This paper is written to help persons become a member of the Society of Urban Monks, a distinctly Christian ecumenical and multi-denominational community of men and women who are involved in encountering, elucidating, and ending social injustices through their employment and/or personal volunteer efforts. As ordinary people, Urban Monks seek to live extraordinary lives by deepening a personal living covenant with God as agents of change and healing in the communities in which they live, work, worship, recreate, socialize, and/or serve. As agents of change and healing, they not only encounter the injustices experienced by others, but seek to elucidate and end the injustices furthering the teachings of Jesus Christ and the tradition of past and contemporary Christian reformers.

Individuals become an Urban Monk by developing and sharing a Rule of Life that incorporates personally chosen spiritual practices found in the Christian scriptures. Such practices are usually taught mostly as a means to help nurture an intimate, personal, and private relationship with God. Rarely are they taught as a means to help nurture a deep, collective, and public relationship with God to help elucidate and end social injustices. Urban Monks develop and share their own Rule of Life for both purposes. Each of their rules is not compiled as a “rule” or “spiritual law” that governs their conduct and actions. Their rules are developed in light of what they currently do, and will do, to enrich and reshape a loving relationship with God and their neighbors and achieve justice for others when needed.

The spiritual practices found in the Christian scriptures are rooted in the passion of Jesus Christ. The source of Jesus’ passion was his intense love for humanity which resulted in his uncompromising commitment to spiritually and physically restore humanity. The Gospels are filled with instances in which he expressed his love for others privately with God through
various spiritual practices, as well as with instances in which he expressed his love for others publically through other spiritual practices. Thus, Urban Monks seek to express an intense love for humanity by nurturing a private and public relationship with God and others in order to encounter, elucidate, and end social injustices through the spiritual practices that they choose to include in their Rule of Life.

Urban Monks also develop a Rule of Life by including some of the biblically-rooted spiritual practices that can be found in the actions and writings of ancient, past, and contemporary Christian mystics and reformers and those who have learned from them. Such persons have demonstrated an ability to integrate their spiritual practices with social action resulting in an intimate relationship with God. Consequently, they became agents of change and healing after confronting the injustices experienced by others and elucidating and ending these injustices which furthered the teachings of Christ and their own tradition of Christian reform.

After developing a personalized Rule of Life, each Urban Monk is encouraged to share some of their spiritual practices with others. Doing so, helps further each other’s ability to integrate spiritual practices with social action and intimacy with God. This also helps reverse any tendency to increase the “inner spiritual life” over the “outer spiritual life” and allows for a more “balanced spiritual life” to be lived out in private and in public.

Therefore, this paper is divided into two primary sections. The first section is entitled “three reasons to create a Rule of Life” which are to, a) nurture an intimate, personal, and private relationship with God; b) carrying out acts of charity; and c) achieving justice. The second section is entitled “three steps to create a Rule of Life which are, a) responding to the call for a Rule of Life; b) developing a Rule of Life; and c) living a Rule of Life.

1. Three Reasons to Create a Rule of Life

A Rule of Life has largely evolved into a spiritual practice that nurtures an intimate, personal, and private relationship with God. For Urban Monks, this is one reason why a Rule of Life is developed and practiced on a daily basis. However, there are two other reasons. One concerns acts of charity towards individuals. Acts of charity are often needed because there is no justice. Such acts become the necessary bandage that tries to make up for the unjust reality that surrounds persons in need until justice is achieved. Thus, the third reason Urban Monks develop and practice a Rule of Life involves bringing justice and healing to groups of persons living in neighborhoods, communities, cities, and counties in which they live, work, worship, socialize, or serve. Such groups often include the individuals that receive their on-going acts of charity.

Reason 1: Nurturing an intimate, personal, and private relationship with God

Urban Monks can learn how to cultivate an intimate, personal, and private relationship with God from several rules of lives that have been practiced throughout the centuries by monastics. Some of the well-known rules of lives include the rules of Saint Benedict, Saint Augustine, and...
the anonymous Master. Each of these rules provides instructions for monks to live a contemplative life. They contain instructions about various spiritual practices such as prayer, chanting, scripture reading, meditation, contemplation, silence, and fasting. Instruction includes appointed hours and days for prayer, reading scripture, and fasting, acts of reverence during prayer and scripture reading, and steps and stages for achieving humility, obedience, meditation, and contemplation.

I have found a fairly recent publication entitled Monastic Practices very helpful in developing and practicing my own rule of life. The author provides instructions for contemporary monastics concerning many of the spiritual practices that are found in the rules of life of the earliest monastics. The book is clearly written for monastics and novices who want to enter the monastic life. The book specifically addresses how monastics can use the various spiritual practices and disciplines that have evolved out of monasticism during the past centuries to cultivate an intimate, personal, and private relationship with God. While the book does not specifically address how non-monastics living outside of a shared community might use these spiritual practices and disciplines, it is clear that such persons could begin to incorporate them into their daily life. As a matter of fact, the author states that “A selective, prudent use of these practices might be of benefit to persons ‘in the world’ wishing to follow the traditional Christian methods of spiritual deepening.”

