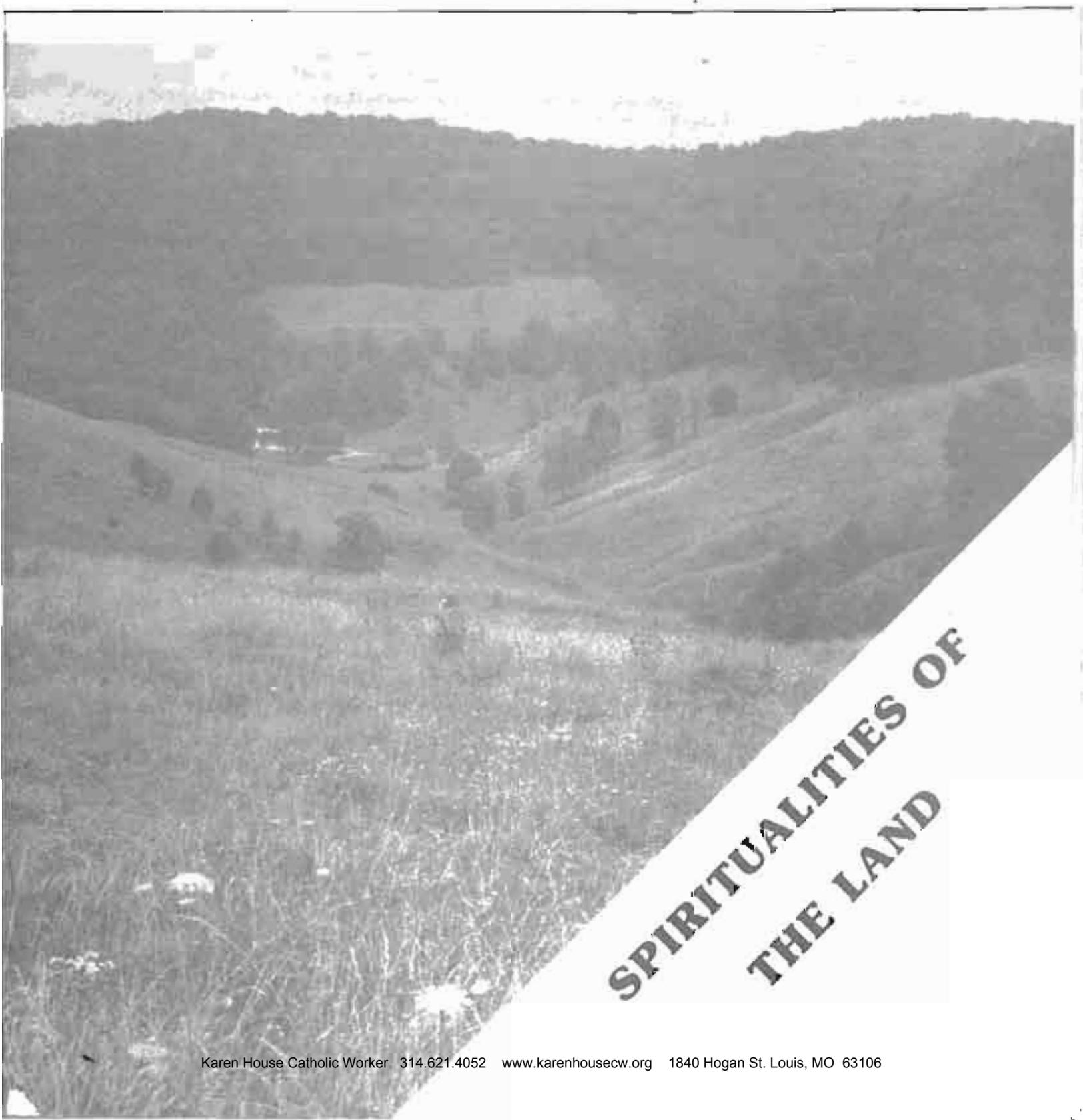


# THE Round Table

Summer

1985

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



**SPIRITUALITIES OF  
THE LAND**

# WHY THIS ISSUE?



One evening at Mass early this summer, a community member said he was thankful for having just had the opportunity to go fishing, for the good fortune to catch some fish, and for the grace to know he was of the earth when he ate the fish. He said it was a sacramental moment.

In this issue we hope to examine some of those moments of truth when we know that our spirits as well as our bodies are of the earth.

Initially, when we discussed whether to choose "the land" as the theme, we considered writing on soil erosion, agribusiness, cash cropping, strip mining, deforestation. We remembered Cesar Chavez saying here in St. Louis that the U.S. spends more to store surplus food than we pay for farm labor; and we considered articles on the politics of hunger and on migrant workers. We decided not to write about the cries of anguish from our earth and those who till it; but to request instead some reflections on the land as a source of our joy.

Pat Coy describes some characteristics of spirituality rooted in experiences of nature and the risk we run of alienating ourselves from God when we separate ourselves from the earth.

Chris Montesano of Sheep Ranch Catholic Worker Farm in California restates Peter Maurin's vision of how things should be. It is not enough to offer urban hospitality and to resist war. The nuclear alley we've come down is a dead end so we must turn around and go back to the land.

Joe Angert took and developed the pictures for this issue, which indeed speak a thousand words about land and God.

Gregory Cusack of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference recalls his childhood rapture with the natural world.

Mike McIntyre and Janet McKennis write their final House columns. Teka Childress concludes the issue with her reflections about how friends in the poorest lands keep the suffering of the poor in our minds always.

Reading these essays, I remember Isaiah's promise that

No child shall ever again die an infant  
or fail to live out life...  
My people shall build houses and live to inhabit them,  
Plant vineyards and eat their fruit;...  
My people shall live the long life of a tree,  
And my chosen shall enjoy the fruit of their labor. (Is 65:20,21,23)

Isaiah's vision is our hope and prayer and gives purpose to our lives.

-Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.



## *the St. Louis Catholic Worker Community*

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

*Casa House*  
1849 Casa Ave.  
St. Louis, MO 63106  
621-3085

*Eller Dixon House*  
1540 N. 17th St.  
St. Louis, MO 63106  
231-2039

# SPIRITUALITY AND ECOLOGY

by Patrick G. Coy



"Drive life into the corner and reduce it to its simplest terms." So went the advice of Henry David Thoreau while living his solitary life at Walden Pond. What was valuable advice in the 1840's is even more so to us: the inhabitants of the mechanized high tech U.S. society of the 1980's. It is difficult for us not to live a life far removed from its origins. Artificial environments like shopping malls and sprawling supermarkets (where one's every media-created "need" can be readily answered) are becoming more the norm than the exception. Agribusiness and our urban/suburban life patterns create a seldom-scaled wall between such elemental human experiences as sowing, reaping, offering thanksgiving and eating. The sad result being that the interrelatedness of all life, and its consequent interdependence, easily elude the grasp of our minds, and more importantly, the embrace of our hearts.

From a monastery nestled in the wooded hills of Kentucky, Thomas Merton taught us—over and over again—that so much of truth is paradoxical. We should not be surprised then, when we drive life and nature into a prayer-filled corner of our lives only to discover its simplest terms to be quite complex: namely, the interrelatedness of all life.

This insight is so fundamental it is the engine which pulls the theistic train through human history. Without exception, the great religions of the world recognize the essential unity of all life. The Creator God is the ultimate source of that oneness. For we experience God as a unitive force, not a divisive one; a reconciling grace, not a driver of wedges.

The Psalms are a near relentless recounting of God's glory and holiness revealed in the beauty and unity of the natural world: "The heavens are telling the glory of God" (Ps 19:1). The human task is to understand this basic unity of nature as the manifestation of God's power, wisdom, and unbounded love.

When we intuit and enter into the mystery of the universe—which is the creative force of love—our own ability and desire to love is increased. We are all possessors of this power-to-love. It is our birthright. That is why when we look faceup into the cleansing waters of a summer thundershower, or stop to examine a flower and contemplate the mystery of pollination, the harmonious mystery of nature resonates within our being. We are then bidden forth to venture out of ourselves in loving service. We assume our biblical role as co-creators, contributing to an increase in the sum total of God's love in the world. For our spiritual pilgrimage to be wholistic, and for us to arrive at its destination, we must awaken and cultivate an appreciation of nature.

