THE Round Table

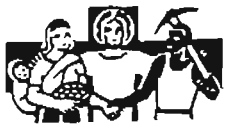
WINTER '89

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

WE ARE GOD'S WORK OF ART . . .

Eph. 2:10

WHY THIS ISSUE?



"We are God's work of art created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning God had meant us to live it." (Eph. 2:10) This quote from Ephesians reveals the union between function and beauty in human life. As God's work of art we are most beautiful when we are most fully human; in other words, when we are most like Christ.

Many people, who consider themselves non-artists, tend to be intimidated by art. The Austrian philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, once assigned art to the realm of the unsayable, along with religion and ethics. And while there is much about art that transcends or simply does not involve words, one suspects that part of Wittgenstein's motivation was an awe -- perhaps even a fear -- of art. It is too holy to draw near to; too ineffable to grasp with rough, human hands.

On the other hand, if we do not put creativity on a pedestal, we may trivialize it. "The guitar's all right, John, but you'll never make a living by it," as John Lennon's Aunt Mimi once told him darkly. But he knew better -- not that he would make a killing at it, but that he had to do it.

He had to create because that is who we are. What the Christians at Ephesus were being told is that, as God's work of art we are also all artists, whether we are conscious of it or not. Every moment in our lives is an act of creation, every encounter with another living being generates something new. But, the skeptic asks, is it art? When does the act of creation not only make something new but also make something beautiful? It does when we are living the good life that we are made for. Jesus taught us what it means to be God's work of art, and showed us how to make our lives a divinely inspired work of art.

In this issue we bring you the reflections of people who have consciously focused on our human vocation as creators. A discussion by four area artists, Mary Ann McGivern, Michael Bartz, Genevieve Cassani and Belden Lane, uncovers the political and communal dimensions of being "the secretary of God's praise." Larry Nolte and Joe Vogler draw out the lessons for life which the practice of their art has taught them. Sister Marian Cowan, CSJ, captures the spirit of Oriental Brush Painting in her spare and elegant article about this art form. Katrina Campbell relates her experiences and thoughts as an art therapist, with the help of some of our guests at Karen House who have benefitted from her loving guidance.

Art is essentially a spiritual undertaking, as the writers of these articles relate. Perhaps conscious art work, like brush painting, wood-working,silk-screening or play writing is even more of a spiritual act than any uttered prayer or liturgical rubric. For when an artist is absorbed in the concrete elements of her calling -- brush, wood, or words -- she is not thinking about the Spirit at all, but attending with great intimacy to the working of the Artist-Creator. ✝

-Ellen Rehg

Front cover drawings
by young guests
at Karen House.

the St. Louis Catholic Worker Community

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ARTISTS IN CONVERSATION

THE FOLLOWING IS A DISCUSSION AMONG MICHAEL BARTZ, GENEVIEVE CASSANI, BELDEN LANE AND MARY ANN MCGIVERN, TRANSCRIBED AND EDITED BY MARY ANN MCGIVERN.

M. Bartz: I'm a high school teacher, I also do silk screening. My first inspiration was Corita Kent, her theory of the celebration of the ordinary, transforming even advertising into the liturgical moment, exploding it, seeing the beauty in it. Wonder Bread as the Eucharist. My own time to do art has always been limited. So with the time I've had I've done political art -- the Vietnam War, Farm Workers, Central America -- and my writing has been connecting social movements: how ecology, women's liberation civil rights, anti-war movement all influenced the writing about Vietnam.

G. Cassani: I do graphic design out of the Human Rights Office, do posters, flyers, brochures for parishes, many justice and peace groups in the city. I'm educated as an artist. I dabble in pottery, silk screening, drawing, not painting.

B. Lane: I'm a dabbler too. I'm not trained in anything artistic except theology which ought to be artistic. I'm fascinated with story-telling and do some writing but I'm uneasy about considering myself an artist.

M. McGivern: I'm a dabbler too. I'm listed in the SL directory as a writer but I make about $40 a year by my writing. I've written four plays and weekly commentaries for KWMU; I'm an essayist of sorts. For being a playwright, if I don't have actors and a theater, it is hard to claim I have art going. I do write and struggle to express something or other in the writing.

When we were setting the date for this conversation, Genevieve asked me if the topic was to be spirituality in our politics. What we are supposed to talk about is how our art is expressed in our spirituality and how our spirituality is expressed in our politics, art, action. Come together in

M. Bartz: I've got to chuckle because after you first told me about this discussion I let my mind go where it will which was to politics.

I see art as coming out of the search for personal or communal liberation that leads right to politics. The artistic expression is the quest for the human spirit to free itself from the brokenness of humanity or original sin. Civilization puts fetters or shackles on us and the artist tries to break them. Our primitive urge for freedom is necessarily bound up in politics. Art as a pure aesthetic beauty for beauty's sake doesn't hold power for me any more.

Really, that was what I first thought about when I thought about my art and spirituality. I remembered the wonderful moment when I finally melded my love of literature and my politics in my dissertation, when I could see that it was possible to bring them together.

B. Lane: I like the idea of story-telling as political.

G. Cassani: I'm a School Sister of Notre Dame, originally a biology major but I took a drawing course and changed fields. In college I was fascinated that art can make a political statement, that there can be social comment/content in a work of art and I remember trying to find out who those artists were and what kinds of comments they were trying to make -- people who did drawings in times of upheaval.

What I was interested in and drew was people off the edges and on the fringes. Poverty, the faces of poor people. I don't have those drawings anymore but I can still see them. I know what I was drawn to. For me I think that spirituality, politics, art, action come together in

being able to see. I think that's the real gift. Somehow when I was able to see the fullness of the Gospel, something I never saw before in the Gospel, I was awakened, and that power to see, to be aware, opens more and more areas for me to see and want to respond to, respond by going down to National and leafleting or do a video saying don't buy grapes. Be aware and awakened and then respond.

M. McGivern: Being able to see. I think my impetus for writing is an effort to clarify so I can see. I did this morning's radio commentary on giving away toys at Karen House because I find giving toys to poor parents a painful experience, tearing me apart, and I wanted to get across political content about people who're poor. For myself I wanted the discipline of struggling for the words, to get a better sense for myself of what I experience. It's a little grandiose to call it art but it clearly is politics and spirituality.

G. Cassani: Given expression.

B. Lane: That search for language I identify with so much, the desire for the right word. In the Jewish tradition it is said if the right word were found and spoken it would bring the Messiah. The quest for language is not just a concern to be able to speak well and not at all to impress other people but Heidegger said that language is the house of being. It is part of a great impulse of Christianity to want words for experience because in the beginning was the Word. We discover a fullness of ourselves by putting our experience in words. That's what William Blake meant when he said one who isn't an artist can't hope to be a Christian. There is that drive to expression in whatever medium you have, a drive for wholeness. You see it in people without education. In fact the ones with education are somewhat deprived. The best story-telling I've ever heard was in a squatter settlement in Cuernavaca, Mexico so I identify with that search for language.

