



CHRISTMAS  
2002 VOL 2. I

# the SIGN of PEACE

JOURNAL OF THE CATHOLIC PEACE FELLOWSHIP

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## THE HOPES AND FEARS OF ALL THE YEARS ...

OUT OF THE LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM, which to this day wears the wounds of war, has come the Prince of Peace. The little town is not forgotten this Christmas: manger scenes cover the landscape, from living rooms to lawns to even city halls. The images of Mary and Joseph, the magi and the shepherds, the star and the angels, and at the center, the Source—the infant Jesus—kindle hopes of love and peace and joy. As well they should. In this time of war and rumors of war, we must remember that amid our fears, Hope has sprung. And Hope will triumph. Christmas scenes—with their symbols and songs and stirred memories—promise us that.

Yet they teach us much more if we look closely at *how* Hope springs forth among us. Not a work of planning or power, the Lord's Nativity is attended with bold and risky acts of utter obedience to God. An expectant couple is uprooted; shepherds, dumbstruck, follow the urgings of angels; kings, on blind faith, empty their treasuries and set out on a journey with an unknown end: None among our Christmas cast of pilgrims enjoys much homeland security. And soon after the holy night, family and kings are back on the move, fleeing terror. Even in Bethlehem, their apparent refuge in a dangerous world, they find no abiding home. And as pilgrim church, neither do we. Citizens of the kingdom of God, we are *seeking a homeland which is the city with foundations, whose architect and maker is God.* (cf. HEB.11:10,14)

Not so the citizens of the here-and-now. This is a time of strategic self-interest. This Christmas season, the wagons continue circling around Iraq and the "Axis of Evil," and Santa seizes the day to sell the crusade to our children. Under the tree in countless homes was the bestselling video game *Desert Storm*, marketed as "your chance to go into Baghdad this time." Others received the J.C. Penney toy, *Forward Command Post*, where an army action figure stands triumphantly atop a bombed-out home (attack rifle and American flag not sold separately).

Would that these were only games for kids. Military deployment continues in the Gulf, and the chasm grows between President Bush—who insists he *already* has the right to wage war—and world leaders. A chasm widens, too, between the U.S. and the Vatican. Cardinal Ratzinger minced no words this fall in calling any U.S. led attack on Iraq patently unjust and saying, "the United Nations is the authority that should make the decisive choice."

The Church has good theological and *personal* reasons to question the rhetoric from Washington: there are over a million Christians, and 275,000 Catholics, in Iraq. But ought we turn to the U.N. to meet the hopes and fears of these people—of all twenty-two million Iraqis—when the U.N. for more than ten years has enforced crushing sanctions on these same people?

We suggest there is a *greater-than-the-U.N.* here. This authority, Christ, calls us to a new politics and a new kingdom. We, his people, speak the voice of Christ the King, here and now as the Church. This indeed is good news, glad tidings of great joy! And this why, as we go to press, some of our CPF colleagues find themselves in Iraq, part of a relief mission in communion with the Church and the people of Iraq.

We all have a part in this work. Perhaps in this season, in this country, we can insist that the scene at Bethlehem—and the Gospel itself—is not merely a quaint *thought* that always must bow to *realpolitik*. As if preemptive strike policies, smallpox vaccinations, a general expansion of U.S. military power, and, most recently, an unabashed threat to use the U.S. nuclear arsenal—the world's most lethal weapon of mass destruction—are likely to bring us anything resembling peace.

They are not. Risky obedience to God is. And this concrete love in pursuit of *the peace the world cannot give* (JOHN14:27) is what drew the cast of pilgrims to Bethlehem, and then sent them forth. Let us follow them, singing to that little town, to Jesus, to ourselves as his presence in the world: *the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight. And praises sing to God the King, and peace to all on earth.*

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## CONTENTS

<b>THE SOLDIERS CAME ASKING</b> a report from draft counselors during the Gulf War 1991 followed by soldiers' statements	page 3
<b>SOLDIER WITH COURAGE NOT TO KILL IS IN TROUBLE</b> a reprint of a 1990 NCR article by Margaret Garvey	page 6
<b>FIRST RESISTER COMES FORWARD IN CURRENT GULF CONFLICT</b> Joel Schorn reports on Army Private Wilfredo Torre	page 7
<b>COMES A WARRIOR</b> a Christmas meditation from Robert Barron	page 8
<b>AVEVERUM: FOR THE CHRISTMAS CHRIST</b> a poem by Dolores Frese	page 10
<b>THE LITTLE FLOWER AND THE CLASH OF EMPIRES</b> Michael Garvey reports on the Archbishop's request to bring relics of Therese to Baghdad	page 11
<b>SAINT ISAAC OF NINEVAH, PRAY FOR US</b> The writings of the seventh century bishop are plummed by Kyle R. Smith, revealing a distinct theology of peace	page 12
<b>PHILIP BERRIGAN—A TRIBUTE</b> a reflection by Patrick O'Neill on the life of the former CPF co-chair	page 13
<b>OUR CHRISTMAS APPEAL</b>	page 14

## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

In this edition of *The Sign of Peace*, we will offer reflections on Christmas—and war in Iraq. As the liturgies of this season teach us, hope for peace is central to the Nativity and Epiphany of the Lord. And so we will take you back in time to Christmas, 1990 when a group of draft counselors began working with soldiers considering Conscientious Objection in the first Gulf War. And this Christmas, too, there are reasons for hope that come from Iraq. You can read about Christians there making pilgrimages to the relics of Therese of Lisieux, hoping to forge a “Little Way” toward peace. And you’ll learn that the first CO of the current military build-up in the Gulf War has already come forward. We dig deep into that biblical-and tradition-rich land to find the treasures of Saint Isaac of Ninevah, who was long ago the bishop of the place where (long before that!) the prophet Jonah had preached repentance.

