

“STRANGE
FRUIT
THOUGHT,
IN’IT



FAA’VER?”



WHY
DON'T
WE



HOPE BEYOND HOPE
THAT YAHWEH WILL SAVE YOU
"MY PEOPLE ISRAEL"

Today's prophets are the peace campaigners; the people who will not accept the necessity of evil, those who hope beyond hope; whose hope, that is, does not come from "the world" but from God.

And such hope is needed to endure the insults and imprisonment that are meted out by "the law".

It is easier to give in, to accept that, "It is just the way things are", that people are bound to be imprisoned, starved, oppressed. "The world is just like that", or, "It's human nature".

But through faith the world is not just like that.

And not only have we the ability but we have a responsibility to ourselves, to one another, and to the eternal spirit to transform the world into a mirror of love.

We hope that in some small way this magazine might present an opportunity for many disillusioned people, who nevertheless believe in and value what Christ was about, to be able to join with one another, to co-operate in realising that love on earth. A love we can offer to all.

A Simple Thought about "the World"

For Jesus, Satan was the ruler of this world.
For us, "the world" is the society we live in,
and "Satan" is the evil we see in the world.
In the jargon of today,
our "structures" are ruled by Satan.
That is why we see so much evil in the world,
even though the individual people
are not usually all that wicked.

St Paul said that the god of this world
has blinded the minds of the unbelievers
to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel
of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God.

It is because the very structures of society
belong to Satan, that they always
serve his purposes rather than ours,
and the structures blind us, so that
we cannot see the evil they do.

The Good News of the Gospel is that
Jesus has delivered us from the dominion of darkness,
from our structures and our blindness,
and transferred us to his kingdom,
because he has overcome the world.

God's kingdom is still to come,
but Jesus has shown us how to live
in this world, but not of it, until he comes.
He showed us how to live in relation to
money and status, to group loyalty
and to power, the things that form our society,
as explained by Fr Albert Nolan OP
in his book "Jesus Before Christianity".

If we live the way Jesus showed us,
we will live free from the rule of Satan,
and free from the blindness he imposes.

But we will not bring in the kingdom.
God will do that when he is ready.
It is only then that we shall have
the new heaven and the new earth,
from which the present ruler of this world
has been cast out.

++++++

RSV scripture references and allusions (to be studied):- Mt 4.8-9, 5.43-44,
6.10, 24.36, Mk 10.42-45, 12.38-40, Lk 6.29-30, 6.32, 14.7-11, 14.26, Jn 12.31,
16.33, 18.36, 2 Cor 4.4, Gal 3.28, Col 1.13, Rev 21.1.

CRUMBS!

People whose bellies are hungry, we know how to feed. We can condemn mountains of butter, rivers of wine, wheat and fruit ploughed in because there is no market, no buyer. We can tell the materially rich to share goods with the poor, and quote prophets of the Old Testament as our authority-source, but does the preacher know how to feed spiritual hunger?

In the house of Dives, the preacher, western man sits at the door, full of sores, waiting for the rich man to throw him scraps. The Lazarus of the western world is told he must lose his sores to be acceptable, become like the people of 2000 or 3000 miles away. There is no loaf left for him to share, only scraps left over from those far away people, like the scraps picked up by a Syro-Phoenician woman long ago, from the loaf of the Law and the Prophets. Yet, even with scraps of faith, she could recognise the Anointed One and receive healing of a loved one, of his generosity.

A lay apostolate group was talking about the Syro-Phoenician woman one evening, about the Jews being the 'spiritually rich' who possessed the two fish of the Law and Prophets, the five loaves of the five Books of Moses; and how the pagans roundabout picked up crumbs of faith from this rich man's table. A woman in the group said "That's us, fed with crumbs of faith." Baptised as a baby, educated in a convent, a regular attender at mass, active in her parish, yet she and the many who agreed with her, felt fed with 'crumbs of faith', just like Lazarus and the Syro-Phoenician long ago.

Jesus broke the five loaves and the two fish, and gave them to his disciples to distribute amongst the people, until they were filled. It was familiar food, easy to digest, and filled the hungry soul. Our movie-makers and song-writers pick up scraps and feed the hungry as best they can. But does the preacher on a Sunday break bread and distribute it? Can he break the Gospel and distribute good and hope-filled news? Or are his words just another pressure, just another weight to be borne? Is the Gospel now a yoke that chafes like the Law and Prophets were made to chafe by the preachers of long ago?

If on a Sunday, I leave mass fed with crumbs, then (for example) I can say with our bishops "Sadly working conditions and poor industrial relations often make the world of work a challenge to faith rather than a positive and creative opportunity for Christian fulfilment."

If the loaf of the Gospel is truly broken and shared, and the wine that is Christ's blood accepted, and my soul is filled with Christ, then I can teach our bishops and preachers and break the loaf for them by saying "Because the world of work is often a challenge to faith, it is all the more reason for strengthening faith and witnessing to Christ in the world of work." To keep saying that, I need the loaf broken by the Lord God of Saba'oth, the God of Rest, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light.

reform

OR

revo -

"Because of an irony of history, only a few years after the Church had been urged by Vatican II ultimately to accept the modern age, 'modernity' itself was fiercely criticised by the world and the movement that we know as the criticism of society began to gain ground. In that sense, Vatican II was, compared with the great 'feudal' encyclicals of Leo XIII and his successors up to the time of Pius XII, the first great liberal, bourgeois Council, in which the Church accepted for the first time the acquired rights and ideals of middle class society - religious freedom, freedom of conscience, tolerance and ecumenism. And, ironically, that happened just at the time when the world was getting ready to criticise the misuse by the West of precisely these liberal values, to the great disadvantage of the poor and the Third World."

Edward Schillebeeckx

For centuries, Schillebeeckx points out, the Church had stood firmly against the world and now the Second Vatican Council made concessions to it; in particular it was to concede to those things that the secular world had already begun to condemn. The secular world had already begun to realise that the politics of capitalism inevitably result in an affluent minority and an impoverished majority, while the Church was naively optimistic in supposing she could play a part in the advancing 'universal prosperity'. The world had already begun to realise the devastating effect of capitalism and patriarchy on the weak, the working classes, the third world and on women. It perceived the ineffectuality of arms 'talks' and the 'sin' of the Church in the missionary countries, the way it had colonised, alongside nations, in the name of God. Capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy, the world perceived, march along hand-in-hand and yet the Church, now twenty years after the Council, still continues its patriarchal reign of power; its hierarchy exclusively male, its theology therefore exclusively male (apart from those feminist theologians who are seldom acknowledged). It remains rich and invests its wealth in capitalist enterprises while under our present Pope, the hierarchy is as strong as ever and its new-style inquisitors enforce doctrine and papal infallibility through their Sacred Congregation rather like a police force or state army.

