

THE Round Table

Spring
1996

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

Christian Anarchism

What
is it?
...and
can it
respond
to these
times?



✠ CHRISTIAN ANARCHISM IS BASED UPON THE ANSWER OF JESUS TO THE PHARISEES, WHEN HE SAID THAT [ONE] WITHOUT SIN SHOULD BE THE FIRST TO CAST THE STONE... AND UPON THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, WHICH ADVISES THE RETURN OF GOOD FOR EVIL AND THE TURNING OF THE OTHER CHEEK.

WHY THIS ISSUE?

Some time ago, while we were brainstorming for an issue of The Round Table, someone suggested the topic "Has the Catholic Worker vision won out?" She offered this in reference to the budget cuts proposed by the Republicans in their "Contract with America." She was being somewhat facetious, but I was stunned by the comparison.

Well, this last November the American Enterprise Institute published an article by Bill Kauffman who made such a comparison, arguing that Dorothy Day, having little respect for the government programs aimed at dealing with poverty, would have approved of the Republican Agenda. Patrick Jordan, Robert Coles, and Mel Piehl responded to Bill Kauffman's article in the January 12, 1996 issue of Commonweal. We have reprinted it here with permission. These three who knew Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker well, explain the profound differences between Dorothy's vision and that of those making the cuts.

What does all this have to do with "Christian Anarchism: what is it and can it respond to these times"? Dorothy and Peter's vision was not the conservative vision of those in Washington who wish to reduce the power of the government so that individuals have less responsibility and can accumulate great sums of personal wealth. Yet, neither was it a liberal vision which looks to a centralized governmental solution to our problems. So we wanted to elucidate what this vision of a personalist, anarchist solution to our problems looks like and wanted to grapple with the dilemmas it raises. Thus, Mark Scheu takes on the brave job of trying to answer some questions about Christian Anarchism, such as, "What is it?" and, "How can we limit the monopolization of resources and power into the hands of a few individuals and corporations without relying on the government to intervene?" Brian Terrell, from the Catholic Worker Farm in Maloy, Iowa, writes about Peter Maurin's vision of living on the land. Brian reminds us that the word "radical" comes from the word "root." Bill Miller talks about the importance of food stamps and questions whether the government might not be necessary for certain things such as that. He advocates the principle of subsidiarity. Lastly, among the articles on this topic, Sue Frankel-Streit wrote a piece in The Little Way, the publication of the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker in Washington, D.C., which she has allowed us to reprint. In it she describes their community's struggle to give life to personalism by scrapping most of their house rules and replacing them with weekly meetings in which all in the house decide things together. The centerfold contains a Christian Anarchist's "Sermon on the Mount," in part composed and in part collected by Mary Dutcher and Scott Stauffer. The art work is by Jeff Finnegan.

Finally, Mitch McGee writes the Karen House article, describing some of the struggles at the house and what keeps him going. Mary Ann McGivern actually writes this Little House article about the Little House. Bill Ramsey describes the St. Louis Human Rights Action Service and what it's done to respond to political oppression around the globe. Ellen Rehg tells us some of the insights she's gained from being the mother of a newborn in the Round Table Talk. Michael Bartz shares a poem he wrote in honor of Daniel Berrigan's 75th birthday.

We offer these articles on the Catholic Worker vision as part of the larger discussion on how the Catholic Worker can continue to respond to these challenging times. We are considering initiating a new practice of gathering after each issue of the Round Table to discuss that particular issue. We are discussing this Round Table, Christian Anarchism, ironically, on "Flag Day," June 14th, at 7 p.m. at Karen House in the Community Room.

Come join us. ✚

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DOROTHY DAY: NEOCON SAINT?

The following article appeared in the January 12, 1996 issue of Commonweal magazine and is reprinted here with permission.

In the November/December 1995 American Enterprise, the bimonthly journal of the American Enterprise Institute, Bill Kauffman writes a "Flashback" column titled "Saint Dorothy." He argues that Dorothy Day was an unstinting critic of Washington and of "the welfare bureaucracy, from the New Deal through the Great Society." He implies that Day disdained government efforts at relieving poverty and would approve recent efforts to gut such programs. We have asked three knowledgeable contributors to respond. The Editors of Commonweal.

Patrick Jordan

Patrick Jordan, Commonweal's managing editor, is a former managing editor of the Catholic Worker.

Bill Kauffman's short, admiring piece on Dorothy Day—prefaced by a quote from Cicero: "To know nothing of what happened before you were born is to remain ever a child"—is an example of how ideological and political slant sometimes slouches toward propaganda. For Kauffman quotes Dorothy Day selectively to make points she would not fully espouse, and to serve causes she would disdain.

It is true that Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, cofounders of the Catholic Worker movement, were not in favor of big government or what has come to be



PRENATAL CARE

known as the welfare state. They were interested in "those tiny, invisible molecular forces that work from individual to individual," the words of William James that Day often quoted. Maurin and Day were Christian personalists. They practiced voluntary poverty and lived with the poor because Christ was poor, but also because they wished to redress the injustices of society. Day called American capitalism a "filthy rotten system" because it places war-making and profit-taking over the needs and dignity of working people and their families. The problem, therefore, is not simply the size of govern-

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ment. It is the nature of the profit-driven system, a system bolstered and maintained by government.

The term "Catholic Worker" is thus poles apart from the couplet "American Enterprise." For "Catholic" implies a universalist and sacramental understanding of the human condition (in Christ, we are all members of one body), and is not tied to the fortunes of a particular state. "Worker" indicates that humanity is enhanced by the labor of hands, head, and heart performed in the service of others, not by the amassing of fortunes by a few. To the contrary, Day often quoted Saint Gertrude that "property, the more common it is the more holy it becomes." One wonders whether Mr. Kauffman has read enough of Dorothy Day to encounter her searing comments on interest taking, arms profiteering, and the withholding of adequate wages from workers; or to meet her praise of the emergency efforts of national governments when disasters had struck. Day and Maurin wanted to create "a new society within the shell of the old." But they did not wish to "destroy" the old one first. Rather their aim was to offer alternatives for the future by creating "cells of good living" now. They would not have countenanced throwing people onto the street to balance the budget, especially while raising military spending and reducing the taxes of the wealthy.

Like Mr. Kauffman, I have no doubt that Dorothy Day is a saint. I worked with her for a number of years and have never known a more holy, interesting, discerning, challenging, and captivating person. But one still has to get her in the right heaven! In Washington, I think that would be at the Catholic Worker house on T Street, N.W., not at the American Enterprise Institute on 17th.

Robert Coles

Robert Coles is the author of numerous books, including two on the Catholic Worker: A Spectacle unto the World (Viking, 1973), and Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion (Addison-Wesley, 1987).

Dorothy Day put no great hope in bureaucratic liberalism as the answer to the big questions this life presents to us. All the time she worked tirelessly, tenaciously, concretely on behalf of the poor. I will always remember her being "on the line," so to speak—helping to prepare food, serving it to some of the walking wounded of our twentieth-century industrial society. But I also heard her worry about another kind of poverty, that of secular materialism: the sad and pitiable preoccupation of some of us who, finally, believe

in ourselves as all that matters.

For her, "poverty" was not only a "socioeconomic variable," but something universal and inevitable, the experience of human limitation and vulnerability. She knew the poverty Ecclesiastes describes, the pride, the ever-resilient egoism that inform our daily lives and cloud our vision. For her, the helper and the helped in a soup kitchen were both ever-so-needy pilgrims, worthy neither of smug satisfaction (the helper) or romanticized condescension (the helped).

Sometimes she could be abrasively critical of an apparently well-intentioned benevolence: "I wonder why so many people pay attention to the poverty here [in the nearby Bowery], but don't notice the terrible poverty in Wall Street, almost next door." I was twenty-four when I heard those words, and was frankly confused by them—a judgement, of course, on me and the kind of education I'd received.

