

THE SERVANT SONG

Volume 19 No. 1 Spring 2010

Christ Consciousness, Woman Consciousness

by Suzanne Belote Shanley

Hibaku Maria: Out of the Ashes of War

Her eyes are gone, their sockets hollowed out, larger than black olives and as dark. Burnt. Her skin is singed; the eviscerated patch on her right cheek, a circle of charcoal. Her mouth, what is left of it, is unsmiling. A carved wooden outline of hair frames a once youthful face. Snatched from flames, seared, not wholly unrecognizable, she is Hibaku Maria, what remains of a wooden sculpture of Mary, the Mother of God, saved from the ashes of Nagasaki.

Today she sits on the altar of Brandeis University's Catholic chapel, 65 years after her immolation, an ancient relic from the distant past brought here by our friend, Carrie Schuchardt, founder of The House of Peace.

Experiencing Hibaku Maria one week after returning from a retreat in Minnesota, dedicated in part to the theme of Women and War, speaks of war's hellish costs. On a more personal level, Hibaku Maria's is a mirror image of scarred face of Omar Kadar, the seven year old who has been a friend to Agape since we first met him and his father over three years ago. Omar's face, like that of Hibaku Maria's is irretrievably scorched by the flames of an unprovoked American attack on his family in Mosul, Iraq, in which his mother was burned alive.

Healing Our Wounds

The healing power of nonviolence, Jesus' advocacy for women, remains submerged within the church in ways all too familiar—women's ordination denied, the feminization of the church without the benefit of equality, the non-history of women peacemakers, silence from the pulpits and in the classroom about the rape, murder, bombing and scorching of women in war.

My friend, Kathy Schweigert invited me to facilitate an annual retreat for about sixty women of St. Frances Cabrini Church, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the weekend before Mother's Day. With a committee of women, we planned a weekend of reflection on themes related to living an integrated life of nonviolence, including sustainability. The single most significant theme which emerged, however, was women and violence, specifically the violence of war.

We women have anguished for centuries of over the toll of war. I return to visit a question which haunts me with crushing regularity: Why aren't we more vocal? More organized? Why aren't American women identified with opposing their country's war-making? Where are the voices of Christian women in parishes, to claim the legacy of so many of our pacifist sisters and followers of the nonviolent Christ?

Realizing the need to begin with a meditative and prayerful opening of the heart, I sought to frame the compassionate Jesus, friend to women, to outcasts, those on the margins, who offered the hemorrhaging woman in Luke 8, the cloak of intimacy, rejecting the calls of men in his retinue to hurry along.

Feeling the touch of a woman's hand, Jesus speaks of the "power" that moves through him. This power is of another order than that of domination and the oppression of women through rituals and laws. Such male power structures of course, still exist in the church, the military, and yes, even in our peacemaking circles.

Jesus reverses the accepted conventions of his day, the marginalization and dehumanization



Hibaku Maria

of women. He restores the nameless hemorrhaging and crippled women to their rightful place in society, reminding those purists who objected to his cure of the crippled woman, that she was at least as worthy as animals that had fallen into wells and were rescued on the Sabbath. (Luke 8 and Luke 13)

We examined the bleeding and crippled places in our own lives which were in need of Christ's healing. In the words of my poet-friend Denise Levertov, peace is "an energy field more intense than war." How do we access the energy of forgiveness that is hard won, in the way we treat each other, solve conflicts in our families, and respond to male hierarchies in the church? Christ's teaching of enemy love is our compass, but the specifics need cultivation and practice.

Women and War: Some Perspectives

In one of our sessions, I referred to Jean Bethke Elstain, and her book *Women and War*, in which she launches a provocative examination of a common assumption in thinking about war—"women are seen as the life givers, men as the life takers." Elstain contends that "Women have sent sons and husbands off to war, sometimes eagerly." Therefore, how can any women point "the finger of rhetorical blame" at men? We can all too easily find that "finger turning back towards us." Saying that "wars are not men's property,"

to our children, but we haven't learned them, considered them, role-played them.

So, we tend to dismiss nonviolence as an option because we can invalidate it in our minds in worst case scenarios that more than likely will never happen. We give up the journey into the strategic and practical applications of nonviolence in personal and historic contexts seeing it as unrealistic, a revered, impractical ideal, not bothering to study its spiritual demands, see its beauty.

Many of my sisters had not had the opportunity to be exposed to the countless number of nonviolent success stories, the work of Gene Sharp, in chronicling the use of nonviolence to resist Hitler. The writing of German mystic Etty Hillesum, whose insights on love of enemy in a concentration camp are stunning and Christ-like, offer signposts as to the depth of the spiritual practice.

In small group discussions, we explored the essence of our individual perspectives on nonviolence, its evocation of non-injury, the dilemma of self-defense, the centuries of women in positions of passivity, not knowing how to respond to violence domestic and otherwise. We practiced compassionate listening in our small groups as a nonviolent communication technique, which we found challenging but positive as an experience of withholding comment until all in a circle had spoken.

In our sharing, I commented on Elstain's depiction of "Beautiful Souls", or women, who like my mother and mothers for generations before her and since, agonized silently over how war affects them; nevertheless, they respond "beautifully" in public, to the point of sacrificing husbands, sons and daughters, mobilizing their energies to support the "cause".

My own mother, a Beautiful Soul, waited for four years for the return of her warrior hero, though she never once spoke of my father's service in heroic terms, carrying something heavy in her heart—abandonment—after he signed up and left for the Pacific front. She was pregnant and devastated. It was all for the cause.

My own narrative, unlike my mother's, has been that of identifying with "the pacifist few", women resisters and non-cooperators with war. Joan Chittister's memoir, *Called to Question* which the women read in preparation for the retreat, contains a chapter entitled "Resistance: The Gospel Imperative" in which Chittister characteristically states with her iron-clad conviction: "If there is a major problem in spirituality today, it may be that we do not do enough to form Christians for resistance to evil. We form them for patient endurance and for civil conformity."

Chittister lays some of the blame on "men everywhere" who are "threatening wholesale slaughter in the name of defense. Violence on the scale it is practiced now and here... is clearly a sin against the sacrament of life." Yet, she is quick to call on women to act as rescuers of men from their enculturation in the seductions of power.

What Can Women Do About War, If Anything?

Strong scriptural and historical evidence exists for the coequal leadership roles of women and men in Jesus' ministry. Many of the Cabrini women hold committed leadership roles within

Continued on page 7

Haiti – The Perfect Other

by Brayton Shanley

I was leaving my five day retreat at St. Scholastica's Priory near home when I first heard the news report. Haiti had suffered a 7.0 magnitude earthquake whose epicenter was 10 miles southwest of downtown Port-au-Prince.

I had planned to visit Steve and Nancy James, our old friends who are 25 year missionaries in Haiti, before this disaster struck. The force and devastation of the earthquake compelled me to keep my February two week commitment. It had been eleven full years since my last trip there.

Waiting for the plane to Haiti at the Fort Lauderdale airport, I met Robeson, a 35-year-old Haitian man now living in Chicago. As we talked, he attempted to explain the unexplainable, which was, to grasp his island homeland with words: "Haiti is always Haiti." Does this mean that Haiti can only be compared to Haiti? I have always felt that visiting Haiti was similar to what Teddy Roosevelt said about first laying eyes on The Grand Canyon: "Words won't do." So here I go trying to explain the unexplainable!