The author goes on to describe many spiritual practices that were used by monastics to seek God which include sacred reading, liturgical prayer, silence, short prayers, and watching. The author also describes many spiritual disciplines for monastics such as the integration of work and prayer and the integration of the present moment with the hour of one’s death. Thus, the monastic life is orientated towards cultivating an on-going personal relationship with God through outward spiritual practices and inward disciplines.

There are several other recent books of great value for Urban Monks to be aware of while creating and revising their rules of life. Most notably, they describe how one can integrate monastic practices and disciplines in everyday life. Everyday Mysticism: Cherishing the Holy is a book that teaches how to nurture a relationship with God through spiritual practices while working, in school, taking care of children, and moving about in public while attending to daily needs. Spirituality for Everyday Living: An Adaptation of the Rule of St. Benedict describes how to incorporate the Rule of Saint Benedict’s balance of prayer, study, work, and solitude into the everyday life activities of the laity as does Finding Sanctuary: Monastic Steps for Everyday Life. Ordinary People as Monks and Mystics: Lifestyles for Self-discovery is a study based on

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interviews of mystics or those who have had mystical experiences. These experiences provide an opportunity for others to reflect on any similar occurrences in their own lives or their desire for such experiences to begin. *Finding the Mystic Within You* distills the experiences of two mystics—Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross—in order to help others understand the stages and experiences of the outer and inner journey of a mystic and to encourage them to begin or continue a similar journey.

There are also several recent publications that have served as an introduction to various spiritual practices and disciplines including those that have evolved out of monasticism. These books are also of great value to help Urban Monks create or revise a rule of life. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* describes over 50 spiritual practices and disciplines and related reflection questions for each one that helps the reader put them into practice.  

*Sacred Rhythms: Arranging our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* also serves as a good introduction to various spiritual practices as well. Both books encourage readers to rearrange their lives in order to find the time to make the spiritual practices and disciplines part of their everyday life.

Sacred Rhythms, however, takes the reader into a fuller understanding of a rule of life than the Spiritual Disciplines Handbook. The latter outlines how developing a rule of life “is a way of being intentional about the personal rhythms and guidelines that shape our lives.” Readers are encouraged to choose spiritual practices that will keep their lives “from devolving into unintended chaos.” They are urged to choose those that will cultivate a desire to grow in love towards God and others and to help gauge the intentionality of being open to God’s transforming work in their lives.

The author of Sacred Rhythms begins with introducing the reader to the first of seven “central disciplines of the Christian faith” which she notes are “linked to the most consistent and compelling desires of the human soul.” She also notes that these spiritual disciplines are the most basic of all such disciplines that are needed to begin a transformational relationship with God. They focus on solitude, scripture, prayer, honoring the body, self-examination, discernment, and the Sabbath. She provides guidance for experiencing each discipline in ways that readers can incorporate them into their daily lives. Each description of a spiritual discipline is followed by a step by step approach to put the discipline into practice.

The book ends with an exercise that helps readers to develop a rule of life to help readers cultivate a daily process of spiritual transformation. The author notes that a rule of life “seeks to respond to two questions: Who do I want to be? How do I want to live?” but then goes on

the say that it may be more accurate to combine the two questions and ask “How do I want to live so I can be who I want to be.”

This book-ending exercise focuses on two primary activities for readers that involve developing a rhythm of spiritual practices and cultivating the spiritual rhythms. Development includes taking time to explore several spiritual disciplines in order for readers to see which ones fit one’s personality, daily responsibilities, and season of life. Once the spiritual disciplines are chosen, then one is in a position to arrange one’s life around the disciplines in order to cultivate an intimacy with God. Cultivation will likely involve rearranging one’s life around the disciplines as time goes on. Readers are reminded that current circumstances in one’s life can change such as days and hours of employment or family responsibilities. When these changes occur, they should ask questions like “Am I willing to rearrange my life for what my heart most wants?”

**Reason 2: Carrying out Acts of Charity**

Acts of charity are emphasized in the ancient rules of life. Distributing one’s possessions to the poor is emphasized intensely. Hospitality is to be shown to those encountered inside and outside the monastery. Visitors to the monastery should be welcomed as if they were Christ and given food, clothing, and a warm place to sleep. The Rule of the Master encourages monastics to take a little extra food and drink for those who monastics encounter in public that are in need of nourishment. In chapter 4 of the Rule of St. Benedict, there is a list of good works that encourage monastics not to forsake charity and to comfort the poor, clothe the naked, and visit the sick.

The acts of charity in St. Benedict’s list of good works are in accordance with the passage of scripture that may be the most well-known in the Bible concerning charity and which is found in the parable of the sheep and the goats. Christ states that when he comes in his glory, all the “nations will be gathered before him and he will divide the sheep from the goats and say to the sheep “you are blessed by my Father” so take your inheritance

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

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7 Matthew 25. 35-40.
Other passages in the New Testament that support such acts of charity include those found in the second chapter of the Book of James. After emphasizing that those who “love their neighbors as themselves are those who will inherit God’s kingdom, James stated

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

After noting how the Old Testament figures, Abraham and Rahab, linked their faith with their actions, James underscored his belief about faith and charitable works by stating “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

The Apostle John expressed similar words in the first of his epistles. After noting the intensity of Christ’s love for humanity, he emphatically stated that

“If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”

Carrying out such acts of charity, however, can easily be reduced to acts of kindness that flow out of a state of abundance in terms of money, time, and/or emotions. For example, such abundance may be based on money. As a result, we may give spare money to a homeless person on the street or to a charitable organization that serves the poor. Such abundance may also be based on time. As a result, we may feel like we have some spare time to give and want to choose among many good charitable programs such as serving a meal at a homeless shelter. Such abundance may also be based on feelings or emotions. We may feel moved to give some spare change to a homeless person or commit to one day a week or month to serve meals at a homeless shelter.