G. Cassani: The words "search" and "seeking" express a double message, an experience of prayer and of art: who I am, where I am, the searching involved in spiritual life seeking God, and in an artistic life seeking expression, -- in both there is the same frustration; you feel your limitation, the desire to control. Searching within our own limitations says so much to me about our life in the spirit, our religious experience.

M. Bartz: In my high school English class, I begin with the juniors talking about logos and trying to give them a sense of the sacredness of language. These kids aren't capable of much religious experience yet because they don't have language to express it. I feel this is tied in with liberation. They are unfree partly because they have such limited vocabularies that you can see some urges but they don't know how to express themselves. If they don't get some reverence for words and language, their growth will take longer.

B. Lane: Freire uses single words like "plow" in his teaching, generative words that open whole words of meaning.

M.McGivern: When I was seventeen in the novitiate I decided I was not going to talk about God because my language was too facile and I said things that sounded good but were apart from my experience. I didn't take up any discussion about the things of God until 1976 when I was thirty-four, half a lifetime later, when I had been picketing with the farmworkers regularly for four years. That summer I did some analysis of how the political work with the UFW had changed me and I was willing to say, Yes, I pray. The rest of me had caught up with my language and my words took on some meaning.

B. Lane: One aspect of language that interests me is the quality of the oral. There are two parts of my art: story-telling and writing, utterly different, they pull me in two different ways and I guess through my story-telling work I appreciate orality more than ever. We have a tendency to think we have to make people literate in order for them to develop and become worthy beings.

I went with the campus ministry group to Cuernavaca this last spring and it was one of the great experiences of my life. What impressed me so much was the ability of people we met and talked with who were totally illiterate but by no means without gifts of expression -- tremendous gifts of orality and consciousness of who they were and their place in the world, with political questions of a deep sort that amazed me.

There is a liberating dimension to orality that our education experiences have separated us from. We have a lot to learn from oral traditions, not only about art but about life. Not only is it being in touch with the word but being liberated

from the written word that kills everything, puts it on the sheet. The spoken word is immediate, alive, creative in its own way.

G. Cassani: Technology comes between the human voice and the thought. You just can't get that experience on paper. I'm sitting here with three writers and I'm thinking how visual I am. I am a visual person who is just beginning to use words in my life, be able to verbally express my experiences. Often it is the visual for me, images, natural images. I would love to get more into rock and land and sky and moon. If I had a chance to really do some serious art work I would go in that direction.

B. Lane: It's a real sacramental relationship with the world?

G. Cassani: Yes, in religious experience and experiencing some power of nature. They're not two different things. There are the same elements of mystery and awe and delight.

M. McGivern: Michael, you mentioned the search for personal liberation.

M. Bartz: When I was first drawn to art it seemed a personal vision and personal delight. I didn't see the communal aspects. Now I can't imagine doing something just for myself. Given the time I have, I would see any of my art as necessarily being communal.

M. McGivern: I think for me, I make political choices about my writing but I find myself writing, even without it being produced. That's the attraction, the personal intensity of the experience. I'd love to have millions see my stuff, but to have a few people see it and be moved by it is enormously satisfying. It can't touch a million people, it can only touch people one at a time.

M. Bartz: It's a failing that I don't take more chances in my art. I have limited time and I want my work to be the most perfect, but real artists do a million things and two or three are masterpieces. There is a positive aspect to personalism: you do it and maybe someone sees it and maybe they don't. I've held back from that and it's a tension in my life. If I was more open to the spirit, the muse, the Spirit, maybe I would take more risks.

Belden, do you start telling a story and not know the end?

B. Lane: I usually know where I'm going but when it works out best, I get side-tracked.

G. Cassani: The person who does a craft knows how the work is going to come out, but I think I remember Robert Frost saying when he'd start a poem he never knew how it was going to come out. To me that's art, when you don't know, when you take a risk and just start it and do it. A real

artist doesn't know the end. If you do know the end I might doubt that you are entering into that creative process.

B. Lane: C.S. Lewis had some dreams of the lion, a dwarf carrying an umbrella, other visual images, before he started the Narnia books. He didn't know where he was going at all. That's what I'm most excited about in story-telling, that you work with an image and you don't know where it's going. That is what makes art a political act. There is no more political act than an exercise of the imagination. If you can really exercise the imagination and think about other worlds crashing into this world, there is no way that can help but be political.

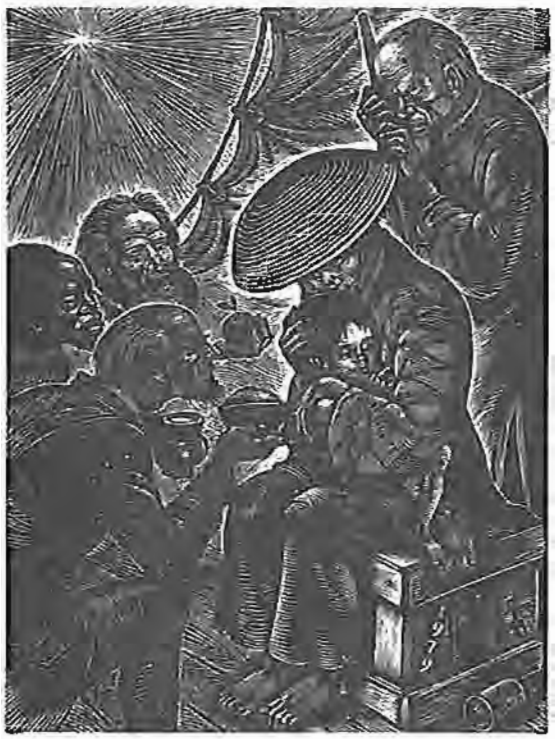
G. Cassani: It's Bruggeman's prophetic imagination.

M.McGivern: Could you also say that if its political you are recognizing that your work has a bearing on the world, that you want it to have an impact? We are using this word political very freely and I was puzzling out what I mean. We've said the political is an essential expression of how we experience the spiritual life but that begs the definition.

B. Lane: You run a danger if you create in order to use your art as a manipulative tool to advance an ideology. Then you won't have good art or good poltics. I'd define political here as Michael said, more of a communal sense of liberation, sense of social consciousness, broader sense of commonality as the context you create within. A sensitivity.

G. Cassani: I would throw in power. That you can give power to something that doesn't have power. You elevate or give power to these images, these people, the drawings I did of poor people who don't have anything, rather than draw real centers of power or images of wealth. There is a power that you can give to that which seems pretty powerless and that to me is a political statement. My scope is limited but if I had a chance, I'd like to do that.

