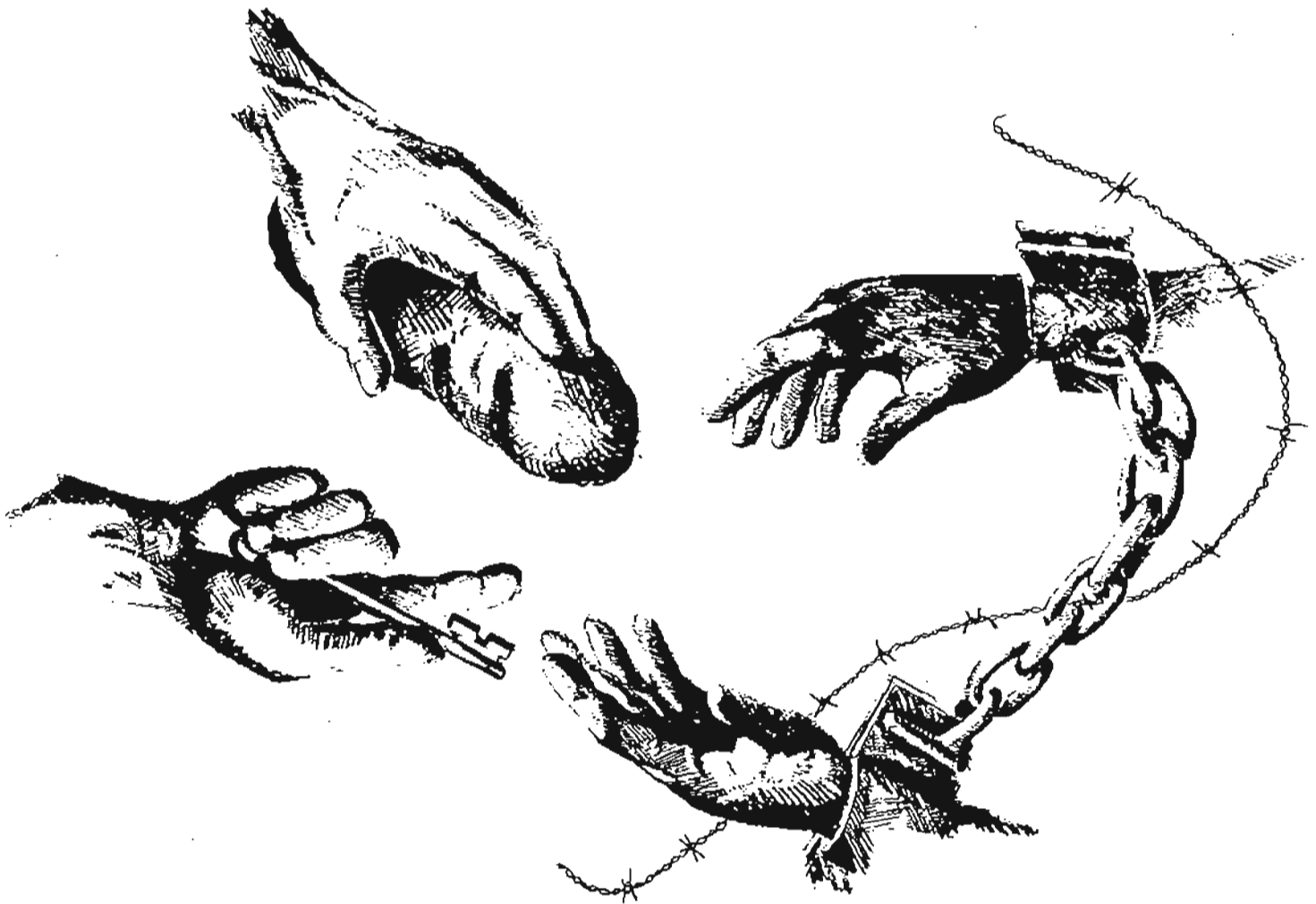


THE Round Table

Spring
1991

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



MERCY AND JUSTICE SHALL MEET

WHY THIS ISSUE?

Justice and mercy. What is the relationship between these two concepts, or should I say ways of being? God is just, but God is also merciful. Is this possible? Is there real justice in mercy? Jesus tells us that God "makes the sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust." Despite scripture, I am sometimes tempted to forge justice by punishing the unjust. Then justice would reign, and all would be well, yes? Then I recall the words of Alexander Solzhenitsyn:

If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the dividing line between good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being, and who is willing to destroy a piece of one's own heart?

The articles in this issue have done much to further my understanding of mercy and justice. Pat Coy opens the issue with a reflection on how the works of mercy and justice should go hand in hand in the Catholic Worker movement. Matthew Schmitt, S.J., finds the gospel source of justice in right relationships where one does not exercise power over another. Terri Bednarz of the Sisters of Mercy draws upon her community's tradition to demonstrate why mercy is at the heart of the divine. Teka Childress describes how the works of mercy and justice are intertwined in her life. Carol Dohohue reports from Latin America of her experiences of working with despairing youth in Bolivia. Tim Pekarek, who returned last summer, presents the Karen House article while Mary Ann McGivern keeps us up to date on Little House. The issue is concluded by Barb Prosser, who calls us all to conversion as she movingly describes an act of violence in her life.

At the heart of the issue are a series of conversations that Virginia Druhe had with several previous guests at our house of hospitality. She discovers that in their lives each has come to identify mercy with justice. Again, although we may initially think that we are serving the poor, it is they who have the most to impart to us.



-Mark Scheu

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FALSE DUALISMS

by Patrick Coy

Much of life's journey is located in our attempts to bring some coherence to thoughts, feelings, and realities that appear to be at odds or in competition with each other. Tensions abound between individuality and community, spirit and body, prayer and action, mind and heart, history and nature, sacred and secular. How to turn these tensions into creative forces that propel us forward in our spiritual journey is a troublesome problem. While tensions that are creative and life-giving often elude us, facile and false dualisms tempt us down a well-marked trail that nevertheless dead ends in a box canyon.