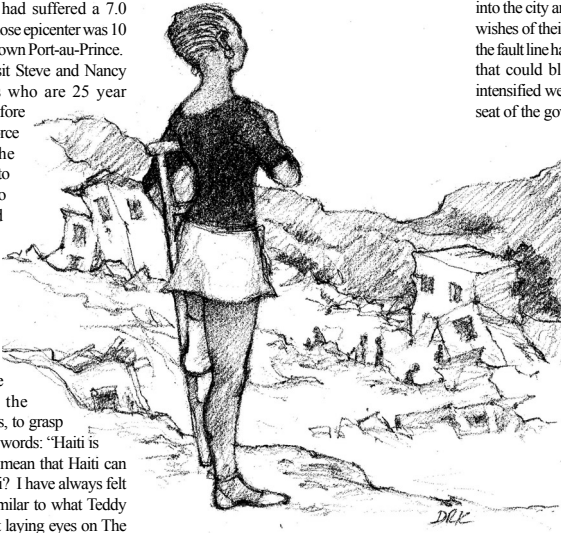
We landed in Cap Haitien on the northern coast. Steve, Nancy and Herb, their long time missionary friend, met me at the airport along with a host of young Haitians, teenage and younger, begging from the new arrivals for what they could get. This overwhelming scene was reminiscent of my memories years ago of border crossings from Iran into Afghanistan and the Pakistan/India border and throughout India herself. I have always struggled to take beggars seriously here at home and around the world. That people beg from others is to me a sign of a world gone wrong, visible proof of grave economic injustice and extremity.

To offer some tangible assistance to Steve and Nancy, Agape raised \$1000 to bring with me along with 200 granola bars to pass out to hungry Haitians and relief workers. Throughout my entire trip, not one of the mostly young Haitians refused this skimpiest of offerings, which was another sign of their desperate conditions. I finally gave my hat away to a very grateful 14-year-old boy when I had nothing left to give. These mostly young males with their broad smiles were very often enjoyable to be with.

I settled into the joys of Nancy's hospitality for the first night, with memorable food, lively conversation and a good night's sleep. In the morning, Steve and I traveled to our first clinic on the outskirts of Limbe, the town where the James' live on the campus of a Baptist seminary. Since the earthquake, Steve was combining his work assisting at local clinics and disseminating urgently needed pain killers and antibiotics to often overwhelmed and understaffed health professionals in full catastrophe need. The Haiti I was seeing was six weeks after an earthquake had split open their earth and 250,000 had perished, tens of thousands seriously injured.

This first clinic was headed up by an English woman doctor with a young English couple in their early thirties. Brave souls, I could feel the toll it had taken on this couple. They had recently absorbed nine paraplegics who had been airlifted from the rubble of Port-au-Prince.

George, one of these paraplegics, greeted me while lying on his stomach, with the widest and most joyful smile I was to see in all my time there. The remaining eight were decidedly more pensive and hurting. The staff members said these nine, like many of the one million displaced and homeless would likely never return to Port. But George, like Haiti itself, was an astonishment as he directed his immediate warm smile at me as if he were the host, and I the guest. Having broken my neck as a 13-



Rendering of Fabienne Jean 31 year old ballet dancer - lost her leg in the earthquake

year-old and so close to a paralyzing accident myself, I always feel the pain and the tragedy of paralysis. George's smile, as the nurses said, "lit up the entire room everyday."

Heading to Port-au-Prince

After a few days of delivering medicines locally, Steve, Herb, I, and Meelayer, our Haitian driver and guide headed south to Port-au-Prince to further assist the Baptist relief effort. This 150-mile trip took six hours, averaging 25 miles per hour on roads so moonscaped that for much of the trip we could only go 5 miles per hour.

We passed towns devastated by the 2008 hurricane that killed 2000 people, flooded four others, driving tens of thousands from their homes. Meelayer, our driver, provided a constant commentary. "Erosion from rain and hurricanes," he said, "is soon going to cave in this major coastal road south to Port." The extremity of this ever-vulnerable place is relentless.

Ten miles outside Port, up over the hill on the left, a few miles in was the location of the mass graves. As we approached this unfathomable juncture and began to see earthquake damaged structures, a smell was tangible, more subtle than overwhelming. Steve commented, "It's the smell of death."

One of the most densely populated cities in the world with two million people inhabiting structures made of the cheapest cement, largely without iron reinforcement, the earthquake had hit Port right between the eyes. By the time we reached downtown, it looked like one in every four buildings was pulverized. A full half of them were noticeably compromised or worse. The ones left standing were often cracked at their foundation while many of the unknown "casualty statistics" tragically remained underneath the flattened buildings. In Haiti, there was this saying: "Earthquakes don't kill people. Cheap buildings kill people."

Entering downtown, we drove past the hotel where Meelayer stayed on January 11, the day before the earthquake hit. He was wrestling with a decision to stay another day, and then decided to return to the north. The following afternoon his hotel was pancaked in an instant, reduced to a massive tonnage of lethal concrete. Stories of the miraculous continuously pumped hope into us as we went along this torturous road.

Before the earthquake, four of the nine million Haitians lived without electricity or running water. Now, add 300,000 newly

orphaned and a million displaced. Forty days after the earthquake, people were inching back into the city and quietly rebuilding, against the wishes of their government. Since only half of the fault line had blown, there was the remainder that could blow any time. As the "smell" intensified we approached downtown and the seat of the government. Was it a metaphor of corrupt politics that every major government building seemed in total ruin?

The Presidential Palace was the most massively bombed out sight of this almost totally destroyed city. Imagine a building, a quarter of a mile long, literally cut in half. President Preval expressed a common feeling as this forty second earthquake shook their lives into chaos: "We thought it was the end of the world." When you see this city, you are deeply moved by the trauma Haitians have had to endure.

The Catholic Cathedral was the spiritual high point in the midst of the quake's devastation. As massively destroyed as the Presidential Palace was, one can only imagine the force that threw the Archbishop Joseph Sege Miot to his death from one of its balconies. This complete ruin continued to attract a steady stream of funerals, masses and prayer vigils, setting up alongside this stark facade. Steve and I had the rarest privilege of being in the presence of a young woman, hands and arms grasping the wrought iron fence before the forty foot high unharmed crucifix. Poised as if she were crucified herself, she cried out her prayer: "Where are you Jesus? I love you Jesus, Where is my precious one?" Steve and I were saying the rosary alongside this sacred presence, this anguished, living Psalm, this primal cry of the wounded and traumatized. How much of our world was looking on, silently weeping the same prayer, "Why Haiti, Lord?"

For two nights we slept in our Coleman tents on a cement slab in the makeshift Baptist relief headquarters that housed ten or so relief workers. The immediate task for this team was to distribute medicine, procure additional tents to house people and purchase a truck to assist in the rebuilding of a local Baptist church and school ruined by the quake. Scott Hunter was a seasoned head of the Baptist effort, a veteran Tsunami relief worker throughout Indonesia, India and Sri Lanka. He signed on for three months, leaving his full time truck driver job and home in Albuquerque, New Mexico for the desperate urgencies of Port-au-Prince.

As a knowledgeable veteran of disaster relief, Scott's opinion of this quake was that it was the most devastating natural disaster he had seen or heard of. "Never before," he said, "has a city of two million been so completely leveled into total paralysis. Even the Tsunami damaged countries in Asia remained intact enough to offer significant and immediate relief to their own people."

Food and restaurants for vegetarians were not plentiful, so I settled for granola bars and fruit juice. "Living the inconveniences of the poor," a Dorothy Day adage rang in my ears. I am tempted to vow never to complain again about the utterly manageable inconveniences of my own life. Haitians' "inconveniences" were constant, utmost suffering without many visible tears or self pity. To observe people in utter catastrophe without any real resources renders our ordinary frustrations, a luxury. I did indulge in one spaghetti and salad meal while in the city and paid for it for a month. If need be I could have instant medical attention wherever I roamed, which pointed again to the injustice we were looking to remedy.

