

The Hartford Catholic Worker

St. Martín De Porres House
St. Brigid House



Kick at the Darkness 'til it Bleeds Daylight

-Bruce Cockburn



Brian Kavanagh

Advent and Christmas 2025

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Compline

By Philip Metres

*That we await a blessed hope, & that we
will be struck
With great fear, like a baby taken into the
night, that every boot,*

*Every improvised explosive, Talon & Hor-
net, Molotov & rubber-coated bullet, every
unexploded cluster bomblet,*

*Every Kevlar & suicide vest & unpiloted
drone raining fire
On wedding parties will be burned as fuel
in the dark season.*

*That we will learn the awful hunger of God,
the nerve-fraying
Cry of God, the curdy vomit of God, the
soiled swaddle of God,*

*The constant wakefulness of God, alongside
the sweet scalp*

*Of God, the contented murmur of God, the
limb-twitched dream-*

*Reaching of God. We're dizzy in every
departure, limb-lost.
We cannot sleep in the wake of God, &
God will not sleep*

*The infant dream for long. We lift the
blinds, look out into ink
For light. My God, my God, open the spine
binding our sight.*

For This We Pray

*The Israeli will live with the Palestinian,
the Russian will sit down with the Ukranian,
the Black and the white, the Hispanic, Asian, and indigenous together;
and a little child will lead them.*

*The Darfurian herder will dance with the Darfurian farmer,
their young will lie down together,
and the Republican will break bread with the Democrat.*

*We will play near armaments that have been beaten into swingsets,
and we will extend our hands to those we fear and to those who fear us.*

*We will no longer harm nor destroy
on God's holy mountain,*

*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea, so too will mercy cover us.*

Isaiah 11:6-9, sort of



Awesome Armani and her turkey

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treasure to help
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God's Water is Gonna Break

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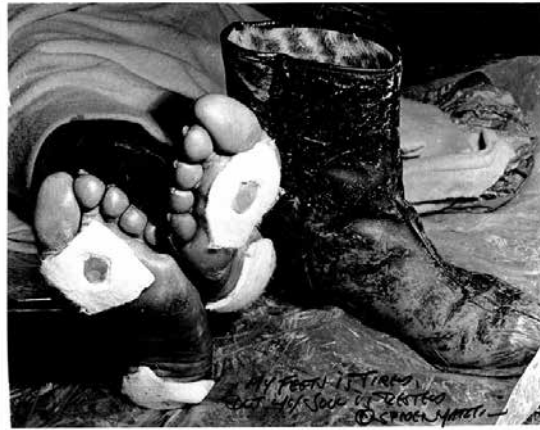
Christopher J. Douçot

It's dusk on a brisk mid-November day at the Green House and I'm exasperated. About an hour ago I sat down to work on this essay- well not this essay exactly, since for the second time in a week I've somehow lost several hours of edits. Six or seven hours of work and all I can find is my original rough draft! Anger at my own incompetence exacerbates that which exasperates me. I began my original essay with: *Since our last issue a few folks have reached out to see if we are OK. We are sorry to have alarmed you- we are fine; weary, but fine.* We're still fine; but I'm definitely aggravated. (All the italicized portions of this essay are salvaged from the original essay, I just don't have it in me try again...)

It's been a full day. I left New London by 7:30 this morning to teach my classes at CCSU. In my Introduction to Sociology we looked at health and society. On Wednesdays I have my students find a news story, an actual news story, related to the topic of the week. I'm hoping the students will become critical thinking interrogators of the news and also see the everyday relevance of the theories from the text. One student read a story in the Globe about the shorter [life expectancies of Black Americans](#). The story pointed out that a growing number of Americans, disproportionately Black Americans, are dying before they are even eligible for Medicare. Other students read stories about the cuts to the Affordable Care Act- not so fun fact- Jackie and I will not have health insurance next year unless the Democrats grow a spine, and the Republicans a heart, because our monthly premium is rising from \$300 to \$3000! Good grief!

I'm reminded of the testimony of Mother Pollard, who quipped during the Montgomery bus boycott: "Since I been walking, my feet are tired, but my soul's rested."