And so the Church remains a hierarchical institution, its functions mirroring the paranoid functions of the western capitalist state. Western ideals are still 'colonised' in Africa and the Third World, endorsed by bishops and cardinals most often educated and trained in western seminaries. While Vatican II encouraged Mass in the vernacular, encouraged an indigenous priesthood, these reforms do not alter the fact that the official theology of the Church remains western, male, celebrate and hierarchical. It seems to me then, that the capitalist model and the sacred model have continued to operate and function side by side, each of mutual benefit to the other and to an extent, dependent upon each other for life and credibility.

I
u
t
i
o
n
?

In this country, most priests have come to accept the aggiornamento of Vatican II. But because the Council was merely reformist, their acceptance is also an assent to their continuing power over the laity; they are still just as much as ever 'in charge'. True to the spirit of Vatican II, they tell us we can do things on our own - we can sing, take part in offertory processions, read, even have discussion groups and chair groups, but my experience is that we are always told how we should do a thing, and if we're discussing or chairing a group, we told what conclusions we should and must arrive at. True, there are well-educated middle class lay people who have been asked to advise bishops on certain specialist problems, but what of the rest, the poor, the divorced, the offenders of society, the less well educated. Are they to be left arranging flowers or polishing altar rails?

The laity then, remain second class subjects in the Church, no matter how much they tell us we are not. Of course, if you're a lay person and a woman, then you're doubly down. The problem with the reforms of Vatican II, as with all reformist measures, is that they are token concessions to the people, to the world, but nobody let go of one inch of their power. They lulled us into a false sense of security as if we really were being given status and rights - just like governments do to attract votes at election time.

Take, for instance, the feminist issue (the struggle of women, I believe, illustrates well the dangers of reformist measures). It might seem that we have come a long way towards womens' equality with reforms that attempt to ensure equal pay for work of equal value, more government daycare centres, tougher anti-porn and anti-rape laws, etc. But these reforms do not get to the root of the problem; rather they gloss over it, making women feel that they really are becoming liberated while in reality, they remain bound to the capitalist system and to patriarchy. Only revolution, the destruction of capitalism and patriarchy, can truly liberate them from their struggle. One woman writes:

"All that most reforms accomplish, whether they are called for within a radical or capitalist context, is the accommodation of a few more white women that are capable and willing to assimilate into the male dominated institutions. This means accepting the values and principles of the corporate world. If a woman seeks power and money in life and is aggressive, ambitious and competitive, then yes, there could be a place for her in the corporate world. She can obtain 'freedom and equality' with her male peers, even though in reality these qualities are viewed as greed and power from the perspective of the poor."

The Second Vatican Council enabled a few 'capable and willing' members of the laity to be incorporated into the lower eschalons of its institution. But of course, these people must accept the values and principles of that institution. Thus they inevitably perpetuate the patriarchal reign of the hierarchy and themselves take on positions of privilege and power.

And so with the world - instead of standing out against its evils and injustices, the Council asked for reforms within an existing structure; by accommodating that structure it is also assenting to it. Reforms perpetuate an institution by making people feel secure - only revolution overthrows it. Thus, while we applaud Pope Paul VI's acknowledgement of the excessive suffering caused by liberal capitalism (in *Populorum Progressio*, 1967), there is again a naive

optimism in his hope for its correction. He hopes that men will adjust industrialisation and the organisation of labour so that it is carried out 'in common', 'shared', 'so that men will find themselves to be brothers'. These are fine ideals, but not ones that will be realised while ever the capitalist way of things continues. How can we ask the peasants in central America to sit back and wait for their oppressors to recognise them as brothers and sisters, or to wait for the rich to share their wealth with the poor. It will not happen this way; a radical stance is necessary, political revolution. But in the same document, the Church stresses that it does not want to 'interfere in any way in the politics of States'. However, the Church has already taken sides: the Vatican Council conceded to western liberalism and failed to take the side of the poor and the politics that would liberate them.

I would suggest then, that it is now time to think for ourselves, be guided by our own consciences rather than blindly assent to what is an ill balanced (male celebrate) and deficient (western liberal) view of the world. If we fail to do so, we will perpetuate an institution of our own oppression and more, that of others. We will not be popular, revolution has always involved taking risks, because we can be sure that those who hold positions of wealth and power will fight to keep them. It is with these thoughts in mind then, that we receive the following warning from the Sacred Congregation (perhaps a little frightened of revolution?):

"Building on such a conception of the Church of the People, a critique of the very structures of the Church is developed. It is not simply the case of fraternal correction of pastors of the Church whose behaviour does not reflect the evangelical spirit of service and is linked to old-fashioned signs of authority which scandalise the poor. It has to do with a challenge to the sacramental and hierarchical structure of the Church, which was willed by the Lord Himself. There is a denunciation of members of the hierarchy and the magisterium as objective representatives of the ruling class which has to be opposed. Theologically, this position means that the ministers take their origin from the people who therefore designate ministers of their own choice in accord with the needs of their historic revolutionary mission."

There must be revolution within the Church itself for the sake of its Christian credibility; in its economic allegiances, its concessions to capitalism, to patriarchy, to hierarchy. We have seen that revolution will not begin from the top, and so it must work from the base upwards.

Vatican II has merely strengthened the existing system, appearing to resolve the contradictions of its ideology of freedom, liberty and religious tolerance with the reality of social, political and economic exploitation. The Church must not be seen to mirror the sin of capitalism and control. Our radical feminist continues:

"Developing methods of struggle rooted in resistance does not mean that we must reject all short term goals. Liberation is a long term process built upon gains made little by little; when we fight (against injustices) ... we must do so within a revolutionary context. This means describing the problem from a radical perspective and using tactics that reflect our rejection of the male controlled legal, political and economic system. For example, rather than demanding equal pay for work of equal value - a demand

which reflects an acceptance of the existing patriarchal economic system - women should develop new means of survival that are non-exploitative and harmonious with the earth."

