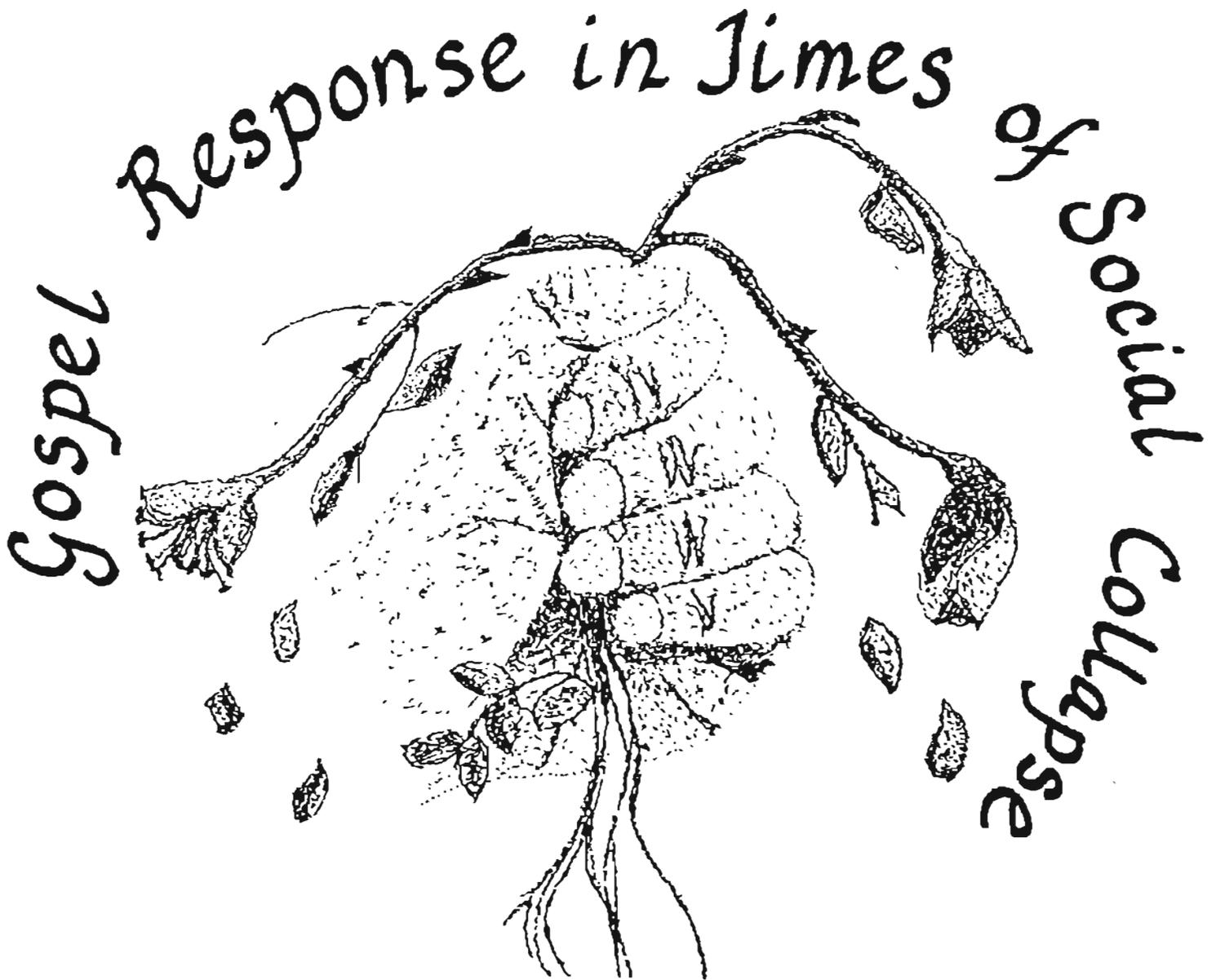


THE Round Table

Spring
1992

"...a path from where we are to where we should be." -- Peter Maurin



WHY THIS ISSUE?

In a conference to Buddhist and Christian monastics which Thomas Merton delivered the morning of the day he died in Bangkok, Thailand, he tells of his encounter with a young Tibetan Lama who was absent from his monastery when his country was invaded. When confronted with the dissolution of the climate created by familiar institutions and structures within which he lived, and faced with the decision of leaving his country, the young man did not know what do. He wrote to a friend, the abbot of a nearby monastery, asking:

'What do we do now?'

The abbot replied:

'From now on, everyone stands on their own feet!'

Merton thought this to be a very important statement for Christianity and Buddhism and urged the assembly that if they forgot everything else that was said, to remember it for the future.

We can no longer rely on being supported by institutions and structures that shape our lives and that may be destroyed at any moment by a precipitous political power or an opportunistic political agenda. We should respect usefulness in these things and strive to secure their integrity but we should not make them ends in themselves. When they are taken away, and when everything is taken away, what do we do next?

With caustic clarity that has become his signature, Mark Scheu opens the discussion on social collapse by sketching a detailed profile of the problem.

Jim Douglass takes us on a biblical odyssey through the structures of Roman Palestine/Galilee enabling us to recognize the presence of human violence and greed existing in our own institutions.

In providing a comprehensive historical perspective of the response of the Church at critical moments of social crisis, John Padberg, SJ suggests the creative potential present within social collapse.

Mary Ann McGivern, SL continues to invite us to look through the window of economic conversion to explore ways of humanizing our labor; and with personal poignancy Virginia Druhe affirms to us that the reign of God is at hand:

*... at our hands
... standing in our own place
... on our own feet*



-Tom Nelson, CM

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for The Round Table
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THE GREAT EXPERIMENT

by Mark Scheu

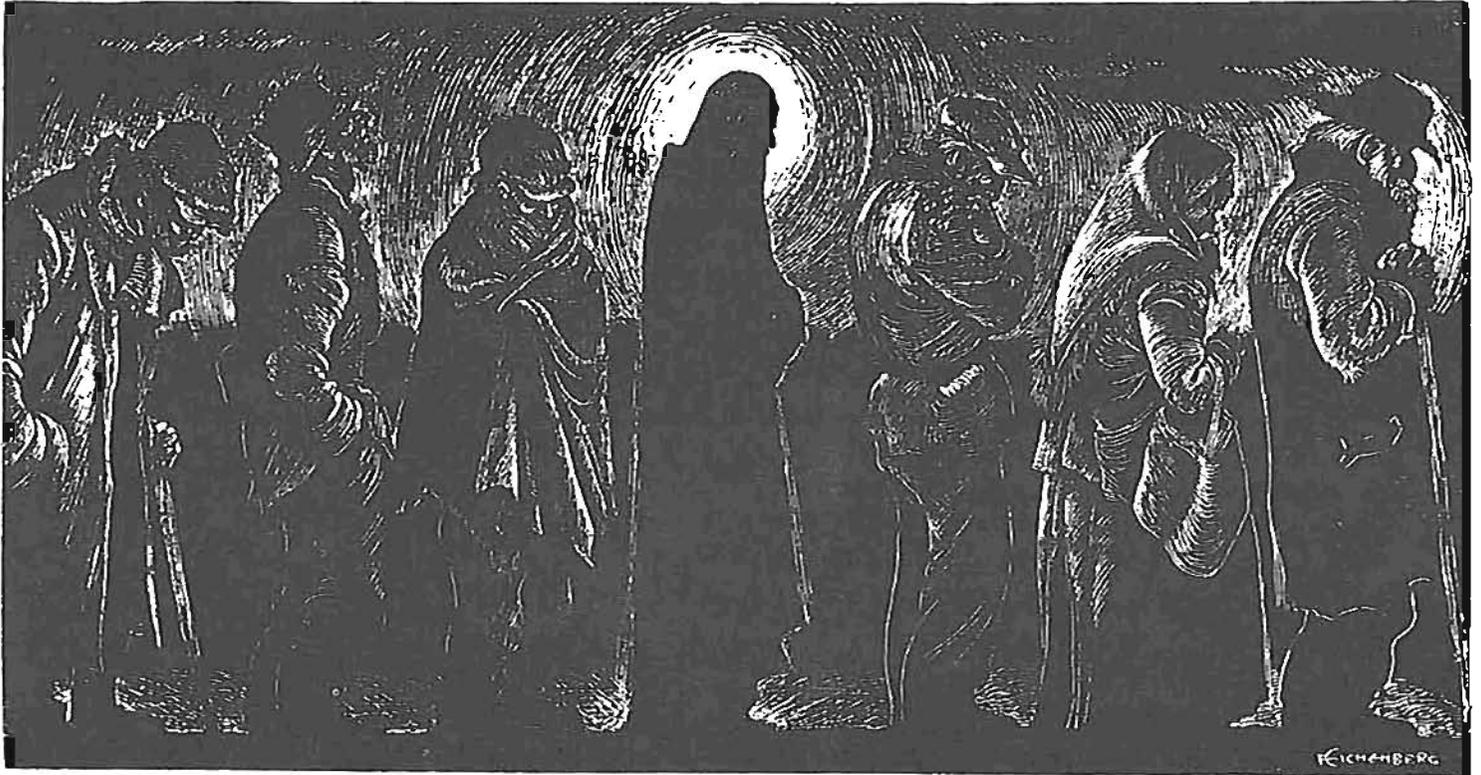
Our nation is in a state of social collapse. The distraction of endless entertainment, the sensationalism of media hype, and the pretenses of mendacious politicians can no longer obscure the stark reality of a disintegrating social order. The illusion of a renewed America that Reaganism fostered is imploding. It requires a supreme effort of self-delusion to sustain such a fantasy; and the reprieve of those who manage to stand apart from the suffering of the vast majority will be brief. "If the ship is sinking, those in the bilge drown first. So far the people in first class are glancing downward and remarking on the stupidity of the people drowning below." (Jim Chapin)

