

MANNA *in the wilderness*

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Reflections on Two Baptisms

by Julia Occhiogrosso

On the same weekend Nicholas and Jonathan (our four and five year old boys) experienced two different kinds of baptisms. For one we gathered in a church. We were encircled by the warm secure support of family and close friends. Each child took his turn coming up to the bowl of holy water, standing on a stool and encountering the sacred ancient ritual of water poured over their heads. Fr. Mike anointed them with oil. The congregation prayed over them. Simple white stoles with colorful images; a sun, a candle, a heart and a flower were draped about their shoulders. Godparents lit the baptismal candles and handed them to each child. Jonathan and Nicholas beamed with deep joy as they processed around the church and the community lovingly received them. Indeed the mystery of the sacrament became tangible. I was certain that in that moment their young souls were gifted with a glimpse into something profound. All was clear. There was no doubt. They were loved, they were part of the Great All that gives life meaning and hope.

That same weekend they knew a different kind of baptism. Cousins were visiting. All the kids requested permission to watch a video, *The Iron Giant*. Jonathan and Nicky were given the video for Christmas, but had not viewed it yet because I had not had a chance to see it myself to know if it would be appropriate for them to watch. I admit I tend to be over-cautious when it comes to TV viewing. We have our TV set for two channels; Channel 10 for public broadcasting and channel four for carefully selected videos. After much pleading, I softened and made a deal that they could watch the video if the older cousins fast-forwarded through any scenes that might be too scary.

This animated tale is an award-winning film for children that makes a negative commentary on the use of violence. A young boy rescues an enormous gentle giant who fell from the stars to earth. In the end the Iron Giant becomes the sacrificial lamb

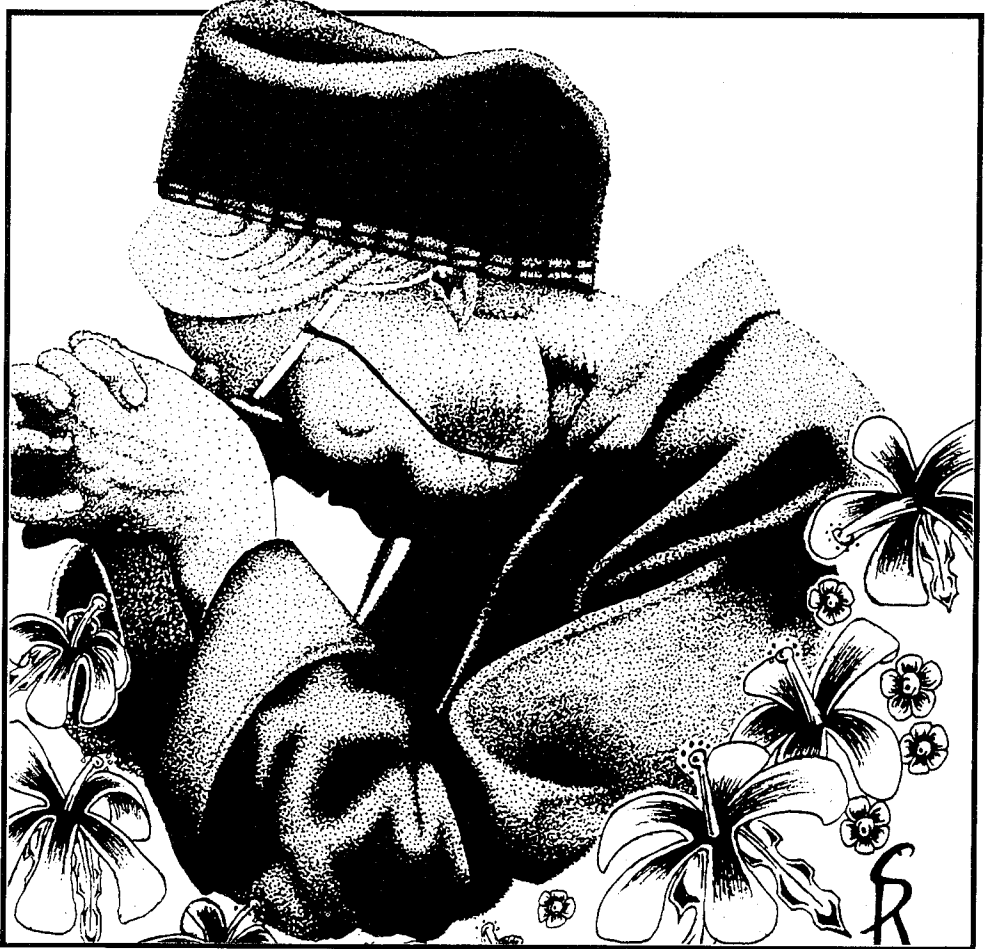
who saves the very community who hunted him down with missile fire.