Mercy and justice are two demands that Christians are called to honor, but which often seem at odds. How to find the time and the focused energy to feed the hungry (mercy), while also working for fundamental societal change that will reduce economic exploitation and inequalities (justice), presents what appears to be a vexing polarity.

It is no less so in Catholic Worker communities. At first glance, Worker houses seem to have diffused the tension by focusing on mercy and charity. Indeed, much is made of the Worker movement's commitment to the works of mercy, and to solidarity with the victims of an unjust system by living with and amongst the poor, and embracing various degrees of simple living or voluntary poverty. But for the most part, the Worker has not been tempted by any false dualism between mercy and justice, the immediate and the future, or the individual and the institutional. And I think the reason why is because the works of mercy, and the friendships with the poor that result, quite naturally leads the Worker movement to struggle for justice as well.

Individual people are poor for a reason. When one lives amongst the poor one discovers rather quickly

that individual cases of poverty are not usually the result of the individual's makeup, personality, or morals. Even less frequently does the reason reside in natural disaster, or some accident of historical circumstance. The life stories one hears in the office at Karen House while checking in a new guest, or in the dining room over a shared meal, soon take on a note of familiarity. These stories seem to have less to do with individual failure and more to do with the failure of the capitalist system to provide for but a few. Dorothy Day called it a "filthy rotten system", one that keeps people poor and both materially and spiritually oppressed by promoting materialism, competition, individualism, and ultimately violence on the individual and societal level.

The paltry economic avenues open to the homeless women at Karen House essentially lead nowhere. A livable wage escapes them. Security of no sort is found in the fast food "industry", or in the temporary placement jobs that are about all most of our guests are ever offered. Fulfilling, meaningful labor—a key ingredient in the recipe for spiritual health—appears largely beyond their reach. Our educational system has already failed them, as have most of the men in their lives, and now the economic order proves unresponsive to their basic needs and rights, and those of their children.

It was this reality that caused Dorothy Day to counsel that people "gain their bread by their work. It is their bread and wine. It is their life. We cannot emphasize the importance of it enough. We must emphasize the holiness of *work*, and we must emphasize the sacramental quality of *property*, too. That means the property of the poor. They have very little of it."

So while the Worker tries to respond to the needs of the poor through the direct service work of the hospitality houses, that has never seemed enough.

Pat Coy is a member-in-absentia of the Karen House community. He is working on a doctorate in conflict resolution at Syracuse University.

The rights of the poor must be realized in a substantive and long term way. The demands of justice have kept a tension alive in the movement between meeting people's daily needs, and calling society to accountability for a system that keeps people economically and politically disenfranchised.

In an article entitled "Our Stand On Strikes", Day minced no words in answering criticisms from those who supported the movement's works of mercy, but stumbled over its activism for justice. They are told that the Worker vision goes beyond the soup bowl and the clothing room: it includes a complete reconstruction of the social order.

"Let us get down to the fundamental point that the seamen are striking for: the right to be considered partners, sharers in responsibility, the right to be treated as people and not as chattels. Is it not a cause worth fighting for? Is it not a cause which demands all the courage and all the integrity of the people involved? Let us be frank and make this our issue. Let us be honest and confess that it is the social order we seek to change. The workers are never going to be satisfied, no matter how much pay they get, no matter what their hours are. And it is to reconstruct the social order that we are throwing ourselves in with the workers, whether in factory or shipyards or on the sea" [or in fast food restaurants].

Charity and justice are not opposites, but the demands they make upon us are different enough that we may well be tempted to honor one and not the other. One may suit our temperament better than the other, or one may simply be more expedient given everything else in our lives. Things are further complicated by the fact that we can easily wear ourselves out as we scurry from the soup line to the demonstration, or from making a prison visit to writing a letter to the editor.

Some balance between charity and justice seems desirable in our lives. One that both nourishes and challenges us. One that follows Thomas Aquinas and honors the intimate relationship between the individual good and the common good. One that consciously puts the poor in our lives so that we will not forget about the need for systemic change, and so that our struggles for justice are informed by the experience and wisdom of the poor. Anything less is not likely to take us where we want to go.



BUILDING OF

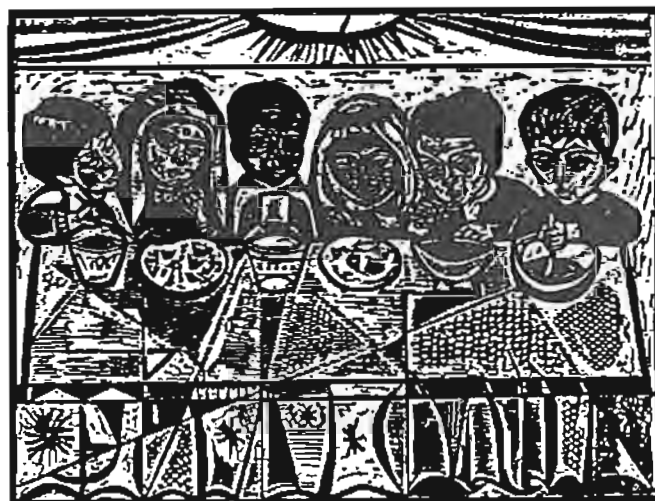
by Teka Childress

When I was in my early teens I set my face toward Washington, D.C. I wanted to be a Senator. I imagined passing legislation that would send justice ringing through the land. By the time I was 17 I no longer believed that change would come from within the federal government. Based on my experience with the United Farm Workers a new vision emerged: that those of us longing for justice would bring it about through the building of community organizations.

When I was 19 I set my face toward New York. There, a group of people committed to working for justice offered me the opportunity to learn the skills of community organizing for social change. I went there and was taught a tremendous amount. But something had happened to me shortly before I left for New York which was going to change my way of seeing things. I had started spending time at Karen House and had fallen in love with it. Thus, while I was in New York, my face kept turning back toward St. Louis, and after a year it was to St. Louis that I returned, perhaps for good.