I don't quite have Mother Pollard's spiritual fortitude, so while my feet are tired, my soul is anxious. I am in awe of the hope displayed by the thousands of Black Brummies (people from Birmingham), largely women, who walked up to ten miles every day for a year. They did not know if the boycott would



[photo by Spider Martin](#)

be successful, or that even if it were successful that it would launch the Civil Rights Movement, or even that the Movement itself would be successful. Still they believed, that despite their bloodied feet, they were right. Faith, made real by public and persistent walking, and not just private piety, leads to justice.

My soul is anxious because though I am mostly fine, people I love- neighbors, strangers, and alleged enemies alike, are not fine. I am mostly fine, but with my knee injured my whole body is suffering. Similarly, the whole of the Mystical Body of Christ suffers when so many people who are parts of the Mystical Body are not at all fine.

After class I was met at the front door of the Green House by a savory waft of warm air. Jackie had left New London before me and was busy preparing dinner for a dozen of us. When she first arrived, she was met by Mimi and Doc Rixson and their weekly delivery of leftover and unwanted Whole Foods foods. Jackie's sister Teri, and an immigrant friend I won't name, join Jackie and the Joses in sharing the food with our hungry neighbors. We don't ask anybody about their citizenship status- as far

as we're concerned, we're all rightful citizens of God's kin'dom.

I've pondered on these pages in the past about the mystery of the Kin'dom of God being simultaneously "already and not yet", but it's been a while so indulge me. At the start of Jesus' ministry, just after his cousin the Baptizer had been arrested, he "came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel... saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kin'dom of God is at hand'"... (Mark 1:14-15).

When strangers in our land are rounded up by masked men to be imprisoned [and tortured in a Salvadoran gulag](#) the "not yetness" of the Kin'dom reigns. But when moms we know rally around other moms whose husbands have been deported- helping with food, rent, solace, and advocacy, the "alreadyness" of the Kin'dom comes into focus.

While Jackie was cooking, Angel came to the door. Angel's mom Andrea, a dear woman we wrote about recently, died three weeks ago. Angel was not well. Lil' Jose let him in... and then skedaddled! (a teachable moment...). Jackie made him lunch and consoled him. After smooching Jackie and greeting Angel I headed up to the third-floor office. I was Andrea's representative payee responsible for managing her disability check. With her passing I need to log into my Social Security account to let them know- but with the government closed I was, again, denied access to the SSA's website.

I moved on to writing thank-you emails to online donors before opening the postal mail. We had several good ole fashioned paper check donations that I logged. There was a letter from CNG asking me to provide proof that Sedrick (I'm also his representative payee) is still disabled and impoverished so that he can continue receiving heat at a discount. There were two assistance forms completed

(Please see: *God...*, p4)

God's Water cont.

by neighbors seeking help with their rent, lights, and heat. One family was also requesting help for the commissary account of an incarcerated loved one, the other family asked for prayers for the Ramirez family. Can you please pray for them.

We will be able to help these families but not until January when the second installment of an incredibly generous grant from the Sisters of Mercy arrives. While I was writing to these families to see if they have shut off notices or if they can wait until January, I heard Brian chewing Jackie's ear. He meandered over from the Purple House with more mail for me. Today's mail included a \$10,000 check from the archdiocese for us to buy food with. Thank God! Thank-you! While the president is petitioning the Supreme Court to withhold food stamps from the [1 in 8 Americans](#) who depend on them, the Church, the people of God, are stepping up to share that portion of God's bounty we've been entrusted with.

The "not yetness" of the God's reign lingers when we cling to the values of this world: greed, acquisitiveness, rugged individualism, violence, selfishness, patriarchy, white supremacy and any other justification for human domination. The "alreadyness" of God's reign is further revealed when we love, share, forgive, seek and celebrate community, cherish and protect Creation, embrace nonviolence, and infuse the institutions of our society with an egalitarian spirit. To live in hope is participate in the struggle to further reveal the "alreadyness" of God's kingdom with confidence that tomorrow can be better than today.

By mid afternoon the neighborhood kids arrived and a gaggle of UCONN students were on their heels. Despite cold noses and soon to be cold hands- the kids dragged the UCONN students (they were happy to be dragged)

out to the swingset. I wished I was with them. I love pushing little kids on the swings almost as much as I still love swinging myself.

