been understood historically in the context of individualism and subjectivism – and therefore had been religiously marginalized. “Gospel nonviolence” and “gospel peacemaking” – actively reconciling differences through creative, communally-based initiatives-- would be the clarion call of the new peace movement to the Church, as it had been in Egan’s writings and thoughts for several years.

Though Pax Christi was founded committed to maintaining a fragile balance between all segments of the Catholic peace movement in the United States, over time the organization “has gradually moved away from the just war and toward Gospel nonviolence as the only viable Catholic attitude.”⁴⁰ In their own tributes to Eileen Egan at her death, Pax Christi associates attributed much of this movement to her influence. “Eileen was a leader in seeing to it that Pax Christi USA was not only international but also deeply Christian,” said Etienne De Jonghe, General Secretary of Pax Christi International. “It is largely because of Eileen that from the beginning Pax Christi USA had a strong accent on nonviolence as central to the meaning of Jesus.” Mary Lou Kownacki, Pax Christi USA Ambassador of Peace and former national coordinator, agreed. “Eileen continued to remind us both eloquently and reverently that Pax Christi should keep Gospel nonviolence as a reason to be. For that alone the Catholic Church should be eternally grateful.”⁴¹

The Right to Refuse to Kill

Part of Egan’s prophetic stance consistently focused on the right of conscience in deciding fundamental issues of war and peace. During the mid-1960s, Egan was asked to represent Pax Romana (the International Movement for Catholic Graduates and Students) as a non-governmental organization at the United Nations. Over the next twenty years, with her well-honed repertoire of persistent poking and prodding, Egan used this forum to press for the sanctioning of conscientious objection as a fundamental, universal human right. Egan argued that

³⁹ As early as 1953, Egan had been lamenting the impression that pacifists had unwittingly given – that pacifism was a passive line of non-cooperation or retreat. “Too often objectors in war appear to the man in the street as fanatics who make nonviolence an adjunct to fringe ideas from vegetarianism to Christian anarchy.... The Catholic who refuses participation in modern war has the basis of the cross for his nonviolence.” Eileen Egan (Jerem O’Sullivan Barra), “The Case Is Not Closed”, October 1953 *Integrity*, 43.

⁴⁰ Ronald G. Musto, *Catholic Peacemakers: A Documentary History, Vol. II* (NY: Garland Publishing, 1996), 805.

⁴¹ “Remembering Eileen Egan, Co-Founder of Pax Christi USA,” www.paxchristiusa.org/pages/182htm.

surely the United Nations, the organization of the world's peoples dedicated to a world without war, should protect what she called the right to refuse to kill:

It had become dreadfully clear by World War II that the obedience of the young was abused when they carried out orders for mass destruction of human beings - - whether this was achieved through air strikes or liquidation camps. Millions of young men, drafted into the military, were given little choice but to submit to induction and, after that, to follow orders. Yet in the wake of the Second World War the ultimate responsibility of the individual was asserted, even though that individual had been part of a military machine oiled by the principle of unquestioning obedience.⁴²

In 1970, Egan was able to break the UN taboo on considering conscientious objection, some member states having seen in it a pernicious threat to their own sovereignty. In a lengthy speech before a World Youth Assembly, Egan reminded the delegates that the international tribunal at Nuremberg had refused to accept "obedience" as exoneration for the commission of crimes against humanity. If the United Nations has indeed recognized the "right to life" in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights, should not the "right not to take life" be equally sanctioned as the right of an ethical, self-determined being, she asked.⁴³

This work and the persistent lobbying by Egan, Quaker activists, and War Resisters International, a non-religious peace group, are credited with moving conscientious objection to the agenda of the twenty-seventh U.N. Commission on Human Rights held in Geneva in 1971. The issue languished there for the next seventeen years, subject to the vagaries of East-West relations - - and continued pressure from Egan and others. In 1987, post-*glasnost*, the Commission did approve the land mark resolution:

Conscientious objection to military service should be considered a legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Egan recalled the achievement with great satisfaction. "I think that's one of the happiest things in my life," she told one interviewer, "that I got that into the UN system."⁴⁴

"The Seamless Garment" – Life, All of a Piece

Although the phrase "seamless garment" and the theological controlling metaphor and unifying image it came to represent in Catholic social teaching is associated with Cardinal

⁴² Eileen Egan, "The Right to Refuse to Kill," *Worldview*, December 1974, 22.