My understanding of my life's work changed. Like many changes that happen in us, mine had been gradual. But, there was a particular moment that crystallized for me a new vision of justice. The year at Karen House had set the stage for this experience which I had while canvassing in Brooklyn.

COMMUNITIES JUSTICE



Around My Father's Table

Irvin Allen

While I was going door to door one day I met a man. I knocked on his door with the intention of convincing whoever answered that redlining was ruining their neighborhood. This gentle and old man answered the door and invited me in. He listened quietly and kindly and smiled at me. Yet, I knew almost immediately that he would never care much about the issue of banks divesting from his neighborhood, that he wouldn't be able to do much in any case because of his age and infirmity, and that he wouldn't be able to donate money because of his poverty. He had listened intently and smiled sweetly because he was terribly lonely and delighted that someone would actually come into his home to talk with him.

But, there I was with my own agenda and my own schedule. He was an impediment to it. He wasn't useful. Yet, I knew instinctively at that moment that I wanted to live a life that took him into account. My working for a just world had to include both facing this person in front of me with his whole range of needs and gifts and the need for change in a system which isolated people and stole from them their very means of survival.

The works of mercy and the work of justice are inextricably linked. Dorothy Day knew this. The same vision motivates me to do the works of mercy and the work of justice. It is that of seeing Christ in every person. Once we see this, we are compelled to respond

in justice and in mercy. And, oddly enough, even though I could distinguish what works of mercy I do compared with what justice work I do, each is the work of both. It is just to give food to someone at the door. It is merciful to work and to live so that someone in Guatemala has the means to survive. Since God's love is completely gratuitous none of us deserves it. It is gift of mercy, and yet, since God has chosen to give it to us gratuitously, we all deserve it because of love. In mercy and in justice, how can we deny to others what we have been given so undeservedly and so freely?

Since returning to St. Louis I have divided many of my days between bringing food to people and planning rallies, visiting the sick and making phone calls, and often I've wondered if I've done it with any grace at all. Often it feels completely foolish. I can't get something organized because I keep getting interrupted, or I feel completely insensitive to someone before me because of my preoccupation with something I'm planning. And yet, I am compelled to continue down this path which weaves here and there and often seems to be going nowhere. I have faith that as long as we have Christ's face before us and make our meager and great attempts to love him, that God will bless our efforts, that our acts of love are never lost or wasted. This may seem foolish to those in the U.S. Senate, but I'm glad for the choice I made.



Teka Childress is a member of the Karen House community. Her picture has appeared recently in the St. Louis Post Dispatch, and in a book of photos by Mev Puleo.

JUSTICE AND MERCY LIVED

interviews by Virginia Druhe

For liberation theology, the starting point is always the experience of the poor. It is from their perspective that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ must be understood, because in Jesus God revealed a preferential option for the poor. In that spirit we thought it might be well to go the experts among us and try to know their experience of justice and mercy. I had the pleasure of speaking with several current and past guests of Karen House on this topic. The most striking outcome of the conversations was finding that each of them identifies mercy and justice, rather than contrasts them. It is an idea that does not dominate the literature on social justice in our day, and one that these conversations have convinced me is worth examining seriously.

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Tracy Washington is a warm and capable mother of four children under ten years of age. Tracy recently left her husband because of violence and their apartment because of lead paint. She was very concise in response to my question. "Mercy to me is having a heart and shedding a light on other peoples' problems and helping them the best that you can. And justice is when you feel like you've succeeded in helping them with their problems."

When I asked her for some occasion in her life she could name as an experience of justice she responded, "I think I found justice this year with all the different times I've been trying with the Housing Authority to get into an apartment. I feel like I finally got justice this year with one lady who works at HDC. She had nothing to do with my case but another

person told me to explain my situation to her. She got on my case when she wasn't my caseworker. She went over the other lady's head and got me the apartment where I'm going now. So I feel like I got justice.

I then asked, "And what about an experience of mercy?" Tracy went back to the same event. "I feel like she had pity on me after I explained how long I've been waiting."

I suggested that most middle-class church people would probably not make such a close connection between mercy and justice and again she wasted no words. "They probably haven't been in the situations we have where we can identify them together."

• • •

Hazel Tullock has been a friend since the first years Karen House was open. She now lives at nursing home in our neighborhood. She identified justice with help and understanding. I asked her, "Do you think it was justice that you went to jail sometimes? Or was that injustice?" She replied, "Injustice was me not seeking help, not getting help for my problems. When I was stealing I wasn't wanting anything that I stole. It was just my way of getting even with people, I guess. Maybe if I had some way of understanding me, why I was doing what I was doing, why I was punishing myself... I guess I'm more bitter at myself than I am at anybody else."

At the end of our conversation she spoke of justice as forgiveness. I asked, "Have you gotten justice in your life?" Hazel answered, "I've asked God to forgive me for my wrongdoings. And I think God has.

Virginia Druhe, a member of the Karen House community, has taken over writing these bios in Pat's absence, and can tell you it is more difficult than you would think.



Tracie Washington

I think if I've been forgiven for some of the things I did, that's mercy. Is that right? I think as long as you ask for forgiveness you're supposed to get it. We all make mistakes."

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Steve Sutton is a young man in his twenties. He, with his mother and brothers, was one of our first guests in the fall of 1977. I asked what has been an experience of justice for him. In one short sentence he linked justice to compassion, revealing considerable insight into human nature. "Most important I will stress that loving your enemy, and loving one another — plus loving yourself, then you have that compassion for others — that is justice. Where justice comes in is if a person came to you and was yelling in your face and he was doing it not because he was mad at you, but because he was mad about something else. Being just would be not to respond back in irrational behavior. Hopefully ask the person what is wrong and how can I probably help you?"

"I have found most situations are settled pretty fairly when you ask the person what the problem is because then he can say, "Hey, this guy is not going to get me. He's asking a positive question. That makes him feel a little safe and then you let him know that whatever he says or does you're not going to cause him any kind of danger or fright. Giving good advice is basically what justice is. When you care for somebody you give them advice that is going to help them. By that justice you show them how to do justice in the right way."

