

DOC NEW LIFE NEWS

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Deserted Spaces

by Dr. Robert Moore, DOC President

A few years ago, David Rensberger published an article in *Weavings* that captured my attention, and I would like to share some reflections on that article. The article is entitled “Deserted Spaces.” He begins by discussing the Greek term *eremos*, which usually is translated into English as “desert” or “wilderness.” Of course we have certain ideas in our heads regarding a desert or wilderness that influences our understanding of *eremos*. When we think of deserts, images of heat, dryness, and desolation like that of the Mojave, the Sinai, or the Sahara pop into our minds. But the Greek word has more to do with being deserted than with physical conditions. An *eremos* is a place without people, regardless of the landscape. It’s more of a deserted space than what we think of as a desert place.

The Gospels often tell us that Jesus frequented deserted spaces. A good example is the NIV translation of the end of Mark 1:45. It reads, “Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.” The translation of *eremois topois* as “lonely places” is right on target. The feeding of the 5,000 likewise

occurred at an *eremos*, a “lonely place” (Mk. 6:31-32; 35). The people sat “on green grass” (v. 39), so it wasn’t a desert. It was a place that ordinarily was deserted. In addition John the Baptist ministered “in the wilderness” (*eremos* again); yet that wilderness had enough water for baptizing (Mk. 1:4). It was a deserted place, not a desert.

Now a person who lives in the *eremos* is called *eremites*, literally a person who inhabits an uninhabited place. We get our English words “hermit” and “hermit” from that Greek term. Some hermits probably are antisocial, in which case, they simply are escaping other human beings. But most hermits are not antisocial. They go to the *eremos* not to escape humans but to find God. As Rensberger puts it:

The great gift of deserted country to us is solitude, the chance to be alone before God. This gift may also be the desert’s greatest terror, however. It is not only the threat of perishing without food or shelter; it is the sheer emptiness of a deserted place that frightens us so badly. We are without help, and we fear for our survival. But even once we have assured our physical safety as best

we can, we are still afraid because we are alone. We have no human companion, no one to cheer us up, no one to divert us. We are left to ourselves, and suddenly we are faced with the question of who that self really is.

Now, interestingly, in the balance of the article, Rensberger turns away from this discussion of the literal lonely place experience, which in the life of Jesus was such a positive thing, to a metaphorical discussion that focuses on negative “desert places.” Rensberger understands that most of us, unlike Jesus, rarely find time to go to literal deserted places for times alone with God. But instead of exhorting us to make time for such solitude, he changes the direction of his article.

He shifts from discussing lonely places as a positive place to find God to a discussion of metaphorical “Deserts of Our Lives,” by which he means those places in our everyday lives where we face what he calls “the abandonment of the desert.”

These are inner feelings of pain that arise from all sorts of situations and relationships. For example, he mentions emotional, bodily, vocational, economic, and social deserts, deserts of time, and of course spiritual deserts. In other words, “every area of life has some potential to be a desert.” In the area of spiritual deserts, Rensberger illustrates with the pain of persons who know God has called them to some type of ministry, but they have been unable, or unwilling, to fulfill it.

Not wanting to end on that negative note, at the close of his article Rensberger shifts back to the positive by speaking of full commitment to God as a desert way. Indeed doing the will of God is the way to live through the other deserts of our lives. He concludes, “The divine presence is not the way *out* of the desert, it is the way *through* the desert. Remain attentive to God, stay utterly dependent on God—this is the lesson of the desert; but it will not transport us away from the desert.”

Psalm 103: 1-10 (New International Version)

¹ Praise the LORD, O my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
² Praise the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
³ who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
⁴ who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and
compassion,
⁵ who satisfies your desires with good
things
so that your youth is renewed like the
eagle's.
⁶ The LORD works righteousness
and justice for all the oppressed.

⁷ He made known his ways to Moses,
his deeds to the people of Israel:
⁸ The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
⁹ He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the
earth,
so great is his love for those who fear
him;
¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions
from us.

