



THE VISITATION

THE PUBLICATION OF THE NATIVITY HOUSE

MARCH 2016

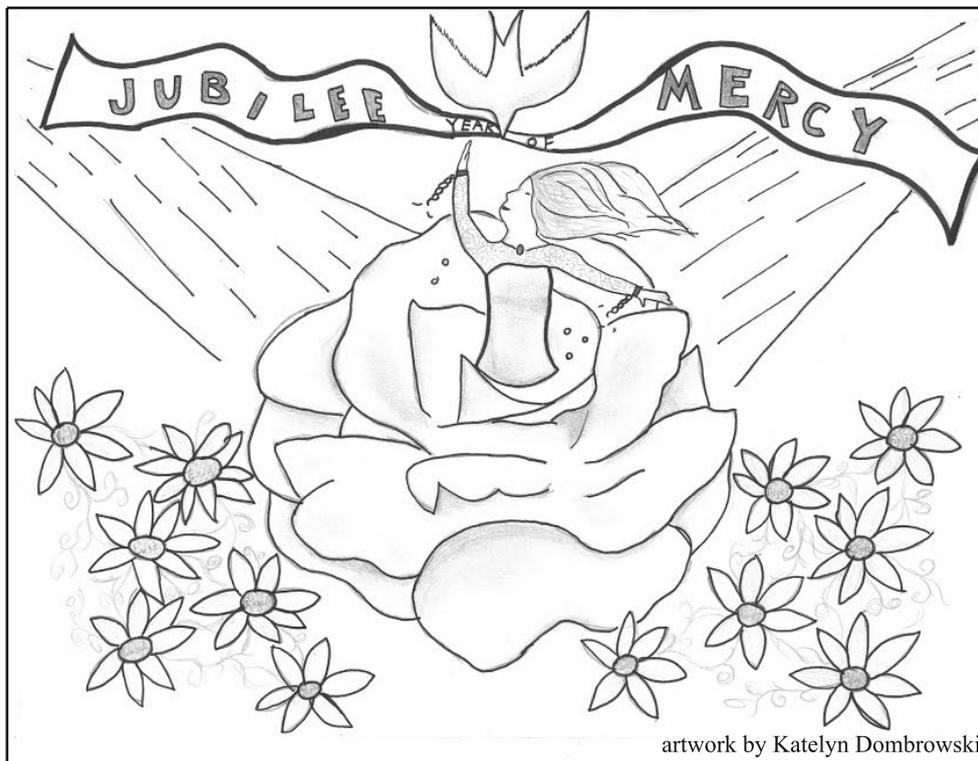
VOLUME 6 ISSUE 2

Jubilee Year of Mercy: For a World in Dire Need

by Joyce Donahue

It seems to be everywhere on the Internet, on TV, in the political arena; increasingly, we experience anger, fear, hate and bigotry, directed toward immigrants, refugees, people of other races or religions, political opponents, and basically anyone with whom people disagree. We have, over the past few years seen the rising of terrorism, martyrdom of Christians, and even the police seem so infected by fear that they seem too often to shoot first and ask questions when it's too late.

It's as though an evil contagion is spreading through the world. Some people are reacting by trying to protect themselves and their families with guns, by demanding the closure



of borders against refugees or by shouting down or mocking the opposition.

In the face of this unrest, Pope

Francis has boldly declared on March 13, 2015 a Jubilee Year of Mercy as a counterbalance to a world seemingly without mercy.

He writes:

Dear brothers and sisters, I have often thought of how the Church may render more clear her mission to be a witness to mercy; and we have to make this journey. It is a journey which begins with spiritual conversion. Therefore, I have decided to announce an Extraordinary Jubilee which has at its centre the mercy of God. It will be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live in the light of the word of the Lord: 'Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful' (cf. Lk 6:36).

The Jubilee Year opened on December 8, 2015 and continues until November 20, 2016. The Year began with the opening of the Holy Door in Rome – and the opening of holy doors in

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Peace in a Post-Christian Era

by Shawn T. Storer

In the spring of 1962, Thomas Merton finished a book he entitled *Peace in the Post-Christian Era* a book that he hoped would be published by Macmillan in the autumn of that year. Just days after finishing the text, Merton was informed that the publishing of this book would not be permitted by the censors of the Cistercian Order. Though the Trappist censors would not allow its publication, Merton's abbot at Gethsemani Abbey allowed him to mimeograph, mail and share the text with hundreds of readers (many of whom were quite influential people in the Church and the

world) and the text still bore much fruit proving to be a well-spring both at the Vatican and the Second Vatican Council.