It was at this point that I discovered my edits had again vanished. While I fumed my phone kept dinging and dinging. Big Jose, aka Pito, was texting for help. We had two toilets replaced, the lame ones we had were no match for the reams of toilet paper, and the occasional crayon, some kids try to flush. I had tasked Pito with removing the seats on the discarded toilets and replacing the broken seat on one of the remaining toilets. He was having trouble removing the broken seat and so I descended the third floor of the Green House to show him what to do, just as my dear, late friend Dennis, aka Buddy Boy, had shown me when I was nearer to Pito's age. Alas, I didn't immediately make it to the first floor. Jackie had just opened the door on the new oven when the handle fell off. Of course, the bolt required a funky star bit. A Phillip's head is obviously superior to a slot head on a screw or bolt, but dear Lord what is the purpose of a funky star head if not to further exacerbate my exasperation?! Curtly I barked at Jackie: "Put down the butter knife". I'll need to apologize later.

Over at the Purple House the problem removing the old toilet seat was revealed to be a design flaw. To my chagrin, this gimpy old man with

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a metal neck had to lie on his back right next to the toilet (eww!) to cut the plastic nut off the bolt that did not have any freakin' slot, Phillip's, star, or otherwise. While I hacked away at the nut with a utility knife, I sent Jose down to the woodshop to gather my miscellaneous star bits. I didn't send him to the basement because I'm lazy, gentle reader- my replaced knee still hurts as much as my knee to be replaced. This is especially so going down stairs. Thankfully, I'll still be insured in late December when my surgery is scheduled. Please pray I don't get a cold, or that there's a snowstorm that would delay the surgery to January, when I won't have insurance.

I left Pito to finish up the toilet work and returned to the broken stove. I opened the oven door and was temporarily blinded by the rush of steam that instantly condensed on my glasses. This happens every time I open a hot stove. I've been wearing glasses for ten years- dear reader, ten years! And I still haven't learned. Note to self: be gentle with my students. The star bit fit the star bolt but the screwdriver I had was one that has changeable heads, flat or Philip's. The star bit, way too short, was swallowed by the screwdriver. Fortunately, I've got a bit of MacGuyver in me and was able to improvise.

On Monday I MacGuyvered a temporary fix on the back door of the Green House. The door must

open and close a hundred times a day. The knob and locks have worn out, again. I know how they feel. I couldn't remove the lockset. It seems that whoever installed it, probably me, was a bonehead. Just last week I was showing Pito how to remove and repair a different lockset. I showed him the tiny hole on the handle through which a teeny tiny tool is inserted to



Hey Melchior, which one are we supposed to follow?

remove the handle to gain access to the screws. Well, the bonehead put the handle with the hole on the outside and so there is no access to the tab which is holding the knob in place. I'll need to cut it off. I sent myself an email to remind me to bring up my sawzall from New London, but I forgot anyways. I've brought most of my tools to New London since the ones I've left in Hartford seem especially vulnerable to the forces of entropy. Our dear friend Ben Peters- [author](#), professor, and Catholic Worker, has been helping us with some of the buildings and grounds work while I'm banged up. On Tuesday he replaced a bunch of mini blinds that gave up the ghost after thirty years. In preparation I spent an hour Monday night looking for our tape measure. Of course it was in a drawer in the Green House kitchen; silly me thinking it would be in the wood shop where I kept tools for twenty-five years. A little bit of MacGuyver can go a long way, it doesn't seem to help me keep track of my tools!

I have hope that our struggle to love is not futile. My hope is sustained by the two Joses who have survived extraordinarily difficult childhoods and early adulthoods. Their struggles have unlocked in them a sense of solidarity with those seeking help at our door... My hope is further buoyed by Sasean and Saniah, twins who grew up coming to the Green House. Sasean has moved back in with us and has begun working with adults living with mental health challenges. Meanwhile, Saniah has taken in her nephews and nieces while their parents are not able to care for them. She hasn't made a big deal, or any deal of it really, so I will because it is a huge deal! Saniah has an abundance of sass but not an abundance of money. Still, she took in these kids, loving them like her own, and keeping them from being separated in foster care so they can know and love each other. She's a friggin' hero.

Catherine gives me hope. Catherine grew up alongside Sasean and Saniah at the Green House. She was raised by her grandparents in a sparse but loving home. Today she works on a nearby farm.

