

Love Your Enemy: A Reflection on the Silence of Passion by Mary Snyder

Mindfulness is a new word. It looks like a much-needed word in our society.

Definition: 1: the quality or state of being mindful. 2: the practice of maintaining a nonjudgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, or experiences on a moment-to-moment basis; also, such a state of awareness.¹

In Buddhist teachings, mindfulness is utilized to develop self-knowledge and wisdom that gradually leads to what is described as enlightenment or the complete freedom from suffering. There are many secular books about mindfulness. They tell you how to be mindful about watching your weight, loving more purely, sleeping better, eating clean, etc. You can pick a subject and develop a state of mindfulness.

It says nothing about mindfulness in church or in prayer or in choirs. That is Christian mindfulness. And Christian mindfulness goes a little bit deeper. In fact, it goes much deeper.

When we are aware of being mindful, it helps bring clarity. When we study the Silences and look at them mindfully, it helps bring a balance.

In studying *Love Your Enemy*, I started to look at the Silences in a very different manner. I started with the silence of passions because that is our driver. It is very easy for us to be passionate about hating someone because they do not believe the way we do, or they don't like the same things we do. There are many reasons for us to have an enemy. At least we think so.

I love what Thomas Merton says about our enemy.

Do not be too quick to assume your enemy is a savage just because he is your enemy. Perhaps he is your enemy because he thinks you are a savage, or perhaps he is afraid of you because he feels that you are afraid of him. If he believed you are capable of loving him, perhaps he would no longer be your enemy.²

Who is our enemy? Each one of us has our own enemies. Maybe we are not partial to Muslims. Maybe we equate them with terrorism. Maybe we consider gay people our enemy. They do not actually follow God's plan for love. These are only two examples of many that could be considered an enemy in our life.

When I was very young, the farmers in the area would hire men from Puerto Rico to help in the summertime with planting and harvesting. Every time my father drove by a farm and saw how the Puerto Rican men lived, he would complain about their living conditions. They didn't have running water, the roofs were made of tin, there were no windows, and there were dirt floors. The housing also had no doors, and mosquitoes and flies went in the sleeping quarters. My mother, on the other hand, was a little what you might call prejudiced. She didn't want any harm to come to them, but she had five daughters and she always told us to stay away from the Puerto Rican men we walked by because they were away from their families, maybe lonely, and could be dangerous. My mother may have considered the Puerto Rican men her enemy, but my

¹ Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

² Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation* (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1949), n.p.

father didn't consider my mother an enemy. He understood why she felt the way she did and probably appreciated it.

They were both very passionate about how they felt. My father's passion for social justice was a great influence on me and helped me look at life as I do today.

I write an article almost every month in *Justice Jottings*. One month, I wrote about John Salvi, a man who walked into two Planned Parenthood Clinics and killed one person in each clinic and wounded a few.

Pro-choice advocates were very angry and full of grief. Pro-life advocates were appalled that their cause would be connected with this horrific act.

John Salvi acted with great passion. He murdered to defend unborn babies. I guess he had a need for justice, but his strategy to meet his need was a horrific one.

The governor of Massachusetts and Cardinal Bernard Law called for talks between pro-choice and pro-life advocates. Three pro-choice and three pro-life members met together privately for over five years. The goals of the talks were to build mutual respect and understanding, as well as de-escalate the rhetoric of the abortion controversy.

They met not to try to change anyone but to better understand the other and to learn to relate to the other.

Ground rules were put in place. There was concern that polarization would deepen if direct communication was not opened.

Despite strains between the two camps in the beginning, they actually grew closer.

As they continued to meet, they started to see dignity and goodness in their opponent. They said that "embracing this apparent contradiction stretches 'us' spiritually." Their words were as follows, "We've experienced something radical and life-altering that we describe in nonpolitical terms; 'the mystery of love,' and 'holy ground,' or simply, 'mysterious.'"³

That is when I became passionate about "loving your enemy." I realized I had a deep need for justice, but it went beyond justice for the victim.

