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# THE SERVANT SONG

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## Deep Green of the Divine

By Brayton Shanley

Growing up in suburban America, the image of God I most frequently encountered was that of a white male. This, I've concluded, was a projected god image of the wealthy class of primarily Caucasian men who ruled this world. So often in this world, women, people of color or the poor, are devalued, and simply have no stature.

As Christianity developed into the modern era in the West, the image of Jesus became increasingly that of a white, blue-eyed Messiah who could comfortably project the face and the inner world of male-driven empire, a god that made the dominant white European economic values more acceptable. Echoing ancient parallels alongside People Israel's Divine Right of Kings, where the Jew's king was an agent of God and the power of Kingship was a Divine power, patriarchy was handed down through history. God continued to be understood as male, sufficing as a perfect symbol for the European Imperial King and his empire. Order in Empire would be achieved by war, plundering the earth would provide the wealth and subjugating the masses of the poor would keep wealth where it is.

America inherited this "God" made in a Caucasian image and likeness, so simpatico was it with empire and the vision of world dominance. Our "kings" and our schemes of empire became the elect of God. After all, some country has to run the world and control all. God has chosen us.

Living through the early twenty-first century, Christianity and the other Western cultural and religious traditions are experiencing almost continual moral and spiritual turmoil, decay and transition. In that volatility, the color shade of the Divine is evolving from white male to verdant deep green.

### Creation Story

The one true God is increasingly recognized as similar to the creation story of Genesis, where the God and creator of all life whose primary color is green, that shade of earth that represents natural things. This life is loved into existence in its fullest spectrum, not just humans, rich and poor, oppressed and free, but all that lives and shares its existence on our fragile planet.

Because we humans are the only mammals who sleep on our backs, we are positioned well to gaze into the night sky, where we can "see" beyond our anthropocentrism, our thinking that humans and their needs are the first and most valid need in all of existence. When human need alone becomes paramount, we descend into fighting each other over the resources of the earth



Gregory Dearth

### Advent

*O pour your darkness  
and your brightness over all our solemn valleys  
O white full moon as quiet as Bethlehem*

Thomas Merton

and otherwise plunder Her to gain our advantages. As Thomas Aquinas wrote: "The whole universe together participates in the Divine Goodness more perfectly and represents it better than any single creature whatsoever."

Anthropocentrism lends itself well to a male dominating hierarchical view. As we move toward a more dynamic balance with the feminine, a vulnerable, gentle and life-affirming way, we move closer to the deep green of the Divine— "Male and female, God created them, all of the animals and

plants in the sea and on land, god created them." (Gen 1:27). What was wanting in one, was supplied by the other.

God saw all God had made and indeed it was very good" continues the first chapter of Genesis. The first passage in the Bible points to the foundational reality of life. God's goodness is created in all of life. Because God saw God's creation as "good" it has an indelible mark of the sacred. Harm brought to any of creation is a sacrilege, a violation against life and its inherent goodness, conferred by God. Because humans

are made in God's image, that is, in love, we humans are to exercise the virtue of loving kindness toward all that lives. We must not exploit the earth or harm it for our own ends, to gain advantage over weaker humans while *dominating other forms of life*. God grants human beings a privileged role as stewards of creation, to have "dominion" over the earth and its creatures. But, the Divine gives us dominion only in solemn trust to uphold responsibly the sanctity of all life in all its forms.

### Hebrew Scriptures

The Hebrew word for humankind "Adam" is derived from the word for earth, "Adama," harkening back to Genesis and the origins of life. "For dust you are and dust you shall return." (Gen. 3:19). Only humans in their non-dominating humility (from humus) can see that they are "of the earth." The oneness of humanity with all earth's creatures is the central image of the flood. In the disaster of the flood, humans are called to be stewards and protectors of all other species as Noah was. The whole picture of all earth's animals crowded together in extremity and interdependent, symbolizes the inherent message willed by a loving God: we will all struggle and survive *together*. God doesn't abandon us even in life-threatening catastrophe. "Behold I establish my covenant with you. . . and with every living creature." (Gen. 9:9-11). Hardly a mandate for male hierarchy, human greed and exploitation of the earth, for human survival only.

God has given us "dominion over the earth," which should not be confused with domination. Hebrew Scripture scholar Claus Westermann writes of the foundational Hebrew idea of "nefesh nayya," that humans are bound together with beasts, birds, fishes and insects. Dominion, according to Westermann's research, "does not even include the right to kill animals for food. Since the priestly creation story and Yahwehist account in the second chapter of Genesis portray humans as vegetarians eating the fruits and plants and trees for their food, people would forfeit their principal role among the living, were the animals made the object of their whim." (Westermann, "Genesis a Commentary" p. 159)

The Hebrew Scriptures continually characterize the oneness of all creatures in the same unity of "nefesh nayya." It is important to note that ancient Hebrew cultures had no word for "nature" because they

### Deep Green

*Continued on page 7*

## Living the Integrated Life:

The Nonviolent Jesus, Spiritual Practice, Resistance to Popular Culture, and Building Community

On a weekend in November (6-8), Agape hosted a weekend retreat with 15 former college retreatants, interns and volunteers or Agape “regulars” plus a few new friends, some of whom have graduated, now in grad school or working in other capacities: JVC, labor organizer, law school, theology school, advocacy for the poor and homeless, shelter work, NYC fire department, aide to an autistic child, and co-founder of Freedom Farm, modeled in part on Agape.

A few have returned to Agape over and over since undergrad years. As people arrived, the atmosphere was charged with nostalgia and purpose as we tackled the question of what it takes to live an integrated life. Ted Henken, now a professor at Baruch College in New York, one of Agape’s first interns when he was in grad school at Holy Cross, was one of the “elders” in the group, as was Edgar Hayes, both of whom in their 30’s had spent considerable time at Agape.

Felipe Witchger, whose article appears below, flew in from London to Boston and several others like Erin McCarthy, Asia James (who lived ten years of her life in Haiti) and Christa Elliott, have been involved at Agape since childhood.