Have you ever wondered why when it snows people become spontaneously playful, and are infinitely more willing to go out of their way to help each other out? It is a moment of being plunged into the creative energies of the universe, released through the falling snow. It is a time of being freed from the prison of our own self-interest; a moment when we have been forced, quite literally, to confront our relationship to the environment. Consequently, it is a time when we recognize, at least implicitly, that we have all been shaped and molded from the same batch of

*Pat Coy, Karen House Community member, does not spend all of his time communing with nature. He just finished teaching a course at Saint Louis University on the spirituality of Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day.*

Karen House Catholic Worker 314.621.4052 [www.karenhousecw.org](http://www.karenhousecw.org) 1840 Hogan St. Louis, MO 63106

clay, by the same Master Potter. We know we are part of a divinely delicate—though infinitely powerful—web of ecosystems that the Native Americans refer to simply as "the land". (For most traditional Native Americans, "land" is a generic term meaning a unity of land, water, and air. For others, it refers to the unity of all life forms as well. It is in the latter sense that I use it here and throughout this article.)

If we had eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart softened by meditation on the natural world, reality would present itself to us in vastly different terms than our throw-away consumer culture allows. For the world is not so much a pyramid, with us at the top, as it is a web of interlocking relationships. As Chief Seattle said, "humankind did not weave the web of life, but is merely a strand in it." Reality is less Jacob's ladder and more Sarah's circle. Put simply, we are in need of some humility when it comes to understanding our relationship to the land.



The Zen master Rikyu best illustrates this in the following. In reading the story, it is helpful to know that in Zen Buddhism, the tea ceremony is, essentially, liturgy.

"When his new tea-room and garden were completed, he invited a few friends to a tea ceremony for the house-warming. Knowing the greatness of Rikyu, the guests expected to find some ingenious design for his garden which would make the best use of the sea, the house being on the slope of a hill. But when they arrived, they were amazed to find that a number of large evergreen trees had been planted on the side of the garden, evidently to obstruct the view of the sea. They were at a loss to understand the meaning of this.

When the time came for the guests to enter the tea-room, they proceeded to the stone water basin to rinse their mouths and wash their hands, a gesture of symbolic cleansing, physically and mentally before entering the tea-room.

Then it was that when the guests stooped to scoop out a dipperful of water from the water basin, only in that humble posture were they suddenly able to get a glimpse of the shimmering sea in the distance by way of an opening through the trees, thus making them realize the relationship between the dipperful of water in their hands and the great ocean beyond, and also enabling them to recognize their own position in the universe. They were thus brought into a correct relationship with the infinite."

### -Knowledge of God-

It is not too much to say that love of the land brings knowledge of God. Just as in clothing the naked we clothe Christ, and in performing loving service to others we come to know God standing amongst us, so too in caring for the land do we come to know the many lines in the face of God. For one is never alone in nature, but accompanied by an intimate companion—a God who, as in Genesis, walks with us in the garden during the cool of the evening. In nature, the Creator God is constant in her surrounding presence. Miracles of life and love abound. Theophanies wait under every overturned rock; and in the symphonic music of every tree rustling in the wind.



It was while living by the sea on Staten Island that Dorothy Day finally began to answer the relentless call of God—the call Frances Thompson referred to in his poem entitled "The Round of Heaven". She tells us in From Union Square To Rome that while walking the beaches of Raritan Bay, she began to recognize nature as an arresting sign of God, and that she unconsciously began to pray, only later coming to realize what delight this gave her. This, along with her experience of

giving birth to her daughter Tamar, was the beginning of her conversion. It was then that she set her face to Jerusalem, turning her life over to God, come what may.

In Dorothy's case, one can't help but wonder if she was not already taking to heart the words of a novelistic character she later came to love, Fr. Zossima, found in Dostoevsky's novel, The Brothers Karamazov. On his deathbed, the monk imparted these final words of wisdom to his followers, "Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand of it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light, every animal... If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things."

The simple truth here is that inside each bird song listened to, each garden weeded, every fish caught, cleaned and eaten respectively, is a glimpse into the best which already lies in our hearts, waiting to be recognized as nothing less than the image of God. The irony and the challenge is that such a simple process—to see the face of God in nature and ourselves—takes such discipline. But the discipline lies not in recognizing God in the mirror of nature. That is a blue chip guarantee. The trick lies rather in merely making the time to look. For what is spoken of here is simply another form of prayer; another way of seeing and reflecting on reality.

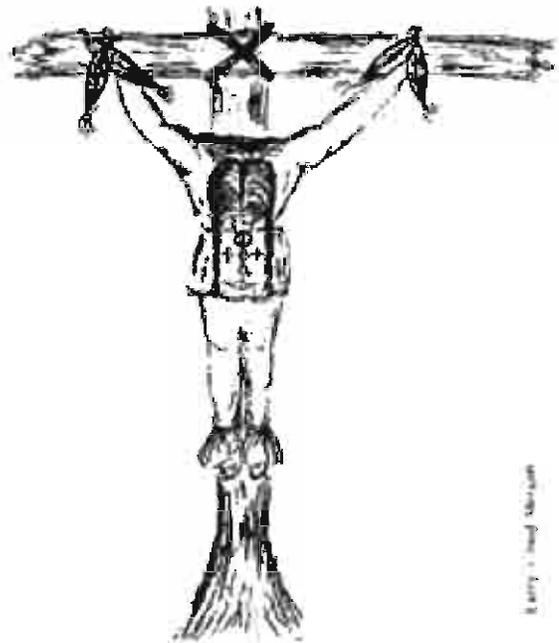
But the human heart is all too often prideful and arrogant. We have misinterpreted the dominion granted us in Genesis for domination. We trade biblical stewardship for economic exploitation. And so we destroy the land, building castles on sand foundations in the form of nuclear power plants constructed over major fault lines in the earth's crust. In the process, we stupidly gnaw away at our own umbilical cord to a meaningful and holy existence. Carl Jung states as much: "People who know nothing about nature are, of course, neurotic, for they are not adapted to reality." Similarly, Christian foundational theology has always named the inability of being able to accurately perceive reality as a characteristic of being in a "state of sin."

My desire here is not to lay yet another neurosis at our doorstep which we have to "get in touch with." Lord knows we all struggle with enough of them already! Yet the concerns of environmental ethics are inescapable. They are a part of our

daily life and must be dealt with. Reason alone should tell us that destroying the environment is impractical. Our faith informs us it is sinful, nothing if not blasphemous. Then blasphemers we must be. For the examples are legion.

### -Environmental Ethics-

The accumulation of toxins in the environment and in human bodies is nearly beyond comprehension. We see it rear its ugly head here at the Worker in the form of lead poisoning. In the U.S. we now treat 15,000 children a year for lead poisoning. Over 200 of those fortunate enough to receive treatment suffer permanent damage. We may never need to push the button bringing on nuclear winter. The radioactive waste generated by our nuclear weapons production is already doing irreparable harm to the land. Of the



50,000 hazardous waste sites in the U.S., the E.P.A. reports 350 of them are so hazardous that they should be likened to "chemical time bombs." Of the 63 million tons of hazardous industrial waste "produced" in 1980, the E.P.A. estimates only 10% was disposed of properly! As if that weren't bad enough, topsoil erosion is now the worst cause of inland water pollution in the U.S. And it is disappearing at truly alarming rates, with a third of our ever-so-precious topsoil now lost to erosion.

We need to listen anew to the words of the founder of the science of ecology, Wisconsin naturalist Aldo Leopold, whose 1949 book, A Sand County Almanac, is the classic in the field. Leopold argued that, "We abuse the land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." For too long we have simply not been able to see the forest for the saw, the hill for the mine, or the river for the dam.

And so, just as Siddhartha was in his early life, we remain spiritual paupers on a pilgrimage to nowhere, for we know not from whence we have come.

ALDO  
LEOPOLD



The greed which, according to the congressional Office of Technology Assessment, puts 255 million metric tons of hazardous chemical wastes into the environment each year (more than a ton for each U.S. citizen!), is of a piece with the greed which keeps so many members of the Southern hemisphere in poverty, unable to meet their basic needs. It is no accident that the environment is often most desecrated (literally: "to violate the sanctity of") where poor folk live. The spent land of the Appalachian people, the uranium mine-studded and irradiated lands of Native Americans, the Black ghettos of the urban U.S., and the denuded tropical forests of Latin America now being short-sightedly used for export-cropping give credence to the words of Leo Tolstoy: "If the arrangement of society is bad and a small number of people have power over the majority and oppress it, every victory over nature will inevitably serve only to increase that oppression."

