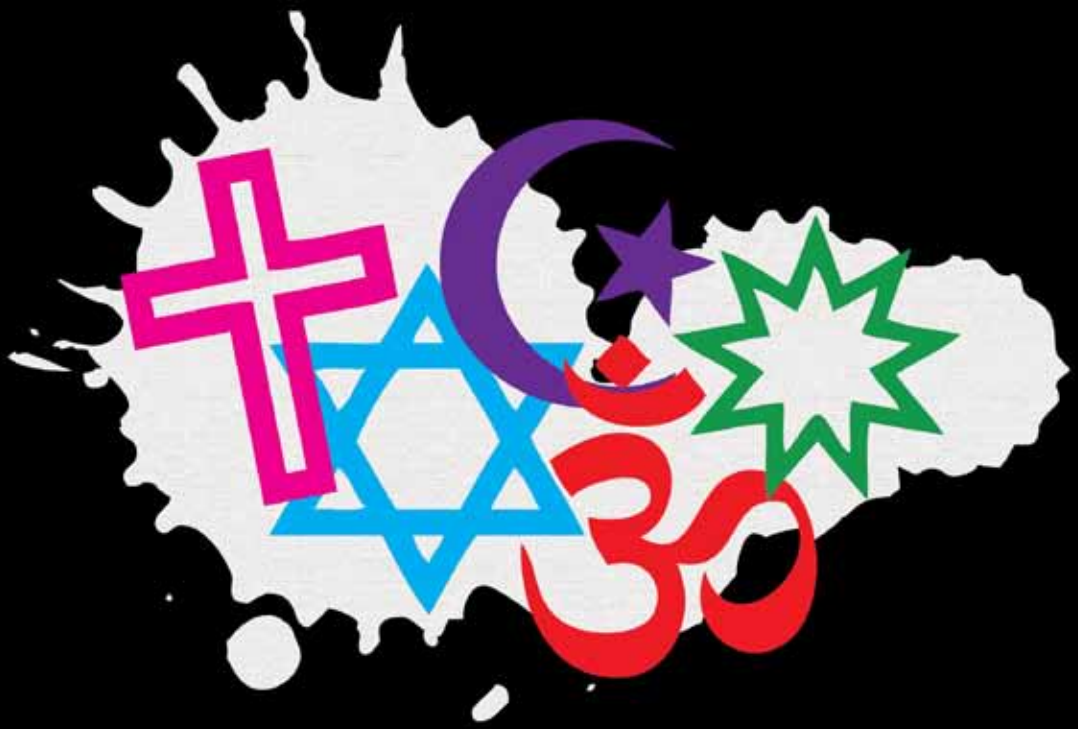
SOCIETY OF HELPERS

VOICES of Hope



e·qual·i·ty

BRINGING HOPE TO THE HUMAN JOURNEY

Vol VII Issue II

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Letter from the Provincial Team | Sr. Angie Kolacinski, SH

My daily work is in favor of the Development of our Youth in the Back of the Yards neighborhood of Chicago. So it's no surprise perhaps that one of my favorite "prophets" in these recent months is Malala Yousafzai, 2014 Nobel Peace Prize Winner, now 17 years old. Malala reminds us all, simply, that "We should all consider each other as human beings, and we should respect each other." It seems so simple, yet most of our adult world makes it so complex.

The Constitutions of our religious community, the Society of Helpers, remind us that "Sent to diverse places, we belong to human communities whose joys, hopes, and sorrows we share…the diversity of cultures and situations is a reality which confronts us, but also a call to believe possible and to construct a universal communion among all people."

I am grateful for the authors of this issue of Voices of Hope, "Equality: the Missing Link," who explore the concept of equality, and what we are seeking when we speak of equality. They take us down multiple paths in questions of creation, justice, faith, and the Christian tradition. May their reflections help each one of us situate ourselves on our own paths, learning to "consider each other as human beings" and even, hopefully, "to construct a universal communion among all people" and thus discover the riches of what each of us have to offer to each other and to our world.

Blessings.

Sr. Angie Kolacinski, SH

Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

We are at a time in history when the idea of equality impacts people tremendously, economically, socially, politically. Although we continue to make great strides in technology, architecture and and medicine, we still struggle to overcome fear-based mentalities that focus on our differences, build barriers and drive us further apart.

Pope Francis himself stood before the United States Congress, calling us all to task to share in his vision to care not only for our environment but to regard our most vulnerable citizens as equals. How will the United States respond to this call for fairness, social justice and love for all of God's creation?

This issue explores the many ways of viewing equality, from the philosophical and spiritual to the material world of friendships and our relationships with animals. Most of all, our contributors raise the question of how our very perceptions of equality and attempts to achieve it can create problems of their own. Our contributors reflect on how we can view each other and differing perspectives from so many different ways, but ultimately we all come down to the common ground - we're all, at our roots, after the same things in life. When will we realize that, while we may be different, we're all equal in our humanity?

Thank you for reading,

The Voices of Hope Editorial Team

A Thirst for Justice | by Laetitia Bordes, SH

I am the fifth of ten children born and raised in a Franco American family in Rhode Island. We were poor. I grew up noticing the keen differences between the rich and the poor and, from an early age, I wondered why some people had more money and others had less. In my child's mind, I thought there was an easy solution to this. Why couldn't just everybody share what they had? Then we would not need any money to buy things. Simplistic, naïve, perhaps. However, when I was a senior in high school, we read the Acts of the Apostles, and I discovered that what occupied my mind as a child had been a reality in the early Christian community.