In the essay "Religious Problems of the Cold War," Merton announces:

Whether we like it or not, we have to admit we are already living in a post-Christian world, that is to say a world in which Christian ideals and attitudes are relegated more and more to the minority...It is frightening to realize that the facade of Christianity which still generally survives has perhaps little or nothing behind it, and that what was once called a "Christian

society" is more purely and simply a materialistic neo-paganism with a Christian veneer..."

In "Beyond East or West" Merton laments we live in a time when "not only non-Christians but even Christians themselves tend to dismiss the Gospel ethic on nonviolence and love as "sentimental."

In short, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era* is an attempt to take the Gospel ethic seriously and is about the necessary outlawing of total war and the barring of the road to total war – modern conflicts bent on the destruction of entire cities and peoples and the banning of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons being made for use in modern combat.

Though Merton later admitted he avoided including personal convictions about war as he had in earlier works out of concern over the Trappist censors, this book is haunted by the call to introspection and Christian self-examination. Merton asks us to take an honest look at ourselves, the erosion of our Christian moral sensibilities, the state of our hearts and lives before God and the crises of our times.

Merton leads his readers through a long, unsettling, ironic and scandalous examination of Church history from defense of the Roman Empire to debates about the immorality of the crossbow to the morality of the

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A Letter from the Directors

Dear Friends of Nativity House,

Happy Lent! I pray that your Lenten devotion is drawing you closer to the mystery of Christ.

Since our last issue of *The Visitation*, Nativity House has been abustle with a new kind of activity. Our new guest mom moved in on December 5. Her baby boy was delivered by an emergency c-section the day after Christmas at twenty-seven weeks, making us truly a Nativity House. With the new mom and baby coming so early, we work with balancing life between Nativity House and Rush Neo-Natal Intensive Care. Mom and Baby are doing very well; they thrive on your prayers. We look forward to having a Welcome-Home-Baby Party mid-to-late March.

We have opened the house to guests for a Community Mass and Round Table Discussion on The Christian Call to Non-Violence. Our goal is to have an open house event monthly. Our March open house is a Meatless Dinner, Saturday March 19. We have another Round Table coming up on April 9 – entitled Mercy Trumps Fear – A Discussion on Pope Francis’ new book, *The Name of God is Mercy*. In May we will have a Mother’s Day event – planting flowers in the Mary Garden, a Rosary and a Potluck to follow. For further details of these events, please follow us on Facebook or subscribe to our email list.

We are preparing for the kick-off of the Nativity House CSA season. The seeds have been ordered and our work days will begin in April. Have you ever considered growing your own food in a community farm setting? The Nativity House CSA garden workdays are truly some of the best times around. If you are interested, but not sure of a total commitment, just come out for one work day. You will love it!

With the hope of Spring just around the corner, we have made a list of Nativity House improvement projects. If you or a group that you are involved in would be interested in helping or spearheading one of these projects we welcome your efforts! Some of the projects include: creating an outdoor gathering space for volunteer groups, trail blazing, building an outdoor meditation space, painting a St. Francis of Assisi mural, and barn building!

During this Lenten Season, the Nativity House Community holds the greater community close in prayer. Our hearts are full of gratitude for the prayers and support that you offer. We welcome your participation in the Nativity House community in any capacity. If you are interested in joining us please don’t hesitate to contact us!

Peace, love and joy to you and yours!
Venus & Justin Wozniak
Directors, Nativity House

Wish List

Prayers	Gas Cards
Stamps	Target Cards
Envelopes #63/4	Sponsor an Intern
Queen Head board, dresser & desk	Sponsor a Guest Mom

About The Visitation

This newspaper, *The Visitation*, is a publication on topics of social justice, spirituality and theology. It is published four times a year by the Nativity House. Submissions are accepted from readers everywhere.

To contact us, email us at:

newspaper@nativity-house.org

Past issues are online at:

<http://www.nativity-house.org>

About Nativity House

Nativity House serves as a shelter for first-time mothers in need of residence in the southwest Chicago suburbs. The Nativity House operates an on-site community supported farm (CSA) that provides nourishment for the Nativity House and the greater community. Overall, we envision a healing environment focused on the dignity of each person, the dignity of work and stewardship of the earth.

Nativity House is administered by a board of directors and an advisory committee of individuals with a broad range of experience. Nativity House has formed positive relationships with relevant local organizations that are extremely helpful in carrying out the mission of the house. Nativity House was recognized as a public charity in August, 2011.

To connect with us, please email Venus Wozniak at:

venusad@nativity-house.org

Postal mail should be addressed to:

Nativity House
17141 W. 143rd St.
Lockport, IL 60441

We extend the sincerest thanks to all.