But we need to go beyond Tolstoy. We must stop perceiving the world through the prism of male eyes jaded by machismo. Nature is not a hostile force over which we must reign victorious. Our just relationship to the land is rather a foundation for a wholistic spirituality attuned to the social demands of the gospel.

## -Reconciliation-

For the prophets, for Jesus, and for the early Christian church, spiritual decay was often linked with the unjust and inequitable uses of land. Christ said we are not to offer our gift at the altar till we have sought reconciliation with our neighbor. In matters ethical, the man from Galilee was a maximalist: he was the scourge of the Pharisees because he was always widening and deepening the spirit of ethical injunctions. So it is we can confidently say that until we've attempted restoration of our land relationship, the altar should be approached with equal trepidation. How can we try and glorify God by offering the "fruits of the vine and work of human hands" one moment, when moments before and after we are blissfully ignorant of the woeful state of the gifts? Invincible ignorance this is not. Reconciliation is as possible and as necessary here as in our interpersonal relations. Such, St. Paul tells us, is the universal redemption won by Christ.

Wendell Berry writes often of his project to reclaim an abused and deeply eroded farm in the Kentucky hills. He says that "in doing these things we have begun a restoration and a healing in ourselves."

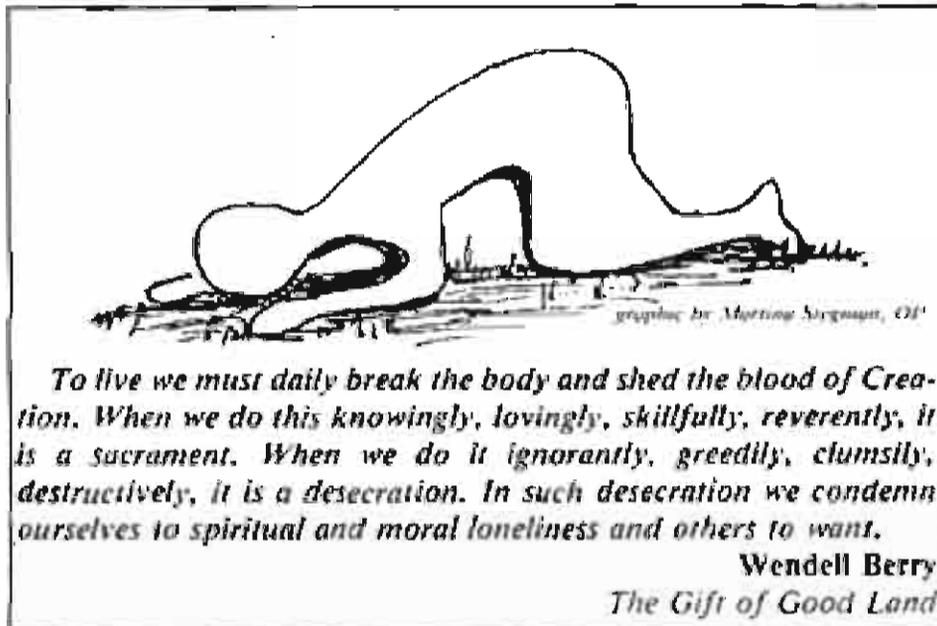


I have often reclaimed unnecessary campfire rings which blacken and scar otherwise aesthetically pleasing campsites. They are left by campers for whom one established fire ring is not enough, who are seemingly motivated by "more is better" rather than by a desire to commune

with nature. For each campsite restored, some of my own brokenness and sinfulness has been healed. I leave feeling better about myself, and the world. And so it goes for all us: for every backyard lovingly tended; every plastic bag, aluminum can, newspaper and glass bottle recycled; every vacant lot made green with vegetable gardens; and every gallon of water displaced and conserved by the placing of a brick into the toilet tank, health is restored on all sides.

These experiences speak of the intimate relationship between people and the land. We are left with a sense that the destiny of one is tied to the destiny of the other. It is finally destiny, and posterity, that we must be concerned with. As Chief Seattle warned us as he signed over Native American Lands in 1854, "Whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth. If people spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves."

Our mandate is to drive life into the corner; reduce it to its simplest terms. Then we will know the divine mystery. For those terms are one in the same with the lunar and tidal rhythms which pulse through our veins, our moods, our menstrual cycles, and our gardens. It is the same force which drives the salmon up the river to spawn, compels people to make love, friends, and music, and directs the birds along their treacherous seasonal migration routes. It is finally the same force which impels God to redeem not only the earth, but our faltering attempts to live lovingly. It is the unitive force of unbounded divine love, revealed in Jesus the Christ. Once glimpsed between the trees, and bowed to in humility, we may proceed to break our bread, and drink our tea. For a harmonious relationship with all of creation is again possible.



*To live we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness and others to want.*

**Wendell Berry**  
*The Gift of Good Land*

*Global Education Associates*

# A Hebrew Sings The Glories Of Creation...

Bless Yahweh, my soul,  
Yahweh my God, how great you are!  
Clothed in majesty and glory,  
wrapped in a robe of light!

You stretch the heavens out like a tent,  
you build your palace on the waters above;  
using the clouds as your chariot,  
you advance on the wings of the wind;  
you use the winds as messengers  
and fiery flames as servants.

You fixed the earth on its foundations,  
unshakable for ever and ever;  
you wrapped it with the deep as with a robe,  
the waters overtopping the mountains.

At your reproof the waters took to flight,  
they fled at the sound of your thunder,  
cascading over the mountains, into valleys,  
down to the reservoir you made for them;  
you imposed the limits they must not cross,  
or they would once more flood the land.

You set springs gushing in ravines,  
running down between the mountains,  
supplying water for wild animals,  
attracting the thirsty wild donkeys;  
near there the birds of the air make nests  
and sing among the branches.

From your palace you water the uplands  
until the ground has all your heavens offer;  
you make fresh grass grow for cattle  
and those plants made use of by your people,  
for them to get food from the soil:  
wine to make them cheerful,  
oil to make them happy  
and bread to make them strong.

The trees of Yahweh get rain enough,  
those cedars of Lebanon God planted;  
here the little birds build their nest,  
on the high branches, the stork has a home.  
For the wild goats there are the mountains,  
in the crags rock-badgers hide.



You made the moon to tell the seasons,  
the sun knows when to set:  
you bring darkness on, night falls,  
all the forest animals come out:  
savage lions roaring for their prey,  
claiming their food for God.

The sun rises, they retire,  
going back to lie down in their lairs,  
and people go out to work,  
and to labor until dusk.  
Yahweh, what variety you have created,  
arranging everything so wisely!  
Earth is full of things you have made:

among them vast expanse of ocean,  
teeming with countless creatures,  
creatures large and small,  
with the ships going to and fro  
and Leviathan whom you made to amuse you.

All creatures depend on you  
to feed them throughout the year;  
you provide the food they eat,  
with generous hand you satisfy their hunger.

You turn your face away, they suffer,  
you stop their breath, they die  
and revert to dust.  
You give breath, fresh life begins,  
you keep renewing the world.

Glory for ever to Yahweh!  
May Yahweh find joy in all creation,  
at whose glance the earth trembles,  
at whose touch the mountains smoke!

I mean to sing to Yahweh all my life,  
I mean to play for my God as long as I live.  
May these reflections give God pleasure,  
as much as Yahweh gives me!  
May sinners vanish from the earth  
and the wicked exist no more!

Bless Yahweh, my soul.

... Psalm 104

# BACK TO THE LAND!---1985

## THE ROUND TABLE INTERVIEWS

### CHRIS MONTESANO OF SHEEP

### RANCH CATHOLIC WORKER FARM



**RT:** Describe in some detail your life and work there at Sheep Ranch Farm, in terms of the routine, cottage industries, and how you make ends meet.

**Chris:** Shortly after 5:30 in the morning we go out and milk the goats—a chore which usually takes about an hour and a half. Depending on the season we may be spending the rest of the day on crafts or farm chores. Sometimes the chores involve sharing child care, cooking, and cleaning. We all take turns doing these chores as well as the regular farm work. In the afternoon around 5:00 we have the afternoon milking chores. Milk animals have to be milked twice a day at twelve hour intervals. For us it has been a unique experience to see the amount of work involved when we don't get our milk in a carton.