**Reason 3: Achieving Justice**

Throughout the centuries, there have been countless religious orders, other charitable organizations, and individuals that have tried to make up for large-scale injustices through acts of charity. The difficulty is that countless acts of charity cannot end extensive injustices unless the acts are interwoven with demands on the systems and practices that create and perpetuate

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8 James 2. 14-17.
10 1 John 3. 17-18.
the injustices. The reality is that too few organizations and individuals have linked, or are linking, the acts of charity and the demands for justice. As a result, charity becomes the necessary bandage that tries to compensate individuals for the injustices they experience.

Thus, for Urban Monks, charity and justice are two sides of the same coin and thus linked together. Charity is an act to help an individual. Such act should not stop, however, with helping only individuals experiencing injustices. A sequence of activities should follow that will elucidate and end injustices experienced by others enduring the same injustice. A scheme should focus on the systems and institutions that are creating and/or contributing to the injustices. A sequence of activities may be initiated by individuals who have the spare time or money. However, a sacrifice beyond spare time and money will be needed by them and/or others who will carry out the planned events. The Apostle Luke told us that a lot will be expected from everyone who has been given a lot and more will be demanded from everyone who has been entrusted with a lot (Luke 12.48). Thus, justice often requires individuals to give well beyond their abundance of money, time, and/or emotions because charity without justice will never be able to reach all who are experiencing the same injustice without a sacrifice.

God is a lover of justice as clearly stated in the Book of Psalms and expects us to be the same. The Psalmist states that “the Lord loves justice (37.28a)” which echoes God’s proclamation “For I the Lord love justice (Isaiah 61.8a).” The psalmist makes it clear that justice is at the core of God’s identity. Psalm 99.4a declares "Mighty King, lover of justice, you have established equity" and Psalm 97b notes that "righteousness and justice are the foundation of God’s throne."

The psalms also make it clear that God administers justice for those in need which include the

- oppressed (9.9; 10.12; 103.6; 146.7);
- orphan (10.17; 68.5; 82.3; 146.9);
- poor (12.5; 41.1; 72.4; 72.12; 140.12);
- needy (12.5; 72.4; 72.12; 82.4; 109.31; 140.12);
- widows (68.5; 146.9);
- desolate (68.6; 82.3);
- weak (72.12; 82.3);
- hungry (107.9; 146.7); and
- brokenhearted (147.3).

The prophet Isaiah makes it clear that we are to administer justice on behalf of God. “This is what the LORD says,” he proclaimed “Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed (Isaiah 56.1).” Isaiah also declared “Hear me, you heavens! Listen, earth! For the Lord has spoken (Isaiah 1.2).” “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow (Isaiah 1.17).
One of my favorite verses in the Book of Isaiah is verse 1 in chapter 42. What makes it one of my favorites is the result of personalizing it as part of my practice of *lectio divina*. Verse 1 is understood as a prophecy that was fulfilled by Christ as noted in the gospels during his baptism performed by John the Baptist. I personalize the verse by inserting myself as the servant and reading the verse as God saying to me

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him, and he will bring forth justice to the nations.”

and me responding in dialogue with God by saying

“I am your servant whom you uphold and your chosen in whom your soul delights. You have put your spirit upon me and I will bring forth justice to the nations.”

Two other favorite verses are found in a song of praise recorded in chapter 26 of the Book of Isaiah. I personalize verses 8 and 9 by praying

“My soul yearns for you O God in the night” and “my spirit longs for you in the morning when people learn your righteousness and when they walk in your just ways.”

When I include the word righteousness in my prayer I think of those who want to learn to elucidate and end social injustices because the Hebrew term for this word is *tzedek* which is derived from the Hebrew root *Tzadei-Dalet-Qof*, which means righteousness, justice, or fairness. *Tzedek* is a different concept than charity because charity suggests benevolence and generosity as a result of an abundance of money, time, and/or emotion. *Tzedek* is rooted in the concept of what is right and just. It is an act of righteousness steeped in justice. *Tzedakah*, which is taken from the word *tzedek*, refers to a religious obligation to do what is right and just. The renowned medieval rabbi, philosopher, and physician Moses Maimonides believed that the highest form of *tzedakah* is to give a gift, loan, or partnership that will result in recipients supporting themselves instead of living on the continuous charitable acts of others. Thus, my soul yearns, and my spirit longs, for God when more and more people learn to walk in the righteous and just ways of God.

