

Benedictine Sr. Joan Chittister (NCR photo/Toni-Ann Ortiz)



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THE TIME IS NOW

A Call to Uncommon Courage

JOAN CHITTISTER

AUTHOR OF *RADICAL SPIRIT*

THE TIME IS NOW: A CALL TO UNCOMMON COURAGE
Joan Chittister
139 pages; Convergent Books
$20.00

Benedictine Sr. Joan Chittister is well-known to NCR readers. One of the most influential voices in American Catholicism, she is the author of more than 50 books and a regular contributor to NCR. A Benedictine nun for more than six decades, she served as president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and co-chair of the Global Peace Initiative for Women, and she is currently executive director of Benetvision, a research center for contemporary spirituality. Her compelling life story is the subject of NCR executive editor Tom Roberts' book *Joan Chittister: Her Journey from Certainty to Faith*.

Chittister wrote *The Time Is Now: A Call to Uncommon Courage* in response to the continuing social disintegration afflicting the nation and the world. It is a clarion call for "prophetic spirituality," what she defines as an "antidote to social sin." Her claim is that we have divorced spiritual obligation from political policy and have retreated from engagement with a suffering world to a kind of pious indifference. She does not diminish prayer and churchgoing, in fact she says these are needed, but she claims these are "safe" activities and not a full response to the Gospel. What is needed is a prophetic as well as a private spirituality.

Her intent is to help each of her readers reclaim the prophet inherent within, and in the process to say yes to life. One hears the words from Deuteronomy in the background: "I set before you life and death. ... Now choose life." For Chittister, the prophetic call is about supporting life, and to bolster her case, she mines the prophetic tradition, garnering its "seeds" — awareness, audacity, authenticity, self-giving, patience, wisdom, vision, faith and confidence.



Benedictine Sr. Joan Chittister (NCR photo/Toni-Ann Ortiz)

These insights she finds not only in the traditional texts of Micah and Jeremiah and in the words of Jesus, but in the lives of contemporary prophets — the Rev. Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, St. Óscar Romero, St. Joseph Sr. Helen Prejean, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Rosa Parks, Archbishop Hélder Câmara and others. These are the great

souls who were willing to risk, to not be bystanders, to persist, to not despair, to reject the false dichotomy between charity and justice. She offers their inspiration so that her readers might realize not only that the time is now, but also that it is they who are the carriers of the prophetic tradition into the morass of the contemporary situation. To be a prophet demands not only a vision, but the commitment and courage to fix a "muddled," visionless world.

At one point, Chittister warns that if one speaks prophetically from within an institution, one will not be loved. Those who know her life and work are cognizant of the fact that this is a hard-won personal statement. For Chittister a prophet is a truth-teller, not an agitator, anarchist or traitor. The prophet is one who acts fearlessly and persistently for the sake of the world, the future and the Gospel.

The Time Is Now is a slim book. It is not an analytical study of any one of the myriad issues she raises: gun violence, refugees, capital punishment, nuclear weapons. Nor is it an in-depth study of the classic or contemporary prophetic tradition. Rather it is an oratorical and inspirational book meant to call all those who claim to be Christian. In its pages, one finds echoes of the hopeful proclamation of the Book of Wisdom: "In every generation Wisdom passes into holy souls, making of them friends of God and prophets." And Chittister would add: And now is the time, and the call is yours.

[Dana Greene's latest book is *Elizabeth Jennings: The Inward War* (Oxford University Press).]

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