Dorothy Day's mission, actually, was to try to teach some of us the reasons for such an observation. And doing so, she called upon Jesus of Nazareth, the prophets of Israel, and the ethically awake story-telling voices of Tolstoy and Dickens and Dostoevsky, her three great favorites, whose novels have given us the humble, half-starved poor, but also the rich and powerful poor, whose snotty self-importance and arrogant self-satisfaction signal a particular and (these days, in certain precincts of America) a not-rare kind of destitution: a moral bankruptcy that is, ironically now celebrated in newspapers and magazines and movies and on television.

For many of us Dorothy Day and her fellow Catholic Workers were and are members of what Irving Howe called "the homeless left": George Orwell, James Agee, Ignazio Silone, Danilo Dolce—they could, indeed, be found scorning big government and its demeaning ways. But their idiosyncratic mix of anarchy and Judeo-Christian generosity of spirit, their egalitarian and populist yearnings, not rarely lived out, serve poorly any effort to bolster what obtains now so influentially in Washington's (or London's) corridors of power. What Dorothy Day told my students in the early 1970's (that she didn't believe "Washington, D.C. is the moral capital of America") would surely be a conviction she'd want to declare today with no less ardor. I used to watch her reading the New York Times, her head occasionally shaking. I fear that today, were she with us, her eyes would fill up with tears as she read that paper, and maybe her hand would once in a while come crashing down in righteous anger on one of those old tables on which she and others have served so many bowls of soup to so many hurt and humble fellow human beings.



Mel Piehl

Mel Piehl, professor of history at Valparaiso University, is the author of Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origins of Catholic Radicalism in America (Temple University Press, 1982).

In the present climate, it was probably bound to happen: Someone at the American Enterprise Institute house magazine has tried to enlist Dorothy Day in the war to end welfare as we know it. While appealing to the great American Catholic authority on poverty must have seemed like a good idea, it could turn out to be a riskier business than the publication's editors think.

The piece begins with a few quick paragraphs that assert Day's importance and announce her sainthood. After that it turns mostly into a pastiche of quotes, which are lifted willy-nilly from Dorothy's writings. Selected to demonstrate Day's moral compassion for the poor, most of these statements also serve as groundwork for the ideological spin the piece provides: that Dorothy Day, a "saint," was also a prescient critic of the welfare state, and so perhaps aligned with the main currents of certain Washington think tanks today.

It is writer Kauffman's loaded introductory phrases that spin the quotes they enclose: "Day scorned the dehumanizing poverty industry," one tag begins; and another declares that she was "an unstinting critic of the welfare bureaucracy, from the New Deal through the Great Society." Dorothy Day did say the things attributed to her, but their contextual framing by such assertions could seriously mislead readers who know little about Day or the Catholic Worker movement.

It is quite true that Dorothy Day was an old time native American radical, a Christian communitarian anarchist, and an often sharp critic of the modern state.

But her criticism of welfare bureaucracies derived from an utterly different—indeed opposite—foundation than those embedded in phrases like "the poverty industry." Day's criticism of government programs for the poor was that they were almost always grudging, parsimonious, and mean, rather than generous, openhanded, and kind. Their elaborate codes and "eligibility requirements" often served to demean the poor rather than elevate their dignity as "ambassadors of God."

In Dorothy Day's experience, and in the long history of Catholic Worker houses of hospitality, a familiar scenario was the crisis call from government welfare offices or social service agencies asking the Workers to care for people whom the official system was somehow unable to assist. It was such experiences that underlay Day's criticism of much public welfare and fueled her alternative vision of voluntary poverty and Christian responsibility. This is not, to say the least, the vision that motivates most present-day critics of "the poverty industry."

Though potentially misleading, the article does provide a backhanded acknowledgment of Day's increasing importance for American social thought about poverty. But one wonders if the editors at the American Enterprise might some day rue their early canonization of their new expert on poverty. For as the Catholic church has learned, from a considerably longer experience in the matter, saints who at first seem appealing are not always comfortable people to have around in the long run. People of various stripes try to fit them into their own political agendas, but saints usually refuse to stay in line or obey orders from ideological commanders, while their strong sense of divine justice and mercy has an unnerving capacity to disturb even those who profess to admire them. And then their voices often become much less welcome than they seemed at first.

So it may be that we will have to wait, perhaps for a very long time, for some more Dorothy Day statements like this to appear in sequels to Mr. Kauffman's article:

"Love of brother [or sister] means voluntary poverty, stripping one's self, putting off the old man [or woman], denying one's self. It also means nonparticipation in those comforts and luxuries which have been manufactured by the exploitation of others... If our jobs do not contribute to the common good, we pray God for the grace to give them up... This would exclude jobs in advertising, which only increases people's useless desires, and in insurance companies and banks, which are known to exploit the poor of this country and others. Whatever has contributed to the misery and degradation of the poor may be considered a bad job, and not to be worked at [Catholic Worker, December 1948]." ✦

CHRISTIAN ANARCHISM: Q&A

by Mark Scheu

Q. What is anarchism? What is Christian Anarchism?

R. Obviously, tomes have been written to explain the nature of anarchism, as for example Rudolf Rocker's Nationalism and Culture, among many others. I am not a scholar on the subject, but more of an informed adherent and advocate.

There are many misconceptions about anarchism. Alexander Berkman once said, "Anarchism is not bombs, disorder, or chaos. . . It is not a war of all against all. It is not a return to barbarism. . . Anarchism is the very opposite of all that." There are different types of anarchism, but a common denominator is the rejection of state authority and of the power of coercion which it wields. More generally and less dogmatically, anarchism can be understood as an historical tendency recognizing and overcoming repressive and authoritarian structures. Anarchists maintain that the state is of itself an instrument of repression, although it is often dressed up to appear otherwise. Instead of regarding the state as a guarantor of order and peace, anarchists claim that state government is the chief source of violence, theft, fraud, oppression and misery in the world.

Christian anarchism is a much more controversial realm. For Kropotkin and others of the same vein of anarchism, mutual aid was a hallmark of the anarchist vision. Social organization was to be based on mutual aid, voluntary associations, participatory decision-making, and relationships of equality (not of domination and subordination). If one recalls the early Christian communities, such as depicted in the Acts of the Apostles and as understood in modern scholarship, one will recognize many of the same features. Jesus taught his community

of disciples to reject hierarchical relationships. "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever



wishes to be first among you must be your slave." (Mt. 20:25-27) Furthermore, Christians are called to obey God above humans — their allegiance to God must supercede all others. The modern state does not tolerate such insubordination, witness those imprisoned for resisting war. Ultimately, if one hears the Gospel call as one to nonviolence and recognizes that the state is founded on force and violence ("war is the health of the state"), there is a natural harmony between Christian practice and anarchism. After all, Jesus died at the hands of the state because his allegiance was to a

Mark Scheu is our resident expert on Christian Anarchism, the historical Jesus, and pipe smoking.

kingdom "not of this world." For more on this there is no better thinker than Jacques Ellul.

Q. What is significant about anarchism to the Catholic Worker movement?

R. Both Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin had openly anarchist convictions. Dorothy Day associated with a radical group of socialists and anarchists in New York in her youth. After her "conversion" she did not lose these sentiments, but they did much to form the "philosophy" of the Catholic Worker movement. Maurin derived similar ideas from the French personalist philosophy of the time. The Catholic Worker's rejection of state power, the commitment to nonviolence even in the face of the "great crusade" of World War II, the emphasis on personal responsibility, the formation of small communities of mutual aid, and the attempts at subsistence farming can all be traced back to anarchist convictions. Ammon Hennacy tended to reinforce these traits and give them a more activist bent. But in contending that the movement is anarchist, it is important not to reduce anarchism to an ideology, but to see it is a historical tendency. Neither Dorothy Day nor Peter Maurin were ideologues, but primarily people of faith.