"There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need." Acts 5:34-35

That passage reinforced my thirst for justice.

When I was seventeen, a Jesuit priest introduced me to the Helpers in New York City.

Both, their name, Helpers of the Holy Souls, and their dark habit and hair parted in the middle were morbid! However, the first two Helpers whom I met - Sr. Anne Cornet and Sr. Irene McHugh - captivated me. Then and there, I said to myself, "That's the kind of woman I want to be!"

In high school, I had been a member of the Sodality of Our Lady, founded by Daniel Lord, S.J., so the Ignatian spirituality that was part of the Helpers' charism was not new to me when I joined them in 1955 at the age of 18. I was attracted by their work among the poor in East Harlem and South Bronx.

My life as a Helper has been spent in a variety of ministries: religious education, community organizing, writing, editing, social work, peace and justice work. Yet in whatever ministry I found myself, I was always drawn to stand with those who had less.

So many experiences shaped me, broadened my view of our society and the world: first of all, belonging to an international community and getting to know Helpers of different cultures; organizing with the United Farm Workers; working with the Campaign for Human Development; accompanying refugees from Central America.

But what has had the greatest impact on my spiritual life are the years in El Salvador 1987-1997. I really never knew what the virtue of Hope was until I went to El Salvador and accompanied those who had literally nothing, and yet possessed a treasure that few of us ever lay our hands on. It was like the treasure hidden in the field. One needs to be stripped of everything in order to find it. The Salvadorans taught me to look at the world and situations from the viewpoint of those who don't have. That changed me radically. It makes it easier for me now to make decisions regarding social justice issues. I try to look at how decisions will affect those who have no voice, who live on the bottom rung of the ladder, and then I know better how to vote or take a stand on a particular issue.

Salvadorans also taught me that relationships are far more important than the work one does. There was no such thing as "wasting time" with people because the "being with" was more valuable than the "doing".

In over 50 years of active ministry, there have been many campaigns and causes I have been involved with. The victories have been few. We are still waging campaigns against the proliferation of nuclear weapons; the farmworkers, although their conditions in the field are better than they were in the 60s, still do not earn living wages, nor are they always protected against pesticides; Salvadorans and other Central Americans are still living in the midst of violence and economic injustice; the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia still has not closed. And on, and on it goes. So, one might ask, "what keeps you going?" The answer is simple. The poor are my brothers and sisters and I want to walk with them. Jesus did not resolve his society's problems in his years of public life, but he walked among the people. Again, it's not so much in the "doing", but in the "being with", accompanying.

For the past 15 years, I have been teaching ESL to immigrants, most of whom are undocumented. They are the ones who energize me. I keep on falling in love with them. The contoured map of their faces

tell stories that slowly unravel in the course of the semester, and it is a privilege for me to have the opportunity to be among them and to walk with them for part of the year.

We hear it said: "The problems are so big; there isn't much that can be done and things never really change. But something can be done. If we begin to look at situations and issues from the side of the poor and oppressed, then it is easy to engage in simple, concrete actions. Here are just a few examples:

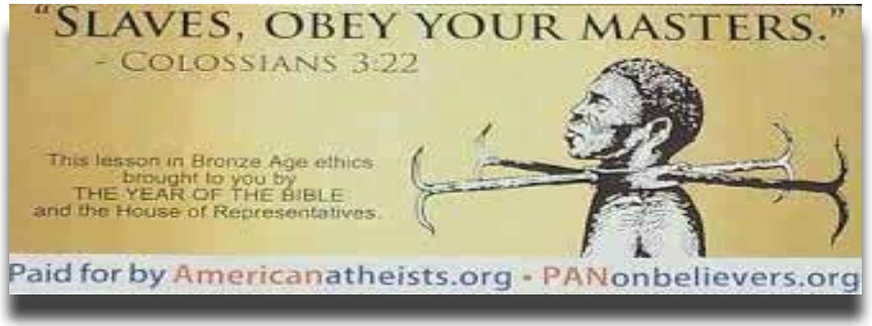
Do I buy Fair Trade coffee?
Does the money I save by shopping on Amazon contribute to the impoverishment of workers or the gradual elimination of small business owners?
Do I eat at fast food places that are not unionized and do not pay fair wages?
Before I make reservations at a hotel or motel, do I check if there is a Union?
In which banks do I have my accounts?

These are only simple examples that involve us in our daily living. If we think for a minute about the have nots, we will think twice about where we shop, where we eat, and where we bank. Not everyone is called to "raise a flag and take to the street", but everyone is called to walk, in some way, in her or his neighbor's shoes.

On Religion & Equality | By Morlie Patel

"Are you saying the only way to go to heaven is to take Jesus as your savior? What about all my relatives in India? What about the *whole world*?!" My voice quivered, and I stood expectantly in front of the poor priest who had no idea how to respond to this precocious little 10-year old girl who had accepted her classmate's invitation to attend his church. He quickly excused himself to attend to the calmer members of his congregation.

But, I wouldn't be calmed. I burst into my house and exploded at my mother. Once I had finished explaining my agitation, I took a breath and hesitated. "But," I started, "is what that man said right?" My mother, accustomed to her young daughter's passion, calmly asked, "What do you think? Does it sound right to you?" I slowly shook my head. "No. Not the God that is supposed to be all-loving and all-forgiving. That doesn't make sense that he'd only let people of one religion into heaven." My mother smiled. "People are going to say all kinds of things to you your whole life, trying to convince you that what they say is true. When you aren't sure what to believe, ask yourself what feels right here," she put her hand over her heart. "Let this be your guide."



