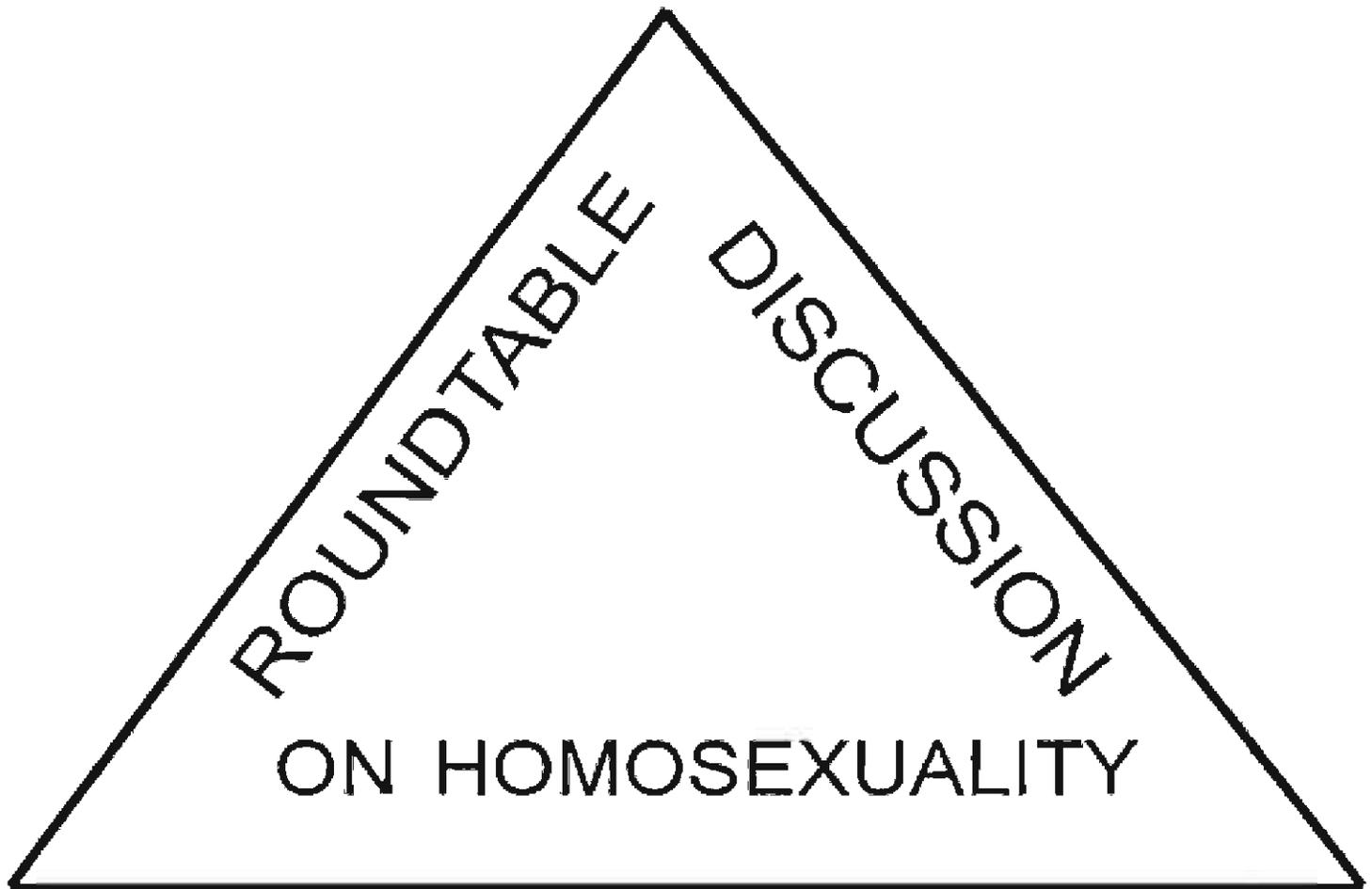


THE Round Table

Fall
1995

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



WHY THIS ISSUE?

In our tradition of providing a forum for open, honest and stimulating discussion of difficult issues from a Catholic Worker perspective, we are pleased to offer you this long overdue Round Table issue on homosexuality. This issue is the culmination of a process of discernment, reflection, prayer and sharing that our community started over a year ago when we first received a copy of the article *Homosexuality & the Church: a Catholic Worker Response* from the Summer 1994 issue of the Toronto Catholic Worker Mustard Seed publication. For a variety of reasons, it has not been an easy process for our community to go through. We have devoted several meetings, retreats and prayers to discerning where and how God calls our community to respond to the many social, political, and religious issues of homosexuality. We have attended meetings of Dignity (a gay and lesbian Catholic liturgy group), read various articles and publications, and carefully considered our personal feelings and convictions. Through this process, we discovered that we have different experiences, points of view and ideas about this Round Table issue. Consequently, we have tried to provide a forum for different perspectives to encourage further dialogue and reflection.

In the centerfold, you will find a copy of the article from the Toronto Catholic Worker publication. We suggest you start here and then move throughout the issue to various reflections responding to the Toronto article. We are pleased that several current community members, past community members and close friends of Karen House have offered their thoughts for your consideration. They include: Chris Butler, Teka Childress, John Kavanaugh S.J., Sue Lauritsen, Tim Pekarek, Ellen Rehg and Annjie Schiefelbein. We close out the issue with a From Abroad article by Pat McCarthy about the continuing war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a Round Table Talk article by Becky Hassler about a "normal" day in the Emergency Room at the St. Louis Regional Medical Center, a From Little House article by Mary Ann McGivern about her new hobby as a St. Louis Rams' fan (yes, that's right - a Rams fan), and finally a From Karen House article by Annjie Schiefelbein.

For our community, this issue has provided a direction for what Peter Maurin called "...a path from where we are to where we should be." We do not know where we are going, but we are on the path. Please join us in the continuing journey to speak out against the oppression and injustice that gay men and lesbian women encounter in our own hearts, homes and communities. May God guide our way!



- Scott Stauffer

the St. Louis Catholic Worker Community

Karen House
1840 Hogan
St. Louis, MO. 63106
314-621-4052



Ellis Dixon House
1540 N. 17th St.
St. Louis, MO. 63106
314-231-2039

ANSWERING AQUINAS

by Chris Butler

This and the following articles are responses to an article from The Toronto Catholic Worker which is reprinted here on pages 12 and 13.

The Catholic Worker has had a long and valuable tradition of speaking Truth to Power. The article on gay and lesbian concerns in The Mustard Seed makes me think that this tradition continues. I say, "More Truth to them!"

When I was a young man—I am in my mid-forties now—first struggling to come to terms with my own gayness in the dark loneliness of the closet, I spent a lot of time in libraries, trying to find out about what I was finding myself to be, making sure no one could see what books I was reading. I was most concerned about the Church and what she had to say about my attraction to other men.

Back then, Thomas Aquinas seemed to be the final authority on most everything. What he said wasn't

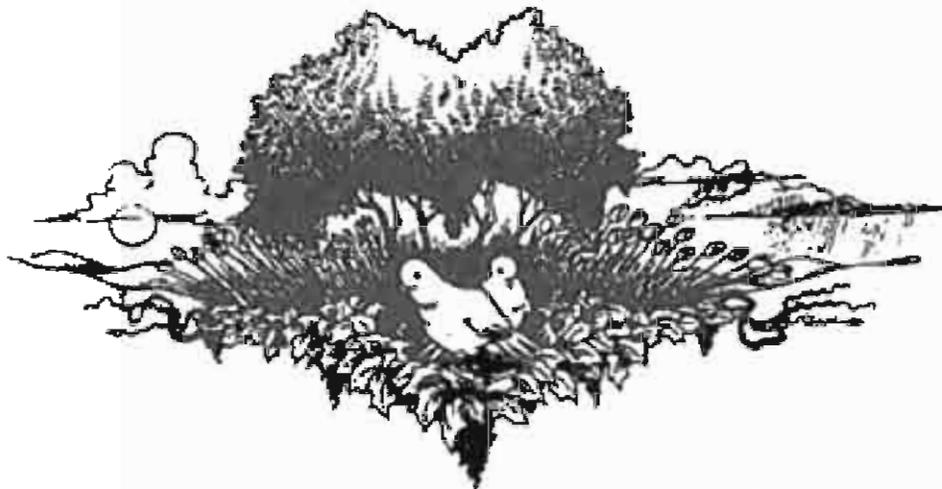
very encouraging, but in retrospect, it wasn't very convincing, either.