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Donna and Willie Staples live in a small, immaculately clean south St. Louis apartment with their three sons. Donna linked mercy and justice several times in our conversation. The Staples are active members of a church, so I asked if there is any part of the bible that they think of as talking especially about justice. Donna was quick to respond: The bible teaches we are all God's children, so why should one be treated any different than the other? But we are. The people at my church and the people at Karen House, I can put those two together and say that there we're treated like humans. We're treated with compassion. Outside of those two, people look down on us because Willie is black and I'm white. People look down on me because I have biracial children."

Donna also spoke of the injustice of not having food stamps for two weeks because of a clerical error in the state office. When I asked her if having food pantries to go to was mercy or justice, she would not accept the distinction. "It's mercy and justice all in one." Similarly, in discussing injustice in health care she said, "I'm on the bottom layer of anything because I have medicaid. I have to settle for second rate It's unjust and there is no mercy in it."

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There were a few other topics that recurred in these conversations. One was racism. Besides Willie's and Donna's reflections on racism, Hazel also had some thoughts on its impact on her life. After saying



Hazel Tullock

that she had not wanted most of what she had stolen in her years on the street Hazel added, "I think I was punishing the public for their prejudiced ways. Towards colored people, mistreating you because you associated with colored people. I had a colored baby, you know. They mistreated me bad on account of him. Then when they took him away from me that seemed to make me want to get even. I did that in the form of stealing. That's what I was doing. My mind was confused. I just didn't care no more. I couldn't see much good in anything, or in myself, or in anybody. Still can't, as a matter of fact."



Donna & Willie, Bobbie, Donnell & Willie

The relationship between God and justice came up several times. Steve had a good bit to say on this topic. "What I'm saying then is that the act of Jesus dying on the cross, and God in heaven having the love God did, which is one, had mercy on us. And when we accept Christ into our life and do God's will then God gives us that strength to have mercy."

I asked if we ever have the right to not have mercy on our enemies. Again, Steve had a clear response. "Yes, but clearly with sorrow. When you have mercy for someone who doesn't want to have no part of it or who just doesn't care, the mercy leaves you. You have mercy, but its more like a bitter sorrow for them."

When I asked Hazel if there was something she had been a part of that she felt was just, she thought for a moment and then broadened the question. "I

really don't think life is just. I don't know. It's hard to figure. I often wonder why we're put here just to die anyway. How are you supposed to go through life being happy when you lose your loved ones?"

I inquired a bit further. "Would you say God isn't just?" "No, I wouldn't say God is unjust. I don't know. It takes more brains than mine to figure out this mess." So I asked again, "When did you experience mercy?" Very slowly, "When they held a gun next to my head and let me go. When they raped me, threatened to beat me up, and let me go if I promised not to say anything. That's what I consider mercy. I figure God's there no matter how lost you get, you know?"

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Donna also reflected on justice and economic realities in the U.S. "A lot of people say, 'She's lazy, sitting back and collecting my tax money.' But I worked a long time before I ever had any kids — from the time I was fifteen. And I've worked four years since they've been born. So I feel I've earned my welfare. And if you go to work at minimum wage they take everything away from you and you're still struggling. So I'll stay home and collect welfare. At least I have medical benefits. I was working sixteen hours a day, four or five days a week. The more money I made the more food stamps they took away from me."

I told her I had recently seen a statistic that only 12% of women on welfare receive benefits for four out of seven years. Eighty-eight percent are families who need help for several years as the children grow up. Then I asked, "How much do you need to make at a job for it to be enough for you?" "I need to bring home \$1,000 per month and have medical coverage." I told her that is the current federal definition of poverty — \$13,000 per year for a family of four. She is after all, only asking for a living wage.

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Talking about justice reminded Steve of the war that was being fought in the Persian Gulf. "There's a sign outside this room that says, 'Anyone that picks up the sword shall perish by the sword.' That means that stubbornness and being greedy and bullheaded will only get you death. No one does survive. What has really been accomplished? Really nothing, except to destroy a bunch of people and land, too."

• •



Steve Sutton

One of my favorite reflections is Tracy's summary of what she has learned about mercy and justice by being a parent. "In mercy, I feel like you have to pay attention and listen to your children. To be able to get on their level and communicate with them, because they have different moods, and their moods change and sometimes you don't understand their changes, so you really have to pay attention. If you don't watch them closely you'll miss something and you'll wonder, 'What did I do wrong?' With each one of them. It's fascinating. They say different things and do different things. Sometimes I can't believe they're doing them! I have mercy in that way."



THE WORKS OF MERCY

by Rick Sieber

Peter Maurin was fond of contrasting the way in which the social worker (the state) approached the poor, and the way in which the Christian should approach the poor. They are as opposed to each other today as during his time. In the spirit of Peter, I say:

The poor should not be approached with an eye toward conversion or rehabilitation.

They should not have to perform any act whatsoever to receive aid.

A long time ago, a great theft took place. The goods of the earth became the property of the few. Most of God's people were robbed of their inheritance.

This is the great scandal of our lifetime. It is a scandal to our good God.

Some of us are now in a unique position. As Christians, we are called to take part in the redistribution of the stolen goods to the poor. We can give back food, money, clothing and hospitality.

This should not, however, cause us to think that we are great administrators.

We are returning stolen resources, not giving away our personal fortunes. We are returning what already belongs to the poor.

We continue the great sin by making people do circus tricks to get what is rightfully theirs. We make them join groups or see doctors or take baths or stop smoking or stop drinking or stop cursing or stop being loud or stop being nuts.

We say that we want to be good stewards but

we are making the poor pay dues to get what is rightfully theirs.

God has told us to perform the works of mercy without thought of reward, but we wince at the idea of giving away our goods without seeing good results. We doubt God's word. We are like Moses. We must tap the rock twice.

We are not called to be thrifty.

We are not called to be business people.

We are not called to be administrators.