In terms of making ends meet, we have been developing a candle craft, where we produce scented candles and beeswax candles. We started with the intention of providing candles for churches, and discovered that there was a highly controlled market, and we were not able to break into it. So we started making scented candles as well. We began to sell these at various churches, and have had some success with that as well as mail

order business. We've had the greatest success with crafts in the making of advent wreaths. We have advertised these and shipped them all across the country. Last year that was one of our biggest selling items. We also make Christmas door sprays which we sell locally, and this too brings in a fair amount.

Our crafts at this time have not been able to support the farm—far from it. Other Catholic Worker houses have helped us out to meet our expenses. We hope next year to get the candle craft to the point where it will fully support the farm. In the nine years we've been here we have learned how naive we were about the amount of money it would take to establish the farm. Part of that is because of the very dry climate here, as irrigation and water systems are key and very expensive.

**RT:** What was Peter Maurin's philosophy of work?

**Chris:** Peter did not believe that work equals wages. Peter was critical of both the capitalist as well as the communist societies, and even socialist societies. One of the areas in which they made a major mistake was how they regarded work. Work was regarded as an exchange for money and Peter felt that this was really a prostitution of work. In its essence, work

*Chris Montesano is one of the founding members of Sheep Ranch Catholic Worker Farm in California. Write him at P.O. Box 53, Sheep Ranch, CA, 95250 (209-728-2193), for a list of candles and other crafts available.*

Karen House Catholic Worker 314.621.4052 [www.karenhousecw.org](http://www.karenhousecw.org) 1840 Hogan St. Louis, MO 63106

was a gift that one gives for the common good, upon which you cannot place a price. This very radically penetrates to a lot of the exploitation in our society, because so much exploitation is based on what people are payed for the work they do. The work that they do is not seen as a gift given for the common good. If one were to begin to create a just order, a society where it is easy for one to be good, this has to be one of the primary bases for that kind of society—a redefinition of work.



Peter Maurin at Mayfarm in 1941, eight years before his death. Courtesy Marquette University Archives.

**RT:** Can you say anything about the theological underpinnings of Peter's vision? In what ways was his faith the foundation of his vision?

**Chris:** One of the foundations that led to this radical view of work was Peter's spirituality. When one looked upon life as having its essence in faith, and having its essence in one's relationship to God and neighbor, then all was defined in a totally new, totally different way. Prayer and the life of the Spirit were essential to Peter. In terms of forming communities, Peter always talked about them as being a synthesis of cult (the primacy of the spiritual), culture (literature, reading, art, music), and cultivation (the working of the land). Peter read the scriptures as well as the writings of the day, and he tried to find a way of synthesizing the two, of combining them—of taking what was very human, looking at it in the light of faith, and coming up with a new vision.

Peter believed that there were three questions which all of us should continually keep before us. The first question is why are things the way they are. We can take that question and say, why is it we have a nuclear arsenal to protect ourselves. Why is it we find our prisons primarily populated with the poor? Why do we have whole sectors of our society where people have far more than they need, and we have other sectors where people do not have enough? Why on a larger world scale do we have a situation where, we who are only 6% of the world's population consume almost half of the world's goods? Why? Why is it a country like ours, which is so powerful, is so bent on destroying the country of Nicaragua?

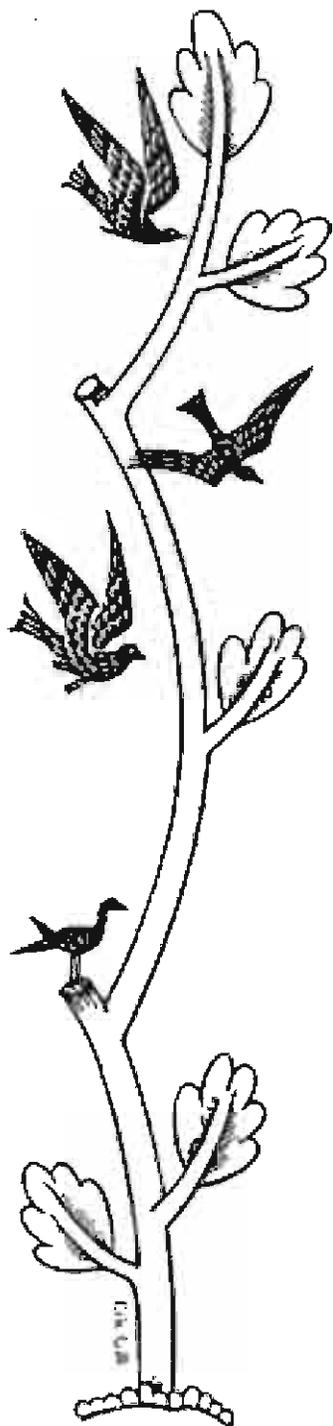
One has to look at how should things be. I recall that the opening statement of Pope Paul VI's encyclical Progress of the People had one of the most radical effects on my life: "What most people aspire to today is better living conditions, better housing, better working conditions. In brief, people seek to have more, in order to do more, in order to be more—when most people live in conditions which make these lofty desires illusory." The last word, illusory, had a profound impact on my life. I began to look at these realities of today—why is it I was part of a country that consumed so much, why we were fighting in Vietnam, why we had a nuclear arsenal.

One has to say in all honesty that the foundation of the society, the absolute bottom line, is greed. Our society is founded in fulfilling our every need, want, desire. When this is compared to the rest of the world, it is not right, it is not just.

Then Peter posed the second question, how should things be. The first thing that Jesus said is that we should change our hearts, for the Reign of God is at hand. What does that change of heart mean for us today? It means that our life has to move from a basis of selfishness, a basis of greed, to one of giving. Peter said he wanted us to become a society of go-givers, not go-getters. This is the Gospel's call. And also to seek first the Reign of God and its justice. The justice of this reign is very simple. Jesus said "I was hungry and you gave me food to eat... I was thirsty...." Our judgement is how we are going to concretely change these realities. How are we going to change our lives so that those who do not

have, do have? One of the challenges today, Helder Camara tells us, is that we now have structural injustice; injustice is rooted in the capitalist system, it's rooted in structures of exploitation through multinationals. We have got to resist these things and stand up to structural injustice.

How do we make that path, from how things are to how things should be? In



Peter's vision the first thing was to meet the immediate needs of the poor—to see that people are fed, housed, clothed. That was the beginning of a revolution, of a path, from how things are to how things should be. When we realize that there is the structural injustice we have to begin to cut ourselves off from it.

**RT:** Does Peter's vision of land use conflict with contemporary trends in the U.S., especially the trends toward fewer and larger farms run on a corporate basis and fewer people making a living directly off the land?

**Chris:** The third part of Peter's vision is how things should be: the return to the land and the creation of farming communities. Peter realized that one of the sources of this exploitation, one of the sources of the beginning of the multinational corporations, was that people had been removed from the land. High industrialization led to more exploitation, led to the centralization of money, wealth, power, into the hands of the few, rather than (as in the Gospel) our seeking less power, to give rather than to get. Peter felt that in order to restructure society, we had to move toward an agrarian society. Agrarian societies do not exploit, as the primacy of what people do is functional.

---

*The ground of the poor yields much food but is swept away by injustice.*  
**Proverbs 13:23**

---

It is functional because it meets people's needs, rather than meeting people's greeds. The society he was envisioning was one where each person would work according to their ability and receive according to their need—a society based on justice. Peter saw that in beginning to build farming communities we would construct a new society in the shell of the old, where it would be easier for people to be good, easier to pursue a life of service rather than a life of greed.

How do we make that happen? That is one of the most difficult questions we face today. Peter has given us a vision, and has returned our hearts to the Gospel. The first step is to take that step ourselves—that's the foundation—to begin to move to the land ourselves. This is a very, very important part of Peter's vision.

*Our attitude toward nature is simply an extension of our attitude toward ourselves, and toward one another.*  
*Thomas Merton*



*The beauty of nature which includes the sound of waves, insects, and cicadas in the trees ...all were part of my joy in nature that brought me to the church.*  
*Dorothy Day*



**Photo**  
**Joe**



*We would be contributing to the misery and desperation of the world if we failed to rejoice in the sun, the moon, the stars, and the rivers.*

*Dorothy Day*

**ographs  
by  
Angert**



This vision definitely conflicts with the direction our society is going in today. Small farms are closing, the ownership of the land is being centralized in the hands of the few. The structure of land holdings is becoming much more similar to what we see in Latin America. In many of these countries the control of the land is in the hands of the few. We are moving more and more in that direction.