Thomas argued that homosexual unions were "against natural law" because: a) they were not open to procreation; b) they did not occur among animals; and, c) they upset the natural order of nature relating to the dominion of male over female. Thomas himself recognized that his first argument was not conclusive, since

infertile heterosexual couples and those past the age of child-bearing can contract valid marriages and do not sin in having sexual relations.

The argument based on animal activities has two major flaws.

First, it is not true. Homosexual activity among animals has been well documented by modern zoological science. More to the point, it is irrelevant. The vast majority of human activity is not replicated by animals. Animals do not raise vegetables, engage in ritual worship, or send birthday cards to their grandchildren. Are these activities therefore contrary to nature? Even in the strictly sexual



Chris Butler, a former member of the Karen House Community, lives and works in San Francisco.

arena, animals do not engage in frontal intercourse. Why isn't that against natural law?

Thomas' third argument makes devotees of the Angelic Doctor a little uncomfortable these days, I suppose, but I like to think this is just Thomas' chance to speak Truth to Power about the underlying premises of this doctrine on same-sex-unions. It seems to me that the *real* reason the Church has been so intractably opposed to reconsidering its teaching on homosexuality is that when two men have sex, one of them is thought to be acting like a woman, and that is both seen *and felt* to be an insult to his dignity as a *man*.

I am deliberately talking about male homosexuality because clearly that is where the fat hits the fire. Because women's sexuality has been discounted along with women's personhood, lesbianism never got to be much of an issue until it became identified in recent years with 'militant' feminism and so became a threat to men. Neither Thomas nor the bible thought lesbianism worth much of a mention.

In July of this year, the pope issued a letter insisting on the ontological equality of men and women, and calling for social and economic equality for women as a matter of justice. That he could not see that this equality needed to extend into the life of the Church speaks volumes about how emotionally entrenched the male bias is in the institutional Church.

In recent years, the Church's opposition to gay and lesbian rights has been presented as a defense of heterosexual marriage and the traditional family. It's hard for me to comprehend this argument. Am I to conclude that if I leave my lover of seven years and subject us both to the misery of divorce and the loneliness of being single, that someone's heterosexual mar-

riage is going to be better? *Whose?* And what kind of perverse marriage could it be that would be strengthened by human misery?

Perhaps the idea is that if gay relationships were not an option, gays and lesbians would be more likely to enter into a traditional heterosexual marriage (even though the Church seems to accept that sexual orientation is a given rather than a matter of choice). Is this going to strengthen the traditional family, or just provide a larger number of marriage annulments, broken hearts and broken homes? Does the Church really think this is Good News?

This defense of the nuclear family argument has a double bite for gays and lesbians, because it is precisely our families of origin that are the most painful arena of our own alienation and oppression. Gay Day Parades here in San Francisco have contingents representing hundreds of groups and causes, but none is so warmly received as PFLAG, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Not a few eyes brim amid the cheering for those of us for whom such a thing is beyond imagining.

The placing of gay and lesbian rights on the agenda of Catholic Worker communities is a difficult question. On one hand, it runs counter to the contention that Workers have been loyal sons and daughters of the Church, who are merely reiterating Catholic social teaching. On the other, the tradition of personalism in the Worker argues that love between two persons is a sacred thing, to be revered and recognized as the life of God among us. I would suggest that true loyalty entails calling upon the Church to live out the full truth of the Gospel message, even when it is uncomfortable.

✦



14. My Father's House There Are Many Mansions

Living Again

UNDERSTANDING LOVE

by John Kavanaugh, S.J.

What are we called to, as followers of Jesus Christ, in matters of our sexuality? The answer will be given only if we keep the life and teachings of Jesus as our central focus. From the beginnings of our Christian community, fidelity to Christ and his Gospel has provided the crucible of faith—whether we were confronted with the “reality principle” of the Roman Empire, of violence and warfare, of greed and arrogance, of nationalism or tribalism, of capitalism or communism.

The cultures where Christians live out their faith provide richly diverse expressions of the Word made Flesh. At the same time, however, cultures present a profound threat to our faith: the temptation to abandon our God for the sake of cultural idols, practices, and ideologies.

Most of us who have sympathies with the Catholic Worker movement are well aware of the ways that Jesus Christ can be sold out for nationalism, militarism or wealth. I believe we are less conscious of the ways our sexual desires and practices can be influenced by cultural ideology and lead us away from fidelity.

Do consumerism, relativism, individualism and hedonism as ways of life compromise the way we look at evangelical sexuality? We are told it is unrealistic to believe that teenagers can be chaste, that it is unrealistic to expect fidelity in marriage, that it is absurd to think that sexuality is intimately linked to covenant and procreation.

I propose that these “realisms” are functions of capitalist free-market utilitarianism, rather than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When applied to one’s own life, they are functions of one’s pride, passions, and ego-fulfill-

ment rather than evangelical commitment.

A case in point is our understanding of Love. In the “Catholic Worker Response: Homosexuality and the Church,” there is a softened but underlying continuity with the cultural position that the fullness of love cannot be experienced without genital expression and fulfillment.

I believe that is not the case. In fact, I propose that the most serious delusion in our relationships and in our understanding of sexuality is that we cannot be fulfilled without some kind of genital union with the particular “love” interest of our life.

In the name of our right to happiness in love, in this year alone, I have seen married people leave their young children, students be seduced, great fabrics of lies be woven, even murder contemplated as a means. In the name of sexual “fulfillment” and the imperial claim that it can make on a person, no value escapes unscathed. I think it is foolhardy to ignore this.

What is more, being “in love” is different from loving. Love, in its deepest sense, is the affirmation of the true goodness of the beloved. It can only be based on truth, not illusion. And it is not love for what the other does for me, but love for the other for the other’s own sake. I have rarely encountered true love in people who are desperately “in love.” More rarely still have I ever seen true love in someone who believes he or she cannot be happy without having sexual relations with a particular person.

Love is not experienced in the urgency of possessing the object of love. It is experienced in the long haul, most especially, as Saint Paul writes, in our

John Kavanaugh, S.J. is currently on sabbatical and preparing a medical ethics class.



Marlene Crispin

patience, in our kindness, in our willingness to forgive, in our fidelity, in our forbearance. Love is not present in jealousy, but in its absence. It is not in selfishness but in its opposite. It is found in trust, hope and endurance. Dorothy Day herself lived the words of Dostoyevsky, that love can be a harsh and dreadful task, won only by an acknowledgment of our own sinful pretense and the acceptance of God's love for us.

I find that most discussions about love in our present day situation—whether heterosexual or homosexual—miss the point. We are all called to love and to experience its glories. But sexual intercourse is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for love. One can even experience the joys and anguishes of "being in love" but not have genital expression. In fact, I believe that the more one is able to truly love a person that one happens to be in love with, the less imperious will be the demand that you possess them, sexually or otherwise. Although my experience is limited to the testimony of others, I believe this is even the case for spouses and "lovers." Without love, "lovers" will destroy each other.

While sexuality is an important part of our

identity, I do not think intercourse or its variations is essential to our happiness, to our love, or to our sexual stability. If we think it is, we will never be happy or fulfilled.

Thus, people who do not have a sexual partner are not condemned to lives of unfulfillment or unhappiness. They may be old and left without a spouse, they may be young and unmarried, they may be men or women who have not married—whether by choice or by the happenstance of not having found a life partner.

As a Catholic who wishes to "follow the Risen One" I believe we are called to holiness in our sexual lives, just as we are called in our relations to material things and in our relation to power. I believe our tradition, saying that the most profound sexual intimacies, are expressions of a love which is monogamous, covenantal, and heterosexual, is the result of that aspiration to holiness. This does not mean that those of us who are single or homosexual are fated to a loveless life. There is ample evidence to the contrary. Moreover, there are expressions of love ranging from laboring and journeying together to the embrace and kiss which confirm our love for others.