2. **Three Steps to Create a Rule of Life**

A Rule of Life is a time-honored practice that has helped ordinary people live extraordinary spiritual lives by deepening their spiritual lives through a personal living covenant with God. Within the context of Christian theology and Biblical studies the word covenant principally refers to the solemn promises made between God and the Israelites in the Old Testament, and the followers of Christ in the New Testament, that are often based upon temporal and spiritual

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12 Ibid.
blessings and renewal. Within the context of a Rule of Life the word covenant also refers to solemn promises and spiritual renewal. However, they are between God and the individual and a Rule of Life manifests the kind of solemn and spiritual relationship an individual wants to have with God and God with an individual. For the Urban Monk, this not only includes nurturing an intimate, personal, and private relationship with God but a relationship that is lived out in public that moves beyond charitable acts and into acts that support a sequence of planned activities that elucidates and ends injustices.

The scriptures are filled with God’s desires to develop a personal living covenant with each of us which are expressed prominently in the Psalms. These Scripture verses are often prefaced with expressions such as “I will” or include “chosen one.” For example, God is quoted as saying “I will bless thee” and the individual “I will bless thy name forever and ever.” Also, for example, God is quoted as saying “you are my chosen one” and the individual “I am your chosen one.” A Rule of Life helps us heed to these scriptures and cultivate a personal living covenant with God that initiates a deepening relationship with God as time goes on.

First Step: Responding to the Call for a Rule of Life

Responding to God’s wishes as expressed through scriptures, like those noted above, is the first step towards creating our own Rule of Life. Responding to scripture is more than just reading it. Reading scripture creates a monologue—God speaking to us. Responding to scripture creates a dialogue—us speaking to God—after we hear God speaking to us through scripture. Thus, one scripture that expresses God’s desire to develop a living personal covenant with us can be found in Genesis 31. Verse 44 declares “Come now, let’s make a covenant, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us.” We can initiate our desire for a living personal covenant simply by saying “yes God, let’s make a covenant and let it be a witness between you and I.”

The scriptures are filled with ways in which God wants to seal a covenant with us. These ways are often ritualized through acts of figurative writing and binding. Some of the acts of figurative writing are noted in the Book of Hebrews as quotes from the Book of Jeremiah 31.33. “This is the covenant that I will make with (you), says the Lord: I will put my laws into your minds, and write them in your hearts, and I will be your God, and you will be my (servants).” These acts of figurative writing are reversed a couple of chapters later. God states once again that “This is the covenant that I will make with (you)” but states that I “will put my laws in their hearts” instead of their minds and “write them on their minds” instead of in their hearts.

Another act of figurative binding can be found in the Book of Deuteronomy. In chapter six we are urged to “love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” We are also implored to keep these words in our hearts, teach them to our sons

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13 Hebrews 8.10 which is a quote from Jeremiah 31.33.
14 Hebrews 10.16
and daughters, talk about them while in and out of our homes, and when we lie down and rise up. We are further urged to “bind them as a sign on (our) hand,” to be as frontals on (our) forehead,” and to “write them on the doorposts of (our) house and on (our) gates.  

The scriptures note that God encourages positive responses from us when challenged by acts of figurative writing and binding like the ones written above. One passage of scripture in the Old Testament declares “So remember, you are my servant whom I have chosen! and I am the LORD who made you, who formed you in the womb as my servant, whom I have chosen and You shall say, I am the Lord’s, . . . and write on your hand, The Lord’s”. . . At times, I am so personally moved by this verse that I want to literally write on my hand “the Lord’s.” Another verse notes a positive response from us when challenged by an act of figurative writing. The verse exclaims “I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”

A Rule of Life helps us further our positive responses to God. In the prologue of the Rule of St. Benedict, we are advised to share in Christ’s passion. The passion of Christ has been understood as the period of intense suffering in the life of Christ from the Garden of Gethsemane to the Crucifixion. Certainly this view is correct. However, the pages of the prologue remind us that there is much more to the passion of Jesus.

Our living covenant with God is rooted in the passion of Christ. The source of Jesus’ passion was his intense love for humanity, which resulted in his uncompromising commitment to walk a very precise and narrow path to redeem humanity. The scriptures remind us to imitate his love for humanity because such love should be the source of our own passion and redemption. The scriptures also remind us that the life of Christ provides a pattern for living a passionate life. Through Christ we can experience a spiritual birth that results in the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that leads to a life of continual communion with God.

The permanent indwelling of the Spirit is a very precious part of the Christian faith because we gain immediate access to the very presence of God. As with Christ, the Spirit informs and guides us. Jesus declared his dependence on the presence of God. He noted that every word that he said was given to him by the Father who guided him as to what to say and how to say it and that his thoughts, words, and actions were given to him by the Father.

Perhaps the most powerful words that were given to Christ by the Father and passed on to us concern God and our neighbors. These words are meant to shape our daily thoughts, words and actions. They are:

15 Deuteronomy 6.4-9
16 Isaiah 44.1; 2; 5
17 Psalm 40.8
18 Philippians 2.1-18
19 Hebrews 10.19
20 John 12.49
21 John 14.31
“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and Love your neighbor as yourself.”}\textsuperscript{22}

These are the words that should largely shape our Rule of Life. As a matter of fact, these words bring us back to the ritualized acts of figurative writing and binding noted above. God clearly wants to write and bind these words into our hearts, souls, and mind as the corner stone of a divinely initiated living covenant and developing a Rule of Life provides the opportunity.