Q. What can a Christian anarchist offer as a way to deal with the massive needs of the dispossessed if one does not rely on a government safety net?

R. Although Dorothy Day had little tolerance for the national government, she stated that as long as it existed it had an obligation to act for the common good. There are better ways to serve the needs of the poor, but one does not begin by dismantling the welfare system without first putting in place alternative means for communities to aid those in need. It requires little political insight to see through the fraudulent rationale by which the current proponents of welfare reform advocate change. I would recommend The Poverty of Welfare Reform as one of the better books on the topic.

The difficulty of relying on state power to solve problems such as poverty is that this expansion of state power also reduces local direct democracy and increases vulnerability to manipulation by the elites, which only reinforces the structural basis of the problem. There are better ways to address social needs, such as outlined in Steve Wineman's The Politics of Human Services. He is an author who wrote an article published in the RT on this topic in the past.

It is undeniable that only providing for someone else's needs won't help them in the long run. The real solution is to provide a healthy, meaningful type of work by which an individual could provide for themselves and their families and contribute to the common good. The

old adage, "Give a person a fish and you feed them for a day; teach them how to fish and they will feed themselves for a lifetime," applies. But this kind of constructive reform would require some radical changes in the present socioeconomic system. Those in power, who profit from the current system, are not really interested in empowering the poor, or workers, or African-Americans, or women, etc.

Q. What can a Christian anarchist do to limit the monopolization of resources and power by a few individuals and the transnational corporations, if one does not set up government regulations to limit them?

R. Good Question! Responses will vary, but the best I've seen was a short piece by Noam Chomsky in a recent issue of The Progressive. He points out that the present move toward devolution—the reduction of decision-making and authority to more local levels—only exposes the individual to the tyranny of these global corporations. "When you've got private tyrannies around, the only institution that at least in part reflects public involvement, that can cope with them, is the federal government." Devolution under present circumstances will only shift resources all the more toward the rich and away from the poor. The government is not controlled by popular influence, as it should be, but by private powers. Chomsky argues that devolution as currently proposed would only enhance the power of private, unaccountable interests. So he suggests that in the short term we have to support centralized state power in order in the long term to oppose it.

Q. What is the road from a state-dominated to a more anarchist and communitarian way of life?

R. These days it is difficult to find such a road in my view, but one must keep seeking. Anything that organizes and involves people on a local level in issues which affect their lives is on the right path. Voting is not a very helpful outlet, as it is democracy by referendum with no real choices. Active citizen participation through local organizing is the only effective channel to reclaim power.

Chomsky states that the first step is to recognize the current situation of power in the world. "If slaves don't recognize that slavery is oppression, it doesn't make much sense to ask them why they don't live in a free society. They think they do." You can't change an oppressive system when there is no general recognition of that oppression or its nature. So the first step in this analysis is education, which is no easy task given the indoctrination to which we are subject. Once that is accomplished to some degree, one can undertake the necessary steps toward change. ✦

RADICALLY ROOTED IN THE LAND

by Brian Terrell

Another Depression might be a relief to many people. They know that our prosperity is built on war. It might be so much better than war. People won't have to keep up a front any longer. They won't have to keep up the payments anymore. There would have to be a moratorium. The threat of Depression is nothing to worry about. I wish to goodness the stock market would collapse for good and for all. I'd like to see a nonviolent revolution take place and an end to this Holy War...

Dorothy Day, from an interview with Studs Terkel published in his 1970 book, Hard Times, An Oral History of the Great Depression.

In the years I spent at the Catholic Worker house of hospitality in Davenport, Iowa, there were occasions when our activism for justice and against militarism, this in a city whose largest employer is the Rock Island Arsenal, caused some contributors to withdraw their support from our house and its work. Some felt angry and betrayed, having been tricked, as they saw it, into giving financial support to what they had believed to be a legitimate charitable organization, only to discover that all the time they had been bank rolling a nest of anarchists and revolutionaries who exploited the homeless poor as a cover while undermining this country's most sacred institutions. A few wanted their money back.

Much more often, though, even those who disagreed strongly with our politics knew that giving to our house was about the most direct way to help their homeless neighbors and gave to us generously and cheerfully. One year, on the anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima, while the rest of the Catholic Worker community was being booked for trespassing by Arse-

nal police and I was home minding all the kids and fixing lunch, the commander of the Rock Island Arsenal pulled up in a station wagon loaded with hot dogs and potato salad, leftovers from an employee picnic.

"Together with the Works of Mercy, feeding, clothing and sheltering our brothers [and sisters], we must indoctrinate... Otherwise our religion is an opiate, for ourselves alone, for our comfort or for our individual safety or for indifferent custom," Dorothy Day wrote in 1940. "If we do not keep indoctrinating, we lose the vision, we become merely philanthropists, doling out palliatives."

What the Catholic Worker offers is not only a more personal, humane and dignified way to care for poor and marginal folk, nor is it a pious union for the sanctification of its members. It is essentially a revolutionary movement, one that recognizes that when we pray "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we are radically breaking with the status quo, committing ourselves to turning the world upside down, to a whole different order of things. Our Catholic tradition, Peter Maurin said, provides an even stronger criticism, a "better criticism," of bourgeois capitalist society than does Marxism.

The easiest way, I think, for a Catholic Worker community to lose its vision, its vocation, is to lose the revolutionary spark. It is when we settle into a niche with the social services and are seen and come to see ourselves as co-workers with the social workers and with the police, when our works of mercy are works of charity and not of justice, that "we become merely philanthropists, doling out palliatives."

Keeping in mind that we ought to love our enemies and cooperate with those good people who do not share our larger vision, our resistance to and our

Brian Terrell is the Catholic Worker mayor of Maloy, Iowa.

active creative hatred of those institutions that dehumanize, impoverish and threaten our sisters and brothers needs to be clear and unambiguous to all. During the Bush administration, one Worker house was horrified to find that some quasi-governmental agency had awarded it a certificate numbering it among George's "thousand points of light"! A good laugh, but a dire warning as well.

Our work is not only to aid and comfort those most damaged by an unjust social order but to create a new one in its place. "The future of the Church," of God's people, "is on the land," Peter Maurin insisted. Agrarian reform is essential if we are ever to live unafraid in peace and justice.

Even among Catholic Workers, Peter's back-to-the-land ideas are often dismissed as utopian and irrelevant; those who pursue them sometimes suspected of elitism or escapism. Many rural Catholic Workers, too, tend to value their work only for the support they give to urban hospitality houses, vegetables for soup lines and places of retreat and recreation for urban dwellers, not as the vanguard of social and economic revolution.

Most Catholic Workers and fellow travelers readily grasp that when speaking of making peace in places like Southern Africa, Central America, or the Middle East, questions of land reform are vitally important. Many are passionately involved in working in solidarity with the people in those places who have been dispossessed of land and homes. We North American activists need to recognize that in our country, as well, ownership and control of land and resources are quickly being concentrated into the hands of an urban corporate elite. Here, as in the "third world," as farms and small towns are despoiled for the profit of these few, those who are forced off the land crowd the cities, straining resources and driving the wages of the lowest paid worker there even lower. Whether it is in Mexico City, Jerusalem, Manila, Lima, Chicago, Los Angeles, St. Louis, or New York, we will not, we cannot, have peace in the streets of our cities while there is injustice in the countryside. The eighth century Hebrew prophets warned us of this truth.



Ana Hogan

Some sociologists are beginning to take notice that rural North America is rapidly taking on the appearance of a "third world" nation, with increasing corporate ownership of land and industrial scale cash cropping bringing poverty, social disintegration and ecological devastation in its wake. There is a revolution that is fermenting in rural North America, but it is largely a revolution of the right. This is because of an absence of a radical but nonviolent and inclusive analysis of the deadly tension between sustainable community-based agriculture and corporate-based agribusiness; between the functional and the acquisitive. Desperate people who hear no other voice and are not being offered another vision can be swayed by racist and violent arguments. The Catholic Worker has much to say to this situation.