⁴³ Egan, *The Catholic Conscientious Objector: The Right to Refuse to Kill*, 44. See also Eileen Egan, "Conscientious Objection as a Human Right; A Proposal to the United Nations," *Ecumenist*, August 1970, 81-82.

⁴⁴ Nancy Hartnagel, "Reflections of a Peacemaker," *Catholic Free Press*, 31 May 1996, 1. Sr. Mary Evelyn Jegen, who was serving as Pax Christi's NGO representative at the time, credits Egan's reframing of "conscientious objection" as "the right to refuse to kill" as one major contribution in the decision of the UN delegates. Jegen, interview with author, April 29, 2003.

Joseph Bernardin,⁴⁵ it was Eileen Egan who first coined it in a 1981 Pax Christi publication, *The Unborn Child and the Protection of Life*. The pamphlet was part of a campaign to make obvious to the Catholic hierarchy the need for consistency in linking anti-abortion and anti-nuclearism. Egan wrote, “In common with the early followers of Jesus, we view the protection of all life, from its conception to its end, as a seamless garment. . . . Our concern for the protection of all life thus starts with the protection of the unborn child. Such protection, credible in its consistency, extends to opposition to the taking of life by the state in capital punishment and to opposition to the taking of life by euthanasia or warfare.” Egan would go on to use “seamless garment” as a template for criticizing Church education and advocacy efforts, where, as she saw it, “right to life” had been defined too narrowly as only a sexual reproduction issue. The Seamless Garment Network - - a coalition of now over 160 member organizations - - was founded in 1987 to advocate for the expression of this consistent ethical vision of the value of life in policy, legislation, and personal decision-making.

Legacy of Peace

In her final years, Egan did not shy away from the challenges of what it would mean to be faithful to a pacifist stance in a post-Cold War world where, as she termed it, the “fearful symmetry” of nuclear stalemates had been replaced with new anguishes – bloodletting in clan warfare, ethnic cleansing, rape as a sanctioned military tool, the difficult decision to use force to defend or establish the basic human rights ennobled in Pope John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris* but so brutally violated in Somalia, East Timor, Rwanda, and Bosnia. The reshaped world does not call for a reshaping of gospel nonviolence, she would still steadfastly proclaim, but, rather, new and crucial teaching tasks answered with new forms of witness.⁴⁶

Egan’s opposition to war was complete. Her capstone work *Peace Be With You: Justified Warfare or the Way of Nonviolence* (Orbis: 1999), part history and theology, part biography and personal memoir, is a *summa* of a lifetime of peacemaking. In it she was to make her final sweeping historical and theological arguments for severing the just war theory from any Gospel endorsement or accommodation. One month before the end of her life, she could still write with hope and confidence, “We live in a graced time when war, having shown its most evil and destructive face, has lost any glamour or glory.”⁴⁷

On October 7, 2000 Egan died at St. Vincent’s Hospital in New York at the age of eighty-eight. “How she was a peacemaker! How she loathed war with an intensity,” said Franciscan Father Vianney Devlin in her funeral homily. Nurtured in her nursery in Wales, strengthened by her experiences in assuaging the horrors of war, solidified by the visions of Dorothy Day and Mother Teresa, she never wavered in her zeal and single-minded dedication to Gospel nonviolence as the imprimatur of Christian discipleship.

⁴⁵ See Thomas G. Fuechtmann, ed. *Consistent Ethic of Life* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1988) for ten of Cardinal Bernardin’s addresses on the “seamless garment” theme plus theological analysis and response at the Consistent Ethic of Life Symposium held at Loyola University of Chicago on November 7, 1987.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Egan, “War: Reversing the Works of Mercy;” Eileen Egan, “The War in Kosovo: Pacifism and Ethnic Cleansing,” *Commonweal*, 18 June 1999, 15-16; and “One Family in God,” *Millenium Monthly*, August 1999, 1.

⁴⁷ Eileen Egan, New York, to Sr. Christine Vladimiroff, September 4, 2000, responding to being named recipient of the Erie Benedictine Sisters Prophet of the Year Award.