Comments below represent some of the expectations of those who came to Agape as serious seekers.

Drones, inner city violence, addiction to meaningless electronic communi-



cation, Glenn Beck, sexual gratification, an ignorance of love, a worsening war in Afghanistan, unemployment, town hall protesters mistaking health care for the holocaust, political correctness, intellectual deficiency, death of real journalism and the rise of news as entertainment and bloggers come to mind when I think of America today.

It seems like I get messages every day of finding the perfect career, building a home, getting married and having kids. It’s not that these things don’t seem wonderful but I realize that these things aren’t as important to me as living a peaceful life and working for peace are. I find myself getting swept up in old friends’ and my family’s lives, which could possibly be a

catapult into complacency for me. Find a job, find a house, live happily forever. Be comfortable. I’m struggling finding a balance between living out what is important to me and not dismissing my old friends, family.

My first time living in a city, and surrounded by mainstream, ambitious people has affirmed my understanding that this modern industrial way of life is deeply flawed at its core. I struggle to see any solutions. Industrialization has spiraled out of control and I am disturbed by a green movement that does not/cannot address that our entire way of life is fundamentally unsustainable. I do not believe that people will voluntarily give up the luxuries of modern life and choose an alternative sustainable mode of living. I fear that in a pas-

sionate attempt to work for solutions to this problem I have fallen prey to Wendell Berry’s concern about the modern hankering after glamour.

*“The real work of planet-saving will be small, humble, and humbling, and (insofar as it involves love) pleasing and rewarding. Its jobs will be too many to count, too many to report, too many to be publicly noticed or rewarded, too small to make anyone rich or famous. The great obstacle may be not greed but the modern hankering after glamour. A lot of our smartest, most concerned people want to come up with a big solution to a big problem. I don’t think that planet-saving, if we take it seriously, can furnish employment to many such people.”* Wendell Berry

I remember Brayton at Agape’s college retreats warning us about the phrase the “real world”, how people use the term “real” to subtly affirm a specific set of values and possibilities. How we can build an alternative reality that is truer to our religious/moral commitments.

Too often I find myself restless and unable to focus on those things that I feel would satisfy me as a person. I often fall victim to the seduction of TV which is, unfortunately, in my house always on and always beckoning. I want to be able to move away from mindless entertainment and toward a more not only productive, but fulfilling life.

## Silence and Slowness: Giving Clarity on Prayer and Economics

by Felipe Witchger

“For behold, The Kingdom of God is among you.” (Luke 17:20)

It was a time to return to a place that formed something in us and that we continue to long for, by nourishing us once again with the witness of what it means to live “the Integrated Life.” Embraced by the woods that surround Agape, we gathered together to once again allow the space to help us slow down. The weekend took on questions like “How do I cultivate a spiritual practice?”

Our responses varied, reflecting the different stages of young adulthood we represented. For me, Brayton’s recalling of Dan Berrigan’s wisdom, resonated: “You got to be clear about a couple things, because you can’t be clear about everything,” particularly because of my perennial desire to be doing more. How often I get excited about new campaigns and new issues and thus get distracted from the narrow path.

For me, the weekend at Agape helped me get clear about two things. One, a consistent spiritual practice is hard, but it’s the most important thing I can do for myself at this stage of my life. And two, I’d like to focus my efforts on economics.

I feel like it’s hard to focus these days.

There are so many exciting, hopeful campaigns to be a part of — immigration reform, health care reform, new climate change and sustainable energy policies, and more. I feel like there is an action being launched or a new strategy announced each day on these issues. And with the new age of online and text-message organizing, new organizations are sprouting up everywhere to make sure unheard voices have the chance of being represented in the Congressional deliberations that characterize these early Obama years.

I know that a consistent spiritual practice, whether centering prayer, the Ignatian Examen, yoga, journaling or some other contemplative practice is critical because it helps refocus and reconnect to the deeper trajectory of our lives and the work of Kingdom-building.

But I feel like trying to cultivate this is one of the most difficult things in our lives. Our modern culture does everything it can to make it as hard as possible to build a daily prayer practice. I find it hard to do in the evening, because I’m tired. In the morning it’s hard because I’m in a rush. And during the day I find it especially challenging because my

smart phone is constantly beckoning for attention. But as centuries of mystics and ancient followers have shown, a simple practice of silence is a cornerstone on the journey toward wisdom.

In a small group discussion on the last morning of the retreat, a fellow retreatant asked me to tell him more about my struggles with economics. As a student of liberation theology and companion of Latin Americans, he knew economics from the perspective of the poor. Also having these experiences I knew where he was coming from.

But now being an employee at a publically-owned corporation, I shared with him my agonizing 401(k) woes. That all of us who have retirement accounts are just feeding the cycle of corporations looking for short-term gains to maximize shareholder returns. And all of us who have mutual-fund filled retirement accounts (now standard practice for nearly all companies and most non-profits) have been trained to expect at least as much as the S&P 500’s historic 11% and to always ask for and look for opportunities to get more.

The hard part is that, today not even our President has as much power as the position once allowed. We’ve created an

economic system that has triumphed over all, in many ways because of its efficient organizing ability to mobilize people and money. We all need livelihood and the unfortunate reality is that we’re taught by the standards of the world that to be successful, you need to work for one of the big internationally known corporate conglomerates. Or, if you choose a non-profit organization, you will likely end up with a job that is funded by a foundation whose money came from such a “successful” company’s overwhelmingly large profits.

We need to cultivate a way to reject the standards of the world and create standards of our own. We need a touchstone practice that can form the foundation of our Christian lives, something that we can always be coming back to and begin to notice the consolations that God so bountifully offers, if we are attentive and actually seeking the narrow way.