Likewise then, our 'tactics' must not be seen to accommodate the existing structure of the Church. We must not be seen to assent to exclusivity, elitism and power. Like the basic communities of Christians that are beginning in Central America, we too must seek to make the Church truly one of the people. For years Catholics have been told that the holiest thing they can do in life is to become a priest (tough luck if you were born female) - what better way of preserving acceptance of, and the credibility of the hierarchy. I am not suggesting that we stop loving and respecting our parish priests, but that we should recognise that they do not have the monopoly on holiness and truth - (that would be gnosticism)! - and that we can do everything they can do - and more - given half the chance. More to the point, if they continue to refuse to give us the chance, it's up to us to take it anyway!

References

Edward Schillebeeckx O.P. "God is New Each Moment"

Anne Hansen "Feminist Resistance Vs. Reform"

(CTS) Populorum Progressio - Encyclical letter of Pope Paul VI, 1967

(CTS) Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

**HAVE YOU READ THE
LAYDOMINICAN NEWSLETTER**

ARTICLES!

YET?

REPORTS!

**NEWS OF
CHAPTERS!**

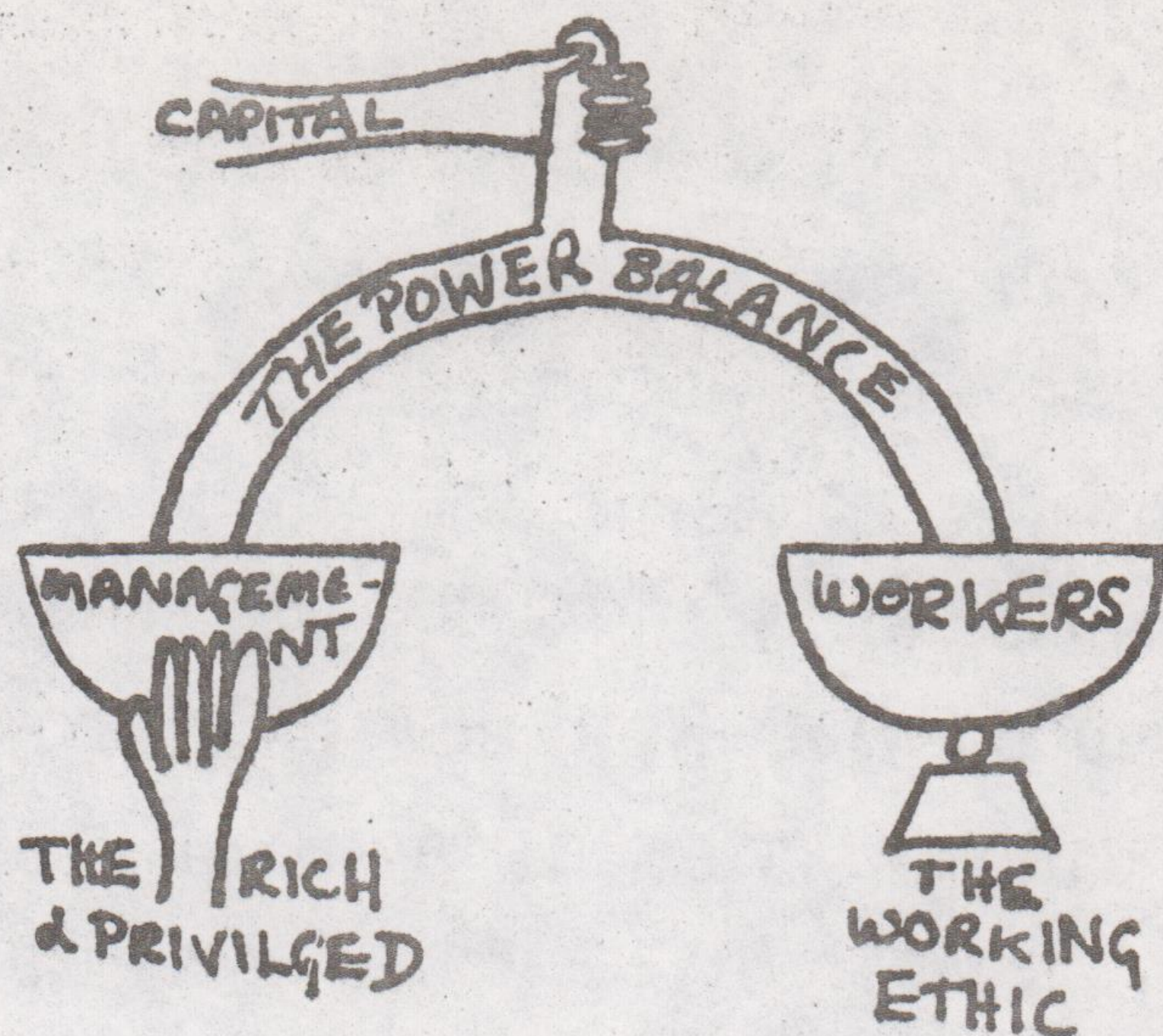
**WHAT
LAYDOMINICANS
ARE DOING!**

If you would like to receive the Newsletter which is published 3 times a year, please send 35p + 23p p+p (or an annual subscription of £1.74) Next edition: Sept./Oct. 1985.

COMMENTS!

Send to: The Editor, LDNL,
286 Basford Road,
Basford, Nottingham.

THE FALACY OF



INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

THERE IS NO PARITY OF POWER BETWEEN 'MANAGEMENT' AND LABOUR IN A CAPITALIST SOCIETY, BECAUSE LABOUR IS AN UNTRANSFORMABLE ELEMENT WHICH CAN ONLY BE WITHDRAWN, WHEREAS CAPITAL (MONEY) A UNIVERSALLY TRANSFORMABLE MEDIUM OF POWER WHICH CAN BE CASHED IN ANY NUMBER OF DIFFERENT FORMS. THUS CAPITAL CAN BE SWITCHED INTO CONTROL OF INFORMATION MEDIA, RESOURCES FOR A LOCKOUT, SUPPORT FOR A PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN, FINANCE FOR PRIVATE EDUCATION, FUNDS FOR A POLITICAL PARTY, BUDGETS FOR WEAPONRY IN A SOCIAL CRISIS. THE WORKERS BASIC SANCTION IS THEIR CONTROL OF LABOUR POWER AND THIS IS A SINGULARLY RIGID AND LIMITED WEAPON.