Jubilee*...continued from page 1*

cathedrals and pilgrimage churches around the world, symbolizing a move to a different spiritual space and a new beginning. In his announcement, Pope Francis reminds us that the key to the Jubilee is to acknowledge that we are all sinners and in need of God's mercy – which he is always willing to give: "Do not forget that God forgives all, and God forgives always. Let us never tire of asking forgiveness."

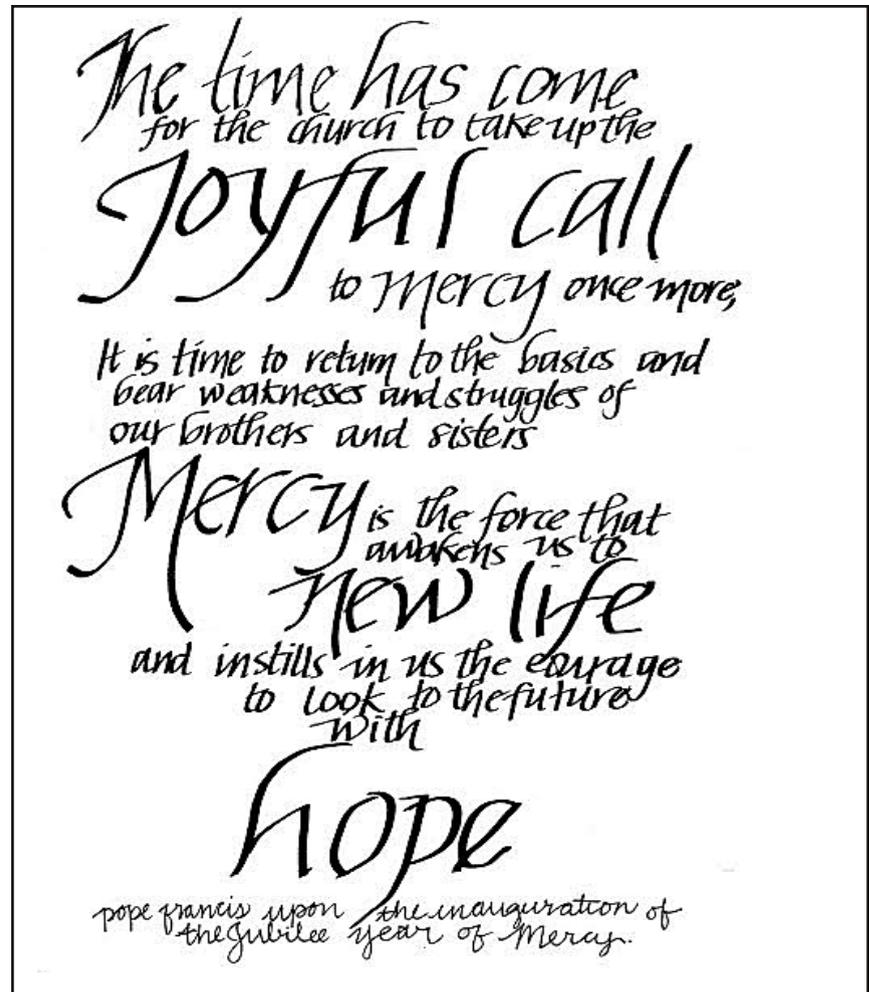
What does this particular call mean for us as a human community? The Jubilee Year, Pope Francis says, is a call for mercy within the Church, but more than that, it is a call for the Church to be a witness for mercy, to bring it to a world which has been alienated from mercy for a long time. In the Bull of Indiction explaining the Jubilee, he quotes Pope John Paul I, who wrote in his own 1980 encyclical on mercy:

The present-day mentality, more perhaps than that of people in the past, seems opposed to a God of mercy, and in fact tends to exclude from life and to remove from the human heart the very idea of mercy. The word and the concept of 'mercy' seem to cause uneasiness in man,

who, thanks to the enormous development of science and technology, never before known in history, has become the master of the earth and has subdued and dominated it (cf. Gen 1:28). This dominion over the earth, sometimes understood in a one-sided and superficial way, seems to have no room for mercy...

Pope Francis proposes a way to counter this absence of mercy in the culture: "The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope." We are to do this in our pastoral activity, but also we are to "proclaim mercy," to go out and announce it to the world beyond the walls of the Church. He points out that we are, in the image of Jesus, called not to judge and not to condemn in all our worldly interactions.

During this Jubilee Year, we are called to live mercy in all our interactions. We are especially to open our hearts to those living "on the margins" – to reach out to heal the wounded, through the Corporal Works of Mercy: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, wel-



come the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. Beyond that, he asks us not to forget the Spiritual Works of Mercy: counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead.