M. Bartz: I think of the search for liberation, revolutionary movements, self-determination movements coming up with song, telling stories, making banners, murals. The cave paintings in France were empowering; the people who gazed on them were giving themselves more freedom. I feel good when I think about the spiritual and political aspects of art.



Do artists, the artists of history whose biographies we know, do they claim to have spiritual inspiration? Do they claim it's a gift, something outside themselves? Say, "It's me? I did that!" I can't remember people talking about it.

B. Lane: More often than not, people say, "I don't know where the hell it came from. It worked through me, it created through me."

M. McGivern: I've been thinking of works. Where do I experience a merger of the political and spiritual? Guernica. Also in Virgil, where Aneas weeps for the land. The poets name some of their inspiration. Van Gogh and Michelangelo, what I know of them is the same sense of an inspiration acting through them. Dante doesn't claim credit.

G. Cassani: Handel wrote the Messiah in two weeks and said, I think I have been visited by God.

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M. Bartz: I never have a sense of them boasting. I have a sense they feel humbled. We see it in those last statues of the slaves emerging, when Michelangelo was old. I see real faith there.

B. Lane: That raises the question of anonymous creation of art like medieval cathedrals.

M.McGivern: Also folk music. John McCutcheon being content to play other people's work, make contributions, and find deep satisfaction in participation in that stream of creation.

M. Bartz: This semester the juniors studied from Beowulf to Macbeth. Easily the majority, what they liked best, what stuck with them most was the Scottish ballads. They remembered them and I loved doing them. All anonymous art.

B. Lane: Writers like Kierkegaard have used pseudonyms to put themselves in another mode and create in a new way. He did philosophy under another name. That ability to get outside of yourself is one of the most beautiful things in any work of creation. That is what I long for, that feeling that something has spoken through me, has expressed itself through me and I have become, as George Herbert says, the secretary of God's praise. That somehow I have dissolved and the work is left.

M.McGivern: The most painful reason for me not to write is the fear of that process. When it happens it's wonderful, but that's after the fact. During, I don't notice. There is a part of me that dreads the risk of it, that dreads this experience of loss of self. It is like a little death.

G. Cassani: I have experienced becoming lost in what I was doing, engrossed.

"There is no more political act than an excericse of imagination."

-Belden Lane

Those kinds of experiences are similar to religious experiences, spiritual experiences.

B. Lane: Do you find yourself caught up in spurts when you can't stop?

G. Cassani: It's hard to stop. Today I was working on a simple thing and I didn't want to stop. If you do stop, something is disturbed. I do give myself, getting lost, taken in, not knowing. Mary Ann, you sound like you've done that a number of times.

but you call it dreadful.

M.McGivern: There are a couple of times when I've written something, a series of monologues in Half a Loaf that came from nowhere and I ended up shaken from the writing and never rewrote any of it. Mostly it's not so dramatic, but if I'm doing good writing, it is a loss of self — I don't particularly like spiritual experiences either. (Laughter and the sounds of agreement) I do think that's what writer's block is in me, a resistance to that.

G. Cassani: Michael, do you get lost?

M. Bartz: Apparently, I don't even hear the phone sometimes. But I do a lot of pacing around.

G. Cassani: If I really have to do something, it's like a dance. A couple of days before, I can start walking around a drawing board, doing a dozen different things, but all the time my mind is on what I need to do there. I'm working but not really working, I call it playing around. You really do need to play around.
M. Bartz: Mary Beth (Michael's spouse) knows that. I have a wild time before I get around to putting something on the paper. I'm so preoccupied she knows she really can't get a conversation out of me.
B. Lane: On the other hand, I do too much playing around. One of the hardest things is getting myself to sit down and do it. The self is involved there too, that you're afraid, Hey, maybe I won't do anything that's worth anything. (sounds of agreement)
G. Cassani: That was today. I was at the last hour of making a bulletin for church and I think I really wanted Madeline to like it. She kept saying, we'll use it for the card at Cronan's; but I kept saying, you might not like it. That's hard too, wanting it to work for somebody.
B.Lane: That's a monkey on your back, having to produce for somebody.
M.McGivern: When one of my brothers was sick and I was travelling and working on several tasks, Virginia said she'd never seen me pacing and so grouchy and ill-tempered. She asked why and I said, I'm not writing. I was not holding myself to doing the expressive work that upset me.
B. Lane: I have three unscheduled days coming up and I am determined to sit down and write. I do a lot of journaling but to sit down and write formally has been a real problem. I think about it as an exercise of wiggling the pen. Orthodox Jews, when they pray "doven", go back and forth, prayer shawl on, and that motion of the body is seen to be honoring God. Well, I wield the pen, I do the exercise for its own end. I have found in the past that when I start that way, without any sense of creativity but just making myself do the basic things, get the pencil sharpened, get the yellow legal pad, get the paints, get all the paraphernalia, then just start doing it, then that opens up things and before long you start getting to it.
G. Cassani: Like prayer. Daily discipline and the doing and the getting whatever you need. Give yourself the time no matter what.
M. Bartz: I take a lot of time getting it together. (much laughter and agreement) Virtually every writer says that you have to have the discipline to just sit down and do it.
B. Lane: Do you find it the same way in terms of visual art?
M. Bartz: Yes, that's what I was talking about before. My bete noir is that it won't be the right thing and so I have to really force myself to just do it, make the sketch, start cutting the stencil.
B. Lane: If anything, I've got to drive the spirituality out of the damn thing. There's too much danger thinking I've got to wait till the spirit speaks and zaps through me. To hell with that. Just wiggle the pencil. (general agreement, vigorous)

