

HOSPITALITY

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The Open Door Community – Hospitality & Resistance in the Catholic Worker Movement

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January 2008

Epiphany Under Empire Remembering Resistance

By Ched Myers

Editor's note: Ched Myers practices theological animation with Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries in Southern California (www.bcm-net.org). This article was previously published in America, January 2007.

Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar, behütet uns auch für dieses Jahr, vor Feuer und vor Wassergefahr. ("... protect us again this year from the dangers of fire and water.")

—prayer uttered during the traditional German Feast of the Three Kings

The origins of the Feast of the Epiphany are historically complicated and ecclesially disputed. We might think of it as a kind of peace offering from the Western to the Eastern Church, given the latter's (surely older) January 6th date for the Feast of the Nativity. The Twelve Days of Christmas, in turn, represent a bridge between the two traditions, straddling exactly our celebration of the New Year.

Epiphany has a rich cultural history in the West, from "Plough Monday" in early England (a drinking day for the peasantry) to *La Fiesta de los Reyes Magos*, still celebrated among Latinos. What caught my attention in researching such traditions, however, was an old German practice of ritually purifying the household on the Twelfth Day, the "eve of Epiphany." Herbs were burned and "C + M + B" (representing the legendary names of the Magi) inscribed above the entry to the house and barn, followed by a prayer asking for protection in the coming year "from the ravages of fire and water."

This seems such a compelling petition for our world, which, like the Magi and Holy Family of old, dwells uneasily under the shadow of Empire. Indeed, the reigning U.S. administration continues its rehabilitation of the old Pax Romana policy of "permanent war." How many contested landscapes suffer the "fire" of depleted uranium munitions and "smart bombs"? And when it comes to deadly "water," as if the Katrina debacle was not grim enough, our markets, our media and our senses are saturated from being flooded with the delusions and distractions of commodity fetishism.

But how are ancient, mythical Magi supposed to protect us from such epidemic dehumanization? Their story is indeed the focus of Epiphany, alluded to at the end of the feast's Old Testament reading:

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and God's glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.... A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall



B.M. Kavanagh

come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord (Isaiah 60:1-2, 6).

While the theological theme of "the in-breaking of the Light" tends to dominate our contemporary liturgical celebrations, we should not overlook the Magi. But that's not easy in imperial America, with its White House crèches and relentless commercial huckstering. We have long candy-coated and Disneyfied the Christmas story beyond biblical recognition, and no characters have been more domesticated than the "Wise Men from the East."

The Nativity narratives of Matthew and Luke may have few details in common, but they agree on one basic theme: God-in-Christ slips unnoticed into a world of brutal rulers and hard-pressed refugees, and a few unheralded people manage to recognize the Presence, and act accordingly. Whereas the classical literature of antiquity focused exclusively upon powerful and famous personalities — not unlike the media in our culture — our Gospels portray ordinary people as the true protagonists. The central characters are a poor couple who end up homeless (Luke) and fleeing as political refugees (Matthew). Yet both evangelists insist that these obscure events at the margins of Empire somehow posed a sharp challenge to the rule of domination by Caesar (Luke) and Herod (Matthew).

Matthew's account narrates the conflict between a King (Herod) and a Kid (Jesus), to which the visit of the Magi (Matthew 2:1-12) is central. Biblical scholar Richard Horsley, in "The Liberation of Christmas: The Infancy Narratives in

Moratorium on the Death Penalty Time for Georgia to Stop, Look, and Listen

by Murphy Davis

Quite by surprise, we are in the midst of a *de facto* moratorium on executions in the United States. The US Supreme Court accepted for review a death penalty case from Kentucky that challenges the particular set of drugs used for killing prisoners by lethal injection. Because all of the states in the regular execution business use this method for killing its captives, all executions have been put on hold until the Supreme Court renders its decision — no later than the end of June, 2008.

The case of *Baze v. Reese* is an Eighth Amendment challenge claiming that the particular mix of drugs used in the execution chamber constitutes cruel and unusual punishment because it can inflict pain and suffering as the prisoner dies. The case cites at least nine bungled executions including one in which it took the prisoner 69 minutes to die and another which took medical technicians 22 minutes to find a suitable vein. Not to even mention the horror of Georgia's bungled attempt to execute Jose High in November, 2001 in which the technicians finally cut into his neck without anesthesia to put in a "central line."

The history of the death penalty in Georgia is a history of racism, class bias and a system more like a roulette wheel than anything else.

On October 18, 2007, the Georgia Supreme Court granted a stay of execution to Jack Alderman who was scheduled to be executed on October 19. The stay was based on the *Baze* case before the U.S. Supreme Court. Then just a few days later, the court granted a stay to Curtis Osborne who was to be executed on October 23. While other states had voluntarily stepped back from setting execution dates in light of *Baze*, the Georgia execution machine marched defiantly onward until stopped by the state Supreme Court. It seems clear now that there will be no more execution dates until the U.S. Supreme Court speaks on the matter.

Over the past several years our movement has made

A Reflection on John the Baptist

From the Belly of the Beast, Georgia Death Row, to My Brothers and Sisters on the Streets of Atlanta

By Marcus Wellons

Editor's note: Marcus Wellons is a longtime friend of the Open Door Community who is on Georgia's death row. We are glad to welcome him to the pages of Hospitality.

I'm Marcus Wellons, a servant of the Lord Jesus, your Brother who sat in the same seats at the Open Door as you. I was in search of the true meaning of Life, why I was created. What is my purpose on this earth? Are God and Christ real? Are they true?

You, my poor homeless friends, are looked upon as outcasts and with disdain.

I once volunteered to stuff envelopes at the front office that were sent to the men and women on death row in the mid-1980s, and marched as an activist with Ed and Murphy protesting the death penalty and homelessness and other injustice issues. My journey has brought me to death row, which I call "life row" because through my troubles I have found out my true purpose and calling in life: to glorify God as a servant of God while serving humankind.

I bring greetings of love, peace and good tidings in Christ's name. I was asked to share my thoughts on the first chapter of Mark and a few passages regarding John the

Baptizer. John prepared the way for Jesus with a message of repentance, turning away from sin and toward God, and Bro. Ed will address this. I'll deal with Mark 1:6, which tells us that he was clothed with camel's hair, a leather girdle or belt to hold his clothes up, and that he ate locusts and wild honey as he told the people about Christ's coming to start his ministry.

Society in John's day, just as it is in our day, often judges people on their appearance: what they wear, eat, where they live; in our day what they drive; in John's day what type beast they rode. The prejudice and discriminations you face are nothing new. He faced the same issues.

John was well received by the *hoi polloi*, the poor masses, but he was rejected by the wealthy power brokers and religious leaders. Why? Because he was poor, homeless, lived in the woods and wore clothing that was unacceptable to the rich and to those in power. He lived off the land, eating locusts, grasshoppers or crickets: flying insects rich in protein. His hair and beard were long and unkempt, and he probably bathed in a river. He was a nonconformist, not a best friend with big business (religious leaders). He called them hypocrites, snakes. No wonder they rejected his message of repentance and Jesus' coming.

John's simple, eccentric, strange, wild man-looking lifestyle spoke of a prophet unbought, unbossed and unbehonden, separate from the rich and powerful but one with God and with a freedom to speak truth and the right message. Hence, he was a prophet not sold out to human power.

You, my poor homeless friends, are

looked upon as outcasts and with disdain. The powerful see you and the advocates for the poor as wearing camel's hair, crazy, an eyesore to be removed from sight. They beheaded John. They want you beheaded too, or locked away or run out of town.

John lived off the land. God provided the insects and wild honey that could be found in trees, dead carcasses, or recovered among rocks. I guarantee you no one else wore a camel's hair outfit with a leather girdle. That was about as cheap and humble a lifestyle as could be. John was not concerned about wealth, his appearance, where he'd sleep, what he'd eat or what he'd ride. He knew God would provide through nature. He fasted and prayed a lot as well with his disciples.

When a man or woman has a humble spirit like John and is unconcerned about the world's trappings, he or she is less likely to be corrupted by greed and ambition. John's lifestyle represents being divorced from the world's system and its lust and greed for power and position. He was behoden only to God, God's mission and God's kingdom. John embodied I John 2:15-16: "Love not the world neither the things in the world, for all that's in the world is the lust of eyes, lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. These things are not of God but of the world."

John's lifestyle required very little or no money. Jesus in John 4:32-34 said that his meat was to do God's will. He said people do not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Meat and bread go together. What Jesus was saying was that obeying God's will was what fed his spiritual hunger, a much deeper need.