For ten years now my family has lived in this little Iowa town near the Missouri border. With our garden and small goat herd we live and eat well on very

little money. Our children flourish. Our life here is better suited to reflection and contemplation than it could be in most urban

Catholic Worker houses, but this is not a retreat house. As remote as this little town appears to our city friends, it is in no way removed or isolated from the world and its problems. Living and working here I am at least as deeply engaged in the struggles of our time as when I lived at St. Joseph House in the Bowery of New York City twenty years ago.

Peter Maurin understood that the root of the poverty and despair in our culture is in our alienation from the land. The skid row soup line and the devastation of war he traced back to the ruined farmstead. Peter admitted to being a radical and reminded us that the word "radical" comes from the Latin word "radix," meaning "root." Being a radical is to get at the root. That is what we are trying to do here in Maloy, Iowa. If these ideas interest you, come see us. Brian Terrell/ Strangers and Guests C.W./P.O. Box 264/Maloy, Iowa 50852/(515)785-2321.



ANARCHISM AND FOOD STAMPS

by Bill Miller

In 1975, Dorothy Day told a gathering of Catholics, "The greatest enemy of the church today is the state." (*A Revolution of the Heart*, Patrick Coy, Ed., Temple Univ. Press, 1988, p. 93) This statement points toward Dorothy's anarchism—a philosophy which leans away from depending on government to do for people what they should really do for one another, responding either individually or communally through voluntary associations of action. At the heart of anarchism is a suspicion of the power of the state which so often leads to aggression and warmaking and which is frequently protected by the threat or use of coercion and violence. Moreover, allegiance to the state can be in conflict with one's allegiance to God and call into question one's loyalties and responsibilities. Dorothy, a Christian and a pacifist, saw the potential for violence by the state to be as grave as the temptation to violence by an individual—and perhaps even more serious, considering the great powers of the state.

While I like some of anarchism's tenets, I have reservations about promoting anarchism as a mainstream philosophy. On the positive side, one of its great contributions is encouraging the acceptance of personal responsibility for one's life and community. Peter Maurin used to challenge liberals who wanted to "organize the unorganized before they organized themselves." In our world of scapegoating and blaming, not enough good can be said for any philosophical or psychological stance that calls individuals and communities to be responsible for their behavior and surroundings.

Another positive contribution of anarchism is

how it discloses that a state often relies on the threat or use of force to control its constituents and/or neighbors. Dorothy Day's friend and fellow Catholic Worker, Armon Hennacy, felt that all governments ultimately



Katrina Plato

relied on the police officer's club, and this dependence on power and coercion was the opposite of the teachings of Christ, which relies on God's saving grace combined with the innate goodness within each human being. Too easily and often people turn their lives over to the state rather than rely on God's authority and the support and guidance of their faith communities.

Finally, I think it's a real question about how well the state can serve people. Bureaucracy, self-

Bill Miller enjoys crooning with his new son, Gabriel.

preservation, a focus on “the numbers,” and the strict reliance on regulations and qualifications can slowly take over in government programs and lead the state to help fewer and fewer people, leaving others to fall through the cracks. Furthermore, as more and more people turn to the government for help with their problems, government workers can become overwhelmed and start hiding behind their paperwork and regulations in order to protect themselves—it’s a vicious cycle!

While offering some positive aspects, I think anarchism has some real problems and challenges. About five years ago, I started working at an agency which assists people who are threatened with becoming homeless. I remember being amazed by how massive the needs were (and still are today). People just keep calling for help—one tragic situation after another! The need

is so great that I’m not sure individuals and communities coming together in voluntary associations can meet the needs. Here are a few brief examples of the magnitude of the problems: In New York City alone there are almost 800 food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters serving 90,000 free meals a day. Yet officials estimate that 33,000 to 50,000 people are turned away from the food outlets and kitchens each month. New York is not alone in this plight. A survey by the U.S. Conference of Mayors found that the requests for emergency food in 29 cities went up nine percent between 1994 and 1995. Coming closer to home, the city of St. Louis has at least 102 food pantries to attempt to serve the hungry. Recently on National Public Radio, I heard a commentator say that over the course of a year, 60 to 70% of the children in Detroit are on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and that the Catholic bishops of that region said that they could not meet the basic needs for such a large number of people should AFDC funds be drastically cut.

When I read about anarchism, I can’t quite figure out how it addresses these massive social questions except by some sort of “invisible hand” guiding people to care for one another. But just as the invisible hand never quite became the great equalizer for capitalism, I don’t see it doing a whole lot better for anarchism.



Secondly, despite the many examples of government programs being woefully inadequate, wasteful, and even harmful, I think the U.S. government’s food stamp program works pretty well. I have met hundreds of low income people in the last five years; and despite the terrible inadequacies of AFDC, despite the paucity of good jobs and the difficulty of getting affordable childcare, despite the great hardship in qualifying for Supplemental Security Income (disability), I have only rarely heard people complain about food stamps. Generally, most people report that their food stamps help them make it through the month if they budget their use carefully. (I must add that my informal survey is mostly with women who have small children. Results could be different with single people or families with older children.) In 1994, roughly 240,000 households in Missouri were receiving food stamps, costing around \$483 million. (That’s 11.9% of all Missouri households.) While acknowledging that this can be a bureaucratic nightmare for some—especially if one’s food stamps get lost in the mail—my sense is that the state does a fairly good job at this and that hunger would be much more widespread if the government did not respond to this call for help.

Thirdly, while there is an element of truth to the statement that all governments rely on the police officer’s club to maintain order—a violence that is contrary to the teachings of Christ—I wonder if the anarchists’ dwelling

A Christian anarchist's

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

+ BLESSED ARE THEY
WHO TAKE PERSONAL
RESPONSIBILITY TO
ADDRESS THE SUFFERING
THEY SEE AROUND THEM,
FOR THEY WILL KNOW
THE JOY OF DOING
THE WORKS OF MERCY.

+ BLESSED ARE THEY
WHO QUESTION
AUTHORITY,
FOR THEY WILL NOT
INADVERTENTLY
PARTICIPATE IN A
CRUCIFIXION.

+ BLESSED ARE THEY
WHO SEE THE MYSTERY
IN EACH PERSON AND ADJUST
THE RULES ACCORDINGLY, FOR
THEY WILL EXPERIENCE THE
FULNESS OF GOD'S REIGN.

+ BLESSED ARE THEY
WHO DO NOT RECOGNIZE
NATIONAL BOUNDARIES
OR NATIONAL "INTERESTS"
AND ACTIVELY SUPPORT
THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF
ALL PEOPLE, FOR THEY
WILL KNOW THE
POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

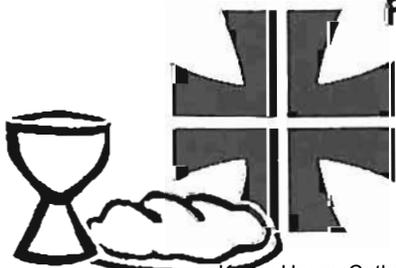
+ BLESSED ARE THEY
WHO DO NOT PAY THEIR
PORTION OF FEDERAL
TAXES WHICH SUPPORT
WAR AND THE MILITARY
INDUSTRY,
FOR THEY WILL HAVE
THE LOVE OF ALL
GOD'S
CHILDREN.



+ BLESSED ARE THEY
WHO TAKE IT UPON
THEMSELVES TO FIX
WHAT IS BROKEN,
FOR THEY WILL
KNOW HOW
TO GET THINGS
DONE.