We are not called to fill out papers.

We are not called to judge the worthiness or unworthiness of the poor.

We are called to perform the works of mercy without thought of reward.

We should take the condition of the poor as our responsibility. We should learn from their condition because that is the condition of Christ in the world. He is still hanging on the Cross waiting to be relieved of our burden.

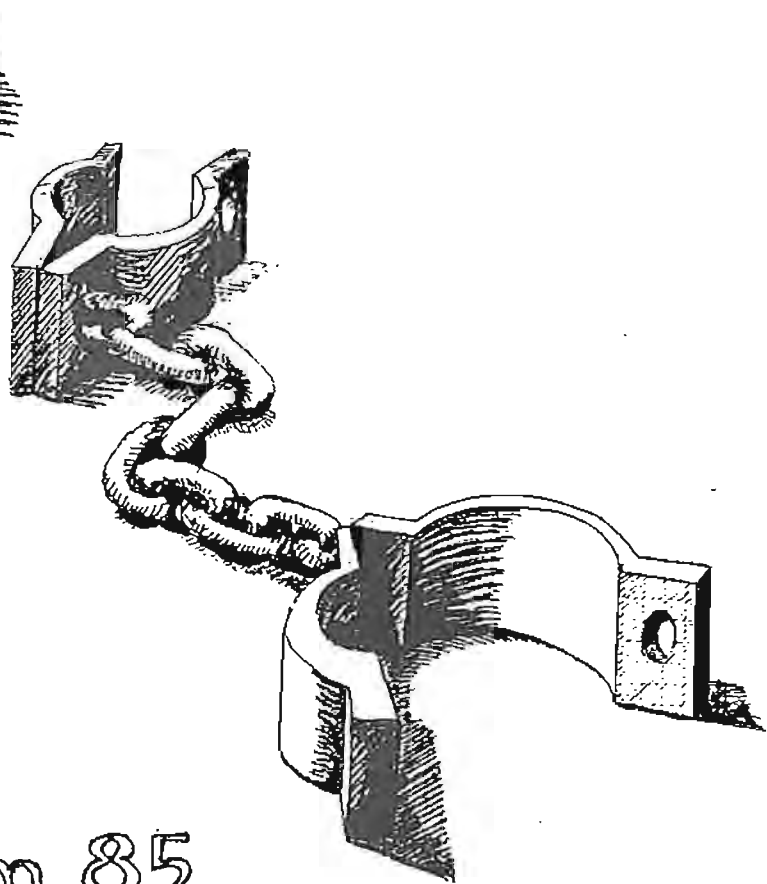
Not everyone can open a soup kitchen but everyone can include one or two people in his or her life. It takes all we have to heal and be healed by one or two people in our lifetime. This is the real dream of the Catholic Worker—for all of us to have a "Christ Room" in our homes and our hearts.



from *The Catholic Worker*, volume LVII, number 5, August 1990

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Jeff Finnegan

Psalm 85

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS AND JUSTICE

by Matthew Schmitt, S. J.

There are many aspects of justice. For the sake of discussion, we could mean by justice that which is due to another because that person is our brother or sister.

The Gospel speaks to the radical sense of self that underpins all forms of justice. St. Matthew depicts Jesus teaching the very motive in which all justice, all right relationships between God, each other and this good earth are found.

Injustice has much to do with the reputed radical power that some come to think they have over others. In fact they have none. To think one has a radical power over another is one of the grand illusions of life.

One of the most liberating understandings of self that come to the oppressed is in a dense teaching of Jesus in the Gospel. Jesus says, in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 23:8-12):

You ... must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master, and you are brothers.

You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and He is in heaven.

You must not let yourselves be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ.

The greatest among you must be your servant.

Anyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be exalted.

Who is the master? Any one over another? No. It is a corruption of the truth, the corruption of what is just, for anyone to pretend that another is someone inferior; for someone to pretend that the way to God, that the way to life, is somehow confided to the "learned and clever" and denied to the simple, the "meek", the "pure of heart", the "poor in spirit", the "sorrowing", the "merciful", the "persecuted", the "peacemakers", "those who hunger and thirst for what is right." The master of the way to God is Jesus; we are only novices, apprentices, imitators, disciples, equals in acquiring the skills for the journey from the one who is Master. "I am the Way." It is a gross misunderstanding of self to propose that there is another master of the journey of life other than the One Master, Christ. This is devastating to "Guruism", to pretense, to the neo-gnostics (an elite) who pretend that The Knowledge is given only to The Few. Deceptions such as these produce ideologues of many diverse sects. It sometimes produces injustices based on religious grounds that are utterly astounding even in our own day.

Who is Father? Who is the origin of and sustains our existence? Any one over another? No. It is unredeemably the source of the gravest injustices to propose an illusion of paternalism or maternalism in the relationship of one human being to another. We are so radically members of one family, with one source of our existence, one God; we are forever so profoundly brothers and sisters to one another in such a fundamental way that all racism, all ethnicism, all imaginary categorization of our relationships that does not acknowledge the profound truth of our union lays the seed for all the terrifying and debasing social relation-

Matthew Schmitt, SJ, is a parish priest in the Missouri Province of the Jesuits.



ships that give mockery to the word just. Since we have one great Ancestor, God, we are members of the one race, the human race, the family of God, brothers and sisters of one and the same Parent. To begin anywhere else in the description of our relationships to one another, is to get lost. For if we have radically one source of life, we are truly brothers and sisters to one another, and that truth establishes how we should relate to one another, establishes what is just.