The Angolite

To close, I think we can live as modern-day John the Baptists and agitators. We too can be ministers and servants. Will we as servants of God strive to be pastors of huge rich churches in the suburbs and drive big shiny cars? Or will we answer the call to serve those despised, left behind? Will we give our lives to the poor? I am thankful to those at the Open Door who have vowed to live in the "desert" at 910 Ponce, to wear camel's hair like the homeless and eat the same locusts and wild honey that God provides through the generosity of supporters.

We can all join in this Movement, fighting the power brokers of the city to repent from hating the homeless poor, calling the privileged to repent from classism, racism, imperialism and discrimination because Jesus the Messiah is coming. It is time to lay the ax to the root of the tree of power, and risk arrest and condemnation for telling them that *the time is now for repentance, a change of heart, a change of mind, and courageous action.*

God bless you,
Bro. Marcus Wellons ♦

HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is published 11 times a year by the Open Door Community (PCUS), Inc., an Atlanta Protestant Catholic Worker community: Christians called to resist war and violence and nurture community in ministry with and advocacy for the homeless poor and prisoners, particularly those on death row. Subscriptions are free. A newspaper request form is included in each issue. Manuscripts and letters are welcomed. Inclusive language editing is standard.

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Calvin Kimbrough
Our prayer circle before serving the Labor Day Picnic.

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What Ever Happened to John the Baptist?

By Brother Eduard-the-Agitator Loring CW#91030306

What ever happened to John the Baptist? John was executed by beheading, that's what happened to John the Baptist!

Herod Antipas (20 B.C.E. to 39 C.E.), son of Herod the Great (73 B.C.E. to 4 C.E.), ordered John's execution while drunk, sexually aroused and showing off to his underlings. ("The poor tell us who we are; the prophets tell us who we could be. So we hide the poor, and kill the prophets," keened Phil Berrigan behind steel bars.)

The father, Herod the Great, is remembered each year at Santa Claus Time (Happy Holiday!) as the ruler who murdered children: the Holy Innocents, (a good time to protest at the Pentagon or military bases). As at My Lai, Vietnam, these orders were carried out by loyal soldiers with no higher obedience than what the Commander in Chief desired. The children's blood guttered the streets of Bethlehem and environs in 5 B.C.E.

Why the children, you ask over your second cup of tea. Fear. Simple as pie. Herod the Great was a ruthless leader, oppressing and killing the poor and raising taxes for lavish living. He was afraid. Lived in fear; died in fear. When fear floods the Palace, blood flows in the streets. Herod's visitors had told him the truth, something unheard of in our day: "A new leader, yea, the messiah has been born. The stars in the heavens point his way. The Hebrews' liberation/redemption songs are being sung in the peasants' hovels: 'This is the one. This is the one. We shall not look for another'."

Agitator: Why the children? Why the children, you wonder as you ride under Interstate 61, holding your breath, praying that the bridge overhead will not collapse. You look westerly and see the homeless urchins, filthy as your college son's laundry on the floor, stoop and pick up the empty can of Gravy Train flung from a car on the way to the vet's to have sweet Cocoa treated for her heartworms. Darling dog, your copilot. Children live under bridges, in the woods and jails in Georgia. What about those lands where you will have your ashes scattered when finally released from the guilt and burden of history and your hands burned clean as your son's clothes washed when he brings them home to you? Why the children? Fear.

This is the way of the Great Ones, and their world ends with a bang in the lives of the poor and a whimper in the deaths of the powerful.

Why the tax cuts that slash the poor in death's dark shadows? Greed. Our economic system, for you who possess two cars in the automatic door-opening garage, demands the death of the poor; the children of the abandoned people, the non-consumers. We need war for our economy to work, whether we pay for the killing of Palestinian children in Canaan today, or Iraq tomorrow. This is the way of the Great Ones, and their world ends with a bang in the lives of the poor and a whimper in the deaths of the powerful. Why the children? Simple: a most unfortunate necessity. 'Tis the way the system works.

Peeking Through a Keyhole Where There Is No Door

When discerning faith and practice as evidenced in Holy Writ, with the hard heels of history stomping down the grains of wheat appearing in the midst of tares and weeds, we know a way to discover the pearls of great price. We, who seek mercy and joy in the hard sayings and harsh stories of the Scriptures, have been given one of the most important gifts of mature discipleship and abundant life: *a way to read the Bible*. That is, a way to *think*, and *see*, and *hear* according to the Word by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. As the author of the forthcoming book on prison life for resistance, "Locked Up," Don Beisswenger sings in his sleep holding on to Judy for dear life: "Life is just a question of Hermeneutics." In other words, life is a question of your angle of vision.

Homeless men and women taught us a new way to read and live our lives. We were on the streets after midnight, while talking and napping on the steps of the Fulton County Health Department with 15 homeless men and women. We were learning to listen with the ears of the poor to the cry of the Christ in the anguish of the poor.

"Test questions," said Marylou.

"Like what?" Robert McGlasson asked.

"You got to know if they are of Jesus or false prophets. You know, white boy, there lots of wolves in this city running 'round in white sheep suits."

"Damn right," interrupted James, "lots of preachers get rich off hawking the gospel."

"Just ask those rich Christians," continued Marylou, "ever been to jail? How many golf balls did you lose last year? How much bread you got in the bank? Gotta big house north of here? Where you gonna run to when you get old? When the troops come marching in to kill the kids?" (All Sherman wanted to do was to free the children and scorch the earth.)

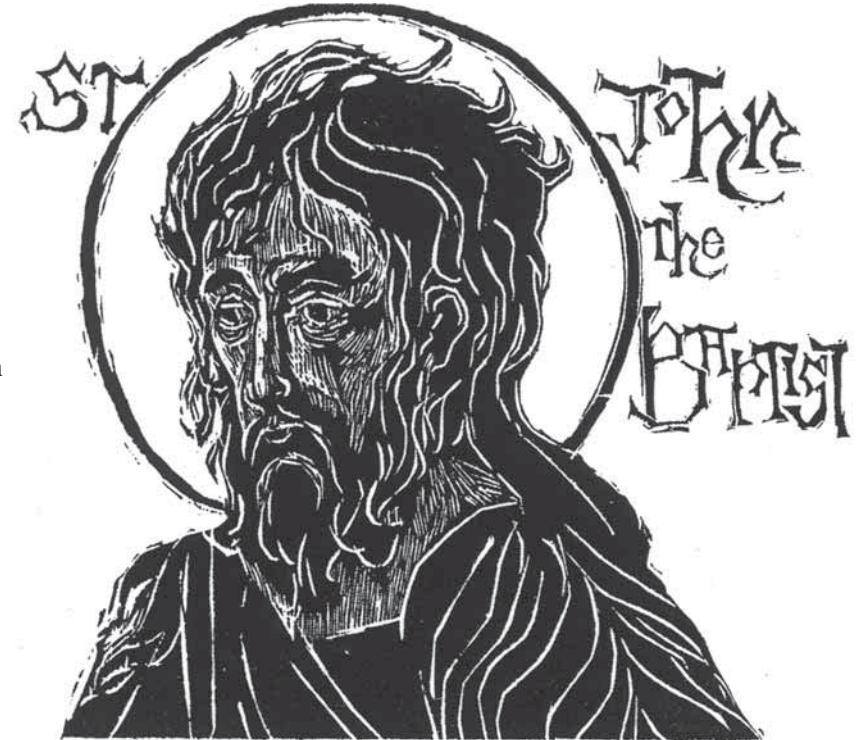
"Good gosh, we can't ask questions like that," Gladys moaned, "we're Presbyterians and that is breaking the rules of Christian etiquette. You want us to get marginalized?"

"Shit, I don't care who eats who," James blasted, not intending to point to our Eucharistic Theology. "I want a job, I want money and a house. I want food and a woman. I know why we are out here freezing our asses and you going home to your bed in a few hours. You got money. We don't. We ought to tear this filthy rotten system down," James continued with Marylou wobbling her head like a plinky doll.

You see, several of us at The Door went to college, seminary or law school, where we learned the critical historical method. It was on the streets that we got a taste of the pedagogy of the oppressed. Sorta put us on another road from the one on which we grew up.

Here's How It Works: The Father Killed Kids, the Son Killed the Prophet

Who was John the Baptist? He was, according to his disciple who went out on his own when JB was put into prison, the greatest of all the prophets! Jesus said that John was as good as you get from one born by woman. But he was least in the Beloved Community of God (Matthew 11:11), which is the highest place you can be since the last are first (Matthew 20:16), an irony that some Christian bankers have missed.



Sally Elliott

John the Baptist was a prophet. His way of life, his faith in Yahweh-Elohim and his hope for God's coming Messiah got his fires burning hot like the desert sands in the noonday sun. He was one URGENT friend of God.