Connections: Life, Theology, and Education

Egan never wrote a curriculum nor taught in a classroom. Yet within the story of her life and lifestance we find the markers that honor what it means to educate --the critical probing and questioning of assumptions and the ferreting out of points of view that call us to embrace a new way of retrieving the richness of our religious traditions. In her role as **prophet**, **advocate**, and **exemplar**, we find pointers to what is best in what Tom Groome calls educating the whole church as a sacrament for peace through justice.⁴⁸ She reminds us that an authentic manifestation of religious education is a willingness to be a herald to the Church from within the church. She once described the Pax agenda as addressing itself to the “long haul of changing the mindset of a great lumbering church on the subject of peace and war.”⁴⁹ Religious education is a vocation not exercised in exile from the Church but as loving critic solidly within the tradition. Egan’s challenge in bringing a new message of peace to the Church is an explicit acknowledgement of the teaching function of the Church -- a power for transformation of persons and social structures that, in her opinion, had been domesticated or squandered or co-opted, but a power nonetheless.

Seeming to take her “pedagogical marching orders” from what Padriac O’Hare would describe as the “chief tool of peace and justice education –classical doctrine, ethically retrieved,”⁵⁰ Egan made accessible the traditions of her religious community even as she made manifest the personal transformation required to reshape those traditions and the society they purport to serve as well.⁵¹ Her passion was reclaiming and reframing the demands of discipleship found in the rich traditions of the Church as a resource in forming Catholic conscience.⁵² Too, her pedagogy of peace falls squarely within the tradition of “see, judge, and act” of Dewey, Freire, Groome, Boys, and other religious education theorists, recognizing as she does the political nature of educational activity and embracing the critical reflection and raising-to-consciousness of the presuppositions, traditions, and interpretations that have forged Catholic social teaching.⁵³

Long before the U.S. Catholic bishops affirmed it in 1971, Egan committed her vocational life to action on behalf of peace and justice and participation in the transformation of the world, seeing it as a foundational part of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race – an integral and mandatory expression for the community, a hallmark Gospel value and a sacrament of the integrity of the Christian life. Her critical questioning of the traditions, assumptions, and premises of Catholic teaching on war and peace – she who was always self-

⁴⁸ Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 379-406.

⁴⁹ Eileen Egan, “Crime Against God and Man,” unpublished manuscript, 1992, 44.

⁵⁰ Padraic O’Hare, “Peace, Justice, and the Middle Class,” *PACE*, November 1986, 45.

⁵¹ Mary C. Boys, *Educating in Faith: Maps and Visions* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1989), 193. Boys’ definition of religious education is “the making accessible of the traditions of the religious community and the making manifest of the intrinsic connection between traditions and transformation.”

⁵² Egan’s approach resonates well with Hessel’s understanding of the church as an intentional educating community. See D.T. Hessel, *Social Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1992). Hessel’s framework for peacemaking education with adults (118-123), beginning with a first step of recovering the biblical vision of *shalom* and retracing the outlines of the whole biblical story, is Egan par excellence.

⁵³ See for example, Boys, 138, 209, 212; John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier, 1938), 30; Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970, 1993), 62; Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1980), 16-17; and Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 135-154.

consciously Catholic – is a sign of the emancipatory, transformative learning that is at the heart of what it means to engage in religious education.⁵⁴ “Religious education” must lead through personal transformation to the reordering and transformation of social structures to reflect God’s reign.⁵⁵

A Pedagogy of Prophecy

John Haughey reminds us that “the primary medium of Christian justice after Jesus, one could argue, is still the person who, like Jesus, stands in the truth the Spirit gives one to see. This truth unmasks untruth even when that untruth is systematized and ensconced in political, social, and religious power configurations that appear impregnable.”⁵⁶ Egan’s life witness – a testimony to Christian justice – is replete with examples of her prophetic voice, basing her prophetic authority on what Anne Mongoven calls the knowledge of the religious tradition, personal insight and experience of God, and passion for justice.⁵⁷

Egan once wrote, “It is my contention that it is a special task of the Christian to be the voice of the victims of history as historian, as critic and prophet, and as mythbreaker for the history of his own time.”⁵⁸ Her life stands as a prophetic critique of the “unholy alliance” of Church with its *realpolitik* accommodation to culture in issues of war and peace. Her distinctive contribution to a reframing of a Catholic ethos of peace shows us both the vision and vocabulary of prophetic witness. It was she who saw in conscientious objection the right to refuse to kill; saw in war the social organization of mass killing; saw in works of war the reversing of the works of mercy; saw nonviolence as the heart of the Gospel and love of enemy as its most distinctive teaching; and saw the dignity of all life wrapped in its seamless garment.