The symptoms of drowning are lapping at our feet. The last fifteen years have been characterized by enormous tax cuts for the rich, major cuts in social spending, deregulation of the economy, bailouts of corporations, a doubling of the military budget, and huge trade and budget deficits. In this time period the U.S. went from the world's largest creditor nation to the world's largest debtor. That quickly. There has been an equally dramatic shift in wealth, from the poor and the working classes to the U.S. elites. The gap between the richest and the poorest citizens is at its greatest since the Census Bureau began to record this data. The poorest 20% of the U.S. population receives only 3.8% of the net income, while the richest 20% receives 46.1%. The wealthiest 1% receives 14.7%! The top 10% of the population own 84% of the nation's assets. The poor are getting poorer and the rich are getting richer. This is called class polarization.



This trend is only accelerating. The average family income of the poorest fifth declined 6.1% from 1979 to 1987, while that of the wealthiest segment rose 11.1%. From 1973 to 1987 the median earnings of all young family heads dropped 24%. Most of the poor in the U.S. are full-time workers or their dependents. In 1979 a full-time worker at minimum wage pulled a family of three out of poverty. A decade later such an income would leave the same family 30% below the poverty level. In 1987, 31.5% of the work force is earning poverty-level wages. The number of poor families on welfare has increased more in the past two years than in the previous sixteen years. But benefits paid are about half of their mid-1970's dollar value. More than 28% of the poor received no assistance of any type in 1990, whether cash or noncash benefits.

Mark Scheu is enthralled at having discovered Ann, and the anarchist novelist B. Traven.



Yet in 1960 a C.E.O. made fifty times what a factory worker earned. In 1988 the same C.E.O. made ninety-three times the factory worker's income. During the 1980's U.S. corporations chose to send thousands of new jobs abroad, while thousands of other jobs were lost in bankruptcies, corporation downsizing and restructuring to increase profits. The government rewards speculative, not productive, investments. A trillion dollars was lost in the savings and loan debacle. The nation's economic resources are being sacrificed to the greed and profits of the few.

The poor and marginalized are suffering the most. One out of four children in this country are born into poverty. Half of all black children live in poverty. The U.S. ranks twenty-second in infant mortality. In the inner cities the infant mortality rate exceeds that of Honduras. One out of eight children goes hungry. According to the Luxembourg Income Study the child poverty rate in the U.S., after taxes and benefits are considered, is more than twice that

of Canada and four times the average of the other nations in the study (including Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway and the U.K.)!

Two-thirds of all mothers in the work force are raising their children alone or have a spouse who earns less than \$15,000 per year. Women make two-thirds of men's wages. More than 80% of full-time working women make less than \$20,000 a year, double the male rate. There is no national child care program. More than 35 million have no health insurance. Conditions are not improving. Requests for emergency food assistance increased 26% in 1991; requests for emergency shelter increased 13%.

These economic figures tell only part of the story. The U.S. ranks only 18th in school-age population per teacher. The conditions of our schools is deplorable, as depicted in Jonathan Kozol's Savage Inequalities. School funding is based largely on property taxes, which of course results in the grossly inequitable funding of schools. Education is increasingly separate and unequal and inadequate. The

National Testing Service found that U.S. 13 year-olds ranked last among a group of nations that included the U.K., Spain, Korea, and three Canadian provinces. Half of the 17 year-olds in this country lack the most basic reading, math and science skills.

Perhaps most revealing is the growing presence of crime in our society. The extent and nature of crime tells much about a society's state of health. The U.S. has the world's largest per capita prison population, greater than that of South Africa or the former Soviet Union. The rate of incarceration doubled in the 1980's. Four hundred and twenty-six out of every 100,000 are in jail. One in four black males is either in prison, on probation or on parole. Most of those imprisoned in the U.S. are young and poor, especially the minority poor. The U.S. has the highest murder rate and reported rape incidence among the industrialized countries. And the rate of violent crime continues to rise: 20% from 1989 to 1990 in large urban areas.

But violence is increasing not only in numbers but in cruelty, which reflects the deepening social and spiritual crisis of this country. One ex-



Joe Angert

ample among many is the beating, slashing, and hacking to death of a homeless man in New York City on Halloween by a gang of masked young men shouting "trick or treat." Murders are often committed by youth who express no remorse. They torment and kill not for money or out of a personal vendetta, as the victim is often not known. They lead truly desperate, meaningless, deprived lives with no hope and no sense of identity with society at large.

These alienated, self-destructive youth have been formed by a market culture where people live increasingly in social isolation. All that is held in common anymore is the desire to play out our roles as consumers and spectators. Our corporate market institutions command the political, social, and economic institutions and determine our culture. The primary motivation is to create profits and to reduce the public to consumers. The pursuit of private gain becomes the organizing principle of all aspects of social life. The intrinsic worth of a human life is no longer respected, as people are reduced to commodities themselves. Value is found only in what can be bought, sold, or possessed. As a result, it is not personhood, relationship, or knowing and loving which is valued, but control, domination and power. Life is competition, and only force and violence prevail. This is why our society is replete with crime, greed, consumerism, divorce, abortion, and the breakdown of family and community. Market society has matured to a state that breeds an ethic which is destructive of community, solidarity, and mutual aid-destructive of life.

The impoverishment of life suffered in the third world, and to which we have much contributed, has finally come home. We have been brought to this state not as a result of failed policies, but by our way of life. The great American experiment has failed, as Edward Abbey observed some years ago. "We have not become the society of independent freeholders that Jefferson envisioned; nor have we evolved into a true democracy government by the people as Lincoln imagined. Instead we see the realization of the scheme devised by Madison and Hamilton: a strong centralized state which promotes and protects the accumulation of private wealth on the part of the few, while reducing the majority to the role of dependent employees of state and industry. We are a nation of helots ruled by an oligarchy of techno-military-industrial administrators." ✦

A Biblical Perspective:

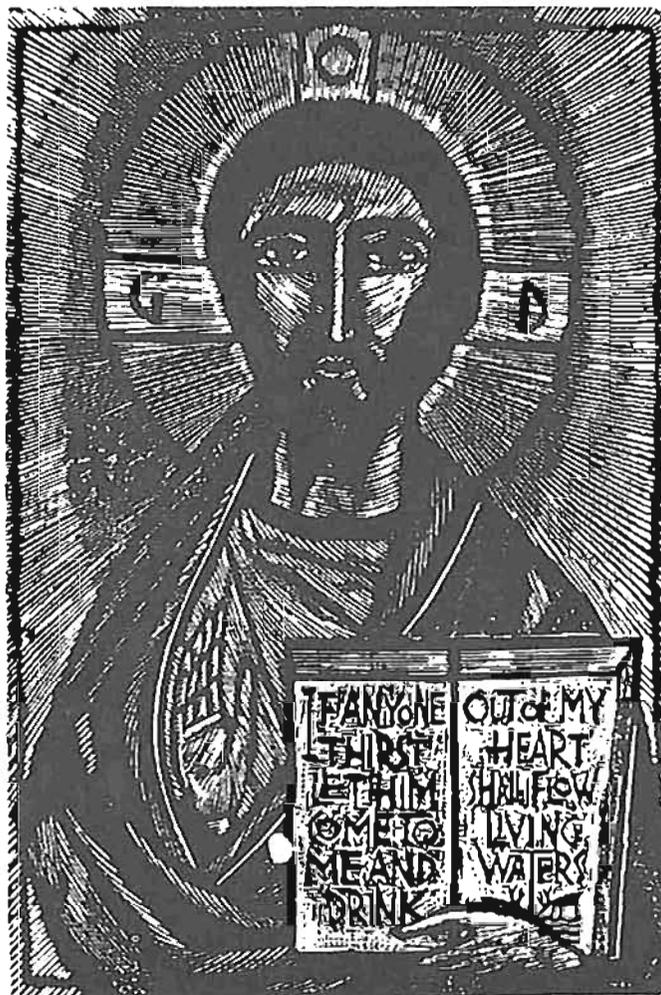
THE NONVIOLENT COMING OF GOD

by James Douglass

The message of Jesus is not only the proclamation of salvation, but also the announcement of judgment, a cry of warning, and a call to repentance in view of the terrible urgency of the crisis. The number of parables in this category is nothing less than awe-inspiring. Over and over again did Jesus raise his voice in warning, striving to open the eyes of a blind people.

Joachim Jeremias, *THE PARABLES OF JESUS*,

I first read these words about the terrible urgency of the crisis in Jesus' parables while I was serving a prison sentence for praying at nuclear weapons bunkers in the Bangor, Washington, Trident submarine base. The treasure of understanding Jesus' and his people's crisis (for they are one and the same) was to be found, as I gradually came to realize, not by traveling across the world in the minds of European theologians, but by seeing Jesus standing in the place where I stood, in prison. As a first-century Palestinian Jew, Jesus was in prison, a Roman prison about to explode. Jesus stood in that place where the wretched of the earth stand now. The crisis he experienced is the crisis experienced by hundreds of millions of colonized people who today live in prison - blacks in South Africa, students in China, peasants in Latin America favelas, Native Americans in reservations, Tibetan Buddhists in Tibet, Jews in the Soviet Union, Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. Jesus was in prison, as they today are in prison.



Lavrans Nelson

James Douglass is a writer who lives in Birmingham, Alabama. He invites you to obtain a copy of his book, The Nonviolent Coming of God, by writing Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 10545, or by calling toll free 1-800-258-5838. The price is \$13.95.

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Jesus' prison, like each of these prisons, had economic, cultural, and political dimensions. The land in which Jesus lived was controlled by Rome for a strategic reason. Rome's imperial strategy in the first century saw Palestine as a necessary barrier against Parthia, still a dangerous enemy to Rome, whose Tigris-Euphrates frontier was a mere few hundred miles from Palestine, separated by a desert no one could control. If the Parthians could take Palestine, Egypt would fall into their hands. Palestine was therefore a critically important area for Rome, analogous in importance to Afghanistan for the Soviet Union or Central America for the United States. The Roman Empire was not about to withdraw from Palestine, however strongly Jews felt about their freedom.

Rome exploited its Jewish subjects by heavy taxation, ranging from the standard tribute to numerous tolls collected by the local tax collectors, as seen in the gospels. A failure to render tribute to Rome was seen as rebellion. Refusal to pay taxes was, in fact, one of the decisive causes of the Jewish-Roman War.

Colonialism works through the power of indigenous ruling classes. Rome made skillful use of Israel's client-kings and priestly aristocracy. Besides its own procurators, Rome appointed Herodian client-kings to rule pieces of the divided land of Palestine. From 6 to 41 C.E. the high priests of the Temple in Jerusalem were also appointed by the representatives of the enemy oppressor, and they could retain their position only by keeping in their good books. The peasantry, who made up the great majority of the Jewish people, were thus controlled in political, economic, and cultural ways by Rome's procurators, client-kings, and the high priestly administration based in Jerusalem.

In Jesus' time much of the land in Galilee was owned by the ruler Antipas. The rest was controlled increasingly by a native aristocracy of priestly families centered in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Temple, built by Herod the Great, was the focus of both the devout worship by the Jewish population and of the power of the priestly aristocracy. The Temple treasury, controlled by the priests of the families named above, tithed the annual production of a farmer by more than twenty percent. This was in addition to Roman taxation of fifteen to twenty percent making a combined total of thirty-five to

forty percent of a farmer's production lost to taxation. The cumulative effect of that exploitation on the farming population throughout the first century was disastrous. Small farmers were devastated by double taxation, rising debt, loans they could not repay, and eventual confiscation of their land. Large estates held by absentee landholders grew rapidly, absorbing the many family farms lost through debt.

Once the peasants had lost their family farms, their downward spiral continued as they became tenant farmers or day laborers. Besides a minimum thirty-five percent taxation/tithe on production, a tenant farmer would have to pay twenty-five percent more to the new landowner. Any unexpected expense of a bad crop would mean another fall into debt. Farmers went from the cycle of self-subsistent

**Jesus stood in that place where
the wretched of the earth stand
now**

family farms, increasing debt, and loss of their land to the even worse cycle of tenant-farming, further debt, and finally debt bondage for themselves and their families under the large landholders. Might not peasants in twentieth-century Mexico or Brazil see similarities between Jesus' time and their own?

Some farmers withdrew from these cycles of destruction and joined the growing number of social bandits or "brigands" in the hills. There they were hunted down by Roman authorities, who not only took action against the brigands themselves but also intimidated and punished the villagers suspected of protecting the outlaws. The effect of such repressive violence was clearly to bring more people into opposition to the Roman-imposed order. Does any of this sound strangely familiar in our world where guerilla revolts arise from civil strife and famine? Vietnam, El Salvador, Afghanistan, Peru.

Given these complex conditions over-all, Galilee, where Jesus conducted most of his ministry, was a world sharply divided into two classes, the very (often remote) rich and the very poor, as we meet them in Jesus' parables. In the parables there are the wealthy and the impoverished: the rich man



The Good Shepard

Louise Foott

with his steward who, if dismissed, has only the alternatives of digging or begging (Luke 16:1-3); the rich man wearing purple and fine linen and Lazarus covered with sores lying at his gate (Luke 16:19-20); the prince setting off for his kingdom who entrusts to his servants only a trifling sum of money (Luke 19:13); the poor woman searching her house for a single precious coin (Luke 15:8-10); the poor widow pleading with the unjust judge for her rights (Luke 18:1-5); the rich man with his great harvest who plans to build bigger barns (Luke 12-16-20). Jesus' parables are peopled, on the one hand, with kings, masters, and vineyard owners, and on the other, with tenant farmers, day laborers, and slaves. Taken together, the divisions and conflicts in Jesus' parables reveal a world in crisis, on the edge of total violence.

Like all of Jesus' parables, the Parable of the Good Samaritan is about the kingdom of God. Every

parable Jesus told gives us a new and startling suggestion of what the kingdom of God is like. The kingdom of God, like the Human Being, was a symbol Jesus used to describe the breakthrough of Love in history, in the creation of a New Humanity. A breaking in of the kingdom of God is nothing that we can reasonably expect, though we can hope for it. Jesus suggests that the kingdom's shattering breakthrough into our lives may in fact be nothing that we want.

To understand Jesus' parable we have to begin, then, by realizing that the man in the ditch had a deep hatred and suspicion, nourished by his history and culture, for the man who out of compassion rescued him. Samaritans were hated enemies. Jesus is saying in his parable that the kingdom of God is like being saved from death by a hated enemy. The kingdom of God breaks into our lives in a form that we may not expect, in a form that we may in fact loath and want to destroy.