By the end of the movie the older cousins were onto something else and I was sitting with Nicky and Cody who were vocally opposed to my editing technique. Even with my skill with the remote I failed to avoid the scene where the Iron Giant is destroyed by missiles. The Iron Giant is resurrected in a different form and memorialized in the community.

Despite the generally happy ending I sensed a deep sadness in my five-year-old. It began with an unusual crying spell as he was getting ready for bed. At first it seemed to be triggered

by an argument with his younger brother. But arguments with his younger brother did not usually produce this type of sobbing. By the time he was in bed he was still lamenting. As I attempted to listen and comfort, the questions rolled with the tears. Why did the missiles kill the Iron Giant? Are there really missiles? Who makes the missiles, where are the missiles? Why do they make missiles?

I had a sick feeling in my stomach as I struggled to help this frightened child to feel safe and secure. I stumbled with my words; my maternal inclinations wanted to protect him from even *(continued on other side)*



Dorothy Day's Sainthood Cause Begins

Dorothy Day (co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement with Peter Maurin in 1933) was recently given the title by the Vatican; "Servant of God", the first step in the beatification process towards becoming a Saint.

"Dorothy Day said 'Don't trivialize me by trying to make me a saint'. Her personal humility was such that she never considered herself to be holier than any other Catholic, her understanding of the way in which so many of her day would have dismissed her Catholicism and her thirst for social justice as only fit for saints, and not for the everyday believer she considered herself and so many others to be, and her deep love for the saints of the Church all combined to make her renounce any notion of personal sanctity as a means to make her something other than what she had always striven to be: a simple woman living the Gospel." -Cardinal John O'Connor

(continued from front page)

the knowledge of bombs. But it was too late. He had been exposed to the awful reality of weapons of mass destruction. He had been initiated into a different kind of baptism.

How do we help children face violence and injustice without threatening their fragile blooming? In most of the world violence, injustice, suffering and grief are the blatant daily reality for young children. Poverty, hunger, warfare are their inheritance.

In North American culture we have a different dilemma. For the most part children are shielded from imminent threats of violence. Yet despite our efforts there are insidious forces at work. Violence in all degrees creeps into our psyches, our living rooms, our neighborhoods and our schools. The formerly safe havens for children have been invaded. Once more we live with the deception that we can somehow conquer this violence with more institutionalized violence. We perpetuate the cycle of violence by building more prisons and enforcing harsher penalties for younger children. The once far off images of violence perpetrated in other countries in other neighborhoods is each moment showing itself to be as part of our personal world as we are to each other.

Violence in all its forms is a failure to recognize the truth of our interconnectedness, our relatedness. It is in part our inability to believe in the Divine sacredness that is found even in the "enemy". Violence is often a consequence of oppression or lack of access to power over the basics in ones life. Our children most likely will encounter violence in some form at some degree in their life. How do we help them sustain hope and vision while they are vulnerable to being drowned in a baptism into a culture of violence?

We need to consciously and intentionally learn about and teach the spirituality and practice of active nonviolence to children. It is possible to teach children how

to access the power of love to transform violence and injustice.

Sixty percent of what children learn comes through what is modeled for them. The model of family has potential to influence and shape the future understanding of who we are in relationship to each other and to all of creation. Families beginning with the example of loving, committed, forgiving relationships serve as the foundation and touchstone for living nonviolence. When we can persist lovingly in our efforts to resolve conflicts within the microcosms of family we are giving our children powerful tools they will utilize in their encounters outside the home. When we take seriously the potential of active nonviolence we give our children true hope and protect them from the despair that the culture of violence threatens to unleash.

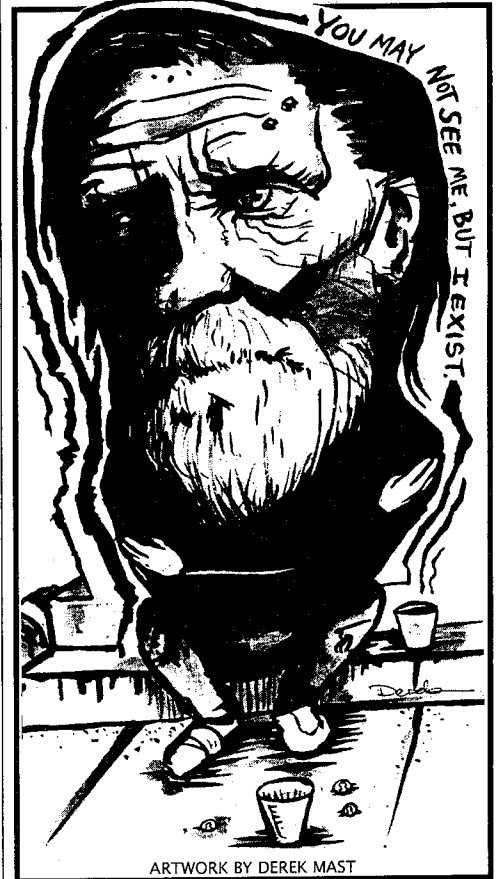
In active nonviolence or unconditional love in action, family models need to reach beyond the narcissistic tendency to become isolated, egocentric and self-serving. We need to celebrate the bonds of family and then multiply the celebration by using appropriate opportunities to include the stranger and the outcast as we deepen and broaden the definition of family.

To learn active nonviolence and teach it to our children takes a daily commitment to begin again. It means a willingness to go with love into the brokenness, the suffering, the grief and the conflict, which presents itself in families. We cannot do it alone. While violence interrupts the fullness of relationship, nonviolence is committed to creating the true Holy Communion.

As I looked out upon the community gathered to witness the baptism of Jonathan and Nicholas, I felt a deep sense of assurance and support. I was certain that the blessings formalized by the baptismal rite would be sustained by the collective loving body represented by those present and absent who have with open arms embraced the boys.

In this moment, I am convinced that this loving mystical body will successfully guide them though the many baptisms they will encounter in their journey on this earth.

Julia Occhiogrosso founded the Las Vegas Catholic Worker in August 1986. She also works on the *From Violence to Wholeness* program of Pace e Bene Franciscan Nonviolence Center. *From Violence to Wholeness* is a ten-part study program in the spirituality and practice of active nonviolence. For information contact: Pace e Bene Franciscan Nonviolence Center, (702) 648-2281, 1420 W. Bartlett St., Las Vegas, NV 89106.



ARTWORK BY DEREK MAST

Thank You

for your generous response to our annual Christmas Appeal letter. We raised \$9,723 so far. A financial report is available for 1999, let us know if you would like one.

PLEASE JOIN US:

Wednesday-Saturday, 6:00 a.m.:

Morning prayer at Catholic Worker.

Wednesday-Saturday, 6:30 a.m.:

Breakfast meal served at St. James Church parking lot (G & McWilliams St.) to the poor and homeless.

Tuesday, 5:30 p.m.:

Mass or Liturgy, potluck following. Call for location.

Seven Days a Week:

Hospitality (IHN) to 3 to 5 homeless families, call 638-8806 to volunteer.

Last Saturday each month; 8:30 a.m.:

Deliver food to homes in need, gather for reflection & prayer, call for info.

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