All relief workers were in an emergency status for tents to live in. That was coupled with Haiti's crisis of one million homeless building makeshift tents with the flimsiest sticks and any plastic material they could find. The terrible winds and downpour of the rainy season were only three weeks away. They would be followed by possible hurricanes starting in July into August. The UN reports that there are 250,000 Haitians in unprotected extremity without adequate waterproof tents. Most of the residents left in Port are conducting "do it yourself" relief work.

Earthquake Trauma

Before the quake, only fifteen psychiatrists served the entire nine million Haitians. More therapists have certainly come since the quake. But in Haiti there seems to rarely be "enough" of any necessity. The people of Haiti are a mesmerizing example of a people who never cease adjusting to that reality. One psychiatrist interviewed for the *New York Times* said Haitians are "extraordinarily resilient." One child pulled from the rubble cried: "Mother, don't let me die." A few precious days later, the child died.

A saying was going around, "You could be pulled from the rubble but you are still in Haiti." Another girl was miraculously rescued from a collapsed house crying, "Mama, I'm coming, Mama I'm coming." Daphne ran only to find her mother, crushed to death, being loaded into a wheelbarrow for mass burial. Many trauma victims are clearly walking the streets, barely making due with their wounded psyches. Haitians tell me they turn to Jesus and their witch doctors in times of deep trial.

Throughout the city, rifles were omnipresent. A guard holding a rifle seemed to patrol every major store or institution, including the automotive showroom floor of the KIA dealership where Steve bought a truck for the Baptist relief effort. All of the thousands of UN soldiers from all over the world carried rifles. The patrolling Haitian police carried rifles. The ubiquitous U.S. military were always sporting their long firearms. More than an earthquake relief effort, it looked like a war zone.

As we traveled around, Steve, Meelayer and I reflected on the symbolism of these visible weapons. Guarding everything with serious, visible weaponry tamps down the fear of chaos. Haitians continually complained to me that they have no real viable rule of law in daily operation, especially after the quake. Guns in the hands of authorities like a talisman would keep people in line and economic chaos just might be held at bay. We in the U.S. have our own talisman; hence, armed to the teeth we invade Iraq and Afghanistan, have one million soldiers at arms around the world, and stockpile nuclear arsenals that lurk behind all of it. Indeed, our own fear of "chaos" is truly alive and well.

As nightfall began to darken the sky, I saw a band playing a concert on top of the rubble. Earlier in the day I saw Haitians in full tuxedos exit a long black limousine to begin a New Orleans style funeral procession. Hope, joy, and normalcy rose up continuously amid the ruins.

Walking at my brisk pace as night was falling, I was startled to see a 16-year-old Haitian lass walking ferociously right at me. She looked intent on running me down, only to stop short, just two feet short from a full collision. She looked me right in the eye with a half smile and said, "Good morning!" I then briskly pranced on. "Only in Haiti," I would marvel to myself.

The "Other"

For white North Americans, Haitians are the "perfect other." Consider the 180 degree contrast. I am from the world's wealthiest country; they are the hemisphere's poorest country. I spend more money getting to Haiti than the average \$660 they make in a year. I am the theistic Christian; they practice voodoo. I do things with high tech "labor saving"

Continued on page 7

Reinventing the Human

An interview with Thomas Berry

*Thomas Berry, a Passionist priest, founder of the Riverside Center for Religious Research, was a college teacher and deep observer of the earth and the human role within the natural world. Berry, who called himself a "geologian," died on June 1, 2009. It is difficult to overestimate his contribution to the environmental age. Agape highly encourages the reading of Berry's *Dream of the Earth**

What follows is an interview Agape conducted in May 1993.

Agape: You say today is the "Great Divide." That suggests that there is uniqueness to the times in history that we are in, that this generation has done more damage to the planet than any other generation, that the planet will no longer function in the same way. Could you expand on this?

Berry: Our knowledge of how our planet functions and our intrusion into it is more extensive today. We've disturbed the planet in an unprecedented way. There is nothing that has happened in the last 65 million years that is of this magnitude. So, in this sense, we are so involved in the functioning of the earth in such a way that we cannot just withdraw. The earth needs help in purifying itself. There is a lot of healing that is needed. Humans need to help in this process. The difficulty is in knowing *how*. We need to develop certain sensitivities, in replanting the forest, cleaning the water. Nature creates new ecosystems that should not be disturbed. So all of this involves extensive understanding, self education on what is the best procedure. Humans should not just withdraw from the problem.

Agape: You write that "humans are woven together into a sacred community." How would you describe the sacred community?

Berry: Humans are interwoven into all the components of the planet earth. Humans and the earth are not separate but comprise a single community. The primary sacred community is an integrated whole. We in the West are little aware of this. Indigenous peoples throughout the world are very conscious of their relationship to the natural world; where they belong in the ecosystem.

Agape: Why have the predominantly Christian cultures in the West not seen themselves as an integrated part of the natural world?

Berry: It goes back to a whole religious orientation. Whereas there are valid aspects of Western religious traditions, there are also vulnerabilities. They are vulnerable to isolating the human from the natural world, because we see the Divine as a historical manifestation, not as a cosmological manifestation, and in so doing, we don't see the Divine art of the natural world. I once went to a meeting of religious teachers. Forty publishers had a whole array of books for teaching. There were all kinds of books on sacraments, ritual, Trinity, Jesus, Blessed Virgin, ministry; there were endless pamphlets, but nothing introducing the child to the natural world.

Agape: That approach, seeing the natural world as more integral in the human experience, seems more prevalent in Eastern religions and Indigenous peoples than in Western religious traditions with an emphasis on health and healing. Why?

Berry: Those traditions have seen themselves as more integral with the community of the universe, the Sacred Community. In this sense there is a greater integrity in religious experience. In our biblical experience, starting with Genesis, we see the human taken out of the natural world as a divine manifestation. Now



there were valid reasons for this, but the vulnerability is that when you take the Divine away from having this pervasive presence throughout the natural world, then we can be left with a monotheistic God, creating a world somewhat outside of itself. Then in a sense, you have desacralized the natural world, even though it is created by the Divine and is somehow present in it.

Agape: You say there are different stages throughout history. The first is God-to-human mediation; then human-to-human mediation. You see us now in the era of human-to-earth mediation. Could you explain this?

Berry: Yes, this is the third mediation. There is the original Divine-Human mediation (Hebrew Scriptures). In the Christian order, in the gospels, we have the inter-human. Throughout the course of history Christians are known for this, the Christian quest for justice and the rights of the individual. The politics of the human soul, all of this contributes to the human itself. The sense of the natural world can be diminished here. It continues throughout the medieval period and then in the fourteenth century when we have the Black Death, when one third of Europe dies in two years. This was extremely traumatic. There was no explanation for this. Many saw this as God's judgment on the natural world. Therefore, humans should be redeemed out of the natural world, instead of entering deeply into the dynamics of the earth systems. Out of this you get a piety that is detached from the natural world instead of a piety that has an integral relationship with it.

Agape: Is the problem centered on the fact that humans have chosen to dominate each other and the earth? Is this a misreading of Genesis or a non-reading of it; that is, do we simply crave domination?

Berry: To some extent it's a misreading. But it's a possible reading. The text is vulnerable

to a reading of domination and *more* vulnerable than some of the other scriptures. Greek humanism reinforced this spirit and tended to see everything through the human at the expense of natural things.