A TRIBUTE TO THE REV. DR. CLAYTON L. SWARTZENTRUBER DOC NATIONAL PRESIDENT 1990-1994

by James K. Wagner, Past President of DOC

Word has been received that Clayton Swartzentruber “passed away peacefully on Thursday morning, August 12, 2010.” Clayton gave effective and enthusiastic leadership to the DOC National Board from August 1990 to August 1994. Those of us who worked closely with Clayton hold a deep appreciation for his gentle, yet persuasive spirit. Clayton expanded the ecumenical dimensions of the DOC movement not only through his Mennonite tradition, but also in bringing to the National Board as a Director-at-Large Dr. Susan Muto, a prominent Roman Catholic advocate of ecumenism and Director of the Epiphany Association in Pittsburgh, PA.

I first met Clayton when he invited me to come to Eastern Pennsylvania and conduct workshops in holistic, healing ministry with pastors and lay leaders in Mennonite Churches. Sensing his deep commitment to Christ and to Christian spiritual formation, I urged him to consider taking a position on the DOC National Board. In 1989, Clayton became the First Vice President. He began his term as President in August 1990. At his first Executive Committee meeting that month he asked the other DOC leaders to join him in discerning “what is the most needful thing for us to do in DOC? What will be our future direction?” Clayton’s lasting legacy to the DOC is employing the discernment model in decision making.

Our prayers and gratitude go out to Margaret, Clayton’s wife and partner in ministry, as well as to his family. Clayton and Margaret practiced “radical hospitality,” a gift that Mary Lou and I gladly enjoyed. I always considered Clayton a good friend and repeatedly sought his wise counsel.

Below: Clayton caught the biggest fish of the day (3-13-04) off Pine Island, FL. Helping him hold this 8 lb. Snook is Jim Wagner.



2010 Disciplined Order of Christ Summer Retreat Caraway Conference Center, Sophia, NC

by Sybil Austin Skakle, Southeastern Region Board Member

National Retreat Disciplined Order of Christ
July 14 – 18, 2010

Set Free: Coming Into Christ's Divine Freedom in the 21st Century

“Set Free” was the theme as the Disciplined Order of Christ Southeastern Region welcomed the visitors from the National Board and other regions of the Order to the Southeastern Region for retreat at Caraway Conference Center, Sophia, NC. Disciplined Order of Christ National President, Bob Moore, and Southeastern President, John D. Bankson, provided leadership for the retreat which followed.

During the retreat, July 14-18, 2010, we explored with keynote speaker, Betsey Mulloy, barriers to freedom and God's loving intention for our true spiritual freedom in Christ. Betsey Mulloy is an author and retreat leader as well as a National Board member. Andy Freeman, Michael Mulloy and Robert Humphries, members of the Southeastern Region, filled the morning speaking slots to share from their lives and experience what it means to them to be disciples of Christ.

A member from a different region took responsibility each morning for the morning watch before breakfast. Music leadership was shared by husband/wife team, Jim and Sheila Todd, whose sweet piano, violin and guitar tones inspired us to worship and renewal every day.

The retreat offered many interesting optional opportunities: poetry workshops

with Marybelle Landrum, “Tips on Christian Writing and Publishing” with John Lurvey, National Vice President; directions by Donna Freeman for Benedictine Silence, a book discussion of *The Great Divorce* by C. S. Lewis, swimming at the pool, and dancing in the evening after the program. We enjoyed an ice cream social on Friday evening following a presentation by the youth under the leadership of Maggie Brown.

Rev. Bob Moore offered communion at the conclusion of the Saturday evening worship and teaching. A healing service concluded the evening.

On Sunday morning, we assembled before breakfast to share our joys. It was deemed a good retreat indeed. All active regions of the order were represented, coming from California, Maine, Florida, Michigan, Texas and points in between. There were 68 registrants, with the youngest a 14 month old granddaughter of Dan and Cindy Booth; with good representation of young adults, youth, older adults; and the oldest members, Edna Menchofer and Sybil Skakle. We said our goodbyes, anticipating next year's retreat, same place, July 13-17, 2011.