Catherine has been regularly, and joyfully, preparing our Saturday lunch for a couple of years now. She also brings her niece by on Saturdays and after school when she can, to help out the little girl's mom while her dad is incarcerated. She doesn't seek an "atta-girl" for preparing Saturday lunch on her day off, and she demurs when I praise her. Catherine, Sasean, Saniah, and the Joses are not making a lot of money. Wages are hardly a measure of a person. Their work, as well as their jobs, are not glorious. They are cooking, cleaning, and sharing not to complete court, school, or church ordered service hours. They are just loving others,



[Wendy Brideveaux](#)

magnifying the way they were loved here as children, and fulfilling time so that the Kin'dom of God will be at hand. For "justice to roll down like waters" as Amos prophesied (Amos 5:23-25), we need to dismantle the damns of despair that doom us to inaction.

Long before John baptized Jesus they met when their pregnant moms embraced. It was at this meeting that Mary first felt Jesus stir in her womb prompting her to pray: **"God has routed those who are arrogant in the desires of their hearts. God has brought down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. God has filled the hun-**

gry with good things and sent the 5 rich away empty." (Luke 1:51-53)

Like Jesus in utero, we too stir in the presence of prophets. Phil Berrigan observed that "the poor tell us who we are, and the prophets tell us who we could be, that's why we hide the poor and kill the prophets." We need to stand, and take a stand, with the poor and the prophets among us to see who we are and, be we who could be.

Like pregnancy, Advent is a time of hope, a time for us to remember that we dwell in the womb of God. We are God's immanent hope, and each other's only hope. As humility supplants arrogance in our hearts the forces underpinning the kingdoms of this world are vanquished.

The Incarnation has always been a joint venture between God and humanity. It was an audacious, ingenious, and risky move for God to come to us in the form of an utterly dependent infant. The vulnerability of baby Jesus required that he be loved by Joseph, Mary, and their community if God were to survive in this world. The vulnerability of every newborn triggers a universally humbling awareness that without the love of others we cannot survive our first month, our last month, or any month in between.

Justice, which is now trickling down in the love of our young friends, will soon **roll down like waters** washing away all hunger and despair and every other remnant suffering inflicted by the kingdoms of this world. In the **fullness of time** the cries of the poor, the cries of the prophets, and all our cries as newborns in the Kin'dom of God will give way to coos as we are soothed in the warm embrace of a loving God who never gave up hope that we would eventually lift each other up.

For now, though, we continue to gestate in this God filled world; our spiritual organs not yet fully developed. Soon and very soon God's water will break. Our full and final baptism will wash us with the waters of justice. Then we will be swaddled in a blanket of mercy as we begin new lives in the wholeness of the Kin'dom of God. Ω

The Provocations of Dorothy Day ⁶

Kate Hennessey

(Kate is one of Dorothy's granddaughters. This is an excerpt from the October 2023 *New York Catholic Worker*. We will publish the remaining provocations in subsequent issues)

Fail Gloriously

"I feel like an utter failure," Dorothy wrote when she was seventy-nine, forty-five years after that day of, May 1, 1933 when she and several others walked to Union Square in New York and began selling *The Catholic Worker* paper for a penny a copy.

"The older I get the more I feel that faithfulness and perseverance are the greatest virtues—accepting the sense of failure we all must have in our work, in the work of others around us, since Christ was the world's greatest failure." But she also said, "Christ understands us when we fail." I can't forget or explain her sense of personal failure, and I can't say I know what she meant.

I don't know what failures she felt most heavily, whether it was in her work or as a mother and grandmother, but whatever its source, it is painful to hear. We can't deny this even in the face of her possible canonization. We must always expect failure, Dorothy warns us, and when she speaks of her failures, mine seem wretched and inconsequential. I need a worthy failure, to fail gloriously at those things that are worth failing at, and even in the failure continue to persevere. To fail at doing what I am called to do and yet still answer this call.

"When you open your heart, you open it to suffering." I imagine saying to my grandmother.

"Of course," she would say, "and

to the failure of the Cross. Suffering and failure are inevitable." I am feeling that look, that Grandmother look, that gaze of clear-eyed honesty, strength, understanding, compassion, perception and love for a world given even at the cost of one's own prosperity. Even in the face of failure. But I think there is power and freedom in expecting and accepting failure, in knowing the improbability of success in a venture and knowing you need to do it anyway.