**Second Step: Developing a Rule of Life**

For the Urban Monk, developing a Rule of Life involves choosing from the many spiritual practices that have evolved over the centuries. Most, if not all, of these practices have stemmed from the spiritual disciplines of reading scripture and prayer. However, as evidenced by these practices, there are many ways to pray and read scripture. The Urban Monk should choose those practices that will help nurture an intimate, personal, and private relationship with God and those that will nurture a public relationship with God and others that involve encountering, elucidating, and ending injustices.

What follows is a description of three sources from which to choose spiritual practices to help develop a Rule of Life. The three sources include a list of books, articles and papers, and web sites. These sources include practices to nurture a private and public relationship with God and others.

a. Books

There are many books that describe numerous spiritual practices. Most of the practices described in these books, however, focus on cultivating an intimate, personal, and private relationship with God. Some of these books were noted already in this paper. Others include:

- Mystical Prayer is for (Almost) Everyone by Ernest J. Fiedler;
- Protestant Spiritual Practices: Theology, History, and Practice by Joseph D. Driskill;
- Sacred Chaos: Spiritual Disciplines for the Life You Have by Tricia McCary Rhodes;
- Soul Feast: an Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life by Marjorie J. Thompson;
- Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church edited by Robin Maas & Gabriel O'Donnell, O.P.;
- Teachings of the Christian Mystics edited by Andrew Harvey;

\textsuperscript{22} Luke 10.27
There are also several books that concentrate on one specific spiritual practice to help with cultivating an intimate, personal, and private relationship with God. These books include those that concentrate on centering prayer, examination of consciousness, *Lectio Divina*, prayer offices of the day, and silence.

**Centering Prayer**

- Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening by Cynthia Bourgeault;
- The Path of Centering Prayer: Deepening your Experience of God by David Frenette;
- Centering Prayer: Renewing an Ancient Christian Prayer Form by Basil Pennington;
- Intimacy with God: An Introduction to Centering Prayer by Thomas Keating.

**Examination of Consciousness**

- The Examination of Conscience (Loyola Classics) by George Aschenbrenner;
- The Examen Prayer: Ignatian Wisdom for Our Lives Today by Timothy M. Gallagher;
- The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in Daily Life by Father Kevin O'Brien SJ;

**Lectio Divina**

- Lectio Divina: How to Pray Sacred Scripture by Dan Korn;
- Lectio Divina—The Sacred Art: Transforming Words and Images into Heart-centered Prayer by Christine Valters Painter;
- Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina by Thelma Hall;
- Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures by M. Basil Pennington;
- Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina by Michael Casey;
- Discovering Lectio Divina: Bringing Scripture into Ordinary Life by James C. Wilhoit and Evan B. Howard.

**Prayer Offices of the Day**

- Music of Silence: A Sacred Journey through the Hours of the Day by David Stendl-Rast and Sharon Lebell;
- The School of Prayer: An Introduction to the Divine Office for All Christians by John Brook;
- Lord, Open My Lips: The Liturgy of the Hours As Daily Prayer by Seth H. Murray;
- In Constant Prayer (Ancient Practices) by Robert Benson and Phyllis Tickle.
Silence

- Words from Silence: An Invitation to Spiritual Awakening by Leonard Jacobson;
- On Silence: 30 Days to a Powerful Spiritual Practice Paperback by Joseph Dispenza;

There are also books that focus on encountering, elucidating, and ending social issues. These books focus on men and women who have combined their Christian faith with social action. The spiritual practices described in these books are based upon their live experiences and include seeing through the eyes of the poor, understanding the relationship between material and spiritual poverty, recognizing that personal faith has public implications, and fearing moral suicide over physical death. These books include:

- Divine Rebels: American Christian Activists for Social Justice by Deena Guzder;
- Christian Social Reformers of the Nineteenth Century edited by Hugh Martin;
- Living Faith: How Faith Inspires Social Justice by Curtiss Paul DeYoung;
- Tough Minds, Tender Hearts: Six Prophets of Social Justice by William O. Paulsell;
- The Spark in the Soul: Four Mystics on Justice by Terry Tastard and Michael Hollings;
- Four Modern Prophets: Walter Rauschenbusch, Martin Luther King Jr, Gustavo Gutierrez, Rosemary Ruether by William M. Ramsay;
- The Compassionate Community: Strategies that Work for the Third Millennium by Catherine M. Harmer;
- Mysticism & Social Transformation by Janet K. Ruffing and Robert J. Egan.

b. Articles and Papers

There are also many articles that describe numerous spiritual practices which also primarily focus on ways to cultivate an intimate, personal, and private relationship with God. The following list contains web sites that provide articles and papers about various spiritual practices along with books, courses, and other types of publications.