A Note on Financials....

by John D. Bankson, National Finance Development Chair

This time last year, I started the article in the fall issue of *New Life News* with: “It has been a year of challenge for the DOC.” Well, every year brings challenges, but I am thankful we have wonderful friends and supporters of the Order. While we still have an uneven (at best) economy and unemployment levels higher than any of us would want, we still feel that God has a purpose for our work. Two years ago, the National Board took steps to reduce administrative overhead going into 2008 and 2009. We continue to do the most we can with minimal expense. Please continue your prayerful consideration of financial support as you have in the past. As you look to your 2010 year-end contributions, please plan to include the Order.

As I write this, I recall past articles in *New Life News*, many from Jim Tarr, encouraging full participation in our activities, from retreats, to days apart, to chapters, and more. I have from time to time heard the phrase that we need to be involved with our time, our talent, and our treasure to the extent we can. I believe Jim would have given an “Amen” to this expression. He set forth on this page that there are additional ways that we can position the Order for solid financial footing

in the years to come. These include setting up gift annuities, planned giving, giving a gift in honor or memory of someone dear, or naming the Order in our will. I strongly suggest you consult with your financial advisor and attorney to make sure your plans are consistent with your overall situation and that you follow through with documenting and implementing what you plan. As with all of our financial planning, let’s not just say I am going to do “x” – follow up. If we want to name a beneficiary, we must do the work, put it in the documents, and segregate the funds as intended.

Please keep those that serve you in the Order in your prayers. We value your prayers and comments. Know that even though the National Board is doing all it can to be accountable for efficient operations, we need broad support to keep the vision alive. As we print on the new member / renewal cards, note that we ask a minimum of \$50 per member annually to help offset operating expenses. But even if each person on the mailing list receiving this issue of *New Life News* had given \$50 (and it is surprising to me how few send in this minimum request), we would still need additional gifts to close the gap.

I wish you a wonderful Thanksgiving and Christmas. God bless!

“A Great Gulf Fixed” or “Do Step on the Grass!”

(with apologies to C. S. Lewis)

by Judy Tressel, Southeastern Region member

Chapter 1

There once was a bus ride to heaven.
The passengers, loaded with leaven,
Stepped up inside
For a fantastic ride
To a place where they never had been in.

Chapter 2

In hell there were no neighbors near,
No need there, but never you fear,
Says Bowler Hat, proud,
“I’ll gather a crowd
When I bring something solid down here.”

Chapter 3

The bus now has landed it seems,
But the people don’t know what it means.
The land is so bright
That it gives them a fright;
It’s a country more solid than dreams.

Chapter 4

There once was a boss man named Dan
Who heard of his hired man’s plan
To kill poor old Jack.
“I’d never do that”
Bragged the boss, “I’m a much better man!”

Chapter 5

The bishop regaled his friend Dick,
His arguments clever and quick:
“Become like a child,
Find Jesus so mild.”
Urged his friend: “Leave your treatise so thick!”

Chapter 6

“A Paradise apple I’ll take,”
Thought Ikey, ignoring its weight.
A voice from the cross
Said, “Just take the loss!

You can eat, if you’ll give up, my mate!”

Chapter 7

The hard-bitten man said, “I must
Go back to the things that I can’t trust.
This place is a ruse,
So if you’ll excuse
Me, I’ll hurry on back to the bus.”

Chapter 8

She hobbled along in her shame.
She wanted no help with her pain.
“Just give me your arm -
I’ll do you no harm!”
“I can’t.” So the unicorns came.

Chapter 9

Sir Archibald thought to survive
Was indeed the ultimate prize,
But he hadn’t yet met
Those people who bet
That losing life kept them alive!

It seemed to her nothing went right,
Her life had become such a fright.
She said to the saint,
“A party it ain’t,”
And grumbled him out of her sight.

Her confidence was her physique.
Thought she, “I’ve no need to speak.”
When they wouldn’t fall
At her beck and call,
Disgusted, she left in a pique.