Agape: Do you think that if Christians had lived faithfully the message of Jesus' love command in the New Testament (John 13:34-35) as He lived and taught it, that it would have had a significant effect on our world, its peoples and the environment?

Berry: It might very well have had both a liberating and a restraining impact. It certainly would have been more benign. The warring activities that are so disastrous to the world and earth community would have diminished. Society would also be less greedy, less centered on status and, yes, of course, this teaching of Jesus taken seriously would have had a more benign effect on the world community and history.

Agape: What is the role of Jesus? What is the significance of the biblical Jesus at this point in history given the urgencies of these times?

Berry: There are two dimensions of the biblical Jesus: One, the particular historical personality, and two, the cosmological Jesus, the Jesus of St. Paul and the Jesus of St. John. At the present time we see a great need in dealing with the cosmological dimension of Jesus, in the sense that the universe from the beginning had a Christ dimension, seeing Christ as the archetype of the universe itself, that in Christ all things hold together. So there is this role of Jesus that plays a continuing role in the new age we are entering. The second thing is in this new context today there is a much better model of the Trinity. The Jesus reality depends on the Trinity. The Trinity has a number of models. You have the model of the Bible, the family model, the Father, Son and Holy spirit. Then,

St. Augustine used the psychological model, which involved "thinking" itself. Then there is in modern time the sociological model, of the self, the other, and the community. I think the cosmological model is the best of them all. There are three tendencies of the universe: 1) differentiation, 2) internal articulation, and 3) the bonding of things with each other. In this context, the Father represents the principle of differentiation, differentiating dynamics of the universe; the Son is the intelligibility and an inner ordering principle of each unique mode of being. Then in the bonding of those beings, we have the Holy Spirit. This gives us a very wonderful model inherent in the very way we structure the universe, so that the Christ presence is the second person of the Trinity as the unique individual carrying that role. He represents the historical urgencies of the Bible itself which perceive the Divine in historical manifestation so that more than in other traditions the person that bears this Divine mode has to be a historical being. This is Jesus.

Agape: Human beings, having no choice, are born into culture. And yet, culture as it exists now is pathological. The political, economic, legal and religious institutions are incapable of sustaining life. They are unable to reconcile hostilities, and incapable of protecting and nurturing the earth. You characterize these cultural institutions as counter-productive, addictive and paralyzing. Your solution is to re-invent the human. Could you explain?

Berry: The human invents itself more than any other being. Other beings are determined by their genetic coding with minimal development beyond that. Teaching, however, affects coding. That's how species evolve through history. Species know their role and how to fulfill that role. The flower from seed knows how to grow into whatever flower it is. There are specific problems, of soil, place, difficulties of adaptation, and it solves those problems with its adaptive instincts. But the human, more than any other form of being is genetically determined toward a further transgenetic cultural mode where specific human qualities are developed. These are already predetermined in the genetic coding, but the specific expression of these needs to be invented by the human. These forms are what give the human the specific manifestation. We don't have the choice to speak or not to speak, but we have to invent speech and how to use it for certain phenomena. The same is true with thinking. This *choice* of how to think and how to speak constitutes reinventing.

Agape: What qualifies one to be involved in the reinventing? What symbols are used? How do we know that the logic and experimentation is valid for these times?

Berry: The historical situation itself determines. We could not invent the human being if the human did not experience the urgency and the need to be reinvented. There is a collapse in this point in time of the existing cultural codes to deal with the urgencies before us. So we must create new forms of action and new ways of being human that are more consonant with the natural world. We can't

Continued on page 7

Sowing Seeds



David Klein

Perfection Lived Imperfectly

by Christa Elliott

Competition breeds a host of phenomena within our society. Some claim that this idea of competition is central not only to our way of life and societal structure, but also to our evolutionary biology. Certainly, there seem to be arguments in favor of this point. I believe that competition will always be a part of the human experience, but now and again I see our culture of competition breeding something that seems to be dragging us under instead of empowering us. One pervasive way that this is manifested is in the common fear of imperfection.

I can remember in elementary school being rewarded for perfect scores on tests and for other "exceptional" things that I might have done. There were frequently awards for those who did the "best" at something, and there was always an assumed envy from those who had not been acknowledged. Worse than this envy, however, was the contempt that we, as children, were conditioned to feel toward those who hadn't achieved the honor. There was always the segregation of those who were not high achievers scholastically from those that were as teachers would hold up all those who excelled as an example. Away from the classroom on sports teams and in dance classes, we were split by levels and those who were favored were those who had an above average ability.

Certainly I was not immune to this method of teaching. I felt that I needed to be the best, to excel beyond my peers, so it would be me and me alone who achieved the recognition of perfection in every aspect of my life. Throughout my childhood and adolescence, I felt that I needed to make excuses for those things that I wasn't able to do as well as the child next to me. I needed a reason for not having received the highest grades, not having run the fastest, not having had the perfect social graces.

I certainly cannot blame all these feelings on my external surroundings. There is a part of my interior life that fundamentally wants to

perform at tasks to the best of my ability. As the oldest of three children, I was always aware of having younger siblings that looked up to me, and there was certainly pressure from my family for me to provide a good influence. *They're smaller than you, they don't know that it's wrong, you need to show them the right way to do it.* Perhaps these beginnings as an oldest were where this drive for perfection stemmed; perhaps it's something innate within me. Regardless of what the root cause, I have always dealt with the worry that I might be inadequate in the eyes of others; that I will disappoint those I care about if I can't be perfect.

But what will happen if I'm not the best? Will I dissolve into nothingness? Will my life have no meaning? Will I cease to have any value not only as a member of society, but as a friend, a daughter, a sister?

It took me until after I graduated from college last year to truly understand that my imperfection gives me a greater value than my false perfection ever could. That is, after all, what perfection is: false. It's unattainable and the futile search that I had been making throughout my life had only made me self-conscious and unable to accept myself.

At the Advent service at Agape, I made a promise to myself. There was a quote that was read from Edna St Vincent Millay's poem, *Conscientious Objector*: "I will die, but that is all I will do for death." As people came forward and lit candles, those present shared something that they would die to. I did not go forward to light a candle, but kept repeating in my head "I will die to the fear of imperfection...I will die to the fear of imperfection...I will die to the fear of imperfection..."

As I move into my independent adult life, complete with full time job and bills to pay, I have found that I am not only a happier person, but a healthier person mentally and spiritually. I don't dwell on the small points in which I'm not perfect (at least I try not to) or the brief moments that I wasn't entirely sure of what to do at any given moment in my life. My personal best is my own personal perfection: my perfection in all its imperfection, and I can't ask more of myself than that.

At age 22, Christa is Agape's "perfect" office assistant and has been a member of the community since she was four, assisting in all aspects of life here and through many phases and changes. We feel blessed to know her.

Retreat Reflection

by Kate Johnston

During the retreat for young college graduates, which took place at Agape from April 9-11, my friend Geoff Gusoff, who also attended, reminded me of a quote I sent him two years ago. It is the conclusion of an essay published in 1959 by the French Catholic novelist François Mauriac, and while I had not thought of it for some time, it beautifully expresses a desire that I think brings people to Agape:

"In our dark world, little consoles me but failures like those of the worker-priests. They are failures that indicate a direction, at least, that forge possibilities for the coming time. To act and to contemplate, to change the world, but to sanctify it all the while...such is the color of my dreams in these days of grace in which the tortured and crucified hope of humanity rises again and looks at us with love, for hope has a face and a name."

