

A movement of Lilliputians

By Johnny Zokovitch



I believe that it was at the Pax Christi USA National Assembly in Cleveland in 1996 when scripture scholar and teacher Ched Myers invoked the story of Gulliver and the Lilliputians (from *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift) to describe the task that is before the peace movement. For those unfamiliar with the story, Gulliver, the titular hero, is washed ashore after a shipwreck and awakes to find himself a prisoner of the Lilliputians.

The Lilliputians are a miniature people, with an average height of around 6 inches tall. To them Gulliver is a giant, and a threatening one at that. Their attempts to subdue Gulliver include hundreds of Lilliputians racing around Gulliver's prone body, throwing tiny ropes over various parts, seeking to keep him immobilized, tied to the ground. Some Lilliputians are trying to fasten down his knee, others his wrist, some around his midsection, and so on.

It is, at one level, a comic scene, but it is also a lesson in strategy, organization and the willingness to work together. Ched invoked the image as a metaphor for what it is that we, as activists on a number of different issues, are doing.

Pax Christi USA is not a single-issue organization. We do not work exclusively on abolishing nuclear weapons, or ending the war in Iraq, or securing the right to healthcare for all, or the protection of the environment. As a longtime reader of Kierkegaard, I have often imagined how satisfying it would be to be about one thing, single-hearted as it were, putting all of our energies and resources toward a single goal. I have a good friend who I envy for this very reason.

Early on in his life, he became a passionate critic of the death penalty, dedicated himself to its abolition and has worked either for himself or with other

organizations whose sole purpose is to end capital punishment in the United States.

It is not that he is either unaware or unconcerned about all of the many other issues. On the contrary, he is incredibly well-read and versed in other areas of peace and justice work and supportive of the many campaigns in which his friends and others are engaged. But he knows his calling: work for the abolition of the death penalty. It is of primary importance to him and it serves as a clear Occam's razor in his decision-making about where to put his efforts.

For those of us in Pax Christi though, our issues vary from region to region, local group to local group, campus to campus, even individual to individual. At the national level, we try to have our work cohere around a few particular issues each year--this year we have campaigns around the abolition of nuclear weapons, immigration, Afghanistan, and Iraq--but even so, we find numerous other issues calling out for a response, a statement, an endorsement or action. We juggle all of these priorities and attempt to do our best at speaking truth to power where a word or action is most urgently, and strategically, needed.

It is not, after all, a single issue or even a position on a set of issues, that define who we are. We are defined by something deeper which we share in common, something which the first sentence in our statement of purpose tries to articulate for us: "Pax Christi USA strives to create a world that reflects the Peace of Christ by exploring, articulating, and witnessing to the call of Christian nonviolence."

It is this deep and penetrating belief in the "peace of Christ" and the practice of that belief defined as "Christian nonviolence" which binds us together. Our word "religion" comes from the Latin, *religio*, which scholars tell us means "to bind together." For us, as members of Pax Christi USA, our religious belief is rooted in the peace of Christ and practiced as Christian nonviolence. This, more than any issue,

binds us together. And I think that for the vast majority of us, we come to our work for peace and justice out of our religious or spiritual orientation. Another way of stating this would be to say that it is our religion or spirituality (in the best sense of those terms) which informs and shapes our political action, not the other way around.

Our faith in the peace of Christ and our commitment to the practice of Christian nonviolence (which, in all honesty, is the practice of discipleship to Jesus) binds us together; it takes all of this incredible diversity we have around issues and interests and it weaves them together, revealing all of our different actions and activities to be directed to the same end--the repairing of the world, the building of the kin-dom of God--call it what you will.

It is to the same end that we are directing our efforts, even though we start out in different areas. It is to the same goal that we have our eyes affixed, even if we are marching forward from vastly different starting points.

And perhaps the greatest lesson that we can take from this is the knowledge that we are not alone, that like the famous prayer, so often attributed to Archbishop Oscar Romero, attests, we may not be the master builder, but we are a community of workers, working on the same project, each doing the work to which they are called.

In putting together the "Community" section of this edition of *The Catholic Peace Voice*, the breadth of the work being done all across this nation and around the world in the name of Pax Christi is astounding. The individuals, groups, religious communities, young people and old who have committed to this work of the "peace of Christ"--it is, simply put, inspiring, and ultimately it is my own "being bound up" with them which keeps carrying me forward.

In his speech at that assembly over 10 years ago, Ched helped us to understand that even though we are not united around a single issue, we are nevertheless united. It is the same giant, maybe best captured by the term "Empire," that we all seek to subdue, and ultimately transform. You may be charged with tying down the knee, another with the shoulder, someone else with the head, me with the foot. It may be the economy or immigration, nuclear weapons or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; it may be Peak Oil, the war in Afghanistan, racial justice or homelessness. Whatever it is, we each do our part, bound together in our common longing for, and loyalty to, the peace of Christ.

Johnny Zokovitch is the Director of Communications for Pax Christi USA and the managing editor of The Catholic Peace Voice.



("Letters" continued from page 2)

May we re-dedicate ourselves this Pentecost season to turning away from the pride of the single superpower. May we place our human and natural resources in the service of the ever-merciful Creator God, origin of all the world's peoples.

As Catholics especially, we ask the continued intercession of Blessed Franz Jaegerstaetter, the Austrian farmer who would not fight in Hitler's wars, helping us beat the swords into plowshares, putting an end to war and our possession of nuclear weapons.

Michael McCarthy, PA-C
Blue Water (MI) Pax Christi

OUR GOOD IS TOO SMALL, TOO HUMAN

In discussions with some of my fellow Catholics about war, they usually point to Yahweh in the Old Testament and state that He was for war and promoted it. When God inspires a man to write a book of the bible, He does not improve the man as an instrument. When you read Genesis, it is obvious that the author believed the earth was flat. The same holds true for Yahweh Himself, who is portrayed as morally ambivalent. In the Old Testament Yahweh is violent, wrathful and participates in war. When you read the book of Job, Job is morally superior to Yahweh.

What is the explanation of this? The person that is writing is projecting his consciousness onto Yahweh. Because he believes war is justified, he assumes God justifies war. Whenever Yahweh is portrayed as morally ambivalent, He can be considered a myth.

In Jesus, the Word became flesh, manifesting Yahweh in human form. Jesus is morally perfect, revealing God as morally perfect. Jesus said, "Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you. Offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well." Does that sound like any conditions for a just war? Jesus was against all war, just and unjust. When He took the sword out of Peter's hands, He disarmed all Christians.

Our God is too small, too human. God in his transcendence is beyond our imagination, beyond our thought. Whenever we think of God in His divinity, we are in illusion. He is the ultimate truth, the transcendent mystery. God is everywhere, in everything, yet God always escapes our grasp. That's one of the reasons Jesus had to become a man, so that we would know that God is nonviolent, a pacifist and morally perfect. He is an inexpressible mystery beyond the definition of the word "God." He is infinitely more than what Jesus has revealed.

Joseph Scaffidi
Slidell, LA

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: *The Catholic Peace Voice* welcomes letters to the editor. Please send your comments to the Editor, *The Catholic Peace Voice*, 532 W. 8th Street, Erie, PA 16502, or email to info@paxchristiusa.org. *The Catholic Peace Voice* regrets that it cannot publish all letters to the editor. *The Catholic Peace Voice* reserves the right to edit letters to the editor for space. In email correspondence, please clearly mark in the subject area "Letter to the Editor."