An important theme of this issue of *The Sign of Peace* emerges in a Christmas reflection by priest-theologian Robert Barron. He speaks to who we are in the peace movement, and who it is that leads us. Far from stereotypes of undisciplined hippies fleeing the world of responsibility and tough choices, we are to be soldiers of Christ. For at Christmas comes this warrior of peace who means danger for the violent rulers of this world. We close this issue mourning the death of one who indeed was (as the book title said) “Unarmed and Dangerous,” Philip Berrigan. He was a warrior of the front lines, teaching us both the power and price of peace. Like him, like the Magi, we can bring our gifts to the Child, who will lead us.

# THE SOLDIERS CAME ASKING: COs DURING THE GULF WAR

*Soldiers also asked John the Baptist, “And we, what shall we do?” Luke 3:14*

**F**or a group of Military CO counselors, these words took on new meaning during the fall of 1990. At the behest of Andre Stoner of the Mennonite Central Committee in Germany, the group—Michael Baxter, Bill Cavanaugh, Tom Cornell, Margaret Garvey, and Maureen Sweeney—traveled to Germany to meet with U.S. soldiers who wanted to declare themselves conscientious objectors. They left Washington on December 10 on an overnight flight to Frankfurt, met the following day with military counselors to review the legal situation of soldiers applying for CO status, and then, on December 12, fanned out to different cities and military bases in Germany: Ansbach, Nürnberg, Bremen . . .

And the soldiers came asking, each in their own way, “And we, what shall we do?”

The group spent long hours listening to these soldiers, discerning with them about their conscientious objection to war, and helping them to prepare their claims. The stories the soldiers told had similar themes: no real alternatives after high school (if they had finished high school), no money for college, no grades for scholarships, no skills for a decent job, no way to get the skills they didn’t have. So, with the help of their local recruiters, they joined the Army to be all they could be. But what happened was that somewhere along the line, in some cases gradually, in other cases quite suddenly, these soldiers realized in a deep and dreadfully concrete way that their military training was going to be put to lethal ends.

Each soldier had a unique and profoundly personal story to tell. One soldier, Michael Ellis from Watts (these are not their real names), was on leave from Germany the previous July when his lifelong friend was killed by a stray bullet in a drive-by shooting. After he watched his friend bleed to death on the street, he returned to Germany convinced that he could not take the life of another human being. Another soldier, Elias Newman from Mobile, awoke

in mid-December from a disturbing dream with the realization that he could not do what the Army was asking him to do; that very day, he insisted on speaking with his platoon sergeant and commanding officer, and he contacted the group of counselors two days later. Another soldier, Roberto Perez from Detroit, went AWOL for four days in order to clarify what in conscience he could and could not do. Then he returned to his unit determined never again to handle an M-16 or drive a tank or kill another person.

Each of these soldiers, and dozens of others, prepared an application in which he gave a clear and specific account of his conscientious objection to war. But the Army did not look kindly on these COs. Although they prepared and submitted their applications in full accord with Army regulations, their commanders refused to accept them. They stated that no CO claims would be processed until after deployment. So each of the soldier-applicants mentioned above were forcibly deployed to the Gulf.

While the group was in Germany, they learned of other disturbing incidents. Of a Pentecostal from the Army base at Gelhausen who, when he announced he was a CO, was confined to barracks for two weeks and given four charges of misconduct. Of a military chaplain, a Catholic priest, who declared himself a CO but was compelled to deploy anyway. Of a medic, also Catholic, who was forced to attend formation in leg irons and was (in the words of one eyewitness) “thrown” on to a plane headed for Saudi. And once returning to the States, members of the group learned of hundreds of soldiers who had come forth as COs, some of whom were harassed by commanders, some court-martialed, some put in shackles and sent to the Gulf.

Alarmed by the situation, the group formed a CO-Support Network. It organized people in the States to write letters on behalf of the CO-applicants to their commanders in the field, advising them of military

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regulations and warning them not to mistreat the COs under their command. This Amnesty-International-style letter-writing campaign resulted in several COs being reassigned to noncombatant duties, or protected from abuse by other soldiers, or encouraged that people in the States were looking out for them. But overall, the situation was not a good one. Very few COs were able to process their claims.

Still, the example of these COs was a course of hope for those who worked with them. In the face of intense pressure and widespread denunciation, COs during the Gulf War stepped forward and resolved, “this war stops with me.” They were lights in a dark time, reflecting the Light that shines in the darkness, Whom no darkness can overcome. So we thought it appropriate, this Christmas, to share excerpts from the statements of two such soldier-COs.

## SOLDIER-COs’ STORIES

**I**N DECEMBER 1990, a team of five Military counselors traveled to Germany to work with U.S. soldiers who had recently come forth as COs. Under the direction of Andre Stoner of the Mennonite Central Committee in Germany, the five counselors (Michael Baxter, Bill Cavanaugh, Tom Cornell, Margaret Garvey, and Maureen Sweeney) fanned out to different US military bases and met with soldiers to help them write their statements explaining why they had become conscientiously opposed to participating in war. Below are excerpts from two such statements.

### I SIMPLY CANNOT TAKE PART ...

At one point, a kid in my battalion got burned up in an ammunition carrier while we were on a training exercise. We were in the field, and he was sent to an intensive care burn station in Hannover. Since I was the only one around to act as a translator—I speak fluent German—I was asked to accompany his mother and grandmother to the hospital, to help them make their way through the hospital and communicate with the doctors and medical staff. It started out as simply a mission: I had to find them a place to stay so that they could see their son or grandson. But it ended up as a very moving personal experience.

