

# THE Round Table

Winter  
1999

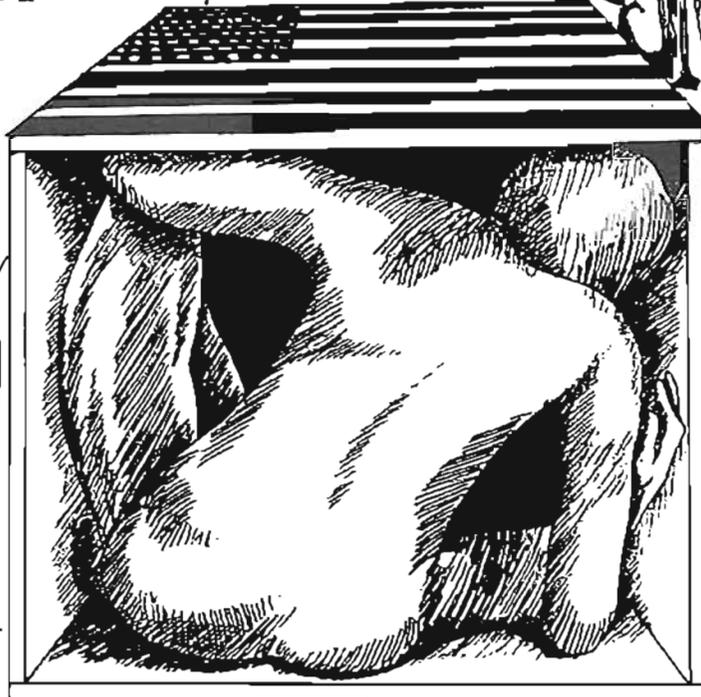
"...a path from where we are to where we should be." --Peter Maurin

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## NonViolence & THE

Healing  
the divide...



# Why This Issue?

Terrorism. The word itself is fearsome. It is bloodied faces and bodies. It is bombed buildings. It is often reduced to sound bytes on the nightly news. If one looks no farther, it appears to be random. But is it really? Does terrorism occur in a vacuum? Does it necessitate a violent response? This issue of *The Round Table* addresses those questions in light of the United States strikes against Afghanistan and Sudan in response to bombings of United States embassies in Africa.

Teka Childress begins by encouraging us to look for a deeper understanding of the Middle East and its people. In doing so, we may come to see that nonviolence would be a better response. Mark Chmiel places the conflict between the Middle East and the United States in an historical context so we can see that recent events did not, in fact, occur in a vacuum. He also asks us to look beyond the stereotype of the Islamic Fundamentalist label. The interview with Osman Handoo helps us to see Muslim beliefs more clearly. John Kavanaugh challenges us not to use the same tactics as the Bin Ladins of the world, lest we participate in that which we say we abhor. Amy Gerth shares her experiences during the demonstration to close the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia last November. She encourages all of us to give voice to the truth of disappearances, torture, and murder, which are the results of training at the School of Assassins.

In From Abroad, Christie Huck and Mary Dutcher describe their trip to Nicaragua to establish a sister community with Rio Abajo, Limay. They offer us an opportunity to help the people in this rural area to relocate and rebuild after hurricane Mitch destroyed their community.

In Round Table Talk, Bill Miller speaks of the meaning of The Word and The Eucharist, especially to those who are weak, vulnerable and diminished. May The Word and The Eucharist help us to see that terrorism and violent responses to it feed on each other and do not result in peace. The ones who are hardest hit by terrorism and violence are often the most vulnerable. May we also see that the One Body of which we are all a part includes our sisters and brothers in the Middle East.



—Carol Giles

Front cover art by Jeff Finnegan

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# Nonviolence: Untried or Untrue?

by Teka Childress

After the bombings of the United States embassies in Africa last summer and the U.S. strikes against the "terrorist sites" in Afghanistan and Sudan, I was struck by how often we are presented by our government with a volatile situation and are told there is no way out but to respond quickly and with violence. It reminded me of when I was younger and friends would pose arguments to me against my pacifism which were filled with hypotheticals, such as, "What would you do if a thoroughly evil and unredeemable person were pointing a gun at your child and the only way you could keep this person from killing your child was by killing him or her first?" In my response to both cases, the hypothetical and the real, I feel like crying out, "This debate has gotten too narrow! How did we get to this pass?" I have the feeling of being boxed in. When you are boxed in, you are in the dark and you have no room to move. The way out of this box--this no-win scenario--is to shine the light of truth and to see possibilities which give room to move and act in unforeseen ways. This issue of *The Round Table* was born out of just this desire.

Nonviolence often makes more sense after we have examined a situation to see it in its true light, stripped of its lies, prejudices, and stereotypes. Indeed, not only does it often appear that upon scrutiny a nonviolent response is more preferable, but the very act of seeking the truth, itself, is the very first and essential step of nonviolent practice. It comes from a desire to see the humanity in another, and to believe in the possibility of the good in them as well as their capacity for committing great evil. Once we can see more clearly, a second step in nonviolent practice must be taken, and that is the one of acting in justice and charity in previously unforeseen and unimagined ways.

So, with regard to the bombings of the U.S. em-

bassies in Africa, we can apply this two-step process of examining the situation and deciding how we might act.

With regard to understanding, we might want to look at the particular facts of the embassy bombings and the following U.S. attacks and ask some questions: Do we really know who was behind the bombings at the embassies? How do we know? Can we trust the sources of the information President Clinton presented to us? How do we interpret the conflicting information that was presented regarding the pharmaceutical plant that was bombed in Khartoum, Sudan? When we respond to the attacks by bombing, are we really attacking those responsible for the embassy attacks, and if so, is there "collateral" damage, i.e., are we killing innocent people or destroying their homeland and/or property? And, even if we've found the true culprits, does the bombing achieve a goal of peace and justice in the region? Does it bring us in closer relationship to the peoples in that part of the world, to Arabs, to Muslims? And, does it protect us from future attacks?

A whole other area that needs to have light shed upon it is, who are the "terrorists" that we fear from the Middle East? Are they terrorists? Where do they come from? What do they want? What is the history which brought them to where they are? What was our own country's part in that history and what is our true relationship to these people now, including our economic and political relationship? Do we gain some benefit, i.e., cheap oil to drive around at will in a car that is predicated on their poverty? Have we helped to create terrorism by supporting oppression, which pushes people to the wall, and then in other instances by giving power and weapons to people like Saddam Hussein when it was to our political and economic benefit, such as during the Iran/Iraq war? These types of issues and others are addressed by Mark

Teka Childress was recently sighted receiving communion from a distinguished visitor from Rome.

Chmiel in his article offering a brief history and analysis of the struggle in the Middle East; by Osman Handoo, in his discussion about the global north and south and the effects of colonialism; and by John Kavanaugh in his article, "Terror Speaks to Terror."

Another area for Western Christians that needs illumination is, what is Islam? What do Muslims believe? We regularly hear the terms "Muslim," "fundamentalist," and "terrorist" put in the same sentence. We hear this so often that we might fail to distinguish one term from the other, until we think every Muslim is a fanatical fundamentalist who believes in or might practice terrorism. Thus, it is a duty of one practicing nonviolence to try to dispel myths, stereotypes, and fears. It is essential to understand another person in all their complexity, just as we know ourselves in tremendous complexity, weakness and strength, ugliness and beauty. The interview with Osman Handoo about Islam gives us an opportunity to see some of the content and texture of a Muslim's belief, which is a far cry from the monolithic image often presented in the popular media.

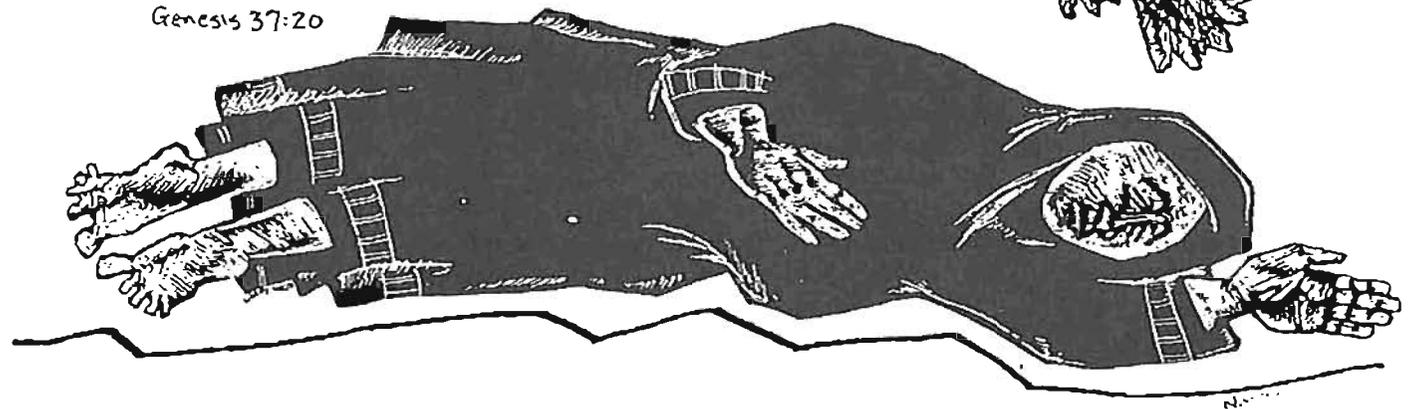
Now imagine, what if, after having a deeper understanding of the Middle East and its peoples, we applied a very different approach to the problem of terrorism coming from that region? What if we sought to rectify injustices, strove for economic justice and political free-

dom? What if we met with those who have grievances against the U.S. and tried to address those grievances? What if we refused to support people like Saddam Hussein, even when it was to our political advantage? What if we refused to support terrorism, whether sponsored by Israel or any other individual or group, and refused to engage in it ourselves? What if we refused to provide weapons to every government willing to pay, even if it were economically less advantageous for us? What if we refrained from creation of stereotypes and the labeling of our "enemies?" How much less often would we come to a pass where it seemed the only way out was annihilation and destruction?