And, she was certainly right. People are constantly trying to convince one another of their views, of their opinions. Today, debates about equality, specifically civil rights and feminism, are back in the forefront of our culture as they were in the 1960s. Arguments persist both in favor of and against advancing these issues. Though definite progress toward equality has been made since the 1960s, we still remain far from true equality for all. Some would argue that religion serves to repress certain segments of society, thus perpetuating inequality. With regard to feminism, the religious right is actively working to reduce access to women's reproductive rights, shutting down women's reproductive health centers across the country, and denying women agency over their own bodies.

Furthermore, members of the Christian right openly shun gay marriage and gay rights, quoting Biblical passages to validate their position: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (Leviticus 18:22).

If we go back in history, slave owners also quoted Biblical passages to help justify their actions

and instill submissiveness in their slaves: "They asked who could question the Word of God when it said, 'slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling' (Ephesians 6:5), or 'tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect' (Titus 2:9)" [Henry G. Brinton, http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/04/12/how-the-bible-was-used-to-justify-slavery-abolitionism/].

And it's not just Christianity in the United States. Early Hindus instituted the caste system in India, wherein the lowest caste members of society were basically slaves, and savage inequality was commonplace. In parts of the Middle East today, we see how radical Islam is used to stifle and oppress women.

If throughout history and into the present we see religion used as a vehicle for oppression and inequality, are we to assume that religion and equality are therefore contradictory to one another? Can we have true equality in a society consisting of religious adherents?

This, however, is not the full story regarding religion and equality.

The first abolitionists in this country were Christians who felt that slavery went *against* the Bible, citing "Love thy neighbor as thyself" [Mark 12:31] and "He that stealeth a man and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death" (Exodus 21:16; also Deuteronomy 24:7). Martin Luther King Jr. himself was a preacher, and regularly incorporated God and religion into his speeches. Black churches and white churches across the country joined together to support abolition and later, the civil rights movement.

Mohatma Gandhi was also a religious man, and in leading the civil rights movement in India he maintained his belief in non-violence rooted in the Hindu principle of *ahimsa*, the practice of refraining from harm against any living being. He openly spoke of the religious tolerance he learned through Hinduism, and addressed crowds by referencing each major religion in India – Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. Though he was a devout Hindu himself, he was adamant about unifying one India, not separated by race or religion, but as one people, all equal.

And in the present day, Pope Francis has been outspoken on his views about equality: "Racism today is the ultimate evil in the world…[we must] fight all forms of racism, intolerance and anti-Semitism, while…promoting mutual understanding through training and social commitment…the problem of intolerance should be dealt with as a whole: every time a minority is persecuted and marginalized because of his religious beliefs or ethnicity, the good of the whole society is in danger…[everyone] should feel involved…Let us join forces to promote a culture of encounter, respect, understanding and mutual forgiveness" (http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2013/10/25/pope-condemns-anti-semitism/).

Thus, there are examples on both sides. Religion has been used to both restrict and promote equality. Scripture and religious leaders have said both that equality is God's way, and that it is against God's way. So which way is correct?

It appears that the way of the world has been toward equality, often aided by religion. We no longer live in the 1800s, and arguably the chief difference today aside from technological advances is the greater equality in society, in large part due to the actions of the great men of God referenced above. Religion can be used to further or quell equality, but it has usually prevailed in furthering it. Perhaps this is because that is the real truth in all religion. After all, aren't all of God's children equal in His eyes?

But if you are not convinced, there may be another way to find resolution.

Perhaps you need to put your hand over your heart, and listen to the answer.

Morlie Patel serves as a Deputy Director for Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart's office. In her role, she has created multiple community outreach programs and worked on reentry programs for both detainees and victims of human trafficking. Morlie also serves on the board of the New Leaders Council (NLC), and the Asian American Action Fund (AAAF). NLC is an organization that trains young progressive leaders in Chicago, and AAAF is a PAC that supports Asian-Americans who run for office. Additionally, Morlie is working on multiple political campaigns for the upcoming 2016 elections.

Beyond Equality to Mutuality | by Patricia Carter Anderson

There is something about the word, "Equality," that feels prickly to me. I don't have the same positive reaction as I do to a word like "justice." Perhaps it's because I'm not sure what it really means or how it is supposed to be applied. My mathematical training tells me that equal means the same, like 2+2=4. But we cannot say the same about people. Bob does not equal Mary. No two persons are the same. It makes more sense when we refer to equal access to those things people need to live a fulfilling life like health care, education, healthy food, and meaningful work. But since each individual has specific needs, what does equal access look like? Even something like equal pay for equal work gets murky. No two people will do the job exactly the same, even if they are both fulfilling all the requirements of the job. I think what I find difficult is that equality seems to be a legal concept that requires an objective judgment about groups of people. In working toward equality, we seem to be still defining ourselves as different or distinct from one another in some way. There is a sense that in order for there to be equality, the privileged need to give up something to those less privileged.

Out of curiosity I googled "equality in scripture." It led me to a Greek word "isos" that is used sparingly in the New Testament and only used three times for the word equal and once for equality. One reference is in Philippians 2:6 about Jesus not clinging to his equality with God, and another in the parable in Matthew 20 of the workers being hired at different times but being given equal pay. In both instances equality seems to be turned on its head.