We could see this guy in a quarantined room

and talk to him on the phone. His body was covered with white cream, so that you could not see all the damage that was done. But the doctors told us that because he had covered his face with his right hand to protect himself from the flames, his right hand was almost gone. It was so badly burned that they were afraid they were going to have to amputate it. His back was burned really bad. And his right leg kept getting infected because it was burned down into the flesh (these were third degree burns). I felt really bad for him knowing what had happened, even without really seeing him.

Then one day his mother, grandmother, an NCO escort, and I were standing outside intensive care when they brought him out from his third operation. They still had him uncovered. You could see the entire front side of his body, the burns. The burned parts of his body were red. His leg was burned so badly that his flesh was gone. You could see how parts of his flesh were actually missing from his body, from his entire leg. The skin on his face seemed like it was dripping. I looked at him and thought, “What’s that?” and then realized that it was a human body, a human person.

Why do human beings have to go through such pain? Why do people have to die horrible deaths?

It was after these incidents that I realized how horrible and painful war is for each person who is

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affected by it, how each death involves such pain and suffering.

This event did not immediately make me reject the military. But later, when I thought more of what we in the military are asked to do, it started to bother me. This event made me realize that my beliefs are totally incompatible with what they want me to do in a war situation.

For example, when we go on a training exercise, I plot the enemy positions on a map, but now I have sat down and thought about the fact that they are not my enemy, but also human beings. The officers want me to talk about how many weapons there are, but I can only think of how many people there are. They expect me to take away the lives of sons, husbands, or loved ones for freedom.

Knowing this I find it harder and harder to cope with the military life from day to day. In the past few months I have found myself pushed to the point of nearly breaking down. I have had a feeling that my superiors have had no consideration for the physical and mental welfare of others. I have begun to think that the Army sees people simply as a number in a book or as a machine which only requires to be programmed for its specific function. I feel as if I am losing my self-respect, dignity, and eventually my self-control. From this I have come to understand that the Army dehumanizes everyone in this way, particularly in wartime. Most dehumanized of all is the enemy whom the Army instructs us to kill. I simply cannot take part in this lethal kind of dehumanization.

### **I REALIZED THAT I COULD NOT KILL.**

In May of 1990, I came to realize that I could no longer perform the duties expected of me. I had just returned from the Graff-Hoenfels field problem. That field was the first and most intense one that I had ever experienced. At that field problem, I fully realized what my role in war would be and what impact it would have. If that training had been a real

war situation, I would have been responsible for the deaths of many people.

While in the “box,” I was assigned to a re-con squad. We maneuvered past the front positions and established an observation post on a hillside. During the course of the battle, we engaged the “enemy” with direct and indirect fire. As the whoopy lights and whistles started going off, I thought to myself, “All these people are dead.” Those thoughts made me feel confused and extremely sad. Deep down inside of myself, I felt that it was all wrong.

Later as we humped back to the gathering point, I reflected on all that had happened. If it had been a real situation, so many people would have died. It just did not make sense to me. It just did not seem right.

In an earlier simulated battle situation, Specialist Wheely, from the Forward Edge, and I were wounded by friendly fire. We were evacuated to receive medical aid. During the course of the day, we “died” of our wounds. We were placed upon a hillside and told to wait for somebody to pick us up. No one ever did. We spent that entire day waiting for someone to arrive. Finally, late that afternoon, we went in search of anyone who could help us. We eventually found some people from the air calvary and from there we eventually ended up at grave registration late that night. From there it took almost another whole day to arrive back at our units. I found it extremely exasperating that “the dead” had to find their own graves.

For that day and a half that we spent being dead. I thought about a lot of things. If I had died, who would have written my mother to tell her that I had been killed by friendly fire? Who would have told her that my body had been left upon a hillside and forgotten? Who would tell all the other parents when and where their sons had died or if it would be an opened or closed casket funeral? Who would tell them if they had suffered or if it had been quick? Who would tell them why? Tell them why there was

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so much needless death, pain, and suffering. Who would try to explain why their sons had to die in a foreign land that was so far from home? It seemed to me that the answers and reasons to these questions no one really knew.

During that day and a half I was dead, I had tried to figure out what war was all about. I thought of all the things that I had found disquieting and confusing. I had thought of my training and Fort Sill and the

people who had died there. I thought about artillery and how it was my job to kill with it. And I thought about what it might actually be like to kill. My only answer that day was confusion and sadness.

For the next several days, I spent a lot of time thinking about all these things and how I felt towards them. I realized that I could not participate in warfare. I realized that I could not kill. I just did not want to have any part of it.

## SOLDIER WITH COURAGE NOT TO KILL IS IN TROUBLE

BY MARGARET Q. GARVEY

1991. I have just returned from a nine-day visit to the frontlines of battle in which American soldiers are waging peace.

At the invitation of the Mennonite Church and with some hastily summoned financial help from generous institutions and individuals, five of us were “rapidly deployed” in locations close to the American military bases of Germany whose personnel are now being poured into the Persian Gulf region and prepared to kill Iraqis on behalf of the United States. Our purpose was and is to counsel and assist men and women among them who cannot, in conscience, agree to do this work. It has been my privilege to spend time with one particularly courageous young man whose ordeal exemplifies what happens when profound Christian convictions encounter the expedience of a nation state.

Gary C. Stiegelmeier, a Catholic from Cleveland, is in the 123<sup>rd</sup> Division’s Delta Company. Five years ago, at 17, an adolescent impressed by the presentation of a recruiter and desirous of a career as an automobile mechanic, Stiegelmeier enlisted in the Army. He underwent basic training and attended mechanic school at Fort Jackson, S.C.