Like Jesus after him, JB was a mama's boy. Elizabeth, even against her husband, Zachariah, raised him with Torah, Prophets and imagination. Elizabeth told their only child bedtime Bible stories of Vashti and Rizpah, Samson and Amos. Sometimes when Elizabeth was dancing with the Holy Ghost and moved by eschatological winds like the sirocco, she told little John of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Dorothy Day who would come as prophets to the American Empire. Already, Elizabeth could see with the eyes of her heart, her John living on the wilderness margins at the edges of Roman occupation and oppression in Palestine. "My child," she whispered, "you will be like Amos before you and Martin after you."

The demands of later imperial and triumphant Christian manners (more important than morals to most minions of money and monkey business), John the Baptist had to be set aside as not really acting like a respectable Christian. Thus, he is not a model for Christian prophets, who are, above all else, to be nice and predictable. (How else could the majority of Christians in the United States support the death penalty?)

John's way of life, especially his clothes and diet, were an embarrassment to the priests and Pharisees. How can you bribe someone when they are satisfied with an old camel skin outfit and a locust burger with honey on the side? John looked then a lot like Mike Vosburg-Casey does today.

John was as loud as a jet plane breaking the sound barrier! He was a street preacher who wanted to cleanse the temple rather than tear it down like his famous disciple from Nazareth. His street theater and public proclamation often stopped chariot traffic, with donkeys knocking into each other and braying (like JB was praying), and chickens getting loose, and lambs on the way to the slaughter crying for their mamas. Wow. Like Five Points in Atlanta, with cars and trucks all honking and the sirens screaming and the panhandlers begging. Some thought he was simply a nuisance on an ego trip or wanting to get his name put into a book like the Bible.

Direct, blunt, not afraid, he accused and named the rich who were corrupting Judaism by conforming to the Roman way of life. He called the priests and Pharisees ugly names like "you snakes" right to their faces; they then would slither away fuming like a tea kettle past its due date.

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THE OPEN DOOR'S TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

Sharing the Bread of Life



HOSPITALITY AND RESISTANCE
AT THE OPEN DOOR COMMUNITY

by Peter R. Gathje | Calvin Kimbrough, photography editor

Sharing the Bread of Life Hospitality and Resistance At the Open Door Community

By Peter R. Gathje

Thank you (and thank Peter) for the modest yet glorious anniversary and its eloquent record. You put the warmakers to shame, and vindicate the Beatitudes as our true and only way, "choosing to be chosen."

*Blessing, gratitude
Daniel Berrigan, S.J.
New York, New York*

272 pages
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**Open Door Community
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John Henry Revisited

Editor's note: David LaMotte's latest CD is Change, featuring 13 previously unrecorded songs. See www.davidlamotte.com.

by David LaMotte

You've surely heard the song
about John Henry and the drill
They raced each other
diggin' a long tunnel in a hill
John Henry won the race that day
as no one can deny
But when he laid his hammer down
he laid right down and died

Oh Johnny, what are you dying for?

Now the people say John Henry won,
there ain't no cause to weep
But to this day John Henry's girl
she cries herself to sleep
They said he could not beat that drill,
John Henry proved them wrong
But the bossman got his tunnel dug
and he got it for a song

Oh Johnny, what are you dying for?

Now the teacher said
the song's about the coming of machines
The union said
the song's about the price of a bossman's greed
The preacher said
John Henry got himself and God confused
But it seems to me
the song's about a proud man gettin' used

Oh Johnny, what are you dying for?

The recruiter comes and tells you
what it means to be a man
Is to let him do the thinking
and to go fight in the sand
He shouts about your country
and he shouts about your pride
But when the shouting's over
he is not the one that died

Oh Johnny, what are you dying for? ♦



Clifford Harper

Now Is the Time to Go to the Streets and Shout for Justice

By Brother Eduard-the-Agitator Loring CW#91030306

Editor's note: Written for First Iconium Baptist Church's The Gazette, January 30, 2007.

Howard Thurman was one of the theologians who touched Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. most deeply. Part political prophet, part mystic, Thurman's "Jesus and the Disinherited" remains a basic text of discipleship, justice and responsible righteousness in solidarity with the oppressed. Thurman calls us out of the holiday season that began with Thanksgiving and ended with the close of King Week. He re-sends us to the streets:

The Work of Christmas

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among all peoples,
To make music in the heart.

The Work of the King Holiday

also sends us out into the world:

When the Parade is over,
When the Atlanta Symphony has left Morehouse College,
When the Mayor and President
have completed their proclamations,
When the garbage workers
have returned to their trucks to pick up all the trash,
The Work of the living legacy of the radical King begins:

To house the homeless,
To fund Grady at 100% of need,
To stop the death penalty,
To make women's rights
and inclusion in the church
and liturgy a daily practice,
To stop the war in Iraq,
To dance and hug
and learn the names of everyone
at First Iconium Baptist Church.

Then the Beloved Community will be fulfilled on earth as it is in heaven and all the angels will flip and fly. ♦

Brother Eduard-the-Agitator Loring is a Partner at the Open Door Community.

The Economist

By Todd Moye

Editor's note: Todd Moye teaches U.S. history and is head of the Oral History Program at the University of North Texas in Denton. This review was previously published in the September 7, 2007, issue of The Texas Observer and is reprinted with permission.

Historians have written so many books about Martin Luther King Jr. that it might seem there is little left to say about the man or the American civil rights movement that many think he personified. Thomas F. Jackson's new book should dispel that impression. More than any other historian of the movement, Jackson takes the civil rights leader's ideas seriously. The author, a former researcher and consulting editor of the King Papers Project at Stanford University, has steeped himself in his subject's secular thought and writing. In "From Civil Rights to Human Rights," he casts King as arguably the most important, and certainly the most eloquent, American political economist of the 20th century.

During King's public life, black unemployment figures hovered at around 20 percent — always at least double the figure for whites — even as the country experienced unprecedented economic growth. King recognized early on that without meaningful economic reform for blacks in the cities, civil and voting rights reforms would have little meaning, and he often repeated his belief that America needed a "radical redistribution of political and economic power."

While the mainstream press was reporting what King had to say about desegregation and the right to vote, King had more ambitious goals. He worked to bind the agendas of labor and civil rights organizations, called for a guaranteed annual income for all Americans, lobbied for massive public works programs to rebuild the nation's infrastructure and spur employment, and demanded an end to American militarism.

For King, the right to vote was no more or less essential than the right to a job and a decent place to live.

Jackson describes King as a democratic socialist — one who believes that economic and political power should be distributed equitably among all the people of a polity. From his teens, when King wrote of his "anti-capitalist feelings," throughout his college, graduate school and seminary years, and finally into his life as a public figure, his beliefs were strikingly consistent. (Pastor

King was thrust onto the national scene during the Montgomery bus boycott at the age of 26; he became the youngest person ever to win the Nobel Peace Prize at 35 and was assassinated at 39.)

Some readers may be put off by Jackson's conscious avoidance of King's theology; King, of course, was more likely to refer to himself as a *Christian* socialist than a democratic socialist, but he was not one to get caught up in semantics. To gain a wider audience, King resisted labeling his prescription for what ailed America. "Call it democracy, or call it democratic socialism," Jackson quotes him as saying, "but there must be a better distribution of wealth within this country for all God's children." Nonetheless, King emerges from this portrait as a democratic socialist, first, last and always, who also happened to be a civil rights leader. For King, the right to vote was no more or less essential than the right to a job and a decent place to live. Human beings have a natural claim to all of them.

King's message was constant even as it was largely ignored by the news media. We have lost sight, for instance, of the fact that the full name of the spectacle that took place in the nation's capital on that summer day in 1963, when King delivered his most famous speech, was the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. The march focused the nation's attention on the need for federal legislation to protect the civil and voting rights of its black citizens.

The result was the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed racial segregation in public accommodations, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which sent federal registrars into jurisdictions in the South with a history of denying blacks the right to vote. President Lyndon Johnson spent a lot of political capital to get those bills through Congress, and most liberal and moderate white Americans thought that, with the bills' signing, the hard work of civil rights reform was over — though the legislation did nothing to address economic inequalities.