THE IMPACT OF POWER ON BEHAVIOUR IS PERVASIVE, DESPITE THE ABSENCE OF OBVIOUS EVIDENCE. IT IS THE ABSENCE OF OBVIOUS EVIDENCE WHICH CAN BE USED TO SHAPE POPULAR IMPRESSIONS ON THE SUBJECT. THE POWERFUL RARELY NEED TO MAKE THEIR POWER VISIBLE AND OBVIOUS BECAUSE ALL THE SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS, MECHANISMS, AND PRINCIPLES WHICH IT IS CRUCIALLY IMPORTANT FOR THEM TO HAVE ACCEPTED AND LEGITIMIZED ARE ACCEPTED AND LEGITIMIZED ALREADY AND COME UNDER NO SERIOUS THREAT. THESE RANGE FAR BEYOND SUCH BASICS AS THE INSTITUTIONS OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE AND PROFIT MAKING. THEY COVER SUCH

MATTERS AS THE INFLUENCE OF WEALTH AND RESOURCE - CONTROL OVER ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING; OVER THE CONTENT OF THE MASS MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS; AND OVER THE MAJOR OBJECTIVES OF THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM. CRUCIAL FOR THEM IS THE VIRTUALLY UNIVERSAL ACCEPTANCE OF CLASS AND STATUS STRATIFICATION, AND OF THE HIERARCHICAL ORGANIZATION OF WORK WITH ITS MASSIVE INEQUALITIES OF AUTHORITY, REWARD, STATUS, AND JOB AUTONOMY. ESSENTIAL FOR THE ACCEPTANCE OF THESE INEQUALITIES ARE SUCH CULTURAL BELIEFS AS FOR EXAMPLE, THAT THOSE IN AUTHORITY OUGHT TO ENJOY HIGHER REWARDS THAN THOSE THEY COMMAND, AND THAT THE ALLEGED SCARCITY OF A PARTICULAR SKILL, TALENT OR ABILITY JUSTIFIES ITS HOLDER IN DEMANDING A LARGER ALLOCATION OF LIFE CHANCES THAN THOSE OF MORE COMMON OR MODEST ATTAINMENTS.

THE GREATER EXTENT TO WHICH POWER CAN BE USED INDIRECTLY TO SHAPE PERCEPTIONS AND PREFERENCES, THE LESS THE NEED FOR IT TO BE USED DIRECTLY IN WAYS WHICH MAKE IT VISABLE.

IT IS PROBABLE THAT FOR MUCH OF THE TIME MOST MEN DO NOT PERCEIVE THE CONVENTIONAL AND ARBITRARY NATURE OF MANY OF THE SOCIAL ARRANGEMENTS UNDER WHICH THEY LIVE, AND SUPPOSE THEM TO BE THE ONLY POSSIBLE ONES GIVEN 'THE NATURE OF THINGS'. THIS UNAWARENESS ITSELF HELPS TO MAKE POSSIBLE THE CONTINUANCE OF THE EXISTING ORDER.

WHEN UNION OR WORKGROUP REPRESENTATIVES TAKE THEIR PLACE WITH MANAGERS AT THE NEGOTIATING TABLES, THEY DO SO NOT AS FREE AND EQUAL CITIZENS, BUT AS MEN WHO HAVE ALREADY BEEN SOCIALIZED, INDOCTRINATED AND TRAINED BY A MULTIPPLICITY OF INFLUENCES TO ACCEPT AND LEGITIMIZE MOST ASPECTS OF THEIR WORK SITUATION. A SITUATION

DESIGNED IN THE LIGHT OF THE VALUES AND PURPOSES OF THE MAJOR POWER HOLDERS.

NEGOTIATION OF ORDER WITHIN THE ENTERPRISE TAKES PLACE ONLY AT THE MARGINS. POWER AND SOCIAL CONDITIONING CAUSE THE WORKERS INTERESTS TO ACCEPT MANAGEMENT'S SHAPING OF THE MAIN STRUCTURE LONG BEFORE THEY REACH THE NEGOTIATING TABLE. THUS THE DISCUSSION MAY BE ABOUT MARGINAL ADJUSTMENTS IN HIERARCHICAL REWARDS, BUT NOT THE PRINCIPLE OF HIERARCHICAL REWARDS. ABOUT CERTAIN PRACTICAL ISSUES CONNECTED WITH THE PREVAILING EXTREME SUBDIVISION OF LABOUR, BUT NOT THE PRINCIPLE OF EXTREME SUBDIVISION OF LABOUR. ABOUT FINANCIAL REWARDS FOR GREATER EFFICIENCY, BUT NOT ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF OTHER TYPES OF REWARD WITH SOME SACRIFICE OF EFFICIENCY. ABOUT MEASURES WHICH MAY ACHIEVE COMPANY EXPANSION AND GROWTH, BUT NOT ABOUT THE PRINCIPLE OF COMPANY EXPANSION AND GROWTH. ABOUT HOW THE PARTICIPANT INTERESTS CAN PROTECT THE ADVANCE THEMSELVES WITHIN THE STRUCTURE OPERATED BY MANAGEMENT TO PURSUE ITS BASIC OBJECTIVES, BUT NOT ABOUT THE NATURE OF THOSE BASIC OBJECTIVES.

THE POWER BALANCE ILLUSION REST ON THE CONTINUING ACCEPTANCE BY THE WORKERS OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND PRINCIPLES WHICH SUPPORT WEALTH AND PRIVILEGE, AND WHICH THE RICH AND PRIVILEGED WOULD EXERT THEIR GREAT POWER TO DEFEND IF THAT ACCEPTANCE WERE TO PASS INFORMATION ATTEMPTS AT REPUDIATION. BUT THE ILLUSION ITSELF CONTRIBUTES TOWARDS ACCEPTANCE, FOR BY CONCEALING GROSS DISPARITIES OF POWER IT FOSTERS THE BELIEF THAT ALL THE PRINCIPAL INTERESTS OF SOCIETY COMPETE FAIRLY FOR ITS REWARDS, THEREBY HELPING TO LEGITIMIZE THE SYSTEM.

politics & morality:

Morality, for me, is about the way in which we act. It's not about being passive and letting the world go by. To take a moral stance means you have to act within the world, more than that I feel that it means you have to act politically.