Many times the word "isos" was used to refer to God's impartiality to people, creating them in God's image and likeness, loving all the same, inviting all to be active participants in the building of the kindom[1]. Other times it referred to the command to love others as ourselves, to call forth the best in each other, to look beyond distinctions, to not rely on a sense of privilege. If we think of equality from this perspective, we are challenged to approach it from a different angle. Instead of a legal activity, it becomes God's loving activity becoming incarnate. It is this love energy that animates all matter. It brings us to the Oneness that we are all part of; the common imperative that we have to participate in the unfolding of the Cosmic Christ. We see each other as co-creators not competitors.

Our approach to others then becomes, "What can you share with me, and what can I share with you that will help both of us reach our full potential and enable the unfolding of the kindom?" One way of describing this approach is mutuality. We encounter each other with openness as both gifted and needy. The divine spark at the center of our being yearns for the divine spark in others and recognizes the need we have for each other for mutual transformation even though our egos resist.

This sense of connectedness takes us beyond the human community to include all of creation. To love as God loves, as Ignatius of Loyola points out in his Contemplation on Divine Love, goes beyond the human community to recognizing that all of the cosmos plays a part in the unfolding of the kindom. Ignatius speaks of the mutuality of love in this Contemplation. The mutuality of all creation is extolled in St. Francis of Assisi's hymn "Laudato Si" and echoed in Pope Francis' encyclical of the same name. If we live in the reality that all is an expression of the Divine, then our response to all of matter must be one of mutuality. In fact, it may be the non-human community that models for us the sense of interconnectedness and mutuality.

There seems to be an innate awareness of our need to connect with nature. Whether it is having a dog, cat, fish or pet rock as part of your family, or a potted plant sitting on the windowsill, there is something that draws us to connect even in these simple ways. The more we immerse ourselves in nature, the more we become aware of the interconnectivity and mutuality of beings. When we are surrounded by our manufactured worlds we develop a sense of dis-

connectedness and self-sufficiency. We perceive that things around us are "human-made", and we lose sight of the reality of God's creative activity that sustains all matter. We begin to believe that we have earned things and that we are in control.

Nature brings us back to a sense of awe, gratitude, and interconnectedness. As we observe nature being nature we get a glimpse of God's creativity and the mutual give and take of all beings. We experience the cycle of birth-life-death-rebirth. We come to understand that what looks like the end of a being — the dying of the seed in the ground or the rabbit that becomes the hawk's dinner — is really the continuation of life in another form. In nature nothing is wasted. All is transformed.

I believe that working for equality is a necessary step in the evolution of the Cosmic Christ. But I also believe that we will come to a time when our approach to each other and the cosmos is one of mutuality. "In a real sense all life is interrelated. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be... This is the inter-related structure of reality."

Patricia (Pat) Carter Anderson moved to Tracy, Iowa in August 2014 from St. Louis, Missouri to marry her husband, Larry Anderson. Through her participation in Christian Life Community and the Bridges Program (19th Annotation) in St. Louis she is rooted in Ignatian Spirituality. She is a spiritual director, and has given retreats, talks and workshops mainly focusing on the Spiritual Exercises through the lens of the new cosmology. She is currently enjoying gardening and living a rural life as a "retired" person with Larry.

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1 I use the word kindom instead of kingdom because I feel it more accurately reflects the reality of the sacred community we call the Body of the Christ.

2 Martin Luther King Jr., *Letter from Birmingham Jail: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail and the Struggle That Changed a Nation*

Looking for Peace Through Interfaith Relationships

by Marissa Minnick

I met Seher on the first day of college. She knew my roommate and was helping her move into our room. It was a crazy morning, my parents and siblings were running around unpacking things and trying to fight back tears, knowing that I wasn't going to be living at home for at least the next four years. Seher was there through all that madness, helping my roommate and me unpack, laughing at our parents' frantic questions, and overall bringing a sense of calm to the storm. I knew that we were going to be friends from that day on.

Seher was of course not the first Muslim I'd met, but she was the first Muslim woman I'd ever become close friends with. During the first few months of knowing each other, we established the strong foundation that our friendship has come to be based on. Going beyond small talk, we found ourselves conversing about deeper subjects like politics, families, and of course, faith. Getting to know about Seher's personal relationship with God and her religion was eye opening and challenging to my own beliefs. I had grown up with a Catholic background and had thought about God and Jesus from time to time, but I had never reached the depths of what I really believed until I met Seher. When she described her experiences with the divine—why she prays five times a day, why she chose to wear hijab as a teenager, how going to Mecca was a defining experience—it forced me to think about my own spiritual journey and core beliefs. Seeing similarities between her experiences with God and my own taught me that seeing God in creation or in people or in action is not an exclusively Christian experience.

Our friendship continued to develop over the next few years of college. During that first year, we began to attend meetings for the Interfaith Council, a group that discussed different aspects of religion through an interfaith context. By our second year, Seher was the Campus Ministry intern tasked with leading that group. During our junior year, I studied abroad in Rome and took the lessons I had gleaned from Seher to my trips to the Vatican and various churches around the city. Her example of faith helped me to appreciate the beauty of the architecture and art in the churches, but

also to remember the importance of a prayerful mindset when visiting these places. Even though I can appreciate history's attempts to raise shouts of joy to the heavens by building elaborate renaissance churches, Seher's spirituality helped remind me that there is something even more beautiful in finding the quiet spaces in these churches, closing my eyes, and having a moment of quiet intimacy with God. Seher taught me a Quranic verse that says that God is closer to us than our jugular vein, and I have taken this imagery to heart on more than one occasion. There were times spent in Rome when I truly felt God's closeness.