This year, we have a special opportunity to live Lent more intensely. There will be additional opportunities to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance (Reconciliation) and the pope has empowered all priests to forgive the sin of abortion, for which people are normally excommunicated.

So, what does this mean for the average person? You can participate by: seeking God's mercy for yourself or for someone who has died, through the Plenary Indulgence (going to confession and attending Mass at a designated pilgrimage church while praying for Pope Francis' intentions and then per-

form a work of mercy), spreading mercy in your home and workplace by refraining from judging or blaming others, resisting the urge to spread nastiness or to argue with people on the internet or in the real world with whom you disagree, going out to the "margins" to serve the homeless, the disabled, the forgotten elderly in nursing homes, or assisting immigrants in need, or working for justice and fair treatment for the unborn, the oppressed and the poor, through political and civil action.

The Jubilee Year of Mercy is an opportunity to be part of God's mercy and to help build his Kingdom. We should not let it pass without doing our part.



Joyce is a Catechetical Associate for the Diocese of Joliet Religious Education Office, a freelance writer and a member of St. John the Baptist Parish in Joliet, IL.

Join us at the Nativity House for

Mercy Trumps Fear:

a Round Table discussion on Pope Francis'

new book, *The Name of God is Mercy*

Saturday, April 9th

at 6:30 p.m.

Nativity House
17141 W. 143rd St.
Lockport, IL 60441

All are welcome!

Beauty in the Philippines

by Kaitlyn Sendzik

Over Christmas break, from January 1-10, I was blessed with the opportunity to serve alongside thirty other missionaries through the Diocese of Joliet in the Philippines. I worked with the non-profit organization, Gawad Kalinga, in building houses for the village of Bago City. During my time there, I also had the opportunity to visit two other villages that Diocese of Joliet groups had helped in the past.

The Philippines is a very poverty stricken area with many garbage pile-ups along with a distinct smell that is a combination of garbage, dust, pollution, and humidity. There is no toilet paper or running water for the bathrooms. To flush the toilet, two scoops of water from a

bucket had to be poured into the toilet bowl. The showers consisted of a bucket to be filled with cold water. While this country may not sound appealing to an outsider, I would go back in a heartbeat.

From the outside, one would feel sorry for the people living there with those conditions. But it is not pity these people need. On the contrary, it is their perspective that we need. They have so much joy, love and appreciation for life, which showed on their beautiful faces. They wanted to bless the missionaries, while our service was to bless them. They taught me even more about the power of solidarity and that one does not need to have the necessities of this world in order to be

happy, but instead the joy and love of the Gospel to truly live a life that would make God smile.

What moved me the most from being in the Philippines was the children and their smiling faces. I did not speak the same language as them, but smiles could go a long way. The children were always climbing all over the missionaries and sharing all of their food and drinks, even if it was a part of their only meal for the day. The children welcomed us, even though we were complete strangers and did not look like them.

In a broad statement, I saw God in every aspect of the Philippines. I particularly saw God during the Masses that the missionaries shared in the villages with the villagers. The definition of Catholic being “universal” became more real to me from participating in Masses with people that live on the complete other side of the world that also speak a different language than I do. From singing with the villagers “Joy to the World” to praying the “Our Father” and receiving communion, I truly felt that I was having a vision as to what Heaven must be like.

The memories that I have with the other missionaries are timeless, but I know that through my mission trip, I want to live a life of service to others around me. This opportunity to connect with people from a different walk of life was a once in a lifetime experience, and I pray that others are able to go out and make a difference to everyone that they encounter, near or far.



Kaitlyn Sendzik is senior Theology major and Peace Studies minor at Lewis University.

Peace

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H-bomb.

When we with the Catholic Peace Fellowship staff have read this provocative book by one of our early advisers in reading circle settings with young people or newcomers to the text we generally recommend that people begin with the latter chapters of the book and then turn to Merton's historical chapters on Origen, Saint Augustine, the Middle Ages, the Just War tradition, Machiavelli, casuistry and the case of conscience and then to turn to the chapters on the 20th Century and the rise of total war and terrorism in the modern era.

In our time Merton laments, *there is still all too general an apathy and passivity among the clergy and the faithful. Perhaps it is exact to say that they are afflicted with a kind of moral paralysis. Hypnotized by the mass media, which tend to be aggressive and bellicose, baffled and intimidated by the general atmosphere of [Cold War] suspicion, [and] bewildered by the war.*

Calling to mind the Nazis' carrying out of the “most revolting of crimes under the cover of ‘obedience’ to ‘legitimately constituted authority’ for the sake of a ‘good’” Merton asks his reader of the 20th and 21st Centuries to confront the grave problem of moral passivity in the Modern age. He lifts up the Catholic martyr Blessed Franz Jägerstätter as a rare Christian witness who confronted this passivity. In the face of this problem, Merton calls Christians to disobedience when obedience would be sinful and unjust.

