

DAVID A. SYLVESTER

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WRITER, TEACHER & SOCIAL WITNESS

I join with all people of good will who are responding to the universal call to work for personal and social transformation in a suffering, confused and broken world. My work and ministry have been through teaching, writing and social witness.

WRITING

"Defending Hope and Freedom against Fear and Repression in Honduras," February 12, 2018, Tikkun Magazine online, Berkeley, CA. <https://davidasylvester.com/publications/the-spiritual-crisis-of-dictatorship-in-honduras/>

"Listening to Leonard Cohen in the Time of Trump," Summer, 2017, Tikkun Magazine, Vol. 32, No. 3 2017. <https://davidasylvester.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Listening-to-Cohen-in-Time-of-Trump.pdf>

"A Journey of Passion: Spirit and Horror in Christian Holy Season," Summer 2011, *Tikkun Magazine*.

"Why the Defrocking of Fr. Roy Bourgeois Will Test the Spirituality and Sincerity of the SOAW Protest," April 12, 2011, Tikkun Daily Blog.

"The Catholic Crisis Part I: How Pop Culture Gets It Wrong and Distorts the Truth" July 26, 2010, *Tikkun Daily Blog*.

"The Catholic Crisis Part II: When Faith is Challenged, Catholics Must Grow Up" July 27, 2010, *Tikkun Daily Blog*.

"Popular Art as Scripture: The Theological Failure of Secular Vision in *American Beauty*." May 2009, *New Wineskins*, Jesuit School of Theology.

"The Road from Journalism to Jail," May 2005, Nieman Reports, Harvard University <https://niemanreports.org/articles/the-road-traveled-from-journalism-to-jail/> .

"Crossing the line at Fort Benning," JANUARY 2005, *The Catholic Voice*, Diocese of Oakland. <https://davidasylvester.com/publications/crossing-the-line-at-fort-benning/>

"The Invisible War on Iraq: Airstrikes are Dramatic Outburst of 8-year American Campaign that Uses Starvation as Strategy," Dec. 20, 1998, *San Jose Mercury News*, Perspective Section. <https://davidasylvester.com/publications/invisible-war-on-iraq-u-s-uses-starvation/>

"Going Broke on \$44,500 a Year," March 1, 1987, *West Magazine*, San Jose Mercury News.

"Debt: The Disease of the '80s." Jan. 3, 1988, *West Magazine*, San Jose Mercury News.

TEACHING

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- Instructor, Oikos University, Oakland, CA.* 2011 - present
 Taught one or two courses per semester in English Composition and Literature, History, the Synoptic Gospels and Gospel of John in the New Testament to 30 to 50 students in Bachelor of Theology degree program for Presbyterian ministry. Students are English language learners from Korea and Thailand. My classes follow "teaching by doing" methods. Students compiled their writing into student-designed magazines.
- Adjunct lecturer, Holy Names University, Oakland, CA* 2012 - 2014
 Taught introductory philosophy course PHILA-140-W, The Human Person, and inter-religious course RLST World Wisdom Traditions to undergraduates seeking Bachelor of Arts.
- Private Tutor in ESL Language and Natural Process Writing* 2012- 2015
 Developed and taught English language learning program for private students of all ages with an emphasis on a natural learning process in reading and writing.
- Adjunct lecturer for journalism at various San Francisco Bay Area colleges* 1988- 1998
 Taught undergraduate journalism and writing at UC Berkeley's School of Journalism, Santa Clara University's Mass Communication Department and Golden Gate University's English Department.