Politics, though, is about many things: it is about the way society is structured and run (which is the all too typical and narrow way people view 'politics'); it's about economics - who owns what and the way society is split into haves and have-nots; and it's about the way as an individual you should act, one of the best slogans that came out of the sixties was 'the personal is political'.

Not only does taking a truly moral stance mean acting politically but also for politics to have any reality outside of pure selfishness, it must have at its base morality. I utterly reject those who rule important matters out of consideration by calling them 'emotive'. To denigrate mine, and others, feelings of anger and pain when we see people starving in Ethiopia; or see animals strapped up and in pain or senselessly killed; to see people so poor so that a minority may be rich; to see, and experience, the slow violence of mindless and soul-destroying jobs; and to view the preparations for war, as 'emotive' is obscene. To say these things are wrong is to say something which is real; it is not something emotive or a matter of personal preference. Torture, suffering and pain are real and my moral reflection of such things is equally as real.

You cannot stand on the sidelines or 'opt out' of the world. Morality is about acting within the world. To stand silent in the face of injustice and suffering is tantamount to agreeing with it. To walk by someone dying on the side of the road and not act is morally equivalent to having killed them yourself. This, if anything, is one of the themes of the 'Good Samaritan' story.

Likewise personal change is not enough (though it's a good start). The oppression and pain in our society is, at least to some extent, the result of the way society is organised. Things will not change just because you've changed - there are too many barriers and blocks in the way. It has to be a dual process - you have to change yourself, attacking your own oppression of others; and you have to act to change society.

To take a true moral stance is to become politically active and aware. Voting is not enough. Politics is a continual process, not just something you do once every four or five years by putting a cross against somebody's name. More than that you can't abdicate your responsibilities onto politicians. Politics is a matter of personal action, it is about you directly doing something, not relying, indirectly, on politicians' (in)action.

For myself I am an Anarchist - that is someone who feels that society can function without the need for the State. I reject Capitalism, Government, patriarchy, racism - indeed all forms of oppression and forced authority - upon moral grounds:

- Capitalism because it's based on an (unnecessary and forced) class division of society into those who have and those who have not, and upon the ideas of conflict and competition rather than peoples' natural solidarity.

- Government because it's based on elites and violence - a government which doesn't have the power to enforce it's decisions by the threat or use of violence would not last long. To me a true moral decision must be one made autonomously - without outside influence. To be forced to do something is not to act morally. Further than that I feel that Government actually acts as a perverter and block to

people's natural morality and feelings of solidarity.

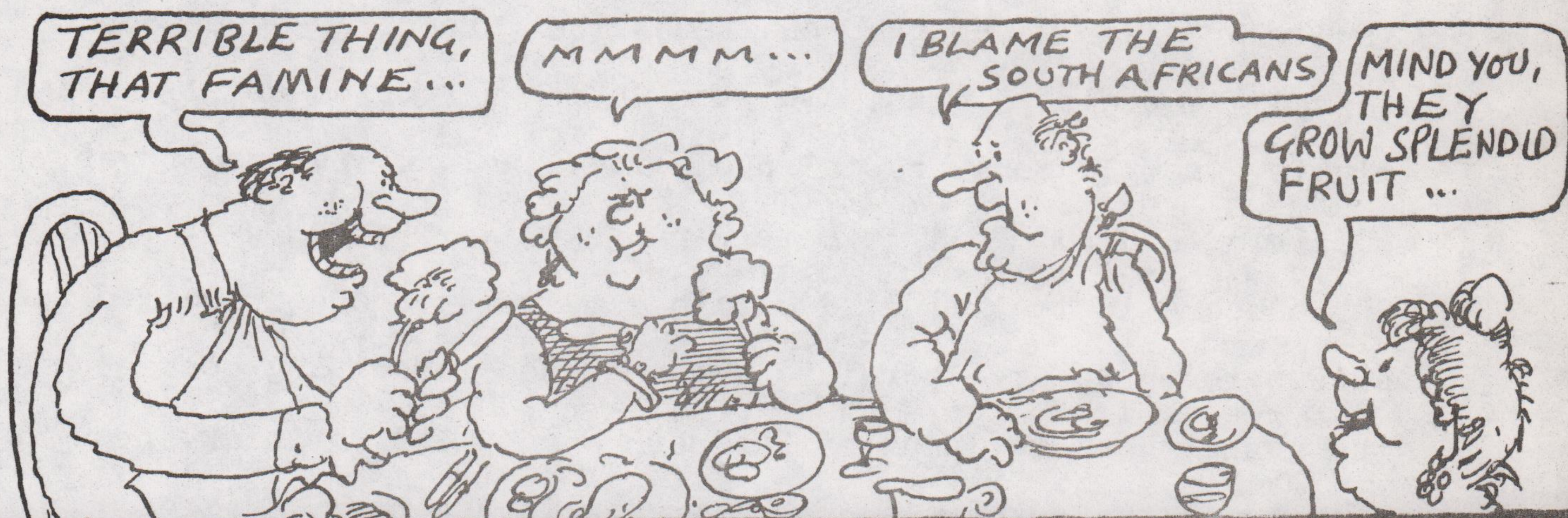
- Patriarchy (Sexism) and Racism because they're about refusing women and non-whites their true equality and human dignity. Before the Nazis could begin murdering the Jews they had to turn them into something less than human, to make them appear not worthy of real moral consideration.

It would be simplistic to say that I feel people are 'naturally' good but I do feel that people are more good than evil and it is Government and society's structure which creates most of the problems. Given a better society I think people would, in general, act better and society would definitely be more just and moral.

There isn't enough room to go deeply into my own moral and political beliefs but if you do want to read anything more, there are a number of good books on Anarchism:

E. Malatesta	-	Anarchy
D. Miller	-	Anarchism
A. Meltzer	-	Anarchism: arguments for and against

- or you could write to your local Anarchist Group



About the pictures on the cover:

Negative images of suffering are available wholesale. Strange how images of people fighting back are not usually so popular.

Strange too, how the poor are encouraged to identify with the crucifixion in this world and to console themselves with the thought of a better here-after.

Not so the rich, eh?