The context of this quote is an essay in Mauriac's "Mémoires Intérieurs," which he wrote as a clarification of his own thinking while entering old age. The essay it concludes has a somewhat lonely tone—Mauriac confides to the reader that he is reading simultaneously a book by the Catholic mystic Cardinal John Henry Newman and a book by the Marxist Henri Lefebvre. While he identifies with both writers' perspectives, he worries that to each other, Newman and Lefebvre must be "irreconcilable, but that does not go far enough, inconceivable" to one another.

Newman could only condemn a Marxist's dismissal of the religious dimension of humanity, and Lefebvre would accuse the clergyman of being "alienated, cut off from everything real, an accomplice of the human masses' exploitation..." The novelist asks himself, "And me, do I really know of which mind I am, from which family I have come? Yes, in truth, I search a 'middle way'..."

This passage has been rattling around my mind since I returned home to Washington, DC from Agape three weeks ago. Fifty years have passed since the essay was written, but the challenge it expresses feels completely relevant to the doubts and hopes that we shared during the retreat.

I was unsure what to expect when I returned to Hardwick, having been away from Agape since graduating from college three years ago, and having missed the first "young adult" retreat in November. I was comforted to find that much remained the same—above all the unwavering hospitality of the Agape team and the stillness, silence, and beauty of the place.

There were also real differences. For one, I encountered Francis House's gorgeous sunlit chapel for the first time. I also encountered a shift in tone from previous retreats. Our conversations in small and large groups were less focused on discovering the possibility of a nonviolent life (although there is always that) than on grappling with what such a life means in practice, individually and as a community.

We spoke about the ills of our culture, both in- and outside of the Church. The dynamics surrounding and including us have changed since Mauriac wrote, but our world remains broken, violent, riddled with discordant ideologies.

It seems to me that the economic realities of the world today, while different, are every bit as unjust as they were when

Mauriac wrote, but that the privileged of my generation have been trained to remain ignorant about the sources and the consequences of our way of life.

When I consider the leadership of my faith, I find that often those with the loudest voices squander the influence they could use to be prophetic voices for peace and justice, and instead focus on precisely the points of contention with secular society in which I believe secular society has come closer than the Church in respecting human dignity.

In my native Washington, DC, for example, my Archdiocese recently decided to withdraw from government contracts that funded services for the most vulnerable Washingtonians, largely in order to avoid providing benefits to single-sex couples. Actions such as this are dismaying to me, and difficult to understand. I often feel torn when what I believe about justice seems to find no full reflection in either secular society or in the practice of my faith. Public discourse seems at once more fragmented and less substantive than when Mauriac wrote, making it all the more difficult to answer or even to frame the question, "do I really know of which mind I am?"

A phrase that surfaced and resurfaced as we discussed discernment in the face of such difficulties was Gandhi's "experiments in truth." Gandhi wrote that we cannot find truth by thought alone; instead, truth can only be discovered when contemplation provides hypotheses that are then tested by action.

Mauriac saw the experiments of the Worker Priests in France as a first step on his "middle way." While I doubt many associated with the Agape Community think of themselves as moderates, I see in Agape itself, the product of so many community members' decades of labor, another step on this "middle way" which seeks to hold faith and justice together in a divided world.

Over the course of the retreat, I saw the same experimentation in my peers' realities of advocacy, organizing, social work, teaching and learning. During the retreat, Ann Rader and Edgar Hayes shared their experiences of starting a new community, Freedom Farm, just north of Manhattan. Ann and Edgar met while participating in separate volunteer corps in DC. They worked as teachers and organizers before getting married and realizing their dream of community life on their farm, where they bring inner-city children to discover the land. They encouraged all of us to continue experimenting—to try making our dreams realities, even if that means starting small. "Just get started!" Ann said.

In the spirit of getting started, we concluded our retreat with a conversation about what futures we could imagine for ourselves as a group in the context of Agape's rich tradition. We came to no firm conclusions, except that we will come together again this summer at Freedom Farm and this fall back at Agape.

I left Agape feeling motivated and encouraged. For me, the weekend was a series of necessary reminders: that God speaks to us in silence; that a community like Agape is needed to maintain hope, and that hope has no better expression or sustenance than action.

Kate has been coming to Agape since she was an undergrad at Brown University. We are delighted that she is going to pursue a career in journalism and that she is now in our grad group called The Creatively Maladjusted.

Witness

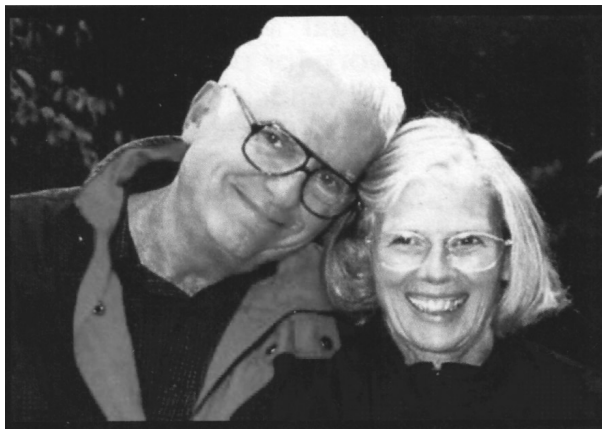
Janet and Alden Poole: 28 Years at Agape

By Paul McNeil, Member of Agape's Mission Council

This is supposed to be a tribute to Janet and Alden Poole who recently retired from the Agape Mission Council, an advisory group that helps Suzanne and Brayton discern the Agape journey. But "tribute" is not a word for the Pooles. It smacks of empire. It raises the memory of the question put to Jesus: "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" Jesus' answer to "render to Caesar what is Caesar and to God what is God's" has been interpreted different ways, but it does open a window into the way the Pooles have seen the world. They have lived in the world, but not of it. They have lived lives that testify to something beyond themselves, something greater than themselves.

Janet and Alden have consistently been involved in causes for good beyond themselves in Quincy where they raised their family of nine daughters and sons, all while they worked professionally. Honored in 2008 by the Quincy Human Rights Commission at the 12th Annual Martin Luther King Breakfast, Janet and Alden were feted with music, meals and tributes: "Longtime advocates and activists for peace and social justice based on nonviolence... the Pooles have marched, vigiled, leafleted, written, lectured, and demonstrated against nuclear weapons, war, racism, and apartheid many times. ...they have been arrested, tried, convicted, and jailed several times for nonviolent civil disobedience in the cause of peace."

Janet was a liberated woman long before the term was coined. After graduating with honors from Emmanuel College, she earned her master's degree at night while raising her children. She was President of the Quincy chapter of the League of Women Voters. She chaired the English Department at the



Woodward School for Girls for eighteen years. I am willing to bet that there is a very long list of women who attended Woodward who saw in Janet an example of how to be a loving, committed presence in the world.

Alden still gets choked up when he talks about his turning point for peace when he was in battle in World War II. He found a rosary and a family photo in the pocket of a German soldier he had just helped to kill. His realization that rendering to Caesar by killing in a war was wrong. He was returned to the States with "combat fatigue", a problem for the military, but an awakening for a man who would be a convert to Catholicism by the influence of Thomas Merton.

The Pooles are my parents' generation, the greatest generation, not because they went through World War II, but because, my father, like Alden, became a pacifist as a direct result of his experience in that slaughter. Janet and

Alden are the greatest generation because they are down-to-earth, accessible people who don't put on airs, don't try to impress, even though they have plenty to brag about. They laugh easily, always the sign of a loving soul.

They will probably tell you that going to jail together after committing civil disobedience does wonders for a relationship.

So thank you Janet and Alden for rendering to God what is God's and for you the greatest compliment might be the one that identifies the followers of Jesus: "See how those Christians love one another".

