

VOCATION IS MISSION
The Washington Institute
20 June 2012

“Hints of Hope”

“Having hope is hard; harder when you get older.”
– Wendell Berry

Introduction

Walker Percy and his publishers—and the New York City literary critics

“I always want there to be a hint of hope in my writing.”

What would it mean to be “an American Camus?”

The Stranger, The Plague, and others—and my conversation in a London café years ago,
and my long interest in *The Plague*, re. Le Chambon and all.

Why did you care? When most of Europe didn't, why did you?

Hints of hope one and all.

I. Hope vs. Optimism— A Line in the Sand

Thomas More and ASP

Machiavelli's *realpolitick* and Bismarck's sausage

II. Stories of Students— Education Connecting to Vocation

David Cummins, Santiago Sedaca, Neil MacBride, Cheryl and Lonni Jackson, Jennifer
Jukanovich, David Franz, Amy Sherman, Chris Ditzenberger

And Chris this past week in Colorado, and letter yesterday

Praying for “eyes to see”

“The Last Butterfly” – and eyes to see, and Le Chambon one more time

III. Living Proximately

“Making Peace with Proximate Justice” (*Comment* magazine)

An essay and a symposium

*It is into this reality that my teaching has increasingly focused on the hope of proximate justice.
How is it that we help people form visions and virtues that will sustain them in their vocations
for the rest of life? That will, by grace, form in them the sufficient skills to navigate the shoals of a
world that will disappoint them, that along the way will wound them? Because you too are*

someone who loves God and his world, you know that your longer hopes and dreams are for 25 years from now, praying that somehow you and those you love will keep on keeping on, having deepened and not discarded the beliefs about God and the world that seem so vital today. It is not easy.

At the Washington Institute we continue to believe that it is the willingness to pray and work towards proximate justice—the vision of something, rather than all or nothing— that allows us to keep going, even as we face what often seems insurmountable and unchangeable.

Wedding Homily (*Critique magazine*)

Today is a day of covenant-making, this day of marriage, of promises made and of love declared. And we are your people, Madison and Pamela, the ones who have come together because of great love for you, and we are the ones who will stand with you, not only today, but for your life. More than any others on the face of the earth, we will hope for you, we will long with you as you find your way into the delights and graces of marriage.

But as we do that, we also say to you that we want you to know that the words you give to each other today will be morally meaningful, if they lead you into proximate happiness together. Proximate—not perfect? Yes, proximate, not perfect. Proximate means close, sometimes very close—but not quite. It is real, so real that it can be touched, but it is not complete, not perfect. At your very best you will disappoint each other; at your very best you will find that you cannot be all that the other requires. There will be needs unmet, hopes unsatisfied. And then what will you do? Will you be able to find honest and true happiness together, proximate happiness together, and be glad for that? Or do you require of yourselves, and this almost perfect day, a perfect marriage as the only possible future, the only future that you will accept?

*Because you're not what I would have you be
I blind myself to who, in truth, you are.
Seeking mirage where desert blooms, I mar
Your you. Aaah. I would like to see
Past all delusion to reality.
Then would I see God's image in your face,
His hand in yours, and in your eyes his grace.
Because I'm not what I would have me be,
I idolize Two who are not in any place,
Not you, not me, and so we never touch.
Reality would burn. I do not like it much.
And yet in you, in me, I find a trace
Of love which struggles to break through
The hidden lovely truth of me, of you.
—Madeleine L'Engle, *The Weather of the Heart**

Conclusion

Something rather than nothing.

Like “love in the ruins” – both the painting and the novel.

A hint of hope, for everyone everywhere.