LAY DOMINICANS



Does it seem to you that the Church does not speak out - either loudly or clearly enough - on issues that are of great concern in today's society? What does the Church say or do about women's rights, unemployment, racial prejudice, nuclear weapons, poverty, suffering and evil? It is never enough while people go in need. Our concern is that mankind's pain, indignity and deprivation be alleviated. We are therefore drawn to the liberating message of the gospels and to Jesus of Nazareth who healed the sick, brought dignity to the outcast and the Kingdom to the poor. Would you like to join us? Well who are we?

LAY DOMINICANS

We are a group of people trying to make sense of life and the problems we face in the light of the gospels.

We have found within the Order of St. Dominic an openness to the challenges of the world and strength to take the risks that Christianity demands of us.

DOMINICAN FAMILY

The Dominicans were founded as a religious order within the Catholic Church by Dominic Guzman in the 13th century. Just as St. Dominic committed himself to the task of preaching the gospel in a way that was both relevant and pertinent to the problems of his age, so today the Order - friars, nuns, sisters and laity - remains faithful to this task.

WHAT DO WE DO ?

As Lay Dominicans we try to combine prayer, study and action, with varying degrees of success. We support one another through monthly meetings, letters, a newsletter, and study circles, all of which are inspired by our love of Christ and each other. Supported in these ways, we are able to go out as individuals and in groups to bring the Good News to our impoverished world.

This is the pamphlet that was written and published last year to be representative of the 'younger' element in the Order.

Copies of this pamphlet can be obtained by writing to Fr. Tony Archer O.P., Holy Cross Priory, 45 Wellington Street, Leicester. LE1 6HW .

The church : light to the nations? (part 1)

What prompted me to write this article was the need to sort out my thoughts so that I might resolve what I felt was an unnecessary contradiction between my Catholic faith and my belief in a libertarian solution to social and political problems. The main issue which preoccupied me, which I felt to be problematic, was the question of Church authority.

Is Church authority based on sound Christian principle or is it rather the result of a consolidation of spiritual sovereignty, a jurisdictional arrangement which allowed the Church to find acceptability in the Roman state through the adoption of the sort of hierarchical power structure which existed in pagan state religion. - the cult of Mithras being a good example - and which was peculiarly susceptible to being utilised as an instrument of state domination.

There is much in the gospels which appears to be against hierarchy (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983) yet nowadays the network of beliefs called Christianity seems so inexorably linked to the notions of hierarchy, control, and office that one feels rather an odd ball in asserting the revolutionary egalitarianism of Christianity.

There are a plethora of problems now when anyone questions certain rulings of the Church judiciaries. Our sense of unity has become tied up with a patriotic belief in the sovereignty of Church government, in the infallibility of those at the top. Unity is now conceived of as unquestioning obedience to the decrees of the mon-archic pope and his hierarchy as if these decrees are absolute. The effect has been to squeeze the life out of the Church. Uniformity has taken the place of unity in diversity. Paul's one body with diverse ministries has suffered a sort of paralysis.

Why has this happened? Let me propose that it happened as a result of the gradual subordination of the Church to the state from the time of Constantine and the complementary acquisition of temporal power by the Church which would flower in the papal states. Never has this process been complete. Christianity has never given in completely to the dictates of worldly powers. Still, it would help to point out where the forces of worldly power have had an effect on the life and ministry of the Church today, in its structures and in the message it puts out to the world, and the ways in which the Church helps to preserve the unity of the state by providing a justification for its activities, a sort of spiritual or ideological cement, despite the often unjust composition of the state and its unfair dealings with others. We can then begin to be constructive, if we are successful, and start to discover what the real foundation stones of our faith are.

The Church would be inhibited from being a full sign or expression of the love of Christ to the world were it to allow a comfortably situated elite to control the expression of the gospel message (highlighting what is consistent with their ideology, hiding what isn't) in such a way that the word of God became simply another instrument for social and political control. To what extent has this happened

in the Church? To what extent has the Church functioned only to put across the dominant ideology? And in what ways has it done this?

Consideration of this question is crucial for an understanding of how we might start to build the "kingdom" of peace on earth. For if we want real unity, real reconciliation in the world - and I presume we do - we've got to ask ourselves what it is that we ought to be doing to achieve it. Is it sufficient to work within the parameters laid down by Church and state, to conform to what is expected of us by the law in two apparently separate fields, i.e. being a good Christian and a good citizen, with, since the decline of the political sway of the Church, Christianity appertaining in the realm of the personal and spiritual and citizenship appertaining in the realm of the corporate and the material. I think we will find that it is not sufficient, that the division of spheres prevents any real Christian commitment. And this is not wholly accidental. This division helps to support and reinforce the status quo. For, by denying the possibility of renewal of this world and focussing our aspirations on the next, religion legitimises the unjust governments of this world as an inevitability. Our spiritual life is composed of our dreams, our aspirations towards the ideal. Authoritarian religion denies the possibility of our aspirations being realised. Authoritarian religion, then, constrains from a very unspiritual jurisdictional perspective the aspirations of humankind for a better society. The two realms of Church and state complement each other. Rather than rejoicing in the gains made in securing for man a free sphere of activity, I believe that this has simply placed the powerful beyond the reach of any religious criticism of a revolutionary kind. What is humanism for one proves to be dehumanism for another (part of the reason why we live well in the West is our advantage position in the world market. Others live badly as a result). I am not advocating any return to the power of popes. Humanism has done us one good service by providing a critique of spiritual sovereignty being the prerogative of the few. Rather I am suggesting that we begin to see the material through spiritual eyes and start to realise, as the early Church Fathers did, how impossible it is for true religion and material inequality to exist side by side.

If we are searching for a better model for our lives, a more integrated life, the consequences cannot be limited to one domain. Liberation spans as a concept the two planes model. Beginning as a political concept, it is nevertheless not restricted to any particular structural achievement. It is an ethical impulse and a spiritual impulse. In its theological sense it allows us to look freshly at the notions of salvation and redemption in an integrated way. Liberation from sin and loving our neighbour as ourselves are not two different things.

It is insufficient to regard salvation within the Church as unconnected to and not part of a universal movement towards liberation and the forms adopted to this purpose. The insularity of the Church is self-defeating for it neglects the universal salvation which is its reason for being. Change for the better, as I hope to show, starts from below. When people start to participate in whatever way in building the "kingdom" on earth we are already moving towards heaven.