Egan points to the power of the prophet in the curriculum of those who would educate for peace and justice. In her prophetic word (written, spoken, and embodied) she both announces the Reign of God revealed in the handing on of traditions that make that Reign present, visible, and possible and in the denouncing of traditions that run counter to Gospel values. Walter Brueggemann in *The Prophetic Imagination* provides the classic definition of this prophetic ministry: “to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.”⁵⁹ Prophets fight against the domestication of the radical call to live out the Gospel. They criticize the dominant consciousness of the culture, engaging in a “rejection and delegitimization of the present order of things.” They energize by showing ways that “we might live in fervent anticipation of the newness that God has promised and will surely give.”⁶⁰ Religious educators see in Egan a model as they lead their communities to examine the signs of

⁵⁴ Jane E. Regan, *Toward an Adult Church. A Vision of Faith Formation* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002), 89.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

⁵⁶ John C. Haughey, “Jesus as the Justice of God,” in *The Faith that Does Justice*, John C. Haughey, ed. (NY: Paulist Press, 1977), 275.

⁵⁷ Anne Marie Mongoven, *The Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis* (NY: Paulist Press, 2000), 280.

⁵⁸ Eileen Egan, “Holy Violence in American History,” unpublished text of address to the University Christian Movement American History Symposium, February 1-4, 1968.

⁵⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 13. Brueggemann’s *The Creative Word* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982) positions “disruption for justice” as one key dimension in Torah teaching. Education becomes, then, a prophetic protest against the present form and a critique of life, culture, and church, each in continuous need of listening to a “word from the Lord.”

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

the times through the lens of Gospel values. They shape new visions of what is possible, moving people to repentance, conversion, and a willingness to be receptacles of grace.

Pedagogy of Advocacy

Egan's life and lifestance point to the both the role of advocate inherent in religious education and, for some, the role of founder. In *Fashion Me a People* Maria Harris uses the call to advocacy – the speaking out in the face of injustice – as an example of the multiple nature of educational ministry, a call infusing each of her five curricular forms. Responding to that call as religious educators requires support in the prayer, teaching, worshiping, and serving life of the community of the faithful, she reminds us. But it is in the very person of the religious educator that a curriculum of advocacy might be embodied most boldly and profoundly. Gabriel Moran makes the point in *Showing How*. “Good teachers do not condemn people,” he says, “but they sometimes are outraged by situations that ought not to be tolerated. The capacity to feel joy that is expressed in praise implies the capacity to feel anger, outrage, and disgust.”⁶¹ Speaking with the zeal and passion of an Eileen Egan can be one way to express the invitation inherent in good religious education.

Flowing, perhaps, from her own vicarious experience of community and solidarity with the Catholic Worker, Egan used much of her advocacy-energy to transform organizations (the Vatican Council, the U.S. bishops, the United Nations) or to found them (American Pax, Pax Christi, the Catholic Peace Fellowship, the Co-workers of Mother Teresa, the Seamless Garment Network, e.g.). Her embrace of the work of public advocacy – confronting corporate evil with public good -- reminds us that “religious education” may take us to new arenas outside of parish or classroom.

We find echoes of this reminder in the groundbreaking work of historian Lawrence Cremin. His “ecology of education”, as he framed it, recognized that many institutions and organizations, venues and experiences, educate. Organizations such as Pax Christi, Bread for the World, Amnesty International, death penalty reform groups, and what Mary Boys terms “peace and justice centers” carry tremendous educational power and potential through newsletters, internships, speakers bureaus, conventions, lobbying material, prayer vigils, rallies, and other kinds of symbolic activity. Boys sees in these organizations “a vision of faith transforming culture; their praxis orientation... suggests that true knowledge is transformative. They place emphasis not only on theological understanding but also on the skills of social analysis. Staff members of peace and justice centers are often leaders in the production of curricular materials and generally are committed to dialogical and process-oriented pedagogues.”⁶²

Egan's legacy as advocate and founder calls us as religious educators to be ever alert to new venues, new partners in connecting our passions and visions. As Mary Boys contends, “One who would offer leadership in the Catholic community on issues of peace and justice needs to think across varied situations and institutions, and to think relationally in order to allocate financial and human resources.”⁶³ This is the very pattern of collaboration Egan modeled in her work with NCCW and CRS, for example. More ecumenical outreach in the founding,

⁶¹ Gabriel Moran, *Showing How: The Act of Teaching* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 113.

