

**Outcomes: Public Ministry Course**

**Where have all the Coffins and Moody's Gone?**

Students may anticipate leaving the class with a renewed appreciation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's strongest public ministry period, that of the sixties and the civil rights movement. They will know the ministries of William Sloane Coffin Jr., Howard Moody, and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. from a very practical and down to earth perspective. Instead of being idealized, their struggles will be in the forefront, showing how they too had to combat the private nature of the parish.

Students will leave knowing the difference public and parochial ministry and how these differences express themselves currently and historically.

These outcomes will fulfill a small part of PSR's purpose of equipping both historic and emerging faith communities for ministry. It will do so by introducing them to each other in a simultaneously appreciative and critical context. In the field of Religion and Society, it will focus on cultural and social methodology. Students will leave learning how to look at tried and true methods of public ministry as well as emerging and innovative ones.

They will also review their own struggles to release parish and "ecclesia" from the private segment of life and be able to see their parishes and situations in a new, more informed light. Students last year left with an appreciation of what they are already doing. Instead of opposing the periods of the "greats" and the remembered, we link to them.

Students can expect to leave with a denser and more nuanced sense of what public ministry has been, is and may yet be.

Finally, students will leave with skills to analyze "church based community organizing" ventures, coalitional work, the New Sanctuary Movement and many other current forms of public ministry. They will

leave being able to discern which of these movements bears good fruit for them and their work, both in the world and in the parish.

### **PUBLIC MINISTRY DEFINITION**

"An old joke circulates way too often that defines ministry as sitting in the stands with the women and the children while the real men play the real game on the real field." People who like this joke miss its obvious sexism only to go on to say that clergy (often understood as effeminate) are "out of their place" when they get involved with politics or economics or the systems thereof. The implication is that private and domestic life is the proper purviews of ministry -- and that public life is not. Interestingly, the very popular religious right made no such interpretation and gladly involved itself in public life, even to the point of activity in electoral politics (and also reinvigorated more masculine versions of ministry).

When we on the progressive side of Christianity speak of public ministry, we mean stands *and* field, not one or the other. We imagine a tension, almost dialectical, between peaceful people bringing about a peaceful world that then creates more peaceful people. We imagine a deep understanding of "it" taking a village. We imagine well people creating a well world which then helps them to be well by providing great education, child care, health care, fair trade, decent jobs, and wages. These latter public "issues" have a great deal to do with private happiness. By public ministry we mean a re-emphasis on the field and liberation from the cage of the stands. We mean simultaneous attention to what is inside the stained glass windows and what is outside. We are deeply incarnational and find the sacred in the ordinary and the personal in the political. We can't imagine any part of life outside of the presence of God, including the political and the most deeply private. We see the links between public and private and we are richly pastoral while being richly public. We see the private and the public as two sides of the same human coin; both embraced in the transformative love and power of God. The use of the word "public" is a compensatory way of rebalancing this old standard: ministry is both public *and* private.

The next time someone tells you that you are out of your place at the immigration rights rally or the peace demonstration, or even at the courthouse handing in a petition for Shawn Bell, tell them that you are a public minister as well as a private minister. Your question as Thoreau put it to Emerson is not about why you are on the field. The issue is why so many are content in the stands.

Jesus was not a private person. He was a public person. He was obsessed with poverty and injustice. He knew that deep grace drives us to the field and lets us enjoy the stands.

When people form social action "committees" in their congregations, watch out. They make think that justice is a sideline not a mainline. When people think their whole social action budget is for that committee, watch out. They may think that half of the minister's salary doesn't apply to public ministry, when clearly it does. A congregation is not a service center for its members but a center of service for the world.

## Readings

Garrett Keizer, General Strike, HARPER'S, September, 2007.

Warren Goldstein, William Sloane Coffin, biography, Yale University Press.

Donna Schaper, Altar Call, Abingdon.

Analysis of Twelve Basic Scriptural Texts regarding public ministry

**John 3:16:** For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

**Ps 23:** The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his names sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

(I don't make this claim often, but the KJV is really the only way to go on this one)

**Romans 8:38-39:** For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Deuteronomy 6:4-9:** Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone (or "...the Lord is one"). You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

**Revelation 21:1-5a:** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See,

the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”

**Galatians 3:27-29:** As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup>There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup>And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.

**John 1:1-4:** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

**Exodus 20:1-21:** Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.” Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid; for God has come

only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin.” Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

**Mark 12:28-34:** ...[a scribe] asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

**Isaiah 11:6-9:** The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. <sup>7</sup>The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. <sup>8</sup>The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. <sup>9</sup>They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

**Micah 6:8:** <sup>8</sup>God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

**Isaiah 58: 11, 12:**

The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.”

### **Additional Selections**

Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician Woman

Ruth and Naomi

Annunciation and Magnificat

Exodus

Crucifixion, but more importantly Easter—in John

Breakfast on the Beach or Road to Emmaus

Paul singing in prison

Balaam's Ass

Wedding at Cana

Saul on the Road to Damascus

Pentecost

Howard Moody, Taped Session on Religion and Politics (will be available in class)

Most of the course will be done as Action-Reflection with students reflecting on their experience in ministry.

Donna Schaper is Senior Minister at Judson Church in NYC – and principal of Bricks Without Straw, a consultation service that helps congregations and not for profits raise money, manage themselves with excellence and to do a lot with a little.