- http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices
- http://www.spirithome.com
- http://conversationsjournal.com
- http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org

There are also several papers about spiritual practices that I have developed over the years. Some of these papers focus on developing a private relationship with God and others a public relationship with God and others. They can be obtained at http://www.urban-monk.org/Spirit.html and include:
• Covenant and Community;
• Dark Night of the Soul;
• Divine Offices of Prayer;
• Divine Offices of Prayer and the Blues;
• Examination of Consciousness;
• Incarnational Solidarity;
• Lectio Divina;
• Material and Spiritual Poverty;
• Silence;
• The Night Watch;
• Theological Reflection;
• Inner Monastic Cell;
• Passionate Love Prayers;
• Wounded Healer.

c. Web Sites

There are also many web sites that describe numerous spiritual practices which also primarily focus on ways to cultivate an intimate, personal, and private relationship with God. I grouped some of the web sites under five of the many spiritual practices that can be found through various web sites that hopefully will remain active. They include:

Centering Prayer
• http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/category/category/centering-prayer
• http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org
• http://www.kyrie.com/cp

Examination of Consciousness
• http://norprov.org/spirituality/ignatianprayer.htm
• http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/consciousness-examen
• http://www.soulshepherding.org/2012/12/the-examen-of-consciousness-to-practice-gods-presence
• http://www.jesuit.org/ignatian-spirituality

Lectio Divina
• http://lectio-divina.org
• http://www.valyermo.com/ld-art.html
• http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/category/category/lectio-divina
Prayer Offices of the Day

- http://divineoffice.org/liturgy-of-the-hours
- http://universalis.com
- http://www.anglicanbreviary.net/office.html

Silence


There are also web sites that focus on combining Christian faith with social action. They include:

- http://www.nacsw.org/index.shtml;
- http://crcc.usc.edu;
- https://cac.org;
- http://www.ccda.org;
- http://transformcentralvalley.org;

Third Step. Living a Rule of Life

Living a Rule of Life involves applying the spiritual practices that you chose to include in your Rule of Life in ways that will nurture a private and public relationship with God and others. Chances are that most of the spiritual practices that are part of your daily life are those that have helped you further an intimate and personal relationship with God. When you first heard about such spiritual practices as Lectio Divina or Silence, you likely heard and learned about them as a means to cultivate your inner and private relationship with God and may have already become very good at using them for this purpose.

Your experience at using spiritual practices such as Lectio Divina or Silence may not include applying them to a public relationship with God and others in a manner that embraces encountering, elucidating, and ending injustices. Over the past 25 years, I have worked hard at learning to use many spiritual practices for this purpose. These practices, which include Lectio Divina, Silence, Examination of Consciousness, Wounded Healer, and the Spiritual Ladder of Divine Ascent, are described below.

I will end this paper by encouraging Urban Monks to include the Spiritual Practice of Theological Reflection into their Rule of Life. Nurturing a private and public relationship with God and others that includes achieving justice will likely challenge one’s Christian heritage that was
shaped by denominational teachings, sermons, books, articles, classes, workshops, etc. The practice of theological reflection helps individuals notice whether if any of their views, principles, values, attitudes, convictions, opinions, etc. are supported or challenged and if any changes may be necessary.

*Lectio Divina*

*Lectio Divina* consists of four traditional steps, which I have used to cultivate my private relationship with God. The first step is reading, the second step is meditation, the third step is prayer, and the fourth step is contemplation. There are two related steps that I have developed and added which are compassion and action. I use the first four steps to nurture my intimate, personal, and private relationship with God. I use the first four steps along with the two additional steps that I have developed to nurture my public relationship with God which includes encountering, elucidating, and ending injustices.

The first step of reading (*lectio*) is an act of reverential listening. As we read scripture we are listening to God speaking to us. When we begin to reflect on the meaning of a word, words, phrase, verse, or passage, we enter into the next step which is meditation (*meditatio*). The transition from hearing the text to interacting with the text prepares one for the third step which is prayer (*oratio*). Such prayer creates a dialogue with God instead of a monologue. As a result, such prayer allows one to take one’s experiences of the first two steps to God for further revelation because of the dialogue. The next step of contemplation (*contemplatio*) allows one to not only accept any divine revelation, but also to rest in God’s transforming embrace.

When I read scriptures like “As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you (Isaiah 63a)” or “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand (Isaiah 41.10)” I feel drawn towards my inward intimate relationship with God. When I read scriptures like “Have I not wept for those in trouble? Has not my soul grieved for the poor? (Job 30.25)” or “Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God (Proverbs 14.31),” I am drawn outwards towards my public relationship with God. Dialoguing with God inevitably reminds me of my responsibility of compassion and action which are the two steps that I have added to my own experience of *Lectio Divina*.

Compassion is a powerful force which lies deep within us. Once we unleash this emotion, it often beckons us into unexplored territory such as a strong desire to encounter, elucidate, and end injustices. This emotion has various linguistic expressions. Latin root words literally describe compassion as "suffering together with another" and Greek root words literally describe compassion as "a wrenching of one's guts". Hebrew root words literally describe compassion as "a powerful emotion of birth that yields personal and societal transformation."

The Christian scriptures teach us to be Christ-like and this includes being compassionate. Just as Christ did, we need to identify with the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, the homeless, the dying, the exploited, and the oppressed. I often unleashed my feelings of compassion after I
experienced the fourth step of contemplation. The outcome is action. This final step of my practice of Lectio Divina often shapes a sequence of activities with others that helps elucidate and end injustices. I further describe the sequence of activities below in the practice of the Spiritual Ladder of Divine Ascent.

**Silence**

Silence can be very attractive when we think about it in terms of serene solitude with God. We may picture ourselves away from the people and places that make up our everyday lives. We may yearn to be high up in the mountains, at the edge of an ocean, or deep within a desert. It is within these circumstances that we may feel that we will experience God unlike ever before and deepen our intimate, personal, and private relationship with God. This is true.