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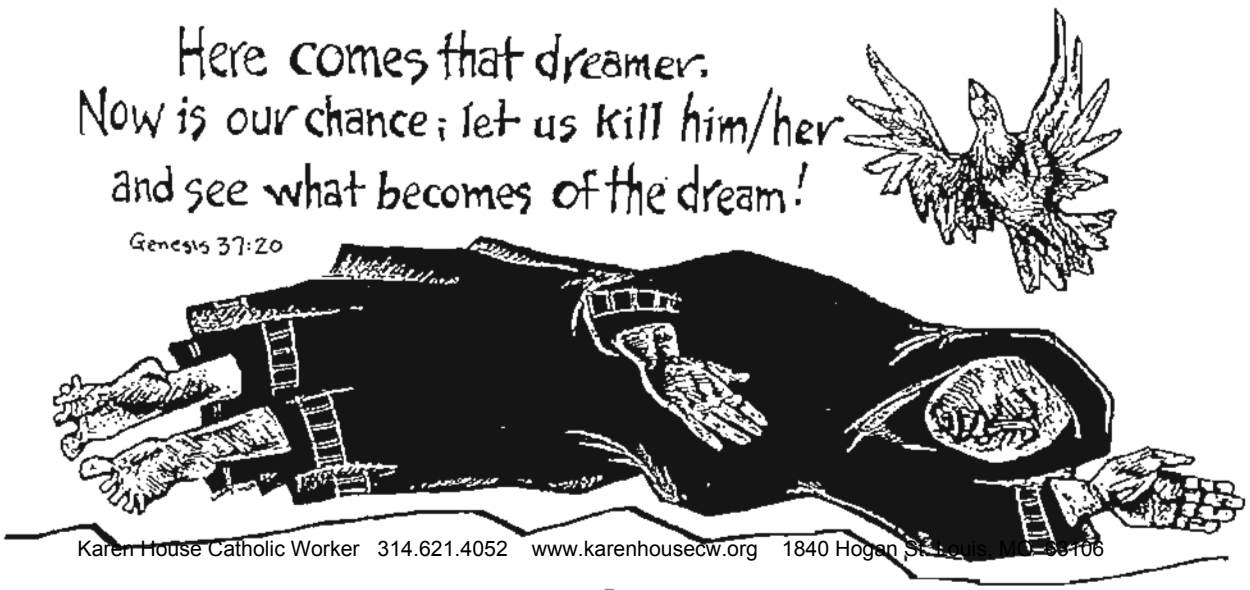

THE ART OF PRAYER – THE PRAYER OF ART

by Marian Crowley, C.S.J.

Many years have passed since I was first introduced to the art of Oriental Brush Painting, and there has been precious little time since then to devote myself to growth in this wonderfully ancient medium of expression. However, it only takes a quiet moment to experience the prayerful centering of this art.

As simple as the painting itself are the materials used: rice paper, water, a stick of ink, a stone well and one or two bamboo brushes. Each of these elements, beautiful in themselves, through the hands of the artist enter into a dialectic to produce a new beauty, a one-of-a-kind poem in line and fluid form.

Preparation of the materials is an integral part of the experience. The time it takes to grind the ink into the stone well leads the mind away from the cares and preoccupations of the external world into the inner silence of creative space. There is no rushing the process of rubbing the hard stick of ink against the watery walls of the grinding stone - rubbing, rubbing, rubbing ever so patiently until the desired blackness is achieved.

Dip the brush into the water first and do a few strokes on practice paper to attain the balance of hand and brush. Hold the brush straight up and down, perpendicular to the paper, touch the paper lightly for the finest of line, plump the brush more firmly against the paper and lift it as it glides across the welcoming surface. Incredible! A leaf, a bird's wing, the body of a fish - with one simple stroke! The loaded brush together with varying pressures against the paper bring into being such subtleties of tone and form that will delight the spirit.

With only an approximate idea of what the desired outcome should be, the artist enters into the process of creating - not sketching first, but contemplating the paper and letting an innate sense of design guide the placement that becomes bamboo or crysanthemum or water lily or carp. Totally one with the act of creating- the mind, the spirit, the emotions, the hand, the ink, the brush, the paper all blend in together and flow into one another in order to express Infinite Beauty.

One of the most contemplative of art forms, Oriental Brush Painting absorbs one's whole being into the creative moment and releases it with the simplicity of a sigh. Uncluttered in materials and expression, it draws one to a meeting with the unencumbered God - artist and Artist at one in the act of creation. The art of prayer becomes the prayer of art. ✦

Marian Cowan, CSJ, along with being an artist, shares her gifts as spiritual director, educator and religious leader on several continents.

ART AS HEALING

by Katrina Campbell

Art is "the glue for everybody." That is what Ann Dugan told me recently, a woman in West Plains, who along with her husband provides art for a community of schizophrenic adults. "Unless you can use your hands you can't get well."

I believe our society is breeding spiritual illness. So many people are in need of nurturing; so few are in healthy relationships or supportive families. Living at Karen House I have seen the illness of loneliness, the starvation for companionship. I have seen self esteem turn to self hate. I have seen bitterness and mistrust. I have seen greed. I have seen empty eyes and lethargic bodies.

The creative arts, use of our hands and the expression of our hearts, can be an act of healing where words do not suffice. The images in a creative work are a reflection of the creator's experiences. Words cannot totally express experiences of pain, alienation, closeness, fear or intense joy. Yet the act of creating is a moment of contemplation where a certain amount of spiritual energy is released, a personal rhythm is found, an expression of self is put forth.

Some guests at Karen House have asked for art materials to pass the time or to express a thought. Guests like Kay view drawing as a time for contemplation. When Cathy (diagnosed split personality) lived at the house she asked for markers and watercolors with which she painted fluid pictures of personal meaning and symbolism. Jill (a severely abused woman) drew a portrait of me once to say, "This is how I see you," when she couldn't find the words. I've seen a couple of guests sketch houses either out of indignation for their situation or dreams of a home they could call their own. In the simple interaction with the medium the guests are involved in a healing act of sharing feelings, releasing tension and possibly gaining insight.

A couple of years ago a guest stayed with us who found drawing to be a catharsis toward healing. Yvonne was a sullen, deeply depressed woman when she arrived at Karen House. She sought nurturing relationships from the community yet often struggled to share the emotions welled up within her. I encouraged Yvonne to draw with other guests and I remember her resisting. Later she decided with a pout to draw on some papers with captions suggesting a theme. She chose such captions as, "Draw your worst nightmare." Her drawings were simple stick figures but extremely graphic expressions of pain. I hadn't known the extent of Yvonne's hurt until she began to draw. These drawings portrayed the sexual abuse done to her by different men in her life and the emotional trauma of having her children taken from her. Yvonne found it easier to talk about the abuse using the drawings to refer to. Over the months she stayed with us she was able to articulate her pain and fears more freely. Once out in the open she could address her fears rather than be haunted by them.

Another guest, Barb, has recently discovered the healing potential art has for her. Barb has been a guest at the house on several occasions over the last four years and has become a good friend and cribbage opponent to many members of the community. Barb's affection for artistic endeavors developed this summer. She was in an art therapy group at Craft Alliance for women battered or sexually abused as adults or children, sponsored by the Women's Self Help Center. She offered to share the

Katrina Campbell and Jim Plato, Karen House community members, recently announced their engagement. They are planning a June wedding.

healing significance of her art projects as examples for this article.

The images in the artist's work are often reflections of that person's inner reality. The observer can learn about the artist by noting the content and process of a spontaneous work. One of Barb's pieces was a collage of magazine clippings symbolizing how she felt or what she would like to be. She chose stuffed animals because they are a soft comfort to her and "because they don't hurt me," - they don't threaten her as people do. There were also pictures of rivers, seas and waterfalls. Water symbolizes for Barb relaxation, but also how life can be rough, then calm; as she says, "Things can get better."