All of this is to say that we often can't imagine a nonviolent way out of a situation because nonviolence has not been tried along the whole path getting us to where we are. Yet, I acknowledge that there is enough evil in the world that we may still come to such a pass, even if we have striven to be nonviolent all our lives and in all our actions. But, if we come to a place where decisions have to be made between allowing some evil to occur or using violence ourselves, if we come to such a place in the context of a nonviolent life, open to the whole truth and acting justly, our refusal to annihilate the one we see as a brother or sister, rather than merely the "enemy," makes so much more sense. ✦

Here comes that dreamer.  
Now is our chance; let us kill him/her  
and see what becomes of the dream!

Genesis 37:20



# Speaking Face to Face

an interview with Osman Handoo by Ellen Rehg

## Being Muslim in the United States

Round Table: Where are you from?

Osman Handoo: I was born and raised in the United States. I was born in Kentucky and raised in Kansas. My parents immigrated in the 1970's from Kashmir. I'm first-generation Muslim-American.

RT: Did they emigrate for religious reasons? Was there any conflict they were involved in?

OH: No. They were part of the phenomenon of the 60's and 70's known as the "brain drain." They were both physicians who came to the United States and, honestly speaking, [were seeking] more economic opportunity than anything else. My mother's family actually was expelled from Kashmir. She was born in Kashmir and their family was particularly active a little bit and were expelled; so she grew up in Pakistan. And my dad was born and raised in Kashmir, and he also went to Pakistan to do his medical studies; and they both came to the United States to do their residency.

RT: Were you raised as a Muslim?

OH: Yes.

RT: How did your religion shape your early life?

OH: If there's one thing that has influenced the way I think and the way I act it's definitely Islam, because we

don't view Islam as just a religion. We don't compartmentalize our life [saying], "This is the spiritual aspect, and this is my job, and this is my school." Islam is more of a guide to everything you do. So from that starting point, it really has been the shaping factor in my life.

The basic world view of a Muslim is that of *tawhid*. That means upholding the oneness of God. When a Muslim accepts the oneness of God, then he or she seeks to live his or her life according to God's laws. It's difficult for some people growing up in this society because you are a minority, and there's going to be some cultural clashes between the culture that your parents came from and the culture that you are surrounded with here in the United States. But it's also a chance for us as Muslim-Americans to separate what's Islamic from what's merely the cultural traditions of our parents. And there are a lot of Muslims that are born and raised in the United States that go back to the Muslim world to get educated in a traditional setting and come back to spread knowledge about the religion. It's a challenge to grow up Muslim and American at the same time. No doubt, it's definitely a challenge, but I think it's flourishing. From what I've seen, there's a lot of Muslim youth that are holding fast to this religion.

RT: They've managed to avoid making this separation between the secular and the sacred?

OH: Yeah. Islam affects the way you deal with other people. It affects the way you deal with your family. There's so many different things that the Prophet--peace be upon him--taught us about how we deal with situations in this life. We're fortunate as Muslims that there's two primary sources of information that we have; there's the Koran, which we believe to be the book that was revealed to the

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Ellen Rehg was recently sighted at the St. Louis University gym getting in shape after the birth of her daughter.

prophet Muhammad—peace be upon him—and also what we call the *hadith*, which is the sayings of the Prophet. You'll find many different sayings of the Prophet that can help guide a Muslim in his life. Basic injunctions like (this is not an exact quote, but), "A true believer does not go to sleep while his neighbor is hungry," or, "the best of you is he who has best character." And, "he who has best character is he who is best to his wife!" And things like, "Heaven is at the feet of your mothers!" Things like that. There's a lot of statements that Muslims and a lot of spiritual traditions have as well that are injunctions on how to live your life in relation to other people. Islam is not a religion that asks you to retire into a corner and engage in meditation. Islam is definitely a religion that asks the believer to go out into the world. Don't get too attached to the world because we as Muslims believe that this is just a trial. We believe in the afterlife. But it definitely asks us to work, to marry, to deal with other people because as human beings we belong to one society, and Islam doesn't ask us to turn inward and worry about spiritual growth just on our own.

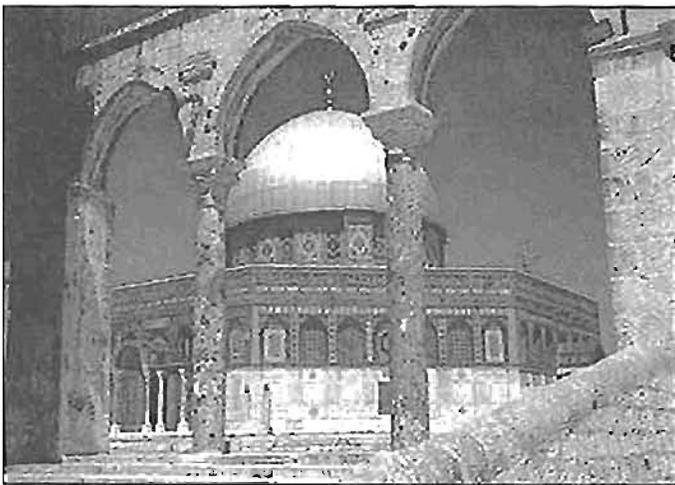


photo by Usmaan Ahmad

RT: I guess you practice the Five Pillars of Islam? You pray five times daily?

OH: There's two carpets right here. [He gestures to two carpets, roughly 2' by 3 1/2', placed perpendicular to each other on the floor near where he is sitting.]

RT: Oh, I guess that's the direction of Mecca, then? [in which the carpets are facing]

OH: Yes, Northeast. There's no real significance to the rug itself. It's just a clean place to pray, because people walk with their shoes on the floor.

RT: Do you find it difficult to pray five times a day, or is it so much a part of your routine that it's second nature?

OH: It's so much a part of our lives that we don't give a second thought to it. There's five different prayers, and

it really keeps you structured and really keeps you grounded. The spiritual symbolism of prayer is that when you're standing up and you're standing before God, a Muslim can envision that as standing on the Day of Judgment before his Lord. If you're praying the right way, if you're engaging your heart and really praying with fear and sincerity and love of God, then you're intensely reminded of how short this life is and how imminent death can be. Not in a morbid sense! If you pray five times a day, and you do that with spiritual conviction, you find that it keeps you in check. You don't forget. Because it's easy otherwise, when you're in a school environment like we're in, or when you're in a work environment, and you work these long hours; you're confronted with immediacy. Everything is before you and you react, and in that sense we become like an animal sometimes. We just sort of take, and we respond to our environment. This way [by praying], we think about where we stand in this world, what direction we're moving in.

RT: If you're at school when the time comes, how do you pray then?

OH: There's a room on campus that the Muslim Students Association shares with six or seven other student groups. So if it's time for prayer and we're on campus, then we'll go to that room and pray there. We're trying to get a room for ourselves, but the University won't fund us; and the property is pretty expensive off campus around here. We're working on that.

RT: Is it ever a problem? What if you're out somewhere and there's no place to pray? What do you do then?

OH: I've prayed in airports, parking lots, parks.

RT: You just find whatever spot you can?

OH: Yeah, find a nice clean spot and pray!

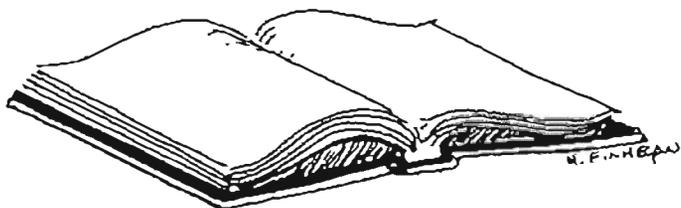
RT: I've always wondered about that.

OH: Yeah, and if you're a traveler, then it's a little bit easier on you. You can make up prayers. Islam is very much a religion of moderation. The Prophet—peace be upon him—said, don't go to extremes in religion. The Prophet said that religion is not just made to be excessively difficult on people.