A majority of white Americans certainly did not appreciate the "nonviolent theater" King employed in the streets of the South to force change. Jackson cites damning Gallup Poll numbers: In June 1963, when the Southern Christian Leadership Conference that King headed was in the midst of the Birmingham campaign that brought images of Bull Connor's police dogs into Americans' living rooms, 60 percent of all Americans thought the public demonstrations with which King was by then synonymous "hurt the Negro's cause" more than they helped it. By May 1964, that figure had risen to 74 percent. By October 1966, following the SCLC's nonviolent direct actions in Selma and Chicago, it reached 85 percent. "[Even liberal whites," Jackson notes, "interpreted nonviolent protest as a prelude to violence,

From Civil Rights to Human Rights

Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Struggle for Economic Justice

by Thomas F. Jackson

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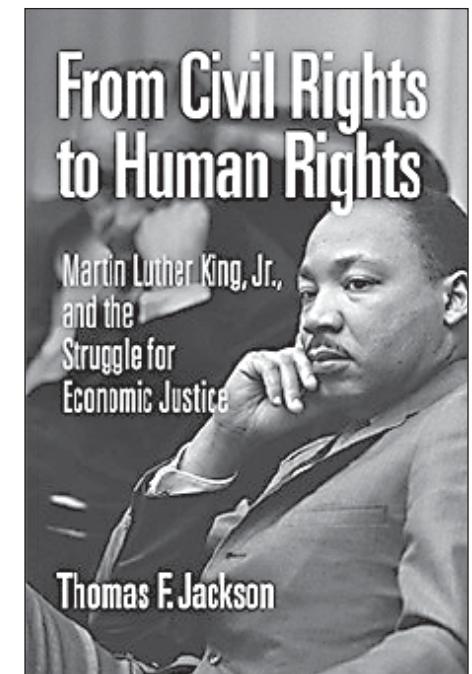
rather than its politically efficient alternative."

It was at this point, in the mid-1960s, that King began losing faith in liberalism and coalition politics, and for good reason. He tried in 1966, through his involvement with the Chicago Freedom Movement, to raise awareness of the institutional racism, systemic poverty and anti-democratic political regimes that urban blacks faced. But he failed to convince white Americans of the need for federal fair-housing legislation and urban job programs. Non-Southern whites, it turned out, did not appreciate King telling them that racism was a deep-seated national, not just regional, problem. Especially recalcitrant, King found to his everlasting disappointment, were Northern working-class whites and their labor unions. For King, the ultimate dilemma was not a particularly Southern brand of white supremacy or even that "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white — separate and unequal," as the report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders warned. The real problem was the development of "two Americas, one rich and one poor."

King welcomed Johnson's War on Poverty, which the president introduced with great rhetorical flair in 1964, but recognized its financial and moral bankruptcy. King understood budgeting *realpolitik* as well as anyone, and saw that the real enemy of the War on Poverty would be war, not poverty. King famously rose to the pulpit of New York's Riverside Church in 1967 to denounce the U.S. adventure in Vietnam and break ties with Johnson for good. The U.S. government, he charged at Riverside, was "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today." By then, the government spent more in a month in Southeast Asia than it did in a year to fight poverty in the United States. The U.S. paid out, on average, \$500,000 a year to kill a North Vietnamese soldier and \$53 to help an American out of poverty. "And half of that is spent for the salaries of [bureaucrats] who are not poor," King complained.

Some King biographers have treated the Memphis sanitation workers' strike that King joined in the spring of 1968 as something like a side project, a campaign that he and the SCLC got roped into more or less unintentionally. In Jackson's telling, King's entire public life led to Memphis. Here King found "a concrete expression of a militant, insurgent, black-labor alliance, organizing unorganized workers to win collective bargaining rights, dignity, and higher wages." He was excited to lend his name and energies to the struggle.

At the same time, King and the SCLC



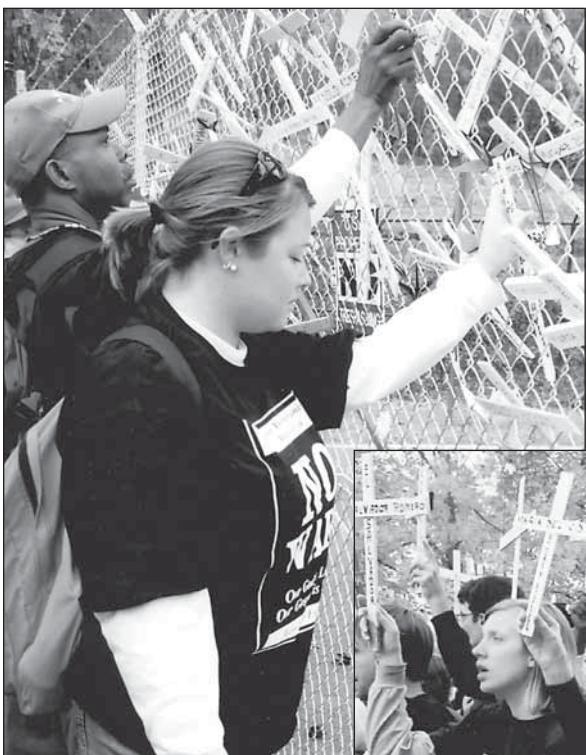
were planning a new initiative that would culminate in Washington later that summer. "Let's find something that is so possible, so achievable, so pure, so simple, that even the [white] backlash can't do much to deny it," he told his staff, "and yet something so nontoken and so basic to life that even the black nationalists can't disagree with it."

That something would be a demand for guaranteed jobs or income, and Jackson is quick to point out that it was more radical than any of the plans offered by King's black nationalist and black power critics. The SCLC would make the demand in the most dramatic way yet, by organizing the Poor People's Campaign, a multiracial coalition from around the country who would take up residence in a tent city on the National Mall and stay there until federal officials responded to their ultimatum. King knew it was a daring, even impossible plan, in part because it involved confronting the "very [same] federal machine that has often come to our aid." He embraced it for just that reason.

Following a long struggle, the city of Memphis did finally recognize the garbage workers' right to collective bargaining, and the workers eventually received pay increases and health benefits. But King's assassination in Memphis on April 4 doomed the Poor People's Campaign. The multiracial coalition King had envisioned did not materialize at Resurrection City in Washington, and the campaign dissolved later that summer.

King "bequeathed his radical vision to a nation that increasingly spurned him while alive and was all too eager to canonize him in death," Jackson concludes. Indeed, King has become a man for all seasons in the memories of contemporary Americans. His vision has been so distorted by partisans in search of a usable past that in the 2006 elections, the National Black Republican Association ("Uncle Tom's Cabin Republicans," one wag called the group) ran radio ads asserting that "Dr. King was a Republican," urging black Americans to vote GOP to further his legacy. The notion that King could have supported a political

The Economist, continued on page 9



SOA Watch

On Sunday morning, November 18, we joined over 25,000 others to call for the closing of the School of the Americas/Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation at Fort Benning, Georgia (www.sow.org). During the Funeral Procession, crosses are carried bearing the names of those killed in Central and South America by graduates of the school. As the names of the victims are chanted, marchers respond, "Presenté!" The crosses are carried to the barrier across the main gate of the base, where they are placed in the fence. Chanting "Presenté!" (above, left to right) are Emily and Harley Hayden, Gladys Rustay, Mike Vosburg-Casey (who served 100 days in federal prison last summer for crossing into the base last November), Ingrid McIntyre, Diane Wiggins, Lauren Cogswell and Dick Rustay. Placing their crosses on the fence and praying are Mike Mack and Ingrid McIntyre.

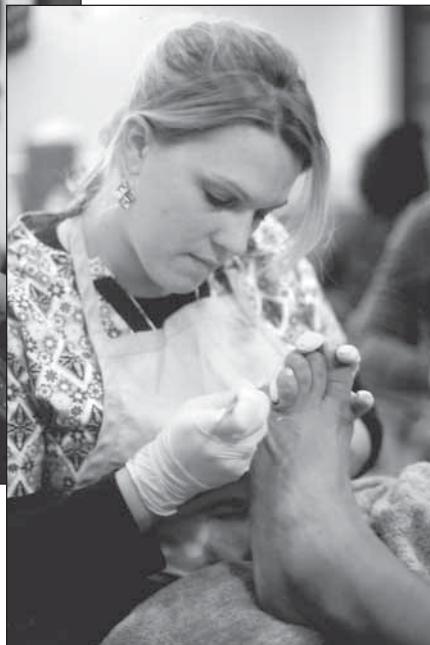


Holiday Meals

The Open Door Community serves special Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's meals family style in our dining room during the holiday season. The Thanksgiving and Christmas meals feature turkey, dressing, gravy, green beans, sweet potatoes, cranberries, coffee and desserts. For the New Year's Day meal we serve ham, black-eyed peas, collard greens, rice and cornbread. A wonderful group of volunteers make it possible for us to provide this hospitality in our home. Some bring us cooked, sliced turkeys; some serve the tables; some drive the vans that take folks back downtown; some wash dishes and pots. And some cook. Doug Ramseur (left), a lawyer, joined Brother Aelred Dean, David Christian and Nelia Kimbrough in the kitchen for all three meals this year. Thanks to all who helped us serve!