’Twas heaven that they railed against;
They’d taken up every offense.
They’d spit and they’d spat;
They’d change this or that.
Heav’n was closer than they might have sensed.

There once was an artist who'd paint
Such beauty you'd think he would faint.
"Put brushes aside
And swallow your pride.
Find beauty without any taint."*

Chapter 10
Hilda's husband it was she'd remake
And, of course, it was for his own sake.
She had pushed and she'd pried
Until he had died;
Into heaven her obsession she'd take.

Chapter 11
There once was a mother named Pam,
Who found herself quite in a jam.
She refused to believe
That the son she had grieved
Was a gift from the great I AM.

T'was as though he were caught in a
blizzard,
The reptile he knew must be scissored.
"I surely will die!"
"No," the angel replied,
And straightway the ghost was d-lizarded!

Chapter 12
T'was pity that occupied Frank:
He loaded it into his bank.
He couldn't let go,
It enthralled him so,
That into its misery he sank.

Chapter 13
It was love Sarah Smith had sought after
And joy that rang out in her laughter.
The light in her mirth
Encircled the earth,
Dispelling all darkness thereafter.

Chapter 14
The silvery table of time
Marks the passengers' progress sublime.
So sleepers, awake!
Before it's too late
You may want to change your mind.

*1 Chronicles 16:29 – "Ascribe to the LORD
the glory due His Name; bring an offering,
and come before Him; worship the LORD in
the beauty of holiness and in holy array."

A Memory within a Memory

by Sybil Austin Skakle, Southeastern Region member

Lord, I'm trying to remember
And many memories surface, but
Because it is an assignment
I feel anxious – afraid of failure.
What does my teacher ask of me?
How can I honor You in my response?
I am a child again and inept.
Then I remember Your acceptance-
Your guidance of me
Through all my long life
And am reduced to tears.
I need not be afraid.

Here too I am accepted.
Life's experiences have taught me
To accept my limitations and
To rejoice in my successes
Which glorify You, My Lord.
Is this the deeper memory
I'm asked to provide?
Is this tension between my
Humanity and Your call on
My life forever present?
You understand. You knew this
Tension when You walked here.

A Biblical Spirituality For Our Time

Excerpts from Clayton Swartzentruber's article in the *New Life News* Nov.-Dec. 1990

This front page article was followed by a note stating that Clayton Swartzentruber presented this message (in its entirety) at the National DOC Retreat in Radford, VA, August 4, 1990.

The present interest in spirituality is a genuine cry from the soul of society, as well as Christians and the Church, to know and experience a reality beyond the temporary and meaningless trappings of our culture. It is my conviction that a spirituality for our time must take seriously the Community of the Spirit, the Church; and must be concerned about the world. These three convictions speak to the nature of our relationship with God, the Church, and the world. They help to shape our definition of spirituality today.

First, we will be lovers of God, being loved by God, and growing in love for God. It is well to be reminded that we don't become spiritual because of our love for God, but by really accepting and internalizing God's love for us. It is this that makes all the rest possible. It is knowing to the core of our being, that in spite of what God knows about us (and that is more than we know about ourselves), God loves us!

Second, we will be lovers in the Church. We need a renewal of caring, committed, supportive relationships within our local congregations. The church must be a safe place for everyone, where acceptance, forgiveness, and affirmation are truly experienced. In this time of deepening Spirituality, it is simply marvelous how Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant persons are coming together in mutually helpful ways to nurture one another. These Christian bodies are all represented in our larger DOC fellowship, and we are the richer for it.

Lovers of God, lovers in the Church, and third, we will be lovers of the World. God loved the world, and we are being sent out to love and minister as Christ loved and ministered. More than ever before we need to be aware that the world is indeed our parish.

Finally, we do well to remember that it is not ours to strain or struggle in our longing for a closer walk and union with God. Spiritual life is a gift of God available to all, especially to those aware of their own poverty and heaven's plentitude.

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