Jesus tells us to love our enemies. He is very serious about it (Lk 6:27-36). Who is our enemy? Each one of us has our own personal enemy. Father Chaminade recognized this in his followers. I believe that is how the Silences were born. In each one of the stories, there was great passion involved.

In *Growing in the Virtues of Jesus* Quentin Hakenewerth, SM, writes: "Passions give us the driving force to attain goals or achievements. However, if our passions are fixed on erroneous objects or goals, they will lead us to a bad end or keep us in an unhappy state."⁴

Each day we may face some type of enemy. Maybe it is when we are driving the car. A driver is going too slow or bullying on the road. Do we make them our enemy? Can we love them? If we at least try to like them, maybe our attitude changes at least a little, and the other driver doesn't ruin our day. Maybe we are really just mad at the car? We may actually like the driver if we meet him or her.

Father Chaminade constantly studied the Bible, and his biblical influence is reflected in the Five Silences. In studying the silence of passions, I have realized that all of the other silences work right along with passions. It is quite remarkable.

³ *The Boston Globe*, "Talking with the Enemy," Jan. 28, 2001.

⁴ Quentin Hakenewerth, SM, *Growing in the Virtues of Jesus: The Marianist Method of Virtues for Use in Groups* (Dayton, OH: NACMS, 2008), 47.

Marshall Rosenberg teaches how to recognize our feelings and needs, as well as others. I believe the Silences and Rosenberg's teachings on recognizing feelings and needs make great partners.

By following the teachings of the Silences and recognizing my feelings and needs, I have discovered there is great joy in trying to name my enemies and loving and forgiving them.

I was recently in the company of some people who dislike President Trump. A woman actually wept. Her passion was very great. I was surprised to see her tears. If she had the opportunity to meet and talk with the president, I wonder if she would think differently. I practiced silence of words and gestures so she could express her grief.

I know two wonderful priests. When I was in the company of one, he was total Republican. He had nothing good to say about the Democrats. When I was in the company of the other, he was totally Democrat. He did not discuss the Republicans, and I knew his preference because I helped him send out donations. These two priests were friends—not great friends, but friends. I was amazed that two wonderful priests could have such a difference of opinion. I personally am an independent voter. I have escaped the milieu of the struggle in which many people find themselves. When I was growing up, my mother never knew for whom my father voted, and my father did not know for whom my mother voted. Nor did I. They both took their responsibility very seriously and were very involved in the community, as well as the local school, but they had enough love and respect for each other that voter preference did not matter.

The Old Testament speaks of the power of the word. God creates by his word and so do human beings. “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made; by the breath of their mouth, all their host” (Ps 33:6). Human words also have the power to create or destroy. A father's blessing went forth from his mouth and created his son's future. Once given, it could not be withdrawn, as we see in the story of Isaac's blessing (by mistake) of Jacob (Gn 27:1-45). After giving his word of blessing to the wrong son, Isaac could not even consider retracting it.

While Scripture extols righteous speech, no acts are more often condemned than the sins of the tongue. The Book of Sirach has lengthy and perceptive warnings about evil speech. Those who learn to discipline their speech reach an awareness of their inner selves.⁵

A clear dilemma facing people is the inability to listen to and empathize with others who see the world differently.⁶

Father Chaminade tells of these dangers and how to deal with them in the Five Silences. Rosenberg, in teaching how to listen to people's feelings and needs, helps us avoid serious, sometimes deadly use of words.

We can make anyone our enemy. We can make our neighbor our enemy, a relative, the shop owner, anyone.