SOCIAL WITNESS & MINISTRY

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- Salvadoran delegation member to Msgr. Oscar Romero canonization.* October 2018
 Traveled to Vatican in Italy to join 10,000 delegates from Archdiocese of San Salvador for Mass of canonization of St. Oscar Romero, saint of the Americas, in St. Peter's Square, and delegation audience with Pope Francis.
- Member of Inter-religious Human Rights Delegations to Honduras.* 2018
 Joined emergency delegations organized by SHARE- El Salvador, Berkeley, CA. to accompany social protesters during authoritarian takeover after presidential campaign. Accompanied Jesuit priest, Father Ismael Moreno Coto, known as Padre Melo, and Radio Progreso journalists to provide protection from death threats in Honduras.
- Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Oakland, CA.*
 Eucharistic Minister for Homebound and Infirm 2017 - 2020
 Brought Eucharist monthly to residents of Oakland nursing home as part parish lay ministry to homebound. Temporarily halted during Covid.
 Lay presider at Communion Services. 2017 - 2020
 Led prayer service, gave gospel reflection, distributed Eucharist at a lay-led communion service as part of parish's lay apostolate.
 Team Leader, Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. 2009 - 2012
 Participated and facilitated a team of three catechists, developed workshops, presentations and annual retreat for 9-month program
- Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Center, Oakland, CA*
 Sponsor at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings for newcomers, 2013 - 2020

- Presidential election observer, Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad, San Salvador* March 2009
 Participated as a CIS election observer during the March 2009 election of Mauricio Funes, first FMLN candidate to win presidency under El Salvador's peace accords in 1992.
- Volunteer teacher, Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad, San Salvador* Summer, 2007
 Taught English as Second Language class to adult Salvadorans.
- Prisoner, FCI-Lompoc, CA* April-July 2006
 Convicted of criminal trespassing, federal misdemeanor, paid \$500 fine, served three months at federal prison camp, Lompoc, California.
- Civil disobedience, School of Americas Watch, Ft. Benning, GA* November 2005
 Participated in mass demonstration at U.S. Army infantry base, Fort Benning, Georgia as protest against U.S. military training in Central America; trespassed in deliberate act of civil disobedience.
- Congressional lobbying, Education for Peace in Iraq (EPIC), Washington, D.C.* 1999-2001
 Trained and participated in congressional lobbying against U.S. sanctions on Iraq with EPIC, organized by Eric Gustafson, U.S. veteran.
- Humanitarian delegation to Iraq, Voices in the Wilderness* October 1998
 Brought medical supplies to Iraq in deliberate violation of U.S. sanctions with Voices in the Wilderness, organized by Kathy Kelly.

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

- Jesuit Retreat House, Los Altos, CA.* 2017-present
 Frequent Ignatian silent retreats, including the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, 30-day Jesuit long retreat, silent and guided by spiritual director, 2017, and annual Ignatian retreats.
- Mercy Center, Sisters of Mercy, Burlingame, CA*
 Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, 19th Annotation. 1990, 1999,
 Nine-month program of daily prayer and weekly group meetings 2005, 2011
 based on Spiritual Exercises in everyday life over nine months
- Ongoing spiritual direction* with various directors at Mercy Center, 1989 - 2022
 and Jesuit Retreat Center
- International Zen Dojo, Mountain View, CA* 1987 - 95
 Member of Zen Buddhist meditation center, Japanese Rinzai tradition.
 Attended monthly weekend Zen meditation sittings and biannual three-day retreats directed by Hosakawa Roshi from Daihonzan Chozen-ji, Honolulu, Hawaii.

EDUCATION

Master of Arts: Center for Jewish Studies, Graduate Theological Union, specializing in Catholic-Jewish theology. Thesis on revisions in Christian theology of Judaism in aftermath of Holocaust. 2012.

Master of Theological Studies: Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, Graduate Theological Union. Thesis: "Recovering the *Via Purgativa*: How the 12-Step Program Revives the Christian Tradition of Spiritual Formation." 2009.

Certificate in Contemporary Christian Living, Mercy Center, Burlingame: Three-year introduction to Christian prayer, faith, and practice. 1989-92.

Master of Arts: State University of New York at Albany, Economics. 1983.

Bachelor of Arts: University of Chicago, European History, including junior year at American College in Paris. 1974.