## Nonviolence and The Prophet

RT: One of the things we were wondering about is whether there is in Islam a peace tradition similar to what exists in Christianity. For example, Catholic Workers are pacifists. We believe in nonviolence, like Gandhi.

OH: Well, if you look at the first ten years of the Prophet—peace be upon him—[and his] prophecy in Mecca—it was nonviolence, plain and simple. It was just nonviolence. People would persecute the Muslims in terrible ways. And the Prophet—peace be upon him—never asked anybody to fight back when he was in Mecca. People would put thorns in front of his path. They would stone him. They would do everything to him. There's one really interesting tradition in which the Prophet—peace be upon him—was confronted by some people, who instead of saying, "Peace be upon you," said, "Death be upon you!" They said this to the Prophet. The Prophet's wife was there and she got angry and she said, "Death be upon you too!" The Prophet looked at her, and he said, "God loves kindness in everything." That was his advice.



There was also a time in which there were some people that were also insulting the Prophet or they were abusing him, and the Prophet was just looking at them and smiling. And then a great, great companion of the Prophet, Abu Bakr—may Allah be pleased with him—[was with him]. He didn't say anything. He was angry too. He sort of like said "omph" or something like that. He made a noise showing he was displeased. And the Prophet frowned. He was smiling, but [then] he frowned. And he walked away. Abu Bakr came to him later on and he said, "Oh Prophet, did I do something wrong? Did I do something that displeased you?" And he said, "You didn't do anything wrong. It's just that while those people were abusing us and we were taking it without fighting back, I saw a circle of angels around us. And when you responded against them, the angels left. And I like being in the company of angels!" That was the way he taught his companions. If you look at the companions, the way they were before they entered Islam and how they responded after the prophet had taught them, there's a complete change in their character. They became very sincere, very very compassionate people.

Going back to your question about pacifism, the first thing I would say is that the Prophet's methodology was nonviolence when he was in Mecca. And then, as you know, he was forced out of Mecca and had to flee to Medina because of the persecution. And when he was in Medina—he was invited there by the local tribes—that's when the

religion flourished as well. Contrary to some of the depictions [that] say he took over Mecca in a bloodbath, it was nothing like that. . . They say that the Prophet—peace be upon him—that when he came in, that he was riding a donkey and his face was literally in the fur on the mane of the animal. He was a very, very humble person. He was not haughty. He did not take any joy in the fact that he was a great leader. He was very humble in front of God. Muslims. . . don't seek to do anything that is outside the bounds of our religion.

[We believe] that if there is a country or a people that make war on you, you have a right to defend yourself. But, a big but, is that in Islam, what a lot of people don't know, a person that is fighting has very strict restrictions on them. For instance, a Muslim fighter cannot kill women and children. A Muslim fighter cannot even cut down trees, or hurt any crops, because this is something that is considered something that there's no use in. . . That's something that provides for the sustenance of the common-day people. That's the Islamic tradition.

## Terrorism and the Media

Now, let's fast-forward to where we are right now. As you know, as everybody knows, Muslims are getting a really bad rap in the media. I view the situation more as a result, I think of it more in terms of the tension between the global north and global south. Before this recent phenomenon of what they call quote-unquote, "Islamic fundamentalism". . . a lot of these same people in the Arab world, the Muslim world, that are supposedly fighting on behalf of Islam or whatever, a lot of them before they were "Muslim Fundamentalists," were Marxists. It's an unfortunate thing that people think this is something unique to Islam—fundamentalists or terrorists. To count the actual number of terrorist acts, it would be much less than, say, the IRA or something like that; but that never gets pegged as a Christian fundamentalist or Christian extremist group. But people just look at Muslim fighters as a monolith. That they're just fundamentalists and they're crazed.

Whereas, what it really is, is in the wake of colonialism, people in the Third World or global south, however you want to call it, have felt disenchanting; and they've felt a loss of a sense of agency, and some people have tried to reclaim that through terrorist means. Some people would use Marxist slogans, some people use Islamic slogans. The thing to key in on is that a lot of this reaction is not, in my opinion, based on a genuinely spiritual understanding of Islam, but it's based on more of a knee-jerk reaction to the injustices of colonialism and the injustices of neo-colonialism.

The Islamic tradition itself is very much a tradition that brings peace to people. . . Not in all cases is the terrorism really what the media makes it out to be. For instance, in Kashmir, the Indian government has over 600,000 troops. It's the highest civilian-to-soldier ratio

anywhere in the world. . . In order to save face, India has to label the Kashmiri resistance as Islamic terrorism. It's a very appealing thing because that Islamic fundamentalist threat, so-called-threat, is something that the West can agree with and say, "Oh, yeah, well that must be what it is." It's very easy for people to believe. I personally question how much of it is really done by people sometimes even claiming to be Muslims.

Like Algeria, for instance. I had a friend that worked at, I think it was, Human Rights Watch. He was in the Middle East division. He was up in D.C. He was just telling me that it's recognized by a broad range of people that a lot, probably most, of when we hear that the fundamentalists have slayed a whole village, that most of that is being done by the government in an effort to discredit the Islamic party. And that's not from a Muslim source, that's from people in the mainstream of human rights work.

So, it's really a complex situation. But I think the important thing for everybody to know is that Islam as a religion does not preach terrorism [and] does not preach violence. It is a religion of peace itself. We have to always cast a critical eye whenever we see these labels being thrown around in the news.

RT: It seems like there are a lot of parallels to the 50's and 60's and I guess even 70's and 80's when "communists" were the bad guys, and a lot was attributed to communism when that was too simplistic a rendering of the situation.

OH: Yeah, people always like to see good and evil, us and them. We, as human beings have this unfortunate tendency to want to generalize about entire cultures and societies of people because if we're trying to make sense of the world, it's much easier to say, "They're all bad." The world's a complex place, it's just not that simple.

## Pacifism and Islam

RT: Getting back to what you were talking about of the peace tradition in Islam, it sounds like the Just War theory in Christianity. Are you familiar with that?

OH: No.

RT: It's a similar thing. There are guidelines to the use of force. . .but that's not quite the same as a pacifist position. I understand your point that, in general, Islam does preach peace. Still I wonder if. . .

OH: When you say pacifism, what do you mean exactly? Like if, say Canada invaded the United States tomorrow, you wouldn't propose that the United States should sit idly by?

RT: No, pacifism doesn't mean sitting idly by. It's like

Martin Luther King and his tradition of nonviolent resistance. . .

OH: So, in that instance, you would preach civil disobedience as opposed to military defense?

RT: I'm not sure what the strategy would be, but yeah it wouldn't be one of picking up arms and defending yourself with arms.

OH: Going back a little bit in history, not even again Nazi Germany?

RT: Yes. Dorothy Day, for instance, did not support the United States taking up arms even in that situation.

OH: She believed that Hitler should not be met with force?

RT: Right. She took a pacifist position even in World War II.

OH: That's definitely alien to Islam. The reason is this when you have a force that is committing evil and injustice, it's a Muslim's responsibility to put an end to injustice and evil. That needs to be done in a means that is appropriate and moderate as well. . . You're actually obligated as a Muslim if an inch of your territory is taken over by another country, it's an actual obligation of Muslims to defend themselves. The moderation is that you have to only do that to the extent that you're defending yourself and that you're doing it in a just way. Terrorism would not fly, and complete pacifism would not fly, either.

## Extremism and Islam

RT: I know this question is very broad, but what do you think Muslims think about Osama bin Laden?

OH: I can only give you my personal opinion. I don't know what specifically he has been involved in and what he hasn't been involved in, but if I could just steer it away from him for a second and just talk about the bombings of the embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Whoever did that, whether Osama bin Laden or anybody else, if you ask any legitimate mainstream Islamic scholar, they would give you a very straight-forward answer--That's just not Islam. End of story. Who was killed in those bombings? It was just honest people trying to make a living for themselves. What did that accomplish? It seems that when you try to bully the West into changing its ways, at whatever cost, to me that's just like the most extreme utilitarian secular ethic. Do whatever you need to do at any cost. That is not the Islamic way of doing it. A Muslim cannot just do [anything] because he [or she] sees it maximizes the potential of. . ."Oh, we can bomb and that'll have the most effect

of scaring the United States of America." That's *not* the way a Muslim acts. A Muslim acts by trying to follow what Allah has told him or her [what] he or she is permitted to do. And you are not permitted to kill innocent people.

Putting the whole spiritual question of right and wrong aside, just from even a pragmatic standpoint, what is that going to do? If you want the United States to stop supporting Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people, if you want the United States to stop supporting this and that, bombing an embassy is not going to help. It just doesn't make any sense. But that's just a secondary point. The primary point is, it's just wrong according to the dictates of Islam.

RT: What about the Taliban of Afghanistan? Do you think they are representative of Islam?