On Dec. 16 this year, having refused to accept the weapon he had been issued, he was physically carried aboard a military aircraft bound for Saudi

Arabia from Nürnberg, Germany, and has not been heard from since. According to current military directives, his claim of conscientious objection will not be processed until he is in the zone of combat.

Stiegelmeier is not a particularly articulate person, but his testimony is animated by an eloquence as old and new as the Gospel and well worth quoting at length:

“I really believe I want to leave the Army because I don’t want anyone to die, friend or foe,” he wrote Dec. 12 as he gave notice of his request for conscientious objector status. “I don’t think anyone wants to kill another man, but war makes them do it. My belief is: I choose not to kill another man. In war, even if you are ‘victorious,’ you still lose because people are wounded in their minds and spirits because they have killed and seen others be killed. I never had anyone who would listen to me and talk about these beliefs, but when I got married last March, I could talk, then. My wife, Tina, has given me inspiration and challenge to face my thoughts of right and wrong. I never took time to do that before.

“I haven’t been in a family since I was 17. The coming together as family made my beliefs come out. We could talk. My family loves me and I love

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*Margaret Garvey was the first woman elected (in 1976) to the national board of Pax Christi USA. She founded the Davenport Catholic Worker House in 1973.*



them. I've never had anyone close listen to my problems. In the Army I never felt comfortable talking to my superiors or peers about any of this. Instead, I'd get drunk. Now that's changed through the support of my family.

"I cannot kill men, because they are created in the image of God . . . how can I kill someone who 'my government' makes as the enemy. It is not the man, it is the government's belief you fight in a war.

"Before the wall came down, I was trained that East Germans and Eastern Bloc Countries were bad. Now that the wall is down, . . . we meet people we were supposed to kill and we realize that they are the same as you and me. It is just the government that makes them as a threat. How can I kill a person like that? A person just like me.

" . . . I remember my old ways—I don't want my old ways back.

"In the future I plan to use my beliefs to be a good husband and father to teach my children to stand up for their beliefs. I would teach them right from wrong. I would teach them that it is wrong to kill or to participate in acts of violence. It is courage to fight [for] what you believe in. I know it is wrong to kill."

Every Catholic in the nation, if not every citizen within or without its military forces, must be prepared to make increasingly dreadful and costly moral decisions as the gulf crisis intensifies. Those who choose, as Gary Stiegelmeyer has chosen, to resist in the name of God the violent enterprise on which their nation is embarked deserve far more than they have yet received of the pastoral attention and institutional support of their church.

Because they are, at the moment, her most faithful witness.

## FIRST RESISTER COMES FORWARD IN CURRENT GULF CONFLICT

BY JOEL SCHORN

**2002.** Saying he was absent without leave because he did not want to participate in a U.S. invasion of Iraq, U.S. Army Private Wilfredo Torres turned himself in on Veteran's Day to military police in Virginia, where he was incarcerated overnight on an AWOL charge, said his attorney Tod Ensign, who is also the director of a veterans' rights advocacy group called Citizen Soldier. Torres' surrender came only three days after the United Nations Security Council approved a resolution authorizing the use of force to disarm Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Torres, a 19-year-old from Rochester, New York, is believed to be the first public resister to a possible new Gulf War.

"Since I left Fort Benning, Georgia last November, I thought about our country's foreign policy and my potential role as a soldier," Torres said in a Catholic News Service report. "I have decided that it will be wrong for our country to attack Iraq on its own, without working as part of the U.N.," he said. Even after the U.N. Security Council vote, Torres remained convinced the U.S. wants to invade Iraq on its own.

"If we do [attack], I won't be going with them,"

*Joel Schorn is an associate editor of the Sign of Peace, covering news and events for this journal.*

Torres said. "I am returning to the military today so my case can be resolved," he continued. "If I am punished, then I am ready," he said.

Under the Uniform Code for Military Justice, an AWOL soldier faces a maximum punishment of "a dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of all pay and allowances, and confinement at hard labor for 18 months." A dishonorable discharge can also disqualify an individual from Army and other veterans' benefits. If a soldier goes AWOL for 30 days, the status of the crime becomes desertion, at which time the military contacts family members and issues a national arrest warrant. According to the Code, "the maximum punishment is a dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of all pay and allowances, and confinement at hard labor for three years. In times of war, the maximum punishment for desertion is death by lethal injection."

"If the war goes ahead and my own reading is that [President George W.] Bush thinks he can go ahead without any need for a further U.N. resolution, I think we will hear from dozens and even hundreds of young people," said attorney Ensign. "I've been getting calls already from reservists who are asking about their options."

# COMES A WARRIOR A CHRISTMAS MEDITATION

BY ROBERT BARRON

God's world—the universe that came forth good and splendid from the hand of the creator—is in the grip of dark powers. Isaiah the prophet tells us that we live in “a land of gloom” (Is. 9:2) and that we are “burdened by the yoke of a taskmaster” (Is. 9:4). We know all too well the texture of that gloom and the weight of that yoke: guns in the hands of teen-agers, the hungry and homeless who roam the streets of affluent cities, families riven by the stubborn inability to forgive, depressions and anxieties that haunt us like ghosts, ambitions that succeed only in breaking hearts and wrecking lives, the million acts of violence against bodies and souls, nations baring their teeth and rattling their swords. And as we gaze back on the bloody century that has just come to a close, we see all too much of the darkness of which the prophet speaks: Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Rwanda, Viet Nam, Flanders Field, Normandy Beach, Columbine, and the killing fields of Cambodia. Yes, God's world is good, but we seem to live, as C.S. Lewis put it, in enemy-occupied territory, a place where the “powers” in myriad forms hold sway. And all of our attempts to ameliorate the situation—economic reforms, political re-arrangements, psychological adjustments—just seem to make matters worse. And so the believer sings his mournful song from the loneliness of his prison: “O come, O come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel.”