What concretely does this mean? I think we should admit it when we fall away from the norm of evangelical holiness in matters sexual and realize that God not only forgives us but wants to transform our deficits. For example, one can acknowledge the moral failure of masturbation and still be faith-filled, compassionate and loving in much of one's life. Two people might find themselves in sexual intimacies which are neither heterosexual nor covenantal, acknowledge its brokenness, and yet experience profound graces in their lives and their relationship. Similarly, heterosexual spouses may "make love" lovelessly, acknowledge their sin, and bear manifold other graces in their lives. In all cases where we fall short of the moral call, we know we cannot judge the interior quality of another person's relationship to God. That goes for people who have problems with money or violence, as well.

All people who truly love and all people who "make" what is called love are both graced and flawed. There is no one of us without sin. Our problem—whether facing the enemy, a mountain of money, or the person before me—is the denial of it. ✚

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

by Sue Lauritsen

This is the twenty-sixth year of the gay liberation movement. The Toronto Catholic Worker wrote an excellent article in their publication The Mustard Seed in 1994 that is worth the time and effort to read. Their article explores in great depth some of the biblical references, the historical perspective and personal reflections concerning homosexuality.

What I write comes from my experience as a lesbian who is still "in process" of accepting herself. I'm of the mindset that although it is a strong show of solidarity to have large groups stand up for the rights of marginalized groups, acceptance has to start with the individual. Whether the Catholic Worker Movement, society or the hierarchical church ever comes out and says the injustice must stop, means little to me. I have to love myself enough to know I am a creation of God and that I will not stand ashamed. Homosexuals strike a chord of fear in some people as though who they are is contagious. Unlike leprosy, homosexuality is not a disease. I want no more rights or privileges than anyone else. I don't want any body of people to single out lesbians and gays to fight for their right to exist, if they cannot accept my sisters and brothers of color, those who are differently-abled, those with diminished mental capacities, or those who anguish over the decision whether or not they can bring a life into the world.

Let us be secure enough within ourselves that our time is not taken up in judgment of those who are different from us. I've found if you are really out "walking the talk" you have little time to worry about

who's on your side and who's still afraid of you. Ultimately we only have to account to the Creator, and I'm sure if the Creator hadn't accepted homosexuals, we wouldn't exist.

This is a rather simple response to a very complex issue. Let us all celebrate the diversity we all bring to the table of life.



The bars of our invisible jails are far more powerful than physical bars. They are bars of ignorance and selfishness and fear...

--Shelly Douglass

Sue Lauritsen, and friends still have a lawn mowing business. If you'd like their services, beep them at 871-1850.

Karen House Catholic Worker 314.621.4052 www.karenhousecw.org 1840 Hogan St. Louis, MO 63106

SHOWING A KINDER FACE

by Tim Pekarek

Recently the Vatican sent the message to the bishops, cardinals, and other clergy, that they should oppose efforts to establish or preserve civil rights for homosexuals. This maneuver certainly drew applause from the far right-wing Christian Coalition in this country. This directive came near the time of the 1993 Oregon and Colorado ballot measures, which if passed, would have prohibited lesbian and gay civil rights in those states. During that season at least three lesbians and gay men in Oregon, and another gay man in Colorado, were murdered.

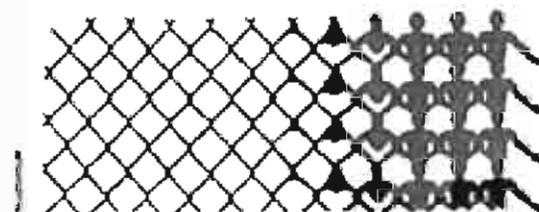
Obviously the Roman Catholic Church is a very long way from offering a message of affirmation to lesbian or gay Catholics, who are likely to feel discarded by the Church. In a world that seems to be lurching toward violence and fascism, this and other Vatican statements on lesbian and gay morality and identity amount to an inferred threat. At other times the Church has been more overt, as with the removal of Dignity liturgies from Church properties around the country in recent years. There is a fear among lesbian and gay Catholics that groups such as Dignity will be declared schismatic, or that they will be excommunicated en masse, as with the recent treatment of Catholics who have provided or assisted women in obtaining abortions. In this atmosphere there would seem to be no reason for any lesbian or gay person to remain in the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Worker movement, in our history, has been able to show a kinder face of the Church to people disenfranchised from the Church. We do this by offering hospitality to women and children, the poor,

racial and ethnic minorities and others. Another part of our history is that the sins of heterosexism and homophobia that are rampant in society have been common enough in many Catholic Worker communities to the extent that lesbians and gays are outcasts. I recall a conversation that I had with a friend who has been a Catholic Worker since the 60's or 70's, in New York and in the Midwest, who has known many lesbian and gays who did not find acceptance at the Worker, and fled. My friend and I both thought that it is absurd, but it would seem that the current Pentagon policy of "Don't Ask-Don't Tell" would apply at many Catholic Worker communities.

Fortunately, I have never felt this to be the case with the Karen House community. During the period that I've lived with the Karen House community, I "came out" as a gay man to them and other friends and family members. There were times in this process that I was left feeling abused by some people; and if I had not felt safe in our community, I know that I would have left.

The diversity that exists in our household at Karen House is what we all cherish, and we strive to make lesbians and gay men feel as welcome as everyone else.



Tim Pekarek has spent the last several months on a pilgrimage and is currently back at Karen House.

"LET US REASON TOGETHER"

by Ellen Rehg

I am writing as someone who does not like The Mustard Seed article very much. Let me warn the reader that I'm responding as a philosopher, so my comments are addressed to the theoretical aspects of this issue rather than the personal, political or pastoral. Also, I am narrowly tailoring my response to specific points raised in this article. What I don't like is what comes across to me as a polemical tone, and I disagree with what I perceive its philosophical underpinnings to be.

About the tone: the most difficult ethical struggles are those in which there seems to be at least some truth to both "sides" of a position. This is one reason why these kinds of issues are so difficult. I would put the struggle concerning the morality of abortion, for example, in this category. Both pro-life and pro-choice positions are espousing important values: among other things, the sanctity of human life in the former case and the value of individual autonomy in the latter. By acknowledging these conflicting values I don't mean to suggest that each position is equally correct, that there is no moral truth. What I do mean to point out is the existence of moral ambiguity based on a genuine conflict of goods. In order to determine how to resolve a conflict of this kind, I think we need the careful, thoughtful, heartfelt and reasoned arguments and experiences of many people, on all sides of the issue. In order for people to feel free to participate in this kind of discussion, their views have to be respected. If one unjustly discredits opposing views, then debate is stifled. People may be afraid to voice their position if it differs from others because they fear they will be labeled in some negative way.

I feel the authors of the Mustard Seed article are guilty of just this kind of negative labeling. In the opening paragraphs, they implicitly identify any opposition to their views on homosexuality with a domineering, violent position of oppression. It is as if there are only two possible viewpoints—either one unequivocally supports gay rights (and possibly any form of sexual expression or practice) or one is a part of an oppressive system which leads to hate crimes and other violent, dehumanizing actions such as ethnic cleansing. Any hesitation to embrace the editors' viewpoint is attached to a fear of the Other or of differences, in other words, to emotional or irrational roots, as though there can be no reasoned considerations that might be raised. Just because one might differ, in varying degrees, with the viewpoint expressed in this article, does not automatically mean that one supports hatred of those who are different or any abridgement of their human rights.

I believe the issue of the morality of homosexuality is not as clear cut as the article suggests, but rather is one in which there exists ambiguity, again because there seems to be, in my opinion, truth on both "sides." The writers of the article appear to want to draw a parallel between the idea that heterosexuality is the normative way for human beings to express their sexual nature, and the idea that, say, white people are the norm for human beings. The idea of "heterosexism," in other words, seems modeled upon the concept of racism. Of course, if this were true, then there could be no justifiable defense of "heterosexism," as there is none for racism. But whether or not this is true, that is, whether the analogy is appropriate, is precisely where the ambi-

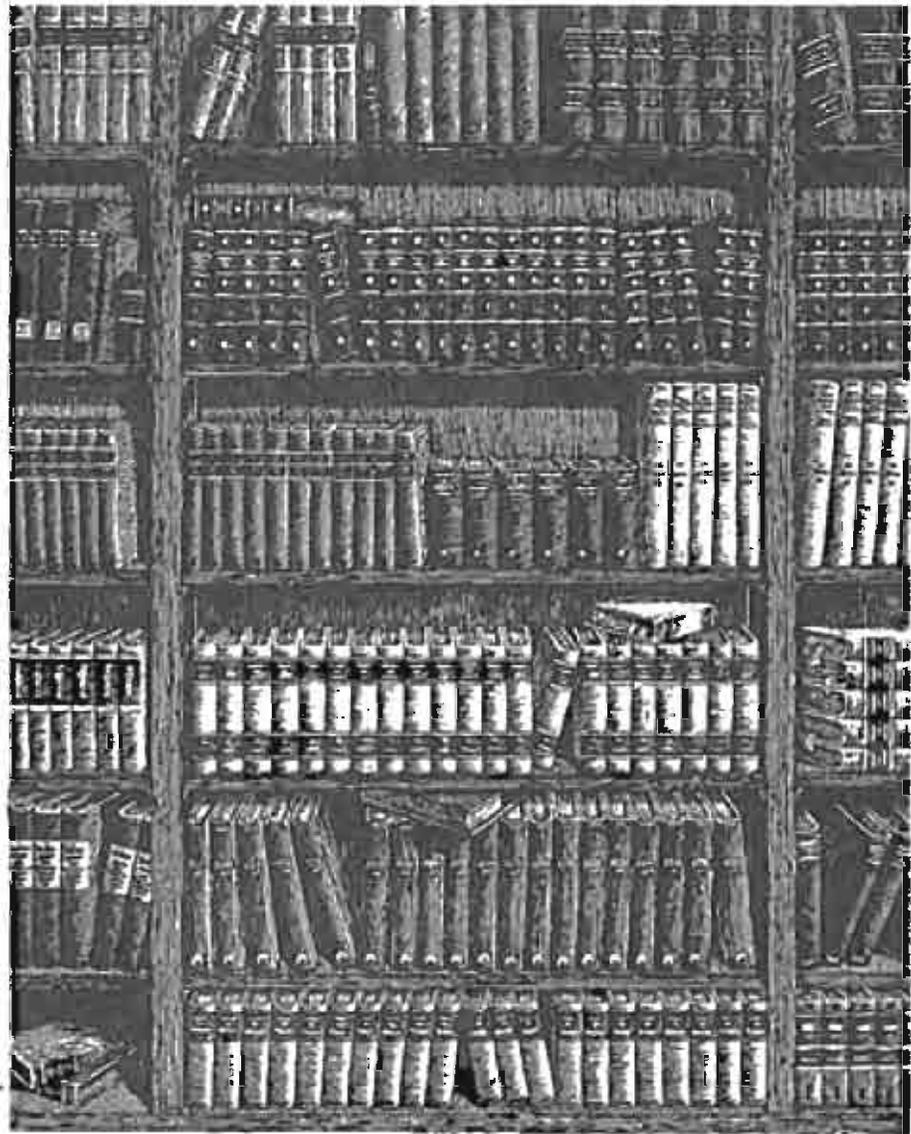
Ellen Rehg teaches philosophy at St. Louis University and Fombonne College.

guity lies, and is, therefore, one of the arguments that has to be made; the truth here needs to be discerned.

This leads to the difficulties I have with some of the philosophical underpinnings implied in the article. Audre Lorde's cited definition of heterosexism seems to reject the idea that one can justifiably evaluate and "rank" forms of sexual expression, in that it is wrong, according to this definition, to maintain that there is a superior "pattern of loving" (in this case, heterosexuality). First of all, what is a "pattern of loving"? Does it include things like monogamy or polygamy, a *menage a trois*, pedophilia or sado-masochistic practices? The looseness of the term would seem to encompass any kind of sexual relationship or practice. If it is wrong in principle to claim that any practice is superior to another, (which is what I think this definition implies), then we can make no value judgments on the superiority of monogamy over polygamy, for example, or on the evils of pedophilia or S & M.

My point is that in order to support the acceptability of homosexual expression, the authors appear to deny any normative basis for sexuality, since the assumption here is that the existence of a norm or standard is inherently oppressive, a form of domination. If any standard for evaluation, if evaluation itself, is inadmissible, then it looks like the basis for this position is a subjective relativism. Whatever any one given individual feels is right for him or her sexually, is automatically right. I find this basis to be morally and rationally bankrupt, and entirely inconsistent with Catholic Worker philosophy. I realize that a defense of the moral goodness of homosexuality need not rest upon such a basis, but in this article it looks to me like it does. I have also read and heard this kind of relativism as the basis for homosexual rights being espoused in other discussions on the topic.

What I am mainly saying is that I think we should think this through more carefully, and less polemically. Let's acknowledge some of the ambiguities of the issue. Yes, there does seem to be a tension between naming homosexuality an "involuntary condition" and then calling its practice sinful. On the other hand, it does seem like an "objective disorder," in that in homosexuals



there seems to be a dissonance between one's objective, biological structure and one's inner sexual-affective drives. To discern the truth of this issue, I would echo the words of Isaiah, "Come, let us reason together." ✦

LOVE: THE OVERWHELMING ANSWER

by Annjie Schiefelbein

I am not one of the world's great thinkers. No one has ever marvelled at my intellect, nor will I go down in history for my amazingly conceived concepts and formulated ideas. I have finally come to terms with that. I'm okay with it. What helps me with that knowledge is the belief that I have been graced in the area of intuition, which I struggle to believe is as valid as any logical thought. I've done no in-depth study on the area of homosexuality, although I've read the writings of many who have. I have no developed theory on natural tendencies versus those which may be acquired. I have no answer for the question of natural law. What I do have is a tremendous, unchanging feeling, born in my heart and refined within my mind. This is a feeling that love is the overwhelming answer to most questions, found when we are able to overcome the barrier of fear. I read the article in [The Mustard Seed](#) and others like it, and my feeling leaps with recognition in me, much like John leaped in Elizabeth's womb. It feels that love is bigger than our understanding of it, and that it can disdain boundaries with greater intensity than our minds can fathom.

It seems to me that the ratio between the amount people speak of love and the amount many people experience it is extremely disproportionate, with the latter being on the losing end. Despite what every romantic novel and movie says, love is hard to come by. I chose to believe that the eod-all, be-all, once in a lifetime love does exist, but not frequently. If a person can find that kind of love, one that exists in respect and is based in truth, how could it be anything but holy? I don't believe it is anything less than glorified by God, whether both participants have penises or both have vaginas. Only an individual can decide within his or her own heart whether a relationship is healthy and based in

God. No one else can be where the person is or has been. We can only challenge each other if something seems blatantly amiss. But I feel we also have a responsibility to trust the intuition of each other. How can we question the intuition that another human being has had since birth? How can we question an intuition that burns true and deep within them and that fits for them, despite it not fitting in with anything the world has told us about what love and life and sex should be, or even an intuition that does not fit with our own love and life and sex?

So that leads directly to the question: how do I understand or accept the intuition many people have that leads them to the conclusion that homosexuality is a sin? I admit, I have a more difficult time dealing with this one. But again, who am I to judge intuitions or hearts of other people? We all just walk our paths and, at our best, try to come to some connection with what role we play in life. My intuitions lead me to many different places than those of others. I may not agree, but I must respect.

In the end as in the beginning, it all comes full circle in love. Blessed are they who are fortunate enough to find a love worthy of song and dance. Even more blessed, I believe, are those who find this love but cannot sing and dance because of the contrived boundaries placed upon relational rules thousands of years ago. May we instead, rejoice with them in the beautiful nature and intuition inherent in their spirits. That is what I am left with as these questions and issues continue to spring forth. My feeling is that of rejoicing. No great thoughts (as promised), but only an almost overpowering feeling rising through my intuitive spirit, guiding my thoughts and actions. Thanks for indulging it.



Annjie Schiefelbein can be seen riding her bike through Forest Park on a pretty day.