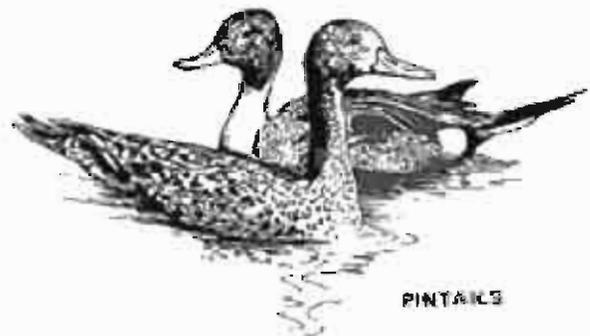
**RT:** How do you respond to those who dismiss Peter's vision as anachronistic (based on imaginary past), or unrealistic (in conflict with present economic reality)?

**Chris:** I know that some people within the movement, and without, often dismiss Peter's vision as unrealistic and anachronistic. I don't agree with that. I think Peter was quite correct when he said that when you are going down a blind alley, the only thing to do is turn around and go back. This is essential, even if you are involved in nuclear resistance, doing all one can to stop nuclear weapons (and we need that witness and it is very important). The reason we have these weapons is to maintain the U.S. middle-class life style, to maintain the urbanization of this country, to maintain the power and energy needed to support this life style. We have to exploit the world. This life style has got to change, it has to become more in accord with the rest of the world.

Both resistance and hospitality have got to go on...I think it is very important that all Catholic Workers, all resistance communities, have farms.

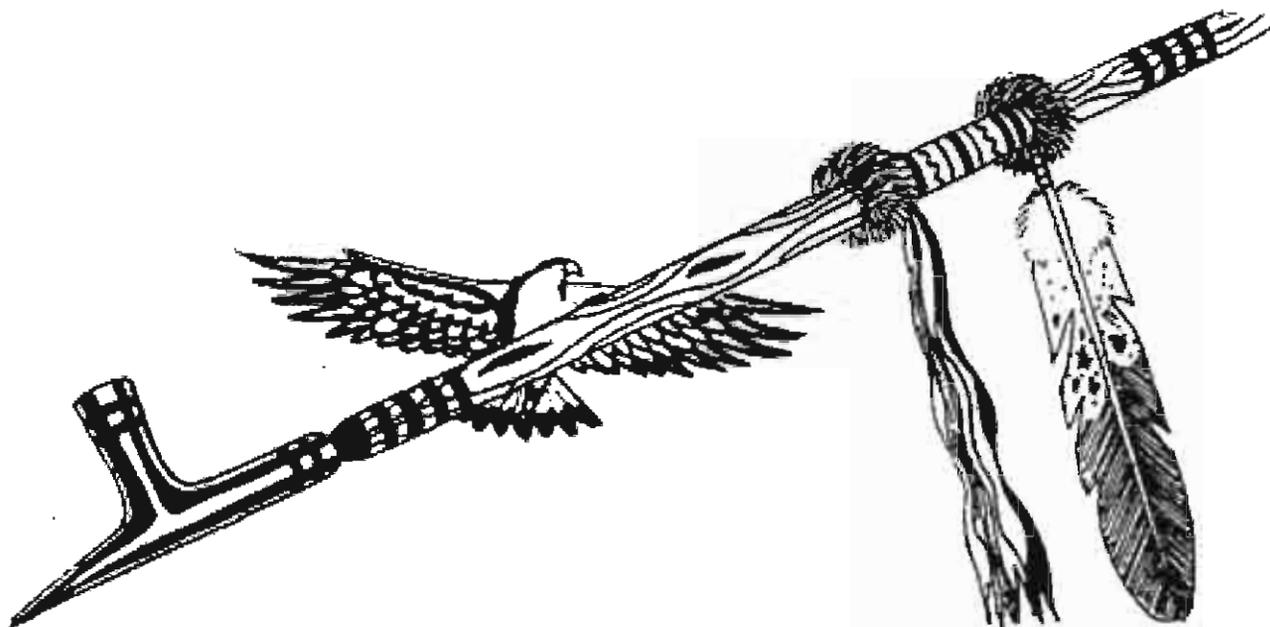
So even when living a life of resistance, one is often plugging into the same power companies and using the same gas. The food one eats comes from the corporate farms.

Certainly, both resistance and hospitality have got to go on. But just as well, there have to be some of us who are really, concretely working to change the structure, change the society—to move in directions that are not exploitative, that are based on justice and an agrarian mode. Unless we move towards an agrarian mode, we are going to have to maintain the weapons, we are going to be supporting those multinational corporation, we are going to be supporting structural injustice. An important act of resistance is to begin to go to the root of the problem. Peter believed that these communities were going to the root of the problem. All of these things—the hospitality, resistance to the arms race, resistance to our policies in Central America—all things have to go on hand in hand with creating a society that is based on an agrarian, non-exploitative mode. This is essential—that all of us work together.



PINTAKS

**RT:** How central is Peter's vision of the land to the Catholic Worker movement? For example, should every CW community struggle to establish its own CW farm?



Chris: I think it is very important that all Catholic Workers, all resistance communities, have farms. Beyond that, even in the larger movement it's important. For example, I've never seen anything of this kind in Sojourners, which I consider a very significant, important movement. There is a failure to make connections in some of these circles—recognizing some of the very concrete ways that society has got to change. All these communities need to establish, as well as their work in the cities, farming communities. It's not a static idea, either. Even in the cities people can establish farming types of communities. Those changes have to come in the cities too. We are just in the beginning stages of this movement.

RT: Do you agree with those who contend that the "back to the land" aspect of the Catholic Worker is the least realistic and has met with the most failure?

Chris: It's true that people say that. Part of that problem has been that most farms have often evolved to houses of hospitality on the land. That has often hampered the ability of the communities to become working farms. It has also hampered the development of crafts. Crafts are also essential—another means to help support these kinds of communities. Most farms, including ours, are not economically self-sufficient.

I hope we are coming to a point in Worker farm history where we recognize that because of structural injustice in society, as essential as hospitality is (and it is extremely important), equally essential is the establishment of working

farms. They should provide enough for the community and some extra for the poor. It is important that hospitality not be allowed to stand in the way of these other things. Those of us who are committed to farms today need to have the courage to move in those directions. Sometimes that's going to mean saying no to hospitality. It's going to mean limited hospitality, keeping a balance between hospitality and establishing an on-going farm. If not, our farms will continue to meet with failure. We are beginning to explore new ways of doing hospitality—instead of providing hospitality to the urban poor (who have no experience of life on the farm), providing it to rural poor. In Nicaragua they provided land first to the rural poor.

RT: Is not Sheep Ranch Farm one of the most successful of the Catholic Worker farms?

Chris: I'd like to say that I consider our farm here to be at the beginning stages. I hope with God's blessing and gift that our family will remain here over the years. We are committed to the long haul, which is necessary to having farms work. One of the realities that we have neglected to look at is that Peter Maurin envisioned a society that had the cultural backdrop in which it was created. There were generations of labor that had gone into creating that society. For us to think that in two or three generations we are going to achieve that is naive. I think that this of work is intended for all of our lives. With God's grace, hopefully there will be others to carry on this work.



# RECOLLECTIONS OF CHILDHOOD: THE WONDER OF NATURE

by Gregory D. Cusack

This is not an easy time to be fighting for the land, or for the people of the land either. The ideas that "bigger must be better", that "constant expansion is the essence of the American game", and that "only the inefficient will not survive" have deep roots in our thinking.

Basic to our problem is that we have, individually and as a people, become sundered from the land.

Only fifty years ago, most of us were but one or two generations at the most from living and working on the land. In the 1930s almost half of our fellow citizens still did so. Today, with less than 3% of our people engaged in farming, and most of the rest of us living in urban settings, it is much more difficult to experience the rhythms of the earth and our intimate ties to the rest of creation. As most of us will not return to work or farm the land, how do we rediscover and reform our intimate ties with the rest of creation?