The good news of Christmas is that the rightful King has returned to reclaim what is his and to let the prisoners go free. The God announced by all the prophets and patriarchs—by Abraham, Jeremiah,

Ezekiel, Amos, and Isaiah—is a God of justice, and this means that he burns to set things right. God hates the sin and violence and injustice that have rendered gloomy his beautiful world and therefore he comes into that world as a warrior, ready to fight. But he arrives (and here is the delicious irony of Christmas) stealthily, clandestinely, sneaking, as it were, unnoticed behind enemy lines. The King comes as a helpless infant, born of insignificant parents in a small town of a distant outpost of the Roman Empire; and there wasn't even room for him in a common inn.

Stealthily he comes, but powerfully and dangerously. Caesar and Quirinius—potentates who think they are controlling the world with their census—are actually working according to God's plan, paving the way for the King who will dethrone them. When Herod hears of his arrival, he trembles, as well he might, for he knows in his bones that his days are numbered. The sad Jerusalem that he rules through fear and violence is meant to be a holy city, governed according to God's designs, and the new Ruler has just arrived. Herod senses what the shepherds see directly: “and suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host” (Lk. 2:13). Let us not be naïve or sentimental about

the angels: a “host” is an army, and this is the army of the infant warrior come to root out the power of the enemy.

There is, of course, another reason for the simplicity and poverty of his arrival: he is to be a soldier, but he will not fight with the violent weapons of the Herods, Ceasars and other kings of this dysfunctional world. Rather he will wield the sword of non-violence and the spear of forgiveness; and he will wear the helmet of righteousness and the

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breastplate of compassion. He will conquer through the finally irresistible power of love, the same power with which he made the universe. In the ancient mythological accounts of creation, God or the gods make the world through a primordial act of violence; they conquer, control, divide, order through force. But the true God makes the universe, not by wrestling an opposing power into submission, not by dominating and destroying a rival, but rather through a sheerly generous and non-violent act of love. In the language of the philosophers, God creates *ex nihilo*, from nothing. And so when the Son of God enters his disordered world in order to recreate it, he acts with a similar gentleness and non-violence. Pharaoh, Caesar, Quirinius, Herod—and their like down through the ages to the present day—seek to throw off all constraints, but the Son of God, the creator of the stars and planets, allows himself to be wrapped in swaddling clothes, to be tied up, bound, beholden to the other. The rulers of this world endeavor at all costs to have their own needs met, but the Ruler of the Age to Come is placed in a manger, for he is to be food for the hungry. The powers seek control, but the Power allows himself to become, in Chesterton's words, "a child too weak to raise his own head."

In all of this, of course, he anticipates the drama of the cross. Over the crucified, Pilate will place a placard announcing "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews," but Caesar's representative will have no idea of the irony of this statement. Roman authority was expressed and maintained through the violent overthrow of opposing powers, through the crucifixion—real and symbolic—of rival Kings. Augustine summed up the Roman way with devastating laconicism: *libido dominandi*, the lust to dominate. But the true King, the ruler of cosmos, breaks that power precisely by meeting it with

forgiveness, non-violence, and compassion: nailed to the cross, powerless, he says, "forgive them Father, they know not what they do." And in those words, the Roman way (the way of the world) is undone. Every playground bully and every canny politician knows that the *libido dominandi* is always stirred to greater ardor when it is opposed by a similar force: an eye for an eye, making the whole world blind, as Gandhi said. When it is met by harsh and dreadful love, a love willing to give itself utterly away, it dries up.

Now listen again to Isaiah's victory cry, read at the Christmas Midnight Mass: "For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder, the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed as on the day of Midian; For every boot that tramped in battle, every cloak rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for flames" (Is. 9:4). The yoke, the rod, the boot trampled, the cloak rolled in blood—all the dark works of a fallen world—will be thrown by this newborn king into the fire. Indeed, when he bursts on the public scene, he will make plain his purpose, "I have come, not for peace, but for the sword" and "I have come to light a fire on the earth." Precisely because he carries a sword of compassion and illumines the flame of love, Jesus is the first truly dangerous warrior, the first enemy the powers have really feared.

So for followers of this soldier, Christmas is not a sentimental feast, not a harmless festival of cards and gifts and twinkling lights; it is a call to arms, a summons to start a blaze.

We are in prison, but the liberator is here; we are in the gloom, but the torchbearer has presented himself; we are pinned down by the enemy, but the Warrior has come. And therefore we can sing our triumphant song: "Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel has come to thee O Israel."

*So for  
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# AVE VERUM: FOR THE CHRISTMAS CHRIST

BY DOLORES FRESE  
CHRISTMAS 1996

Ave verum corpus natum  
HAIL TRULY HUMAN BODY, BORN  
de Maria virgine  
OF MARY'S VIRGIN FLESH;  
Vere passum immolatum  
SACRIFICED, TRULY SUFFERING, TORN  
in crucis pro homine  
FOR US UPON THAT CROSS;



Cuius latus perforatum  
O, TWICE-TRUE BODY FROM WHOSE PERFORATED SIDE  
unda fluxit et sanguine:  
THE WAVES OF WATER ONCE DID FLOW, AND BLOOD:  
Esto nobis praegustatum  
BE THERE FOR EVERY ONE OF US, RECALLING AND FORESEEING  
in mortis examine.  
OUR MORTAL PASSING THROUGH THE FLESH, AND AFTERWARDS, THE WEIGHING.