PREVIOUS PROFESSIONAL WRITING & EDITING

Editorial Assistant to Rabbi Michael Lerner 2010-2011

While enrolled as a full-time student, I worked on various projects on the rabbi's proposal for a Global Marshall Plan, coordinated interns, wrote reports. Also assisted in research and in editing his book, *Embracing Israel/Palestine*, published by North Atlantic Books, in 2011.

San Jose Mercury News 1997-2005

Assistant Business Editor/Financial News: Supervised five financial reporters and coordinated and edited quarterly venture capital, annual salary survey and performance chart of top 150 companies in Silicon Valley. *Financial Writer, San Jose Mercury News:* Wrote over 200 articles on Silicon Valley economy, including Nasdaq tech bubble.

San Francisco Chronicle. 1990-96

South Bay Bureau Chief: Reported on regional news in Santa Clara County.

San Jose Mercury News 1983-88

Technology writer: Reported on semiconductor industry, venture capital investors and Silicon Valley culture. Developed The Money Tree quarterly survey of Silicon Valley venture capital investments.

AWARDS & HONORS

Visiting Scholar at UCLA's Center for Social Policy and Comparative History. Studied globalization and alternative economics under Prof. Robert Brenner, economic historian. 2004.

Nieman Fellow, Harvard University. 9-month journalism fellowship. 1985-86.

UCLA's Gerald Loeb Award for Distinguished Business and Financial Journalism; and Investment Company Institute-American University Award, Magazine category "Going Broke on \$44,500 a Year" *West Magazine*. 1988.

"The Big Man and The Minister," reprint of my article written for *Electronic Business* in a college-level journalism textbook, *Feature Writing for Newspapers and Magazines*, Harper & Row Publishers, 1988.

Various state Associated Press reporting awards, on disappearing production jobs, children suffering in divorce, ravages of toxic waste. 1983-87.

LANGUAGES

Spanish: Moderately fluent in conversation.

French: Moderately fluent in conversation and reading.

Biblical Greek: Able to translate and teach New Testament and patristic texts.

Modern and Biblical Hebrew: Able to translate and teach Hebrew Scriptures, Rabbinic texts and acquainted with modern spoken Hebrew.

PERSONAL

Active member of St. Paul's Catholic Center, and St. Charles Borromeo Church, Bloomington, IN.

Former parishioner for 20 years at *Our Lady of Lourdes* Parish, Oakland, CA.

Active interfaith member, *Beyt Tikkun* synagogue, Berkeley, CA.

SELECTIONS FROM PUBLICATIONS

“The Road from Journalism to Jail”, *Nieman Reports*, Harvard University, Summer, 2006:

“I’m now an inmate at a federal prison camp at Lompoc, California, serving a three-month sentence for trespassing onto a federal military installation, and I’ve had lots of time to reflect what happened and why. Other journalists reading this may decide I’ve adopted “a point of view,” or become “political” or lost my “objectivity,” or become “partial” to one side or the other. I think this is hogwash. And I wonder how they deal with the shame.

“Twenty-five years later, I still feel ashamed of the U.S collusion with the killers of Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador. I still feel ashamed of the El Mozote massacre, and it’s humiliating to read the evasions and distortions of the Reagan Administration officials who denied the massacre and then persecuted the reporters who broke the story.

“Now, to top this all off, there is the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib in Iraq. I was working as a copy editor on the national desk at my newspaper when these first stories came in, and I had to read every last word of it. I had to write the headlines and captions for those iconic photos. I had to digest the horror almost like it was my dinner, and even after work, on the way home, I still had the taste of it in my mouth. Compared to what enormity of what had happened, the whole enterprise of journalism – reporting to editing – seemed unbearably passive, like the people who discuss the progress of a fire burning down a neighbor’s house....