Cesar Chavez, Coretta Scott King, and Dorothy Day, 1973

Maybe a better definition of success is knowing you did your utmost best. "In the meantime, you've got to live," Dorothy's daughter, Tamar, cried when she was a young mother of four and facing her failures, but still impatient with all the dire, eleventh-hour predictions that flooded the world in the aftermath of the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Failure is mysterious. Things that at the moment feel catastrophic may lead to something else, though we may not live to see this.

Something having failed to work may develop into something that will work. St Francis said to start by doing what's necessary, then what's possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible. The choice given to us through our failures is how to

move forward. We must keep going, we must continue regardless with faithfulness and perseverance, for who are we to judge what is failure and what is success?

I thought it was that moment in my mother's final hours when she said, "I lost my faith" that wouldn't let me go, but she also said, "I failed the children," and for this, too, I wept. What did she want for her children that she felt she hadn't been able to give? Our contentment through fulfilled lives? An element of faith?

Her words, "I lost my faith," were easier to hear at the time, but now I feel a connection between the two. Tamar knew what a life of faith could achieve. That it could shape reality. She had seen this, after all, in her mother's life and in the *Catholic Worker* regardless of Dorothy's feelings of failure.

Aren't we obligated to see and

admit our failures? Have we become habituated to them, particularly those on a colossal, unimaginable scale? Are some failures just insupportable? Such as our failure in our responsibilities to each other, to the Earth, to the wild? How do we live with these failure and continue on?

Continue, Dorothy would say, with acts that have every possibility, probability, certainty of failing in any sensible manner, but you do it anyway. Poets, therapists, theologians, artists, and political leaders often have something to say about failure, but after a lifetime of following her conscience and her calling, Dorothy Day just comes out and says it, "I feel like an utter failure." Yes, I say. But let's fail gloriously rather than wretchedly. Ω

Ched Myers

The etymology of the term radical (from the Latin *radix*, “root”) is the best reason not to concede it to nostalgia. To get to the root of anything we must be radical. No wonder the word has been demonized by the elite and co-opted by marketing hucksters, and that no one in conventional politics dares use the word favorably—much less track any problem to its root. It is also curious and revealing that the notion of discipleship is so marginal in our churches. Curious, because discipleship is inarguably the central theme of the gospels. Revealing, because it shows how wide the gulf between seminary, sanctuary and streets has become in North America.

The prevailing expressions of faith among Protestant churches—evangelical decisionism, mainline denominationalism and fundamentalist dogmatism—are each problematic in a society that is mired in dysfunctional politics, delusional economics and a distractive culture.

Faith as discipleship remains the “road rarely taken” here at the heart of empire. We have yet truly to reckon with Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s famous warning, delivered under the shadow of fascism, that “*cheap grace is grace without discipleship.*” Radical Discipleship thus calls us to a double commitment: to reveal the roots of personal and political pathologies that continue to shape our imperial society, and to recover the roots of our biblical tradition: the messianic movement of rebellion and restoration, of repentance and renewal, and of a “Way out of no way” that has been going on since the dawn of resistance to the dusk of empire.

This Way was birthed when Creator scattered humans from centripetal Babel in centrifugal liberation.

It continued when Abram and Sarai bailed out of Ur and Moses and Myriam busted out of Egypt, and when Jordan’s flooding waters stood

beggars and brought down fat cats to co-inhabit the Jubilee common-and-level ground about which his mama had sung to him as a baby. The

Nazarene’s movement ground to a halt on a Roman cross, on which the imperial bill for the cost of discipleship came due; only to re-open at an empty tomb from which the stone of impediment had been rolled away.

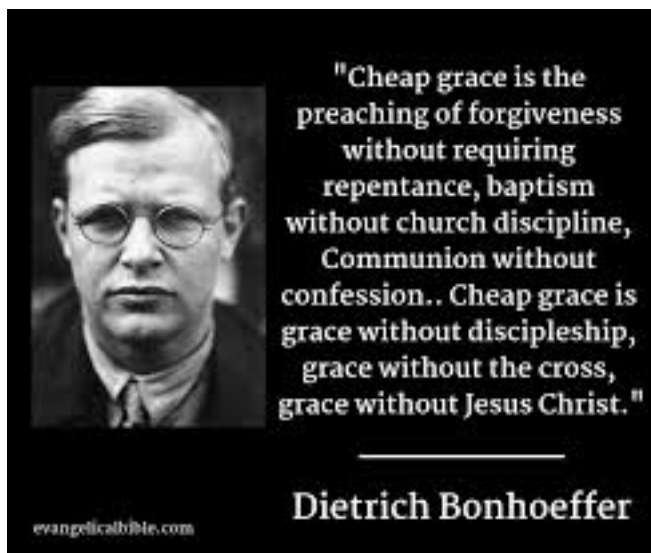
This uprising spawned a Pentecost insurrection of multicultural restoration and economic redistribution, a strange unleashing of tongues and pocketbooks that spilled from a safe house attic into the streets in a popular theater of protest and proclamation just a few blocks from where Jesus

had been lynched. These shenanigans earned official backlash, which only spawned restorative payback: the murderous chief head of security—whose mission was to strangle this inconvenient Movement in its crib—broke down in the middle lane of Damascus Road, struck blind by visions of his victims. He changed his name and his life, defecting to the Movement he had sought to destroy, such that he had to be smuggled out of town in a basket like baby Moses... For the rest of his life, he and his fellow defectors spawned small ecclesial communities of nonconformity, bread-breaking and discipleship to Jesus throughout the empire.

We know about all this only through tattered fragments of correspondence and liturgy and catechism that survive in a Second Testament, which is today every bit as misunderstood and abused as the First.

Then came martyrs who rendered to God everything and to Caesar not much at all, and monastics who returned to the wilderness in the waning days of a decadent Roman empire

(Please see: *Radical...*, p8)



up and Jericho’s walls came tumbling down. Though often beat down and always marginalized, this vision of truth-telling and reconciliation-dreaming was remembered when Elijah read the riot act to Ahab, and Isaiah sang a lovesong lament to the vineyard, and Jeremiah bought a field in the bear market of occupation, and Ezekiel saw the wheel within the wheel, way up in the middle of the air.

It animated John the Baptist to go feral, troubling Herod’s business-as-usual and then turbulating a certain Nazarene into Jordan’s waters, as the old Spirit of the Way hovered above like a condor.

Jesus then rebooted the nonviolent insurrection, accompanied only by clueless fishermen and stubborn women, by demoniacs liberated from centurion possession and peasants armed only with palm branches. He faced down the Mammon system with loaves and fishes in the wilderness, remembering the old catechism of Manna; redirected our attention away from Temples and toward wildflowers and birds; raised up street

in order to rediscover the evangelical disciplines of fidelity and poverty. The Movement was re-membered by medieval Franciscan nuns and friars, who bound themselves to nature and society's poorest; and by 14th century communitarians who defied feudal canons of hierarchy and vengeance; and by 16th century radical Anabaptists who refused to participate in the bloody religious wars of Christendom.

Then by Baptist radicals, Methodist reformers, Quaker abolitionists and Anglican visionaries in Europe and the Americas against the grain of colonial... genocide, and by 18th century "Levelers" standing against the privatization of the Commons—and by Luddites resisting factory culture, and immigrant Wobly and Jewish labor organizers a century later in Gilded Age America.

Above all, this Way was preserved for us all by 19th century African slaves under American apartheid, who knew who Pharaoh was and where the Promised Land was, and who journeyed there on an underground railroad singing:

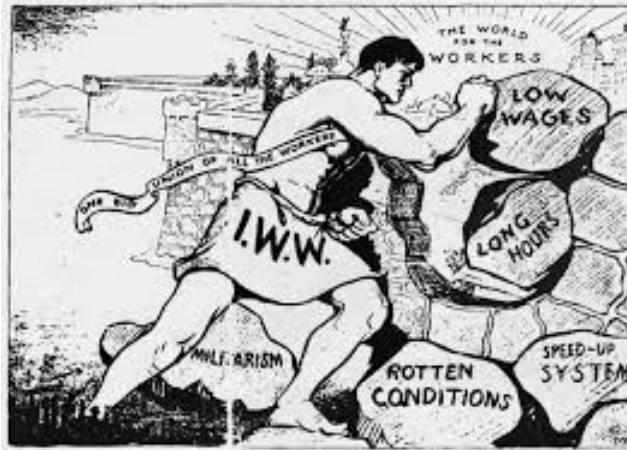
"Go down, Moses, way down to Egypt land..." and

"I looked over Jordan, and what did I see..."

These old Jubilee anthems came alive again in 20th century Civil Rights movements that reached from Selma to Soweto. Freedom songs birthed in Jim Crow jails were blown by the Spirit to cross-pollinate all the way to the Berlin Wall and Tiananmen Square and the streets of Manila...

This ancient vision has animated practitioners from "every tribe and tongue": Lutheran theologian Bonhoeffer and Catholic laywoman Dorothy Day; Baptist preachers Martin Luther King Jr. and Clarence Jordan; Archbishop Oscar Romero and missionary nun Dorothy Stang;

and so many others, both famous and forgotten. From immigrant agricultural laborers organizing with the United Farm Workers in California's fields of wrath in 1968 to store-front Pentecostals in Appalachia sitting down in front of massive coal trucks during the [Pittston coal miner's](#) strike in 1989, the church has been reborn... whenever it has remem-



bered that it is first and foremost a movement for radical personal and political transformation accountable to God's dream of justice and *shalom*.

This is what we mean by "radical discipleship." This conspiracy of life, hatched in a distant Sinai past, has ebbed and flowed ever since, right down to our time and place. It lives among gay bishops and lesbian evangelists; Peacemaker Teams accompanying those under military occupation and Catholic Workers sharing life with the homeless; immigrant rights organizers celebrating [Posadas sin Fronteras](#) at the... border and tree [sitters defying pipelines](#).

It is embodied by every addict who walks the Twelve Steps to recovery, by every sinner who makes that long and continuing march up to the altar of repentance, and by every activist who seeks to comfort the afflicted...and afflict the comfortable with gospel justice. Because only those who know their captivity can carry on this Freedom story. So do we gather from the Four Direc-

tions at [Bartimaeus Kinsler Institutes](#), to remember, celebrate, and incubate another round of this long tradition of soul searching and struggle. "***Since we are surrounded by so great a Cloud of Witnesses,***" as the ancient writer put it, "***let us lay aside every weight that restricts us, so that we too might run this race***" (Heb 12:1).

For those of us of relative privilege and mobility, radical discipleship is a call that disrupts the chronos timetables of empire with a divine kairos opening for transformation. This summons from the undomesticated God originates... from deep within a groaning creation and weary communities of struggle. It challenges the entitlements and conveniences of the religion-industrial complex. And its disturbing, animating call is always before us—...[the] Risen Christ, who is always in disguise. So no matter how

long we've been in this or at this, we should never presume... to be off the hook of its challenges...; we are ever invited to encounter Messiah afresh on the Way.

That's why we need to convene as a community of conviction once in a while, as kindred spirits struggling to make this radical tradition flesh in our fraught time. Because this Movement-building is indivisibly relational, and no amount of social media sophistication can replace actual face-time. As my elders at Jonah House taught me in the 1970s, "*the most apostolic duty of all is to keep one another's courage up.*"

To inhabit the deep tradition of Radical Discipleship requires us to honor the past, to listen to elders... and to encourage young folk just showing up...

So let us come together in joy—because as [Mother Ruby Sales](#) taught us, we are stepping into a River that has been flowing since the Exodus. And this ancient Movement will not be disappeared.Ω

Mother Ruby Sales

I want to respond to the question where we go from here when far too many Black people are in the theological and christological grip of white conservative Christians. I want to... deconstruct the notion that... Empire Christianity is the same as liberation Christianity.

Liberation Christianity begins with the assertion that God is on the side of the oppressed rather than the side of the Empire. This is the good news of the radical Jew Jesus who challenged the Roman Empire and its Jewish gatekeepers. Jesus made clear the radical nature of his mission: (1) to bring sight to the blind, i.e. to bring a new consciousness that freed his community and others from the false consciousness of identifying with the goals of the Roman Empire. (2) to feed the hungry, i.e. a systemic redistribution of resources that is not charity, but systemic economic justice. (3) to set the prisoners free, i.e. a recognition that the Empire uses law and order as tools of... domination.

This message of liberation galvanized the southern freedom movement... and liberation movements around the world. It is a dynamic message that... rearranges our relationship with God and others. It is a justice message of non violence. It is a message that reminds us that we are not entrapped by history; we have the collective power to free ourselves from the bonds of a tyrannical state. It reminds us that we have the power to make a new history and a new world. The view of our collective power challenges the notion that history begins and ends with the Empire.