⁶² Boys, *Educating in Faith*, 140.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 213.

sponsoring, linking, or transformation of “centers for peace and justice” may be one tangible way to work for religious literacy in the twenty-first century.⁶⁴

How aware, for example, are we of the work of Betty Reardon who has served as the Director of the Peace Education Program at Teachers College, Columbia University, again, like Egan, in a lifetime of teaching the skills of peacemaking. Maintaining peace among nations, avoiding the scourge of war, and creating a just and lasting peace is the major public concern of our time, she argues, and the most urgent task faced by the people of the earth. Her work with public school teachers – a corpus of rich resource and curriculum material – could be a treasure for us as well, as we invite catechists to embrace a vision of their role as a witness for justice.⁶⁵

Educators for Social Responsibility is another organization ripe for partnering. ESR is a non-profit organization providing resources and curriculum for educators helping young people develop the convictions and skills needed to shape a safe, sustainable, and just world. Programs, packages, and publications offered by ESR are designed to nurture the ethical, emotional, and social development of children through leadership in conflict resolution, diversity awareness, violence prevention, character education, and intergroup relations.⁶⁶ Surely the “values questions” challenging the very bases of the social order that make peace education so controversial in a public school setting could be, should be explored unabashedly in any environment where religious education is the goal.

The Exemplar as Pedagogue

Pope Paul VI once contended, “People today put more trust in witnesses than preachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission.” Faith is evinced only in concrete human experience and in the history of a life well lived. Fresh exemplars of the character of Christ call us to reframe our religious imaginations and point us to ways we might have settled for thinner, less challenging accommodations. As we cull out the dominant or controlling images of a life and how that life was given under the guidance of that image, we discover the mystery and challenge of the Gospel’s incarnation – an incarnation which can be the central task of our own age.⁶⁷

Egan’s own witness, experience, life, and action and her dedication to telling us the Good News embodied in the lives of Dorothy Day, Mother Teresa, and other prophets of peace speak to the power of the stake of the convinced person in the world. In many ways, in her own person

⁶⁴ A partnership between Mennonites and Catholics in analyzing exciting new research in peacebuilding at the Kroc Institute at Notre Dame and between Eastern Mennonite University and Catholic Relief Services in developing a training program in conflict resolution are two examples of the potential in thinking “relationally and ecumenically.” See Drew Christiansen, “An Exchange of Gifts,” *America*, 3 March 2003, 19-21.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Betty Reardon, *Educating for Global Responsibility: Teacher Designed Curricula for Peace Education, K-12* (NY: Teachers College Press, 1988). Equally helpful are Reardon’s seven essential capacities for peacemaking -- reflection, responsibility, risk, reconciliation, recovery, reconstruction, and reverence – useful, perhaps, as an outcomes assessment of religious education. See Betty Reardon, *Comprehensive Peace Education. Educating for Global Responsibility* (NY: Teachers College Press, 1988), 54-73.

⁶⁶ I successfully used ESR material in developing a program for senior highs on violence, supplemented with resources from my religious tradition. I was impressed the how the ESR material forced the broadening of the idea of “violence” – how the exercises and role plays would help students explore the social and economic roots of violence in the community through critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

⁶⁷ James W. McClendon, Jr. *Biography as Theology. How Life Stories Can Remake Today’s Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974, 1990).

we can see a vehicle for integration, bringing the implications of the message of Dorothy Day to the Church and the spirituality of Mother Teresa to the lay person. In her own person we find a synthesis of uncompromised charity and a prophetic call to justice. When “Gospel nonviolence” and “Gospel peacemaking” would, over time, become the clarion call of a new peace movement in the Catholic Church in the United States at the end of the 20th century, it would draw on the rich resource in Egan’s prolific and prophetic writings, organizing, and advocacy –and on the power of her personal witness.