OH: No! The Taliban, I view more as . . . just ugly politics. I mean, there's a lot of oil involved. There's a lot of things involved and the Taliban are essentially a creation of Pakistan. They came out of schools in Pakistan, and Pakistan has always wanted a strong foothold and a sympathetic ally in power in Afghanistan. I know people who have been to Afghanistan who have actually seen Pakistani soldiers manning Taliban weapons [which were] made in Pakistan. I think it's just a political game. I group them in the same category of people that don't really have a genuine understanding of Islam. With the position they've taken with how they treat women, it's just not according to the traditional understanding of Muslim scholars. [Also,] I don't know if they do this, but I've heard from some people that in certain parts of the world there'll be people

trying to beat you to pray, trying to get people to pray. And that is *so* alien to Islam. There's no concept in Islam of forcing someone to pray. "There's no compulsion in religion." Or forcing a man to grow a beard or something.

RT: What about forcing women to wear veils?

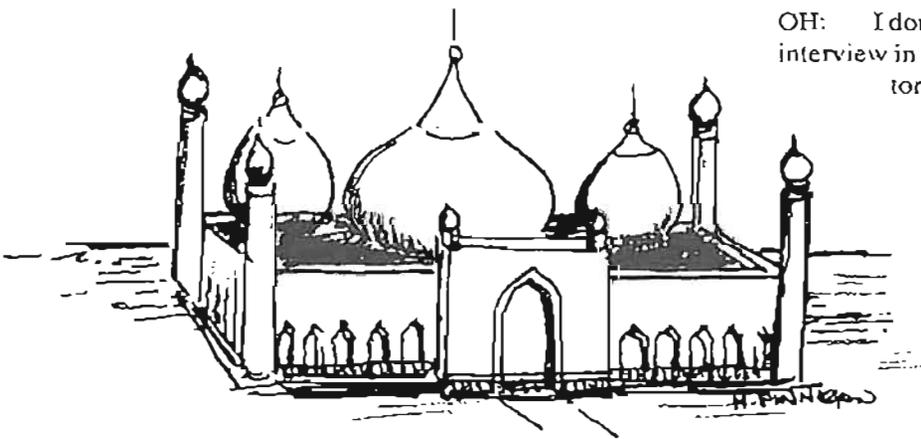
OH: I don't know the Islamic ruling on that. That's a good question. I've thought about that before, and the one thing I've come up with is that in the United States if anybody was to walk out just buck naked on the street they would be arrested for public indecency. So our society does have that moral restraint. Now, . . . another society, be it Islamic or otherwise, they would, I assume, have that same right to make that moral restriction on dress. The only difference is that . . . our society has gotten progressively less restrictive. If you look at other societies they have different conceptions of modesty than 1999 United States. Right now in the United States our standards of modesty are substantially less restrictive than fifty years ago in our country. But if you go to a Muslim country and Muslims believe that believing women should cover themselves, except for the face and hands which don't need to be covered, then just from my own personal opinion I couldn't really say that it's wrong to enforce that just the same way the United States enforces its basic moral standards by saying you can't go out naked. . . It's different concepts-- What's nakedness? What's pornography? What's indecency? They're subjective terms. And different cultures have different definitions.

But having said that, I do not know the specific ruling. I'm sure there's a scholar who has an opinion on that, but I don't know it. I'm ignorant, but in my own mind I could see the possible justification for saying the covering should be worn.

RT: What about non-Muslim women [in Muslim countries]?

OH: I don't know. This touches on one thing about the interview in general. The greatest scholars of Islamic history would have people coming to them with many different questions, and for the vast majority of questions their answer would be, "I don't know." The reason why we say that is because there is this disease where everyone just wants to get their opinions out. In Islam there are textual sources and scholarship and things like that, which I respect and I don't want to just proffer my own opinions without really taking recourse to the scholarship. To some of these questions, not to disappoint you, but I'm just going to say, "I don't know."

RT: As a philosopher from the Socratic tradition, I respect that answer!



# A Gaze Blank and Pitiless as the Sun: The U.S. in the Middle East

by Mark Chmiel

The political critic Noam Chomsky once quipped that he could be scheduled to give talks years in advance and it would always be safe to always publicize one of the talks as "The Current Crisis in the Middle East," since it seems like there is always one or another crisis, conflict, or catastrophe brewing there.

Indeed, at the time of this writing, one of the current crises in the Middle East is the on-going battle between the United States (and its loyal ally, Great Britain) and Iraq. There are two serious issues here. One is the U.S. attack on Iraq in late December before Ramadan, in an attempt to "degrade" Saddam Hussein's capacity to use "weapons of mass destruction."

This last expression became a veritable mantram as used by U.S. officials and repeated by the media. It was taken for granted throughout the mainstream discussion that no one need be afraid of our extensive collection of such weapons of mass destruction. Western care with such weapons was assured eighty years ago when Sir Winston Churchill, in his capacity as Secretary of State of Britain's War Office, commented on using chemical weapons against Arabs as an experiment: "I do not understand this squeamishness about the use of gas. I am strongly in favour of using poisoned gas against uncivilised tribes. . . . It is not necessary to use only the most deadly gasses; gasses can be used which cause great inconvenience and would spread a lively terror and yet would leave no serious permanent effects on most of those affected."

A second issue is the lethal effect of the U.S.-led sanctions against Iraq, which have left "serious permanent effects" throughout the nation, such as 6,000 Iraqi civilians dead each month, one million Iraqi children under the age of five who are chronically malnourished, and tuberculosis rates that have risen more than 500%.

If the human suffering weren't so immense, one could only guffaw at the brazenness of President Clinton's lie that "we mean no harm to the Iraqi people." And as if to cover all bases, it is quickly added that any suffering from the sanctions and bombing is Saddam's fault anyway.

U.S. citizens often have their focus on the Middle East when "vital U.S. interests" are threatened—as in oil during the Persian Gulf War—or U.S. lives, as in the case of the terrorist attacks on U.S. embassies last summer in Sudan and Afghanistan. In this article, I want to give some background that may help sort out some of the issues and principles that undergird events in the Middle East. The values and goals of U.S. policy makers are long-standing and will be there when today's crisis fades and a new one takes its place down the road.

First, some semantic clarifications involving Arabs, Muslims, and fundamentalists. It's true that in the Middle East, Arabs are the dominant population, most of whom are Muslims. It's worth bearing in mind, however, that there are close to a billion Muslims in the world, and most of these are not Arabs. Also, like any religion, Islam is a complex affair, but it seems to be a reflex action of the U.S. media to adjoin "Islamic fundamentalist" with "terrorist." We need to recognize that there are Islamic fundamental states, such as Saudi Arabia, which do not seem to concern U.S. officials and commentators. And we need to keep in mind that there are Christian and Judaic fundamentalists in the Middle East as well.

Second, I think it is important to keep in mind the big picture, which, basically, means the big powers versus the people of the region. If we stick to the modern period, we should note that, with the collapse of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire after World War I, the colonial powers, England and France, were eager to extend their domains to

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Mark Chmiel was recently sighted at the Plaza Frontenac seeing *Shakespeare in Love* for his fourth time.

that part of the world. In asserting their control over the region, they also took care to create the borders of the various states, such as Iraq.

Britain also was giving assurances to Arab populations that their nationalist aspirations would be respected, even as the British also promised the Zionist movement that they supported a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The consequences of this imperial playing off one group against another remain with us today.

After World War II, the United States was the overwhelming power in the world and moved to the Middle East after the crumbling British and French empires. In the words of the State Department in the 1940s, the Middle East region was described as "a stupendous source of strategic power, and one of greatest material prizes in world history," "probably the richest economic prize in the world in the field of foreign investment." (quoted in Noam Chomsky, *World Orders Old and New* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1994], p. 190)

Because the Middle East was what Dwight David Eisenhower described as the most "strategically important area in the world," the U.S. wanted to make sure that it kept control. I want to note two cases of U.S. control. First, Iran. The U.S. backed the Shah of Iran who was friendly to U.S. oil corporations and tyrannical to his own population. Premier Muhammad Mussadegh was ousted when he committed the heretical act of nationalizing the Iranian oil industry, a definite infringement on a basic principle of the latest great power of the region: the oil belongs to the United States, not to the people of the region. A second case is Israel. After its victory in the 1967 war, Israel became a strategic ally of the United States, and both nations denied a political settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel, along with Iran, at this time, served as U.S. watchdogs to keep control of this most vital region. Just as the needs of the Iranian people were sacrificed to the need to keep a strong, dependable (vicious) ally in power, so, too, the Palestinians' right to national self-determination was also denied by both Israel and the United States. Consider the issue of illegal occupation of land: The U.S. supported the war against Iraq for its invasion of Kuwait in 1990, but

ignored numerous U.N. resolutions censuring the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territory captured in the 1967 war. But instead of leading the U.N. to force Israel to abide by international law, the U.S. has long given Israel at least \$3 billion in annual aid. The word double-standard is apropos: Israeli occupation is fine, since it serves U.S. interests in the region, but Iraqi occupation of Kuwait interferes with U.S. control. Hence, the 1991 slaughter of Iraqis under George Bush.