When we understand it in Jesus' context, the Parable of the Good Samaritan initially moves us to thank God that we, at least, are not lying in a ditch where we have to be saved from death by our enemy. But that is exactly what our situation is: We can only be saved from death by our enemy, and only if we believe in that enemy and are willing to

A breaking in of the Kingdom of God is nothing that we can reasonably expect, though we can hope for it.

be saved by him. Our enemy has been not a Samaritan, but a Communist. We are in the ditch of nuclear death, and during a now forgotten period in our recent history, Mikhail Gorbachev was the Good Communist attempting to rescue us from death.

Jesus' parable assumes that the Samaritan in our case, the Communist has a history and capability of violence which rightly (and righteously) preconditions our attitude toward him. Neither the Samaritan nor the Communist is a saint. On the contrary, the point of the parable is in the shocking reality, in our eyes, of a well-proven enemy with a violent history acting in a redemptive way toward us and if we refuse that redemptive action, the impossibility of our being saved from our own situation. Because the rejected Good Samaritan/Communist will then revert to our worst expectations of him as our enemy and will in turn use our violence to cover his own, as in Gorbachev's repression of Lithuania in January 1991, simultaneous with President Bush's triggering of the Persian Gulf War.

As Jesus' parable teaches us, we cannot be rescued from the ditch in which we are lying helpless unless we are willing to accept salvation from our enemy whether that enemy be Samaritan, Roman, Communist, Iraqi, Capitalist, or Third-World Terrorist.

Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan, like his teaching "love your enemies," confronts an impasse of total violence in his time by transforming it into the kingdom of God. Love your enemy is a hard saying because there is no other salvation in an age of violence than the God who comes to use through our enemies, the God of Nonviolent Transformation. The end of the world is transformed into the beginning of a new world by accepting the truth of my enemy.

The transformation of power, both human and divine, is a basic theme running through Jesus' parables. Because the nature of power can be transformed by a people realizing its own divine power, in the replacement of violent attitudes and injustices with the kingdom of God, the military power of Rome was irrelevant to Jewish freedom. Nonviolent liberation was in the hands of the Jewish people. Today nonviolent liberation is in the hands of every people.

This is the meaning of that bedrock text of the Jesus tradition, Luke 17:20-21: "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor



The Prodigal Son

Louise Foott

will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is within your power [entos humon]."

For Jesus, the kingdom of God encompassed both "within you" and "among you," but in a far more comprehensive grasp of liberation or better, transformation, than either of these understandings allowed. What Jesus proclaimed to the oppressed Galilean peasants was that the kingdom of God is "within your power," a divine power that is both within and among humanity. What he said, and practiced, was that the power of freedom for all the people in that Roman prison was in their hands, if they could only realize its divine presence. The alternative to that realization was destruction.

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The above article is excerpted with permission from Chapter 4 of The Nonviolent Coming of God by James W. Douglass, published by Orbis Books, 1991.

CHURCH COMMUNITIES IN TIMES OF CRISIS

by John W. Padberg, SJ

Members of the church or of more specialized communities within the church in a time of social collapse may feel the pain of that collapse all too vividly. And no one can tell another person that "No, there really isn't any pain there." But any historian dealing in large movements or great periods of time or shifts in meaning has to be very careful about what really is going on behind such terms as "members of the Church" or "Church communities" or "social collapse." Any period of great change or transition may well be seen as the descent of winter or the harbinger of spring. For example, what were the two hundred and fifty years between the end of antiquity under Emperor Diocletian (245-313) and the beginning of the middle ages with the baptism (496) of Clovis, the Frank? For Americans the question may have almost no feel; not only do we not have even that long a history as a nation, but many Americans seem to have little sense of history at all. Or, to go to another time period, were the roughly two hundred years of the Renaissance (c.1342-c.1527) a crisis that signalled the end of the Middle Ages and many of its values or an opportunity for new beginnings! Or what about the really brief but profound twenty-five years of the French revolution (1789-1814)? Did that quarter-century experience a fundamental social collapse on a huge and swift scale or the beginning of the opportunity, over the next two centuries, to institutionalize many of the liberties we now take for granted?

As if those questions were not enough for a vigorous debate, what were the experience and meaning of "church" and "members of the church,"

at any time in its history and in the three periods mentioned here? What about our own experience and meaning of those realities today?

To return to the basic question addressed by this essay, what were the responses of church communities in history to times of social collapse? Take simply the three periods already mentioned. First, between the end of antiquity and medieval beginnings, the Christian church increasingly became the glue that held together whatever was left of the old society and the soil from which sprang the new. The earliest Christian lay movements to flee the world for a life of contemplation began with individuals such as Anthony of Egypt (250-356). It did not take very long for those individuals to gather in communities. But while over the next several centuries such



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people were spurning the structures of everyday life to live out their vision of Christianity, the larger Christian community, especially in the persons of the bishops and increasingly the bishop of Rome, had to take on many of the functions of civil society and government which were collapsing around them.

But however much those organized communities of men and of women gave up the world around them, they could not escape completely its secular social norms. For instance, such norms in late Roman times almost always restricted the activities of women to the home (and then to the convent). At the same time, the original purpose of many communities changed to meet changing circumstances.

Try to imagine the social collapse that came with death rates ranging from twelve to seventy percent of the population, depending on the region.

For instance, male communities, originally concerned only with life internal to their membership, gradually went out into the world to evangelize the tribal newcomers in western Europe. The answers to the question of the way in which church communities of those transition years responded to social collapse would have to be many.

Leap, now, almost nine hundred years (about four times as long as the United States has existed) to the beginning of the Renaissance around 1342 with the publication of Petrarch's *Italia mia*. And then carry that Renaissance forward at least two centuries more until 1527 and the Sack of Rome. In summary, we often tend to imagine that period as a homogeneous experience of the rediscovery of the glories of classical Greece and Rome and of the value and beauty of human nature as such. It surely did have those obvious characteristics. But look at just two other major experiences of those two hundred years.

The head of the church, the bishop of Rome, had been absent from Rome, living and reigning since 1308 at Avignon in present-day France. From 1378 on, in the Great Schism, there were two and sometimes three claimants to the papal throne, good and holy people as well as scoundrels supported the claimants on all sides. And that collapse of religious authority took place in the context of the recurrent Black Death or the Plague which had come to west-

ern Europe in 1347. Within three years it had spread all over Europe, as far west as England, as far north as Scandinavia, as far east as Poland. The plague raged again and again for two hundred years and continued on less intensely for another two centuries. Try to imagine the social collapse that came



with death rates ranging from twelve to seventy percent of the population, depending on the region. Put it in contemporary terms for ourselves among the almost two and one half million men and women of the St. Louis metropolitan area. Imagine our social, physical, psychological, economic, religious collapse if in a few short years from three hundred thousand to one and three-quarters million people here were dying and dead in the streets. During the first thirty years of the Black Death the overall loss of life in Europe was no less than forty percent. In terms of the present United States population that would be about one hundred million people dead, in numbers so great that they would overwhelm almost all the usual care-giving structures. The ambiguity and the scandal of the Great Western Schism was followed by the reconsolidation of papal power. And then, the just as scandalous worldliness of Renaissance prelates and popes brought on a cynicism about many of the Church's claims and practices. That reaction, taking place in the context of the increasing individualism of Renaissance men and women, contributed to the growth of a highly individual, highly personal piety. Church communities, of course, still existed, but a person's encounter with God became socially less communitarian and psy-

continued on page 14

ZEN POEM

'How I long for supernatural powers!
said the novice mournfully
to the holy one.
I see a bent old woman
I want to say, Be Healed!
I stand before a dead man
I long to say, Arise!
Alas, I feel like a dry stick in paradise.
Master, help me, confer on me
supernatural powers!'

The old man shook his head fretfully,
'How long have I been with you.'
he groaned
'and you know nothing.
How long have you known me
and learned nothing.

'Listen. I have walked the earth
end to end, these eighty years.
Have stood beside
the newborn, the ill, the dying.

'Little could I do,
next to nothing!
the ruse of power
the rush of pride
passing me by.

'I confess to you
never once
have I healed
the ills
of human kind
never
from their dwellings
summoned the dead.

'We thrive, we sicken
soon, late, under
a stigma of frost or fire.