+ BLESSED ARE THEY
WHO DO NOT VOTE IN
NATIONAL ELECTIONS
BUT WHO PARTICIPATE
IN LOCAL NEIGHBORHOOD
INITIATIVES,
FOR THEY WILL KNOW
THE REAL NEEDS
OF PEOPLE
AND
COMMUNITIES.

+ BLESSED ARE THEY
WHO ARE THE
ANSWERS
TO OTHER PEOPLES
PRAYERS,
FOR THEY ARE
CHRIST
TO OTHER
PEOPLE.



+ BLESSED ARE THEY
WHO ARE NOT AFRAID
TO BE DIFFERENT IN
FOLLOWING THEIR OWN
SENSE OF TRUTH,
FOR THEY
WILL DO
THE RIGHT THING.

+ BLESSED ARE
CHRISTIAN ANARCHISTS,
FOR--AS NOTED BY
AMMON HENNACY--
THEY WILL NOT NEED
A POLICE OFFICER
TO BE
GOOD.

+ BLESSED ARE THEY
WHO WANT TO
CHANGE THE WORLD,
SHUT THEIR MOUTHS
AND GET ON WITH IT,
FOR THEY
SHALL
LEAD
THE
WAY...

(COLLECTED, ARRANGED,
COMPILED OR WRITTEN BY
MARY DUCHER & SCOTT STUFFER)

on this is focusing on the wrong thing. Isn't in fact our government based on the rule of law that has been formed by reasonable people over time? That we use force and violence to get our way shows grave problems with enforcement (and perhaps a lack of imagination), but the laws themselves could be applications of reason arrived at by an evolving interplay of discussion, debate, and the effort to reach some sort of common judgement. Now I think for the most part that laws are made by wealthy people and favor wealthy people; but this should be corrected by change coming through the people rather than by doing away with government altogether. Similarly, there are terrible problems with lobbying and enforcement, but this does not mean that democracy and majority rule are bad in themselves. I get the impression that anarchism's aim is to do away with government. Wouldn't we do better to focus on improving the dehumanizing and negative components of government rather than do without it? In my mind, one of the purposes of government is to safeguard, protect and even champion the rights of the weak and vulnerable. I know that democracy has a lot of room for improvement in this area, but I've never heard a convincing explanation of how anarchism could do a better job.

Catholic social teaching backs up this role for government, as stated in the bishops pastoral letter on the economy. "Society as a whole and in all its diversity is responsible for building up the common good. But it is government's role to guarantee the minimum conditions that make this rich social activity possible, namely, human rights and justice." ("Economic Justice for All," #122)

In response to some of the concerns about big government, less government, or no government, Catholic social teaching speaks to the principle of "subsidiarity" in explaining how a government can regulate its involvement in social affairs. Again, the bishops: "This principle states that, in order to protect basic justice, government should undertake only those initiatives which exceed the capacity of individuals or private groups acting indepen-

dently. Government should not replace or destroy smaller communities and individual initiative. Rather it should help them to contribute more effectively to social well-being and supplement their activity when the demands of justice exceed their capacities." ("Economic Justice for All," #124)

The principle of subsidiarity can be a guiding light in helping us frame a positive role for government in these confusing times. Anything that individuals and small groups can do on their own to build up the city of God, they should be able to do without the fear of government intervention. But if the demands to meet human needs exceed the resources in a local commu-



Sharyl Boatman

nity, the government should intervene to insure the delivery of services and goods to help the poor maintain a basic level of human life.

Anarchism, without a common religious or spiritual foundation, can lead to isolationism and a self-centered mentality. And even Christian anarchism with its beautiful, early-church values and witness, may lack the cohesiveness to confront the massive social problems of our day. We need the loving cooperation of the individual, communal, state, national and international bodies to work together to renew and sanctify the temporal order.



PERSONALISM AND RULES

by Sue Frankel-Streit

The other day I got a letter from our friend and former community member Jim Keane, who is now in Iowa preparing to start a Catholic Worker house. The postscript of his letter stuck in my mind like a mantra, prompting me to organize some thoughts I've been grappling with for years. "P.S.—What do you think about personalism and rules?"

I've always found personalism to be at the heart of the Catholic Worker vision—the most challenging and most important means of creating the new society. And over the years I've come to view 'rules' as a major escape route from the practice of personalism. By 'rules' I think Jim means the same thing I do; standards of behavior imposed on people by those in power. As Catholic Workers—that is, as personalists offering hospitality—the question of rules comes up a lot.

When I first got to the Dorothy Day House, we had a three page list of 'rules' that we handed to our guest when they joined us. We felt good about helping new guests get oriented to the policies of the house and they appreciated knowing the guidelines. Or so we thought.

Then one evening after a lot of discussion among the intentional community, we sat down with a couple of the families and asked them what they thought of the rules. By the end of the night, we had scrapped the whole set, and begun a new way of being together as a household. Out of this "revolution" as we termed it at the time, came our weekly Monday night meetings, in which all the adults in the house sit down together to hash our decisions big and small. It has been in this forum that I have been most challenged to face my own unjust use of power through rules, to let go of control

through rules and to undertake the seemingly impossible task of living by consensus.

Week by week there can be a tedium to these meetings that makes us all dread them: discussion (or monologue) often centers on dirty dishes, cockroaches, rodents, the need for recycling and the state of the bathrooms. And when we do get down to the tough issues—how we deal with the children, how we conduct our personal relationships in ways that respect the community, whether we eat meat or watch TV—we often enter into them with anger and defensiveness. But even with our prejudices, our egos and our tempers, most nights we end with an agreement of some sort, even if it is only to come back to an issue in a few weeks.

As our sense of trust and respect grows, we find rules falling away and consensual agreements with room for flexibility emerging in their stead. "But you have to have some rules," people say. And we do: no drugs or alcohol in the house, no violence and no smoking inside. But even these "bottom lines" were at one point decisions made by or at least accepted by the Monday night meeting. And I believe that it is a good thing to bring these to the table occasionally for renewed agreement. In this way, they become not rules, but ways of life to which we have all agreed to hold each other accountable.

Of course, we are far from perfect. There are certainly times when I find myself wanting to fall back on rules. At these times I try to remember my time in jail, where I experienced the oppressive nature of "power over" from the underside. The first time I went to jail it was only for five days, and I was so caught up

Sue Frankel-Streit, a member of the Washington, D.C. Dorothy Day Catholic Worker community, wrote this article for its publication, The Little Way.

in the intensity of the experience that it wasn't until I got home that I was unexpectedly goaded into reflecting on my time as being guarded.

"Where do they keep the mayonnaise?" It was this simple question from a woman staying at our house that set me thinking. "They?" I repeated. "Who are they?" What struck me was the way she referred to the amorphous "they", just as we had in prison, whether we meant the guards, judges, lawyers or chaplains. "They" were the ones in charge, the ones holding the keys, the ones in power. And here was Pam, in what was supposed to be her own, albeit temporary, home, referring to somebody (and I knew I was part of that somebody) as "they". At that time only Catholic Workers had door keys, and the pantry, medicine closet and tool room were all locked, as well as the house doors after 11:00 pm. There I stood, my keys in my pocket, wondering how in my attempt to become a Christian and a personalist, I had become, in some ways, a guard.

Well, the more things change, the more they remain the same. Everyone has keys now, and not much is ever locked; and I am now keenly aware of the power differences in our community. But I still struggle with the concept of rules. Is there such [a] thing as personalist rules? How do we remain true to a vision we've been struggling with for years and still maintain an openness to consensus with folks staying with us for a couple of months? Is everything up for discussion at all times?