As a postscript, here are a couple of testimonials from former Agape mission council members.

Marie Lueders wrote:

Agape has been most fortunate to have had the Pooles aboard for ever so many years. Alden and Janet had espoused the principles of non-

violence—Christ's love for all and carried them to Agape, a place of like values. As longtime members of Agape they served actively on the board helping to shape Agape's direction. Both were deeply engaged in the planning and carrying out of the annual St. Francis Day program held early in October. Each had his own role. We can easily recall Alden's fund raising efforts and role as an able speaker. Janet could be seen with Suzanne making certain all details were covered and that they were covered within the allotted time frame. She drew on her years as a teacher/organizer and as a member of years at Pax Christi as well as member of community organizations. **Bob Lueders'** message to Janet and Alden says it all: "My hope for Janet and Alden is for continuing association to help others, wherever life takes them."

Fr. David Gill, SJ, former Agape chaplain wrote: "To Alden and Janet on their retirement from the Agape Mission Council: When shall we meet again? If not sooner, then I hope to see you at that Grand Assize, "when the Son of Man shall come in his glory . . . and separate the nations one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats . . . sheep on the right hand and goats on the left."

"Then shall he say unto them on the left hand: Depart from me; ye cursed into everlasting Tea Party rallies, wherein Sarah Palin shall talk forever and ever and ever. For inasmuch as she has done it unto the least of my brethren she has done it unto me."

In the meantime, much peace and contentment for a life well lived!

Suzanne and Brayton and the entire Mission Council have feted Janet and Alden with warm and loving words for their 60th Wedding Anniversary, as well as for their 80th birthdays. Agape would not be what it is without their loving, generous, monthly, yearly, and ongoing support. We love you both and miss you at our meetings.



Daily Bread

The following was read at Agape's Annual Stations of the Cross at Boston's State House on Good Friday, 2009.

Station 14: Jesus is laid in the tomb.

by Eileen Reilly

"Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb."

The body of Jesus is laid in a stranger's tomb. We commemorate his death, his falls, his torture, his condemnation. We believe that the cross is about the power of love, the commitment of God to humanity. Dorothy Day is clear about what love: "We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes from community."

Across the street from where we now stand is the Boston Common. This park is

home to many of the homeless of Boston. In my work as a psychiatrist, out-reaching and treating homeless persons experiencing mental illness and substance abuse I am aware daily of their afflictions.

Jesus is laid in the tomb.

Judy, a homeless woman, sleeps on the sidewalk across the street from South Station. Her shopping cart is full of books. For the first six months that we knew her she told us that she was waiting for her husband to pick her up. After that, she told us that her ex-husband had found her an apartment in Topsfield and that she was waiting for friends to pick her up to drive her there. She believes she works for the CIA. She stays out even in the coldest weather. Gentle and kind is Judy, with a sweet smile. She tells me often that when she gets her place to live she will cook me a vegetarian dinner.

Jesus is laid in the tomb.

John sits on a bench in the sun on a day when the temperatures have reached 90°, wearing a heavy winter coat and a wool hat. His legs are swollen, his pants covered with flies. He has difficulty walking and often cannot make it to the bathroom in the coffee shop in time. "Don't worry about me," he assures us. "I'll be okay."

Jesus is laid in the tomb.

After 10 years of living on the street Donald acquired an apartment. He had a leather recliner and sofa of which he was quite proud. Sadly, he continued to be dependent on alcohol. He would tell us often that he wanted to quit but could not. An outreach worker visiting him at his apartment one day discovered that he had died. He was 45 years old.

Jesus is laid in the tomb.

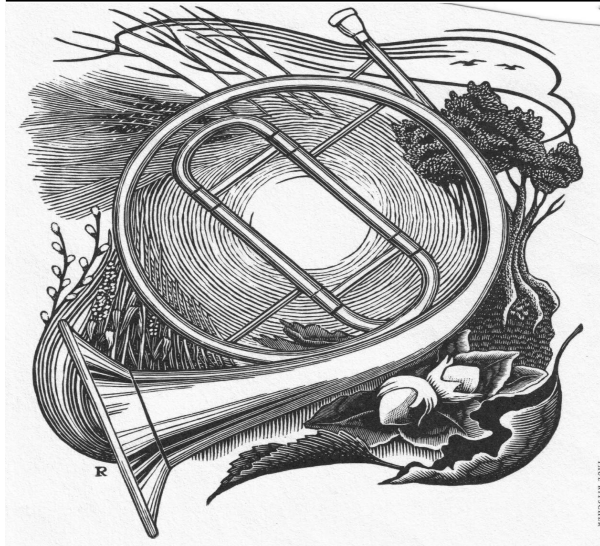
Mortality studies on the homeless have shown that the mean age of death is 45. Homeless people under age 45 are 3 to 4 times more likely to die than the general population. Many die alone. Often, there is no one to claim the body.

Those who are homeless suffer deeply from cold exposure, beatings, falls, hallucinations, addictions, and infections. Most of all, they suffer from being alone.

Mother Teresa wrote, "God has identified with the hungry, the sick, the naked, the homeless; hunger, not for bread alone, but for love, for care, to be somebody to someone; nakedness, not of clothing only, but nakedness of that compassion which very few people give to the unknown; homelessness, not only for a shelter made of stone but that homelessness that comes from having no one to call your own."

Jesus is laid in the tomb.

Writer's Corner



a gardener like me

by autumn rose cutting

i long
for god to make a garden
of my heart
to turn it into a
growing, blooming, fruitful –useful-
place
loving hands immersed in its
soft soil
massaging it, picking out
the stones – those
all-pervasive impediments to growth;
passionately carving their way
through the closed cage of my ribs and into
the secret interior of my soul
opening up long furrows upon its
too-smooth surface deep enough
to find its tender places;
expertly, carefully, planting
each seed
one by one
gently and eagerly encouraging it to
take root and rise up!
i envision this gardener
approaching my heart-bed joyfully in anticipation
each and every day
to water the seeds;
crouching closely – hoping
to witness the first sign of growth
whispering and
singing come out!
come out, my loves!
arise!
dancing and
clapping her hands in delight
at each new green sliver of
life – yes!
yes.
i want my heart to feel like this
i want my god to be like this
–a gardener like me.

Autumn has been an intern at Agape for the past eight months and Agape's garden will be rooting and rising because of her "hands in delight."

Jeanelle Wheeler

Jeanelle Wheeler, who has been at Agape since she was born, and whose mother is on Agape's Mission Council and part of the community since its beginning, at age 14, has demonstrated her many talents in writing by winning The Boston Globe Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. She entered 6 pieces in 6 different writing categories and was recognized with a **Gold Key for Journalism and Dramatic Script** as well as a **Silver Key for Short Story** for a children's story with the theme of prejudice called *The Ice Cream Challenge*. She will be receiving her award at Carnegie Hall in June. *Congratulations Jeanelle. We are all so proud of you.*

Circle of Being

Paraliturgy at Agape College Retreat

by Bob Thieffels

When he was at table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him... Luke 24:30-31

The context of our Agape college retreats is a weekend gathering of young people mostly from a Catholic or other Christian background. Since Agape is known as a Christ-centered community grounded in a more radical approach to the Gospel, there has tended to be a self-selecting process with regard to those who attend retreats. Still, many of the retreatants find themselves deeply questioning their faith; others are alienated from their tradition, and there are even some who have not been grounded in any religious tradition at all. The retreat process has a threefold goal: to nurture an environment in which the actual formation of a community of openness and caring can be formed; to introduce the tradition of Christian nonviolence; to introduce participants to an experimental lifestyle rooted in sustainability. These goals are interrelated in that the practice of Christian nonviolence needs a supportive community as its foundation not only for creative resistance to injustice but also to support and sustain more proactive alternatives to cultural "business as usual."