This article was written by the editors of The Mustard Seed, a publication of the Toronto Catholic Worker. It was published in the Summer of 1994 and is reprinted here with permission.

Twenty-five years ago this June, New York police raided the Stonewall bar in Greenwich village, one of many bars catering to the neighbourhood's gay and lesbian subculture. Such raids were commonplace, but this one ended differently, with the bar's patrons turning on the police and chasing them onto the street. The event was a catalyst: from this act of resistance the gay liberation movement was born.

As we of The Mustard Seed collectively joyfully prepare to mark this milestone in the history of gay liberation, we reflect with sadness on how much that injustice remains unchallenged: both by our society, and within the Catholic Worker movement.

Writer and poet Audre Lorde defined heterosexism as "the belief in the inherent superiority of one pattern of loving, and thereby its right to dominance," and homophobia as "the fear of feelings of love for members of one's own sex, and therefore the hatred of those feelings in others."⁽¹⁾ In a society such as ours, tightly woven together by the bonds of capitalism and the power dynamics of male domination and white domination, a sexual reality that does not fit into the prescribed pattern is seen as a threat, both on the individual and collective level.

This is a critical time of social upheaval. As we move into a state of permanent recession, the familiar polarities of the cold war are replaced by the proliferating hegemony of transnational business interests. Casting around for our bearings, everything that deviates from the norm needs to be purged. Ethnic cleansing becomes horribly commonplace. Refugees are denied shelter. Hate crimes against anyone perceived as Other increase.

For lesbian and gay people, this inability to recognize the dynamic human force of difference takes the form of open street violence, of the Ku Klux Klan leading pro-gay-bashing rallies through gay neighborhoods in Pennsylvania; of the murders of over a dozen gay people in Montreal in hate-motivated crimes.

Responses from the Catholic community of faith have not been encouraging. For example: the Archbishop of Toronto, Aloysius Ambrozic, is calling for Catholics actively to oppose the provincial government's proposed legislation that would standardize benefits for heterosexual and homosexual couples.

It is against this background that we face the Catholic Church's teaching on homosexuality. As a community striving to live as disciples of the Risen One, the Catholic Church has a unique responsibility to immerse itself in the work of liberating all people who face injustice. It is a sad and scandalous reality that by its current position the Church only reinforces and perpetuates the structural and psychological oppression faced by lesbian women and gay men. The Church sorely needs to address itself to the real questions of gender, sexuality and power that problematize its pastoral and theological mission.

Certain texts in the bible have been traditionally used to define gay love as a perverse sexual act—most specifically, the text on Sodom in Genesis 19:1-29. Yet many Biblical scholars are in agreement that the story of Sodom is in fact a condemnation of rape, xenophobia and, above all, a gross failure to fulfill the sacred requirements of hospitality.

The few biblical references to specific manifestations of homosexual sex (Romans 1:26, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:10) do not in fact address homosexuality as a genuine affectional orientation. Rather, they are intended as a condemnation of perverse homosexual activity indulged in by otherwise truly heterosexual individuals as an expression of contempt or self-centered lust and usually associated with some form of idol-worship."⁽²⁾ It is indeed ironic that these few passages are interpreted so literally, and broadened into a general condemnation of same-sex relationships, when the many teachings throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament on economic justice (usury for example) have been watered down or flatly ignored.

We need to look honestly at the dynamics of friendship and love in the stories of Naomi and Ruth, David and Jonathan. With the interpretive tradition passed down to us from the Jewish midrash to the writings of the Church Fathers, we need to wrestle with all these texts, believing (to paraphrase theologian Karl Barth) in their innate truth as the revealed Word of God while at the same time recognizing how they are rooted in a particular historical and cultural context.

Current Catholic teaching tells us that "violent malice in speech or in action" against "homosexual persons" is "deplorable." At the same time, however, because a "homosexual orientation" is "an objective disorder," and "homosexual activity" is "an intrinsic moral evil," civil rights legislation "can be legitimately limited for objectively disordered external conduct,"⁽³⁾ and thus denied to gay and lesbian people. There is a tremendous tension within these statements. A

homosexual orientation is accepted (in the recent Universal Catechism) as an involuntary condition. As such, it must therefore be sinless—yet any expression of this condition is a sin.(4) The Church strongly advises people with this orientation to stay silent about it, to stay in the closet—and then the question of anti-gay discrimination will not arise.(5)

The “objectively disordered external conduct” referred to above as justifying discrimination is in everyday terms being “out of the closet.” For openly lesbian and gay Christians, being out is an act of faith, continually renewed. It is a most joyful and deeply personal recognition of gay or lesbian sexuality as a manifestation of the love of God; it is a commitment to living that gift of Love in one’s daily life. Christ’s teaching that “the truth will set you free” resonates in the soul. To be in the closet is to experience a barrier to the spiritual life, because it is a conscious denial of who one truly is within Christ’s Mystical Body. Andrew Sullivan points out that “being gay is not about sex as such. Fundamentally, it’s about one’s core emotional identity. It’s about whom one loves, ultimately, and how that can make one whole as a human being.”(6)

Being out as a gay person is an act of solidarity, letting others still gripped by silence know that they are not alone. As a witness to our very heterosexual society, it is also a political statement: straight persons who know openly gay people, as friends or acquaintances, are much less likely to be gay-bashers, make fag jokes, or otherwise practice discrimination. And, as such, coming out is a step made in hope towards the day when what it means to be lesbian or gay will be acknowledged and affirmed in every aspect of social and cultural life.

As people of faith, we in the Catholic Worker Movement need to go much deeper than the meagre liberal notions of “tolerance” and civil rights. The Catholic Worker’s call is to announce the good news of the Gospel, to denounce oppression in whatever form it may take. We are particularly called into grace through the practice of hospitality. In being with the stranger, in breaking bread together, the categories and prejudices that separate us fall away and we can learn truly to know each other.

As Catholic Workers, as Christians, we are asked to make room in our hearts, and by our love in action, for all those who suffer injustice. We can not look at the teen suicides, the lesbian mothers who lose their children the many tens of thousands of men who died in Auschwitz wearing the pink triangle, the profound spiritual and psychological anguish of the closet, and simply continue to dismiss homosexuality as an objective disorder. Falling in love with a person of the same sex is a spiritual, emotional, physical reality in the lives of millions of people, across all cultures and economic strata. If we can respond only by closing our hearts, we risk falling into the true sin of Sodom—the failure to practice the divine imperative of hospitality.

Notes:

- (1) Audre Lorde, in her essay, “Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving.”
- (2) John McNeill: The Church and the Homosexual.
- (3) From the revised text of the Doctrinal Congregation’s Responding to Legislative Proposals on Discrimination Against Homosexuals in Origins, August 6, 1992.
- (4) Andrew Sullivan, interviewed in America (May 8, 1993)
- (5) Doctrinal Congregations, ibid., para. 14.
- (6) Andrew Sullivan, ibid.

“It is indeed ironic that these few passages are interpreted so literally, and broadened into a general condemnation of same-sex relationships, when the many teachings throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament on economic justice (usury for example) have been watered down or flatly ignored.”

DISCERNING THE TRUTH

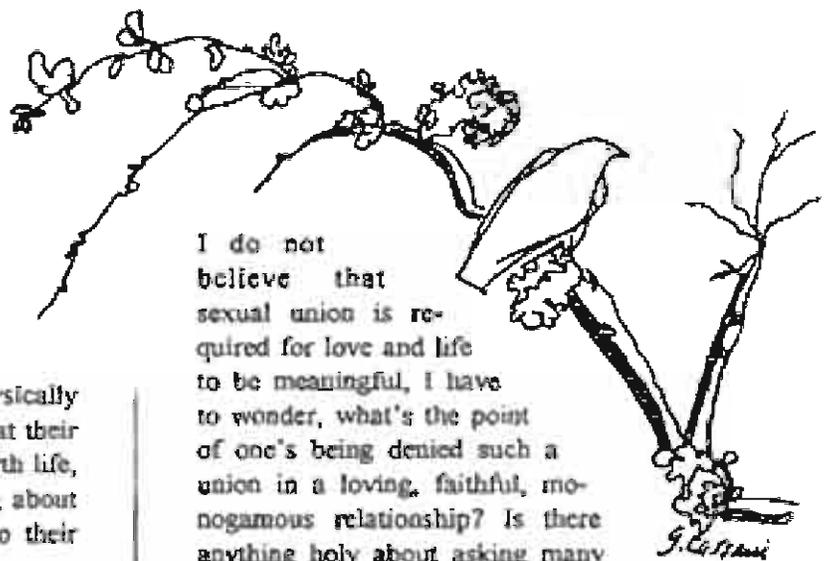
by Teka Childress

I have been perplexed about how to approach the question of homosexual unions. In coming to discern the truth about any issue, one must have a basis upon which to build or a starting point from which to draw conclusions. It is precisely at this juncture that I have usually gotten stuck.