I don't have answers to these questions yet, and perhaps I never will. But I am beginning to learn that personalism is a long, slow struggle. Breaking down the barriers of race, class, gender and culture takes such a long, long time. We are all so enculturated into our own ways we cook, clean, have conversations, schedule our days, discipline our children. We don't think of them as 'our' ways we think of them as 'the' ways. And so when we're confronted with a different way, it can take a while to recognize its validity. I've found this to be especially true of basic things like how we eat or when we wake up in the morning. At one point in this house, Catholic Workers cooked all the meals. As we entered more deeply into relationships with people from other cultures, we discovered that a 'normal' meal for us, both in what was prepared and in what time it was served, was a totally new experience for others. Gradually we came to the point of everyone sharing the cooking, of people cooking their own meals if they preferred, and of as many people sharing the evening meal as felt called to do so. All our original fears of wasted food, too many people trying to cook at once, and lack of a communal meal were for naught. Trusting each other in this basic realm, and giving each the respect to eat as they are accustomed to, has helped



create a more cooperative atmosphere. Of course we still challenge each other regularly about diet. Vegetarianism is a constant topic for discussion, as is junk food consumption. But people choose freely how to enter into the community food scene.

Taking personal responsibility is much more difficult than making and following rules. But my faith teaches me that God is a God of love, not a God of rules. "Love and do what you will," said St. Augustine. "Love is the only solution," said Dorothy Day. The call to love, not law, is the call of a life of faith, a mandate for personalism and the heart of the Catholic Worker vision.



FROM ABROAD



by Bill Ramsey

Scanning Amnesty International human right alerts on my computer each morning leaves me with no doubts about the need for a service like the St. Louis Human Rights Action Service. As one person sitting before the seemingly endless catalogue of terror, I am overwhelmed by what I read—indigenous people threatened in El Salvador, the daughter of human rights activist Amilcar Mendez attacked in Guatemala, union members detained and not heard from in Bolivia, and dozens of executions by countries around the world.

One person would be paralyzed just by the sheer volume of reports. Fortunately I have a collective resource to draw upon—over 150 households who have authorized the service I operate to write letters on their behalf. Each day I compose 15 letters and feel that together we have made a small contribution, standing in the way of those who would abuse others and reminding ourselves and others that the world doesn't have to work this way.

Among the violations we responded to in April were killings of civilians in northern Israel and southern Lebanon. Neither the Hezbollah nor the Israeli government seem to remember that civilians are protected under the Geneva Conventions. Over 150 civilians have been killed as I write, with no end in sight. Villages have been rocketed, ambulances have been fired upon, a U.N. facility filled with refugees has been bombed, and hundreds of thousands have been made homeless.

I selected sixteen St. Louisans: Christians, Jews, and Muslims, from SLHRAS and faxed letters to the Prime Minister of Israel and the head of Hezbollah in Lebanon. A copy of Prime Minister Perez's letter was sent to Hezbollah and a copy of the letter to Hezbollah

was sent to Perez. We appealed to both of them to respect the Geneva Conventions. We acknowledged their needs for territorial security and an end to the occupation. In our small way we were able to carry out what might be called a "citizens' shuttle diplomacy" without ever leaving St. Louis.

How do we defend the security and rights of squatters in Brazil from the relative safety of our homes in St. Louis? On April 17, twenty landless people in the Para State of Brazil were gunned down as they attempted to occupy a roadway and assert their right to land. Amnesty International reports that it is not clear who initiated the confrontation, but it is clear that the 200 military police fired machine guns into the occupation indiscriminately at first, and then returned to kill specific people. Our SLHRAS letters called for an independent investigation and called on the federal government of Brazil to locate those still missing and to guarantee their safety.

The execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, an indigenous man and environmental activist in Nigeria, received significant attention last Fall. In late March the director to the Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law in Nigeria was arrested. He remains in detention in an undisclosed location. The arrest followed a raid on the IHRHL headquarters in which security forces were looking for an IHRHL report on Saro-Wiwa's trial. Since then eighteen members of Saro Wiwa's Movement of the Survival of the Ogoni People, MOSOP, have been arrested and detained without charge. Included among them are Saro-Wiwa's parents.

Until I attended the United Nations Association annual meeting on April 21, I thought that the fifteen

Bill Ramsey, out of jail for a long while now, still generously lends his pickup truck whenever asked.

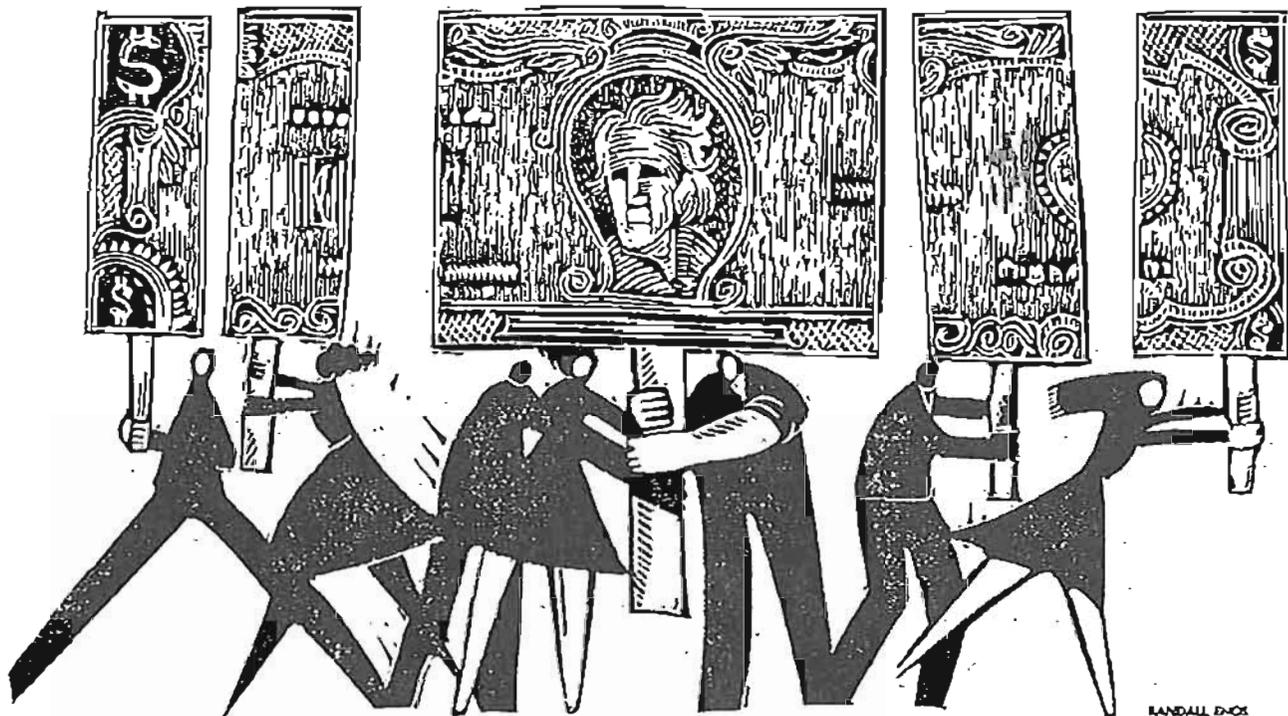
letters that I sent off to the military government of Nigeria was all we in St. Louis could do to protect the Ogoni people. At the meeting I met Noble Aboni Nwibari, an Ogoni leader, and other members of MOSOP who escaped after months in hiding. Now, through the United Nations, they have been granted the right to political asylum and have resettled in St. Louis. Noble wants to tell his story and the story of the exploitation of Ogoni land and people by large oil companies. If you are interested in hearing his story, give the SLHRAS a call at 862-5595.