Who is Teacher? Any one over the other? No. We have one teacher, which makes us all learners. What does it mean to fulfill our human lives, what is fulfilling truly? The great Teacher of what is fulfilling human existence is the one who became truly human for our sakes, to teach us the way to fulfill our deepest longings as persons: how to love and be loved. The way is the way Jesus lived: the Teacher is the Christ. On that Way are the great paradoxes of the Gospel. "The greatest among you must be your servant." "The last shall be first, and the first last." "Any one who exalts himself [is unjust] will be humbled [will be faced with the truth]; and anyone who humbles himself [lives according to what is just] will be exalted [will be confirmed by the truth]." "Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all." (Mk 10:43-44) "Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and the sake of the gospel, will save it." (Mk 8:35)



*...the Scriptures
should be taken out of the classroom
and stained-glass sanctuary
and put out under God's skies
where people are toiling and crying
and wondering,
where the mighty events
of the good news
first happened
and where alone they feel at home.*

Clarence Jordan



THE COMPASSION OF GOD

by Terri Bednarz, RSM

Mercy is the compassion of God brought about when uprightness and justice are carried out, extending some favorable action for the cause of other persons. For God's covenantal love reaches beyond the "inner drive or attitude to live justly" and "the right relationship with neighbor" and calls us to link uprightness and justice, giving birth to Mercy, the compassion of God. Mercy in its spirit is compassion when we consider the needs of those who are alienated or wounded by society. "Hesed" means providing security and loyalty to the needy, ensuring that they, the anawim, will not be overlooked or forgotten in their needs. Mercy wears the cloak of hospitality, encompassing within it the very compassion of God.

Compassion literally translated means to endure, to bear, to suffer, connoting a desire "to alleviate the distress of the other." It is not enough to be compassionate because Mercy insists upon the alleviation of distress. When justice is established and right relationship with neighbor is corrected, then we see that Mercy has been realized. Both the one being merciful and just as well as the one receiving mercy are blessed.

Righteous anger which "defends the truth" also defines Mercy. Mercy and compassion carry righteousness one step further.

Prompted by their guilt, sins and fear of God, the warriors turned over their captives to the people who in turn "took the captives, clothe them, gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, anointed them and carrying all the feeble, they brought them to their kindred."

2 Corinthians 28:14-15



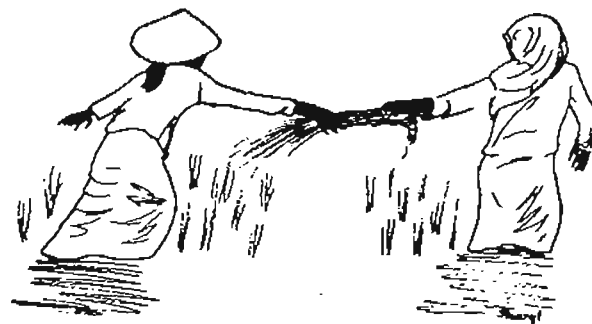
God's message to the Israelites of the Old Testament times was to remind the people who had "forgotten" what being wounded by society meant to them in their earlier desert wanderings. As the gap between the "haves and have-nots" in Amos' day widened, Mercy and compassion for the have-nots met with indifference and silence (Amos 5:13). God constantly called the people to remember the time when they were not so fortunate.

Terri Bednarz, RSM, volunteers both at Karen House and at St. Patrick's Center.

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

Matthew 25:35-37

These words of Jesus became for us, the works of Mercy, God's compassion made active in the world. Here Jesus tells us that compassion must be lived in our experience. It is not enough to offer sacrifices or holy worship, but as in the word of the Old Testament prophets and of Jesus, himself, we are called to do the works of Mercy and we are called to be merciful.



Once again, our response to be merciful and compassionate arises not because anyone "earns" or "works" for our response, but because it comes from the depths of who we are.



Thus, Mercy, the compassion of God, relieves the sufferings of others by providing security, loyalty, steadfastness, forgiveness, patience, comfort and above all love. It is taking the compassion we feel in our hearts and making it come alive by the actual relieving of another's suffering. Mercy is rooted in who we are, having experienced in our own lives the Mercy and compassion of God.



Whereas in the Old Testament, Mercy is translated to mean security, loyalty and steadfastness, "compassion which moves to alleviate", the New Testament adds a uniqueness to Mercy by stressing forgiveness.



Mercy also includes "spiritual works such as caring enough about others to advise or correct them when they are doing wrong, teaching and educating those in need of spiritual/academic learning, being prepared and willing to counsel those seeking advice, comforting the sorrowful, forgiving all injuries, praying for the living and the dead and, finally, making a conscious effort to always speak the Truth in word and deed while seeking to resolve injustices."

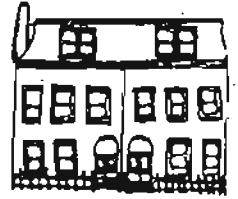
from "Clothe Yourself with Heartfelt Mercy," Sisters of Mercy



Helen David Brancato

FROM LITTLE HOUSE

by Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.



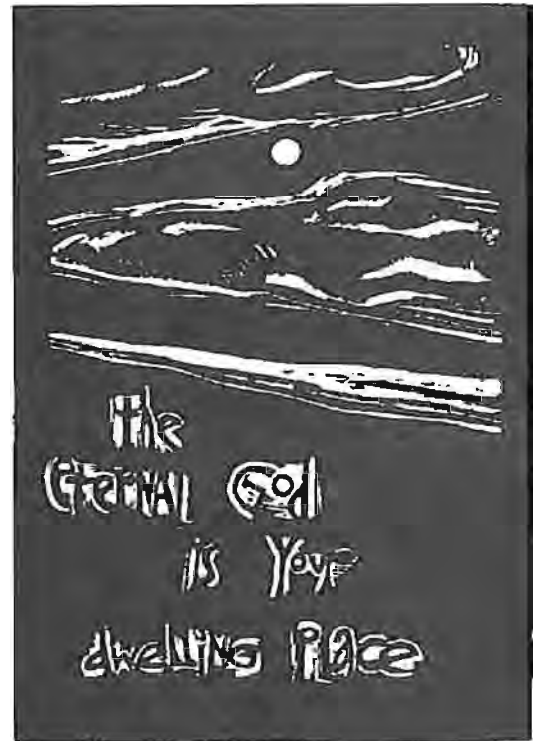
For a person who has a vow of poverty and lives at the Catholic Worker, I spend a lot of my time thinking about money. First, as part of my job at the Economic Conversion Project, I'm forever counting the seven billion dollars that the Pentagon is spending here in St. Louis. People ask me how much a Cruise Missile costs, or an F-15 — and I know! \$1.3 million and \$50 million. How many jobs does a billion dollars generate? It used to be 30,000. Now the bureau of Labor Statistics says 25,000; but a billion dollars in the arms industry may not generate more than 10,000 or 15,000 jobs because weapon production is capital intensive.