In sum, big powers do whatever is in the self-interest of their dominant groups, the U.S. being no exception. Iranians under the Shah, Palestinians under Israel, and Iraqis facing the sanctions are simply expendable, irrelevant to the primary goals of U.S. power.

This is raw Machiavellianism and policy-planners presume it won't play in Peoria. Thus, these policies and priorities have to be crafted in a patriotic, moralistic manner. This leads me to the third consideration: the need to be careful, critical, and cautious when reading about the Middle East in the media or when listening to official U.S. pronouncements. The very language used to discuss the current events reflects the perspectives of U.S. propaganda.

There are two examples that one can read about almost any day in the *New York Times*. The first is the use of "terrorism." As already mentioned, Islamic fundamentalist terrorists are considered to be the lurking menace both in and outside the Middle East. For many years, the word Palestinian was virtually synonymous with "terrorism" in the United States, so successful was the U.S. propaganda system. Political critic Ed-

ward S. Herman once suggested that "[i]f 'terrorism' means 'intimidation by violence or the threat of violence,' and if we allow the definition to include violence by states and agents of states, then it is these, not isolated individuals or small groups, that are the important terrorists of the world." In the U.S. propaganda system, Herman noted that there are two kinds of terrorism: retail terrorism, that done by official enemies, small agents, and condemned by the U.S. government and media; and wholesale terrorism, that done by our own government, our allies, and thus not consid-

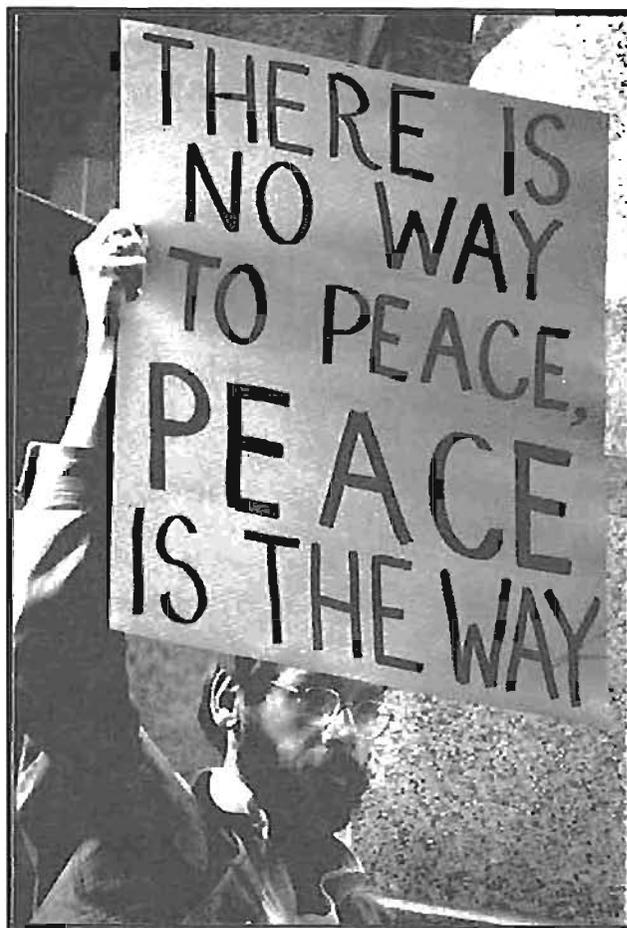


photo of Mark Scheu from Round Table archives

# From Rumi, a Mystical Poet of Islam

## *The Reed Flute*

Listen to the story told by the  
reed,  
of being separate.

“Since I was cut from the  
reedbed,  
I have made this crying sound.

Anyone separated from someone  
they love  
understands what I say.

Anyone pulled from a source  
longs to go back.

At any gathering I am there,  
mingling  
in the laughing and the grieving,

a friend to each, but few  
will hear the secrets hidden

within the notes. No ears for  
that.

Body flowing out of spirit,

spirit up from a body. We can't  
conceal  
that mixing, but it's not given us

to see the soul.” The reed flute  
is fire, not wind. Be nothing.

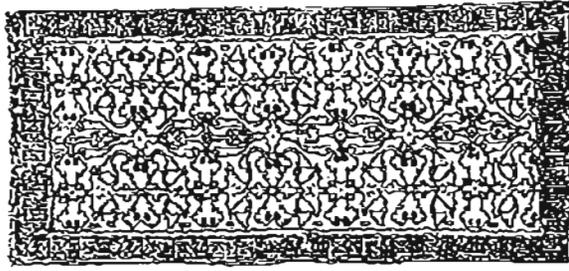
Hear the love-fire tangled  
in the reed notes, as bewilder-  
ment

melts into wine. The reed is a  
friend  
to all who want the fabric

torn and drawn away. The reed  
is  
hurt and salve combining.

Intimacy and longing for  
intimacy in one song.

A disasterous surrender,  
and a fine love, together.



The one who secretly hears this  
is senseless.

A tongue has one customer,  
the ear.

The power of a cane flute comes  
from its making sugar in the  
reedbed.

Whatever sound it has  
is for everyone.

Days full of wanting, let them  
go by  
without worrying that they do.

Stay where you are, inside  
such a pure, hollow note.

*Untitled*

Leave, with your scholarship  
and your philosophies.

Even if you reduced them  
to a single hair's breadth,

there'd be no room here for  
those,  
as now the dawn comes up.

In the wholeness of the sun,  
it's an impudence to light lamps.

*Untitled*

Friend, this talking about you  
keeps me from enjoying  
your presence.

Your face disappears  
in its own shining.

When I think of your lips,  
I can't come near.

Remembering other times  
prevents this now.

ered terrorism (but rather self-defense). Thus, regular Israeli attacks on Lebanon, resulting in civilian deaths and massive dislocation are never considered acts of terrorism in the U.S.

A second example is the use of the seemingly benign expression, "peace process." This is supposed to refer to the U.S.-brokered attempts to get the Israelis (now under Netanyahu) and the Palestinians (under Arafat) to make good on the Oslo Agreements of over five years ago. Ignored in this usage is the recent history in which the U.S. has been one-sided in its support of Israel and in its contempt for the U.N. and international law. As Noam Chomsky commented, what the U.S. government and media refer to as the "peace process" is simply whatever the United States is pursuing, whether this has anything to do with what ordinary people would recognize as promoting peace and resolving conflicts between Palestinians and Israelis. By definition, the United States cannot be acting against the hallowed peace process.

A third instance of propaganda is selective use of the word "security." The U.S. insists that Israeli security concerns be well addressed, given the Israeli sensitivities coming out of the Holocaust period. While one ought to be aware of such legitimate concerns, there is never any comparable concern expressed for Palestinian security--and in their case, they have grave reasons to be so concerned, since so much of their land has been illegally occupied by

Israel, and so many of their resources have been monopolized by Israelis for the benefit of Jews, water being the most important example.

A last illustration: according to the definition of Herman above, it is clear that the December 1998 U.S. attacks on Iraq are wholesale terrorism, portrayed, however, as a justified attack on the preeminent monster of the Middle East. It is simply unthinkable that, in the respectable press of the United States, one would see the U.S. attack on Iraq characterized as "terrorist."

Thus, for anyone interested in making a fair assessment of the various crises in the Middle East, it is well worth it to be suspicious of the terms of debate as used by the U.S. government and mainstream media.

During the 1980s, a significant popular movement arose to challenge U.S. power and ideology on Central American issues. The churches played an important role in generating and sustaining this movement of solidarity with the victims of U.S. power in the region, from offering material aid to monitoring the press to challenging Congressional funding of regimes which committed grave human rights abuses. Such a movement needs to be extended to and nurtured regarding the Middle East, where human beings continue to suffer from hunger, torture, and displacement, even though such sobering facts are not the makings of a media "crisis." ✦

## Speaking Terror to Terror

by John Kavanaugh, S.J.

"You keep talking about collective punishment and killing innocent people to force governments to change their policies. . . You call this terrorism. . . Well you were the first ones who invented this terrorism. . . when you dropped an atomic bomb which killed tens of thousands of women and children in Japan. . . You killed them by burning them to death. You killed civilians in Vietnam with chemicals. . . You went to wars more than any other country in this century, and then you have the nerve to talk about killing innocent people.

"And now you have new ways to kill the innocent. You have so-called economic embargo, which kills nobody other than children and elderly people. . . Yes, I am a

terrorist, and I am proud of it. And I support terrorism so long as it is against the United States and Israel, because you are more than terrorists. You are the ones who invented it. . . butchers, liars and hypocrites."

These words were spoken at a trial one year ago by Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, who was sentenced to 240 years in prison for masterminding the World Trade Center bombing. Does Mr. Yousef have a point? After all, our Government tells us that the terror of bombs is the only thing that Sadaam understands. We are defending ourselves and our national interest. We are using weapons of mass destruction to stop the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction. But this is the very argument which Yousef used

John Kavanaugh, S.J., can be sighted at Karen House on the third Tuesday of each month at the 8:00 p.m. liturgy. Some data of this article appeared in earlier form in *America* magazine.