Beyond a letter written on their behalf monthly, SLHRAS subscribers receive two other resources each month. The SLHRAS "Buyer's Guide to Human Rights" provides information on boycotts, like the Shell Oil boycott over the situation in Nigeria, and campaigns to hold clothing companies accountable to the rights of those who work in their shops. Subscribers have begun a dialogue with a St. Louis clothing firm's CEO, who is a Catholic Deacon, over the company's operations in Haiti. This month's "Human Rights Media Watch"

analyzes coverage of six human rights stories in the Post-Dispatch and similar papers around the country. The March issue provided an analysis of international coverage and will be published in the St. Louis Journalism Review.

In May, SLHRAS moved to the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese. I am grateful for the offer of space and companionship for this new endeavor. The service could be operating every working day of the month, sending out twice as many letters as it does now. If you would like to join other subscribers and "light one more candle against the darkness," please give me a call at 862-5595 or at the HRO in the mornings, 531-3755. ✚

St. Louis Human Rights Action Service
Archdiocesan Human Rights Office
462 N. Taylor Ave.
St. Louis, MO 63108
-yearly subscription fee: \$50.00



FROM KAREN HOUSE



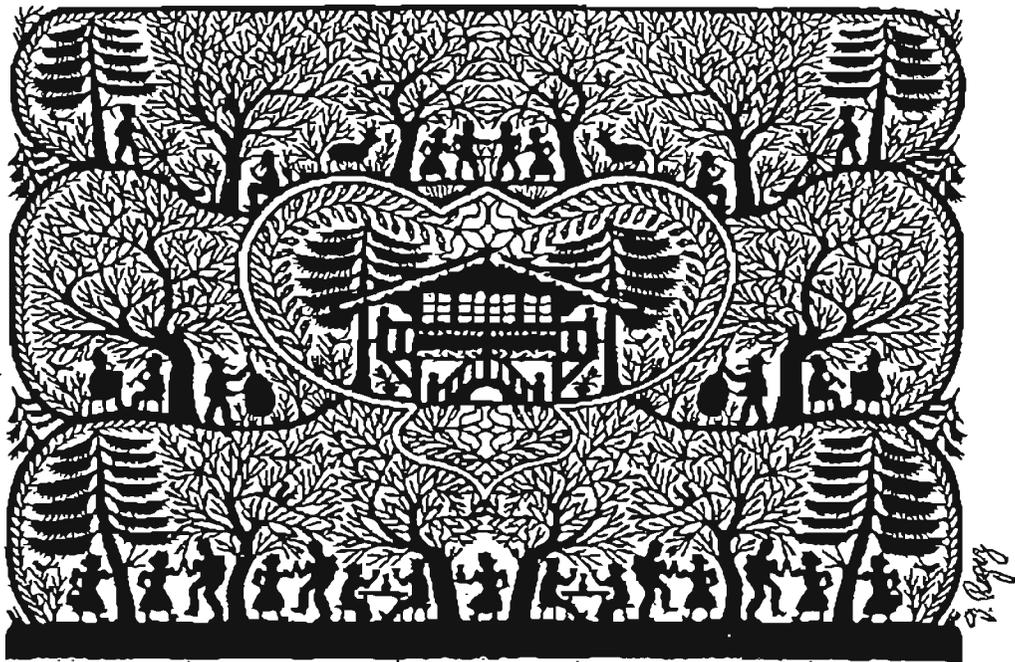
by Mitch McGee

As I once again sat down to actually write the Karen House article, many thoughts went through my mind, starting with, "Why did I say I would write the article for this issue?" Other thoughts included, "Where are all those various ideas that have been floating through this tired brain for days, that would have at least been serviceable?!" Next I began looking for a scripture passage that had provided comfort on a stressful day, to use that as a springboard. Could I find it? Of course not.

Then I looked back over the house articles from several back issues. Did any great insights come to mind? No! This left me with the next option, (since I am two weeks overdue in submitting this article), to simply make the effort and do my best with what I have at this moment. I realize that's what much of our life is about, making the best of what happens at the moment, doing our best, and even in the possible failed attempt, knowing that we tried. Sometimes this means making a dinner out of the various donations that appear and being amazed at the wonderful (or possibly the not-so-wonderful) meal that results. Other times it's being the voice of reason (or sometimes another voice of madness) during the 2 a.m. crises that occur. In my three years here, I often experience an inability to be a soothing, calming presence for others (my innate hyperactivity precludes this usually). At the same time, though, it's true that I'm mak-

ing the attempt.

One aspect of life in the house that has caused me to struggle, yet keep trying, is the number of seriously wounded people who come to us and the need to find an option for them. In one week I encountered three women who were each: mentally ill, developmentally disabled and chemically dependent. Since this is what much of my caseload at work is like, these are people who immediately touch my heart and yet terrify me. They terrify me because I know how few options are out there for them and what a tremendous struggle it is to provide them support. I become terrified of what this says about our society, that people with such tremendous needs are left to the streets. One more reason to keep trying!



Mitch McGee gives us hope with his wonderful laugh.

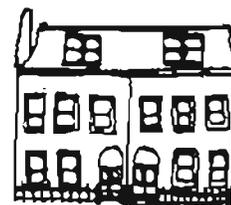
As I plod along, some days feeling that I'm doing no more than putting one foot in front of the other, some things do give me hope. The folks I live with in community give it to me. We are fortunate in having others who know us so well (as you can from living and working together). And we're fortunate in that we don't usually all have a bad day at the same time. Even when we are all frustrated, it's not so hard when you know you're not alone in the struggle.

The wonderful folks with whom we come in contact daily are another source of hope for me. So many wonderful volunteers who will listen to my newest story, share an idea, provide encouragement, or share a

laugh. I've said many times that I have yet to meet a regular volunteer whose company I did not enjoy.

As I continue thinking about what's hard about our life and what's good—for me, the good is so very much worth the effort that getting through the bad requires. My realization for the moment is that I need to keep reminding myself of this fact. These are words that will probably haunt me in the next crisis and frustration that follows ("Remember, Mitch, you said that the effort was worthwhile'y). I fear sounding trite and clichéd. Yet I come back to Dorothy Day quoting Dostoevsky: indeed, "Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams." +

FROM LITTLE HOUSE



by Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.

Because the Little House is so small, I don't write about what goes on here very often. Describing events in the lives of those who live here puts their privacy at risk. But it has been a very long time since I've used this column to tell about the house.

When Father Marty Manion was here at St. Laborius in 1980, he suggested to Ella Dickson that, since she couldn't find a buyer for her four-flat and she wanted to move to Our Lady of the Snows, she should just give the building to me! I had said several times that while I loved the life and work of the Catholic Worker, Karen House was too big for me. So when Ella offered me the house, I accepted gratefully.

I moved in in January of 1981 with two of the guests, Sharon, who is a single mom and has worked for the past five years at a nursing home, and BJ, who has her own home now and works at Southwestern Bell. Paul, then a homeless fifteen-year-old, was hospitalized

in April; and when he was released he came to live with us. His younger brother, Elijah, soon moved into a group home and I became his guardian, too. Paul and Elijah still call me Mom and their children call me Grandma. I keep a box of toys in one corner of my living room for them.

Sharon, BJ, Paul, and Elijah all put in a lot of hours with me rehabbing the house. The two flats we moved into had been uninhabited for twelve years; and we all tuckpointed, plastered, sanded, painted, and polyurethaned for years.

Virginia and Charlie Nestmith and their children, Elizabeth and Ken, moved into Ella's apartment. Charlie worked for months to finish the attic, install hot water (it was a cold water flat), design the smallest shower in the world, and remove the lead paint; it's the apartment I'm in now. Bill Miller, Virginia Druhe, Stanley Hackney, Ellen and Myrrah Reh, Mark Scheu, Pat Coy and

Mary Ann McGivern, SL has become the St. Louis Catholic Worker's expert on The Beatles.

Karen Tanquist all lived at the Little House at various times and in various apartments. A schizophrenic woman named Jackie died of cancer here. A man with AIDS and women with mental illness, lupus, and some who were striving to recover from crack and alcohol addictions all lived here, too, over the years.