I recently had an interesting experience when renting a car. I took my car to the auto body shop for some work, and someone was supposed to pick me up from the car rental agency. When the woman picked me up, she was very rude. She spoke broken English, and I asked her if she would speak more clearly. She didn't like what I said and was not nice. She gave me a really bad car to drive and said there was no other car available. I already had set her up as my enemy. She had set me up as her enemy when I asked her to speak more clearly. This situation came out of the blue. A person who is writing about loving your enemy wanted to tell her off with words that were very hurtful—the more hurtful the words, the better. It was all I could do to control myself.

⁵ George T. Montague, SM, *The Woman and the Way: A Marian Path to Jesus* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1994), 102-103.

⁶ Michael T. McRay, “Meet a True Story,” *Plough Quarterly* [Winter 2018]: 73.

All I had written and read went right out the window. I rode around in that awful car and found myself plotting what cutting words I could say to her. I finally decided that really wasn't a healthy road. So, I decided to bring my 18-year-old granddaughter with me when I brought the car back. I would be more careful how I handled myself in front of my granddaughter. I didn't say anything hurtful, but I had to let her know she didn't give me a half-tank of gas (which she should have done). When I look back, I really didn't have to say what I said. To tell the truth, if I had been a little more tactful, I may have liked the woman who picked me up. Rosenberg tells us to try to look at the need that is driving the feeling.

Father Bertrand Clemens says silence of the passions is the direction that reason and faith exercise over emotions. He goes on to say it has a threefold objective. The third objective is the direction of one's main drive or "passion" in life.⁷ It is very important to learn how to look at ourselves and try to watch what is happening when we are in a situation that is hurting us or someone we love.

Quentin Hakenewerth, in *Growing in the Virtues of Jesus*, says: "Passions give us the driving force to attain goals or achievements. However, if our passions are fixed on erroneous objects or goals, they will lead us to a bad end or keep us in an unhappy state."⁸

I remember meeting a man at a convention. We were at a dinner, and he was sitting all by himself. He was older. He looked maybe late fifties or early sixties. I sat down with him to start a conversation, and I was sorry I did. He told me all of the details of his wife who left him for another man thirty years ago. He was still mad at her and happy when bad things happened to her. He made his wife his enemy and still had not forgiven her for walking out of his life. He was a very unhappy man. I did not stay in his company long. I did not know what to say to him. That is a good example of our passions being fixed on erroneous objects or goals.

Hakenewerth goes on to say that Father Chaminade recognized the importance of healthy passions. We should become aware of our feelings. To become fully aware of our feelings can affect subsequent behavior. Name our feelings. It is important to name them correctly. Are we sad or glad or happy? When we name our feeling, it helps understand something about ourselves, others, and the situation out of which the feeling arose.⁹ This could have helped the man I met at the convention. Rosenberg goes a step further and connects our feelings with our needs. Our needs change all the time. That is why we continually have to try to keep in touch with our feelings.

Hakenewerth explains passion as emotional energy/feelings attached to a given object or goal. When we pay attention to which passions are at work in us, we begin to notice how they influence our conduct and whether or not they are helping us to be our true selves.¹⁰

This falls right into place with Rosenberg's teachings, but he would tell us to try to identify the need that is driving the feeling and then to find a healthy way to meet that need.

I think my favorite Marianist book so far is *Virtues for Mission* by Joseph Lackner. He not only uses Bible references but also uses words that connect with Rosenberg. He helps us identify our feelings and why we feel the way we do. This makes it easier for us to identify our needs.

⁷ Bertrand Clemens, SM, *The System of Virtues of Father Chaminade* (St. Louis, MO: Maryhurst Preparatory, 1962), 33.

⁸ Hakenewerth, *Growing in the Virtues*, 47.

⁹ Hakenewerth, *Growing in the Virtues*, 47-48.

¹⁰ Hakenewerth, *Growing in the Virtues*, 49.

I will concentrate only on silence of passion because it connects with my project. The other silences will fall into place.