*Felipe Witchger and former Agape volunteer Casey Stanton, both graduates of University of Notre Dame, will be married in June, 2010, and will be striving, they tell us, for an integrated life.*



### I pray that you will walk away

by Robert Thiefels

I pray for you, Christian soldier  
That one day soon, very soon  
You will find your weapon too  
heavy to carry.  
I pray you drop it then and there  
Wherever you are.  
I pray that you take off your  
thirsty boots  
And leave them by the side of the  
road.  
I pray that you remove your  
helmet, your coat and your armor,  
Your shirt and your tee shirt  
Your belt, your pants, your  
underwear, your socks.  
I pray that you take your dog tags  
and lay them there as well  
On top of your clothes of war.  
I pray you leave everything and  
walk away.

When they find all this and  
identify you,  
They will wonder if you are dead  
And if they find you  
I pray you tell them that you have  
died to war  
And laid the tools of our enmity by  
the roadside.  
They will hate you  
and call you crazy and a coward  
a deserter and a bastard.  
They and the people in the pew  
will not understand  
The generals will condemn you  
The bishops will scratch their  
heads.  
Most will just go on with their  
lives, But the universe will sing.

*Bob is an Agape friend of 30 years.*

### October 5<sup>th</sup>

by Paul McNeil

October 5<sup>th</sup> was a long day, much of it waiting like the wise and foolish virgins waiting all night for the bridegroom. I have been galvanized by a Thomas Merton essay on Christian non-violence and by Dan Berrigan's exhortation to "get off the train of the living dead... crowded with contented passenger-citizen-Christians".

There were several groups joined for the civil disobedience. I aligned myself with WitnessTorture because those are the people I've met before and most are Catholic Workers/Jonah House folks. About twenty-six of us paired up wearing orange jumpsuits and black hoods and stood in front of the Supreme Court building from 8:00 AM to 9:00 AM to remind tourists, etc. of this forgotten reality.

Matt Daloisio of Mary House, Catholic Worker, has arranged for an attorney, Ann Wilcox, to enter not guilty pleas for people who can't attend next week's arraignments (that include me). So far, twenty-eight of the sixty-one arrested are seeking a trial date, hopefully in January to coincide with planned actions by the Peaceable Assembly campaign organized by Kathy and

Voices for Creative Non-Violence. I don't expect the DA to go any further than offering a small fine and/or community service, perhaps a night in jail. I doubt if we'll get what we had in Natick (can you believe eight years ago?), a full day in court to plead the case for peace.

Carmen Trotta addressed passersby as we stood there. Then we made the long walk to a park near the White House, again, quite a powerful witness to see all these mock Guantanamo detainees walking through the DC streets at morning rush hour two-by-two with our hands behind our backs. We took a break at the park to listen to music and speakers including Liz McAllister who reminded us that Phil would be very happy to see what we were doing on his birthday.

For me, getting arrested recently was a personal thing, something about not being able to live with myself if I went on like a drone with business as usual. The most wonderful thing about the trip to DC was the fellowship of the people, sleeping and even having a few beers in the sanctuary of St. Stephen and the Incarnation Church!

*Paul is a Mission Council Member*

## Circle of Being

### Flowers in the Desert

By Julian Collette

I came to Agape as part of a search for a way of life that ties together the various strands of what I have found life-giving over years of prayer, study, and community living. Having resided in an eco-village and in several contemplative monastic environments, both Christian and Buddhist, my present aspiration is to discover the possibility of uniting the better part of these distinct focuses into an integrated lifestyle that remains in communion with the Catholic tradition. Agape, a Catholic community that emphasizes ecological sustainability, shared contemplative prayer, non-violence and social justice, is a living model of just such an integrated way of life.

The forerunners of the Christian contemplative tradition, the desert mothers and fathers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, undertook a radical physical departure from all that was familiar to them by forming small communities or living as solitaries in the wilderness. This physical dislocation served as an aid to more clearly discover, in the silent spaciousness of the desert, the indwelling Christ and the flow of gratuitous love that is His Spirit. While the journey of contemplative prayer isn't contingent on such a physical dislocation, their example still speaks of the necessary integration between the inner purification of contemplative prayer and an outward lifestyle that renounces the violence inherent in conventional patterns of social, economic, and political life. The positive side of this renunciation is the creative choice for lifestyle patterns centered on Gospel values.

Where, then, are the deserts of our day? What is the context of our dislocation from a culture of violence? What are the new wineskins, the structures and practices that can foster life patterns aligned with the Spirit, that unite contemplation and justice? These are questions I believe the Spirit has imparted to me, as to many others in this time, the very questions that brought me to Agape.

When I first arrived at Agape early this summer, I was met by an exuberant group of young Dominican Americans from Manhattan. Still jet-lagged and disoriented, I did my best to keep up with the action. I was gratified to witness their sense of wonder and joy as they tasted the pristine, quiet wilderness of the neighboring Quabbin Reservoir. Their time at Agape was clearly revivifying them, and their enthusiasm was infectious. We shared prayer, volleyball, meals, and conversation. The natural and social environment at Agape permitted all of us to relax and disclose ourselves more

openly and intimately than if we had met elsewhere.

Once these young people left, the following few weeks were relatively quiet, which gave me the opportunity to settle into a prayerful household routine with Suzanne and Brayton. Gardening gave me a sense of satisfaction in working benevolently and cooperatively with the Earth, and in enjoying the fruits of our shared labor, shared also with others. Light carpentry was a welcome reprieve from the mental grind of the previous months' theological studies. Shared prayer and lively, thought-provoking conversation allowed me to sink more deeply into the spirit and rhythms of the community life.

Hospitality and reverence for God and life in all its forms were the central values that permeated the daily round. Life was not divided into fragments as we're accustomed to in our dominant culture. Rather, a single thread seemed to weave itself through all our activities. If conflict arose, the issue was addressed with the express aim of bringing into the light of awareness what needed to be healed and resolved. If an intern was in grief, she received consolation and care. If a neighbor was in need, material or emotional or spiritual help was extended to them.