“The problem now in journalism is an epidemic of unconsciousness. Our worthy victims seem to be only within our borders, such as the victims of the attacks of Sept. 11, while those outside our borders, such as the Iraqi civilians caught at crossfire, are unworthy. However, when all is said and done, when all the press conferences and meetings are over, and the editors go home, and the lights go out and the presses start running, the villagers of El Mozote are still dead, and Iraqi parents are still grieving for their children who died during the 1990s sanctions, and relatives are still searching for answers about what happened at Abu Ghraib.

“This is the reality I contemplate as I lie on a prison bunk, and for right now, prison feels like the right place to be.”

“Crossing the Line at Fort Benning”. *The Catholic Voice*, Diocese of Oakland, January 2005.

“The question I ask myself is not about why I went to Georgia but why it took me so long. Once there, I prayed and prayed for God’s guidance and in the end, was holding Domingo’s cross and the poster of the Jesuits when I crawled underneath the fence of the fort. On a grassy knoll, I started to kneel to pray for myself, for my country, for the victims and their torturers when a Military Police officer seized my arm and ordered: “Stand up! Don’t move! You’re under arrest!”

“Had God called me to do this? Was this an act of faith? Reflecting on it now, it’s more accurate to say that God has been at work, Mass by Mass, prayer by prayer, to remove my fearfulness. God has gently eased the bonds that constrain me from being who I really am. Then, one day, suddenly, I was free, free to act from my deepest self. My journey does not feel like one toward faith so much as one out of faithlessness. And I find this journey, God’s journey within me, is not shaping me to fit some theological “agenda” but for me to be me more than I dreamed possible.

“As I sat on the red Georgia dirt, the MP filling out his form for Prisoner 01, my hands cuffed with plastic strips as I’ve seen so many Iraqis held, I felt an overwhelming sense of relief. It was as if some shred of my dignity had been restored and some imbalance righted. Perhaps in a microscopic way, I had brought the thousands of suffering Iraqis, the Jesuit professors and the unknown victims like Domingo Gomes back to where it all started, to Fort Benning and the School of Americas.

“Quien es Domingo Gomes?

“Uno de los pobres de la tierra y los amados de Jesucristo.

“The Invisible War on Iraq: Airstrikes are Dramatic Outburst of 8-year American Campaign that Uses Starvation as Strategy.” San Jose Mercury News, December 20, 1998.

One morning, we arrived at the Red Crescent as if we were Santa Claus, carrying our last bags of medical supplies. A crowd was gathered outside, and I began taking photographs. Suddenly a thin young man squatted before me. He was carrying his daughter, who lay across his arms squalling like an infant, although she was perhaps 6 or 7 years old. He motioned to her teeth, all rotten along the inside, and her frail, thin arms. I clicked away, no more than three feet from him, somewhat overwhelmed by the commotion around me. Then it hit me: This child was dying. She was starving to death. Two or three mothers came forward with their young children and stood them in front of me -- screaming, wailing, miserable kids, as if some invisible force was torturing them. These people were bringing their dying children to the Red Crescent, an agency that had virtually no supplies.

I broke down.

This was what I had come to Iraq for. Deep inside, I had known all along the truth of what has been happening these past years of the economic sanctions. I had sensed the horror and suffering behind these disconnected images on television. But I needed to see it. By doing so, I reclaimed the piece of myself that, as an American, this eight-year war has torn from me. These are my children, my responsibility, because of what my country has done to them -- even if all I could do was take a photograph or offer a bottle of vitamins.

In Basra, the chief of pediatrics of a local hospital showed us photographs of children dying because they could not obtain medicines usually common. She paused in her clinical description of their cases, leaned across her desk and whispered fiercely:

“America is killing our children!”

“Why?” she asked. “Why?”

We had no answer. We had nothing to give her except our attention.