Crisis at Grady Hospital

As many of you are aware, Grady Memorial Hospital is in trouble. It is the place of care for Atlanta's poor, a place of training for Emory and Morehouse medical students and Georgia's premier trauma center. Federal, state and local governments have continued to reduce funding for indigent care and teaching hospitals. Business leaders and some politicians have pushed for privatization of this public institution. We have joined with the Grady Coalition to urge continuing health care for all. Horace Tribble (left), a longtime Open Door Community volunteer and Grady patient, speaks to the press at a coalition rally. Open Door folks (right to left) Gladys Rustay, Ira Terrell and Calvin Simpson march and chant in front of Grady at the same rally.



Harriet Tubman Medical and Foot Clinic

Congratulations to Alice Tudor, RN, BSN (far left), and Hannah Loring-Davis, RN, BSN (near left), who graduated from Clayton State University's School of Nursing in December! Both are shown at work in the Open Door's Harriet Tubman Foot Clinic. Hannah has been the coordinator of our clinics for 4½ years. She will be joining the staff at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore this spring. Alice is joining the staff of the Gwinnett Medical Center and will become the new coordinator of our clinics.

ODC Band

At Worship on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 23, the Open Door Community Band included Ron Toering on trumpet, Calvin Kimbrough on guitar, Dick Rustay on clarinet, Lauren Cogswell on banjo, Sara Jane Toering on piano and drum, Heather Bargeron on drum and Tony Sinkfield on percussion. Sara Jane's dad, Ron, a school music teacher in Michigan, brought his trumpet. He provided us with special music and trumpet solos for the evening.

Tony was the photographer, so he missed being in the picture.



Tony Sinkfield



Soup Cooks

Frank Ostrowski and Bonnie Wykman cooked soup on Wednesday, December 19, subbing for Dick Rustay who had pneumonia. Frank, a retired psychologist, has cooked soup with Dick for more than six years. He has been a representative to the United Nations for the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. Frank is living with cancer and continues to help us get food on the table. Bonnie came to visit us from the Pine Tree Community in Perth, Australia. By grace we receive the help we need!

Epiphany, continued from page 1

Social Context" (Crossroad, 1989), writes: "Quite apart from any particular incident that may underlie it, the story portrays a network of historical relationships that prevailed in the general circumstance of the birth of the messiah." He details how Herod, the powerful, half-Jewish despot serving Rome's interests in colonial Palestine, oppressed his own people with taxes to fund his grandiose building projects. Herod "instituted what today would be called a police state, complete with loyalty oaths, surveillance, informers, secret police, imprisonment, torture and brutal retaliation against any serious dissenter," Horsley writes. He concludes: "Matthew 2 comes to life vividly against the background of Herodian exploitation and tyranny."

In addition to its "historical verisimilitude," Matthew's caricature of Herod is also inspired by two stories from the Hebrew Bible. The first is found in Numbers 22-23, where the Canaanite king Balak summons Balaam "from the east" to curse Israel, only to be betrayed when the prophet instead pronounces blessing. In Matthew 2:1-12, Herod is double-crossed by Magi "from the east," whom he had employed as agents to find Jesus so he could ostensibly "bless" him.

The Magi seek a star — in antiquity a cosmic symbol signifying the birth of a great leader. Herod is understandably disturbed that these foreign diplomats have named the child "King of the Jews" — for that is his own title! He clearly understands this as a challenge to his political legitimacy, which indeed was continually contested by Judean nationalists of the time. But in a fashion typical of the powerful (then and now), Herod cloaks his real intentions in pious pretense (2:8). The Magi, however, are not fooled. Finding Jesus, they offer him gifts befitting true authority, thereby rendering him their allegiance, then turn heel and slip out of the country.

Against the crushing presence of Power is pitted the liberating power of Presence.

Horsley provides further fascinating historical context. The *magoi* were "originally a caste of highest ranking politico-religious advisers or officers of the Median emperor, then in the Persian imperial court." It seems that these sages and seers wielded legendary political influence, which explains why in earliest Christian tradition they were portrayed both as "wise men" and "kings." More importantly, "*magoi* may well have been instrumental in opposing the Hellenistic imperial forces that conquered them and other ancient Near Eastern peoples.... Throughout the first century C.E., there was a continuing confrontation if not outright war between the Romans and the Parthian empire to the east. It is not difficult to imagine that

the Magi would have been associated with the eastern empire in opposition to Rome."

Their actions in Matthew are, therefore, both conscientious (saving innocent life) and politically subversive (since Herod was clearly aligned with Rome).

Their "civil disobedience" to imperial authority calls to mind a second story from the Hebrew Bible. Exodus 1-2 narrates the birth of Moses, whose life is also threatened by a paranoid potentate, and who is similarly saved by non-cooperating "double agents." The challenge of an infant brings both Herod and Pharaoh to unleash policies of infanticide — justified by "national security." But the best-laid royal plans fail because their "accomplices" (the Hebrew midwives, the *magoi*) instead deceive their superiors in order to *choose life*. We never hear again of these mysterious heroes in the biblical story — yet upon their "bit parts" of costly conscience hangs the entire drama.

Dare we assume that our own choices in a time of imperial violence, minor players though we be, are of any less consequence?

In both the Moses and Jesus stories, the Empire strikes back, and the slaughter of innocents ensues. (The Bible is so much clearer than we are about the cynical realities of Statecraft!) "Rachel weeps" (Matthew 2:17f = Jeremiah 31:14) over such an absurd mismatch: emperors vs. infants! Yet as imperial minds plot genocide, God's messengers enter the world at risk: floating down the Nile in a reed basket (Exodus 2:3), spirited out of the country on back roads (Matthew 2:14). So does the Savior of the world begin life as a political refugee. Against the crushing presence of Power is pitted the liberating power of Presence.

This biblical paradox is commemorated in the Feast of the Holy Innocents (December 28) — a sobering interlude to the Twelve Days of Christmas. It was instituted by the Latin church in the fifth century to preserve the "underside" of the Nativity story. For obvious reasons, it is not much appreciated by U.S. Christians. This feast offers a grim reminder that there was and is a political cost to the incarnation. Friends at Jonah House in Baltimore taught me its importance: each year for decades on December 28, they hold "Faith and Resistance" retreats that bear witness to peace in the teeth of imperial militarism at the Pentagon. Because kids continue to be collateral damage of kingly pretensions, from Iraq to Darfur to Colombia.

Perhaps the old church anticipated that the Christmas season would become too sentimentalized and too innocuous in a comfortable Christendom, and thus wisely instituted the Feast of the Holy Innocents as a sharp counterpoint to all the pious pageantry. As such it can prepare us to recover Epiphany as a season of resistance to imperial violence.

Typically in our North American churches, Epiphany brings triumphal paean to "the miraculous and glorious Light of

divine revelation" — but the problem is, this Light fails to inhabit real political geography. The entire journey of Christmastide, from the Nativity to Epiphany, confirms the New Testament conviction that Messiah will forever sneak into our history like a "thief in the night" (I Thessalonians 5:2).

La Fiesta de los Reyes Magos reminds us of ambiguity, violence, displacement and danger — which is to say, of real life as it is for the poor in the shadow of empire. For our world, too, teems with refugees, wailing mothers and murderous foreign policies. We can learn from the Zimbabwean civic group Sokwanele, for example, which throughout Christmastide educates and organizes around "the deliberate manipulation of food in our country for short-term political gain ... policies and practices which amount to state-imposed starvation" (see www.sokwanele.com).



Hope Amen

Epiphany invites us to remember old stories of resistance from the entrails of Leviathan that were spun and preserved by people of conscience with no certainty of the consequences. May they give us courage and hope in our own time of imperial discontent. Let us pray during this season for the growing numbers of soldiers who are conscientiously non-cooperating with the Iraq/Afghan war, and for agents of creative nonviolence in conflict zones around the world, from Palestine to Sri Lanka. And may we remember our own recent martyrs of justice and peace, such as Christian Peacemaker Team member Tom Fox, the Quaker from Virginia abducted and executed in Iraq two years ago, and Dorothy Stang, the 73-year-old nun from Ohio assassinated in Brazil in 2005 for her prophetic resistance to corporate interests pillaging the rain forests.

The Bible has seen our historical moment before, and assures us that "God is with us," alongside the victims of "fire and water," and those who stand with them. It is into *this* darkness that the Light still sneaks. The question is whether we will recognize the Presence, and like the *magoi*, act accordingly. ♦

Moratorium, continued from page 1

a concerted effort to achieve a moratorium on executions so the death penalty states and the federal system could step back to take a careful look at the use of the death penalty and how it stacks up according to our standards of fairness, decency, and good government. Georgia has not chosen to impose such a moratorium, but in spite of not making the choice, we are certainly faced with the opportunity to consider our history and practice of executions.