Settling in as much as I was able over the relatively short period of my stay, I could already sense this thread of hospitality and reverence weaving itself into my spirit, challenging me to a greater vulnerability, wakefulness, and responsibility in all my relationships. Most importantly, this thread led us back each morning, midday, and evening to the reservoir of prayer in Christ, from whom we received guidance, direction, and sustenance for the day, to whom we brought our needs and the needs of the world.

What remains with me most from my time spent at Agape is a sense of peace and thankfulness for the community itself, and the years of integrity, vision, and labor that have given form to their shared aspirations. I carry this felt-sense with me as a seed, a knowing that another way of life is not only possible, but is already manifesting in our world. I witnessed how something similar was also communicated to others who visited during my stay. And I can visualize, as a form of prayer, how Agape and communities of like spirit, representing diverse traditions, are imparting such seed-knowledge to those whom they touch. Moving out into the wider world, I can see many flowers blooming in the desert.

# Stepping into the Tragic Gap: Nonviolence and Reconciliation with Nations at War

By Suzanne Belote Shanley

## War, Grief and the Dilemma of Suffering

The unremitting suffering that is Gaza screamed out at us during the most recent Israeli invasion, in the headline: "Gazan Doctor and peace advocate loses 3 Daughters to Israeli Fire and Asks Why?" (NY Times January 18, 2009). Dr. Izzeddin Abuelaish, a "Gazan and a doctor" who devoted his life to medicine and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians was "a one-man force," bringing "injured and ailing Gazans for treatment in Israel."

How does Dr. Abuelaish continue to live with the reality that directly or indirectly, his life as one devoted to peacemaking, resulted in the deaths of his children? How do we, removed and so responsible, stunned and yet distanced, respond?

In a recent essay entitled: "The Broken-Open Heart: Living with Faith and Hope in the Tragic Gap," (Weavings; March-April, 2009), Parker Palmer attempts to address this dilemma by recounting the words of Basim, an Iraqi translator for Americans who relates to both sides in war: "If reconciliation is going to happen, there must be people willing to live in the **tragic gap**, the help the two sides understand each other."

Palmer's construct speaks of a transformational place where we "move directly"

who honor the "other," willing to search for what Palmer calls "comfort in ambiguity" and to hold "contradictory ideas" (loyalty to one's people, yet rejection of violence) while examining "both poles of the paradox."

We wondered if we could come together in an interfaith gathering to "transform suffering into something life-giving" by being "vulnerable in a culture that doesn't respect the shadow" and which, quite the opposite, tends to "drive the suffering soul back into hiding." (Palmer) Our commitment this possibility became the Francis Day banner: "Stepping into the Tragic Gap: Nonviolence and Reconciliation with Nations at War".

## St. Francis Day 2009

### Rabbi Sheila Weinberg

In her comments, Rabbi Weinberg imagined someone asking her whether Judaism "is a religion of war or a religion of peace?" The answer depends, she commented, "on our convictions and the social conditions that surround and influence us." Rabbi Weinberg asserted that "peace is the very name of the Highest, the noblest expression of the human being." The Mishnah, recounts that "it is illegitimate to promote spiritual ends by violent means," just as the Talmud lauds the "heroic per-

son" who "controls the urge to hate... or to diminish another who is, after all, a creation in the image of God like himself/herself." In Weinberg's words: "The true hero makes of his enemy, a friend," practicing the work of the "spiritual warrior," that of "inner jihad." "It is not surprising" Sheila reminded us, that all the important Jewish prayers end with a prayer for peace, "Shalom."

### Imam Talal Eid

Imam Eid, of the Islamic Institute of Boston, emphasized the monotheistic nature of the Abrahamic traditions, noting that they all worship "only one God, not just a Muslim God for Muslims." "We are identical" he stated firmly, turning to his mentor and former professor, Fr. Ray Helmick SJ of Boston College, to pose the rhetori-

### Kathy Kelly

Kathy Kelly, a lively story-teller and Founder of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, whose trips to scenes of conflict in the Middle East, most recently Afghanistan, chronicle stories of deprivation, nightmarish attempts by refugees to leave camps, to survive bombings and to absorb the death of relatives, often children. Kathy intoned nonviolence as a powerful force of witness, urging the occupation of state and congressional offices to protest to the continued carnage caused by American made drones, the unmanned, computerized death machines, indiscriminately killing civilians in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Holding up our "adversary" as a vehicle of our own transformation, Kelly cited the need to find "good" in the enemy, even if our lives are threatened. Kathy Kelly moves into suffering, doesn't flee it and listens to what Palmer calls "the still, small voice of the Holy." Listening to this voice, she was able to see the humanity in a police officer who had arrested her.

### Kobi Skolnik

Kobi Skolnik, an Israeli born into a Hasidic family who, as a teenager, lived in a radical settlement in the West Bank, was a member of the Kahana youth movement that promoted Jewish power and regularly encouraged its members to assault Palestinians. During his army service, he became aware of the complexity of the conflict and began to open his mind to other perspectives.

Currently a student in New York, he is also a Practitioner at the Center for World Religions, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University, from where he and his partner in the Agape presentation, Aziz Abu Sarah, a Palestinian, launch their national and international talks on reconciliation.

Handsome, dark-haired and soft-voiced, a reserved man in his mid-late twenties, Kobi preferred to sit in a chair to tell his riveting tale of hatred for Palestinians, yet living with a divided heart as he witnessed the shooting at and killing of civilians. Beginning to question the long held belief that "a Palestinian is someone who would kill Israelis if they had the chance," he recalled thinking that "for many Palestinians, a Jewish-Israeli is either a settler with a gun



Old City, Jerusalem, Muslim Quarter Sept. 2009- Photo Skip Schiel

or a soldier at a checkpoint."

Kobi was beginning to listen to his inner voice, which told him that the "vicious cycle of self-fulfilling prophecies and violence began in my own heart". He admits to living out a contradiction: "I am of two minds. I understand the settler perspective, but I have a second view that comes from years of experience working for peace."