One restorative avenue open to us is memory.

I was born and raised upriver from St. Louis, in the (former riverboat) town of Davenport, Iowa. It was easy there for a child in the 1950s to grow up relatively close to, and involved with, nature. Within a few city blocks of my boyhood home, dozens of acres of "undeveloped" land, still in its virgin forested state, lay beckoning. I fondly recall the many, many days my childhood friends and I roamed throughout those woods in our play, all the while becoming more familiar with the ways of plant and animal life alike. Although I did not dwell on it then (there was no need to), the "outdoors" felt very much like an extension of me, and I of it.

Those and other similar experiences occurred at a crucial time in my life and are, perhaps, responsible for why I found it difficult in my maturing years to regard nature as something "inanimate",

merely to be manipulated to suit our changing whims.

I remember vividly being jarred by others' quite different views of nature. For example, in my days as a member of the Iowa House of Representatives I often attended meetings wherein "developers" spoke of the land's "highest and best use" as being the dollars it would bring on the market. Such statements, and the mentality behind them, profoundly troubled me, for it represented an attitude quite alien to my own experience. Being forced to grapple with that point of view helped me to begin to connect the growing despoilment of the land and its creatures with our spiritual alienation from God's creation.

In our obsessive attempts to "use" everything, including people, we seem to have lost sight of the wonder all about us, and of our interrelationships with all of creation.



Do you remember how "magical" everything seemed to you when you were a child? When each day brought thrilling unknowns, encounters with things yet unnamed or, at the least, unexperienced? When each hour brimmed with the possible, the as-yet-undone? How everything was, indeed, part of our world to know and to explore? Perhaps this is one of the things Jesus had in mind when he said "unless you turn and become like little children, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3-4) In so many ways, children truly see more than we adults.

This was brought home to me with renewed force when in January of 1983 I was almost killed in a traffic accident.

*Gregory Cusack lives in Des Moines where he serves as the Executive Director of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference.*

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

During my recovery, as the reality of what had almost happened to me really sank in, I was briefly able to once again experience the world as if I were a child. Everything seemed new, fresh, and wondrous! When I was once again able to resume walking outside, I remember how lustrous all the colors of nature seemed, how marvelous the trilling of each bird. For a short while, at least, the scales (of deadening adulthood routine) were lifted from my eyes. I truly saw the world for the marvelous, alive place it really is.

One of our chief tasks, in this jaded and cynical age, ought to be the restoration of a sense of wonder to the miracles all about us.

If we really saw the land as teeming with life, all of it part of an ecological whole with which we are deeply dependent for our own survival, and further understood our role to be that of good stewards of all of earth's resources, would we treat the soil as just "dirt", or poison our air, or foul our water? If we really perceived the wonder of the miracle of life which we share with all about us, would we continue to act so callously, and with such indifference, towards our fellow creatures, human and non-human alike?

We all have like memories, and many have experienced similar insights. But we too often allow the pressing urgencies of the day's concerns to intrude upon, and thereby suppress, the truths of this larger reality.

In his fine book, The Spirit of the Earth, John Hart discusses those basic

principles underlying the perspectives of Native Americans regarding the land. They can be summarized as:

1) People cannot own the land, as one cannot own that of which one is a part! Mother Earth is a unity and belongs to the Great Spirit—no one else can possess or divide her.

2) This same understanding applies to other living creatures as well. Since other life also belonged to the Great Spirit, it could not be bought or sold, either.

3) The land belongs to all people and to future generations.

4) As it is the land which provides life, people must respect, and live in harmony with, the land. All creatures are united within this single circle of life and share with human beings God's living spirit.

5) As we are all part of the Earth, we must not abuse our Mother.

It is difficult, I believe, to conceive of a more integrated, or ethical point of view.

I think we need to draw upon our common rootedness in the whole of creation to escape the dreary gray of materialism and the distorting arrogance of militarism. We need to speak newly of old memories and orienting truths. I reflect upon these and related thoughts every time I return to my hometown and find myself walking through the forests of my youth.



## National Catholic Rural Life Conference

*Since its inception in 1923, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference has consistently championed the family farming system of agriculture and the rights of migrant workers. The NCRLC was also among the early prophetic voices linking our fate as human beings to the preservation of the ecological integrity of all of God's creation.*

*The current work of the Conference involves: 1) fighting for sustainable agriculture and the preservation of the family farming system; 2) conceptualizing and arguing for the implementation of a Just Food System for the U.S.; 3) sponsoring a series of Theology of Land Conferences 4) publishing the bimonthly Catholic Rural Life.*

*The Conference is a membership organization. Write to NCRLC, 4625 N.W. Beaver Drive, Des Moines, Iowa 50310.*

# FROM LITTLE HOUSE

by Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.



Over the years, in efforts to comfort me when I moaned that peace and justice movements don't have any results to show for their work, people have said, "what you are doing is planting seeds."

"But I'm tired of planting seeds," I'd say. "I want to reap the harvest!" I tried to be funny and I certainly was grateful for offers of sympathy. But I wondered sometimes if really I ought to be not only impatient with those who counsel patience, and but also downright angry with the very fields that are not ripe and myself go take some field by storm, forcing it to yield its harvest.

Well, a little honest experience with the real soil (as opposed to the parabolic soil) is educative. In the last four years I haven't just learned about pH values and asparagus and hardy perennials; I have also learned I really don't like much to reap harvests. I prefer to dig and add mulch and pull weeds. Early this summer I was too busy planting tomatoes to get the last of the sugar pea crop in. Last fall I prepared the asparagus bed for spring planting but the green tomatoes all froze on the vine. Right now my tomatoes are weeded and the suckers are all picked off; the early blossoms on my mums have been pinched back so there will be multiple blooms—but my lettuce has gone to seed!

I never pick the roses or mums or glads or lilacs to decorate the house. I love to look at them while I catch my breath between wheelbarrows full of dirt for the nine fruit trees I plan to plant next spring. Maybe, just maybe, economic conversion of McDonnell Douglas and stopping the Trident Submarine and corporate social responsibility are good life tasks for me just because they are unlikely to be the first fields of peace-making to ripen. Ah, what my garden has taught me.

What does my garden really look like now that I've told you how it grows? It is a 40 by 120 foot corner lot at 17th and Mullanphy, where a four-flat and a two-flat stood for ninety years. I guess

the owners didn't pay the taxes because about twelve years ago the city tore them down and bulldozed the rubble into the basements. Three years ago we bought the lot for \$600, two-thirds of the assessed value, and began not exactly to reclaim it for anyone or anything but to cultivate its edges and to exercise our hope.

First we put in tomatoes along the fence next to the Little House where there had been a brick path. We had to remove the bricks first. Tomatoes are an encouraging crop and we proudly gave away sacks of Italian, cherry, and beefsteak. We claimed it as our own virtue that no aphids settled in nor blight nor even drought that summer.

Energized by our success, we enlisted a crew to dig eleven three-foot by four-foot deep holes in the packed clay that had been the yards of the buildings. Our plan was to fill the holes with free topsoil and plant an orchard.

About twenty people worked four Saturdays in fall, dumping clay in the parking lot across the alley and bricks in the sister lot across the street. A small truckload of dirt filled three holes. But no more dirt was to be had except for money and the three trees we did plant died in the extraordinary drought of '83.

However, tomatoes were a success again, the cherries volunteering; sunflowers were startling in their size and vigor; and we harvested lambquarter we'd thought of as weed.

The holes remained in the yard and I prayed that no one would fall in and break a leg.

That autumn I saw an ad for a fence of roses. I took my pitchfork and tested the front of the lot, where there had been a brick patio. It looked like I could prepare the ground for a row of 20 bushes. In back too, along the alley, on the other side of three holes for the future orchard, the dirt between the brick rubble seemed deep enough to support roses. I ordered 50 for \$93.00, my most extravagant

*Mary Ann McGivern, S.L., recently celebrated her twenty-fifth anniversary in religious life. We celebrated by closing off 17th St. and having a square dance.*

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

action ever at the Little House.

This past fall the Morning Edition on National Public Radio ran a series on Civil Rights, twenty years later. They interviewed a Chicago Black community organizer who's still there. He said a lot of us White folks moved in with good intentions and left when they didn't see quick results, but a few settled in and planted flowers. It's modest long-term social change, but its tangible and pretty as well as symbolic. For the joy the roses give me, they are not so extravagant after all.