However, we often find ourselves experiencing difficulty while trying to keep silent for a length of time within these seemingly ideal environments. We may even start thinking about the very people and places that we sought to escape just for a brief time. We may start thinking about various things about ourselves. All of a sudden, we are unable to remain silent and feel attentive towards God because these very thoughts become distractions.

Why does this happen? One reason is because the longer we achieve silence the deeper and deeper we are able to go into ourselves. Ordinarily we do not enter such depths because we feel less and less in control. As a result, too much silence may frighten us because being in the midst of such immense silence opens us to hearing the silence of God unlike ever before. Some of the mystics such as Thomas Merton and William Johnson remind us that if we are able to obtain lengthy periods of silence we need to hold ourselves in readiness to hear the nonverbal communication from God. Being ready to hear is necessary for they further tell us that while silent we will hear the words of distress, the cries of pain, and the pleas for help that rise from a suffering world and in turn we need to present these cries to God in intercessory prayer. Also, as already noted, we will likely get in touch with our own hurts and pains. Dealing with these kinds of experiences is not what we normally have in mind when we are willing to practice silence. We want our silence to feel intimate, personal, and private. The more we practice silence, the better we will get at cultivating this kind of intimacy. Also, the more we practice silence, the better we will get at encountering, elucidating, and ending injustices.

**Wounded Healer**

The spiritual practice of the wounded healer is based upon the writings of Henri J. M. Nouwen and in particular his book entitled “The Wounded Healer.” Nouwen describes wounded healers as individuals who “must look after (their) own wounds but at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others.” Nobody escapes being wounded. We all are wounded people, whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. Thus, the one who wants to minister is one who wants to serve others. However, the one who wants to minister is a wounded person.
Under the spiritual practice of *Lectio Divina*, I noted that the Christian scriptures teach us to be Christ-like which includes being compassionate. We need to identify with the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, the homeless, etc., just as Christ did. However, when we open ourselves to the hurts and pains of others, we inevitably open ourselves to our own hurts and pains. Too often, we have experienced brokenness in our own lives and are in need of the very transforming embrace of God that we yearn for others to experience. Thus, just like *Lectio Divina*, the spiritual practice of the wounded healer becomes a practice to help nurture an intimate, personal, and private relationship with God and a public one with God and others.

**Examination of Consciousness**

For instance, the St. Ignatius of Loyola’s Examination of Consciousness helps us reflect on God’s activity in our lives each day. It is a practice that involves taking time out to examine ourselves and asking God to examine us as well. I find the end of day as the best time to do this. During this time of reflection, we are encouraged to ask several questions that we may want to reflect on such as

- How was God present in my day?
- How did God speak to me today?
- How did I cooperate with God today?
- Did I resist God in any way today?
- In what ways do I believe God may be calling me to a new awareness about something?
- What needs healing in my life?

These questions help us to further develop an intimate, personal, and private relationship with God. As a matter of fact by reflecting on these questions I often examine myself by asking God

- What did you do that I did not see?
- What did you say to me today that I did not hear?
- What should I have done that I did not do?
- What pains or hurts did I ignore?

The answers to these questions help me feel the warmth, love, and tenderness of God while I am alone with God. They often allow me to feel vulnerable with God which helps me feel happy or sad or delighted or frustrated or even ecstatic or hurt depending on the answers to the questions.

These questions and answers also help deepen my public relationship with God and others. The more that I have practiced the Examination of Consciousness the more I have been able to express the questions noted above in public. For instance, in the midst of a public meeting that is focused on an injustice, I have found myself asking God
What are you saying that I am not hearing?
What are you doing that I am not seeing?
What should I say or do right now?

As a result, my questions and comments in such meetings are influenced by what I believe God is saying or doing and what actions are appropriate for me to take. Such influence also results in me asking other participants after the meeting similar questions such as

- Is there anything that was said that we did not hear;
- Is there anything that we should have said that we did not say?
- Is there anything that we should have done that we did not do?
- Did we ignore or not fully address any issues that were painful and hurtful to others?

Thus, together we may feel happy or sad or delighted or frustrated or even ecstatic or angry because we did, or did not, make enough progress towards ending the injustice.

The Spiritual Ladder of Divine Ascent

I have used the Spiritual Ladder of Divine Ascent as a spiritual practice in order to help me plan and take the steps that I need to further my private and public relationship with God that includes focusing on social injustices. The Spiritual Ladder of Divine Ascent consists of as many as 10 rungs according to several of the church mystics including John Climacus, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Evelyn Underhill, and St. John of the Cross. Each rung represents a step that leads to an intimate loving relationship with God through prayer, love, and forgiveness. Climbing the steps takes a lifetime. However, it nurtures an intimate, personal, and private relationship with God through the years.

For me, a Spiritual Ladder of Divine Ascent also consists of several rungs that lead to encountering, elucidating, and ending injustices. Each rung can represent an action within the sequence of activities that I have encouraged throughout this paper. Two such ladders that I have shaped in recent years can be found in a paper that I have written and entitled “Becoming an Urban Monk: A Personal Integrative Experience” and can be obtained at http://www.urban-monk.org/Publications_Newsletters.html. I will briefly describe them below.