### Aziz Abu Sarah

Aziz's world was torn apart when he was only ten and his older brother, Tayseer, died after being interrogated and beaten for fifteen days in an Israeli prison. Aziz's response was immediate: "I wanted revenge." He recounted: "I used my pain to spread hatred against the other side."

Moving back and forth in front of the speakers' table with his microphone, Aziz, as youthful and handsome as Kobi, worked the crowd, with self-deprecating jokes and one-liners. He recounted how taking a lan-

guage course to enter a university meant that he had to be in the presence of Israelis, forcing him to cast off rigid stereotypes and see Israelis for the first time as human beings.

Reconciliation: Kobi Skolnik and Aziz Abu Sarah

Recounting together the movement of their friendship, they recalled together how Aziz won over Kobi's mother who initially refused to allow Aziz in her home. Kobi's persistence finally convinced his Mother to move from "never in my house" to acceptance of her son's choice to befriend the "enemy."

Kobi, like Aziz, finds that he must stand in interface between the reality of a given situation and an "alternative reality we know to be possible because we have experienced it." (Palmer) Kobi senses "the lack of true empathy for other points of view among our diverse communities." He maintained and Aziz agreed, that violence from either side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an expression of "unmet needs" and, until these needs are met, empathy is in short supply.

Aziz testified that "Each day I live I refuse to become like those soldiers fifteen years ago, and I choose to put aside the revenge I worshipped as a teenager... It is a hard decision to abandon revenge, and an easy road to follow your feelings. Yet, hatred begets hatred, and the same tools you use on others will be used on you."

Kobi nodded his assent to Aziz's words, stating that for him the process begins with "shedding the preconceived ideas and judgments about each other, while reaching for the understanding that all of us are part of the same community, humanity." Of concern to Kobi is the need for people on both sides of the conflict to have "a place to express the trauma of loss and grief" without which, people turn to bitter revenge or psychic numbing.

Both agreed that a goal for them is to "avoid manipulation by leaders at extreme ends." So these two young friends, former reviled enemies are collaborating on a book about nonviolent solutions in the Middle East. To those of us observing their rapport, they truly were brothers, so transparent was their esteem and affection for each other.

### Fr. Ray Helmick SJ

Fr. Helmick SJ, a professor in the Theology Department at Boston College who acted as an unofficial emissary between Catholic and Protestant paramilitary groups in Ulster, played a part in the eventual peace accord in Northern Ireland. Fr. Helmick related the suffering of mothers in Northern Ireland who helplessly watch sons on either side kill each other in an internecine civil war. He paused to regain his composure after sharing the unspeakable pain borne by women in war.

Fr. Helmick experience included private meetings with Hamas leaders, and while reconciling the conflict befriended Ian Paisley in Northern Ireland.

Fr. Helmick's humble style would serve as a Gandhian plus in reconciliation. On the Middle East, Fr. Helmick wrote: "I am committed to principled nonviolence." In speaking about Palestine, he conjectures that "No violent resistance will be of use to them. It will only provide the rationale for massive Israeli reprisal."

Fr. Helmick tried to move Yasser Arafat in the direction of non-cooperation, urging him to see that "when his people were conscious that they had a successful camp of nonviolent resistance" then perhaps they would see that "any act of violence was sabotage to their own cause." Hence, he told Arafat, with nonviolent resistance, you "seize the moral high ground, visible to

Israelis" and to themselves.

### Skip Schiel

Skip Schiel, long time member of Agape's Mission Council, and noted photo-journalist of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, exhibited his riveting photographs of the courage and resilience of people under siege.

Skip observes in his journal that he often feels caught straddling two worlds such as when he was in the Golan Heights this year: "I am surrounded by army vehicles, including tanks and flatbeds, numerous jeeps, and soldiers with M16's as I work on a peace proposal about this region for Quaker meeting." Skip asks himself the question that became a repeated theme of Francis Day: "How do people deal with the cognitive dissonance, the gap between the fiction of much of the conventional Israeli narrative and the truth of the suffering of the Palestinians?"

### Sabah, Omar and Ali

For Agape's previous two Francis Days, El Maclellan of Agape's Mission Council brought the Kadar family from Iraq, whose anguish as a family is captured in the scarred and severely burned face of Omar, age 6, and the fusing of his fingers, resulting from an American attack on the family, leaving his mother dead and his father, Sabah, severely injured.

the survivor tree's remaining limbs with cedar sawdust from our newly built chapel, nourishment for a small Cedar tree, symbolizing the Cedars of Lebanon and peace in the Middle East. Our service was hauntingly begun by the plaintive Muslim call to prayer chanted by Sabah Kadar of Iraq.

Preceded by a chant by Rabbi Weinberg calling for courage and action, women from the community moved into the circle of ash and cedar, to mix the soil of our suffering as victims of war, while intoning memories of women's struggles. Our pleas and petitions mysteriously coincided with the sudden stoppage of a steady down-pour of pelting rain. Kaye Pfeiffer, long-time Agape friend in her 80's remarked to Brayton: "I feel so loved, so warm. Despite the rain, I don't want to go home."

We all grappled with the illusive, out of reach but absolute necessity of reconciliation. Like Kobi, Aziz, Omar and Sabah, we may find that "we can never flee suffering," but that we can acknowledge the life force, the soul in the "other."

Kobi Skolnik realized his own soul life when, after a military maneuver resulting in heavy casualties, a female Israeli, commented to him with burning intensity: "You are different. You are not meant to do these things, to commit such acts of violence."

None of us is meant to commit or wit-



From left: Kathy Kelly, Imam Talal Eid, Rabbi Sheila Weinberg

ness such self-inflicted darkness. At this Francis Day, we relied on the light, as we committed ourselves to be dissenters in a culture that "doesn't accept suffering." We have a choice to embrace the "inexorable, the inescapable" tragic gap between what is and what should be.

Our hearts were surely broken open by all we had heard and witnessed. As Rabbi Weinberg sang in her final chant:

"As we bless the Source of Life  
So we are blessed.  
And the blessing gives us strength  
And makes our vision clear  
And the blessing gives us peace  
And the courage to dare."