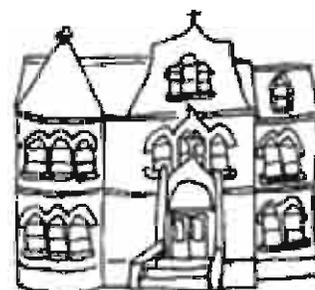
We have also planted lillies and rhubarb by the fence and on March 7th sugar peas. Five Nanking Cherry bushes run along about 20 feet of Mullanphy (in two of the holes we dug for trees), leaving just 100 feet of the outside edge to be cleared. Behind the roses on 17th we put in the asparagus and two green ash trees.

In the middle of the lot goldenrod, sleepytime fly-catchers, Queen Anne's lace, chicory, purple thistles, evening primroses, violets, dandelions, hedge bindweed (that wraps around tomatoes and roses and everything else), wild mint, and dozens more grasses and bushes and ground covers I don't know the names of all flourish. They bloom and go to seed amid broken bricks and glass and other rubble. Eligha and a kind neighbor cut them to meet city regulations.

The moral may be that God plants more seeds than I do, tills more deeply, and harvests thoroughly and with joy because, although I am God, God is much more than me. This learning doesn't quite imbue me yet; but in the four years I've been gardening I've become more content than I used to be to live in this uncertain and suffering world. †

## FROM KAREN HOUSE

by Mike McIntyre



Continuity and change have been much on my mind these past few months. How could it not be? Come September I'll be in Chicago beginning a doctoral program in political science. Sometimes I can hardly recognize the person who came knocking at the Karen House door in February of '82 to be given a breathtaking nonstop moving talking working laughing introduction to the art of housetaking by Mary Ann Gleason.

But Gleason is in Denver now, and Mary Dutcher is in Nicaragua. Joe and Clare are getting married (will have gotten married by press time). Ellen's plans to adopt Myrrah are coming ever closer to realization. The house was closed for repairs and refurbishing in June, and has now reopened (by design) to an entirely new set of guests. Looking only a bit further back, Pete moved to the near south side and Tom moved to the extreme far south side (an oil rig off the Texas coast). I recall one meeting of all the houses at which we hung

some eight feet of butcher paper on a wall to create a time line of just these sorts of changes—and ran out of room.

Of course, Ann has been here through it all. Now Ann is going through more changes than any of us. Ann has been a resident at Cardinal Glennon since I've known her. It's been easy to think of her as a constant in the house: always working incredible hours at the hospital, yet always willing to put forth a bit more of herself for the sake of the house. This year, her residency ended and she began to make plans to move to Guatemala in the fall. But then Ann discovered a lump in her breast which proved cancerous, and in June went into the hospital for surgery. Ann is now undergoing chemotherapy and her prognosis is good: your prayers are welcome, of course.

What does all this mean? The community at Karen House is fairly stable as Catholic Worker communities go, and it's been fairly easy for me to locate our continui-

ty in our persons. When you see a fairly stable group of people on a daily basis, it's easy to confuse that surface sameness with the source of continuity in the community. In the past few months, though, it's become clear to me that we all change, individually and collectively; we can all be shaken. In the midst of this, what accounts for any continuity in our communal persona?

At every other meeting of the Karen House community, we budget fifteen minutes or so for an item called "Catholic Worker Tradition." One member of the community briefly presents an aspect of that tradition; a bit of discussion follows. That gives some insight into one way of accounting for continuity in our community (or any community, for that matter). We share a set of values, or so the argument goes. Particularly in a self-selecting community such as ours, this explanation carries some weight. If the values the community stands for did not attract us, we would not have joined it. If their attraction ceases, we are free to leave. We often talk about our shared values, and, I think, often regard them as the glue which holds us together.

I'm not so sure about this explanation, though. It's always reminded me of the social theory of Talcott Parson, who believes that shared values hold all social groups together. That school of social theory has always seemed to beg the question on some level: it explains everything and nothing at the same time. In particular, it has difficulty explaining conflict and change, and even more change within continuity. "The more things change..." It's a cliché. Formally, though, it's a contradiction.

Maybe this can be better understood on a personal level. I'm hardly the same person I was a couple of years ago. Some of these changes impinge directly on my role as a Catholic Worker. I'm less and less attracted to personalism as a philosophy and direct action as a way of dealing with poverty. Service, kindness, love, do not appear to be remedies for poverty, even if extended far beyond our present efforts. Rather, they seem to foster a dependency relationship which degrades the recipient and drains the giver. The poor

need our love far less than they need money and power. Failing to recognize this, I fear we begin to think in terms of a "blaming the victim" ideology which William Ryan dissected so well some twenty years ago. I must also admit that my faith has been dramatically shaken in the past year. I've seen a lot of intense pain; some of it the church has seemed powerless to alleviate; some of it the church has caused. Now faith is not something I do; it's a gift, and I'm perfectly willing to await its restoration. Meantime, I'm quite skeptical of any religiously-based effort for social change.

Yet, I don't feel any need to repudiate the Catholic Worker. I value my time at Karen House. If I reject any portion of Catholic Worker philosophy, it's only because of the day-to-day reality of the Worker itself. In leaving, I'll consider myself a part of the extended community of those who have been touched by the Worker experience, a group that has long been much larger than those engaged directly in the work of the Catholic Worker.



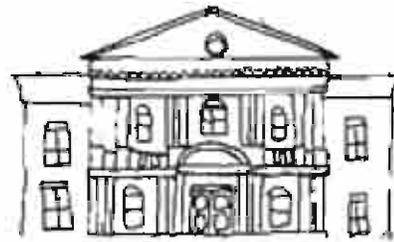
Continuity and change. How to account for both? Charlie King once characterized the Catholic Worker as a field hospital in the class war. (Charlie King is a songster who comes through St. Louis about once a year. If you haven't seen him in years past, please do). That characterization rang true at the time, and it still rings true. Our community changes because we cannot do otherwise. We stay the same because we exist within a larger social context which has not fundamentally changed since our founding. Karen House will change in any number of particulars, but its work will not fundamentally change as long as capitalism generates a lumpenproletariat and patriarchy generates woman's victimization. The lives of those of us who have touched and felt that reality have been changed, and that change grounds a new continuity.

+

*Mike McIntyre here presents his "farewell address" to the St. Louis Catholic Worker Community. His gifts of compassion, keen political insight, and unremitting analytical faculties will be sorely missed. Farewell, Mike, may God...*

Karen House Catholic Worker 314-621-4052 www.karenhousecw.org 1840 Hogan St. Louis, MO 63106

As I write, Cass House has just closed its doors for the remainder of the summer. The house seems terribly empty now. Although some of the guests who remained with us the week we closed were able to find permanent housing, most went to other shelters. A few went back into the very situations from which they had sought shelter. Hardest of all, it is necessary now to tell all those who call or come round for help that we will be unavailable for shelter until September for women and until October for soupline and men guests.



In his quiet way, Tommy has assumed many of Stanley's responsibilities, in addition to all of his own. The work with the land trust keeps him occupied on all fronts. We so enjoy the frequent visits of his beautiful daughter Keena.

## FROM CASS HOUSE

by Janet Grey McKennis

I hate it when we close! However, it is important for us to work both on the physical plant, always in need of repair, and also to tackle the intangible repair work of individuals as well as the community.

As tired as we are, we have all felt rejuvenated by the cheerful spirit of our newest community member, Dennis Fey. Fresh from the Peoria Catholic Worker, Dennis will be studying theology, among other things, at St. Louis University. His equanimity and capability in the face of bizarre and difficult house-taking situations have elicited admiration from all of us.

Tom Wagner and Mitch McGee, of Kenrick and Holy Family Seminaries respectively, are two other new faces who have enriched the life of our house. We are so grateful for their help.

To the surprise of his doctors and therapists—but not of those who know him well—Stanley continues to make a remarkable recovery from his strokes. His patience and determination constantly amaze me. I am awed, too, by his ability to share his moments of frustration as well as his victories. Please continue praying for Stanley as he fights his daily battles.

With the last of her children starting school, Audrey will be returning to work this fall. We are all excited with her. Emmett and Zack will both be continuing their outside jobs in addition to their work at the house. Please keep these three in mind; it is difficult to juggle the needs and demands of so many. The work of the house depends on such a difficult balance.