'And what is soon or late
to you or to me -
but the turn of the wheel
but the way of birth
but the gateway to paradise?



'Supernatural powers!
I confess to you
sprout without root
root without flower -
I know nothing
of supernatural powers.
I have yet to perfect
these natural powers!



'Go join the circus
tricksters will train you
in deception for dimes.

'Bird man, bag man,
spouting fire, moon crawling
at sea forever -
supernatural powers!

'Do you seek miracles?
Go
draw water
hew wood
break stones!

'I offer a koan:
Enter a dark time
then a red time
then a green time.

'Endure in the dark time
bleed in the red time
walk free in the green time!

In the dark time
deceive no one
in the red time
kill no one
in the green time
contemn no one.

Then you will behold
the irresistible power
of natural powers -
of height, of joy,
of soul, of non belittling.

Then
angels and you will trace
round and round and round -
an inch, a mile,
the earth's vast compass -
a liberated zone
a paradise!

Daniel Berrigan, S.J.

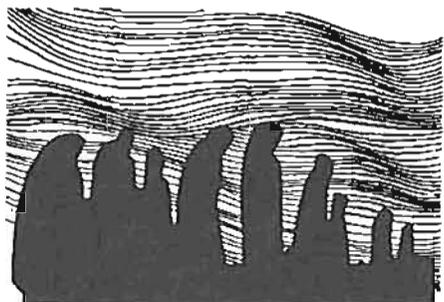
'To see and not be seduced
to hear and not be deafened
to taste and not be consumed
to touch and not be tricked

'But you -
would you walk water
would you master air
would you swallow fire?

'Go ride with eagles
they will hatch you, nest you
eaglet and airman.

(The author read this poem as a part of his address:
**Doing What We Say: Christians and Peacemaking
After the War.**)

chologically more a one-to-one relationship. One example of that individualism even in communitarian circumstances would be the Brethren of the Common Life, both clerics and laymen, who originally took no vows, and often continued their ordinary occupations. The Imitation of Christ, first put into circulation in 1418 and one of the supremely influential books on Christian life in the history of the church, is an example of such individualistic piety. On the other hand, the Black Death with all its horrors called to the most devout souls to work together in putting into practice the love of God shown in the love for others. In the midst of the plague, pious lay people constituted themselves as communities dedicated to nursing the sick, praying for the dying and burying the dead. One such community founded in the 1400s that has flourished right to our own day is the Alexian Brothers.



The People Of God Continue To March

Eda Corbin

Later on, even in the midst of the utter scandal of the lives of Roman prelates and popes, reform movements began right in the midst of the papal court itself. Such movements helped prepare the way for the widespread change for the better that began with Pope Paul III (1534-49) and the Council of Trent (1545-63) and the rise of new religious orders and the reform of older ones.

Two hundred and fifty years after the conclusion of Trent (again a period longer than the history of United States), the French Revolution began (1789). For the next twenty-five years until the fall of Napoleon (1814), the results of more than a thousand years of European history were called into question, modified, overturned. To speak only of the Catholic Church, political possessions were lost; sources of financial support were expropriated; dioceses were abolished; religious orders were suppressed; worship was at various times forbidden; clergy and laity and religious were persecuted, ex-

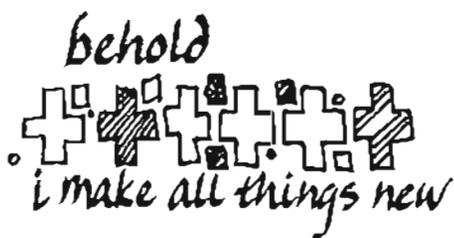
iled, murdered. The whole external institutional structure of the church since the time of Charlemagne came close to being destroyed. When Pius VI died in exile in French captivity in 1799, some of the revolutionaries took it as a sign of the death rattle of the church on the eve of a glorious new century of progress.

When Pius VII, himself a prisoner of Napoleon from 1809 to 1814, finally returned to Rome, it seemed as if almost everything in the life of the church had to be rebuilt. Unfortunately, so great was the reaction to what had come from the so-called "Principles of '89" in both state and church, that both had a very hard time seeing the good that many of those principles embodied. "Liberty, equality, fraternity," desirable in themselves, became identified in the minds of most practicing Christians with the excesses of the Revolution. Such accomplishments as freedom of worship, extension of suffrage, elected government, liberty of the press, were as much anathema to hierarchy and papacy as to many of the secular governments as well. In the alliance of "throne and altar" each relied on the other for support. The papacy itself reestablished its administration, now more centralized than ever, to cope with increasingly centralized governments.

At the same time, the Romantic movement with its idealization of a Christian past, sympathy for the undoubted heroism of Pius VII and a great revival of religious practice all contributed to an extraordinary period of growth for the church in the nineteenth century. Everywhere for the next hundred years, small groups of laymen and laywomen gathered to pray, to preach the gospel and to serve others in material ways. But almost always what began as lay groups constituted themselves within a few years as religious congregations of brothers, nuns and priests because the idea of existing as a permanent, independent lay group almost never even occurred to these women and men. Truth to tell, there really was at that time no structured place within the church for such lay groups and no consciousness among the larger society of their desirability. These new religious congregations fundamentally exhibited the same impulses that had existed in the time of the first example in this essay. But to a great extent they did so in ways responsive to the nineteenth century. The first impulse, to leave the world for a life of uninterrupted prayer, became

incarnate in the foundation or revival of a great number of contemplative, cloistered congregations. The preaching of the Gospel led to the establishment of more orders destined for the foreign missions than in any previous century. The service of others resulted in the founding of more apostolically active orders in the nineteenth century than in all of prior church history. And for the first time the apostolically active congregations of women religious were overwhelmingly more numerous than the contemplative cloistered groups.

For the three quite different periods used as examples here, as well as for five times that many, several important, general, similar characteristics describe, in at least a partial way, how church communities respond to times of social collapse. First, small groups arise within the larger church to call it to reform, to keep it faithful to its original mission, to emphasize a facet of the Lord's teaching and life that has suffered neglect, to respond to a particular crisis, to be a Gospel witness, sometimes only by silence and suffering, in the midst of the storm. The desert hermits, the informal reform groups in the papal court, the new orders at the time of the Reformation and Trent, the teaching, nursing and contemplative congregations in the nineteenth century are examples of this. Secondly, even when starting out as counter-cultural, such groups cannot help but be influenced, for good or for bad, by their surrounding culture. The desert hermits often had a contempt for the body influenced by Stoicism and neo-Platonism; the nineteenth century groups were as conservative politically as most Christians then were. Thirdly such groups often recognize and react only to current



circumstances and not to the underlying causes of those circumstances which make them problems or opportunities. There were men and women who fed the hungry and sheltered the homeless in times of famine, but had no idea that famine was regularly inevitable under the prevailing system of grain distribution. The fourteenth and fifteenth century lay groups helped the plague stricken and buried the dead but did not and, at that time, could not know how to prevent or forestall the

plagues. Fourth, the life of the larger church meanwhile goes on, of course, and it also will of necessity respond to a social collapse. At times it attempted to do so by taking on the responsibilities of a civil society that could no longer carry those tasks, as at the time of the breakup of the old Roman empire. At other times, so preoccupied with its own internal problems, the church leaves to individuals or spontaneously forming groups the response to such a collapse, as with the Black Death and the rise of lay confraternities. Fifth, in seeking to respond to the crises brought on by such a collapse, the center, in the institution of the papacy, almost has to gather power to itself. It did so in a post-Renaissance response to the Protestant Reformation under a series of strong-minded and strong-willed reforming popes. It did so, too, in the nineteenth century aftermath of the French Revolution in an increasingly centralized papal government in response both to the breakup of the old operating structures of church and state and the introduction of increasingly centralized governments. Sixth and last, any social collapse inevitably brings with it disorder, social, structural and psychological, but most human beings can stand only so much disorder and yearn for predictability and stability. So the impulse toward the restoration of order, even if it has to be imposed, is very strong, and a reaction in favor of a conservative, sometimes nostalgically conceived past, is almost inevitable, at least for a time. Such a reaction took place in the larger society in all of our examples, and it happened in the church too, and it happened also in the small, newly-arising groups of laymen and laywomen and in religious congregations.