Lackner says: “When Father Chaminade recommends silence of passions or feelings to those who would follow in the Marianist way, his advice is not like that of the Stoics or the Buddha, who would have us eradicate them. Rather, he recognizes that passions are good in themselves, but their exercise needs to be integrated into who we are as individuals and into our common destiny of living for God and our neighbors.”¹¹ I find this interesting because I tend to follow the Stoics. I think they have much good to say, but there are times when I don’t totally agree, and maybe this is the reason why.

Rosenberg tells us that it is our nature to enjoy giving and receiving compassionately. But we have learned different forms of life-alienating communication that leads us to speak and behave in ways that injure others and ourselves. A form of life-alienating communication is the use of moralistic judgments that imply wrongness or badness on the part of those who don’t act in harmony with our values.¹²

The examples I have given describe what happens when we recognize our feelings and other people’s feelings as well. Lackner describes the urgency of Mary visiting Elizabeth and her ardor in her *Magnificat* cry on behalf of the poor and lowly and her tenderness for the wedding couple’s perplexity. Of Mary, it was not a consciousness of situation but a felt awareness expressed in feeling that moved her to be with and present to others and to act on behalf of others.¹³ This kind of awareness brings scripture to life.

When I first studied Rosenberg’s nonviolent communication it seemed very clinical to me. I read his book, took notes, watched his videos, and listened to his recordings. I could see the humanness he was trying to teach, but it really didn’t come alive for me until I connected it with the Silences. I concentrated on the silence of passion because of my first example of the contrast between pro-life advocates and pro-choice advocates. I was so taken with the story that it led me to this study. I watched Rosenberg in one of his videos say that all needs are beautiful. Even Hitler’s needs were beautiful. He went on to say his strategies were abhorrent, but all needs are beautiful. (I am not there yet with that one.) Needs touch the soul. That is why when a need is met, we are joyful, at peace, and in some cases touch a holy place. In today’s world, it is so important to be able to listen to our own feelings and needs, as well as the people around us. Our needs constantly change. We are in a constant state of change, which is a point echoed by Father Lackner.

Surprisingly, some people do not know what they feel.... One of the first steps in practicing this virtue, therefore, is recognizing that we feel, naming the feelings and consciously feeling them. We may need someone...to help us in this first step. Once we have named and felt them, questions arise.¹⁴

This sounds like the spiritual side of Rosenberg!

At the end of the chapter on silence of passions, Lackner has a few questions to help us identify our feelings. The first question is “Do you believe you are fairly able to name your

¹¹ Joseph H. Lackner, SM, *Virtues for Mission* (Dayton, OH: NACMS, 2003), 21.

¹² Marshall Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language for Life*, third edition (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2015), 1-24.

¹³ Lackner, *Virtues for Mission*, 22.

¹⁴ Lackner, *Virtues for Mission*, 21.

feelings and passions?”¹⁵ This is a wonderful first step to naming our feelings so we can recognize our needs and choose a healthy strategy to meet our needs.

When I studied Rosenberg’s nonviolent communication, I saw a deeper side of what Father Chaminade was trying to teach us. In Rosenberg’s *Practical Spirituality* he says, “Even if people practice NVC as a mechanical technique, they start to experience things between themselves and other people they weren’t able to experience before. So, eventually they come to the spirituality of the process.”¹⁶ Personally, I did not have that experience. His work did not make sense until I connected it with the Five Silences. Then, everything came together.

Conclusion

I realize everyone has feelings and needs, and our needs are universal. We all have the same needs, i.e., people who are for abortion and against, Republicans and Democrats, those just like us and those we see as different.

I have a final insight to end my work.

Jesus was killed especially by those who thought they were on the right side and didn’t know they weren’t.¹⁷

¹⁵ Lackner, *Virtues for Mission*, 23.

¹⁶ Marshall Rosenberg, *Practical Spirituality: Reflections on the Basis of Nonviolent Communication* (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2004), 2.

¹⁷ Andrew Costello, *Thank God It’s Friday: Mediations for Hardworking Catholics* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1987), n.p.