Can “exemplars” and their patterning of the human life of faith be an important conversation partner as we educate toward the transformative learning for new understandings of holiness and discipleship that lead to social change? The renewed interest in “mediating figures” in the popular religious press would seem to say yes. Joan Chittister introduces her best seller *A Passion for Life. Fragments of the Face of God* by asking, “What qualities will be necessary to live a life of integrity, of holiness, in the twenty-first century? What models of those values, if any, have been raised up to show us the way to God in a world that is more preoccupied with the material than with the spiritual, more self-centered than selfless, more concerned with the mundane than with the divine, more parochial than cosmic?”⁶⁸ Robert Ellsberg’s *All Saints*, whose work reviewers describe as “a narratively compelling look at human goodness as it has been tested by life,” a work which “mediates the many and surprising ways in which grace makes discipleship possible,” is now in its third printing and has recently been translated in Spanish. Ellsberg sets as his goal

the rediscovery of many familiar figures from Christian history, to show their creativity, courage, and imagination in the face of historical challenges; to highlight aspects of their lives or message that speak to contemporary concerns; and above all to show that their sanctity was not simply a garment they wore but a quality that was expressed through struggle and conflict as they lived their lives.⁶⁹

In this regard, Egan’s work also points to the power of theological biography as important methodology in religious education. This approach, broadly defined as an exploration of the religious convictions embodied in the narrative of a life story and the social, historical, and experiential perspectives that give theological truths a shape,⁷⁰ has, for the most part, focused on the remaking of theology using narrative and biography. (All liberation theologies begin with the naming and claiming of the narrative base of the participants’ own experience, for example.) Recognition of the power of the exemplar sharpens the connection between narrative and religious education. As Terrence Tilley contends in *Story Theology*, “The process of discovering, creatively transforming, and proclaiming the stories which carry the key idea of Christianity is the distinctive work of a Christian narrative theology.”⁷¹ The stories like those of Dorothy Day and Mother Teresa so beautifully and faithfully crafted by Eileen Egan can “truly become my own story...showing me how to move from the injustice of my life to a justified life or from violence to peace.”⁷²

⁶⁸ Joan Chittister, *A Passion for Life. Fragments of the Face of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), x.

⁶⁹ Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints* (NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1997), 3.

⁷⁰ Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 62-66.

⁷¹ Terrence Tilley, *Story Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 5

⁷² *Ibid.*, 16-17.

Leadership for Peace and Justice

In sum, we do find in the template of Egan's life and lifestance as prophet, advocate, and exemplar a model for a liberating pedagogy, what Hessel would describe as "the calling to mind of a critical consciousness and hopeful vision that ennobles [us] to evaluate events and act courageously to change dominant systems, encounter fresh claims and ideas of justice, and work for *shalom*."⁷³

Her use of personal power was a holding-in-tension of a single-mindedness of purpose with a self-effacement that freely gave away ideas, vision, and mantras to others ("seamless garment" and "gospel nonviolence", for example). Her modest, unassuming style, often caught at the edge of the photograph, content somehow in the shadow of her formidable friends, stands as a rebuke to a power that would equate itself with celebrity.⁷⁴ Her positional power was used in tenaciously lobbying organizations for change, in founding them, or in reframing them. She did not see "Church" as a stumbling block but, rather, as an institution worthy of being re-ennobled by claiming its original charter, founded in the life and ministry and teachings of Jesus. Linking persons and organizations with similar vision, using the power of the pen and personal connections to work for the greater good – these were her special gifts. Egan never identified herself as a feminist nor lobbied for women's issues, but she always wholeheartedly claimed her role as lay woman. With no official role in church hierarchy, she, like the woman who crossed boundaries to anoint Jesus before his death, did nonetheless "do what she had the power to do." (Mark 14:8)

The capricious terrorist attacks since September 11, 2001, the retaliatory strikes in Afghanistan with their "unavoidable" deaths of civilians, the cycle-of-violence debate on post-war Iraq – these are but a few of the events now prompting religious communities to take a fresh look at the just war tradition and the Church's theology of peace. In a time of seemingly intractable divisions in the Church and in society, those who have committed their vocational call as religious educators to reform and renewal may welcome Egan's fresh patterns for identifying shared visions and the energy, courage, imagination, and love needed to make "manifest the Reign of God."

⁷³ Hessel, 111.

⁷⁴ Walter Conn terms this leadership style as "self-transcending subjectivity," sufficient ego strength to let the power of the tradition carry the day, not the messenger. See Boys, *Educating in Faith*, 209.