Two Assumptions of the Catholic Worker

These two assumptions are excerpted from the book All the Way to Heaven (A Theological Reflection on Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin and the Catholic Worker) by Lawrence Holben. (Note: There are six assumptions, we printed the first four in the September 2010 Manna, available on our website)

THE FIFTH ASSUMPTION

While unambiguously set forth in the two creation stories in Genesis, the fifth assumption is one that the West has by and large ignored, especially since the advent of mercantile capitalism and the triumph of the Industrial Revolution. It is: A vital part of our imaging of God the Creator, an essential component of the call that is ours as human beings, is to be co-creators with God, vicars of his or her particular contribution to that process, then something is fundamentally wrong with the system.

THE SIXTH ASSUMPTION

While the sixth assumption would seem to be co-creators with God, vicars of the natural order (and forms the basis of what has come to be called Christian Ecology), for the Catholic Worker another important import of this truth has been primary: Our work, our labor, is not just how we earn our keep; it is (or should be) an essential medium for acting out our destiny and dignity as human beings. Work is a “spiritual” issue.

First, God gives the abundant gifts of creation for the common good. God gives us the ability and the charge to take that abundance and — with our toil, ingenuity and creativity — make it more than it originally was so that we may share it with each other, again for the common good.

This is, in the true meaning of the word, an “awful” task: Our labor is alarmingly sacred. It is not a commodity. It should be a holy act of conscious cooperation in the continuing work of God in the unfolding of creation.

This participation in divine creativity is not the province of a select few: artists, farmers, crafts-workers. Every person born is summoned to it. As our particular talents and gifts differ, so the specifics of how we each individually play our part in this process of ongoing co-creation will differ. But we are less than fully human if we fail to play that part, and if the “system” somehow blocks the ability of anyone to discover, enact and celebrate his or her particular contribution to that process, then something is fundamentally wrong with the system.

Witness at NATO Summit

by Katie Kelso

When it comes to Dorothy Day’s assumption of youth I am no exception. In her book Loaves and Fishes she explains, “One of the greatest evils of the day among those outside of prison is their sense of futility. Young people say, ‘What can one person do? What is the sense of our small effort? They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time; we can be responsible only for the one action of the present moment. But we can beg for an increase of love in our hearts that will vitalize and transform all our individual actions, and know that God will take them and multiply them, as Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes’.”

I have often asked myself what is the point of my protesting. I have vigiled for peace without passion and without hope of results. I have found myself even bored, disconnected, waiting for the time to pass, but I can say that my recent experience of protesting the NATO Summit in Chicago was quite the opposite. It began with the Catholic Worker Faith and Resistance Retreat, hosted by midwestern Catholic Workers. Around 150 Catholic Workers gathered together for a weekend at the Holy Innocents Convent in Chicago was quite the opposite. It began with the Catholic Worker Faith and Resistance Retreat, hosted by midwestern Catholic Workers. Around 150 Catholic Workers gathered together for a weekend at the Holy Innocents Convent. Our largest banner summed up our primary message. It read: “NA TO = economy of war, Community = economy of love”.

Robert Majors talks with police during NATO Summit in Chicago. (See Holben, continued on back page)
Scripture, especially the prophets, tends to uphold this truth in negative form, through judgment. This is not surprising, since such a societal call, heard with any seriousness, is clearly a devastating critique of not only our own society but ultimately of every society ever created by humankind in history. Some may come closer to the mark than others, at least for a time, but all fall short and, inevitably, all finally seek to mask that failure by the creation of an alternative, pseudo-religious ideology grounded in models of power, self-interest and exploitation rather than love, self-emptying and liberation.

Thus, every human society becomes, in biblical terms, “Babylon” — an illegitimate distortion of God’s intent for human life. Inevitably, each will posit for itself ultimate moral preeminence, demanding an allegiance that is by rights God’s alone. In doing so, each makes of itself a blasphemous counterfeit of the Kingdom of God.

There is a consequence to the collision of this final assumption with the painful facts of human history: Since every human society not only fails to live up to its divinely ordered purpose but also justifies its failure through self-serving ideology at war with the truth, every human society stands under the judgment of God and must be called to repentance. This means that the prophetic stance (truth spoken and enacted in self-emptying love, not in self-righteousness) is not an occasional occupation of God’s people but the permanent reality by which they must live until the inauguration of the Age to Come.

Peter Ediger: Poet, Prophet, by Julia Occhiogrosso

At the Catholic Worker, Peter was the music that rose above the clamor of pot washing. Peter was the thinker that lifted our thinking. On the streets of Las Vegas and the desert wilderness, Peter was the sign, held with relentless conviction. He was the practitioner of gospel nonviolence, teaching, learning, turning over in his heart and mind the way to follow Jesus more closely.

Peter was the comforter, listening when listening was just what was needed. Peter was the sorrowful repentant spirit of a broken man, needing comfort himself. Peter was the poet, ready to celebrate our story with music, metaphor and rhyme. In his physical absence, Peter is alive in each and every one of us who loved him.

On May 31, we had a service and installed a cross in the Catholic Worker front yard.

Las Vegasans at NATO Summit, from left: Jessica, Robbie, Mary Lou, Jim, John, Katie at our side, energized and gratified with our attempt to offer an alternative to a system of violence and dehumanization.

In the conclusion of our weekend retreat I believe many left taking comfort in Margaret Mead when she tells us to “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Closed in August

The Las Vegas Catholic Worker soup line and Hospitality Day will be closed from August 5 - 18.

Website: www.lvcw.org

PLEASE JOIN US:
Wednesday-Saturday*, 6:00 a.m.:
Morning prayer at Catholic Worker.
Wednesday-Saturday*, 6:30 a.m.:
Breakfast served to the poor & homeless.
*closed on fourth Saturday of month
Wednesday, 8:00 a.m. - noon:
Hospitality Day, we invite 20 homeless men home for showers, to wash clothes, and to have a great lunch.
Thursday, 9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.:
Vigil for Peace in front of Federal Courthouse, 333 Las Vegas Blvd. S.
Thursday, 10:30 a.m.:
50 Bag lunches delivered to homeless. Third Saturday of month, 8:00 a.m.:
Deliver food boxes to homes in need.