I have generally been convinced that we can discern the truth about things by examining the reality presented to us in nature and in our experiences. Yet, when I look at what I find in nature and experience with regard to homosexual love I discover things that are not easily reconcilable. When I see that men and women physically complement one another in their sexuality and that their sexual union brings the possibility of bringing forth life, I cannot ignore this. Does it not tell us anything about what human beings are called to with regard to their sexual relations?

And, yet, perhaps the complementarity of men and women does not indicate that no place exists for homosexual unions as well. This is the other side of the coin. There is love and attraction experienced between people of the same sex. One cannot dismiss it.

One of the more compelling elements I find in support of homosexual union is the simple reality that many people are seemingly born with this orientation or minimally find themselves with this orientation set. While



I do not believe that sexual union is required for love and life to be meaningful, I have to wonder, what's the point of one's being denied such a union in a loving, faithful, monogamous relationship? Is there anything holy about asking many people who long for this kind of relationship to forgo it? Is this what God asks or requires? I find that hard to believe.

Obviously, love is the measure by which we must decide all things, and therefore the most important thing is that we love and accept one another as we each strive to see how God calls us. And we must always work for justice and against oppression.



Teka Childress is back to practicing the Sax now that this issue has gone to press.

CONTINUING THE CHALLENGE

by Mark Scheu

I rejoiced at the publication of the statement on homosexuals and the Church in The Mustard Seed. I believe it was long overdue in a Catholic Worker publication, and I embrace it wholeheartedly. I have contended for some time that there is, understandably, a tendency in Catholic Worker circles to sanctify the opinions of Dorothy Day on various moral questions, such as abortion, women's role in the church, sex outside of marriage, or whatever. This is akin to reading the letters of Paul for guidance on individual points of conduct, stipulations which were pertinent to his own culture and time but hardly immutable moral principles. What is important in Paul's letters is the overall understanding of who Jesus is and what he means for us.

Likewise in Dorothy Day's radical Gospel vision. Nonviolence, solidarity with the poor, and personalism (yes, social anarchism!) are the hallmarks of her vision. But to try to deduce individual stances on every moral issue with which one is confronted by referring back to Catholic Worker tradition or the "canon" of her writings is a great disservice to the Catholic Worker movement, to Dorothy Day, and to the Gospel.

It is not crucial for the movement to affirm this statement of the Toronto Worker on homosexuality and the Church. One cannot expect instant unanimity on an issue of this nature. Yet this issue needs to be aired and freely discussed. It IS crucial to break away from the dead hand of authority, whether it be a Roman decree or

a stance of Dorothy Day's—to break the pall of silence on some of the most urgent issues of our day, such as the role of women in the Church, abortion, homosexuality. An unofficial ban of silence has existed in Catholic Worker circles because it is contended that Dorothy Day did not challenge the authority of the Church on these matters.

Yet if the Catholic Worker movement is not to atrophy, if it is to enliven our faith and to quicken our souls and to inspire our hearts, it needs to continue to challenge both society and the Church (as Dorothy Day often did) when the practices of these institutions conflict with the Gospel. Those who are the heirs of Dorothy Day, those who call themselves Catholic Workers, must experiment with the truth as they perceive it, not simply as it is handed down. Such sojourns are not to be censored as heresy, but welcomed as this generation's grappling with the Gospel vision in our time. Jesus said that he came not to bring peace but a sword. It does not serve the truth to avoid difficult and potentially divisive issues—it usually only serves to perpetuate injustice and oppression. We are indeed promised a "new heaven and a new earth." But we are not there yet! Let us contend with these issues as our conscience and our faith lead us. It is in this spirit that this bold statement on the part of the Toronto Catholic Worker should be received, and it is in this spirit that I welcome this issue of The Round Table. ✦

To everyone's delight, Mark Scheu was wed to Ann Kinsey on October 7, 1995.

FROM ABROAD



by Patrick McCarthy

On Refusing to be an Enemy in a Time of War

Last spring, I received a call from an immigration lawyer asking for help in gathering information to support an application for political asylum for Almir M., an eighteen year-old Bosnian Muslim man from Zenica, in central Bosnia. I knew that Almir, as a Bosnian and a Muslim, had, by definition, the legally-prescribed "well-founded fear of persecution and physical harm" in his home country. I also knew that the process for obtaining asylum in the United States was never so simple, even in obvious cases like this one.

I contacted the office of the United Nations Chief Investigator on War Crimes in the former Yugoslavia. I explained that I was seeking documentary evidence to support an asylum claim for a Bosnian national in the United States. Days later, I received a package several inches thick, containing UN reports detailing war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide in Bosnia.

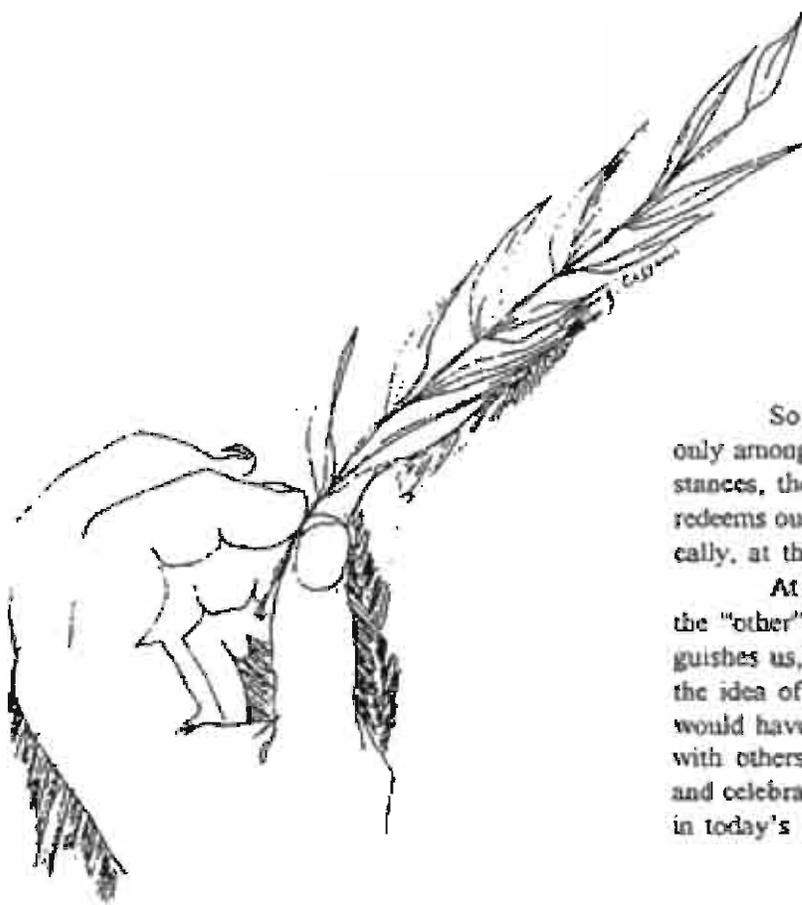
Even though I had been in Bosnia a few months earlier and had seen up close the wholesale destruction of a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional society, I was unprepared for the catalog of horror in the pages before me. The facts alone were staggering: over 200,000 Bosnians killed; 800 prison camps with at least 500,000 prisoners; over 50,000 torture victims; 151 mass graves with bodies numbering from five to 3,000 in each; and over 20,000 documented rape victims. Many of the rape victims were between eleven and seventeen years old,

and were raped repeatedly over eight to eleven months. Over 90% of these crimes were committed by Serbians on a base population of only five million.