Are we seeking power for power's sake? Or are we seeking to make the world and our nation a better place to live? If we seek the latter, violence can never provide the answer. The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie. . .

The beauty of nonviolence is that, in its own way and in its own time, it seeks to break the chain reaction of evil. With a majestic sense of spiritual power, it seeks to elevate truth, beauty and goodness to the throne.

--Martin Luther King, Jr.

against us. He embraces the logic we ourselves employ.

The few Iraqis who were willing to speak to Americans a year ago were reported to have only anxious questions like, "Will we be bombed again?"

We held off until December. I wondered what the people of Iraq felt as they awaited, our news cameras perched like vultures, the terror from the sky. Can you imagine what it would be like, if it were happening to Saint Louis--the bomb alerts, the screaming missiles, the anti-aircraft bursts, the thunder? Do you think we might be drawn to the likes of Yousef, so willing to do some of his own bombing on our behalf?

Am I saying that there is perfect moral equivalence between the U.S. policies and Iraq's? No. But I am saying we should hold ourselves to the standards we hold them. Am I saying that we should not resist Sadaam Hussein? No. But I am saying we should not attack him by punishing his people, destroying his properties, and further enhancing the stature of Ramzi Ahmed Yousef. It might also help if we make some admissions of our own.

We ourselves make weapons, more than any people of history, and many of them you can be sure, are designed to kill populaces, whether by chemical or explosive means. We also sell weapons which are now used by both sides of every war. Our officials threaten people in our name.

Such an admission would be a start. Then we must let go of our nonnegotiable and one-sided demands. After all, would we allow an Iraqi-controlled United Nations to inspect our munitions and bases? Would we be inclined to forgive the aerial bombing of New York's infrastructure? It seems not, judging from our proper outrage at the bombing of the World Trade Center.

The Judge at Yousef's trial rightly condemned the terrorist. "Your God is death. Your God is not Allah. . . You worship death and destruction. What you do, you do only to satisfy your own twisted sense of ego." Do we have any kindred problems?

As for Yousef, he is in jail, but there are candidates to

replace him. On December 22, Osama bin Laden, the son of a wealthy Saudi industrialist who has used some of his \$250 million inheritance to fight the United States, stated the following in a rare public appearance: "The attack was against the needy people of Iraq, not against the Iraqi regime--which was supported by the Americans and the British during the war against Iran. No one talked about Iraq when it used chemical weapons against the Kurdish people in the '80s and no one is mentioning anything about the weapons of mass destruction in Israel."

Bin Laden is the latest Islamic "Freedom Fighter." It is crucial, for our own sake as well as the world's, that we understand him. In doing so, we may better understand ourselves.

In an extended 1997 CNN interview with Peter Arnett, Bin Laden defended his "war" against the United States as a response to generations of violence and unjust aggression. One need not agree with his facts or his interpretations, but his logic sounds familiar. Just reverse the names of the antagonists.

"The [arrogant] U.S. has set a double standard, calling whoever goes against its injustice a terrorist. It wants to occupy our countries, steal our resources, impose on us agents to rule us. . . If we refuse to do so, it will say we are terrorists. With a simple look at the U.S. behaviors, we find that it judges poor Palestinians. . . who throw stones against the Israeli occupation as terrorists, whereas when the Israeli pilots bombed the United Nations building in Qana, Lebanon, which was filled with children and women, the U.S. stopped any plan to condemn Israel. . . The U.S. does not consider it a terrorist act to throw atomic bombs at nations. . . The U.S. does not consider it terrorism, when hundreds of thousands of our sons and brothers in Iraq died for lack of food or medicine."

Well, this time around, we stopped the bombing after a few days, supposedly out of respect for the Muslim time of Ramadan. No one, in this country, dared say much about respect for the Prince of Peace. +

# An Exercise in Nonviolence

by Amy Gerth

"The Truth cannot be silenced."

It was written on the black cardboard coffin carried in by four of those who crossed the line that Sunday afternoon. The coffin was preceded by many other people carrying white crosses bearing the names of those whose spirit was with us, but who had been murdered, disappeared, or tortured. The procession flowed in, four at a time, reverently, and yet it spoke louder than anything that weekend.

That's where Adriana Bartow comes in. She spoke on Saturday, the day before the procession. She was a woman from Guatemala and a mother. Her voice was so courageous, and yet all over her voice was ridden with her sorrow and pain. Her story was one of many women in Guatemala. She stood before us with her remaining children and held pictures of her husband, her children, and other family—all disappeared. She held them high. She said that long after they had been taken away she agonized over their fate. Surely they wouldn't have killed even the children. She still lives not knowing--she's left only with the memories of those she held so dear.

As painful as it was, she told her story for the

mothers, wives, children, husbands, and fathers of Latin America. Adriana, with her story, took me back to my trip to Santiago Atitlan in Guatemala two years ago. She told the story the women I met at the widow's colony wanted to tell. All those in that colony had lost at least one or more of their loved ones in much the same way as Adriana. I wanted to hear their stories, but our silence was language—two different languages—too different to distinguish much

meaning. Despite our gap in words, one widow had such a long, sorrowing face that it seemed to tell of pain far deeper than any one day could bring. Her face surely was not silent. Adriana and this widow, as well as countless others in Latin America, share the story of the suffering that belonged not only to those whose names we remembered on the white crosses, but the suffering that belongs to all who loved them.



"We've spoken. Now what?" I came down to Georgia believing I might have this question. Little did I know that not only did I have this question, but so did many, many others. On returning to St. Louis I rejoiced in the energy that followed. I went to mass at Karen House, as did several others from our trip, to pray, process, and be

Amy Gerth has been sighted coming and going from Sophia House, an intentional community in the Forest Park Southeast neighborhood.

community. The St. Louis Inter-Faith Committee on Latin America (IFCLA) brought together again even more people who had made the decision not to be silent. My brother, Jeff, planned a simple *campesino* dinner to help with relief in Honduras, and here I am writing an article (which I never thought I'd do).

Even if we never have to make this trip again—forever the truth will speak to our hearts. Adriana's words, the words on the coffin, the procession, the testimonies, and the peaceful, passionate crowd of thousands said it:

How liberating it is to have a voice!

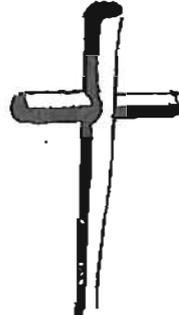
How liberating it is to be able to speak, to no longer be an accomplice by our silence!

And so long after the coffin passed, the words hold

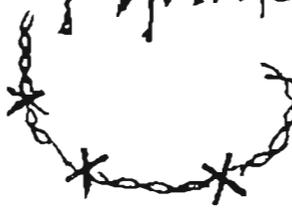
true: "The truth cannot be silenced!"

(On November 21, and 22, 1998, over 7,000 people gathered at the gates of Fort Benning, in Columbus, Georgia, to call for the closing of the United States Army School of Americas. Peace and Prayer dominated as the crowd stood in vigil outside the base. The action culminated as over 2,300 people "crossed the line" onto Fort Benning property, risking arrest in a solemn funeral procession in memory of thousands who have been tortured, raped, killed, or "disappeared" at the hands of SOA graduates. The Army, however, who anticipated only 1000 to cross the line, bussed the demonstrators to a park about a mile away and released them.)

+



The  
God of Peace  
is never  
glorified  
by human violence.



Thomas  
Merton

# From Abroad

by Mary Dutcher & Christie Huck



While we were in Honduras and Nicaragua (January 8-26), the United Nations issued its report concluding that Hurricane Mitch was the worst natural disaster to strike Latin America in the last two centuries. We were there doing hurricane relief work and also looking for a community with whom interested people could form a relationship for long-term reconstruction.

We met with Nan McCurdy, who grew up in St. Louis and who now lives in Managua, Nicaragua. She rec-

was a good candidate for *hermanamiento* (sister community relationship). After Posoltega, (where thousands died in mud slides), Limay is one of the areas hardest hit by Mitch in all of Nicaragua.

St. Louis U. High graduate Father Guadalupe Camey spent his last year as a pastor in Limay and wrote his autobiography there before returning to Honduras, where he disappeared in 1983. Virginia Druhe lived in Limay for a year as a member of Witness for Peace in



Some people of Rio Abajo with their temporary houses of plastic sheeting. -photo by Mary Dutcher

commended that we visit San Juan de Limay, where she had lived for three years and where she still owns a house that is used for solidarity work. She said we could stay at her house. We met with a representative of the *Instituto Juan XXIII*, a Jesuit development organization that works all over the country. There, too, we were told that Limay

1985. In fact, Virginia's Christmas card this year was about hurricane destruction in Limay. So we talked about these connections with our friends, Julio and Miranda, as they drove us to Limay in their four-wheel drive vehicle.