Rather than holding grief, confusion or anger within, the use of one's hands and mind to create can be an alternative to self violence or destruction. Barb realized this through the process of forming a clay sculpture. She molded clay into a ball, wrapped string around it, then put hole in the middle to represent a volcano "ready to explode." After fixing the piece which burned off the string, she saw the ball as a person. "Until I realized how I really felt I couldn't do anything. The project in clay helped me learn how to express myself without the use of mental violence."

Barb also gained the insight through her work that healing takes time. Her last piece was a wooden sculpture of an hour glass which she is still working on. Reflecting on the project she said the time it took her to decide what to do with the wood reminded her of how long it can take to heal. The amount of work and care the sculpture takes reminded her of the patience involved in healing." If I hang in there life will be better in the long run. " I try not to be too disappointed if things go wrong." The concept of the hourglass itself she compared to the healing effort. "Time never really runs out like sand in an hourglass unless you decide not to turn the hourglass over."

Creative expression is a form of communication between the unconscious and the conscious realms of one's mind. When the two are connected in visual art one can look at it and see a statement or reflection of oneself. Sometimes one can gain an insight that could not have come from words or reason.

I believe our society's alienating aspects stifle our creative expressions. As God is creative so we, in God's image, are blessed with a creative nature to be expressed in several possible ways. If not expressed a part suffers. These expressions should be encouraged to heal our sufferings and keep us whole. +

NOTE ON COMMERICAL THEATRE

You've taken my blues and gone --
You sing 'em on Broadway
And you sing 'em in Hollywood Bowl,
And you mixed 'em up with symphonies
And you fixed 'em
So they don't sound like me.
Yep, you done taken my blues and gone.

You also took my spirituals and gone.
You put me in Macbeth and Carmen Jones
And all kinds of Swing Mikados
And in everything but what's about me --
But someday somebody'll
Stand up and talk about me,
And write about me —
Black and beautiful --
And sing about me,
And put on plays about me!
I reckon it'll be
Me myself!

Yes, it'll be me.

Langston Hughes

Can a clay pot argue with th
it, one vessel among earthe
Does the clay say to its fa
does the thing the potter sh

Thus says Yahweh, the Holy
"Is it for you to question
and to dictate to me what my

PROSTITUTION OF TH

In the Middle Ages
the theatre
was considered
as an efficient way
of preaching.
They liked to produce
Mystery Plays.
They aimed to preach

one who fashioned
vessels?
ioner, "What are you making?"
ed say, "You have no skill?"!

e who fashions Israel:
about my children
ands should do?:
Isaiah 45:9,11

THEATRE

and not to pander.
Pandering to the crowd
has brought the degradation
of the theatre.
the theatre started
in the Church.
The theatre has ended
in the gutter.

Peter Maurin

PROSTITUTION OF ART

In the Middle Ages
the artists
were not called artists,
they were called artisans.
When the artists
were artisans
they had the community spirit.
They had the community spirit
because they believed
in the doctrine
of the Common Good.
Now that the artists
do no longer believe
in the doctrine
of the Common Good
they sell their work
to art speculators.
As Eric Gill says,
"They have become
the lap-dogs
of the bourgeoisie.

Peter Maurin

That hour before dawn. The night was rolling back and I was squatting, cold and cramped, in a duck blind with my uncle's shotgun across my knee. My family was not much on hunting but my uncle had volunteered to introduce me to the sport. Now I wondered why I'd come.

Slowly day dawned. The sky lightened, birds called. I fidgeted and breathed into my hands. Time and the world seemed to stand still.

Eventually the day arrived fully. At last my uncle stood up and stretched. It was time to go. "But we didn't get anything." In four hours we'd only seen a few ducks, much too far away. My uncle replied with a shrug. "Yeah, well..."

WAITING ON CREATION

by
Larry Nolte

I was only ten or so at the time and didn't get the point. Uncle Bob was more interested in just being out there than he was in shooting ducks. In his own way, without either of us being aware of it, he had shown me two disciplines that form the crux at the intersection of creativity and spirituality.

The first was easy: waiting. There are two kinds of hunting whether you are hunting ducks, images, meaning, or God. You can set off to track the quarry down or you can wait for it to come to you. This waiting in creative work is letting it simmer in its own juices, bringing the bits of a story or unrelated images together, identifying a problem or picking out a major theme and dropping it into your subconscious for a while to let it stew. Keep the heat on low for days or months (years!) and as Einstein said, "When you least expect, an idea will present itself and say, "Here I am'."

The second is much more difficult: acceptance. To be able to shrug and say, "Yeah, well..." Forgetting to weigh the results as the full measure of your success. The greatest barrier to convincing most people that they are creative is the idea that artists are in control of the final result of their efforts. That what is on the paper should look like something they see in their mind. But when the creative process heats up you must relinquish control. The pen leads the hand, the story reveals its secrets to the writer, dancers are swept away by their own feet.

* * * *

Creative people who live in faith will find a need sometime to do work with a spiritual dimension, work which God may use in some small way. When that happens these two disciplines will facilitate

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Larry Nolte has been a loyal supporter of our work for many years. His art work graces the facing page and several others throughout this issue.

putting your work more consciously in God's hands and getting out of the way.

Scripture is filled with calls for us to wait actively, staying wakeful for the bridegroom, watching for the thief in the night. "See," says the Spirit, "I make all things new." But we find ourselves still waiting, waiting.

When you put your creative work at God's service you may find a wonderful thing happens: God works with you and allows you to be a co-creator in a work of the Spirit. Waiting like this is a contemplative act and transforms creative work into prayer.

The finished product in this partnership may surprise you. Unclenching your fist, letting loose of the need to control the direction a work takes will allow the Spirit to lead your work to places you are not likely to get to on your own. But now the product (the drawing, photo, story...) is not the result, which is an end probably completely hidden. Did this creative work, done in spiritual desire, bear some fruit? Perhaps only God will know. Just as waiting becomes contemplation, so acceptance becomes non-attachment. Don't try to weigh the results.

* * * *

The world and its people are the creative act of God. God waits on us, watching, working tenderly as God's creation, each one of us, unfolds. Relinquishing all force in the process and ready to accept us one and all. Within the confines of this cold and cramped world God waits. It is that hour before dawn and the night is falling back. ✝

INTERIOR WOODWORKING

by Joe Vogler

A few years ago I remember talking to a friend about where she went to school and what she studied. I was surprised to hear that her major was chemistry. It seemed odd because she's a more introspective, "right brain" type of person. When I asked why this was her major she said it was because she was never very good at that sort of thing and thought that if she majored in it, she would get more balanced in her thinking. I've often thought about this when I've tried to do things that challenge my nature. I know in some ways I'm a lot like her. I can remember when I was a child I loved to just sit and look out my window. These were times without many thoughts. I would just be watching the way the sun fell on the trees and listening to the birds singing. A lot of things about me have changed over the years but I have to say I still get great pleasure in mindlessly observing nature.