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photo provided by Kaitlyn Sendzik

Kaitlyn and a young Filipino boy celebrate friendship in Bago City, Philippines.

Beef with *Cowspiracy*

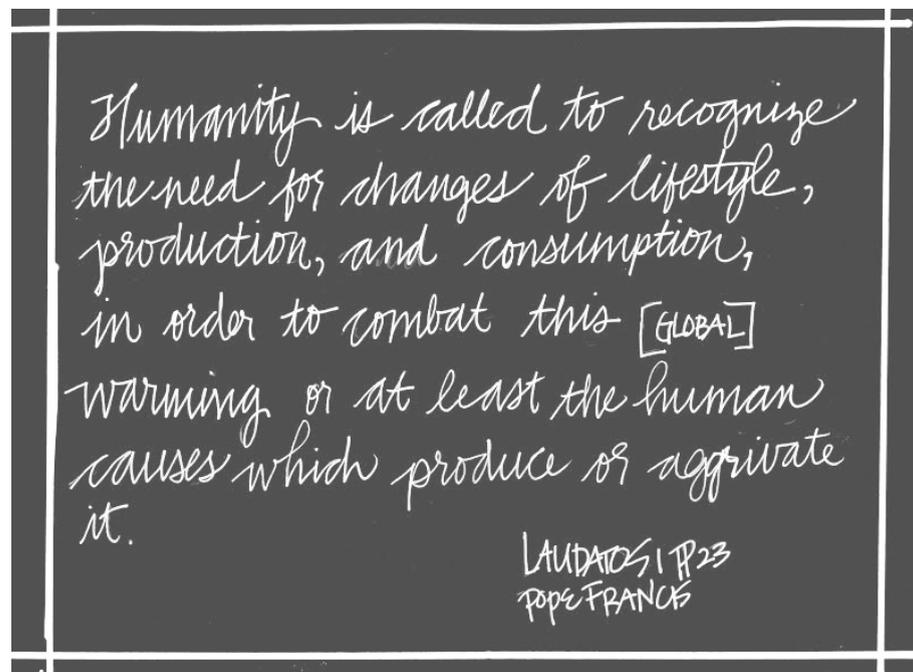
by Martin Tomszak

Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret is director Kip Andersen's foray into the controversial world of Animal Agriculture and its devastating effects on the environment. He undertakes the tough task of uncovering the seemingly hidden connection between the beef, dairy, livestock feed industries and a whole host of environmental ills including deforestation, water consumption, greenhouse gas emission, species extinction, eco system destruction, topsoil erosion, and ocean depletion. Kip begins the film with the simple premise that climate change is not just about changing the way in which humans live, but changing the way in which everything on the Earth interacts. One specific environmental interaction that sparks Kip's interest is a UN study which found that livestock used for human consumption emits more greenhouse gas than all human transportation systems combined (cars, trucks, trains, planes, boats, etc). Kip, an avid conservationist and a self-termed obsessive compulsive environmentalist, is stunned by the fact that he had never heard of this particular source of climate change before.

After scouring all of the major environmental organizations' databases and websites he is further perplexed by the fact that he cannot find information related to livestock gas emissions anywhere else. He sets out to discover why this is the case and more importantly if the UN research is accurate and what its implications might be.

His main area of focus quickly forms around not only the gas emission of livestock but also to the massive amount of water consumption that goes into the

raising of those animals. Everything from providing the water for the livestock to the actual amount of water it takes to grow the grains that the animals consume. He estimates that it takes 2500 gallons of water to produce just one pound of ground beef. All of the water conservation efforts that he has taken seriously (short showers, turning off the faucet while brushing his teeth, etc.) seem completely futile in the face of this fact. His disappointment is only compounded when he finds that the California's leading conservationist researchers fall into



two categories: they either don't deal with agriculture's and animal husbandry's impacts on the environment as a research topic or refuse to comment on his questions.

While the film goes into a nuanced exploration of the relationship between agro-business and environmental woes, the standout statistical findings of Kip's research are that agro-business constitutes 30% of the world's water consumption, 45% of the Earth's land, is directly responsible for 91% of Brasil's Amazon destruction, is the lead-

ing cause of water dead zones, habitat destruction and is also a huge factor in species extinction. The most troubling moral consequence of these statistics is that none of the world's leading advocacy groups have this as a central issue of focus, or even as an issue at all on their agendas.