Women's prayer circle dedicating cedar tree

Reunited in the previous year, with Ali, Omar's older brother, age 9, who was waiting for them at a refugee camp, Ali, who spoke little English but kept repeating "Oh my God! Oh my God!" at the sight of each new dinosaur or dragon I fetched from a box of toys. The family is a living pieta of brutality and innocence.

### A Call to the Tragic Gap

As the day wound to an end, we prayed in repentance, taking ash from an Agape peach tree which had died and had been previously dedicated in 1995 to victims of the Holocaust, planted by a survivor of Auschwitz, as well as by Hibakusha (Japan's atom bomb survivors) of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

We mixed the ash from the burning of



From left: Koby Skolnik, Aziz Abu Sarah

## Daily Bread

### Three Angels

by Alicen Roberts

Trusting that God has a plan for my future has become a central aspect of my journey through Smith College—my guiding compass. Though with the future constantly in mind, I try my best to not let the present go unnoticed, and to remember that a moment can so easily be lost if you yourself are not in it. I also believe that God brings angels into your life, should you have eyes to see them.

During the St. Francis Day Celebration at the Agape Community, I have no doubt that my awareness and regard for the present was heightened. Not only were my eyes opened wider to the realities of warfare, but also my heart and my soul.

And there is no doubt in my mind that this was a result of the three angels that God brought into my life, Omar, Ali, and Sabah. These two young boys and their father radiate the beauty of The Community's name: Agape. Even after so much loss and pain in their lives, their actions still exhibit open-



Omar with Agape volunteer Dustin

ness towards the future. These three dear friends of mine, whose entire lives were changed in an instant, have taught me what it means to live in the moment.

*Alicen, a sophomore, saw a flier about Francis Day at Smith. Responding immediately, she came for the entire weekend, helping especially with Ali and Omar, who loved her spirit and energy, as we do.*



Ali in the Agape garden

## Canticles of Silence

### Echoes from the Hermitage

by Dean Hammer

The marvelous power of the Hermitage continues to amaze me. As its guest during the past fifteen years, the Hermitage is a place that enables me to see and hear "reality" from a sacred perspective. The trees that stand tall bless this holy space. The wind that sometimes howls through the driving rain speaks of the Ruach (meaning Holy Spirit and the wind in Hebrew). The Hermitage is a place of peace and a countersign to our culture of violence.

So much of our country seems to be at the mercy of the force of the Profane. The blatant torture of prisoners by U.S. personnel is dressed up euphemistically as "enhanced interrogation". The relentless killing of innocent civilians by the U.S. military is cast off as "collateral damage." The US bails out company CEOs and hierarchs

who continue to receive exorbitant bonuses and retirement plans—ripping off American taxpayers. The litany of horrors and injustices seems to go on and on. And yet the Hermitage, this very modest cabin in the woods, provides an alternative witness beckoning us to know that the Holy Spirit is alive and well.

My wife, Jean, and I had the special privilege of staying at the Hermitage while the Agape Community prepared for



D. Roberts Kirk

and facilitated the St. Francis celebration this year. With steadfast dedication, Brayton and Suzanne continue to sponsor these days in which the spirit of St. Francis prevails

and calls us into a deeper commitment to peacemaking. Jean and I were perched in prayers of support and solidarity as the tent went up and the chairs were set out for the community to be gathered.

And then we were blessed to retreat to this hilltop sanctuary and to hear the echoes from the day of celebration. The special array of speakers called us to know the God of Peace, to

remove all rancor from our hearts, and to compete in the race of spreading Goodness in our world. Through the practice of compassionate empathy, we can gain courage from each other and rise up on behalf of our common humanity. We can join our voices to say: "Stop the blood-letting. Give peace a chance." The choice to be a peace activist is a daily decision. Each of us has a critical role to play in creating a culture of peace.

The annual St. Francis celebration and the inspiration of the Hermitage are special blessings. These gifts set our hearts on fire with the hope that nonviolent love can overcome hatred. We are deeply thankful for the call to be agents of compassion and healing in our world, which is "groaning in travail".

*A friend of over 30 years, a member of Plowshares 8 (1980), Dean assisted in the blessing of the new Cedar tree, representing those lost in the Holocaust, as were many of his Hammer family.*

## Interns and Volunteers

### Go Take a Hike!!

by Autumn Rose Cutting

I love the fact that I was instructed by my "boss" to stop early and not wear myself out; that I deserved (and needed) a break.

"Stop!" she said, "Take a break and rest! You've done enough today – go for a walk in the woods before it rains. It's not healthy to be stuck in the house all day, you need to get outside! Go!"

So go I did – out to the Quabbin to sit on the rocky shore and breathe with the waves and watch the sun set behind the dark hills and windy clouds, to relax my body that was tired of cooking and cleaning, to soothe my mind, rejuvenate my spirit, to connect with the God that is in all and through all, to feel the presence of the Spirit around me and let it fill me.

Being in nature – letting myself be overwhelmed by it – is the best way I know of to connect with God, and if I want to live my life so that everything I do is an expression of my spirituality, then I need to have regular, intentional time in nature. Here at Agape, that is understood as an integral part of life.

Life here is not about the *job* – although there is certainly lots of work to be done! But the goal of life here is *life itself*. We don't work in order to live or live in order to work, the way many people do: people stuck in unsatisfying jobs because they have to pay the bills; people to whom life is meaningless if they can't prove their worth to society by being employed.

The point is not to be a "good employee" who will do everything the boss says and beyond in order to prove your value and be appreciated. Your skills as a worker are not the sum total of your worth as a community member at Agape.

So, even in the midst of preparing to host a day-long 40-person retreat, I was told (quite literally!) to go take a hike. There was much work yet to be done, but that was only all the more reason to take a break: because at Agape, work is only one *part* of life – a significant part, yes, but not the *purpose* of it. The purpose is to be practicing a simple, spiritually grounded life, a *whole* life, supported by community and grounded in nature. The work we do here arises from that intention: providing for our daily needs (gathering wood, harvesting crops, etc.) and doing outreach to others (hosting retreats, speaking at colleges, writing a newspaper...).