Taking up woodworking for me has been in some ways like my friend's chemistry was to her. Finding a balance between being a mindless watcher and a mindful worker has been one of my wishes. There are a lot of things about woodworking that make it impossible to have professional results and be "spaced out" at the same time. Because of this my work is a great

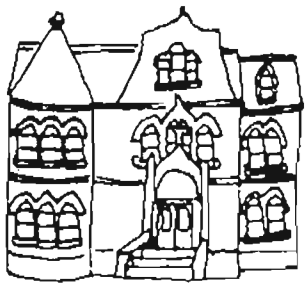
I think in order for anything we do to develop into an art there has to be an element of personal transformation. I know for my work to be good, I've got to be "present" while it's being done. This seems to be true of almost everything else I do as well. The problem I run into is that it's often not at all easy for me to invest all of my attention into what I'm doing. There are so many distractions. The past is filled with episodes and people that leap up in my mind right when I should be watching what I'm doing, making plans for the future, even planning my next step in what I'm working on, can cause serious mistakes. It's interesting for me to think about how I deal with these types of distractions while I'm working. One of the simplest solutions I've found is to just take a few seconds and become aware of my breathing. I guess it's one thing that is always present.

When I'm building something that is large or complicated there are many things to coordinate. I generally plan projects with scale drawings, material lists and cutting lists but still there always seem to be problems that have to be worked out during construction. Seeing them before destroying expensive materials is important. This leads to the situation I find myself in more often than not, i.e., trying to see ahead to the problems while also putting all my attention into what I'm doing. Somewhere I read that for meditation to be most effective we should practice being aware and mindful in quiet times and during our everyday activities. I can really relate to that with my woodworking. It seems that when I feel at peace with myself and my work, problems have a way of working themselves out. This is a lesson I keep learning and forgetting nearly every day. What I'm really discovering is that it's not the distractions I have to deal with as much as it is my own state of mind. I'm truly thankful to have a job like woodworking that challenges me to be at peace and tells me when I'm not.

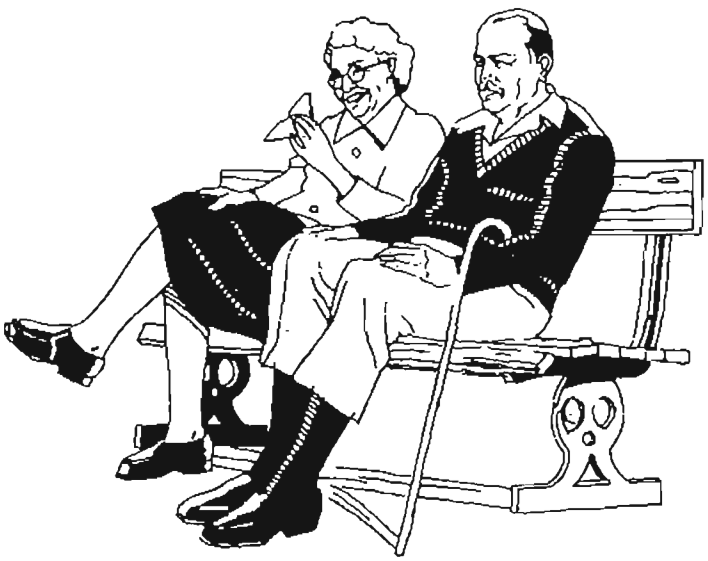
Joe Vogler, and his wife Beth, frequently host sumptuous potlucks where good food, friendship and folk music abound.

FROM KAREN HOUSE

by Mark Scheu



Thanksgiving is always a special time at Karen House. We usually have a liturgy and this year it was distinguished by the baptism of Clare and Joe's child, Issac. It is gratifying that even though Joe and Clare no longer reside at the house, they have remained very close and involved, visit often, and above all Joe still takes the Sunday morning house shift in his inimitable way. They will always be very much part of the community, especially now that Ellen is Issac's Godmother and I am



his Godfather!

Yet what makes this day holy for me is the Thanksgiving meal. An ironic trade-off takes place every year. Many of the present guests go elsewhere to celebrate the holiday — to friends and family in the area. We are glad for them. Remarkably, this does not leave the seats in our dining room empty. Each year they are filled by former guests, friends who have stayed with us in the past but now have a home elsewhere. They return to us on this day, perhaps to commemorate the holiday in a special way, perhaps just to renew a relapsed acquaintance, perhaps to assure themselves that we are still here and value their presence. Such a meal truly offers a glimpse of the heavenly banquet which is promised, where a seat is reserved for each of us.

This year one of these returning guests remarked to me that even though she had her own place now she really missed living here at the house. She awkwardly dismissed the remark with a laugh, saying how silly it was, of course, to prefer life here to her own Section 8 apartment. The tone of her voice betrayed the longing in her soul. Don't misunderstand me — we have no heaven on earth here. Much to the contrary, the house is full of wounded people (including of course the community) groping to find some meaning in an often cruel and perplexing world.

The sentiment in her voice brought home to me an essential distinction between the Catholic Worker and the welfare agencies which are to serve the poor. The state had succeeded in providing for her — she now had a modest income and a subsidized apartment. One can surely ask no more of the state — it had fulfilled its responsibility. But she was not happy, she was not at peace. Her needs were not truly met. She had been rewarded with an isolated, lonely and meaningless existence in a strange neighborhood. Her basic biological needs had been met, but the longings of her soul for community, purpose, supportive friends — all these perfectly human needs were denied. She knew this but was almost ashamed to give voice to that truth.

Since I moved into the house three months ago I have felt more connected to

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Mark Scheu, Karen House community member and resident anarchist, continues to gain proficiency at playing his "squeeze box" — the English concertina.

the lives of our guests than when I lived only a couple of blocks away. It is more difficult for me to extricate my life from their fate. My response remains woefully and grudgingly inadequate, and I am daily challenged by the spirit of sacrifice which animates others here. Still I take hidden pleasure in what I perceive as a trend in the community — to allow the guests more time to sort out their lives before they are encouraged to move on. I think we are becoming less of a shelter and more of a house of hospitality. This impression may be subjective — just a reflection of the vantage point of my new home.

In any case, I am all the more convinced by this incident that we must not compromise in our work the radical Gospel vision passed to us by Dorothy Day. For in many respects we are in conflict with the very nature of the state. I certainly applaud the modest response of civic authorities to the plight of the homeless, however inadequate. I do not shun appropriate cooperation with them or fail to appreciate the good work done by the highly-motivated employees that we have had contact with.