Since graduating college, Seher and I have continued our friendship. While I moved from California to West Virginia to farm, she moved to Connecticut to attend Hartford Seminary and get a Masters degree in Islamic Studies and a Graduate Certificate in Islamic Chaplaincy. She is living out her vocation in a way that promotes peace, interfaith dialogue, and God's love. Since we met during that first day of college, we've grown in our spirituality and religious understanding. We both want to share God's love with the world.

Something that I've come to understand during these past few years knowing Seher, though, is how negatively our American society can treat Muslims. In the United States, there is an overall distrust of Islam and of Muslims, likely a result of the media's designation of any violent act by a Muslim "terrorism," whereas non-Muslims are "lone wolves" or simply suffer from mental illness. By knowing Seher and how sacred the Quran is to her, I was sickened when a pastor from Florida wanted to hold a "Burn a Quran Day" at his church. I am deeply hurt when I hear people say things like "all Muslims should be killed" or "Muslims are terrorists." When people say things that are discriminatory or violent towards Muslims, I can't help but think of Seher, who is ultimately one of the targets of this language.

What people may not realize, though, is that this discrimination can have real, awful consequences. In February earlier this year, I received a text from Seher at just past one thirty in the morning. In the text, she told me about the three Muslim students at University of North Carolina that had been shot and killed in their apartment. I was horrified when she told me that she was related, the victims had been her cousin-in-law's younger brother, his wife, and her sister. Later that day, I began to read about the three students—Deah Barakat, Yusor Mohammad Abu-Salha, and Razan Mohammad Abu-Salha—and I again became enraged and saddened by what had happened to them.

There was evidence that the man who had killed them had shared anti-Muslim and anti-religious sentiments, similar to those found in mainstream media contexts. As I called Seher to talk to her on the phone for the first time after the shooting, without warning I broke down and started to cry. I said that the students reminded me of her; their ages, their interests, their involvement in social justice causes, and of course, their religion. Throughout the next few days, Seher simply asked one thing of me—to pray for the victims and their families. Our friendship was based on knowing that ultimately it is God that provides all we need, including solace in time of tragedy. I have learned that it is vital that we recognize the humanity in all in order to prevent violence, and getting to know someone can be the first step to fully loving them as a child of God.

During our senior year of college, Seher and I took a road trip through Big Sur, California. We were driving on the cliffs at the edge of the Pacific, the sunshine reflecting off the ocean water, the pine trees sitting proudly among the rocky ridges. It was one of the most beautiful views I had ever seen, prompting me to say out loud, "How could someone not believe in God after seeing this?" Seher agreed and asked if she could play something on the stereo. I said, "Of course," and suddenly the car was filled with the sound of a beautiful voice reciting the Quran, and at that moment God was with us, undoubtedly, celebrating our friendship and creation and the awe we felt. God was there, reminding me of my place in humanity, sitting next to my best friend who loves God as much as I.

Marissa Lynne Gubitosi Minnick lives and works at Bethlehem Farm, a Catholic community in Summers County, West Virginia. Originally from San Diego, California, Marissa attended the Jesuit-run Santa Clara University in Northern California and was inspired to continue working for social justice after graduation. She enjoys reading, writing, and hiking in Appalachia.

Meditations on the Concept of Christian Equality

by John A. Stevenson

It is difficult to find a fully-fledged Christian doctrine of *equality*, especially today. This silence stems from the fact that so much of early Christianity, and so many of the modern radical traditions focused on the project of *liberation*. Christ's observation to "be of good cheer for I have overcome the world" (John 16:33, KJV) was taken as the chief concern of Christians: to remain filled with joy in the process of overcoming the sinful world. Pope Francis I, whose writings draw many of the radical Catholic counter-publics into the larger Church, is perhaps the closest proponent of Christian conception of equality currently in power, but he focuses more on the perverse effects of *inequality* than spelling out a proper conception of equality. As he wrote in his first apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel): "Today we also have to say 'Thou shalt not' to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills."

Liberation from inequality does not a doctrine of equality make. This is doubly unfortunate because a robust concept of equality is quickly becoming an endangered species.

This relative silence about equality, nonetheless, should not be taken to mean that the idea of equality is wholly absent from foundational Church doctrine. Indeed, what I want to convince you of in the remaining space that we have is that there are two components of Christian equality—a *cosmological equality* and a *deontological equality*—in our biblical texts, the latter of which generates positive duties on Christians to strive for more equality. (Positive duty puts an obligation to do an act, on the part of the person on whom it is imposed.)

The cosmological aspect of equality is known to most people: This type of equality first springs from the fact that we are all created in the image of God. Most Christians take this to mean that all life is precious

and that we should treat every human being with equal concern and respect. This type of equality, as known as *Christian egalitarianism*, is reinforced by the fact that all Christians are one within the body of Christ, which springs directly from the Pauline tradition as stated in Galatians 3: 28 (NKJV): "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This vision of all social divisions and signifiers becoming irrelevant within the Christian Church sadly has not been a main concern of the Church, particularly since the abolitionist movement.