Life at Agape is not about how much work you can get done in a day – rather, it is about practicing a way of life that integrates sustainability, simplicity, and spirituality; living your beliefs and inspiring others to go and do likewise.

*Autumn comes to Agape, via Oregon, has been with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, plays many instruments and hopes to stay on at Agape as an intern, where hiking reigns.*

## Deep Green

from page 1

didn't as humans see themselves apart from the natural world. Humans in their profound need were to stand with all of creation in utter dependence on God. These archetypal Hebrew scriptures and inspired writings hold up the sacredness of all life, the story of our human origins and the unified whole of all the earth's species, plants, animals, air, earth, and soil. That life is sacred is not a cliché, but a warning.

To proclaim the greenness of the Judeo-Christian tradition, we don't need a reformed foundation document or to make up a new one. We simply need to read with new eyes the Hebrew Scriptures, the Genesis story, the prophets, the Psalms into the New Testament, to find where God continually demonstrates deep concern for all creation.

### Jesus and the New Testament

The gospel writers portray Jesus as a prophet who communes with wild beasts and stills the storm. His beginnings were birthed within the rigorous natural elements of a stable, surrounded by animals, spent a great deal of his life outdoors, worked simply with his hands and wits as a carpenter, building with natural materials. The influence that "nature wisdom" had on him was quite obvious in his preaching exemplified by the Parable of the Sower in the gospels. Using the common experience of watching how plants grow, the parable symbolically teaches us the realities of the human condition. By observing what nurtures or inhibits plants that are sown from seed, Jesus teaches his faithful the *essential* wisdom about how to live the word of God.

Even Jesus' Resurrection impacts the earth's natural rhythms—the day goes dark and the great earthquake rocks the very foundations of the Earth. This Prophet Messiah's message always came from the everyday existence of "close to the land." He was born into an understanding and love of the essential rhythms of the earth and taught from that vantage point. His life, his message and his earth connected world guides profoundly in these urgent times of ecological crisis.

### Pagans and Nature Spirits

The pagan people in cultures before Judaism believed in a multiplicity of divinities located inside the various forms of nature—streams, trees, earth, air, mountains. The new and radical monotheism that became Judaism was prone to a rigid interpretation of "one God over all." This theology began to cancel the idea that the spirit world could any longer exist within the natural world. Some of these first monotheists with their dim view of pagans, unwittingly ushered in the beginnings of nature denuded of all mystique and sanctity. Robbed of Her intrinsic sacredness, nature was now in harm's way. Her world could more easily become de-sacralized, treated like a thing, or worse, seen as profane. The spirit world of nature no longer was a protection from the anxiety and greed of humans.

Another uniquely human force threatened the beauty and spiritual power of the natural world—human's fear of scarcity. The question has always loomed large in human cultures throughout the millennia: "Is there enough sustenance on the earth for all humans to survive?"

The Biblical answer throughout history is definitive: "Yes—God will provide". Life is so abundant that we can afford to take a Sabbath Day once a week, inspired by God's rest. God observed the seventh day of creation (Gen. 2:2). Hebrews survived the fear of famine in the desert of Egypt due to God's enduring provisions of superabundance. As long as the people gathered only what they needed, there was "never a shortage." (Ex. 16:18)

Ancient Israel was learning an economic lesson that still stares us squarely in the face. The superabundance of life which flows from a generous God is a Gospel truth of Divine Providence, a force that can reverse the fear of scarcity and guide us with a steady hand as we all struggle for the life sustaining provisions of everyday existence (Matthew 6:25-34). No, we needn't hoard nor fight over the lucre, the necessities of this life or the land. But one sacred law must rule. To know this sacred law, that a generous God provides superabundantly, we must not take more than we need. The cor-

ollary to this comes straight from Jesus. Who in this world *is* in need? *Who* is suffering want due to our hoarding and our fear of scarcity? How can we alter our living habits to respond to the plundered earth and her starving masses? To maintain the sanctity of life, it is paramount to look beyond ourselves.

### Property and Ownership

Nowhere does the demon of scarcity control us as it does with property and the right to own, control, and develop it. Our golden calf of private property has devastating effects on our environment. But ancient lore has a different story. The ancient Hebrew laws discouraged the faithful from "owning property" with a simple premise: God is the overseer of all the earth: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity the Lord told Moses on Mt. Sinai, for the land is mine for you are strangers and sojourners with me." (Lev. 25:23) In concert with this teaching, the prophet Micah warns: "Woe to those who devise wickedness. They covet fields and seize them." (Micah 2: 1-2). We have traveled a very different road since the warnings of the Hebrew Prophets.

Property law and rights in the US were inherited from Common Law of England, but, as the US developed as a major nation-state, property lines were intensified to reflect the extremes of individualism that mirrored this new American frontier spirit. Our founding fathers, especially Jefferson, perceived property as an essential right because it allowed adult white males to make a living working the land. At the same time, Jefferson was troubled by the fact that people of means owned land at the expense of the poor. The right to "develop land" that is, *do with your land what you wanted* in American Property Law came increasingly to reflect our nations individualistic culture and in so doing rejected our English origin which respected the common good over the private good.

No legal development would highlight the resulting differences more significantly than Britain's Town and Country Planning Act, enacted right after WWII. As American law was entrenching the landowner's inherent right to develop, British law was largely taking it away. British law empha-

sized that development had to contain a comparable benefit to the public. Property was not first and foremost an individual right. It began with the understanding of the common good. British landowners thereafter could build on their lands only with prior government approval.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the United States, the "do no harm" rule of land ownership began to lessen and accommodate itself to the environmental demands of the burgeoning Industrial Revolution. The noisier, dirtier activities of this Industrial age joined with the rise of Capitalism. During these last earth-shattering centuries, Americans have progressively forgotten the essential links between property rights and the health of the environment, rewriting property law to stimulate the ecologically savaging growth of the corporation. A tragic history began, of over-fishing, of deadly mining operations and privatized water rights. Eventually, property law in its agrarian form posed too much of a roadblock for industrial growth. ("Orion" March/April 2005, pp.18, 23). Up to the present, we continue to suffer from this human mindset that is motivated both by the fear of the common good (scarcity) and the possessive sense of private property as a personal right and for financial gain (scarcity again).