We are not the handmaid of the state and must resist cooptation by it. We are called as individuals to respond to those in need, not to buttress "Holy Mother State," as Dorothy has said. In our time the state is encroaching more and more boldly in every aspect of human activity, converting us into lifeless consumers and unquestioning automatons. We must be vigilant in preserving our disparity. It is not our aim to anesthetize their wounds with medication so they can "better cope" with that harsh and uncaring world. It is the world in need of reform, not those wounded by it.

The Catholic Worker is to strive to embody the love of God by doing the works of mercy on a personal level for the least of these our brothers and sisters, and "to build a new society in the shell of the old." Despite popular misconception, the Worker is not a band-aid organization. There is a vision towards which we pray and work. It is not the vision of the liberal welfare state, nor of the conservative national-security state, nor of the communist bureaucratic state. We work for "a new heaven and a new earth," the reign of God, the "constitution" of which is fully given in the Gospel and the fulfillment of which is wholly dependent on the one whom we profess — Jesus Christ. ✝

FROM LITTLE HOUSE

by Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.

Jackie Pate who lived with us died on October 26. Her 18 year old daughter Shawn and Virginia and I were with her all that day in the intensive care unit at Barnes. Jackie had been diagnosed with cancer this past July and her illness progressed much more rapidly than any of us expected. Her last admission to the hospital was for radiation treatment, not because anyone thought she was near death. Two days before she died she told us, "I think I should go home because I don't feel so sick there. Here they keep finding more things wrong with me."

That last morning when her blood pressure dropped drastically, Jackie told the doctors she didn't want any extraordinary means taken if her heart stopped. We visited with her. Teka and her son-in-law came to visit as well. Around noon she lost consciousness and at 5:15 she very slowly stopped breathing. It was a simple, easy death, very quick. She was sick a lot through the summer and fall; but she never had the pain she feared.

One evening a month earlier we were chatting and I said, "If you could be anywhere in the world right now where would you be?" and she said, "In heaven." A few days before she died I stopped by the hospital on my way to see a play and she said, "I've never seen a play, But I think I would like to go to one. I think I'd like the experience." On another visit I told her about the Nerinx auction of ten minutes free in a supermarket for two that sold for $1200. Since they wouldn't let her eat she lay in bed fantasizing about the food she could fit in a grocery cart in ten minutes. She said she'd load up on shrimp and crab and I told her I didn't know she had such expensive tastes. We planned the menus we'd fix when she got home.

Jackie first came to Karen Huose more than a year ago, disoriented, thinking she was possessed by the devil. She was diagnosed schizophrenic and the drugs she was given were healing. She was able to get a job as a bus girl at Pope's Cafeteria in the South County shopping

mall. She earned minimum wage, no benefits, and rode the bus three hours a day. She moved in at the Little House in February because she couldn't afford anything more, because people feared she wouldn't stay on her medecine if she lived alone, and because she wanted to live in community.

What I didn't know when she moved in was how much she'd suffered in her life, how hard she worked, how loving she was,or how funny she could be. She told me how her husband had left them when her

Mary Ann McGivern, SL, continues to work on economic conversion, love her dog, do a Monday morning commentary on KWMU, and work in her garden in the rain.

daughter was eight, rent unpaid, enormous utility bills. She cleaned houses and bussed tables to pay the bills and raise her daughter and son.

Her daughter showed us, as we watched by Jackie's bed in the intensive care unit, how when she was little and they'd walk down the street, Jackie would hold her hand and squeeze it three times, a secret sign that meant "I love you."

During the treatment of her illness Jackie suffered at the hands of the medical and social service bureaucracies. She spent six weeks in Columbia getting radiation she could have received as an outpatient here among people she knew and loved because she was threatened with no treatment at all if she tried to insist on anything else. It seems that treatment was chosen without scans to assess whether the cancer had metasticized. Certainly during previous stays in psych wards she never had a Pap smear which could have diagnosed her illness much earlier. No one ever explained to her how applications for benefits would be processed and in fact, for weeks they were not. The medicaid officer told Jakcie she ought to apply instead for general relief which would have limited her health care to Regional and denied her SSI benefits she was eligible for. The day before she died her SSI application was approved and she died believing she was leaving money for her funeral and her debts. But because the check had not been issued when she died she was denied all benefits.

The individual nurses and doctors and social workers I met at Ellis Fischel Hospital in Columbia, and at Barnes Hospital and clinics were very fine. They told us from the beginning that Jackie's tumor was too big for surgery and that she was dying. But some residents did not explain the treatment plan to her. Some presumed she was unable to make her own choices. Some ignored chronic systems or focused more on her anti-psychotic drugs than her need for care for her nephrostomy.

It is almost impossible to question health care decisions on behalf of another person who is not your relative. Our battle with bureaucrats on Jackie's behalf was a limping effort, burdened by our own grief and lack of knowledge and by responsibility for other work.

My grief is for the loss of Jackie. Grief is a complex experience: part anger, part numbness, part fond recollections that break into the rest of life like a non sequitur. Along with this grief I have a searing anger for our system that denies human rights and dignity to the poor. My anger blocks my efforts to tell you who Jackie was and my grief engulfs me with helplessness, reduces me to tears. I keep trying because Jackie's life and death are important to us all.

FROM LATIN AMERICA

by Virginia Druhe

I write these reflections in St. Louis yet I am most literally "from Central America." Due to the extravagance of God's grace and many friends I have spent two of the last three months in Latin America. I spent two weeks each in Panama and Bolivia on an exchange of nonviolence sponsored by Fellowship of Reconciliation and Servicio Paz Y Justicia. That was followed by two weeks each in Salvador and Nicaragua, visiting Ann Manganaro and Mary Dutcher and doing a little work for Witness for Peace. Then in November I was presented with a sudden opportunity to accompany Salvadoran refugees from Mesa Grande Camp in Honduras to the Salvadoran border as they returned to reclaim their homes and lands from war.

These countries are at very different stages in their history and developments, yet everywhere we went one theme became a refrain: the popular movement. In every country there was talk of repression, the role of the military, economic deterioration, U.S. military and economic domination. Yet the response to all of these issues, the hope, the balance, was always "the popular movement." We asked about democracy, people told us about the popular movement. We asked about nonviolence, people told us about the popular movement. We asked about the role of the church, people told us about the popular movement.