None of this will foretell an inevitable future for us but it may help us understand the contexts of our present circumstances. Any future depends on the clear-sightedness and conviction and courage of men and women who can see alternatives and can see the contexts that make such alternatives possible and desirable.

The study and the writing of history is in so many ways "a struggle against anachronism, an effort to define those aspects of contemporary understanding that separate us from the past." To bring about such understanding we have to know that past and enter into it with an empathetic imagination. When we do so, then as Christians we can better use that knowledge and imagination to work for a future in concert with a God who in Scripture told us, "Behold I make all things new." ✦

THE REAL NEW WORLD ORDER

by Virginia Druhe

Where among us do we see anything that might resemble the reign of God? I have lived with this question the past several months and been surprised at the variety of people, institutions and events that have caught my attention. I think of groups of landless families in Latin America who organize carefully for months, and then invade unoccupied land, laying out streets, lots and cardboard homes overnight to create a new, shared and very poor society. I think of the Highlander Center in the hills of eastern Tennessee which for thirty years has trained ordinary people to take leadership of their own struggles for labor rights, civil rights, environmental rights. It is small, unendowed, unnoticed. Yet it transforms people, and has played an important role in transforming economic and social relationships in our nation.

I think of the dramatic nonviolent collapse of dictatorships in Eastern Europe, the Philippines, and much of Africa in the last decade. This is not to suggest that any of the new governments are the reign of God, but that radical unforeseen transformations toward freedom and dignity are occurring through the power of truth and nonviolence.

I also think of individuals like Archbishop Romero, who clung to no form of power other than service to the poorest, who spoke boldly of a society that would center on their needs, and who in doing so transformed his church. I think of a small theater group in Honduras formed of untrained campesinos that speaks truth to power and to the powerless. I think of the twelve step movement across our land and around the world, slowly, quietly, powerfully changing hearts and relationships. I think of women with great courage opposing violence against themselves and their children in their own homes.

Yet the place where I think I most personally recognize the reign of God is as foolish as the parables of Jesus: The reign of God is like the clothes room at

Karen House ... there is abundance for all, and in receiving, people become generous. On the surface it is an exceedingly small and unimportant thing. The New World Order is pauperizing millions around the globe, and the reign of God, perhaps, is like a small clothes room in a forgotten neighborhood that serves 100 people.

Yet it has its wonder. All the clothes are brought to our door without our asking for them or seeking them. Those with excess create abundance



The Good Samaritan

Louise Foot

for us in need. By someone else's initiative the poor are provided not just with what is necessary, but with an abundance of clothing, much of which is very good and beautiful.

One of my favorite memories is of a rainy afternoon when a woman from the neighborhood was looking over the racks as I sorted out sacks of donations. I pulled out a very expensive and sophisticated black cocktail dress just her size, so I held it up and asked her if she would be interested in it. Tears sprang

Virginia Druhe celebrates the coming of spring and eagerly anticipates her upcoming return to El Salvador this summer.

to her eyes as she looked at the dress and she said, "And Friday is my birthday!" I have no idea where she could have gone in that dress on her birthday, and perhaps she only sat at home in it. But for me that kind of unsought extravagance is like the reign of God.

Perhaps those who bring the clothes are transformed, I don't know. I know the women who use the room are. They are clothed in dignity. I find that a powerful metaphor. The first times people visit the room they carry out clothes by the trashbagful. And given that dignity so freely, they return it. It's not unusual for one or two women to stay to help straighten up or to sort new clothes. More remarkably, after only a brief while they begin giving to each other. Even if two women find and want the same item, it quickly becomes, "Go on and take it, it goes with your shoes." "Are you sure? Don't you want it?" "No, I don't really need it." "No, you take it..."

In being given even this little, women's sense of themselves is changed, their relationships with others change, and the economic structures of our society are turned on their head.

I am also transformed in this process. The clothes room is a small part of my life. Often I work there thoughtlessly. The reign of God has slipped into my life in a way I would not have chosen. It is not effective enough. I want to convert the military industrial complex, not simply give away clothes. I am a stickler about mutual responsibility in relationships. I do the clothes room because it is possible, because it is at hand, not because I really believe that just giving things away is the reign of God.

In the clothes room I have had to admit to some things about myself. Slowly, I've had to admit that I'm ornery about people not making a mess in there. Is that part of the reign of God? I hate to shop and have always thought I'm not a consumer, but I love opening the bags and exploring the colors and textures and shapes inside. I don't only distribute clothes, I take some, and I take more than I need. I violate my own commitment to poverty. Is this the reign of God? I don't know. I know I share this need with our guests.

In this quiet, ongoing exchange, differences between "the poor" and myself, between the poor and the middle class are rubbed away. It turns out that everybody gets a wedding garment, because everybody needs one. It is so ridiculously small, but it is personal, concrete, ongoing. It has changed me profoundly.

The reign of God as preached by Jesus in the Scriptures has these two paradoxical characteristics: it is "at hand" and it is difficult to recognize. These parameters certainly describe the confusion of many of us today. In faith in Jesus we believe the reign of God is begun though not completed; that it is active among us and available to us. And we most often do not know where.

The eye attuned to grandeur or effectiveness will not see the reign of God.

There are other qualities of the reign of God, especially as described in the parables and the Sermon on the Mount, that contribute to this paradox of hidden availability. The reign of God is very small and easily overlooked, like a mustard seed. At full growth it is only a large shrub, not even a tree, much less a cypress or redwood. The eye attuned to grandeur or effectiveness will not see the reign of God.

The reign of God will be revealed to us by our enemy –the Good Samaritan, the Canaanite woman, the Roman Centurion. The proud or certain heart will not recognize it. The reign of God is contained in the dirty and rejected. Leaven, for the Hebrew people, was rotted bread, a sign of contamination. Anyone who keeps themselves too clean will miss it.

The reign of God is dynamic, like leaven. Anyone who is settled and secure will miss it. So there are many obstacles within each of us, and among us, that prevent us from seeing and enjoying God's transforming reign.

There is another, saving characteristic of God's reign, which is that it is God's. While we can hasten its coming, it is God's work of transformation and at God's initiative, not ours. The reign of God seeks us, like the woman seeking her coin, like the shepherd seeking the last sheep.

And finally, because God's reign is as it is - without power except through love and service, accepting all who want to enter regardless of "worth" - it is opposed. The reign of God does not eliminate the cross, but leads to it. Jesus did not announce the initiation of the reign of God after the crucifixion, but before. Small wonder we feign stupidity in finding God's reign. It will convert us within and without, it will establish a new order, it will restructure tangible relationships among us, and it will cost. It also brings great joy. ✝

FROM LATIN AMERICA

by Bob Corbett

I'm writing this article in Haiti and feeling very low indeed. There had been a short spurt of hope after Jean-Claude Duvalier fled in February of 1986, but that was virtually snuffed out one and a half years later when the army and Tonton Macoute thugs destroyed the presidential elections of November, 1987. A second surge of hope lifted Haiti in December, 1990, when Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected president. On January 7, 1991 the people rallied to squelch a coup attempt, and Aristide began to lead Haiti into a hope come true. After only eight months in office, a coup d'état deposed Aristide and now only three short months later, Haiti has been plunged back into conditions of terror and hopelessness worse than anything since the terrible days of Papa Doc Duvalier.

I've been coming to Haiti for eight years, having made more than twenty visits. I've never seen things so bad, people living in such terror, less hope. There had been a mushrooming of "ti legliz" groups—little churches, the equivalent of the base communities in Latin America. Now progressive priests and "ti legliz" leaders are in hiding, many have already been killed. In one mountain village when a leader got away, Macoutes pulled the teeth of his two small daughters. This barbaric act is symptomatic of the terror in Haiti today. It weighs heavily on my soul.

How has Haiti become this land of poverty, misery and hopelessness? This tragic and ironic story begins in French slavery. The French men, using slave women for their sexual gratification, created a special class of freed slaves. Most were light-skinned mulattoes. Worried deeply by their second class citizenship, they tried to out-French the French in imitating European values. They scorned anything that had to do with their black and African roots. They spoke French and avoided Creole; prac-



Jeff Finnegan

ticed Catholicism and verbally denied Voodoo; often treated their own slaves more harshly than did the French.