So much for discussion of the big bucks. At the other end of the spectrum, I just bought three gallons of a discontinued line of outdoor paint at Central Hardware that almost matches our back porch for \$5. a gallon. Elijah's getting married and I wanted him to buy a good sports jacket instead of renting a tuxedo; but Tim Dunn's advice was that spending money on a wedding helps to "make it take", helps the newlyweds view marriage more seriously. But Joan, the bride's mother, and I are counting our pennies, cooking all the food ourselves for the rehearsal dinner and reception. And on yet another home front, users on Lorraine's and my extensions have made \$5. worth of 1-411 calls and the two of us are out to get those information-seekers and make them pay their .45 per call.

The house needs some small repairs, like fixing storm windows; but we are waiting to see if the Missouri Supreme Court says the passage of the St. Louis School Bond Issue for \$100 million by 61% was legal, which would give the school board money to build the new school on our property. There's a case of not knowing what to pray for. Actually, we're praying the site be moved to Pruitt Igoe, and I heard a rumor today (in March) that that's what will happen.

I used some Christmas donation money to take the six children in Paul's extended family shopping for clothes at New Hope, a used goods store about a block from us. Four adults went with the children and we

bought three pairs of jeans for each kid, shirts, dresses for the girls, two winter jackets, boots and shoes, pajamas and nightgowns — 56 items of clothing for \$75. The two girls knew what they wanted and we had to do a little negotiating to get dresses that they liked and would be useful. The two older boys needed a little time to get the hang of shopping, but they caught on. The toddlers docilely let everyone try clothes on them.



Melnard Craighead

Mary Ann McGivern, S.L., is alive and well and "Living in St. Louis" on Monday mornings on KWMU.

The Worker always needs money, (We have a big plumbing bill coming up.) and we spend carefully; but people always respond generously to our requests for help with immediate needs. It is harder to raise money for long-range social change like economic conversion. We send out mailings, make phone calls, visit people, hold concerts (Jim Ford's group will sing for us in June), and sell calendars. My latest embryonic idea is to hold an afternoon of writing letters to Congress this summer and get sponsors for all the letter-writers. So instead of paying fifty cents for every mile walked, a sponsor would pay fifty cents for every letter written.

Funding proposals is another kettle of fish. I've received grants from the Peace Research Lab and the Sisters of Loretto, but generally foundations don't seem to be supporting economic conversion. I helped write the St. Louis County proposal to the Department of Defense for a conversion planning grant and I helped

write proposals to the Missouri Arts Council to underwrite production of new plays by local playwrights. It was incredibly easier to get \$100,000 from the DOD than \$3000 from MAC.

Finally, in March I wrote an essay about local sports for the program for the Leukemia Association big fundraiser: Breakfast of Champions. BJ, who lived at the Little House for about 5 years, was one of the first children to recover from leukemia. The breakfast was attended by upper middle class sports fans, but it was not a project of the super rich. Comfortable Americans joined to fight a terrible disease. The breakfast happened to be held on the anniversary of my brother Frank's death from AIDS, another disease with no money for research or prevention or care. I cried that morning on the way to the breakfast, for lack of money for so many people I care about, and for how we as a nation spend the money we have. +

FROM KAREN HOUSE

by Tim Pekarek



It is not easy for me to describe how life has been lately at Karen House. I think that life in wartime has been difficult for all of us to handle. I recall that we were just gathering for our community meeting on that evening in early January when the U.S. and allies began bombing Baghdad. During the weeks to follow several community members would be spending time at vigils and demonstrations against the war. Shortly after the war began Mark and Teka were arrested with twenty others while blocking the entrance to the main federal building in downtown St. Louis. Currently there is news of a cease-fire and talks to end the war.

Throughout these weeks we have all managed pretty well with the rest of our lives. It has been fun for all of us to watch both of the Catholic Worker babies growing up – Ben born to Katrina and Jim back in September, and Terri born to Sharon in December. Sen-

nora has volunteered to be a support person for one of our guests who is due to have her child in a few days.

Jim, Katrina, and I, along with a group of friends of the community, are planning a garden on an empty piece of land on our block. With good weather we should be started soon (crocuses and snow drops are already blooming in the yard at Karen House!).

Mark and I have escaped the city for a hike in the woods once in a while. I'll not soon forget our trip to Hawn State Park on New Year's Day . . . with several inches of ice on the ground and us sliding around like penguins!

Virginia has been doing a bit of traveling and in fact made it up to Syracuse to see Pat and Karin.

I would like to end with a thank you to all for your constant support. +

Tim Pekarek rejoined the St. Louis Catholic Worker community last June after spending a few years in Chicago. He is a creative cook, a vegetarian, and an avid gardener.

FROM LATIN AMERICA

by Carol Donohue, CPPS



Today is the last day of Carnival -- a time of forgetting momentarily pain and suffering here in Bolivia.

Last night I too experienced a time of relief. A fifteen year old boy with drug problems who had lived with us for over four months before once again returning to the streets appeared at our truck asking for bread and milk. He had not been seen for over a month and we had feared the worst. He is again with us and we hope and pray he will make it this time.

So many of our people, including children, turn to drugs, inhalants and/or alcohol in order to ease the intense pain and suffering which poverty inflicts. With the threat of the cholera epidemic entering the country and all the fears about contamination the situation is worsening for the poor.

The poverty is such here in Bolivia that its harshness coupled with the fact of a 50% illiteracy rate are leading us to the brink of a social revolution. It's been evidenced with the assault on the U.S. embassy and the murder of Jorge Lonsdale. Additional violence is imminent with the forced militarization of the drug war.

