

SEPTEMBER 18
**LISTENING TO DOUBT?:
 CONTRADICTIONS IN WHAT COMPELS US
 AND SUSTAINS US IN AID WORK**

NELLIKA LITTLE

*Consultant in International Development with a Focus
 on Mongolia, Afghanistan, Syria/Turkey*

SEPTEMBER 25
**MOVING BEYOND THE WALLS THAT
 SEPARATE US: A PRISON JOURNEY**

LORI POMPA

*Founder and Director of the InsideOut
 Prison Exchange Program
 Department of Criminal Justice, Temple University*

OCTOBER 2
PRAY THE DEVIL BACK TO HELL

*Award winning documentary on
 the Women's multifaith nonviolent revolution in Liberia*

OCTOBER 9
THIS IS MY STORY, THIS IS MY SONG

AUBRIE TOSSMANN

*Partnership development Specialist
 Umoja Student Development Corporation*

OCTOBER 16
REVOLUTIONARY PATIENCE

DR. CHARLES KAMMER

*The James F. Lincoln Professor of Religious Studies
 The College of Wooster*

OCTOBER 23
**HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
 THE ROLE FOR U. S. LEADERSHIP**

CARROLL BOGERT

*Executive Director for External Relations
 Human Rights Watch*

Location

All sessions of the Academy are held in the
 Lean Lecture Room on the lower level of
 Wishart Hall, at Bever and University Streets
 on The College of Wooster campus.



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*The 45th Annual
 Fall Academy
 of Religion 2013*

**THE HEART
 HAS ITS
 REASONS:**

**STRUGGLING TO
 HEAL A BROKEN
 WORLD**

7:30 – 9:30 p.m. Wednesdays
September 18 – October 23



*Free lecture series for persons
 of any background*

THE HEART HAS ITS REASONS: STRUGGLING TO HEAL A BROKEN WORLD

“But the meaning of life is not a fact. In a world still under the sign of death, in which the highest values are crucified and brutality triumphs, it is an illusion to proclaim harmony with the universe as a present reality.

As a trapeze artist must leap out over the abyss, abandoning every point of support, the spiritual soul also has to leap out over the abyss, toward the evidence of feelings, of the voice of love, of the suggestions of hope. In the manner of Pascal and Kierkegaard, it is an impassioned wager. And what is thrown down upon the table of uncertainties and hopes is your entire life.

And we ask, perplexed, in search of a final certainty, ‘Does life have meaning? Does the universe have a face? Is death my sister?’ To which the spiritual soul can only reply: ‘I do not know. But I ardently desire that it be true. And I make the leap unreservedly. For it is more beautiful to risk on the side of hope than to have certainly on the side of a cold and senseless universe.’

Rubem Alves, “What Is Religion?”

In a world “under the sign of death”, “where our highest values are crucified and brutality triumphs”, we often, and rightly, focus our attention on those individuals who have been emotionally, spiritually and physically wounded and brutalized. In the process, however, we often lose sight of the institutions, ideologies and structures that have caused the damage. Theologian Walter Wink wrote in depth about the “principalities and powers” that shape our lives and our interactions. Wink noted that these principalities and powers include governments, justice systems, economic enterprises, ideologies and values. As Wink noted, all of these principalities and powers are necessary for the development of and persistence of rich and fulfilling human lives and human societies.

As he noted, however, these principalities and powers, whose intention is to serve human life, often take on a life of their own, becoming destructive forces in the world. Another philosopher/sociologist/theologian, Jacques Ellul identified a reality he called the “technological imperative”. He noted that every technology, whether a simple ox drawn plough or nuclear power generation, requires a whole structure to support it and each technology reshapes our institutions and our values. Technologies, which are

invented to serve human needs and make human life rich, soon take on a life of their own and begin to force human lives into their service. Over time, humans come to serve the machines they have built. Governments, economic systems, even religions, according to Ellul, can be viewed as bureaucratic machines that over time force humans to serve them.

Walter Wink makes this same point. Governments, created to provide social order often become oppressive, using their power to support the privileged by sacrificing the rights and the lives of the less powerful. Economic systems, designed to enhance the economic well-being of all, end up generating mass poverty and a permanent underclass. Prison systems, designed to reduce crime through rehabilitation, become incubators for criminal behavior. Even our educational systems, designed to enhance human potential, in many cases become institutions that destroy self-esteem and suppress rather than enhance learning.

But just as our structures are corrupted, our prevailing beliefs and ideologies are corrupted as well. Economics, instead of being about human well being, caring “for the least of these,” comes to base its legitimation on corporate profits and the accumulation of individual wealth. Government, in the guise of nationalism, focuses on security and secrecy that requires restricting human rights. We end up shifting from human centered values and beliefs to what Martin Luther King Jr. referred to as “thing centered” ideologies and beliefs. As King notes, “When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are more important than people, the giant triples of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.” (*A Time to Break Silence*)

In our broken world, then, it is not enough to simply minister to individuals who have been wounded by the “principalities and powers”, the destructive systems and values which organize and guide social behavior. The structures themselves and the controlling values and belief systems must be challenged and reformed. We live in a broken world whose shattered institutions perpetuate daily harm upon us, our fellow human beings and on our natural world. Yet, challenging dominant institutions and beliefs, offering alternatives is hard work. Those in power who benefit

from the existing systems and values are not eager to consider alternatives, yet such work is essential.

In this series, we will hear from people who have devoted themselves to the hard work of rescuing people and repairing people’s lives by attempting to reform and repair our social institutions and values. This work is hard, often very slow and often shows few immediate results. As Rubem Alves notes, they work with no guarantees that they will ultimately be successful.

Our speakers come from a variety of backgrounds and represent a wide range of beliefs and philosophies. Yet all of them, in various ways have found the commitment, the courage, the hope to engage in hard, often disappointing, yet important and meaningful work. Our presenters are all persons who, in the words of Rubem Alves, have made “an impassioned wager” and have “thrown down upon the table of uncertainties and hopes”, their lives.

Our presenters will speak to us about the work they are doing, but will share with us what motivates them to engage in the work which they do. They will discuss where they find the strength to do work that many would find discouraging and what allows them to commit themselves to goals that are not likely to be accomplished in a single lifetime if at all.

We invite all in attendance to use the speakers and the reflection time to explore their own deep values and commitments in the context of a broken world.

“We used our pain, our broken bodies and scarred emotions to confront the injustices and terror of our nation. We were aware that the end of the war would only come through non-violence, as we had all seen that the use of violence was taking us and our beloved country deeper into the abyss of pain, death, and destruction.

We succeeded when no one thought we would: we were the conscience of the ones who had lost their consciences in their quest for power and political positions. We represented the soul of the nation.

When confronting the warlords we did so because we felt it was our moral duty to stand as mothers and gird our waist, to fight the demons of war in order to protect the lives of our children, their land and their future.”

Leymah Roberta Gbowee
(Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech)