

# Who Is Leading?



BY NANCY COPELAND-PAYTON

Stars shine in the dark sky of my Smountain home. In the silence, I ponder discernment and the horror of human trafficking. What is there to discern? Surely it doesn't require much to see that human trafficking deeply wounds and harms another even as it denies one's most profound identity as a cherished child of God.

In the darkness, the stars do not answer. The quiet of night only reflects my questions back to me. But I am not discouraged. Perhaps this is helpful guidance. Discernment in the face of obvious injustice and hurtful actions focuses not so much on the actions themselves, but more on *our response* to such actions.

When confronted with the horror of the Nazi concentration camps, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "Only he who cries out for the Jews can sing the Gregorian chant."\* Yes, the reality of that terrible situation cried out for a faith-filled response, but the details of that response were not the same for everyone. There were many ways to "cry out for the Jews." Bonhoeffer's agonizing discernment of his response led ultimately to the sacrifice of his life in a concentration camp, among those with whom he chose to cry out.

When it comes to human trafficking, prayerful discernment is required to understand what particular response Christ is calling us to take. Discernment invites a quiet staying with this question. In this case, that might mean that we as readers ought to listen more deeply and with greater intention as we read these



**Anguished, Tamara Rickerts**

articles. Our conditioned response often is to rush in and rely solely on human ingenuity—plans, actions, money, publicity—to address injustice.

But perhaps discernment asks more of us. Discernment, like the night's quiet, invites us into silence, into stilling our sole reliance on human plans. Discernment asks that our first response be to *pray* our thoughts and feelings. We should also look at what scripture tells us about how Christ might invite us to respond to this situation. It's hard to hear the Spirit when we are caught up in all-forward motion, paying

attention only to what our human capabilities indicate we can achieve.

It has been said that doing something good of our own design is a significant obstacle to doing something better of God's design. We're prone, like Sarah, to take matters into our own hands and arrange for Hagar to make God's promise happen, rather than being part of *God's* acting.

Discernment asks that we always turn to God first. It's a difficult request for us, so accustomed are we to taking care of things by ourselves. There is a beneath-the-surface but critical difference in letting God use us to respond to injustice, rather than assuming we're to fix it all on our own. The pivotal question is, "Who is leading?"

As you read the thoughtful, provocative, challenging articles in this issue, I invite you to take your thoughts and emotions to prayer. Pray your way through scripture. Then wait and listen. Are your first thoughts and emotions what God would have you do in response? Or do other possibilities now arise—perhaps divine possibilities that are surprising and life-giving in ways you never imagined?

\*Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 441.

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