"Going Broke on \$44,500 a Year," West Magazine, San Jose Mercury News, March 1, 1987:

“About 10 years ago, I heard of an advertising man in Chicago who quit his job because the seat of his pants had turned shiny. Being young then, I didn't understand the power of detail. Now I can imagine the man opening his closet and mechanically picking out a pair of dress slacks, and then catching himself, startled to notice an unfamiliar gleam on the dark fabric. He walks to the window. He rolls the material back and forth between his fingers, peering at the fibers. What memories this unlocked, I'll never know. He quit and became a photographer, saying only: “I never wanted a job where I sat on my butt all day.

“I mention this incident to illustrate the power of detail, the significance of the insignificant because this is a story about the most insignificant details of all: the way we spend money every day....

“Sometimes, late at night, I walk through my house while when the children are in bed, and I look around me: a dishwasher that leaks, a power lawn mower that needs sharpening, an eight-year-old car with a bad transmission bearing, carpets that are spotted from spills. In the darkness of my living room, I think: Is this a way of life or the absence of any? I check the lock on the front door and find my way to the children's rooms. I untangle my boy's arms from his legs, straighten his blankets. Upstairs, by the hall light, I smooth back my daughter's hair and kiss her forehead softly enough so maybe she'll think she's dreaming. Our only way of life is being a family. Perhaps this is what is disintegrating in the economics of 1980s, when so many people of my age are not having children, sacrificing kids for careers, homes, consumption.”

"Debt: The Disease of the '80s," West Magazine, San Jose Mercury News, January 3, 1988:

“...Chris and I left the children with my parents and drove to Santa Cruz to drink a bottle of wine on the beach. Sitting in jackets on lawn chairs, we watched the evening settle over the ocean. The surf was curling and crashing into the shadows of the beach. Waves are another thing that are seen but have no reality, I thought. They are only the thinnest surface, a membrane caught between the whip of the wind, the tug of the moon, and the shape of the ocean floor. If the wind stopped blowing, or the moon's gravity relaxed, or the ocean was bottomless, there'd be no waves.

“For the first time, it became clear that, like waves in the ocean, money doesn't exist either. Every dollar comes from work and is spent on a desire. What's left is only the surface tension between the unseen wind, gravity and floor of beliefs. Perhaps the confusion over national deficits, taxes, and trade imports is only a confusion of values.”

Book review of **“The Great Unraveling: Losing Our Way in the New Century,”** By Paul Krugman. Reviewed in San Jose Mercury News, October 5, 2003. *“Krugman, in the end, is an old-fashioned New Deal liberal, operating within the conventional principles of economics to save capitalism from itself. He is neither a radical nor a revolutionary, and he's a good deal more conservative than the radical right he is battling.”*

“The Tragic Revenge of Ellie Nesler,” San Jose Mercury News editorial, October 3, 1997: (Nesler smuggled a gun into a courtroom and during a recess in the proceedings, shot and killed the man accused of molesting her six-year-old son William. Seventeen years later, when William was 23, he got into an argument and beat a man to death. He is now serving a life sentence for murder, eligible for parole in 2031.) *“If the fate of one person ever illustrated the sad and terrible price of revenge, it is that of Ellie Nesler... How difficult it would have been, but how much more healing if she had walked the more courageous road of grief and reconciliation.”*

“Death or life? Pete Wilson looks for reasons to execute; Pat Brown looked for a chance of redemption,” San Jose Mercury News, editorial August 4, 1997. *“If Gov. Pete Wilson thinks justice is served by executing Tommy Thompson, the governor should have no objection to witnessing justice carried out. But he might want to remember what haunted the memories of 83-year-old former Gov. Pat Brown: the decision to execute.”*

“The Two Faces of Health Care: Why El Camino Hospital's turnaround should make us wonder about the brave new world of HMOs,” San Jose Mercury News, editorial August 24, 1997 *“El Camino may well reveal that hospitals aren't as easily centralized as factories, and that health care is more a public service than a commodity. The real answer to reasonably priced medicine may lie less in excessive attention to the bottom line and more in the quality of the service itself: patient care.”*