After the slave revolution of 1791-1803 created a free and independent all-black nation, these mulattoes joined forces with black army leaders to create an elite class. The mulattoes traditionally controlled trade and land while the black elite controlled the army and government graft.

The masses of illiterate ex-slaves tolerated the exploitation by the 3% of the population which constituted the elite. The masses were continuing to retreat into the mountains and live lives of subsistence farming, keeping alive the African family and social customs, the Voodoo religion and developing the Haitian language. Effectively there were two countries: the official Republic of Haiti ruled by 3% of the populace, and the Haiti of the 97% poor, but

Bob Corbett is a peripatetic philosopher who can be found at Webster University or in Haiti with his family or students.

mainly happy and satisfied, peasant class who lived in relative isolation in the mountains.

However, by the early 20th century the population growth began to put pressure on subsistence farming and a non-subsistence misery replaced the idyllic life of rural Haiti. This misery forced the peasants into more contact with the Republic of Haiti in which they dwelt, and subjected them to greater and greater degrees of exploitation.

Today Haiti remains essentially a pre-industrial, pre-democratic state. The masses (85% or more) are illiterate, politically naive and powerless, unarmed, recoiling in terror from the onslaught of an army which is struggling to maintain the ancient system of control.

The United States government and virtually all other major industrial powers have acquiesced and abetted the status quo in Haiti.

How does one even begin to interact with Haiti? My personal view is that direct political action in the United States is a virtual waste of time.

Further, while extremely appealing at a personal level, I don't believe direct service of food, medicine or personal or familial charity is of much long-term benefit. What seems to help are foreign supported projects in small villages which begin to develop local democracies and autonomy by helping the "ti legliz" groups learn the value of joint communal action through small, group-centered development projects.

Haitians suffer desperately in their current environment of political oppression and terror. But there are no quick fixes. The people must learn the value of determined group action, the power of literacy, a sense of inquiry and critical assessment and the mechanics of political power, all of which are needed to struggle against such an oppressive system.

I invite you to join our organization, PEOPLE TO PEOPLE, in supporting such development projects in Haiti. Please contact us for a sample copy of our quarterly magazine about Haiti and our work there.



FROM KAREN HOUSE

by Kris Dennis

Winter is over. It was a mild winter. Sources say that it had been the warmest recorded this century. Winter is winter all the same. I miss being close to the sun.

Now that spring is here, I have to reflect on last spring. It was a year ago when I first came to Karen House. During the long five hour train ride to St. Louis, I thought of all the hopes and fears about what was (or wasn't) going to happen. When the community welcomed me into their home, I knew that many of the comforts I had taken for granted would no longer be available. A short year later, I still wrestle with the concept of voluntary poverty. I also struggle with trying to share myself with people, my feelings about life, and the world in which we live.

It's these times when I reflect on the gifts I



have been given. These gifts are: the guests' laughter, Virginia's thoughtfulness, Sennora's wisdom, Mark's humor, Tim's solitude, Teka's energy, Jim's devotion, Katrina's creativity, Ben's spirituality, Sharon's strength, Terri's happiness, Ellen's philosophy, Myrrah's dance, Delores' history, Cain and Abels' (the dogs) companionship, and the love and support of my family.

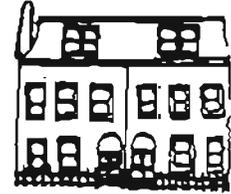
Most of the time I'm not really sure what I'm going to do about tomorrow. I was always taught to have some kind of plan. But living with the women and children who come to the house has taught me that even the best-laid plans can go astray. So, with the gifts I have been given, I plan to live today and hope for tomorrow. It's these gifts, and several others, that have carried me through the winter and into spring.



Kris Dennis has proven to be a great cook and is looking for a soul mate. She shares her art work with us for the first time.

FROM LITTLE HOUSE

by Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.



One of the first economics books I ever read was E.F. Schumacher's Small Is Beautiful. His "issues of scale" struck deep responsive chords within me and, to this day, I resonate to opportunities for adjusting the scale of our economy down to manageable size. Peter Maurin's call, too, for society structures that help people to be good, has one answer in the choice to be small. I think we have a big opportunity now to make that choice and adjust the scale of U.S. participation in the global economy.

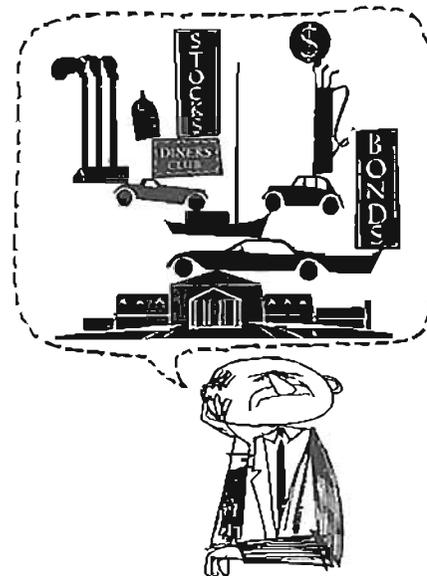
I've lived in St. Louis for the 20 years now, studying and opposing the principles and practices of McDonnell Douglas and General Dynamics, the two largest for-profit arms makes in the world. I experience them as inexorable both in their manufacture and sale of weapons of destruction and in their economically destructive behavior—diverting our labor, capital and technology from civilian production; generating profits that smaller, leaner firms could not hope to match; refusing to consider the human implications of their research and sales policies; and refusing to consider, much less make, conversion plans.

In the next few years, the multinational military manufactures may prove to be dinosaurs—on their way to extinction. But whether or not the giant corporations survive, smaller firms must face the task of reindustrialization. The issue is not making the U.S. number one again, but using our industrial capacity for the good of the globe.

St. Louis industry has revolved around McDonnell Douglas which employs 32,000 and has close to 1500 subcontractors here. The next arms manufacturer in size is ESCO with 2300 jobs. Most of the St. Louis arms contractors and subcontractors are metal, plastic, or electronics job shops with fewer than 50 workers. These men and women are often very highly skilled, able to set up and run three or more machines to close tolerances, read blueprints,

and make some repairs and programming changes. But owners very rarely share decision-making power with these employees about quality control, nor do they view their participation as essential to company success. They don't offer on-the-job training or profit sharing as production incentives.

These small firms are savvy competitors. They have had to bid against each other for contracts and subcontracts and to meet each other in the marketplace. But in this bankrupt U.S. economy, that's about the only resource they've got. They have relied on the arms market for a third or more of their contracts and now they're in trouble.



They need to retool. They need to upgrade their CAD and CAM capabilities. They need to retrain management and labor to total quality production and learn how to leverage business skills to capture new markets. They need to listen to and utilize workers' and middle management's production and sales ideas. They need to learn new ways to do business. One of the multinational arms firms, Rockwell International, calls this Continuous Process Improvement (CPI) and is sending the whole

Mary Ann McGivern, SL, welcomes new tenants from Karen House in hopes of grooming new gardeners.

workforce, beginning with the Board of Directors, to CPI boot camp. Small firms don't need as much retraining as the big ones; but CPI boot camp would be a good idea for most.

Small business needs a lot of help, some of it from government. Two of the simpler remedies government can offer are financial aid and infrastructure repair. But local reindustrialization depends on internal choices by the businesses themselves for strategies that use the talent of the workforce, approach 100% quality control, and find specialized market niches. One such powerful strategy is flexible manufacturing networks.

...owners very rarely share decision-making power with these workers about quality control, nor do they view their participation as essential to company success.

Flexible manufacturing networks (FMNs) have satisfied Italian textile firms and German machine shops and even Japanese computer chip makers that smaller is both more profitable and more satisfying work. The Italian structure (begun by blacklisted Communist machinists in the '50s) is to form a consortium and bid jointly within the consortium for jobs that are too big for any one company. Manufacturers often have several joint ventures in operation, all at different stages. When a job is completed, the participating firms separate. Everybody learns new methods of production, marketing, and quality and sales go up. The consortium develops loan packages for its members, seeks new markets, and may house research and development efforts on their behalf. In Italy, these small businesses, defined as 22 or fewer workers including a full-time owner/manager, are known as artisan firms and are eligible within their consortiums for several financial aid packages.