Acts of violence, Jacques Ellul once observed, have a certain sameness to them. As I pored over the pages and pages of testimony, presented in legally precise and agonizing detail, I became numbed by the similarity of the acts described, until I came across one small passage, almost by accident. It was an account of the rounding up of non-Serbs from an area near Sarajevo.



Patrick McCarthy is a librarian at Saint Louis University and the coordinator of the Bosnian Student Project in St. Louis. For more information about the Bosnian Student Project, please call 664-9920.



At the beginning, the description followed a predictable pattern: a group of civilians hiding in a cellar were discovered by Bosnian Serb soldiers and were ordered outside. The soldiers instructed the group of 60 or so to separate into two groups, Muslims on one side, non-Muslims on the other. This practice is often the prelude to the summary execution of Muslim groups and has been commonplace throughout Bosnia. But one person in the assembled group, a 50 year-old Serbian man, refused. "These are my friends, my neighbors," he said, referring to the Muslims. "I am with them," he declared, as he moved to join the Muslim group. The Serbian soldiers were so incensed by this act of "betrayal" that they beat him to death on the spot.

Who can fail to recognize a compelling truth in this exceptional act of martyrdom? The refusal to be an enemy, at the heart of the Christian gospels, is also the most ennobling of human actions. In this single account, buried among hundreds of pages of testimony, is preserved a profound counter-witness to literally thousands of acts of barbarity, carried out in the name of religion, in Bosnia. On one level, it is a story of defeat. However, as a Bosnian acquaintance once remarked, "there is more power in a single act of love than in a thousand years of hate."

So often, we are confronted with making choices only among bad options. And yet, even in such circumstances, there is always a way to act that affirms and redeems our common humanity, though sometimes, ironically, at the cost of our own lives.

At its root, the Bosnian war has been a war on the "other", a war of savage assault on all that distinguishes us, one from the other. In short, it is a war on the idea of civilization itself. The aggressors in Bosnia would have us believe that we can live only in groups with others just like us. Toleration, mutuality, respect and celebration of differences; these are a fragile luxury in today's world.

"Who can fail to recognize a compelling truth in this exceptional act of martyrdom?"

In the last analysis, the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina has been an almost unimpeded slaughter of innocent people and the culture that sustains them. Most tragic of all, in my opinion, is the fact that this war was preventable and unnecessary. That fact places a terrible judgment on all of us.

"In the evening," wrote St. John of the Cross, "we will be judged by how well we have loved." Our continuing hope for the people of Bosnia is incarnated by acts of love, the "harsh and dreadful love" of our shared humanity.



* Almir eventually received political asylum and is now attending college in Missouri.

FROM KAREN HOUSE



by Annjie Schiefelbein

One of my favorite parts of introducing new guests, volunteers, or visitors to our house is when we say, "This house is totally run on donations and by volunteers." Seeing the surprised faces and hearing the confused questions as I explain this philosophy reminds me of my own reaction the first time I heard it. I was amazed, as I still am, that everything I am surrounded by exists only because people have identified goodness and hope within themselves. From our toilet paper to our light bills, we exist in and from the generosity of people who realize the imbalance in our world, locally and globally.

Karen House has been shaped and changed through the years by so many people: those from far away who only hear of our work but chose to have hope in it, those who send donations, those who volunteer, those who live here, and those who pray for our work. Like the tuck-pointed bricks that raise our house to three stories, each person has supported the house in integral and necessary ways. Most of them I'll never know. I've heard many of their names. Their stories are told by former and longer-standing current community members. As I sit in this southeast corner room on the third floor that I know as my room, I wonder how many others sat here (maybe even writing desperately overdue Round Table articles, as I'm doing now)? I know of the two that came before me, but there have been many more, spanning many years.

Just like everyone else in the world, I suppose, those of us who live in the community, (just five of us now—the smallest number in the history of the house), do our best to sort out what is being asked of us, and how to live within those questions and answers. Being five very different people, the answers and questions lead us to very different places. Living within those different places, yet within the context of community is an important, challenging joy. It has been an amazing

process for me, and, I would guess, everyone who has lived in community.

Here at Karen House we have said a very sad (and we hope temporary) good-bye to Tom Nelson, one of the foundation bricks of the community. Tom has gone to Denver for now. His eager teachings are missed here, as are his wonderful stories that I could listen to over and over (actually have listened to over and over, now that I think about it). It seems the times are always changing here at Karen House. We hope that they will continue to change until they return Tom back home (where, I might add, he belongs!). Also in the ranks of those departing, is Kris Dennis. Kris was a community member for over three years. No one currently in the house has Kris's flair for art, poetry, and drama. So while waiting for her letters to inspire us, we'll just have to spend our time wondering how much hair Scott will have with each new day. Tim Pekarek was out there in Washington at Bethlehem Farm with Jim and Katrina Plato and is now back visiting with us.

"...everything I am surrounded by exists only because people have identified goodness and hope within themselves."

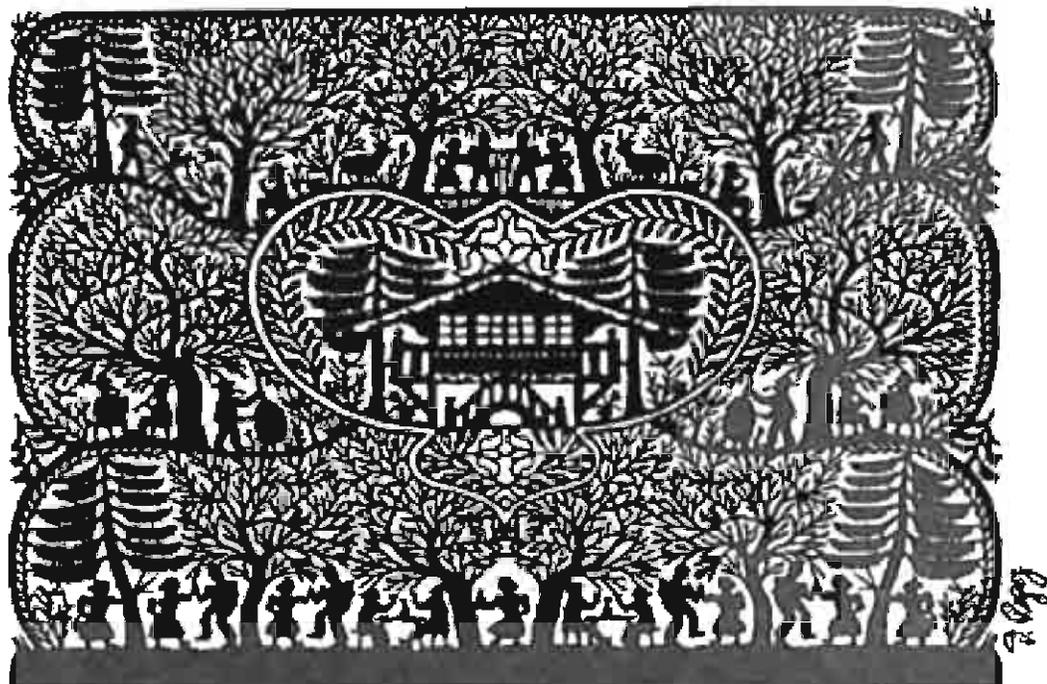
Annjie Schiefelbein has been chosen for the role of "little sister" by Scott and Mitch who tease her mercilessly.

Back here in the house we keep sorting out the questions presented to us by our faith, lives, philosophy, and guests, most of whom are young women with very young children. Mitch continues his work here at the house, playing the part of maintenance worker out of necessity. He also continues his work with the developmentally disabled and listens to us rant endlessly about wishing he'd slow down. Becky started back into her nurse-practitioner program at St. Louis University for another semester. She also works at Regional Hospital when not making the 1/4 block trek to Karen House from her apartment. Teka graces our lives with musical notes (via saxophone) when not keeping up with the hundreds of connections she's made in her fifteen years here at the house. Scott is trying to balance his work at the house with his work at Coro. We almost lost him to a job in San Francisco last spring, so we are especially

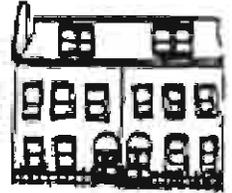
grateful for his presence. I continue to work at Barnes Hospital as a nurse while living here. My own answers seem to be pointing in a direction different from Karen House right now, so in February I'll be moving to Dogtown, changed by my one and a half years here and wondering what the future will bring.