There are many time-tested and context-specific components that make up an Agape college retreat. It is a dynamic and exciting event in that a variety of experiences seamlessly work together to move us all in the direction of our above stated goals. The Saturday evening liturgical celebration has proven to be an important dimension of this process.

Until more recently, Agape has been able to find a priest who has been willing to join the retreatants in a celebration of a Catholic Mass. These priests have been those most familiar with the traditions and spirituality of Agape and thus have been able to flow with the process in a manner keeping with the goals of the retreat. However, as the difficulty of finding an available priest increased, the staff has turned to paraliturgical celebrations with very positive results; and this has raised questions among us about the nature of liturgy and about whether or not we want to continue to explore what we see as the potential inherent in a paraliturgical celebration.

For the most part, our paraliturgies have been patterned on the Catholic liturgy. We share the Word; we participate in a dialogue to engage as many people as possible in a process of "breaking open" the Word; we often bless, break

and distribute bread. In keeping with our stated goals, this liturgical experience, situated as it is in the center of the retreat, further serves to ground the participants in the midst of a viable and longstanding Catholic and Christian community.

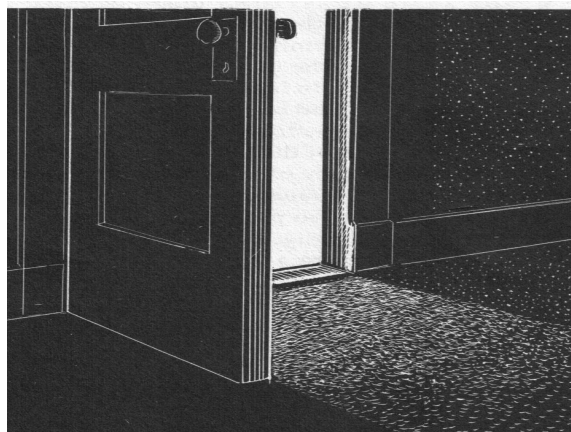
At this point these paraliturgical gatherings are experimental in nature. Whether or not such experimentation as ours might eventually lay the groundwork for more broad-based liturgical renewal, as yet not envisioned institutionally, remains to be seen and is not within the scope of this article. We are rather a group of lay people, young and old, experimenting out of necessity because we recognize a power inherent in liturgical celebration and we have chosen to continue our celebrations while honoring certain parameters inherent in our liturgical tradition. The response overall to these endeavors has been very positive, particularly when, as is the custom, retreatants have a hand in creating our paraliturgies.

What this entire experiment means, again, remains to be seen. Is this valid worship? We gather in the name of Christ. We listen to his word. We pray together in his name. And it is indeed reverent. Does not all this characterize worship? Is this gathering, and ones like it, sacramental? It is surely grace-filled, and it helps to effect what it symbolizes—mainly, our unity. It points to the presence of divine reality in our midst which sacraments are intended to do.

Overall, our paraliturgical celebration seems to add up as an experience, coming in the middle of our retreat, which gives heart to our community aspirations. We then follow this celebration with dinner together and after dinner we gather for an evening of fun where all are invited to share their many and varied talents in a "coffee house" environment. But it has been our liturgy, and now our paraliturgy, that somehow manages to help us give assent to and to concretize, as it were, this dimension of Christ-centeredness on the retreat.

To this end, the Agape community will continue to experiment with these paraliturgical celebrations during college retreats, realizing that they form part of an integral Gospel-centered process.

Bob Thieffels is a cherished friend of Agape whose talent and skill enhance our college retreats for which he has driven eight hours round-trip from Vermont for the past 13 years. We are blessed by his depth and devotion.



Michael McCurdy

Christ Consciousness, Woman Consciousness Continued from page 1

their own church—movers and shakers, planners and preachers. Yet, the battle is often up-hill. Currently, they are dealing with a new Bishop's heavy-handed and typically non-consultative dictates ending the practice of lay preaching at Masses.

I attempted to connect these lay issues of church politics with the issue of war. I recalled, for example, the affirmation of the invasion of Afghanistan by the Catholic Bishops after 9/11 and the continued silence of the hierarchy about the daily cost in human terms of shameful slaughter in Afghanistan of innocent civilians in the search for so-called "insurgents."

Can we imagine introducing at the parish level, the history of women peacemakers, an educational offering in churches, with youth group discussion of Catholic teaching on war?

Sunday after the retreat would be Mother's Day. Millions of women throughout the US know nothing of the origin of Mother's Day in Julia Ward Howe's feminist denunciation of war written in 1870: "Disarm, disarm. The sword of murder is not the balance of justice. Blood does not wipe out dishonor." Women could make the first Mother's Day Proclamation available to parishioners, opening up the possibility of a further look at the lineage of women peacemakers.

Women and War: The Untaught Lineage of Women Peacemakers

"Why don't the mothers of humankind interfere in these matters to prevent the waste of human life of which they alone bear and know the cost?" Julia Ward Howe

From the beginning of the retreat and throughout, I asked my sisters to grapple with the idea of living an integrated life—personal, societal, national, in the midst of centuries of war and desecration of the planet. "Where is my voice?" and how do women "put together mothering and political thinking rather than to have to put aside the one in order to engage the other," (Elshain) were difficult questions to pose to women I did not have a long relationship with, risking their presumption that I was judging them.

Always before any of us as teachers or carriers of the nonviolent word, is the challenge

of how to present its difficulties, its depth and power with sensitivity and humility.

Sensing this moment as a vulnerable one, I tried to establish the need for integration of the various aspects of our lives to include a cherished obligation as women to know our dissenter stories, to be bearers of Christ consciousness. In assuming the role of healers of sorrows of war, no single effort would ever be too small.

After all, in the early days of Christianity, women were not simply "beautiful souls" but were instead, co-workers, as Paul points out in Acts, or *synergoi*, co-equals. A new world view is called for as we women claim our role as peacemakers and prophets in the smallest and seemingly most insignificant ways.

I shared, for example, a real-life story of Israeli and Palestinian women in Michigan who established a monthly women's circle, sharing their pain, practicing compassionate listening to each other's suffering in an effort to find points of sympathy and empathy. Issues, which many of the participants had previously thought unapproachable by "enemy" camps, became a means of mending brokenness. Metaphorically "crippled" and "bleeding" women became whole through nonviolent communication. Thousands of such examples exist of what poet Denise Levertov calls "the syntax of mutual aid."

Still the question of whether addressing the catastrophic results of war on the planet is simply too time-consuming in the midst of other priorities is a pivotal one for women, whose lives are full of demands and pressures. Or, is it time for women to speak about war and its normalization in our kitchens, bedrooms, classrooms, offices, bringing the discussion out in the open. Otherwise, we risk a life of disintegration, divorced from the Wisdom Spirit of the feminine.

To give us courage to do such prophecy-making, we examined the life of Lucretia Mott, whom Margaret Hope Bacon in the book *Valiant Woman* calls "the first woman to practice and preach nonviolence," a role model of the "radical peace activist." Few women know that she and her husband James abandoned a lucrative business in order to withdraw their support from slavery, no longer wanting to make money at the expense of the institutionalization of human degradation.

When Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Sojourner Truth were denied seats at all male abolitionist meetings, they started their own Female Anti-Slavery Society which became "the cradle of women's rights," leading to the historic gathering at Seneca Falls, NY.

Mott opposed the death penalty and spoke out against corporal punishment of children, risking rejection by Quaker meetings as she challenged them to abolish slavery. She did all of this as the mother of six.