George Bush and his conservative allies believe the opposite. Their God is the keeper of the status quo. Theirs is a cynical status quo view of God that allows them to be "on the wrong side of history..." The Empire religion espoused by George Bush and his white Christian Conservative allies is headed by a white supremacist patriarchal upper class God who stood on the side of enslavement and the



Mother Ruby Sales

genocide of native peoples throughout the globe...

This is the message of... right wing Christians. Like their forefathers, they believe that God... gives them the theological authority to build an oppressive white supremacist patriarchal world. They misuse scripture to justify this, and they hide their intentions behind self-centered God talk that undergirds... exclusion and domination...

Nor is their Jesus the Jesus who wept over the oppression and suffering of his people. Or the Jesus who was executed by the Roman Empire for proclaiming that God and not the Empire owns the world or the people in it. This Jesus who acted in history for those people whom the Empire minimized moved generations of enslaved Black people to assert, in the face of an Empire that said "they were property without any civil or spiritual rights, "I have a right to the tree of life."

What Black Christian conservatives must understand is that the God of the Empire can never be our God. Nor can their Jesus be our Jesus. The Empire Jesus is their emissary and the messenger of war and oppression. For them, Jesus is not as the Black old folk understood, a poor little shepherd boy, outcast and belonging to a people whose backs were "up against the wall."

The next step is to unveil the lies of White Christian Conservatives so

that Black folk understand that these lesbian and gay hating folk come out the same tradition of the people who threw Emmett Till's body in the Tallahatchie River...

Their God can never be our God. Nor can their theology or Christology be ours. They are inheritors of a Biblical tradition that believed that Black oppression was ordained by God...

We must unveil their hypocrisy... remembering that these [Right Wing Conservatives barred Martin Luther King](#)... from the doors of white churches... They stand today in the doorways of Christian... universities like Bob Jones Academy, [where they] see Blacks as inferior...

Our job is to... help Black Christian Conservatives remember so that we... do not fall prey to demagoguery... [W]e are called upon to stir within Black Christian conservatives the reminder we serve a God that brought our us out of the tyranny of enslavement... This same God enabled Black southern sharecroppers... to bring down southern apartheid, one of the most powerful governments in history, without firing a shot.

There is a great spiritual and social danger of not remembering this God... When we forget we allow other people to reconstruct God in their own image and to make us believe that their God of hate and injustice is our God. When we bow down to their God, we bow down at the altar of the Empire.

Finally, it is important to remember that our ancestors, these magnificent and ordinary people had a vision of God that broke with the enslavers' view of God. Their view of God moved them to a theology of agape that enabled them to say in the midst of enslavement: *"I love everybody, I love everybody, and you can't make me hate you; you can't make me hate you."*

This clear refusal to give over the control of their internal and outward lives to a system and a people that "talked about heaven, but wasn't going there," is the solid and prophetic rock upon which Black Christians must continue to construct our faith and religion.Ω

Empire Christmas Poem

(We are hoping Chris' essay on p3 will be a sufficient substitute for Jackie's Notes From De Porres House. We can already hear your disappointment. Notes will return in our next issue.)

By Bill Wylie-Kellermann

*empire,
crouched to devour,
breathes, like a dragon, winter darkness
upon us:
decrees go out, are believed and obeyed,
indictments
are suppressed, privilege covers the blunt ends
of supremacy;
widescreen redundancies brutalize, dull, the
mind; the most basic human*

rights as to water or life are violated as practical policy, a financial necessity.

*education is dismantled by race. children,
students, girls, go disappeared with impunity.*

*it's the massacre of innocence. robot planes
patrol the skies looking down on weddings
and*

*funerals, on targets and their collateral damage. the holy city is militarized and divided,
like a*

*land occupied. The sweet earth is fracked
and poisoned; its winds and waters whipped,
scorched*



*or polar vortexed; it's all one thing: the
world is tortured, reduced to extremities
moral, material.*

but a crack. the light

*(we are warned as in a dream, and so promised) in history, in creation, in community, in
human*

*flesh, is not overcome. look at the faces of this
movement: new and young — hands high,
insisting*

*to breathe, lying down, standing up, blocking
the way, discovering resistance, inventing
love-in-action, sharing water, saving and
scattering the seeds, while a host*

*of heaven, ancestors, martyrs, elders presente,
movement saints*

*and singers, the very disappeared now chant
glory*

*and imperial demise as a single song, as if
birth*

were a sign irrepressible, mangled as a child

who cries this light upon us

emmanuel