Panama's social context is startlingly similar to the U.S. The "crisis" of the last year had doubled unemployment to U.S. levels. The Civilian Crusade, a nonviolent effort of the business class to displace Norriega, has disintegrated -- and given nonviolence a bad name in the process. Many people told us there is no short-term solution to Panama's problems because there is no popular base: enough Panamanians are not socially and politically active to demand or support a solution that would truly respond to the needs of the people. "We must simply dig in and do the long term work of creating the base." The churches were trying to organize a national debate on the crisis and its solution, but found themselves stymied because there is no one who truly represents the popular sector--the ordinary people, the unvested interests.

Bolivians spoke in a coherent voice of their problems: massive poverty under IMF mandated "reforms" and drug runners buying off the government who buy off the military to maintain a facade of democracy while social gains of the last thirty years have been wiped out in two years. We found in Bolivia, however, no clear sense of how to respond to these problems. One woman put it very succinctly: "For thirty years the miners' union and the union movement have been the backbone of the popular movement here. They have been destroyed in two years by layoffs and buyouts. We are disoriented; we are in disarray and cannot respond in a united way to these losses."

Salvador, by contrast, is full of excitement and hope. "The popular movement is so strong! Anything can happen." Salvadorans are amazing. The workers are organized, but so are the unemployed. Neighborhoods, but also homeless victims of the earthquake, and even refugees who have fled the country are organized. Through all this organization, with the support of the churches, more and more coherent demands for peace are being made. Wide consensus has been articulated now for a negotiated end to the war, for a society of political pluralism, mixed economy, without foreign domination.

Nicaragua is always an interesting reverse view of popular movements. There

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Virginia Druhe, Karen House community member, wonders why in all her travels to Latin America she has not amassed enough miles to get a free trip to Greece like Mary Ann McGivern did.

the questions are: How does one keep the vitality and immediacy of a popular movement when it is institutionalized in the government? How close can government and popular movements come? How separate must they remain? How can popular movements confront economic and military intervention?

All of this vigorous organizing and analyzing and praying and building makes our U.S. democracy look a little pale by comparison. It calls to mind a study I read years ago which concluded that the heart of democracy does not lie in elections. Elections are the fruit of democracy, not its source. The quality of the democratic process is in the "secondary political organizations." It is not in the Republican or Democratic parties but in the Freeze movement, the pro- and anti-abortion activists, the Kiwanis club when it takes a stand on gun control, the political committees of unions and churches, the thousands of study groups and newsletters and the radio call-in shows. A moment's reflection convinces me that is very much the case.

Several weeks of this notion jostling around in the back of my mind began to remind me of something else-the Holy Spirit. Isn't that after all how we believe the Spirit sustains the church? Buildings and committees and liturgies do not a church make. It is the presence of the Spirit in thousands of hearts, in thousands of small acts of love and commitment that breathes the life of God into external artifacts of a church.

It now seems obvious to me that anything as central to human life as political freedom would carry the marks of the life of the Spirit. True democracy will never consist in something so contained as voting. Freedom requires more of us — far more work, more commitment, more participation in the conflicts and struggles of our society. The poorest people in Central America have shown me that only by creating true community can we create power and freedom for all. ✦

There is an obvious analogy between pop art as a cult and "religionless religion" as a religion. In either case the total acceptance of mass secular culture as the one significant reality, and the consequent rejection of "spirituality"... is taken as the only form of honesty. Art without art -- the abandonment of the artist's "special experience"; religion without mention of God and religion, but simple openness to "the world"... The sins of art and of religion in our Western culture have been so great.

Thomas Merton

Round Table Talk

By Harriette Lane Baggett

O God, Who preserved human nature in wondrous dignity and still more wondrously transformed it, grant us, through the mystery of this water and wine, partnership in His divinity, who was pleased to become partner in our humanity, Jesus Christ, Your Son, Our Lord....

That is the prayer we said in the old Latin Mass when the priest put drops of water into the wine. Now a diluted version is said quietly by the priest or deacon. I think we are paying for the diminishment of that prayer and the subsequent downplaying of the radical concept of our participation, even in this life, in divinity. This startling concept comes to us from the New Testament. St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross made much of it. It was dear to Rahner, Merton and Teilhard.

This human sharing in divinity is not a dimension of life which can be classified or described in physical or biological categories or terms. It is spiritual and grows from our moral sense. That of our humanity which is describable in physical and biological terms has "wondrous dignity" in that it is the necessary though not sufficient basis for God's dynamic presence on this earth — in us. When God transforms our human nature we move into the moral, beyond the physical and biological. Though dependent on those latter dimensions and even reflected in brainwaves, the moral dimension of life is where the meaning of each life resides. And that meaningfulness can never be totally measured or described by physics and/or biology, as can the total actuality of a fetus or irreversibly comatose person.

In the moral dimension of our lives we image God and are capable of love. It is there that we are noble or ignoble, bored or involved. It is in the moral dimension that we are set apart from the rest of creation but still tied to it as the fragrance of the flower is to the stem. Fittingly, Adam and Eve first appear as full-blown adults in a garden.

In grappling with the problems of the value of individuals at various points along the human life continuum, many seem to ignore the vast inequality between the instances of human life with the actual capacity for divinity and instances of human life lacking the biological requirements for that sublime capacity.

Perhaps a reemphasis on that radical prayer from the old Latin Mass would help bishops and moral theologians find the true value of human beings moving along the human life continuum. To insist on equality all along that continuum denies the supremacy of God, who deigns to raise us to openness to actual partnership in the Divine only at certain points along that continuum. To insist on that equality reduces all human life to a dull pastime of following rules within a restricted horizon. That equality defeats the possibility of the realization of Teilhard's vision of a love-fired civilization, Merton's sublime concept that in God we find our true identities and Rahner's exalted ideal of the human as essentially slanted toward the transcendent.

With bishops and moralists leering at those stages of human life devoid of partnership with God instead of opening their eyes to the active presence of God in this world and blessing that, how can we hope for a transformation into the reign of God?

We might try restoring our sense of awe at the "mystery of this water and wine" and sing to God with the psalmist, "your love is greater than (human) life itself." (Ps. 63, The Jerusalem Bible) +

Harriette Lane Baggett, Karen House community member, who is now grandmother of three, recently surprised us all by revealing a serious talent for tap dancing.

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All gifts to the Catholic Worker go to a common fund which is used to meet the daily expenses of our work.

Gifts to our work are not tax-deductible. As a community, we have never sought tax-exempt status since we are convinced that justice and the works of mercy should be acts of conscience which come at a personal sacrifice, without governmental approval, regulation or reward. We believe it would be a misuse of our limited resources of time and personnel (as well as a violation of our understanding of the meaning of community) to create the organizational structure required, and to maintain the paper-work necessary for obtaining tax-deductible status. Also, since much of what we do might be considered "political," in the sense that we strive to question, challenge and confront our present society and many of its structures and values, some would deem us technically ineligible for tax-deductible, charitable status.

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