*Dolores Frese teaches in the English Department at Notre Dame*

# THE LITTLE FLOWER AND THE CLASH OF EMPIRES

BY MICHAEL GARVEY

What most of us cherish as “America” was born in the first successful colonial rebellion against the British Empire. The nation which resulted was as unwilling to suffer as to inflict imperial policy. That reluctance is now so diminished that, for many Americans in the 21st century, the once pejorative word “imperialist” is ingenuously employed to describe military and economic initiatives for which no justification need be offered. If it is to survive as the world’s sole remaining superpower, the United States must embrace its imperial responsibilities, and the fact that the nation must behave as an empire simplifies the answer to the famous post 9/11 question, “Why do they hate us?” They hate us because we rule them.

Catholics—whether American or Iraqi—are subjects of an empire in which the pronouns “us” and “them” cannot be used so confidently, a point which was brought home last month, when the relics of Saint Therese of Lisieux, the Little Flower, arrived in Baghdad November 18, a few days before the United Nations weapons inspectors.

The relics have been on a worldwide pilgrimage since the centenary of Saint Therese’s death, and they have been carried through some of the world’s least peaceful places. They came to Iraq by plane from Lebanon, where for two months they had been venerated in various churches around that country, and before Lebanon, they had toured both regions of border-slashed Ireland. Their tour of Iraq responded to a request by Archbishop Jean Sleiman, head of the Catholic Arch-

diocese of Baghdad.

As the bones of Saint Therese left his country, Cardinal Nasrallah P. Sfeir, the patriarch of the Maronite Catholic Church in Lebanon, prayed that “the urgent and crucial visit of the sacred relics which will be carried to Iraq may drive away the specter of war from Iraq and the whole region.” The exposition of the relics in his own country took place amidst crowded liturgies and large processions in which, according to a November 19 Vatican Radio report, Christians and Muslims participated side by side.

The relics will tour eight sites in Iraq—many of whose one million Christians are Catholics of the Latin, Chaldean, Syrian and Armenian rites—until December 28. There are 40 Chaldean Catholic parishes in Baghdad alone. In communion with Rome, these Chaldean Catholics worship in a liturgy whose language is Syriac, the language that Jesus spoke.

Interviewed by western reporters at St. Joseph Cathedral in Baghdad, Ramzia Isaac, a retired teacher, said she had prayed before the relics of Saint Therese for the Little Flower’s intercession to cure her sick son. “I also hope that she will keep war away from us and end the embargo,” she added. Imad Elias, another worshipper at Saint Joseph’s, said he hoped the saint would cure him of his diabetes and stop “the hostile war against us.”

Interviewed back in France, Father Raymond Lamella, rector emeritus of the Basilica of Lisieux, spoke approvingly of such responses, observing that the Church “always respected this habit which consists of gathering to pray in the presence of the remains of those whom we knew and loved. We are not pure spirits and we need signs. Precisely the relics of the saints are

to be regarded as the very humble and very fragile signs of what were their bodies. In the presence of the relics we can thus evoke more easily their human condition: It is with their body that the saints acted, thought, requested, worked, suffered and experienced death.

However, these so thin and almost ridiculous signs—these are what God sometimes wants to make use of to express his presence and to make his power and glory known.”

This Christian custom of which Father Ramella spoke began in the Middle East during the earliest days of the Church, in Smyrna, a city in what is now Turkey, after Polycarp, its 86 year-old bishop, had been burned at the stake for refusing to renounce the faith.

After the bishop was killed, according to his Smyranean flock, “we took up his bones, which are more valuable than precious stones and finer than refined gold, and laid them in a suitable place, where the Lord will permit us to gather ourselves together, as we are able, in gladness and joy, and to celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom.”

It is good to know that the custom persists. . . that our brothers and sisters in Iraq—fellow citizens in the empire of Christ the King, flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone, Eucharist of our Eucharist—gather around the relics of the Little Flower even as the smart-bomb computers are being programmed. May their witness embolden us.



*Michael Garvey works at the University of Notre Dame.*

# ST. ISAAC OF NINEVEH PRAY FOR US

BY KYLE R. SMITH

**S**t. Isaac of Nineveh, a 7<sup>th</sup> century ascetic, was from the town of Bet Qatraye on the Persian Gulf. In 660 AD Isaac was ordained bishop of Nineveh, an ancient city on the Tigris River in present-day Iraq. But Isaac preferred the contemplative life of a hermit to the ecclesiastical life of a bishop, so he left his see “for a reason known to God” after only five months. From Nineveh, Isaac withdrew to the monastery of Rabban Shabur in Iran where he died at an old age.

Isaac was a monk, a teacher, and a renowned scriptural scholar who, so it is said, studied Scripture so much that it eventually made him blind. Although he was a tremendous exegete, it is Isaac’s discourses on the ascetical life for which he is remembered.

Reworking the teachings of Origen of Alexandria (d. 253) and Evagrius of Pontus (d. 399), Isaac puts forth a threefold way to God: the way of the body, the way of the soul, and the way of the spirit. In the first stage, Isaac prescribes fasting, vigils, and psalmody so that one may master the fleshly desires that lead us away from God. Once one has achieved a certain self-mastery, one is able to turn away from created things so to focus solely on the contemplation of God’s wisdom. This second stage leads on to a total openness of the soul from which one may enter the third and final stage: continual prayer and an acute understanding of the immortal life given to us through Christ’s salvific death and resurrection.