This is a very important opportunity and we should make the most of it to question ourselves about what we are doing. Since our Governor and legislature are great supporters of the death penalty, this would be a good opportunity for them to set up a study commission to deal with the criticisms and studies that show how miserably our system has failed in the task of fundamental fairness. Let's ask them to *show us* how fair the system is. Is it really without bias as the 1973 law promised that it could and would be?

The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* published a series of articles just this fall presenting a study of murder cases in Georgia from January 1, 1995 through December 31, 2004 and came up with damning results. The editorial board concluded after the series that the 10 year period of the study showed that the death penalty "as it is imposed here in Georgia does not meet... minimum standards (of being based on clear standards of the law rather than human biases and prejudices)." They quoted defense attorney Jack Martin who said, "It would make as much sense just to execute every 10th or every 100th murderer [as] it would be to figure out the rhyme or reason for why we're picking the ones to get the death penalty."

The *AJC* series also revealed a state Supreme Court that has been shamelessly sloppy and inaccurate in their "proportionality reviews" of each case. In the majority of the 159 reviews since 1982, the justices have continually cited as "precedents" cases that have already been dismissed, overturned, or reversed on appeal. Investigators found only 14 of 159 reviews that cited no cases that had been reversed.

Predictably, who gets the death penalty in Georgia is affected by race, class and geography: geography because if a murder is committed in a judicial circuit where the prosecutor favors the death penalty, that defendant is many times more likely to be charged with a capital crime than if the crime were committed in a circuit where the sentence would more likely be plea bargained.

The history of the death penalty in Georgia is a history of racism, class bias, and a system more like a roulette wheel than anything else. For this reason, the US Supreme Court overturned the Georgia law in 1972 in the *Furman* case. When similar evidence was taken back to the court to show the continuing bias, the Court did not dispute the findings of racial discrimination (*McCleskey v. Kemp*, 1987). Still, the court decided by one vote *not* to strike the law because to do so would run the risk of undermining the entire system of criminal

control in the United States. Dissenting Justice Brennan referred to this as the court majority's "fear of too much justice."

And the bias — to no one's surprise — has continued. As long as any society maintains bias of any kind, that bias will be exercised through the criminal justice system. When we become a society free of racial and class and other forms of prejudice, then perhaps we might anticipate a more fair system of deciding who dies for their crimes.

The world pressure is growing. Amnesty International has issued a major report on the horrors of lethal injection and continues to urge the United States to abolish not only the method but the use of death sentences altogether.

A petition with 5 million signatures has been presented to the United Nations urging a global moratorium that would lead to complete abolition. The resolution is sponsored by 85 nations, including all of the European Union nations. 133 nations have abolished the death penalty and only 26 others have recently carried out executions. The resolution is being opposed by the major executioners: China, Pakistan, Sudan, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Botswana, and the United States,

Closer to home, there are more and more new voices for moderation, reform, and abolition. In January, 2007 a 13 member legislative commission in New Jersey recommended the abolition of the state's death penalty. The panel, which included prosecutors, police, murder victims' family members, and clergy, concluded that the system was too error-prone and clearly not a deterrent. Just weeks ago toward the end of the year, the legislature obliged by becoming the first state in more than 40 years to abolish their death statute and replace it with life without parole. The *New York Times* editorialized, "It took 31 years, but the moral bankruptcy, social imbalance, legal impracticality and ultimate futility of the death penalty has finally penetrated the consciences of lawmakers in one of the 37 states that arrogates to itself the right to execute human beings."

The Lt. Governor of Texas has announced his support for the establishment of an "Innocence Commission" in the wake of growing numbers of exonerations of those sentenced to long prison terms and the death penalty. Since 1973, 124 men and women have been exonerated and set free from death rows across the nation. And during the past year, a number of newspapers have joined the call for abolition. Massachusetts has again voted decisively against re-introducing capital punishment.

Two Georgia death penalty cases are front and center in the news and they both point to some of the greatest problems of administration of the death penalty. In July, Troy Davis came within one day of being executed before he received a stay. The Georgia Supreme Court has since heard his lawyers argue Troy's innocence of the crime for which he has spent 18 years waiting to die. He was convicted on the testimony of nine "eyewitnesses," most of whom have since recanted. Some have told of being coerced by the police to say that Troy was the gunman.

Since 1976, five death sentenced men have been exonerated and set free from Georgia's death row. Troy should be the sixth. The system is irretrievably broken when we kill and almost kill innocent people. Even death penalty supporters are and should well be disturbed by our error-prone system.

Brian Nichols, on the other hand, is awaiting trial in Fulton County for a courthouse escape and shooting that left four people dead. Nichols is willing to confess his guilt in exchange for a life sentence without possibility of parole. But Fulton County Prosecutor Paul Howard is insisting on seeking the death penalty.

There has been endless publicity and criticism about the mounting cost of Nichols' defense — now around \$1.8 million. And there have even been legislators who have tried to have the judge removed (more "fear of too much justice"?). The trial judge is standing firm in his demand that the defense lawyers be given the resources to defend the case properly. The question is not raised, however, and information surely

has not been volunteered concerning the even larger costs mounted by the prosecution. The case could be settled today and the public resources would be spared the additional huge expenses. Why would we move forward? Is there any answer other than political grandstanding?

It's time for the pro-death penalty folks to be put on the defensive. What can they tell us to justify the public expense, the added horror that a death sentence brings, the system which remains blatantly unfair, and the sordid company we keep in the community of nations as one of the few thuggish nations that continues on this futile path?

When we have come to the point of debating methods of killing, we just have to wonder what is going on. We want to kill; but we don't want to be nasty about it. We want to maintain our institutions of revenge; but we want to appear civilized. The arguments have become bizarre and even grotesque. The late Henry Schwarzschild of the American Civil Liberties Union in New York used to say, "There are worse ways to kill, but there is never any *better* way to kill. We would probably all agree that drawing and quartering is worse than the gas chamber. But when we begin to say that this or that method of killing is *better* than another, we have come to a dead end."

The death penalty is a dead end. Enough already. Abolition now. ♦

Murphy Davis is a Partner at the Open Door Community.

Norm Stamper, a 35-year police officer from San Diego, recently wrote in *The Mercury News* that from his experience, "the death penalty is inefficient and extravagantly expensive." Instead of spending millions of dollars on the death penalty, Stamper writes, "Spending scarce public resources on after-school programs, mental health care, drug and alcohol treatment, education, more crime labs and new technologies, or on hiring more police officers, would truly help create safer communities."

The Economist, continued from page 5

party that brought us the war of choice in Iraq and tax cuts for the rich at the expense of the poor is beyond ludicrous. But it says something about us as a people that we would even try to have the argument.

"From Civil Rights to Human Rights" rescues the historical King from these crazy debates. I cannot in good conscience recommend it as an easy or entirely enjoyable read, but I can promise that it will reward close study. The book was written for academics, but it deserves a large audience. If it finds that audience, it should help to reshape our collective understanding not only of King and the civil rights movement, but of the movements for peace and racial and economic justice that preceded King and continue today. Now that I think of it, maybe we should allow the members of the National Black Republican Association and their cohorts to think that King was one of them. If he was, they've got some changing to do.

Like Jackson, I have a great and abiding hope that next January, and every January thereafter, instead of saluting the King we contemporary Americans have invented — the nonthreatening King, sanitized of class consciousness — we will remember the King who made us uncomfortable, who was willing to lead thousands of poor people into Washington to shut down the nation's capital until our leaders found a way to distribute power and wealth more equitably. We will celebrate the King who despaired that we Americans "arrogantly feel that we have some divine messianic mission to police the whole world" and challenged us to be warriors for peace. It's a tall order, but I hope it will happen. You might even say that I, too, have a dream. ♦

Join us as a Resident Volunteer



Calvin Kimbrough

Former Resident Volunteer Bemene Baodom-Piaro (left) and her dad Bliss, at 910 for Thanksgiving Day dinner, say, "The Open Door Community needs you!"

Live in a residential Christian community.

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Join Bible study and theological reflections from the Base.

You might come to the margins and find your center.

Contact: Phil Leonard

at opendoorcomm@bellsouth.net
or 770.246.7625
For information and application forms
visit www.opendoorcommunity.org

Recommended Viewing



Dorothy Day: Don't Call Me a Saint

a 55-minute film by Claudia Larson
available on DVD

for information,
to view a trailer
or to place an order:
dorothydaydoc.com

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volunteer needs at the Open Door Community

People to accompany Community members to doctors' appointments.

Groups or individuals to make individually wrapped meat and cheese sandwiches (**no bologna or pb&j, please**) on whole-wheat bread for our homeless and hungry friends.