The violence in the drug war isn't reaching those who are reaping its benefits. The "supposed" coca eradication program is aimed once again at the poor campesinos. The Bolivian economy is underwritten by the drug profits and there is no way Bolivia is able to pacify the U.S. by doing something which will make the Washington policymakers believe there are real efforts being made here to stop the flow of drugs.

There is no way I believe violence is justified. However, when I see the brutality and evil which the public policymakers are inflicting upon the poor by their choices, I understand a little better why the frustrations of the poor are leading them to take up arms against their brothers and sisters or to take up the weapons of self-mutilation in drugs and alcohol.

My work here in Bolivia has evolved into something much different from what I had antici-

pated. I am based at Sayaricuy, the house for the boys coming directly from the streets. I'm involved in fund raising and one of the ways I've chosen to approach this responsibility is by spending time with the older boys, listening to their stories and letting their courageous attempts at letting go of drugs serve as my motivation.

Furthermore, because I've never been one to spend all of my time inside of four walls, I also go in search of some of the young men who've gone back to the streets. It really pains me, shames me and angers me that my country (at least its policymakers), in part, is responsible for the despair and self-destruction that I witness during my searching.

I've also been given the responsibility of helping to reinsert boys back into their families. In visiting homes I again am faced with the harsh realities which the structural injustices of the world economic system are imposing.

Recently, however, I've seen and experienced a certain hopefulness and spirit of compassion. The outbreak of the war in the Persian Gulf, in spite of the hardships that will come, has brought out a real depth of caring and compassion on the part of the people here. There have been prayer vigils here and last week there was a protest march. Petitions were also sent to President Bush asking for an end to the war.

I believe Lent is a time for hope. I've been reading a booklet of Lenten meditations which was published here. In one of the reflections I was struck by the call to fidelity with God and the community, a call that cannot have limits. I was reminded once again of something I learned long ago at Cass House. I must accept the call to love without boundaries.

As we live out the Lenten season and struggle to accept God's call, let us choose to live in solidarity with God's special friends the marginalized. However, let us remember to pray daily for our own conversion as we pray also for a change of heart for the powers that be.



Carol Donohue, CPPS, is another member-in-absentia of the St. Louis Catholic Worker family. She worked at Cass House for eight years before joining the work of her sisters in Bolivia.

by Barb Prosser

It had been a full week. I am ready to call it an early night this particular Friday. It's evening, around 8:00 pm., and it's dark outside. I just want to go home.

I park my car, grab my bookbag and purse and walk across the street to my house. As I am unlocking my front door, I feel a jolt and turn around to see a young man running down my front steps and across the street to an alley that faces my house. He is carrying my purse with him.

I am left holding my bookbag, which contains, among other things, two books, one entitled, The Universe Bends Towards Justice: A Reader on Christian Non Violence in the U.S. and the other, Black and White Styles in Conflict. I had been reading these books in hopes that they might help me to write something for this Round Table Talk. I hadn't decided on a theme, as yet, but I had been thinking about several concerns, including my fear of increased violence in the United States as a result of the recent affirmation of the use of violence in the Persian Gulf and my fear of increased tensions and frustrations in relations between black and white people in my community and in my country.

So here I am watching a young man race away down the alley and into the night with my purse.

I'm angry! A rush of thoughts and feelings race through me. I scream, "You'll pay for this", and I am immediately struck by the irony of my words.

Having spent some of the evening reflecting on how to write about violence in our lives, violence on the personal level and on the community level, I am surprised at my immediate reaction of yelling out a threat of violence accompanied by vehement swearing.

Later, I am embarrassed and uncomfortable when the police bring a young man matching the description I had given and ask me to identify him as the person who took my purse. "He's too tall," I say. The look on the man's face as he whispers, "Thank you, ma'am," will haunt me for a long time.

What bothers me the most? The purse is not worth much. I am inconvenienced, and this annoys me. Mostly though, I hate the idea of feeling fearful about where I live. I hate worrying about the shadows around my house at night (Is someone hiding behind the bush

by my front door?) and about the persistent feeling that someone might silently come up behind me again. I'm angry at the power this small act of violence holds over me.

Later in the evening, I find myself praying for the young man who risked so much for a purse worth so little. I am sure that the money is gone before I begin to write these thoughts. What other acts of desperation will he take to get through the next day or the next week or the rest of the year?

So too does his attack affirm my fears of increased violence in our country. All the more reason for alarm, I think, at our celebration of a victory resulting from our recent violent actions in the Persian Gulf. As we affirm success resulting from violent means on the global level, so too will we affirm it on the domestic and the personal levels. As our neighborhoods and our community continue to crumble around us, I believe more people will experience violence in their lives with greater frequency and with less hesitation.

My immediate reaction of yelling out my anger and threatening revenge shows that I have a way to go before I can be confident about my ability to respond to violence with nonviolence, understanding and compassion. I am reminded of one of Walter Wink's reflections in Angie O'Gorman's The Universe Bends Towards Justice:

"Jesus' sayings about non-retaliation are of one piece with his challenge to love our enemies. Jesus did not advocate nonviolence merely as a technique for outwitting the enemy, but as a just means of opposing the enemy in such a way as to hold open the possibility of the enemy's becoming just as well. Both sides must win. We are summoned to pray for our enemy's transformation and to respond to ill-treatment with a love which is not only godly but also, I am convinced, can only be found in God."

I pray for this young man. I pray for our country and its leaders. I pray for God's healing in my life.



Barb Prosser is going to France in March, starting a new job in April, and getting married in October. We wish her great happiness in all three ventures.

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sustained us through the winter!**

The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to The Round Table, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO. 63106. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work with the poor. People working on this issue include: Joe Angert, Margaret Boyer, Virginia Druhe, Bill Miller, Tom Nelson, Tim Pekarek, Katrina Plato, Barb Prosser, Ellen Rehg, and Mark Scheu. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

The Round Table

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