European and Asian small manufacturers are finding niches where flexibility, timeliness, quality, and innovation are demanded—characteristics



the big firms just don't have. Instead of supplying discrete parts to the multinationals who dictate terms, FMNs cooperatively manufacture complete components and proprietary products. Their strong links with other job shops balance their subcontracting connections to giant corporations and give them parity in negotiations. Decentralized production utilizes and fosters the skills and initiative of entrepreneurs. I think Peter Maurin would love it.

Flexible manufacturing networks are not a guarantee of a just economic system of production—but they are a window of opportunity. FMNs enhance the benefits of being small, and it is easier to be just when the scale is small. FMNs enhance cooperative effort and learning because feedback about the benefits and failures is quick. It is easier to be just in a cooperative than a competitive setting.

Finally, FMNs make it possible for a region to choose deliberately to seek one or more socially useful production niches. Firms in Akron, Ohio have developed the capacity to bid on and manufacture jointly kitchens for people with severe disabilities. They maintain their other contracts; but the kitchen subcontracts are new work that open new avenues of work development. Consortiums could make other tools for the disabled like children's go-carts that won't tip and wheelchairs that climb stairs; they could bid jointly on systems, and mass transit components.

The multinational military manufacturers have created a system of dependent subcontractors whose old way of doing business is blocked by the brick wall budget cuts. The subs can downsize or close; or they can choose to do business differently.



FROM OUR MAILBAG



Dear Editor,

Enclosed is a check for to support your work. I send this for all the work you do for the poor, hungry, neglected and abused. I admire you for your work with them and know you are a dedicated people.

I so much disagree with many of your articles in The Roundtable; sometimes am tempted to send the money somewhere else.

This issue, especially the article by Jim Plato, many things are true, but so many are not. It seems so often that if you do not see things the way Jim does, you must be wrong.

So often the U.S. is criticized. Many of the problems talked about, the U.S. is wrong. What other country could you be so free to criticize.

There are so many people in our parishes that are beautiful Christian people. Why not talk about them sometime. We are here to teach by example. Sometimes it is harder to live in the community with many with whom we disagree, than live only with those who share our vision.

Most of the priests I know do not have to turn 'beet red', but are going about their daily routine of following Christ with the sick of body and mind each day.

Let us continue to pray for each other, and know, that there are many ways, sometimes different than our own, to share the Body and Blood of Christ.

Sincerely,
Mildred Tichacek
Saint Louis, Missouri



Dear Friend,

Recently I returned from a long and arduous journey through the Middle East with the American Friends Service Committee and I saw how each side could not acknowledge the suffering of the other side, not the harm each had done to the other. I wonder if the time has come for a new American peace initiative. I'd like to share it with you.

I have long recognized that we Americans are in denial about the terrible suffering we have inflicted through our wars, our invasions, our massacres, and our efforts to control other people. It occurs to me that an act for helping heal ourselves and enabling some Americans to come out of denial might be to initiate a new kind of pilgrimage. To do this I suggest we follow the lead of the Vietnam Vets Restoration Project. They returned to Vietnam to acknowledge the suffering they had caused, made their amends by rebuilding a clinic they had destroyed, and asked for forgiveness from the Vietnamese.

Is it time some of us began such pilgrimages? We could go in any size groups from two or three to one hundred or more - to every area where we have fought a war. We could acknowledge the harm we have done, be prepared to make amends suitable to the area, and ask for forgiveness.

If we are faithful to our charge and blame no one, judge no one, this tiny trickle of people might grow - just as the Vietnam Vets Project is growing. Perhaps such an example might help bring the awakening we need to become a peaceful people.

Peacemaking now seems to me to be a healing as well as a political process. Perhaps our efforts may be more fruitful if we add this dimension to them.

In peace,
(Ms.) Gene Knudsen Hoffman
Santa Barbara, California

by Barb Prosser

"When you arise in the morning, give thanks for the morning light. Give thanks for your life and your strength. Give thanks for your food and for the joy of living. And, if you see no reason for giving thanks, rest assured the fault is in yourself."

Native American Sioux Indian Prayer

I am just completing my first year as administrator of a nursing facility in Red Bud, Illinois. It has been a year filled with challenges and opportunities, and it has been a tiring year, as well I often think that our theme of "Hope in the midst of suffering" was chosen to express my experiences of the past 12 months, although, for me, it could be more accurately be phrased as "Hope in the midst of frustration". Frustration seems to be the form of suffering to which I am most often drawn. My natural instinct seems to be to plug into those problems at my work which are most draining and exasperating.

On top of my continuing experience of frustration, the daily news of the world often speaks of more despair than I can bear to hear. It is hard to discern the meaning of my actions in a world where one life seems insignificant.

These are the times that I need to test myself and to draw on signs of hope. I know that they are out there. And, if I look close enough, I can name some of them:

- the recent South African election in which people voiced overwhelming support for the goal of creating a united black/white government.
- the heartwarming selection of Carolyn Moseley Braun as a candidate who may become the first woman of color to win a seat in the United States Senate.
- the recognition given to Katherine Dunham for her contributions to the arts and for her choice to share her gifts with the people of East St. Louis and now, especially, for her witness on behalf of the Haitian refugees.

On a personal level, the challenges of my work seem overwhelming sometimes. Many days, working with limited resources to serve a high Medicaid population in a rural nursing facility consumes all my energies. It is easy to feel only fatigue and frustration when my actions don't bring the results I envision. My hope for improvement breaks easily when it hits up against hard and unyielding realities of nursing home care.

But, I am surrounded by a community of willing workers and surprisingly resilient residents, who trust me to believe in them and to lead them.

And, I remind myself that the congregation of women who sponsor the facility have shown great faith and love with their witness, leadership and support in this ministry to aging people.

So I thank my God for giving me work in a time when so many are unemployed. Work is a ministry that allows me to use my gifts freely and to experience, in return, the rewards of labor, even when they sometimes take the form of great weariness. Of course, there are other signs of hope, as well:

- the coming of Spring
- celebrating my first months of marriage
- the promise of new life among family and friends
- the return of Janet, Mike and their daughter, Kate, who were longtime members of the St. Louis Catholic Worker Community.

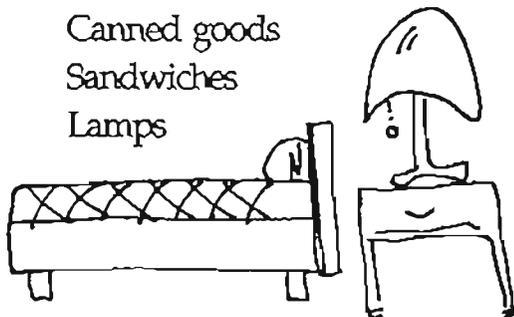
When frustration seems to overwhelm everything else and to throw my life so far out of balance, I need to remind myself that we all travel between the reality we can control and the reality that is beyond our power. It is in these times that it especially important that I look for signs of hope, within and without, and challenge myself to name reasons for giving thanks. Surely, they surround me a hundredfold.



Barbara Prosser travels 100 miles a day to and from her work in Red Bud, Illinois. She is taking helicopter lessons on the side. Her husband serves as her mechanic, editor and typist.

Can you help us? Karen House needs:

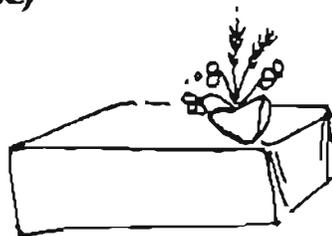
Beds
Canned goods
Sandwiches
Lamps



St. John of the Cross Catholic Worker House in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, needs one or more live-in staff. For information contact:

Leslie Swindler
P.O. Box 2321
Cedar Rapids, IA 52406
319-364-7266

Please join us for liturgy at Karen House,
Tuesdays at 9:00 pm.



The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to The Round Table, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO. 63106. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work with the poor. People working on this issue include: Joe Angert, Margaret Boyer, Kris Dennis, Beth Druhe, Virginia Druhe, Bill Miller, Tom Nelson, Katrina Plato, Barb Prosser, Ellen Rehg, and Mark Scheu. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

The Round Table

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