Essentially, the Little House has been home for some of the Karen House Community and for a few men and women and children who couldn't make it by themselves—although most people receive a disability or welfare check and pay a proportionate rent. But in the last two years it has become a home for a couple of poor families who were not carrying enormous troubles besides poverty. As the economic conversion work has grown larger and I have grown older, I have not been able to cope very well with the unrelenting crises and demands that come with mental and physical illness and

addiction. I've made some peace with my own limitations and been content to offer a simpler form of hospitality.

Your Worker donations still subsidize the Little House, helping to cover the cost of major repairs like the new roof we put on last spring. All the tenants, including me, pay some rent. One pays in in-kind services like painting and repair of the back steps. I leave my key with the neighbors when I go out of town and they take care of my cat, Morris. The two and three-year olds who live next door greet me every spring and summer day with a request for a flower. Their baby lips say "daffodil" and "hyacinth" and "vrose." It is a low-key and comfortable life, ordinary. Still, I couldn't do it without the long-term love and support of the larger Worker community. Thank you. ✦

For Dan Berrigan on his 75th Birthday

by Michael Bartz

we still hear bread breaking
after all those wars
and you, old jester,
companion of Jesus,
fool for Christ's sake
still sing to us, telling us
(pardon us, dear friends)
the truth for 50 years:
prayer from a picket line
poetry in night flight
reflections from a prison cell
eucharist in hospices
foetid and sickly sweet with death
(for the fracture of good order)
in the detergent fire
of Catonsville were
ignited a million hearts
then a million souls
were steeled against the lies
as imperialist bombs—bald eagle
become hawk and vulture—
rained in Hanoi

(the burning of paper)
and still you batter our hearts
washing us with the minstrelsy and blood
of plowshares, patients
and liturgy, straining
for the next millenium
Christ nailed to our nuclear cross
(instead of children)
pax tecum, carissime,
all you ever wanted was to tell
the children the truth
but now Ignatius nods his head
Merton laughs and nudges and Dorothy undoes
her braids while smiling wryly from above
scolded, banished, pursued, convicted,
sacerdotal,
you are called again to break the bread,
and so you set your face, and dance toward Jerusa-
lem
to once more show us love,
love at the end ✦

EASY ESSAYS

by Peter Maurin

Self-Organization

People go to Washington,
asking the Federal Government
to solve their economic problems,
while the Federal Government
was never intended
to solve people's economic problems.
Thomas Jefferson says that
the less government there is,
the better it is.
If the less government there is,
the better it is,
then the best kind of government
is self-government.
If the best kind of government
is self-government,
then the best kind of organization
is self-organization.
When the organizers try
to organize the unorganized,
then the organizers
don't organize themselves.
And when the organizers
don't organize themselves,
no one organizes oneself.
And when no one organizes oneself,
nothing is organized.

Not a Liberal

They say that I am a radical.
If I am a radical
then I am not a liberal...

Liberals are so liberal about everything
that they refuse to be fanatical
about anything.
And not being able to be fanatical
about anything,
liberals cannot be liberators...

Not a Conservative

If I am a radical,
then I am not a conservative...
Conservatives try to believe
that the world is getting better
every day in every way.
But the world is not getting better
every day in every way.
The world is getting worse
every day in every way
and the world is getting worse
every day in every way
because the world is upside down.
And conservatives do not know
how to take the upside down
and to put it right side up...

A Radical Change

I want a change,
and a radical change.
I want a change
from an acquisitive society
to a functional society,
from a society of go-getters
to a society of go-givers.

by Ellen Rehg

It is hard to write about motherhood and babies without sounding a little like a commercial for Hallmark cards or a long distance phone company. Yet I will indulge myself since I and my husband Bill and daughter Myrrah are still wrapped up in the wonder of our new son/brother, Gabriel, who is just four months old. Perhaps an issue may even emerge amid my scattered thoughts, those being the only kind I am capable of these days.

One forgets how very dear new little human beings are. Sometimes in the mornings when Gabriel wakes up, instead of crying, he simply looks around for awhile. I love to watch his face and eyes as he does this. To be met every day with eyes that convey no deceit, no malice, only the reflection of the inner workings of his mind as they confront the world, is like opening up the door every morning to a fresh spring day. In Nature there lives "the dearest freshness deep down things," the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins said. Like tiny buds shooting out of the earth, babies also seem to incarnate the sturdy innocence of God. "A strain of earth's sweet being at the beginning," to quote Hopkins again. The Garden of Eden may be an age in all of our lives when we are innocent: our babyhood. We are perhaps original beings then, like Adam and Eve, without sin. I know that we all eventually choose unwisely and reject the limits of our original nature. But it is a comfort to know that God makes us with the dearest freshness deep down, our taproot to the divine.

It makes me think that the women's movement should change its approach towards pregnancy and childbearing. Instead of expending so much energy winning reproductive rights and control over our bodies, we should insist that the business world be transformed to accommodate babies. (I realize many people are working for affordable childcare and maternity/paternity leave, but I mean more than this.) Why should women and infants have to conform to the values of the

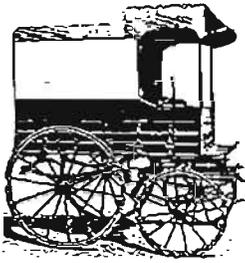
business world: control, efficiency, competitiveness and a utilitarian standard, rather than vice versa? Certainly God is more manifest in the fresh vitality of a baby than in the narrow minded, profit-loving, bottom-line mentality of the business world. I have come to think that the La Leche League, a group that fosters and supports breast feeding, is the most radical "arm" of the women's movement, since breast feeding is one of the most counter cultural activities one can engage in. Breast feeding requires that one give up control (to a certain extent) of one's schedule and give up a lot of personal productivity to adapt oneself to the erratic needs for nourishment a baby has. One has to simply sit down and do nothing more active than allow the baby to eat. In doing so mothers put themselves at the behest of the least powerful members of society. Imagine if the business world were governed by these the needs of the least powerful.



If parts of the Catholic hierarchy took breast feeding seriously it would transform the church as well. Some Catholic officials deny that women can be priests because they do not present an image of Christ. Although not many people seem to notice this, Jesus has already made this a moot point, since he modeled himself in part after women, I am now convinced. He did this through his activities of feeding his followers, not only by distributing bread and fish to the throngs but in the eucharist,

in which his very being becomes our food. This wild idea prompted many of the same followers who had been fed to pack up and leave. "How can we eat your body?" they murmured uneasily as they backed away. The mothers in the crowd no doubt had less trouble with this concept. I believe that breast feeding is the hidden motif for the eucharist. The food I eat becomes food for my son, which he gets through my body. I can say to him, as Jesus said to his friends, "Take and eat, this is my body, which I have definitely given up and given over for you!" +

Ellen Rehg, often on the cutting edge, is afraid that "Gabriel" will become a trendy name.



The Karen House community needs a car. We have a small amount of money to contribute toward one.

The community celebrates liturgy on Tuesdays at 8:00 p.m. -- all are welcome.

We are gathering to discuss this Round Table issue, Christian Anarchism, on Friday, June 14th, at 7:00 p.m. (Flag Day). Please come.

Of Note:

Anne Carter, a member of the first St. Louis Catholic Worker Community in the 40s, and long time friend and supporter of Karen House, passed away on March 31st, 1996, Palm Sunday.

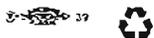
House needs:

- ♦ House takers
- ♦ Sandwiches
- ♦ Money
- ♦ Fans
- ♦ Pampers

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, Teka Childress, Mary Dutcher, Jeff Finnegan, Mitch McGee, Bill Miller, Ellen Rehg, Mark Scheu, and Scott Stauffer. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

The Round Table

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