The first ladder that I created related to economic development. This ladder I developed at MacArthur Park, which is located in the center of the City of Los Angeles. The purpose of my involvement, which began in 1998, was to develop a plan that would initiate the city’s first sidewalk vending program under a recently adopted ordinance by the City Council. It quickly became apparent that the plan would have to address the many social ills that the park and the surrounding neighborhood were experiencing during the past several decades due to community disinvestment.
After renting a storefront across the street from the park, I was able to get a firsthand look at a deeply wounded park and surrounding neighborhood as a result of the disinvestment. The sidewalk in front was filled daily with more than 20 illegal document dealers selling “micas” or false documents to illegal immigrants who want to work. Among them were drug dealers who sold their goods openly and drug users who visibly snorted or injected cocaine. At times, vans that served as mobile brothels would pull up along the curb letting prostitutes and their customers in and out. At times the vans would remain stationary and serve as the location for sexual acts.

The first rung of the ladder involved creating a task force of representatives from public and private organizations that were willing to help change the park and surrounding neighborhood. While meeting monthly, I chaired the meetings that focused on the next two rungs, which were “weeding” the area and “seeding” the same area. The first of these two rungs was built upon the law enforcement idea of weeding out the illegal and undesirable activities such as drug sales, drug use, illegal document sales, and prostitution. The next rung was developed upon the idea of having various segments of the community seed in desired activities such as concerts, legal street vending, picnics, public art displays, and recreational games. If the seeding did not happen, the weeds would grow back after law enforcement weeded then out. The next rung was to acquire the necessary resources to keep seeding desired activities through volunteer efforts and funding from public and private agencies to achieve reinvestment. The last rung involves ensuring that disinvestment never happens again through ongoing investment.

The ladder that I climbed with the help of so many others brought about significant changes to the park and surrounding neighborhood. Overall crime decreased dramatically. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that in 2005 the census tract, which included the MacArthur Park neighborhood, had experienced the largest decrease in crime among all census tracts of similar size in what amount of time?. What was once a point-of-destination for criminals became a business and social point-of-destination for many adults and children who came to picnic, play, shop, and socialize. Not only did many people experience healing, but the actual streets, sidewalks, and the park did as well. The very people who initially expressed such outrage over the fear that they felt while walking the sidewalks and who did not dare go into the park, conveyed their feelings of relief and joy that they could walk their sidewalks and actually use the park with a lot less fear. Even the park experienced healing. The band shell was refurbished and summer concerts began. The children’s play area received all new equipment and the public bathrooms were remodeled.

The other ladder that I created involved homelessness. My involvement began as a case manager which entailed dealing with the issues that caused people to become homeless and those that prevented them from exiting their state of homelessness. This experience brought me closer than ever before too many social and physical conditions such as chronic homelessness, domestic violence, HIV/AIDS, mental illness, physical disabilities, poverty, substance abuse, and underemployment and unemployment. They also brought me closer to the fears and prejudices expressed by members of the public.
The ladder that I fashioned consisted of several rungs. The first one involved designing homeless programs that were based upon the research of others and my own that were proven to work. Such programs were residential and non-residential. Another rung led to the formation of several coalitions and committees that I either initiated myself or with others. Another rung led to grant writing. I began to write public agency grants that helped secure millions of dollars for several counties and cities and private agency grants that secured thousands of dollars for nonprofit and faith-based organizations. Another rung led to eliminating discriminatory practices in zoning codes that prevented the development of homeless services and led to the adoption of other practices that encouraged the development of professional homeless services. Still another rung led to writing strategies for jurisdictions to end homelessness that were filled with “best practice” recommendations and guidance to implement the recommendations. I know that thousands of people have exited homelessness as a result of the many activities that make up the rungs of this ladder.

Theological Reflection

I am ending this paper by encouraging Urban Monks to include the Spiritual Practice of Theological Reflection in their Rule of Life. Nurturing a private and public relationship with God and others as described in this paper stems from the belief that God is incarnational, providential, and revelational. Incarnational means that God is present in the world today, providential means that God cares about the world today, and revelational means that God communicates with the world today.

Nurturing a private and public relationship with a God who is incarnational, providential, and revelational will likely challenge one’s Christian heritage that was shaped by denominational teachings, sermons, books, articles, classes, workshops, etc. The practice of theological reflection helps individuals determine if any of their views, principles, values, attitudes, convictions, opinions, etc. are supported or challenged especially when they are trying to achieve justice. When individuals take actions that involve encountering, elucidating, and ending injustices, new questions will be raised, new insights will be suggested, and new opportunities for new responses will become evident. Any responses or actions that they take will likely change their lives forever. Thus, for Urban Monks theological reflection is a useful, and potentially transforming, spiritual practice to include in their Rules of Life.

In conclusion, a Rule of Life helps Urban Monks cultivate an interactive two-way relationship with God that is nurtured privately and publically each day. Such daily interaction will reveal how each of the spiritual practices within their Rule of Life relates to, and builds upon, one another. Such progress will keep their Rule of Life a living document and will strengthen their personal covenant with God in order to further their private and public relationship with God, which I believe ultimately, involves encountering, elucidating, and ending injustices.