The larger body of Christ is divided in sentiment and sociability by national borders, as well as by race and class within the United States. Martin Luther King, Jr., once famously lamented that "the most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o'clock on Sunday morning." In 1988, the Multiracial Congregations Project found that only 8% of all Christian congregations in the U.S. are racially mixed and that few multiracial churches are successful. Successful multiracial congregations varies greatly by doctrine: 2-3% of mainline Protestant congregations, 8% of other Protestant congregations, and 20% of Catholic parishes are multiracial. Updated in 2007 and 2010, the Project found little had changed: 85 percent of congregations in the United States were comprised of at least 90 percent of one group and just 4 percent of all congregations claimed to have no racial majority.

The deontological aspect of Christian equality will require slightly more effort and biblical text to draw out. Quoted directly below is the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30 (NKJV)):

Parable of the Talents

14 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. 15 And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. 16 Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. 17 And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. 18 But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. 19 After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

20 "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' 21 His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' 22 He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' 23 His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

24 "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.'

26 "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. 27 So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. 28 Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.

29 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. 30 And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

This Parable richly complicates easy views on Christian equality. Notice that despite cosmological equality the story is clear that talent is distributed *unequally* by God through nature. Inequality is built into the very fact of the world: We may all have equal dignity but we are not all equally blessed.

Equality then, in this parable, cannot be found in the moment of birth, but comes later in the moment of Divine Judgement: *each person is equally responsible for making use of the talents they were given, with an expectation that those with more would do more*. The Judgement reveals the positive duty aspect of Christian conception of equality: We are all equally responsible for making something of our lives, within the larger framework of Church and revelation. This has a spiritual aspect—as recorded in Philippians 2:12 (KJV) you should "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"—but also possesses a social dimension that we each not let our faith become a stumbling block to others. In other words, every Christian should continually work to bring the God-given purpose of their lives to completion or fruition with great humility and respect for others and the divine plan.

The duty that deontological equality imposes on Christians is that: We must be constantly strive to be living at the limits of our God-given potential (our talents) in ways that glorify Christ through the works made possible by our faith. This also means that we, as far as possible, must make it socially so that others can exercise the personal responsibility to make something of their lives by tearing down the structures and constraints that limit the ability of some to do that. Not following this precept to equality leads to punishment in the moment of Divine Judgement. As Luke 12:47- 48 (NIV) reveals: "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."

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A Zoological Reflection on Social Justice

by Marilyn Matevia, Ph.D.

In the last year, we have learned quite a lot about the impact of human beings on the planet Earth and its other residents. We learned that in just the past half-century, the human species destroyed more than half of all other animal species on earth.[1] We received confirmation that a human-caused mass extinction event – long warned about by biologists - is most assuredly underway (the sixth in the history of the universe).[2] We learned that climate change is already measurably shifting the distributions and diversity of bird species around the world.[3] We learned that we are changing the chemistry of the planet's oceans[4], making some areas uninhabitable for animals that have long made those regions their ancestral homes. We learned that we are on track to entirely miss the UN's conservative goals for achieving stability and

recovery in the diversity of plant and animal species on earth.[5] Closer to our homes and dinner plates, we in the US have been confronted with several horrifying investigations of animal abuse in industrial farms and slaughterhouses – where the demand for fast, efficient processing assures that food-animals spend the last minutes of their lives in terror and pain.[6]

1 http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2014/09/30/weve-killed-off-half-the-worlds-animals-since-1970/
2 http://www.nbcnews.com/science/environment/scientists-build-case-sixth-extinction-say-it-could-kill-us-n378586
3 http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/09/us/climate-change-will-disrupt-half-of-north-americas-bird-species-study-says.html
4 http://www.nature.com/nclimate/journal/vaop/ncurrent/full/nclimate2757.html

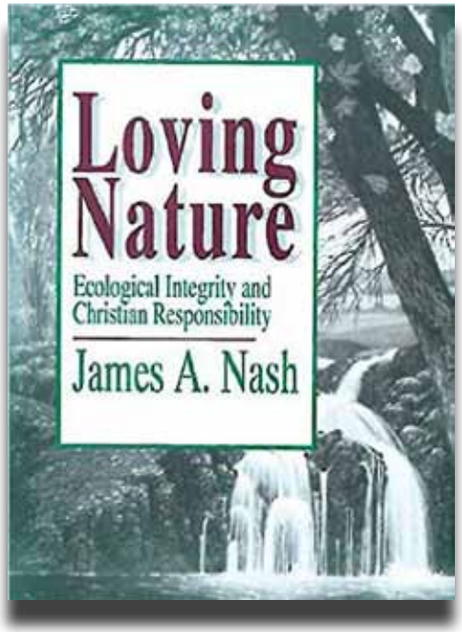
5 http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/oct/06/un-biodiversity-report-failure-meet-conservation-targets
6 http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2015/08/27/activists-mcdonalds-tyson-chicken-abuse/32449069/; http://www.twincities.com/business/ci_28619875/minnesota-hog-producer-employees-suspended-over-animal-abuse;

If our job as "stewards" of the earth was subject to annual review, surely we'd be "terminated for cause," by now. (Several years ago, a *New Yorker* cartoon depicted an agitated-looking "God" instructing his angelic assistant, "This human experiment has gone on long enough. Give the hippos control.") But what – you ask – does mismanagement and mistreatment of animals have to do with social justice? Isn't social justice concerned with people and their access to political and economic resources and opportunities?