Tim and I seeded two plots late this spring, which he has tended assiduously ever since. We all enjoy the gorgeous blossoms which now brighten our grounds as the product of his labor. Although Tim steadfastly refused to speculate on the possible length of his stay with us, his overheard comments about next year's garden have pleased us all. His consistent thoughtfulness embodies the spirit of hospitality for so many of our guests, and endears him to the community.

Mike and I will be leaving Cass House late in August for Chicago, where Mike will study political theory and I will continue to do hospitality work. It will be difficult to leave behind so many good people, however much I look forward to all that Chicago has to offer us.

While I pondered how best to write of Cass House, a friend of the Worker suggested that I draw a picture. I thought it a lovely idea. If I could do any better than stick-figure drawings, I would draw all of the guests as community members. I would draw the kids playing ball in the yard. I would show Tim in the garden and Zack cutting grass nearby. The women would be sitting in their dining room talking, and the men playing cards in theirs. Stanley would have to be drawn sitting around the kitchen table, regaling everyone within earshot with Stanley-tales. Although I don't draw well enough to suit, luckily that is not necessary. I have an abundance of memories locked inside; this is the wealth that the people of Cass House have given me during these past years.

†

*Janet McKennis, Cass House Community member, leaves Cass House only after having established a flower garden, which graces the driveway in the backyard. Farewell, Janet, and God bless.*

Karen House Catholic Worker 314.621.4052 [www.karenhousecw.org](http://www.karenhousecw.org) 1840 Hogan St. Louis, MO 63106



## FROM OUR MAILBAG

Dear Friends,

Your quarterly reaches my desk regularly and it is always a special treat for me. My work keeps me at a desk and too far away from the faces of the poor but I have known Cass House and have walked its halls in the earliest days of my religious life and feel proud that this house of prayer and mission from which we went forth to serve the church "two by two" is in service to the ideals of the gospel and church as it is today. Your efforts there at the Worker mirror the face of the poor Christ to the St. Louis church and there is something about your works, your stories, your genuine sincere sharing of your lives with God's neglected ones that forces readers to take a look and ask the question "How and where is Jesus really present in His church today?" You answer this very well for me. I really wish I could leave this desk more and give you more of my time. I know I will be the one enriched by this. Please continue to share your lives, your experiences, your shared community with us your readers. Always I am refreshed to continue in this work of striking at the sinful structures that are causing so much poverty to so many, after reading about the ways you carry out your ministry. Please continue in this for there are many of your readers who are not only inspired but positively recharged by your newsletter.

In God's Peace,  
Loretta Hennekes, C.S.J.

---

*"Let us pray that the cry of the poor and the hungry is heard and that the problem of world hunger is finally overcome in a spirit of true fraternity and cooperation."*

—Pope John Paul II

---

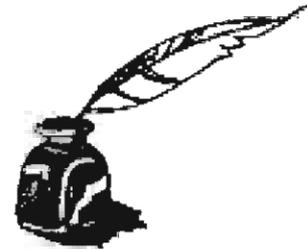
Dear Friends,

Just within the last two days I have had the opportunity to read the spring Round Table. It is an excellent issue. Congratulations!

I was especially touched by your interview with eleven year old Dione. I appreciated the authentic expressions and speech pattern of this little girl as she tells the outlook of so many children these days on their home and environment. It is a tragic story and yet the simple beauty of her child's heart with its aspirations and desires shines through. I plan to use some of Dione's thoughts in my own work.

With personal regards  
and greetings to all,  
In Christ,

Most Reverend John L. May,  
Archbishop of St. Louis



Dear Friends:

Your recent issue of the Round Table devoted to the children whose lives you touch moved me very much. Last Sept. I had a baby girl—our first—and since then our lives have been turned around, rearranged, shot through with delight and anxiety and pride and much much grace. So it's like buying a new car; suddenly one notices all the cars like your own—suddenly, all babies are interesting and, in some small way, all children are like my own. Thank you for opening my eyes to some more children.

Enclosed please find the remainder of our Rice Bowl money from the Easter season, in honor of your babies and the care you give. We think you are pretty fine people. God Bless You!

Peace,

Janeese and Paul Brandon-Falcone

# Round Table Talk

by Teka Childress

Three of my friends have gone to Nicaragua—Mary Dutcher, Virginia Druhe, and Rita Schonhoff. Two of my friends have gone to Guatemala—Angie O’Gorman and Jean Abbott. Their presence in Central America has made ever real to me the suffering of the people of that region. It is harder to ignore what is happening there when your friends place themselves in dangerous situations and when they begin describing the fears and pains of the people they meet. The faces of those living in Central America come into focus; they are those of particular, loveable people. I find it difficult to continue living as if these people do not exist. I mention my inability to ignore the people of Guatemala and Nicaragua because I am aware of an overwhelming desire in me to avoid acknowledging their existence, and the existence of third world people in general, whether they are those starving in Ethiopia or those suffering oppression in South Africa.

I think this is a tendency I share with many people, particularly in this culture. I do not wish to acknowledge the existence of suffering people because acknowledging them makes me feel I need to respond to them. Either I do not know how to respond to them or I fear responding to them will involve suffering for me. Yet, to not know these people is to not know Christ. To ignore them is to ignore that which gives me life—my union with all people in Christ. And so, my friends’ going to Central America has caused a dilemma for me. They have set the suffering people of the third world before me. To ignore them is unthinkable. To accept suffering, however, to choose to let it enter my life seems overwhelmingly hard.

Jesus spoke to this difficulty when he was asked, “How can a rich person enter heaven?” He answered that it was impossible for a human being, but not for God.

Though I may not find it within myself to risk loving, I can find it within God. I may be too afraid to let go of all the securities that are not of God, yet God will provide the grace necessary to allow me to do so. Maybe this will happen in one great heroic conversion, but more likely in a series of turnings toward God in my



desires and struggles, and thus my consolations. I can find this ability to love in the person of Jesus. Jesus is an example to follow and the one to whom I may look for my security. He demonstrated that love is possible; possible even in the face of hatred and death, and that in fact it outlives them.

My desire to love, then, along with the proof of its being possible found in Christ and in my personal experience, allows me a way out of my dilemma. I, as a rich North American, can choose to love the poor of the third world. I can believe that my doing so will result in my union with them and that this union will bring me joy. It will be the love that lives beyond suffering and death. I can have the courage to take more risks on behalf of the people of Nicaragua or Guatemala. I no longer have to be afraid of acknowledging them. I can become involved in their lives.

+

*Teka Childress, Karen House Community member, was recently arrested in an act of civil disobedience at Senator Danforth's office. Danforth had voted to provide funding for the Contras in Nicaragua. We invite you to join Teka and others in the "Vledge of Resistance" at the biweekly Friday noon vigils outside the Old Post Office in downtown St. Louis.*

Karen House Catholic Worker 314.621.4052 [www.karenhousecw.org](http://www.karenhousecw.org) 1840 Hogan St. Louis, MO 63106

# A ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION



"CHRISTIAN NONVIOLENCE & THIRD WORLD LIBERATION" with MARY DUTCHER

Mary Dutcher has lived in Nicaragua for the past year and a half as a member of the Witness for Peace permanent team. As a pacifist community committed to nonviolence, we at the Catholic Worker have been struggling with the range of responses open to us in liberation movements. Please, come join us in this important clarification of thought and action. Refreshments will be served after the discussion.

Karen House, Friday, Sept.13, 7:30pm

Community  
Prayer:

AT KAREN HOUSE:  
Tuesday at 9:00 p.m.

AT CASS HOUSE:  
Wednesday at 7:15 p.m.

The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Although subscriptions are free, donations are gladly accepted to help us continue in this work. Please write to Mark Scheu, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO 63106. People working on this issue include Harriette Lane Baggett, Lee Carter, Teka Childress, Patrick Coy, Mary Ann McGivern, Barb Prosser, Ellen Rehg, and Mark Scheu.

## THE ROUND TABLE

Karen Catholic Worker House  
1840 Hogan St. Louis, MO 63106

Bulk Rate:  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
St. Louis, MO  
Permit No. 3087

Address Correction Requested

Karen House Catholic Worker 314.627.4052 www.karenhousecw.org 1840 Hogan St. Louis, MO 63106