Lucretia Mott was one of the signers of the first historic document on nonviolence in the United States, A Declaration of Sentiments, in 1838, aspects of which have become cornerstones of Christian Nonviolence. For Lucretia Mott the issue was clear: "Even the women's question does not take hold of my every feeling as does war."

Such was the case for Catholic convert, Dorothy Day, who, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor wrote: "We must reject war. Yes, we must now make a stand. War is murder, rape, ruin, death; war can end our civilization. I tell you that within a decade—we will have weapons capable of ending this world as we know it."

Our sessions ended with great love expressed among the women for each other and for the elders among us. Individual blessings were sung in unison for me and for the mission of Agape. We chanted names of men and women peacemakers throughout the ages as we blessed each other with sacred oil. I had never encountered before, so many women so devoted to each other, so aware of their communal history and responsibility for each other. I wondered if I had had a Cabrini women's retreat as a younger woman, what difference such an experience would have made in my formation as a Catholic woman.

A week later, I was praying before Hibaku Maria, this tragic icon of women and war, listening to the soul-shattering strains of a woman's voice singing an Ave Maria, expressly composed for Hibaku Maria. Thinking about the pity of war, brought back the faces and voices of the women of Cabrini, our journey into Christ consciousness, the long road that lay ahead, sanctified by the sisters who have gone before us, our legacy, our trust.

agreed. Could this tragedy also be a sign of a new Haiti about to emerge? A Haiti that will truly capture the long suffering spirit of these mysterious, intriguing, tenacious poverty stricken? One that authenticates the spiritual songs they sing from the depths of their love for Jesus especially in catastrophe? "Bene swa leternal." "Blessed be the Lord."

creating a multitude of responses everywhere. This is by all odds the single greatest focus of the human mind at the present moment. It is our primary preoccupation.

Agape: Where can the average Christian start practically?

Berry: Start with the air and the water and sunshine. Find out given your life situation as it stands now, how you can do something. Not everyone can do everything right away, so let's start with a re-orienting of mind and judgment and straighten out the multitude of ambivalences we are caught in and then begin to support others who are radically rethinking the human situation. Particularly the Christian situation. So that Christians can take seriously the devastation of the planet.

Agape: What is the role of the Church in this age?

Berry: Yes, the Church and the university are the two institutions that can best critique this situation and develop responses to this situation.

Voices

Comments from Fairfield University Students after Rural Immersion Day in March 2010

The soft blanket of warmth that rubs across my face when it peeks through the trees. It's like God reaching down to hold my cheek. Anon.

Peacefulness of the walk to the reservoir... I never take the time or patience to walk that slowly. I love how everyone here is so open and respectful of each other and what we have to say. Anon.

Thank you for the yoga class- I legitimately had never felt so relaxed in my life. I could literally feel my body slowing down. Thank you for the new perspective. I was able to learn a little bit about myself this week, and I thank you for that. ~Alicia, Fairfield University

Two dear brothers and sisters shared with us a few days ago their thoughts on God resurrecting Haiti from the ashes of terrible suffering. Muller reflected on those who gave their lives for Haiti to throw off slavery and oppression to build a new land with great hopes for the future, that their lives were not lost in vain. Damise responded by saying that the 200,000 people need not to have died in vain if God through Jesus working in the transformed nonviolent hearts of all of us as a nation could truly be led by God's spirit and not our own or the spirits that are not of God. Many are articulating the prayer and question: does God want to use Haiti as a Light for the world? We feel deeply and pray to be committed to this long distance race for Haiti.

~Steve and Nancy James from Limbe, Haiti

I tried to see what life lessons I could draw out of the work we had done. Chopping the wood reminded me that this world is full of stubborn times and knots that can't be broken through, but we have to remember to persevere and we will eventually break through it all. Also, harvesting vegetables in December after the first snow totally amazed me! It was incredible to see the vegetables that were still in beautiful condition when I least expected them to be. This made me think that the time of harvest is not always going to be on our time, or when we expect it. God can bring a harvest at anytime.

~Elizabeth Boohar, Smith College

Haiti - The Perfect Other Continued from page 2

machines; they are like beasts of burden, doing most everything with bare hands. I could easily live to a ripe age of 80; they die at 47 on average. We were European slave holders and traders; they were history's only successful African slave revolt turned country. Their nation was brought to a standstill by an earthquake; my nation was brought in as a "savior." Our country is aging, while 40% of their country is under 18. They function without viable rule of law; we successfully exercise world domination spending one trillion on our military per year.

Reinventing the Human Continued from page 3

straighten out our politics without including the environment. Our economic system is perhaps the most pathological, the most incapable of sustaining life.

Agape: What would be an example of reinventing ourselves in the world today?

Berry: Well, we are reinventing our occupations—livelihood that looks at the value of the land. We are reinventing property rights and property obligations. We are reinventing legal structures. We are reinventing religious rituals and spirituality. We can take any aspect of the human and start with new forms that need to be created. The question to ask this new system is: Is it life-enhancing or not? Some of these new forms are coming from other cultures. I think the most important reinvention or re-creation is to invent rituals and sacred ways of understanding the phenomena of the universe. We did not choose to be born. We were chosen

to be here in this time and place. We need to understand our role in reclaiming the sacred.

Agape: Where could the average Christian's spiritual life begin in healing people within the context of the earth?

Berry: They can begin by seeing the natural world as being primary to divine revelation. To rethink the human in our relationship to the natural world as a sacred community. Then we could move to rituals that would enhance this. Establish our presence in the universe on those bases.

Agape: Many of us have known of the ecological damage for many years. It was brought to our attention by Earth Day in 1970. That didn't seem to motivate. Here we are several decades later with an intensified crisis. What will motivate us now?

Berry: I think it's all around us. Certainly the urgency is there, particularly when you consider that we have ruined the water and the soil, the genetic basis of our food supply. It's

*****Interns and Volunteers*****

Much of our day-to-day community life centers on welcoming interns and volunteers into our community life.

Interns—people of all ages who will commit nine months to a year at Agape.

College Interns and Independent Study—

Students have received credit in graduate and undergraduate school. Inquiries welcome. Excellent skills learned in ecology, sustainability and retreat work.

Volunteers—commit from one week to several months.

Interns and volunteers participate in the various

activities of Agape community life including prayer, homesteading (wood cutting and stacking, gardening, hospitality, office work and ministry, including work with youth and retreats for adults and young adults.

and experiencing a community life of nonviolence and sustainable living and learning the practice of contemplative disciplines.

Please contact us!

If you are interested in spending some time at Agape



Garden: Ali Kadar from Iraq, hiding in the Agape garden.



Multicultural Young Artists at Annual Francis Day, 2008



Easter Liturgy at Agape



Agape Youth Witness Against War

URGENT MESSAGE: MAILING AND PRINTING COSTS HAVE RISEN ASTRONOMICALLY: PLEASE ALERT US BY RETURNING THIS FORM

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Enclosed is ☐ \$10 ☐ Other donation \$ _____
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AGAPE CALENDAR

Sun. June 6th—10 AM Talk at UCC Church; Petersham, MA

Sat. June 12—Annual Agape Workday—9 am - 5pm.
Bring Friends Pot-luck and Music to follow.

Rain Date, Sat. June 19th

Tues. June 22—St. Susanna Parish Youth group at Agape

Sat. June 26—10 am - 2 pm Cluster Group Discernment Day

July 1-3—Sal y Luz NY Youth Group Work Days

Sat. October 9th—Mark your calendars—Women and War
(usually the first Sat. of Oct.)