All but lost is a sense of the sacred, that the land is a gift of God to be loved, sustained, and shared according to the needs of other humans, animals and plants that inhabit this vulnerable earth with us. If we humans wish to survive into this next millennium, we must radically and urgently learn new ways of living in harmony with the earth while upholding the sanctity of all life. In living sustainable ways of being on the earth, we must seek to invest in the fullness of life by giving back to the earth and her life forms more than we take from them.

This spiritual revolution will celebrate and strengthen the sacred circle of all life on this threatened planet. As Christians of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, can we join in this Spirit Earth Revolution? Can we love God and follow Jesus by reverencing and sustaining the earth that our Deep Green and Loving God has so created?

## Voices

From Afya, Brazil, where former interns, Anne Marie Yu-Phelps and her husband Jonathan, work as Maryknoll missionaries.

"We have many people who come for guidance in treating physical ailments with natural remedies and complementary therapies, but what they often end up discovering is that so many of their physical ailments stem from emotional traumas. When people complete their treatment plans, they often feel transformed and renewed. We recently had the first (and only) female colonel in the Paraiba Military Police come for treatment. When she and her driver entered, people got very nervous...why are the Military Police here? (They were in full uniform and came in the police car.) But it turns out that her driver, who had already come for trauma therapy before, had brought her here because she has been so stressed out by her job that it was impacting her health and he (the driver) thought she might benefit from our services. It was interesting, because she is not naturally someone who is drawn towards holistic or alternative therapies, yet she was willing to try it out, and so our clientele diversifies even more! Imagine the ripple effect if she ends up liking it and recommending it to others in her police force!"

*Suggestions for Annual Earth Peace Day by Elaine Walsh, Cape Cod, MA*

"I am announcing the first annual peace earth day September 10th a time to consider the actual life force and struggle of the earth as a single entity to examine our collective human consciousness that keeps war always with us."

*The following are reflections from Saly Luz, a Dominican young adult group from Good Shepherd Church in New York City. They spent a weekend retreating at Agape in May.*

"I loved how we feel peace and how we get to relax for a while. We live in a place full of contamination and full of noises and poverty. I have changed my way of living life; my life is a routine, always running. I constantly wake up and get so worried about insignificant things and I forget God but from now on I am going to communicate with my soul and inner spirit." ~Alteña

"At first, I was a little scared about how far we are from civilization and about the bugs. Spiritually I actually accomplished a lot to do with meditation prayer, and it as like nothing I have experienced." ~David Rodriguez

"It was the stars that amazed me. This was more than a spiritual time, but mostly coming out of the same routine in NYC." ~ Sandy Rodriguez

"This experience has taught me that through prayer I can actually calm my anxiety, my anger and my frustration. I had talked to myself while I was in the city but the quietness of this place I had reflected of the things that I have been doing and that I have to change." ~Jeanette Regalado



*New Agape Chapel Opens*

Agape's five person crew, led by **Fran Reagan** and assisted by **Brayton Shanley**, **Paul Chevalier** who lives in the Dominican Republic, **Paul Lavallee** of Rhode Island and **Peter Andersen**, electrician and Hardwick neighbor, completed the new chapel on November 1<sup>st</sup>. Designed by Bob Wegener, architect of all Agape buildings, after twenty-two years of ruminating about a community chapel, our stunning prayer space is now a reality. We will bless our holy site on November 22 with a liturgy by Fr. John Sullivan, long time Agape companion, dedicating its beauty and hallowed space to Francis House builder and generous friend, Dan Lawrence.

**Fred Roberts, in memoriam**

Fred Roberts, beloved husband of Pat, committed nonviolent disciple of Jesus, and father of Debbie Kirk, Agape artist of great skill and dedication, died suddenly in mid-November. Suzanne and Brayton had just spent time with Pat and Fred at the Pax Christi, Franz Jagerstatter Mass. Rest in Peace, dear Fred.

**Agape Needs Interns!!!!**: We welcome inquiries and applications for Agape interns to join with those who spend a month or more on the Agape homestead. Full description of the program may be found on the Agape website: [www.agapecommunity.org](http://www.agapecommunity.org)

**Agape Volunteers**: We need volunteers at Agape all of the time for the many programs, retreats and activities here, including maintaining the garden and homesteading, along with serving meals to the many guests and retreatants. A day, an hour, a week. We need you.

**Special Thanks: to Rita Lee** who volunteered on Francis Day in the pouring rain, with over 200 people to feed and seat. Rita brought gorgeous flower bouquets as well as dried flower arrangements which have graced our new chapel since we began using it.

**Christa Elliott** is Agape's new office assistant, bringing her many talents to all aspects of Agape life, having grown up around Agape, and now taking charge of its office. Way ta go Christa!!

**URGENT MESSAGE:**

**MAILING AND PRINTING COSTS**

**HAVE RISEN ASTRONOMICALLY:**

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*Young adult retreatants in Agape Chapel*



*Young people, Francis Day, from left: Emily Luhrs, Clark U.; Alicen Roberts, Smith College; Ali Kadar; Dustin Rutenberg; Christa Elliott.*

**AGAPE CALENDAR**



December 5, '09—5:30 pm—Agape Advent Vigil and pot-luck—Welcoming the Prince of Peace in a time of War.

January 29, 2010—5:30 pm—St. Brigid Day—Music, song, poetry and this Celtic feast of St. Brigid, pot-luck.

March 26-28, 2010—Undergraduate Spring Retreat—Register Now—open to all college undergrads