Is it sufficient then to encourage a position of mere passivity and uniformity in the Church? Must we not rather have for our starting point the sort of structures which encourage shared responsibility, and this necessarily means some sort of shared authority: a situation in which everyone freely co-operates in the work of the Church. Is it not necessary that we become active participants in the process of reconciling.

It is important to realise also that the Church as an organisation hasn't got a monopoly on the 'spiritual'. I would argue that the motivation for much of the 'secular' liberation movements, C.N.D. for instance, is in fact what we might once have classed as spiritual.

It seems to me that the whole notion of a qualitative difference between 'secular' and 'spiritual' salvation is perverse, the result of a merely technical narrowing of general terms. There seems to me to be no distinguishing mark of any kind of any specifically religious truth. Notions of sacrament, grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, unity have become a mystifyingly specialised language within the Church, yet it seems plain that their meaning is really more general, that these words can, in fact, be meaningful only within actual context of situation, and must be if the world is to be saved, liberated from sin; for everyone must participate in the saving work.

Do we not find an ideological slant placed on these notions which removes them from the world in which we are all involved and in which we can all participate and makes them solely the outcome of an ideological system so that reconciliation is possible only within a framework of power and submission, that is, it is dependent on the ministrations of a higher caste.

So the first tentative criticism I am making is that the particular form of the Church can lead to a stifling effect on the possibility of universal salvation being achieved. It technicalises and removes from us the onus for achieving reconciliation, leaving us powerless to participate in Christ's saving work. Not least in importance is the effect that an authoritarian understanding of and determination of reconciliation has on those who lack power. Denied a chance of participating creatively in the work of reconciliation - and this would mean working for some form of justice, I should think - the least powerful party is confined to only an acquiescence in a state of affairs, not to reconciliation in any positive sense. This means that any sense of injustice must be, as it were, stifled in the heart, constrained and repressed and passively lived with to the dismay of our moral sense. Can one side dictate the terms for reconciliation? Can others speak for us? Would we not then get merely an enforced uniformity rather than true unity. And in as much as uniformity can occur through force, fear, etc., uniformity does not entail unity. Quite the contrary, enforced uniformity can prove an added cause of discontent. It is not a trivial matter when people - as many increasingly do - find themselves alienated from the Church they love because their own voices, beliefs, aspirations, are regarded as an irrelevance. This is equivalent to treating people like Skinner's rats: behavioral uniformity and conformity taking the place of creative dialogue, co-operation, participation in decision making.

One objection that I think could be made to my thesis is that though some democratic participation in decision making may be a good thing, some form of hierarchical government is necessary to preserve right doctrine. This is a good point and needs answering. A good answer would have to go into the relation between doctrine and practice. For the moment though, I would like simply to question what we mean when we talk of right doctrine or right anything else. Can any party make a claim to possess the objective truth about something. We know that scientists are reluctant nowadays to make any such claim since no scientific theory has proved to be sacrosanct. Historians too are aware of how their own assumptions, beliefs and preoccupations influence their interpretation and reconstruction of the past. But the gap in time is only one factor which can highlight the relativity of our understanding. Age, sex, class, rank, etc., are all similar factors. This is not to say that the truth does not exist but rather to emphasise how our perception of the truth is relative to our situation and how it can be altered through dialogue with others. I propose that we are more likely to come to a just assessment of the truth through an openness to others and to ourselves. There are no monopolies on the truth.

It seems then that one argument against the official powers of the Church or any other institution pronouncing for the whole body is basically that it offends the truth, the living, changing, growing truth of life. Such authorities are open to the accusation that they have opted out of the search for truth and replaced it with the ethics of power. And we as laity are partly to blame. Although the desire for truth makes us rebel against mere conformity, the need for security makes us acquiesce.

These questions about the absolute and the relative are important. The absolute is a dimension of our experience as much as is the relative. The intersection of the absolute with the relative is our meeting place with God. To meet God our relative is required as much as His/Her absolute. This requires participation from us in every aspect of our being, in our minds as well as in our hearts.

Who can define an official approved way for us? Much though we sometimes wish everything could be handed on a plate to us, just fed to us, we are only too aware of the realities of authority and power. For, although on the one hand we cling to power, to office, to approval, to legitimacy, on the other we are aware of being terrorised by the stamp of office, approval, legitimacy, which makes outlaws of us all. The law condemns us no less today than it did in the past. But do we not remember someone else who was condemned by the law and abandoned to his death by God?

To be continued

Gustavo Gutierrez: A Theology of Liberation, British ed. 1974, SCM
(His criticism of the distinction of two planes
model inspired my own)

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza: In Memory of Her, 1983, SCM

STRANGE FRUIT QUARTERLY
NEXT ISSUE OCTOBER

This magazine was
put together by a few people.

Naturally, it reflected our
particular interests.

What we need now is to
broaden the scope of the maga-
zine. So we would welcome
your contributions, as well as any
comments on this issue.

We're also hoping to have an
events page. So if you know of
any events people can join in on
please let us know.

Please write to:

Anthony Verdon

10 BRIGHTMOOR ST.,

GOOSE GATE,

NOTTINGHAM. NG1 1ED

THE CONVERSION OF FRA PHILIPPINO

I was tired and hadn't eaten for two days since I'd left the city. The mountain terrain was hard going and I hoped it wouldn't be too long before I arrived at the encampment, that half-hoped-for, half-dreaded monster - as I had once thought - of unrestrained impulse and life with her brood of outcasts: criminals, murderers, thieves.

I was reminded of the elaborate splendour of a gothic cathedral in it's creation: many builders, many heads meeting and separating, no apparent order, shapes and ideas and stones clattering and clammering, clambering but growing, joining, winding in a glorious child-like confusion of discovery. Since the sack of our monastery and the dispersal of our brethren, I had been engaged in a game of hide-and-seek, for a while taking refuge in the labyrinth of the cathedral but now on the move again, looking for a sign, a word, a look - a need for communion with others hastening my way as fear had hastened it along the many candle lit corridors and chancels during the night of terror. It was there that I first met Frederick and heard of the peasant struggle. He had spoken with a hope that spurred me on to join him now, now that the past was lost, in the struggle for a better future, although it sometimes seemed, and he had known his own death was imminent, that all of us were moving towards an inevitable death.