The catastrophic trends described above are the result of deeply entrenched patterns of exploitation, oppression, and abuse in our food and resource economies. Such patterns are always expressions of injustice, no matter the victim – human or animal. (And the victims are legion in both categories.) Social justice aims to restore fairness, access to resources needed to survive, and the opportunity to flourish. These needs are not unique to human beings. "[God,] The Lover of Justice sets no boundaries on justice," wrote James Nash in his magnificent book, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility*. "The gospel we are called to incarnate relates to *all* creatures in *all* situations."[7]

7 p. 166 (Nashville: Abingdon Press)

But just how do *we* "relate" to all creatures - to such a vast, occasionally bewildering, strange, and even frightening community of non-human beings, most of whom we will never see "in person?" How do we even think of them as our *community*? Among the many things I appreciate about Pope Francis' recent encyclical, *Laudato Si'*[8], is its clear and compelling language describing the human relationship with our fellow creatures. The Pope repeatedly calls attention to the deep interdependence of all creatures of God, and the moral imperative this engenders: "Because all creatures are con



8 http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

nected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another. Each area is responsible for the care of this family."[9] And later, citing the Catechism, "'God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of the other.'"[10] The Pope describes the many creatures of God as "a kind of universal family, a sublime communion," and notes that "when our hearts are authentically open to universal communion, this sense of fraternity excludes nothing and no one."[11]

Christians are accustomed to talking about the relationship of humans to the rest of creation in terms of "dominion" over it, or "stewardship" of it. We are less accustomed to talking about the nonhuman members of creation as "family," or "community." This vast, beautifully diverse collection of created beings is bound into community not just by biological kinship and ecological interdependence, but by Covenant. The first covenant established in the Hebrew bible is a universal one - between God and "every living creature," between God and "all flesh that is on this earth" (Genesis 9:8-17). How often do we diminish the cosmic scope of this bond, in order to emphasize God's promise to human beings? Indeed, the phrase "every living creature" or "every animal" occurs seven times in that short text! Moreover, the covenant specifically names domestic and wild animals – a reminder that a creature's usefulness to human beings is not the primary source of its value. A creature's value is inherent, and its existence essential in ways that we can only barely begin to comprehend (Job 38-39, Psalm 104). We are all differently but equally integral to the community of creation.

If we acknowledge and understand ourselves to be living in community with other created beings, we soon realize that the only way to flourish is in mutuality and solidarity, and with a sense of responsibility and commitment to the well-being of all (and to learning what "well-being" looks like for all – no matter how wild and weird!). Our interdependence means that no one segment of the community will thrive for long if its flourishing is achieved by depriving or exploiting others. That is why social justice is not just for people.

A lovely and important prayer, attributed to St. Basil of Caesarea, a bishop of the early Christian church:

Oh God, enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all living things, our brothers and sisters the animals, to whom you gave the earth in common with us. We remember with shame that in the past we have exercised our high dominion with ruthless cruelty, so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to you in song, has been a groan of travail. May we realize that they live not for us alone, but for themselves and for you, and that they, too, love the sweetness of life. Amen.

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9 Ibid., Chapter 1, par. 42
10 Ibid., Chapter 2, par. 86
11 Ibid., par. 89, 92

Sister Mary Funge, 90 years old, has been a Helper since 1956. She sat with the editorial team at Marian Village to discuss her life and times, telling the story of her ministry in an effort to share a personal facet of Helper History. Her warmth, humor and wonderful memories serve as a gift to readers and as a record of a sister who truly embodies the Helper's mission to help in all manner of good.

What drew you to the Society of Helpers?

I was attracted to the whole mission, which was so universal. One wasn't locked into being a nurse or a teacher.

Can you tell us about your background?

I lived in Jersey City and became acquainted with Father Frank Drolet, who came to our parish. I believe eight people or so from that parish entered the Helpers, among them Dolores and Margaret, who are now here in Marian Village. However, I didn't always want to be a religious. When I lived in Jersey, I worked in a war plant for a number of years, then worked near Wall Street for maritime lawyers. We were on the 16th floor, and we could see the ships coming in from the harbor. I worked there for quite a while.

When the war was over, my sister and I decided to go out west. We went to Arizona for a season where we worked as waitresses and I actually found that interesting. We met a couple there on their way to the mountains in Wyoming, so we went there for the summer and worked as "cabin girls", making beds and cleaning. I liked the mountains and the weather, and at this place, we were also allowed to use the pool. After these

experiences, I returned to the law firm to work as a secretary. During this time I knew Father Drolet was in the parish. Part of me kept refusing to consider religious life, but the thought kept coming back to me. I was 28 when I entered.

What was the turning point?

After I had been out west and had had experience with the world, the thought of religious life kept coming back. I wanted to put it off, but it kept returning with persistence. It's a real call! In 1953, I entered the novitiate in Chappaqua, New York. We had a beautiful place, 40 acres. I made my novitiate there.

What was religious life like for you then?

We don't, as Helpers, have a home base. They call the third rule obedience - you go where you're sent. When I made my first vows, I was sent to St. Louis. Then I went to Chicago and I took practical nursing for two years because we needed people to take care of the ill in the different houses. I did that training with a Japanese sister from San Francisco. We went from hospital to hospital. I got my LPN and then I went to back St. Louis to help take care of the sick. The Helpers always sent their sisters out to the sick. That was our main universal ministry. We wore gray cotton habits, and we'd come home and change into our black.