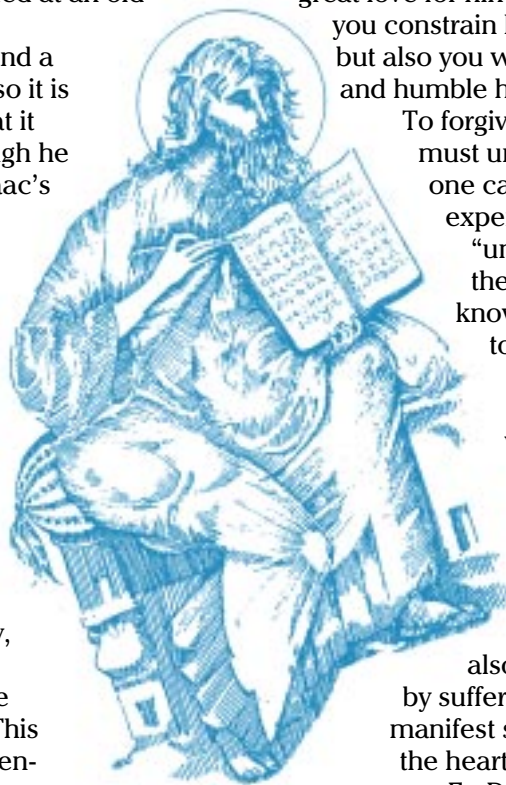
The constant refrain throughout Isaac’s ascetical discourses is his firm insistence on the necessity of mercy and forgiveness. Isaac so insists on mercy

that, like Origen and St. Gregory of Nyssa (d. 386), he speculates on the possibility of universal salvation—even for demons. For Isaac, being merciful means offering “tearful prayers even for the enemies of truth.” Isaac recognizes that this level of forgiveness requires much strength, but he challenges us nevertheless: “When you meet your neighbor, force yourself to honor him beyond his measure. Kiss his hand and his foot and piously warm your heart with great love for him . . . by these things not only will you constrain him to desire beautiful things . . . but also you will establish in yourself peaceful and humble habits.”

To forgive with such abundant mercy, one must understand, says Isaac, that “no one can know the Truth without gaining experience of suffering.” For Isaac, “unless the soul tastes suffering for the sake of Christ, it will not share in knowledge with Him.” And in order to taste suffering, Isaac counseled poverty, saying “nothing gives peace to the mind as much as voluntary poverty: fire does not blaze among fresh wood, and enthusiasm for God does not break forth into flames in a heart that loves comfort.” Isaac demanded a lot of himself and his fellow Christians, but he also indicates that the tears brought by suffering are a “gift” that serve “as a manifest sign of the perception of truth” in the heart of a Christian.

Fr. Daniel Berrigan says, “Being a pacifist between wars is like being a vegetarian between meals. This is exactly where the Gospel gets verified or denied.” In the same way, Isaac implores us that it is precisely in times of persecution and injustice that we are most called to encounter Christ and, indeed, to suffer with Him.

St. Isaac of Nineveh’s memory is celebrated by the Church on January 28.



*Kyle Smith is an associate editor of the Sign of Peace and a student of early Christianity at Notre Dame.*

A CATHOLIC WORKER HOUSE NAMED AFTER ST. ISAAC OPENED ITS DOORS A FEW MONTHS AGO:  
St. Isaac of Nineveh Gift of Tears Catholic Worker  
513 Colt Run Road  
Spenser, WV 25276

# A TRIBUTE TO PHILLIP BERRIGAN

## 1923-2002

BY PATRICK O'NEILL

When the Catholic Peace Fellowship was "just a post office box," Philip Berrigan was one of the driving forces who helped get CPF funded and active in the effort to stop the Vietnam War. Berrigan, 79, died Dec. 6 from cancer, surrounded by his loved ones at Jonah House, the "resistance community" he and loving wife, Elizabeth McAlister founded in 1973 to oppose war.

In 1964, when Phil was a Josephite priest living in the Bronx, he would often come to Manhattan to join his brother, Fr. Daniel Berrigan, SJ, Tom Cornell, Jim Forest, Jim Douglas and others for planning meetings that led to CPF's founding, said Bill Ofenloch, who was CPF's program coordinator from 1978 to 1994. Phil, along with Marty Corbin and Jim Forest were the three original co-chairmen of CPF.

"Phil was one of the guiding spirits in the very early days that got CPF off the ground with his early opposition to the Vietnam War," Ofenloch said.

In a final statement, dictated to Elizabeth, Phil said: "I die with the conviction, held since 1968 and Catonsville, that nuclear weapons are the scourge of the earth; to mine for them, manufacture them, deploy them, use them, is a curse against God, the human family, and the earth itself."

On the day of his funeral, Berrigan's pine coffin, beautifully adorned with the hand-painted roses of Jesuit iconographer, Fr. William Hart McNichols, was loaded onto the back of a black pick-up truck and driven about a mile in a procession of 300 people to St. Peter Claver Catholic Church, where Berrigan once served as a priest. The procession passed through inner-city streets and past abandoned tenements, including one that had burned and partially collapsed just hours earlier.

Chris Barrett of Lynchburg, Va., carried a sign stating: "Phil had the strength of 100 men." Barbara Washington, who was among scores of locals who lined the streets to watch the unusual event, said she hadn't known of Philip Berrigan until she read about his death.

"I'm sure to know him was to love him," she said.

During a standing-room-only service, that included 600 people, Daniel Berrigan touched on his own pain at the loss of his brother.

"Philip was diagnosed, and in slightly over two months, died," Daniel said. "Cancer pummeled him under like a horsemen of the apocalypse. The speed, the near frenzy of death, were terrifying; no slowing it down, no bargaining with it, no give and take."