People to cook or bring supper for the Community on certain Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday evenings.

Volunteers for Monday and Tuesday breakfasts and for Wednesday and Thursday soup kitchens.

Volunteers to help staff our foot clinic on Thursday evenings.

**For more information,
contact Chuck Harris at
odcvolunteer@bellsouth.net
or 770.246.7627**

What Ever Happened, *continued from page 3*

He believed that a Messiah, King David's son, with army ready, weapons in hand, was on the way to overthrow Rome and re-establish the Davidic Empire and theocracy like in the days of the golden period. Like the Christian Right (sic) today, John was on the way, but never reached the revelation of the Beloved Community of God on earth as it is in heaven.

He was a celibate and passionate man full of testosterone, and demons toiled to lead him into temptation. He unmasked the terrible link between political and ecclesiastical power, and its lust for luxury and the bodies of beautiful women. John spoke out. He stood up, against the sexual adventures and desecration of marriage by Herod Antipas. For John's siding with women, for his demand that the covenant with Yahweh-Elohim be honored and practiced, for his teaching that family fidelity is a constituent part of the coming reign of Yahweh-Elohim, John was executed. Not much different than Sacco and Vanzetti.

John the Baptist was a wild man, a mad man (Matthew 11:18). He lived on the verges, in the wilderness, on the desert, by riverbanks, going home only occasionally to visit his profound mother and his failed father. His clothing style came from Elijah and his commitment from the prophetic tradition. His food was part of the cuisine of wilderness wanderers. One thousand three hundred years later, St. Francis of Assisi threw ashes and water on the expensive food brought to him by the church auxiliaries. Food eaten, his plate clean, Francis saw the face of John the Baptist smiling on the dish.

This undomesticated, unruly, stormy image of God, this holy radical called for a new covenant in the *old* wineskins. But alas, just as Jesus explained to us later, the old wineskins cannot contain the new wine. So, wham-bam, they burst, and the vocation fell to Jesus to put the new wine of the new covenant into new wineskins that would be crafted in the love of enemies and nonviolence.

JB built his movement on the Radical Remnant and recruited new disciples. Baptism, for adults only, was his sign of joining the journey for new life, allegiance to living the Torah, and readying one's self and community for the coming Messiah. His message was the love of the God of Exodus and the Word of the Prophets. He preached preparation, resistance to the religious elite and Roman domination, and readiness: "Change your way of living, for the Kingdom of God is at hand."

No pie in the sky for rich to feed the poor, but daily bread on earth which is the foundation of justice.

Standing against nature, Hebrew ancestral guarantees, and a primary means of political and religious organizing (like the neo-Nazis and Israel today), John's movement did not count blood and ancestry for anything. It did not matter if Sarah was your mother or Abraham was your dad. (Paul had to redo all this later.) Did not matter about the foreskin around or not around your male compass needle. Did not mean a thing if you were a woman, except to demonstrate the nature of the new way.

This was a scandal for the priests and macho males, the rich and those with blood-certified pedigrees; this was the beginning of the crack in the wall of patriarchy. There is no biblical evidence, but on the basis of his heart and vision, many researchers and followers, including the present writer, trust that he welcomed gays and lesbians to the center of his movement. When blood does not count, you will journey up the rough side of the mountain. Blood did not matter; he had his head brought in on a platter.

YES, YES, YES

No, not blood, not ancestry, not your SAT scores or your professional status, not your resume, not your prison rap sheet, not a home address (zip code) whether under the viaduct or up there on the hill in Herod's palace. No. Only faith in the other way: the way of the Jewish Messiah.

And, as importantly, John the Baptist taught and modeled radical and resistant deeds on the way. Jesus knew when he went to the streets on his own in Galilee in 30 C.E. that the greatest offense to religion and the powers is to put your words into deeds. ("Put your ass where your doctrines are," said Phil Berrigan from another prison cell.) If not, you could win accolades for "best sermon of the year" and get to preach on "The Protestant Hour," as long as there was no protesting and it didn't last an hour.

John the Baptist taught and his disciples preached and practiced sharing, Jubilee and the Festival of Shelters. Baptist economics are based on need. Everyone receives enough, what they need. (Jesus picked this up and put it in his prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread.") "Everyone according to their need." John the Baptist taught: Give your extra shirt to the one in need. Give food to the one who needs it (Luke 3:11).

Need. Not meritocracy. Not bloodline, just hard commitment with the risk of life and limb to make the vision become real on earth, in history, as it is in heaven, in eternity. No pie in the sky for rich to feed the poor, but daily bread on earth which is the foundation of justice.

You with ears to hear, listen to the way Luke of the one-eyed Gospel tells it in the Cotton Patch translation from the peanut and cotton fields of Koinonia Community:

Here's what he was saying to the crowds who were coming out to get dipped by him: "You sons of snakes, who put the heat on you to run from the fury about to break over your heads? You must give some proof that you've had a change of heart. And don't start patting one another on the back with that 'we-good-white-people' stuff, because I'm telling you that if God wants to, he can make white folks out of this pile of rocks. Already the ax is lying at the taproot of the trees, and every tree that doesn't perform some worthwhile function is chopped down and burned up."

And the crowds were asking him, "Then what shall we do about these problems?"

He answered, "Let the one who has two suits share with the one who has none, and let those who have food do the same thing."

Then the politicians came out to join up, and they asked, "Honorable Teacher, what shall we do?"

He said to them, "Cut out your graft and bribes."

The servicemen too were asking, "Now how about us? What shall we do?"

He told them, "Don't ever use violence on anyone, and don't take advantage of native people — be satisfied with only your government check" (Luke 3:7-14).

Pretty cool, uh? Never would have gotten into Iraq if the preachers had practiced these teachings!

John the Baptist and Jesus the Messiah: A Short Introduction

John the Baptist baptized Jesus. The Nazarene was John's gritty disciple who sometimes seemed a bit like a girlie-man to John the Baptist. Yet John knew that Jesus had a call from Yahweh-Elohim; he even heard her call Jesus "my own dear son with whom I am well pleased." JB, the forerunner, took this as a high compliment. Jesus, unlike John, did not baptize. Jesus, the Human One, washed feet and taught his followers to wash feet as John the Baptist taught his disciples to baptize.

Jesus loved John the Baptist passionately. He honored John, by making baptism a Christian sacrament. Just before he ascended into heaven, he told that tiny ragged remnant who still believed and followed him after crucifixion and

resurrection:

"I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Creator, the Redeemer and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18B-20 GNB, adapted by ODC).

John the Baptist was pushed to the side in the Gospels and church history. He was just too wild to be domesticated.

One of the sad pages in the history of the Jesus Movement is the loss of foot washing as a sacrament — which it clearly is. When Jesus honored John the Baptist by taking his ritual into the movement, some hypocrites got rid of foot washing. Then they changed baptism into a sacrament for infants so they would not have to get wet so often. Only the very radical (like the Mennonites) and very literal (like the Primitive Baptists) kept foot washing as a sacrament of joy as Jesus promised it would be (John 13:17).

John the Baptist was arrested for naming the powers and unmasking the abuse. Nothing new here. Only then did Jesus begin his movement in Galilee. After three years of street preaching, teaching, healing, forgiving and getting into lots of conflict, he and his hard rock band took their concert to Jerusalem.

John the Baptist was pushed to the side in the Gospels and church history. He was just too wild to be domesticated. Ministers of the Word and Sacrament would have to preach on the streets and in prisons, and give up their preferential parking spaces if John the Baptist had been accorded his rightful place in the story. Instead, Christian worship and life is incarnated in safe, antiseptic, air-conditioned sanctuaries, often watched by security guards who could not find fair labor when they returned from Iraq.

So John the Baptist got what comes to too many in the Radical Remnant Movement. He was executed by the political powers to stop his revolutionary movement (Josephus). His head was brought in on a platter to please Herod Antipas' wife and friends at Herod's birthday orgy. When the bullet blew a hole in Medgar Evers' back, and the shotgun blew a hole in Jon Daniels' face as Ruby Sales shrieked in horror, John the Baptist screamed in heaven, hot pain streaked across his neck, suddenly his heart turned in anguish, and he looked at Jeremiah: "Why? Why? Over and over again? Can't God's people act?"

Not only was JB executed by the state. Martyrdom is a gift after the killing. But far worse for the people of God than execution is the marginalization and domestication of our leaders. John the Baptist, like Amos before him and Martin King after him, was simply too radical for a movement that would by 312 C.E. be on the side of the middle and upper classes. Christianity became a religion, not a way of life.