We headed north out of Managua on the Pan American highway. We followed several detours where Mitch had destroyed the highway, saw lots of people living in tents made of plastic sheeting, and saw a new lake created by Mitch. We turned left thirteen kilometers north of Estelí.

The drive is breathtakingly beautiful in places, as one climbs over a chain of mountains and beholds the valleys below. That same climb, combined with a couple of bridges destroyed by Mitch, rendered Limay inaccessible by land for over a month after the hurricane. Great scars remain on the mountainsides from

the many landslides, and the various places where the road had washed out are obvious. Nicaragua received 1000% of its usual rainfall during Mitch.

We reached Limay and were welcomed by Tranquilino, Leonidas and Angelica, friends of Nan and Virginia, who were expecting us. They recommended that

Christie Huck and Mary Dutcher were recently sighted in Nicaragua.

we form the *hermanamiento* with Rio Abajo, the closest to town of the thirty rural communities that belong to Limay. Rio Abajo had lost all of its thirty two houses and its school. The people of Rio Abajo want to relocate their houses to a site nearer to Limay and safer. The landslides that buried many of their houses up to the roof are likely to occur again in the rainy season (May-November). Also, much of their arable land was lost in the old site, so they want to conserve what is left solely for agriculture.

We visited the new site and saw the now familiar tents made of plastic sheeting. When we visited the old site, the children were having school under the one big tree that remained standing while their parents did road repair under the blazing sun in the "Food for Work" program. Tranquilino introduced us to don Rafael, who wanted us to see the remains of the old school. He said he hoped that a group would visit before May, when the rains will probably make Limay inaccessible again till November. We said we would do our best.

Leaving Limay, we gave a ride to a couple, friends of Tranquilino. They told us of digging out the bodies of the husband's brother and family of seven from their house that was overtaken by a landslide. Back in Managua, we left \$500 with Nan for immediate needs in Rio Abajo. It is to be disbursed by an *hermanamiento* committee in Rio Abajo in response to written requests, with Leonidas as the accountant. Longer term, the people might need help buying the land at the new site. There is only a slight chance that the mayor's office will obtain it for them (though there have been promises), and land in Limay is not expensive, Nan said. There will be construction costs. What is difficult to communicate but is palpable is the human warmth of the people, who say they appreciate our presence so much because it helps them not feel so alone.

If you are interested in helping or participating in the *hermanamiento* with Rio Abajo, please contact Christie at the St. Louis Inter-Faith Committee on Latin America (438 N. Skinker, 63130; 314-721-2977). +



photos by Mary Duicher

# From Karen House

## Winter in the Lives of Karen House Friends

by Christie Huck



Of the countless things that I have learned, realized, and observed from a new angle in the time that I've been at Karen House (as I am the newest community member, having moved in at the end of August), one of the more notable "new items" has been my increased awareness of the changes of the seasons. There are a number of reasons for this, probably most prominent being that I started off situated in "the attic," the unheated part of the house, plus the new endeavor of either biking it or bussing it (plus Metrolink) to work across the city. (Of course, some days I do take a community car, or, bless her giving heart, Mary Dutcher's car.)

I have since moved from the attic into Mitch's old room. But, having experienced "the elements" in a more intimate fashion myself this fall and winter. I have taken a keen interest in how the seasons, the weather, affect all of us, and how differently they affect each of us. Thus the recent "St. Louis freeze," which incapacitated much of the St. Louis area for days, has stimulated my reflection on how greatly and how differently we are all affected by such a string of storms and cold weather. So I thought I would share how our recent extreme weather has impacted some of the folks around Karen House.

Probably all of us at Karen House would say that the most significant effect of the freezing "winter mix" has been the extended (seemingly endless) holiday vacation from school that our beloved young ones have had. The city schools have been open two and a half days out of the past month.

Thus, for Matt, who is eleven and has an infinite supply of energy, this snow-in has been a test of his patience and creativity, as it has been for the rest of the kids as well. Playing cards and building igloos can only last so long. . . Matt's mother just started a new job a few weeks ago. So she has had to find child care every day that Matt and his sister have been off school, which detracts from her income and undoubtedly adds to her stress level.

Our recent string of storms and cold weather has meant a loss of income for Liz as well, a guest who works as a home-health aid. Treacherous roads, super cold temperatures, late buses, and kids home from school all make

for lost hours or days of work for which she won't be paid.

For our housetakers and volunteers, especially Eric and Paul, St. Louis University High School students who are spending three weeks volunteering at Karen House, the extended school vacation has meant that finding things for our teens and pre-teens (we have two babies and the rest are ten and over) has been a daily adventure. Perhaps most striking to me has been how such extreme weather affects the people that come to our door on a daily basis. Leslie, who has various health problems and weighs about 90 pounds, comes over about once a week to fill her little buggy with food for her grandchildren. She came over the week of the snow and said her heart was hurting. She couldn't have gotten home with her buggy in the snow, so she didn't get it for a few days. Although physical pain and a shortage of food are not out of the ordinary for Leslie, life somehow seems harder for her in light of ice and snow and a sub-zero wind-chill factor.

And for Mehl, too, who comes at least twice a day usually, for peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. In the summer and the fall he slept on the bench in our backyard. When winter came, we told him he couldn't any longer, trying to encourage him to get into badly needed shelter and mental health care. I'm not sure whether it was because of the weather or not, but he recently admitted himself into a psychiatric treatment program, after fighting it for so long. However, just giving him peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and letting him stand inside for a few minutes when he came to the door, or just getting food together for Leslie and listening to what is most recently causing her pain somehow doesn't seem like nearly enough when it is sleeting and snowing outside.

Perhaps we all feel more vulnerable when the cold penetrates us, when we feel trapped indoors (or are seeking a warm place), when nature takes control of life and we have to let go. It seems somewhat cruel of Mother Nature, in the middle of what is for many of us the most difficult season anyway, to dump snow and sleet down too—making it nearly impossible to carry on with normal life. But perhaps we all gain something in it—in feeling our own vulnerability as well as others, in having to ac-

Christie Huck was sighted carrying out the trash at Karen House.

knowledge that we cannot always control life.

It seems that God made snow white and ice sparkly and pretty—the two elements that make our winters most difficult—for these very reasons. No matter what inconveniences or difficulties are at hand, no one (I think) can look out the window and not be taken aback by the beauty of a snow-covered city. It's as if in the middle of our season of death, sin, winter, we are drenched in beauty and

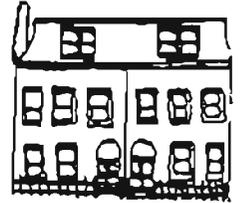
newness—we are baptized anew! A restored sense of joy and hope fills us, making it easier—truly—to bear the harshness of winter.

And so perhaps the extremities of winter are a lesson to us to let go, to be more attentive, even to be still, and to allow ourselves to participate in the death and rebirth of the seasons. And we shall see what the change of winter into spring brings forth. . .



# From Little House

by Mary Ann McGivern, SL



## Part One:

My income has always been below taxable level, but I began withholding my telephone tax during the Vietnam War. Back then, even though I had been a member of the Sisters of Loretto for a dozen years, when I went to graduate school in California I had to list a relative's telephone in order to get one myself. So eventually, the Tax Man visited my parents' apartment in Chicago, looking for me. He spoke at length with my college-aged brother, Joe, until Joe tired of the game and finally disclosed that I hadn't lived with my family in some time and wasn't likely to return there soon.

Frequently, telephone company employees have warned me politely that resistance is useless. I've had at least a dozen dire "final notice" IRS warning letters; but since I haven't had a bank account in my own name, I've driven old cars, and I've worked for groups who paid the Sisters of Loretto instead of me, the Department of the Treasury has never seized my assets or put a lien on my wages.

About a year ago I got a very sweet message from Southwestern Bell on my answering machine, telling me I didn't have to hand-write a note explaining my resistance each month. There are agencies, the voice explained, that provide printed cards and one need only sign one's name. In fact, my long distance service WALD provides such a form on my bill.

However, I like to write to Southwestern Bell: Dear Sir or Madam, I am withholding .57 in federal tax from my phone bill because I oppose the military spending the tax was levied to pay for. (Every time I try to find a sentence construction that doesn't end in an preposition and isn't ponderous, but I always settle for this.) Please notify

the IRS of my nonpayment and adjust my bill. Thanking you for attending to this matter and wishing you peace, I remain Sincerely yours.

Alas, a few months ago SWBT stopped adjusting my bill. I'm nearing the \$5 past due point of no return when SWBT charges a \$5 late payment fee. In a month or two I'll have to phone them and try to find a path through whatever bureaucracy has sprouted around my little, more or less immovable, tree of resistance.

The accumulating charges have led me to wonder how many people still withhold that telephone tax. Does the IRS still try to collect it? I haven't had a warning notice in ten years. And I haven't heard any collection horror stories from others.