Nearly everyone had been killed, crushed by the pillars of the law courts where they had expected justice and now, for us who had escaped, there was no authority, no concentration of power, just a desperate need for solidarity. The law we had once brandished, now turned on us, revealed to us it's horrific face of violence. Enclosed between the stones of the new building were many of our brothers and sisters who had rebelled. Each spontaneous carved stone head of the old cathedral had been smashed: Frederick, Maria and the rest, sacrificed to a single-minded head, the stones of the cathedral taken down and reassembled under the direction of a single architect; instead of on the plan of a cross, on the plan of a law court. Now the gothic creative impulse, the festive dragon of God - as I liked to think of it - had climbed up the hillside and was being hunted down from it's refuge.

I almost fell upon the camp after my struggle up the hillside.

SENTRY'S REPORT An old man stumbled into the clearing. He looked harmless enough, but one could never be too sure. He was worn out though, so unlikely to cause any immediate problems. Celia invited him to sit by the fire, giving him a blanket. We told her to make sure he had no weapons. She retorted angrily that we thought too much of ourselves and took him a bowl of food. We were torn between self-preservation and charity.

Carved by time out of the side of the sandstone cliff face was a hollow inside which a fire blazed invitingly, causing the snow to drip from the green leaves of the surrounding trees. I saw a woman bending over the blazing fire of wood and dry ferns. The glow of the fire illuminated her craggy features and I noticed with some surprise that the hunched and huddled body had deceived me. Her skin was fine and as transparent as amber, her eyes sparkled and danced like a river in the firelight. She could have been thirty or fifty years old - it was hard for me to judge. I was tired and weak from hunger and my belly ached. The moon shone down pale and silvery on her sleeping child, five or six rifles wrapped in a blanket at her feet and a ball resting from play on top of the bundle. The woman motioned me to sit down and I thought I remembered her for a moment, from somewhere else, in the city below. My mind returned to an incident some years ago when I had caught a young girl in the monastery trying to steal valuables. I was going to call for the guards but she persuaded me that it would be an act of charity to let her go. In the morning I was woken with the news that some of the valuables had disappeared from the crypt. I had considered her a damned soul. Now the irony of the situation overwhelmed me; I had fled here to people I would, in any other situation have disdained and feared.

I watched her as she walked over to me, smiling and bending towards me with a bowl of food. Somehow I expected anger or resentment at my presence, but she patted my shoulders firmly and just looked at me with a half smile. It seemed the silence for her was easy, but it unnerved me and to break it, to communicate with her, I asked her who was in charge. She didn't answer me directly, but as if what I said reminded her of a puzzle that preoccupied her. She said half to herself and half out loud, "Many parties have sought to control us. Your ideology once stretched it's tentacles out to dominate and subdue us and now you in turn have been dominated and subdued but there is no stasis here, we move in a rhythmic weave and dance, constantly changing. You are a slave to your habit!" she added, letting out a full bellied laugh which resounded round the campsite as she walked away.

I grew sleepy as I watched her moving quietly in and out of the little groups of people gathered around the fire. I was confused. I forgot the food and was left in abstractions. Perhaps down there we in power forgot those who supported us and thought we were a law to ourselves, disdaining the law that bound us together: dependency on food, warmth and shelter. It now occurred to me that these things should be distributed equally. All that's needed is love, compassion, the ability to see and feel from another's point of view. Picking up the bowl I greedily consumed the rest of my meal of barley and fish, then sleepily watched the coming and going round the camp fire as if it were a vision of angels who surprised me only by their uncultured speech. They seemed to be discussing me; and using all that I'd believed and hoped against me.

COUNCIL

"I don't know what made that worm crawl up here out of his hole. He won't get any tithes off us."

"Ha! There's nothing I used to enjoy more than filching from the pockets of clerics. Those professional saints aren't happy unless they're terrifying the wits out of somebody."

"Cultivators of devils for people to worship and fear. Now that his own table's been overturned, I can see him selling himself and his religion for crumbs from any table. We'll never be able to trust him. He'll sell us down the river given the chance. His faith is in a master's wealth and power."

"But he may change", Celia said.

"Yes, he may be converted. In any case, who are we to judge? Would we have been any different in his shoes?"

"That, Sophia, is a question impossible to answer. But let us not, at least, make a decision based on a law which has, after all, been used against us and which has never ceased to multiply the sufferings of us all. Remember, violence breeds violence, love breeds love. Look at the sun, how it shines on everybody alike; it does not discriminate with it's warmth, neither can we with our love. If we fail to observe this, our community may be divided and we will be sowing the seeds of our own destruction."

As my sleep dissolved, I found myself listening to sounds that turned me rigid as stone, a series of gunshots distant and near, as if shouting abuse. Flashing back into my mind came my horror at what Frederick had told me in the cathedral about the necessity for violence and how I had tried to convince him that violence breeds only violence, that the means had to be similar to the ends; that peace could only come from peace. Wasn't it a total contradiction that before one man can exist he must destroy another's existence. Frederick had explained that once they had seized the means of production into their own hands, justice and ultimate peace would be achieved on earth. My retort was that ultimate peace would be our heavenly reward. "But don't you see," he had laughed, "your whole scholastic jigsaw of like fitting into like falls to pieces if now you are trying to conclude that by allowing suffering on earth, we will achieve peace in heaven."

I wasn't convinced, I felt myself betrayed by everything that was now happening around me. Some of our people had been wounded and were being carried into the hollow for safety. "A change of heart," I muttered to myself, "there must be a change of heart." I was talking for all, yet all around me people were busy. They were not petrified like me, but were intensely active. No matter how much I strained my eyes to heaven, no answer came, no help, no legion of angels, only a cry from behind a bush could be heard. I picked my way over, afraid. It was the woman who had given me food now seeking my aid.

All around me they needed my support, my help. But what? To defend something that evaded my grasp! Where's the self-determination in that! I might as well have asked where's the self I wanted to preserve: all around me came the answer in the broken bodies and ruptured voices. In a flash I realised that if I didn't do something to help, we would all be wiped out. I had been like a man holding a balance. It could be anything that was being weighed: gold, human suffering - never had I thrown the balance away, until now, before my eyes, I saw the poverty of formalism and the significance of it's content, the suffering of these people. The injustice that was being done to them tipped the scales completely. I picked up a gun, not out of hatred. If my death could have saved these people, I would have given it.



From The Journals of Fra Philippino
monk and time traveller,
Book I, circa. 1400 AD

Am. AD

RISE UP



AND RECLAIM OUR GARDEN