Kip pulls together a group of environmental researchers that are willing to talk to him and begins to discuss the very real dangers of our continuing consumption rate of livestock. He also attempts to uncover why it is that groups like Greenpeace, NRDC, Sierra Club, Amazon Watch, OCEANA, WWF, etc. do not place any emphasis on making the connection

manages to get an interview to ask the question of "If animal consumption is the leading cause of greenhouse gas emissions, why are we not addressing it?" He is given replies along the lines of "That is your assessment and we have our own."

Kip also makes the important connection between the rain forests and the devastating effect of their depletion. This action of deforestation is often tied to the creation of grazing land. However, most of the rain forest advocacy groups don't mention this connection, instead choose to focus on issues like paper production, coal pollution, tar sands, oil pipe lines and other fossil fuels. He finally makes a breakthrough with the program director of Amazon Watch who admits that the top cause of deforestation in the Amazon in land use terms is agro-business like cattle ranching and soy bean production (used to feed cattle).

Questions about advocacy arise when Kip learns that many of the activists championing the cause of deforestation in Brasil have faced opposition from the Beef industry and have even been killed. He examines the murder of activist Sister Dorothy Stang by Brazilian cattle ranchers as an extreme example of the lengths to which the industry is willing to go to keep the status quo.

Kip's question is finally answered by admissions from a Dairy CEO and a Dairy Farmer on the unsustainability of the beef and dairy industries in terms of both land use and greenhouse gas emissions. In these conversations government subsidies for grazing lands are also discussed. Essentially Kip is revealing that whether or not we choose to eat meat, a portion of our taxes are used to level out the hidden costs

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Cowspiracy*...continued from page 5*

through the use of state and federal dollars.

As the film continues, Kip begins to lose support and funding from his backers due to the controversial nature of his work. In order to highlight the extent to which the topic has become taboo, he interviews Howard Lyman, a former owner of one of the largest dairy farms in Montana who himself was sued by leading Dairy and Beef companies for discussing some of the problems associated with the unsustainability of those industries on the Oprah Winfrey show.

After convincing himself that any outside pressure or threat is ultimately worth withstanding to get his research out to the public, Kip continues. He then explores the possibilities and outcomes of a vegan diet, ultimately reaching the conclusion that a vegan diet is the best way to interact with our neighbors, both human and animal, as well as the best course for sustainability and environmental stewardship.

If I had to describe this film in one word it would be difficult. That term sticks out in my mind as appropriate for a number of reasons. First, any discussion of a personal life style change as complicated as becoming vegan is not easy so the implications of this film must be taken seriously and the choices presented before the viewer are difficult indeed. Secondly, I must reference the fact that as I review this film I do so from a position of someone who is a vegetarian so again, difficult would be appropriate here in terms of portraying myself as unbiased. However, a notion of bias may possibly be wiped away when I highlight the fact that this film is also difficult in the sense of believability. The way in which

Kip went about proving the connection between agro-business and environmental deterioration leaves a lot to be desired statistically on the one hand, and leaves him playing on the emotions of viewers on the other.

While the initial statistical analysis of the UN report seems to be legitimate, a majority of the facts and figures thrown out by Kip are calculated by the director himself and are often done on the fly. Although his infographics and charts go a long way in “establishing legitimacy,” his case would have been greatly strengthened had he taken the time to utilize experts in the field to back his claims. If he presented it in an academic manner it might make for a boring documentary and would downplay his cry of conspiracy to a mere lack of thoughtful research, but it would be more effective for his cause of discussing sustainability in a serious way.

A lack of legitimate connection and data is also present when Kip discusses the cloak and dagger actions of agro-business executives to cover up the secret fact of the unsustainability of their industry. The title seems to play at a clear connection between those executives and the leading environmentalist groups. He makes it seem as if there is some sort of collusion going on behind the scenes between the two groups, that somehow the organizations listed earlier are being secretly funded by agro-business to not discuss the connection between livestock and environmental decay.

He also makes it seem as if his funding being withdrawn is also a telltale sign of conspiracy despite the fact that the studio merely says it is because he is pursuing a controversial topic. If someone I had funded to shoot a film went barging into people’s offices I might remove funding as well.

This pulling of the audience’s heart strings continues in brilliantly edited shots of fish being gutted, ducks being beheaded, cows being tied up and hauled off by construction vehicles, chickens happily running free at a sanctuary and smiling children eating vegan friendly food. Documentaries are very rarely objective, but Kip is not subtle in the least bit.