Daniel said Phil, in a "kind of high wire balancing act of the spirit," was both patient and impatient.

"From 1967 to the day of his death, Philip learned patience, a harsh, grating, unattractive so-called virtue. He learned patience through bolts and bars, through stopped clocks and time served, at the icy hands of judges and guards and wardens. He learned it through the war-making state and the complicit church, through long sacrifice and small return, through 35 years of American war and scarcely a week of genuine peace . . . Patience was like an iron yoke placed on his shoulder. What we had at the end was a master work of grace and human sweetness. We gazed on him with a kind of awe. Dying, Philip won the face he had earned at such cost."

Among those in attendance at the funeral were notables such as former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark and actor Martin Sheen, but mostly the crowd was composed of individuals who had crossed paths with Phil in the work of peace—Catholic Workers in blue jeans and sweatshirts, elderly nuns, Buddhist monks and scores of priests.

Willa Bickham and Brendan Walsh, the founders of Baltimore's Viva House Catholic Worker, had a 35-year friendship with Phil and Elizabeth. Walsh praised Phil for the aid he and Liz gave in helping to get Viva House off the ground.

"Philip Berrigan is our friend," Walsh said. "And he's a friend to everyone gathered here today. Philip Berrigan and his Jonah House community are friends of Dorothy Day, our Viva House community and all the Catholic Worker Houses throughout the world."

". . . Philip Berrigan knew the truth. He was a witness to the truth. He was that rare combination where word and deed are one—always, everywhere—steadfast, rock solid, hopeful, one in a million. He was that tree standing by the water that would not be moved. The Gospel was Phil's truth. He understood the meaning of the mystical body better than anyone we know."

Last January, Phil visited us here in Raleigh. His words left a deep mark: "I would like to exhort you to not get tired—don't get tired. As the Gospel of John said, the flesh—everything in us that the world controls—the flesh counts for nothing. It is the spirit that counts. . . you renew your spirit with the scriptures. Gandhi used to say everybody has to have a scripture. It doesn't necessarily have to be the Bible. . . But we have to compare our lives to a book of wisdom, a book of courage and justice and decency; constantly comparing our lives to that. . . and as they say, we might lose all the battles, but we'll win the war."

Philip Berrigan won the war. His weapon was love.

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*Patrick O'Neill is cofounder of the Fr. Charlie Mulholland Catholic Worker House in Garner, NC*

## TO OUR READERS

We have often remarked that the merest fraction of the take from any Pentagon coke machine—let alone the cash dropped into one of its more “advanced” machines—would fund our peace work for a year. They haven’t offered. They probably won’t. And so we have to look elsewhere, dear friend, to keep this work going! And what better time than now, since we really are almost broke, and since it is Christmas.

Again this year, Christmas reminded us that we should honor God’s gift to us by giving to others—family, friends, neighbors, and those in need. Every time we give of ourselves to one another, we are a sign of God’s gift to the world. The Catholic Peace Fellowship is trying to respond to God’s gift to us by spreading the Gospel of Peace. Through our newsletter *The Sign of Peace*, we communicate the peace tradition of the Catholic Church; we tell the inspiring stories of the saints; we provide a forum for theological reflection; and we give up-to-date information and support to Catholics discerning their conscience about issues of war and peace.

This is a very exciting time for us, because the kind of work we do—focusing on Conscientious Objection, ROTC programs, and war resistance from a Catholic perspective—fills a real niche in the peace movement. We are eager to do all this work, but it takes money—money we do not have. We hope to travel the country, offering workshops that will prepare those who work with youth to assist them in discerning their conscience regarding military service. We hope to provide materials to dioceses and parishes nationwide, so that they will be able to train their own members in counseling COs and sharing the teachings of the Church on conscientious objection.

We hope to sponsor summer educational programs here at Notre Dame to teach the youth and youth ministers the Catholic theology of peace. We hope to produce written materials concerning the problematic but popular Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs at Catholic colleges and universities. And for high school students being indoctrinated in JROTC programs, we want to provide their religion teachers with materials to help them make an educated and conscientious decision about joining the military.

We also intend to continue to pay our one full time staff member a living wage, and to possibly hire interns over the summer. We need to maintain our website, [www.catholicpeacefellowship.org](http://www.catholicpeacefellowship.org). And right now, we don’t even have our own office space and office supplies. We share with whoever lets us!

Truth is, God does provide. Though right now we have no way to pay for all—well, any—of the above goals, we raise confident prayers to God and the saints. Taking after the first Catholic Worker in Washington, D.C., Llewellyn Scott (whose first donation was \$5 from Dorothy Day), we have a financial committee of Saints Martin de Porres, Francis, Therese and, of course, Joseph. Yet the way it works is not that they send us checks. Would that it were that easy! Rather, if they inspire our work, people might glimpse something holy and want to be a part of it.

And so there’s the story. Flat broke, we’re working our tails off to be at the service of the Church and its concrete mission of peace on earth. But the mission costs more than just hard work, and we humbly ask now that you consider becoming a part of CPF, supporting our efforts and advancing our aims. We rely on your gifts in order to share ours.

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I am discerning my status as a conscientious objector and would like assistance to begin a CO file with CPF.

I would like to help CPF bring a draft counseling/CO workshop to my area.

I am interested in acting as a regional contact for CPF.

The Catholic Peace Fellowship

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Quotes and information found in the article on Isaac of Nineveh, page 12, are also from the above book.

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**“WE URGE  
A MIGHTY LEAGUE  
OF CATHOLIC  
CONSCIENTIOUS  
OBJECTORS”**

*—Dorothy Day*