Postscript

And what about you and me? Through our gifted prophetic imagination, disciplined scholarship and committed, love-led practice, can we ask each other: Were you there when they beheaded John? Oh, were you there when they brought his head in on a silver platter? Will you be there when they drive the needle home in the next execution in the United States? Oh, OOOOOH, sometimes it causes me to wonder, to wonder, to wonder ♦

Brother Eduard-the-Agitor Loring is a Partner at the Open Door Community.

Grace and Peaces of Mail

Editor's note: Holidays are generally a very difficult time for people locked away in prisons and jails, and Christmas tends to be particularly excruciating. We are blessed each December to be able to share gifts with the prisoners in one of Georgia's many prisons. It is a small but meaningful gesture as we remember and pray for captives, most of whom feel (and often are) forgotten and abandoned.

Here are a few of the many notes and letters we have received in response to the gifts.

Dear Brothers and Sisters at Open Door Community,

Peace and God be with you. We, the men of our cell block, offer this letter of thanks and extend our wishes for your good health, good works and Joy throughout the upcoming new year.

Your Bible quote from Matthew 25:40 was quite appropriate. I asked in prayer for guidance in selecting one also appropriate and hope I have found one that can be used in its proper text. Luke 14:14, "And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

Below is a list of some of the men whose lives y'all have blessed and touched; thank you.

Signed by 140 prisoners

Open Door Community,

I would like to thank you very much for remembering us. It was very thoughtful and very generous of you. It's nice to know that someone is thinking of us during this time. The hand-signed card also was very thoughtful. It showed care and time taken. I would also like to obtain a monthly copy of your newspaper, *Hospitality*, if that is possible.

Thank you much.

P.S. Happy New Year, and thanks again for your help to inmates.



My name is Chris and I am in prison. I wanted to write and thank all the people involved in the gift I received. It means a lot.

Christmas time in prison is the hardest time. Everyone wants to be with family and friends. So everyone is depressed. I can't speak for all the people here, but when they called us out to get the Christmas package from y'all, it lifted me up when I needed it. I can't really tell you how much it means to people in jail.

Thank y'all from my heart and God bless you.

I also wanted to be put on the list for your newspaper *Hospitality*.

I'll close this letter now by telling you again you helped make my day. Again thank you and may God give you the blessing you need.

Thanks with love.

The Open Door Community,

Thank you so very much for your love and your ministry. I really appreciate the wonderful Christmas package. I rejoice that God has people that are willing to share his blessings and love. You and your ministry will be in my prayers always.

Please add me to your mailing list. I would like to receive your paper.

Dear Open Door Community and Southern Prison Ministry,

I wanted to write and thank you all for the Christmas remembrance you sent. Also for the many prayers. That shows to me how the love of Christ really works. Jesus has shared His love with me through you all. So I wanted to let each and every one know that I love you and that you and your ministry are in my prayers as well. May the Peace of God be with you and bless you.

John 13:35: "By this shall all know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

Love always,
Your brother in Christ

On behalf of my Christian brothers and the rest of the other inmates and I, we just want you to know that we are very grateful. We thank God for blessing us with the Open Door Community and the presents you have given us. I myself want to say God bless you for your humility and kind-heartedness. I just thank God for unending love, grace and mercy. It is awesome to know that God has set it on the heart of some people to have a prison ministry. All of this, the support and just the thought, is greatly appreciated, especially around this season of Christmas. Some of us in here really don't have support from others, but by you all they now know that in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, they have you.

Thank you, God bless you.

P.S. When I got [what you sent], I felt like a little kid again. Thank you.

To the Open Door Community,

I am an inmate in a Georgia prison. Today we heard from you. Thank you for your thoughtfulness. It is nice to know that there are people who care. Your letter said I could be put on a list to receive your monthly newspaper. I would enjoy that very much.

Thank you for sharing with all of us here. Happy Holidays and God bless you all.

Sincerely,

Hello,

I'm serving five years in [the Georgia prison system]. I wanted to write and thank you and your staff members very, very much for [remembering me at Christmas]. It was really nice of you guys. Thanks a lot.

I also wanted you to send me the *Hospitality* newspaper. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

God bless you.

We got the boxes of goodies yesterday, and everything was fantastic. Thank you!

Thanks also for the letter, card and calendar picture, the calendar and for your kindness. I hope that all of you there have a wonderful time during the holidays. How great is the Lord Jesus' goodness, which has been laid up for them that fear and serve God.

God bless all of you there at the ODC.

I really appreciate the Christmas box that you sent to me and the other guys here. It really came in handy as for making my Christmas, well, seem like a Christmas season. Thanks for the calendar also.

God bless you all in the Open Door Community.

Open Door Community Ministries

Breakfast & Sorting Room: Monday and Tuesday, 6:45 – 8 a.m.

Showers & Sorting Room: Wednesday and Thursday, 8 a.m.

Soup Kitchen: Wednesday and Thursday, 11 a.m. – 12 noon.

Use of Phone: Monday and Tuesday, 6:45 a.m. – 8:15 a.m.

Wednesday and Thursday, 9 a.m. – 12 noon.

Harriet Tubman Medical and Foot Care Clinic:

Thursday, 6:45 - 9 p.m.

Clarification Meetings: some Tuesdays, 7:30 – 9 p.m.

Weekend Retreats: Four times each year for our household, volunteers and supporters.

Prison Ministry: Monthly trip to prisons in Hardwick, Georgia, in partnership with First Presbyterian Church of Milledgeville;

The Jackson (Death Row) Trip; pastoral visits in various jails and prisons.

We are open...

Sunday: We invite you to worship with us at 5 p.m., and join us following worship for a delicious supper.

We are open from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. for donations.

Monday through Thursday: We answer telephones from 9 a.m. until 12 noon and from 2 until 6 p.m. We gratefully accept donations from 9 until 11 a.m. and 2 until 8:30 p.m.

Friday and Saturday: We are closed. We are not able to offer hospitality or accept donations on these days.

Our **Hospitality Ministries** also include visitation and letter writing to prisoners in Georgia, anti-death penalty advocacy, advocacy for the homeless, daily worship and weekly Eucharist.

Join Us for Worship!

We gather for worship and Eucharist at 5 p.m. each Sunday, followed by supper together.

Our worship space is limited, so if you are considering bringing a group please contact us at 770.246.7628. Please visit www.opendoorcommunity.org or call us for the most up-to-date worship schedule.

January 6	Worship at 910 Eucharist Service
January 13	Worship at 910 Eucharist Service
January 20	No Worship at 910 join us at First Presbyterian Church Milledgeville, Georgia Murphy Davis preaching
January 27	No Worship at 910 Retreat at Dayspring Farm 1/23 - 1/27
February 3	Worship at 910 Stacey Rector preaching
February 10	Worship at 910 Edward Loring preaching
February 17	Worship at 910 Eucharist Service
February 24	Worship at 910 Eucharist Service



Calvin Kimbrough

Open Door Resident Calvin Simpson with the new worship table he made for use at Dayspring Farm. Calvin has also made us a new worship table for use at 910. Thank you Calvin!

Needs of the Community



we need blankets!

Living Needs

- jeans
- men's work shirts
- men's belts (34" & up)
- men's underwear
- socks
- reading glasses
- walking shoes
(especially 9 1/2 and up)
- T-shirts (L, XL, XXL, XXXL)
- baseball caps
- MARTA cards
- postage stamps
- trash bags
(30 gallon, .85 mil)

Personal Needs

- shampoo (full size)
- shampoo (travel size)
- lotion (travel size)
- toothpaste (travel size)
- combs & picks
- hair brushes
- lip balm
- soap
- multi-vitamins
- disposable razors
- deodorant
- vaseline
- shower powder
- Q-tips

Food Needs

- turkeys
- hams
- sandwiches
- meat & cheese
on wheat bread
- quick grits

Special Needs

- backpacks
- single bed
mattresses
- double bed
mattress
- bed pillows
- blankets

Clarification Meetings at the Open Door

We meet for clarification on selected Tuesday evenings from 7:30 - 9 p.m.

Plan to join us for discussion and reflection!



Daniel Nichols

For the latest information and scheduled topics, please call 404.874.9652 or visit www.opendoorcommunity.org.

Medicine Needs List

Harriet Tubman Medical Clinic

- ibuprofen
- lubriderm lotion
- cough drops
- non-drowsy allergy tablets
- cough medicine (alcohol free)

Foot Care Clinic

- epsom salt
- anti-bacterial soap
- shoe inserts
- corn removal pads
- exfoliation cream (e.g., apricot scrub)
- pumice stones
- foot spa
- cuticle clippers
- latex gloves
- nail files (large)
- toenail clippers (large)
- medicated foot powder
- antifungal cream (Tolfanate)

We are also looking for volunteers to help staff our Foot Care Clinic on Thursday evenings!