There are also perfectly legitimate avenues that open up from his research that he fails to explore. For example, the notion that a plant based diet could lead to a buildup of surplus grain which could in turn be used to alleviate world hunger is only lightly alluded to. Perhaps the discussion of food distribution being a more legitimate problem than meat consumption or food scarcity is ignored because it does not paint a picture of conspiracy either, and without conspiracy there is less allure to his film.

While I enjoyed the short fifteen minute plug for a sustainable vegan diet at the end of the film, I walked away with an overall sense of inadequacy on the

part of the film makers.

The idea was a good one, but we must allow research and truth to take the wheel rather than to try to shape and mold statistics to fit our own narrative. Seeing the modern consumption of meat as simply unsustainable is not shocking to anyone who thinks about it seriously, but the way in which the film is structured, it doesn’t open up doors of dialogue, rather beats viewers over the head with shock tactics and veiled allusions to conspiracy. There are better approaches to discussing the topics of environmental stewardship, sustainability, and plant based diets. In the end, *Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret* may have crude methodology that leaves the audience wanting, but it asks important questions and may serve as the starting point for many on the path towards conscious living.



Martin is a professor of Theology at Benedictine University in Lisle, IL.

Easy Essays:**The New Apologetics**

by Peter Maurin (1877-1949)



In his lectures on the New Christendom Jacques Maritain emphasizes the necessity of laying the foundations of a new social order.

Laying the foundations of a new social order is the task of the laity.

The task of the laity is to do the pioneer work of creating order out of chaos.

Peace

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In "Christian Conscience and National Defense" Merton diagnoses the root problem of our time noting that,

The real problem of our time is basically spiritual. One important aspect of this problem is the fact that in many Christians, the Christian conscience seems to function only as a rudimentary vestigial faculty, robbed of its full vigor and incapable of attaining its real purpose: a life completely transformed in Christ ...Genuine Christian action has to be based on a complete sacrificial offering of our self and our life, in the service of truth. Short of this, we cannot attain sufficient detachment from our own selfish interests and from the peripheral concerns of a wealthy, spiritually indolent society. Without this detachment we cannot possibly see nuclear war as it really is, and we will consequently betray Christ and His Church, in the mistaken conviction that in defending our wealth we are defending Christian truth.

Merton points to the Servant of God Dorothy Day (another early CPF adviser) as an example of a life shaped by a well-formed Christian conscience in both her practice of the works of mercy and as a witness to Christ's peace.

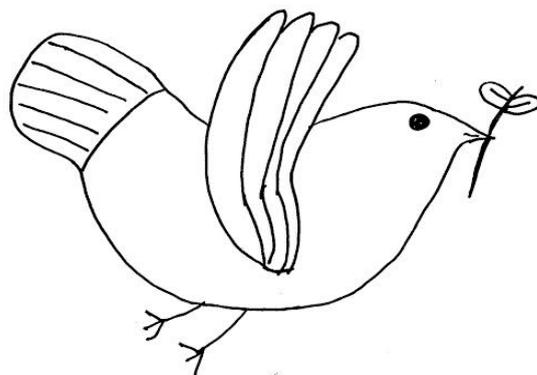
In a 1961 letter to Ethel Kennedy, who was also a recipient of one of the mimeographed copies of PPCE, Merton identifies for us what he calls the "main enemy." He writes:

It seems to me that the great problem we face is not Russia but war itself. War is the main enemy and we are not going to

fully make sense unless we see that. Unless we fight [against] war, both in ourselves and in the Russians...we are purely and simply going to be wrecked by the forces that are in us....

It seems to me that there are very dangerous ambiguities about our democracy in its actual present condition. I wonder to what extent our ideals are now a front for organized selfishness and systematic irresponsibility. The shelter business certainly brought out the fact that some Americans are not too far from the law of the jungle. If our affluent society ever breaks down and the facade is taken away, what are we going to have left? Suppose we do have a war, and fifty million people are left to tell the tale: what kind of people are they going to be? What kind of a life will they live? By what standards? We cannot go on living every man for himself.

After these humbling words

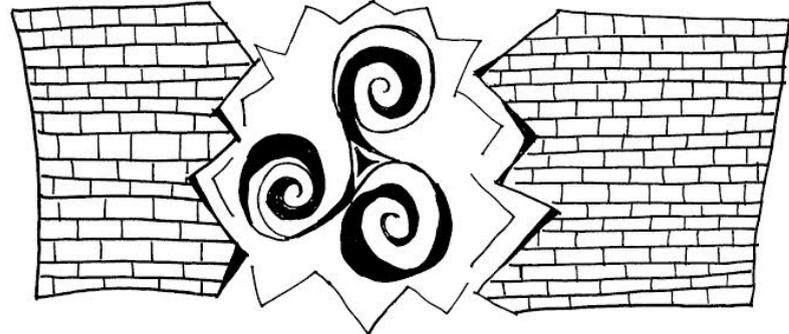


Peace not war

artwork by Gracie Wozniak

for Americans, in "Theologians and Defense" Merton chastises those Christians who would call for a Modern American or Western Holy Crusade in our times. Merton's words sound a warning about ends and means that is as clear to us today as they were in 1962. He writes:

The Christian Responsibility is not to one side or the other in the power struggle: it is to God and truth, and to the whole of mankind.