But for tonight, I sit in the room that is mine for now, with the current lot of people that make up who Karen House is and will be. The hope that is shown through the house's existence warms me. In spite of all of the fear and despair, there is a light which seems minuscule at times, but is brightened by those who can see it. Those who see this light illuminate the future for people who may one day walk around Karen House or some place like it saying, "We are totally run on donations and the generosity of people who care."

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FROM LITTLE HOUSE



by Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.

In 1977 I spent six months working for the United Farm Workers in Florida, helping negotiate and enforce the Minutemaids contract there. The day I arrived, Winterhaven director James Logan, an African American, told me the staff was going to Disneyworld the next day on passes from relatives of some of the orange pickers in the area.

James looked at me sternly and said, "These folks gave us the passes because they want us to have a good time. I want to have a good time. I want you to come and I want you to have a good time too. But, if you are the sort of white organizer who never leaves your political analysis at home and complains all the time about unjust distribution of wealth and how terrible Disneyworld is, then you should stay home."

I went to Disneyworld and I had a good time. In the years since, I have occasionally remembered James' admonition; and when I've deliberately chosen the good things of this world, from a bottle of beer to a trip to Greece, I've consciously enjoyed those present moments more because I have a better appreciation for maintaining balance in my life.

All this is pertinent because, during September, I got home on a rainy Sunday afternoon and I thought, "The Rams are probably on television. They've won two games. I wonder how they are doing. If they win, am I going to refuse to enjoy their victories because our political decision to build the stadium was so wasteful and because a few people are making so much money?"

I'm a fair weather sports fan. When I was eight and living in Chicago, just beginning to read the paper and follow comics and the baseball standings, I asked my father whether he was for the Cubs or the White Sox. "The Yankees," he said. "They're winning!" I was appalled, but, like James, my father was pragmatic about taking simple pleasures where he found them.

So, following my two mentors, I watched the Rams beat North Carolina and, the next week, beat the

Chicago Bears. As I write this, the St. Louis Rams have a record 4-0 start for the football season.

I can't imagine that I will ever have the money or the willingness to spend the money on a football ticket. I don't want to support the local entertainment industry of sports and gambling that has been built at the expense of manufacturing and other good job creation strategies.

A good job pays enough that the worker pays taxes and receives health benefits, offers opportunities for advancement, is satisfying, is driven by problems or needs, and is environmentally benign. I know all that, and I won't subvert my own work by contributing to and supporting bad jobs like souvenir vendors. But in this present moment, it is fun to have a local team that's unexpectedly on a roll.

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Rita Corbin

Mary Ann McGivern, S.L. was recently featured in The River Front Times discussing *The High Road*, a digest and critique of economic development plans.

FROM OUR MAILBAG

Dear Round Table,

Just read you issue of Round Table on Prayer. Well done-congratulations! It is sensitive, thoughtful, covers so many types, and is rich in variety. Also liked Jeff's cover illustration. All conducive to prayer!

Best Wishes,
Sister Mary Mangao

cut and mail to: St. Louis Human Rights Action Service
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St. Louis, MO 63130

St. Louis Human Rights Action Service

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The St. Louis Human Rights Action Service will provide busy people with a way to regularize their responses to human rights abuses around the world and in the United States. SLHRAS will use the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948 as its definition of human rights. The Declaration includes political, civil, economic and social rights. The following organizations will be utilized as sources for action alerts: Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Equal Justice-USA, Witness for Peace, Peace Brigades International, and Fellowship of Reconciliation. SLHRAS will be operated ten months a year by Bill Ramsey, who has worked promoting human rights and peace for the American Friends Service Committee for 19 years. The annual subscription fee is \$50.

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by Becky Hassler

As many of you know, I am a nurse and work in the Emergency Room at St. Louis Regional Medical Center. I have been working there since I graduated from Nursing School in 1991. I chose to work there because I very much wanted to work with those who are poor and cannot get access to health care anywhere they choose. I love working there, though it is extremely difficult at times, not just because of the twelve hour days and getting a 30-minute lunch when you're lucky, but also because of the emotional aspect as well. It can be seen as a great privilege to enter so deeply into someone else's life when they are wounded and in pain, even if it's for ever so brief a time. But it can also be extremely challenging. Being a part of the community at Karen House gives me an added privilege of having shared life with many of the patients who come to the ER, either from living with them or knowing them from the neighborhood or giving them food at our door.



Rita Corbin

Come on morning rounds with me as I begin my shift as charge nurse for the day. In room 1, we have a 57-year-old male who is here because his diabetes is out of control. His blood sugar is above 500mg/dl. He has been out of his insulin for three days and cannot get into the clinic for another two weeks. In room 2 is Ms. B. She is a 22-year-old female who overdosed on her mother's antidepressant medicine after her two children were taken away from her. Room 3 has Mr. C in it. He's a sixteen-year-old male in police custody and is here for a "fit for confinement" statement that he is well enough to go to jail after wrecking the stolen car he was driving while being chased by the police. Mr. G. is in room 4. He's a 34-year-old male brought here in a friend's car for decreased respirations and decreased level of consciousness. Though his drug screen is not back from the lab, it is strongly suspected that he has overdosed on heroin. The patient in room 5 has schizophrenia and is waiting on transportation to Malcolm Bliss for further psychiatric evaluation. She is a 47-year-old found wandering the streets, screaming obscenities to customers in an all-night coffee shop. (I know her as a former guest at Karen House.) Room 6 has a 32-year-old male suffering from a heart attack due to crack cocaine use. The patient in room 7 is here for a gunshot wound to his arm. He is a fourteen-year-old involved in a drive-by shooting. Room 8 has a nineteen-year-old female who was raped by two men and left in an abandoned building. She escaped while they were sleeping. Ms. J. in room 9 is a 42-year-old female who comes very often to the ER for alcoholic seizures. Mr. D. is in Rm. 10, an 87-year-old male brought in by the ambulance for heat exhaustion. He had no air conditioning or fan in his senior citizen apartment. No one knows who's been taking his social security check. Ms. R. in room 11 has a blood pressure of 220/134. She has been taking her blood pressure medicine every other day instead of every day to make it last until her next check comes. I'll stop there, though we have a total of 25 rooms.

Because of the cutback in funding to Regional, our staff has been cut once again. We never have more

Becky Hassler spends her Sundays studying pharmacology but wishes she could be out enjoying the Fall.

than seven nurses and that is for just twelve hours, though we're open twenty-four. The rest of the time we have five or six, as long as no one calls in sick that day. At any given time there may be 30 or 40 patients waiting in the waiting room to be seen while all our rooms are filled. You can imagine how long the wait is for someone who has a stomach ache, earache or cough.

The new managed care program for people with Medicaid will be initiated very soon in St. Louis. This will give Medicaid patients a choice (a limited choice, but at least a choice) of where they want their health care. Of course, all hospitals participating in this program are eager to sign these patients up because they'll get reimbursed for them. There is still a very large

population in the city who have absolutely no health care insurance, Medicare, Medicaid or money to pay for health care. No hospital is going to be fighting to get these patients. Approximately 30-40% of the patients Regional sees in the ER cannot pay for any of the care they receive.

If we still believe that health care in this country is a right and not just a privilege (even though the U.S. government doesn't seem to believe this), then we need to take seriously our responsibility to make sure it is provided here in St. Louis. Fighting to keep Regional's doors open is essential in assuring that those like the patients described above can receive the health care that they deserve.

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I am afraid of what is before us, because what we sow we will reap. It is an exercise in courage to write these words, to speak in this way when it is revolting to consider how much we profess and how little we perform. God help us.

DOROTHY DAY



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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, Mitch McGee, Ellen Rehg, Mark Scheu, Annjie Schiefelbein, and Scott Stauffer. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

The Round Table

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