We followed the spirituality of St. Ignatius and were guided by the Ignatian rule and Constitutions. One very practical consequence of this was that we were available to go and serve any place we were needed. It was one of the expressions of our vow of obedience. So, when I made my first vows, I

went to St. Louis. Shortly after I was asked to go to Chicago where I completed a practical nursing program with a Japanese sister from San Francisco. We had a very active home health care program in most of our houses at that time. Upon completion of the program, I was sent back to St. Louis where I worked for several years taking care of the sick in their homes. Care of the sick in their homes was one of the first ministries of the Helpers dating back to Mary of Providence. I remember we wore gray habits and changed back to our black habits when we returned home.

Did you enjoy nursing?

I enjoyed dealing with people, but I never felt a call to nursing. I endured it. There were parts of it that I liked. We used to do everything. We helped young mothers and many elderly people.

Where did you finish your schooling?

In New York, I had gone to night school and had completed two years of college. After a number of years in St. Louis, I had the opportunity to complete my college degree at Barat College in Lake Forest, IL. where I majored in English. During my two years there I was a Resident Advisor and actually wore the habit during my first year. It caused a great stir when in my final year, I appeared in lay clothes. I thought it was great.

What was your ministry that meant the most to you?

After I got my college degree, I worked in the inner city of St. Louis teaching religious education and other subjects as well as being in charge of the Home Health Care program. At the same time, I served as "Minister" of the house as I had done in Chappaqua, New York and St. Louis before. The "Minister" oversaw the care, repairs and upkeep of the house as well as the practical day to day concerns of the community.

I remember while I was living in NYC, they sold the house on 86th Street. It had six floors and went all the way through to 85th Street with another building. I worked at cleaning out that house, they moved to another location on 89th Street. I never lived there. I spent most of my religious life in St. Louis.

My main ministry was religious education in New York and in St. Louis. We never worked in schools, but in different types of groups gathered in the city. Our houses were gathering places for people in the neighborhood, we had classes in sewing, etc. I had religion classes. I went back to New York, worked in Spanish Harlem, visited the sick there. Also, I remember having 80 kids in a religion class. That was when the Pope came to New York and visited Yankee Stadium.

In St. Louis, I was connected with Immaculate Conception, St Henry's. Immaculate Conception Parish was mostly white, some black. St. Henry was all black, and they joined the two parishes. We had a parade from St. Henry's to Immaculate Conception when they joined the parishes, I was with them for eight years. I worked with the Augustinians, I educated adults in religious education. I guess they called me a pastoral assistant. The rectory served as the novitiate building for the Augustinians.

Where else did your travels take you?

I lived in France in my 30s. I went to Pontoise, for my tertianship a "third year of novitiate" before final vows. I lived there for a

year. I also made a 30 day retreat in Spain with Claritians. That was a wonderful experience. They told us we could put together our own pilgrimage, so I went by myself on a bus and went to Montserrat in Spain where St. Ignatius was born and I went to Manresa, where a chapel had been dedicated to him.

Much later, I went to England for two years. In England, we did weeks of prayer based on Ignatian spirituality. With lay people in a parish, we gathered as many churches as we could, and then you might have 2 or 3 denominations to gather and do these weeks of prayer. You would meet with small groups and introduce them to different types of prayer. We'd start out with the birth of Jesus, go to his life, end up with the passion and death and resurrection and ascension. That was how the week went. Eventually we had 2 weeks. That was even better.

I spent two years in England where I worked in a team adapting the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius to "weeks" of prayer among lay people. It was an ecumenical program in which we gathered several Christian parishes together and offered prayer experiences in everyday life. We would meet with small groups and introduce them to different types of prayer. The themes were focused on the life of Christ. The program grew to be a 2 week program of prayer with these different groups.

I came back to Chicago, lived in Humboldt Park for 4 or 5 years and launched the weeks of prayers programs and then I went back to St. Louis to establish the weeks of prayer programs there, where they were very successful. I passed it to Clarence Heller, a layman, and he really got it going. He developed a two week program and then he designed a month of prayer. Recently he sent me an email and told me that they now have had retreats with 1,000 people. It's very beautiful.

What are some of your hobbies?

I like to paint. Scenery mostly, I like oil.

Is there anything else you'd like readers to know about your journey as a Helper?

Like I told you, I really resisted until I was well into my 20s. But I think it turned out to be very wonderful.

Reflections from Pope Francis

A delicate balance is required to combat violence perpetrated in the name of a religion, an ideology or an economic system, while also safeguarding religious freedom, intellectual freedom and individual freedoms. But there is another temptation which we must especially guard against: the simplistic reductionism which sees only good or evil; or, if you will, the righteous and sinners.

The contemporary world, with its open wounds which affect so many of our brothers and sisters, demands that we confront every form of polarization which would divide it into these two camps. We know that in the attempt to be freed of the enemy without, we can be tempted to feed the enemy within. To imitate the hatred and violence of tyrants and murderers is the best way to take their place. That is something which you, as a people, reject.

Our response must instead be one of hope and healing, of peace and justice. We are asked to summon the courage and the intelligence to resolve today's many geopolitical and economic crises. Even in the developed world, the effects of unjust structures and actions are all too apparent. Our efforts must aim at restoring hope, righting wrongs, maintaining commitments, and thus promoting the well-being of individuals and of peoples. We must move forward together, as one, in a renewed spirit of fraternity and solidarity, cooperating generously for the common good.

Sr. Jean Kielty, SH
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