It is absurd and immoral to pretend that Christendom can be defended by the H[ydrogen]-bomb. As Saint Augustine would say, the weapon with which we would attempt to destroy the enemy would pass through our own hearts to reach him. We would be annihilated morally.

In his censored essay "Target Equals City" Merton somberly arrives at an even more definitive conclusion about warfare:

There is one winner, only one winner, in war. The winner is war itself. Not truth, not justice, not liberty, not morality, not Christian truth. These are the vanquished.

While a nuclear war may not be something regularly discussed or considered today as it was from the 1960s to the early 1980s we know it is all too possible even in these times as the Obama Administration turns away from disarmament and looks to spend a trillion dollars over the next thirty years to upgrade the U.S.'s nuclear arsenal.

Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* also calls Christians and all people of goodwill to confront this painful reality along with the other grave crises that face humanity, while regularly lamenting that humanity finds itself in the midst of a "Third World War fought piecemeal" – total war waged in far too many parts of this world.

In the face of these serious matters, Merton would remind us to not lose hope and give into despair, instead he reminds us that "the doctrine of the Incarnation makes the Christian obligated at once to God and to man. If God has become man, then no Christian is ever allowed to be indifferent to man's fate. Whoever believes that Christ is the Word made flesh believes that every man must in some sense be regarded as Christ. The Christian responsibility is not to one side or the other in the power struggle: it is to God and truth, and to the whole of mankind."



Shawn T. Storer is Director of the Catholic Peace Fellowship and lives with his wife and four children at Blessed Jägerstätter Urban Farm on the South Bend of the Saint Joseph River.



THE VISITATION

Nativity House
17141 W. 143rd St.
Lockport, IL 60441



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St. Thomas Aquinas

by Landon DePasquale

Feast- January 28th

Recently, I read a biography on the life of St. Thomas Aquinas. While St. Thomas is best known for his intellectual contributions to the faith, the biggest one being the *Summa Theologiae*, what was so striking about this story of St. Thomas' life is the holiness and saintliness of this simple Dominican friar.

St. Thomas was born into a wealthy influential family, but gave up all of that to join the Dominicans. The Dominicans were a mendicant order, which means they begged to support themselves and their community. Aquinas' family was not happy with his decision to join a poor, simple order, so at the age of 20, he was kidnapped by his brothers and held against his will in the family castle. Despite their vigorous attempts, his family could not convince him to forsake the order. Finally, they decided to tempt St. Thomas to lust, in order to persuade him to abandon the Dominicans, by putting a prostitute in his room. Instead of choosing sin, St.

Thomas chased the prostitute out of his room with a flaming log from the fireplace, and used its charred tip to draw a cross upon his door. That night, God sent two angels to deliver a cincture to him, a small cord of wool worn around the waste as a symbol of chastity. Once girded with this angelic cord, St. Thomas never succumbed to lust.

There are many stories related about St. Thomas, but one of my favorites is concerning his commentary on Isaiah. He had come to a particularly difficult passage that he could not understand. For weeks, he tried to understand its meaning, but with no success. Late one night, his attendant heard St. Thomas speaking. When he came in he found no one else there, and pressed St. Thomas about his discussion. Finally, after some time, Aquinas told his attendant that he was speaking with St. Peter and St. Paul, who had come to explain the passage to him. In another instance, St. Thomas was praying devoutly before the Blessed Sacrament. As the other monks came in to pray the Divine Office, they

noticed him levitating off the ground as he prayed.

Another thing that is striking about St. Thomas is his humility. Were Sts. Peter and Paul to appear to one of us and explain a passage of scripture, we might be tempted to inflate our own importance or use their appearance as proof that we are right and other wrong. It is in the deep humility of St. Thomas that we see an example for us to follow.

These stories may seem fanciful, unbelievable, or even strange. Yet, I think they indicate an important truth, namely that God truly does call us to be saints and that holiness is something to strive for here on Earth, not just in heaven. If we were truly to devote ourselves to goodness, we might find that something like levitation or conversations with saints would be the least incredible things we experienced.



Even miracles pale in comparison to union with God.



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