Meanwhile, military spending continues. The government makes new plutonium triggers and new delivery systems for the stockpiled nuclear arsenal. The Pentagon's goal is to be able to wage two wars in different parts of the world simultaneously without allies. Apart from the question why we would ever want to do that, the chairman of the Armed Services Joint Chiefs of Staff recently testified to Congress that \$265 billion (plus retirement and health benefits, payment on the debt incurred during the military build-up in the '80s, the Department of Energy nuclear weapons budget, and foreign aid in the form of weapons) isn't enough. So Clinton has called for increased military spending. They'll just have to do it without my .57 a month.

## Part Two:

Here's a confession. I voted against the city sales tax increase to support the city schools. I could not bear to vote for another sales tax. I've been working for six months designing and promoting a workshop to get rid of the lo-

Mary Ann McGivern, S.L., was sighted preparing a workshop on a just tax system for Missouri.

cal sales taxes on food throughout the state (call me if you'd consider hosting this workshop). So it seemed not only wrong to vote for this tax but counter-productive to my own job.

I'm afraid the new sales tax won't be enough to pay for good education for city kids and that the state and the rest of the region will walk away from the need, letting the poorest kids face dismal futures. This was brought home to me in a recent Karen House conversation with three eleven-year old guests, two boys and a girl, nice kids, quiet and polite.

One of the boys wanted to know if I was going to watch the Denver Broncos in the football game that night. I said if he meant the Superbowl, it wouldn't be played until next Sunday. I asked him a little more and learned that, while he's a fan of John Elway, he didn't know who the other team was or what state Denver is in. Neither did the girl, a Green Bay Packer fan because her aunt's a fan, but she thinks Green Bay won the Superbowl last year. The other boy thought the Minnesota Vikings were playing the Broncos this year. But when I said it was Atlanta, he's the one who knew Atlanta is in Georgia. None of the three of them knew what state the Dolphins, the Saints, the 49ers, or the Raiders play in, though they knew the

cities.

Then, to give them a freebie, I asked what city and state the New York Jets play in. They couldn't answer. Oh, don't be smart and say the Jets play in New Jersey. For these children, geography is not just a state of confusion but a symptom of really rotten education. They need small group tutoring that links their interests to information, that takes the time needed to cover the basics and that they experience as satisfying. Quality education is expensive, but who deserves it more than they? And I don't see any hope for it in St. Louis, Missouri.

#### Part Three:

My hope is in our grappling with several complex issues all at once: military spending, campaign and school finance, designing housing that distributes the poor throughout the region, understanding that it is wrong to tax food, etc.; and at the same time finding simple action strategies like refusing to pay the telephone tax, sheltering homeless children, hosting a workshop, planting a garden, and singing. It's when we try to do all these things at once that we remember what we are about and what we want our own lives to be like: wise as serpents, guileless as doves. ✦

## Passages

### Harry James Cargas

Born June 18, 1932  
Died August 18, 1998

Here's what I believe.

I think that we are responsible for creating God. I do not think that God is unchangeable but is rather affected by what we do in the universe. Process theology and the Holocaust have taught me this. . . .

These representations of give-and-take imply a tremendous responsibility for each of us. . . .

What a great adventure life is.

--from Harry's Testament.

We will miss Harry and appreciate all his contributions to *The Round Table* over the years.

### Anna Tekakwitha Rehg Miller

This beautiful baby, named for Ann Manganaro and Teka Childress, was born November 16, 1998 to the Rehg Miller family of Ellen, Bill, Myrtah, and Gabe. We welcome this new child to our community.

### Marie W. Ritt Towley

Born October 6, 1902  
Died December 26, 1998

All day long help me find your presence in other people. In spite of my failure keep me so dearly in your presence that at day's end I can pray:

"Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit."

--from Marie's Journal

We will miss Marie, who inspired us by her long life of service and work for justice.

### Sam Smith

Known as "Boo" at Karen House when he was a little boy, for years he helped his mother with his younger siblings. He had a sweet smile and fun loving attitude. But as an adolescent he became involved with life on the streets. On February 19, 1999, he was shot to death at age 18. We mourn.

by Bill Miller

For years I have considered the homily to be the highlight of any eucharistic celebration I attended. There are, of course, other important parts of the liturgy—prayers, the consecration, communion, readings, music and singing, etc. Surely all of this would work together; but for me the key would be, “What could I take home from the homily?”

While I still love a good homily, two factors have affected my perceptions. First of all, in the last few years I’ve learned, like many parents of young children, that I don’t often hear or register the homilies due to the moods, movements and needs of the children. And secondly, in my new job as an ambulance worker, I’ve been made more aware through my visits to nursing homes and hospitals that there are countless people who, because of their age and/or illness, are unable to hear or comprehend anything spoken, to say nothing of the wisdom and insight that a good homily offers.

These experiences, along with a talk by John Kavanaugh, S.J., which I will quote from below, have led me to think more about the primacy of the eucharist in our liturgy.

In the eucharist, our God comes to us as our nourishment, our food, our life. The homily can point to this, but the eucharist stands on its own in bringing God’s life to us regardless of whether a homily is preached or understood. God’s grace, along with our willingness to try to believe, help us to live this mystery of God being our nourishment.

The saving love of God in the eucharist can break through our fears and brokenness and fragility to remind us of our graced lives and hopes. The saving love of God can be shared even with those affected by aging and diminishment; it can remind us of our living in the presence of Christ even among the most vulnerable. (And let us remember with thanks those who work at nursing homes and clinics, at shelters and hospitals—how they give and receive Christ among our society’s most vulnerable and fragile people.)

All of this came together and became more clear to me upon hearing a talk given by John Kavanaugh at the Great Preacher’s Award dinner late last year. I’m taking the liberty of quoting a good chunk of it which speaks to my concerns:

The Eucharist is the central prayer and act of our faith. We literally take Christ, once again, into our bodies. Our God in Jesus, our food and sustenance, becomes our bodies. It is because he takes our bodies as his own that we are saved. It is because he enters our wounds that we are healed.

The good and gracious God, “The One who sent me,” Jesus said, now looks at every human face and sees Christ. That is what happens at communion. And if we see as God sees, we encounter Christ in each other’s bodies, as well as the bodies of the poor, the lost, the wounded, the dying.

When Jesus said in the last parable of Matthew’s Gospel, “Whatsoever you do to the least of these, you do to me,” he was saying to God, to us and to all history, “This is my body.” These are my Body.” This applies not only to the homeless or the prisoner, but to one’s babies, one’s beloved, one’s enemy. Every labor of justice, then, is a labor of faith. We people who are fed by “the real presence” of Christ under the appearances of bread and wine, also believe that we feed him in his “real presence” under the appearances of human flesh.

How much this faith of radical “transubstantiation” is needed in a culture of “marginal” and unwanted humans, in a nation which ignores the starving of the world, in a political system which cannot even bring itself to protect a half-born child.

The central mystery of the “real presence” took strongest hold of me when I heard Jean Vanier tell the story of tiny “Pierre,” one of those marginal and unwelcome bodies of Christ. Pierre was a profoundly handicapped infant brought to a Eucharist being celebrated by a Canadian Jesuit physicist. The woman holding Pierre sat in front of the crowded room, with Pierre almost on the altar. And at the Consecration, it became clear to all that the words of transubstantiation were said not only over bread and wine, but over body and blood --Pierre’s.

Let’s pray to believe deeply in this saving love of God and the mystery of the Body of Christ in our world. This means that our fears, losses, weaknesses, and diminishments will never have the last word. ✦

Bill Miller, although last sighted in an ambulance as an EMT, is now studying to be a paramedic.

## Irish Imports Final Concerts

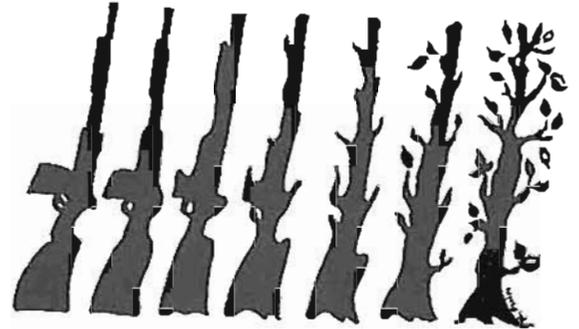
The Kavanaugh clan, along with Jack Renard and Peter Fisher Hased, will perform together for the last time on:

Thursday, March 11 and Friday, March 12.  
8:00 p.m.

St. Louis University's  
Lower College Church  
at Grand and Lindell

Tickets available at Catholic Supply,  
Webster Records and College Church  
Rectory.

We are still seeking original art work for *The Round Table*. If you are interested contact Teka Childress at 621-4052.



## Karen House Needs:

- ◆ Housetakers
- ◆ Money
- ◆ Chairs and beds

*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, Mark Chmiel, Mary Dutcher, Jeff Finnegan, Celestia Gaudreault, Carol Giles, Bill Miller, Ellen Rehg, and Mark Scheu. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

## The Round Table

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