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Rosie's Place

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Homelessness

The Politics of Accommodation

Kip Tiernan

This article considers the problem of poverty, with homelessness as the centerpiece. A survey of the problem and its roots and ancillary branches includes (1) a description of poverty in Boston (and America) from 1974 to 1991, its effects, its victims, and its predictable effects on the economy; (2) a description of displacement and of the homelessness that results from it; (3) a description of the immediate response to displacement and homelessness, that is, shelters; (4) a description of the institutionalization/professionalization/ossification of the response (more shelters); and (5) an outline of the terms of the new debate and suggestions for what a renewed, redirected effort to eliminate poverty and homelessness should take.

Situations of cultural acceptance breed accommodating complacency.

— Walter Brueggmann, *The Prophetic Imagination*

Homelessness in this nation increases annually by 25 percent.¹ It is not an emergency but rather a chronic condition to which Americans have accommodated themselves for many years. The growing polarization in American society has created painful inequities and has had a profound effect on our ability to distinguish good public policy from bad politics. We have allowed our realities to be redefined by those who would deny the real realities, by our national leaders who set the terms of the debate around standards of living. Shelters have become, in a few short years, acceptable standards of living for thousands of American citizens whose economic status isolates them into what may well be a permanent state of exile.

For the past twenty or more years as an urban minister, I have been an advocate for fragile populations, ever since I realized that to learn the truth, one must listen to those whose realities are created for them by those in power, a lesson I learned when I moved to Roxbury in 1970 and became a member of the team ministry at Saint Philip/Warwick House. No one chooses poverty; it is selected for them by

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somebody. In an effort to alleviate some of the suffering of these populations, I have choreographed, developed, or helped to develop a number of alternative structures when the ones we had no longer seemed to work. The first, and the one to which I have the greatest attachment, is Rosie's Place, which I began over seventeen years ago when I saw women "passing" as men to get a meal at the Pine Street Inn or at Haley House, a Catholic Worker for men in Boston's South End. The South End was one of the first neighborhoods in the Boston area to be "redlined" by banks in the early 1970s, and later one of the first areas to be "gentrified" by real estate developers for the young "urban pioneers" moving back to the city their parents deserted during the "great white flight" of the 1960s.

I was told at the time that there were no homeless women in Boston. This was one of my first run-ins with the denial of reality. At that time there were no categorical or gender statistics on homeless people. Homeless women then tended to be more anonymous, more secretive, more humiliated by the experience of homelessness. For the next decade, I started or helped start several other so-called emergency alternatives, all of which are now pretty much institutionalized, including, in 1978, the Boston Food Bank. Because funds were rapidly drying up for local community groups, some of which were previously funded by the federal government, between 1980 and 1983 I helped to start three new funding sources, including the Poor People's United Fund, the Boston Women's Fund, and Communityworks. One philosophy all of these groups have in common is the belief in grassroots organizing and the power of a single person to act positively in the human interest.

I was a founding member of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless in 1982, and in 1983 headed a panel on the Governor's Advisory Committee on Homelessness. We had twenty-two subcommittees, but nothing on medical services for homeless people, so the group I chaired was on the medically homeless. Our recommendations became the basis for the first funding for Health Care for the Homeless. During those years, I continued to help other groups get off the ground, including the Up to Poverty campaign for welfare mothers. I began to realize that all my efforts were indeed helping hands, but I was not solving anything, I was not preventing homelessness, I was not stopping poverty, and if I were to look at it honestly, I would have to say I was helping to perpetuate problems.

The Seductive Rise of Shelters in Massachusetts

In 1982, Massachusetts had two state-funded shelters. Homelessness was on the rise, and when he returned to office, I suggested to Governor Michael Dukakis that homelessness would not be solved by the creation of a shelter system, that he might look at the growing lack of affordable housing — people were being displaced because they could no longer afford to live in their old neighborhoods — that the cost of rentals was out of proportion to people's incomes. Yet by 1989 we had over 130 state-funded shelters in the commonwealth and needed many, many more. It became depressingly clear, at least to me, that an entire class of people was being condemned to shelters and that the emergence of a new public sector — the professional pedagogy of shelter "experts" — would be managing these people and maintaining them in shelters from coast to coast. Redlining, welfare cutbacks, deinstitutionalization, the higher cost of living — all had come together in the 1970s

to create an economic problem that was not going to be solved by the creation of a "shelter industry," yet that is what we have.

In his first administration, 1974 to 1978, Governor Dukakis, in a fit of fiscal austerity and against the recommendations of an econometric study, removed thousands of people from the welfare rolls. The termination of General Relief cash and medical assistance had numerous disastrous effects on many citizens of the commonwealth, among which was the increase in the number of homeless people. In an attempt to evaluate the impact of the policy changes, the Office of Research and Planning of the state's Department of Public Welfare conducted surveys of employable and unemployable former recipients almost three and a half months after the cutbacks went into effect; the results were published in the Abramowitz report.² Its primary findings included the fact that the average respondent was forty-five years old with a ninth-grade education, and the reported need for medical and dental care and medicine during this period was very great. The most common health problems reported were bronchitis, pneumonia, and heart conditions; recipient discouragement was a major factor in the terminated medical and dental care. Access was so difficult that people just gave up. The denial of medical or dental care was a chilling indication of what can happen if you are sick and poor. The report confirmed the correlation between health and housing.

By 1978 I was a familiar figure at City Hall and the State House, where I frequently requested help for people without housing and medical services. I also was an advocate for welfare reform, condominium moratoriums, rent control, disposal of Boston Redevelopment Administration housing, specialized housing for the emotionally fragile, and adequate welfare assistance for mothers and children. All to no avail. At the time, I warned policymakers and politicians that they would soon have to be considering "family shelters" for the new poor, but was told not to worry — it was all in the pipeline. The pipeline had now become a rash of family shelter motels and welfare hotels.

Toward a Political Theology: Bridging the Values and Vision Gap

So what do we do? I have infinite hope that we can be caring rather than custodial, enabling rather than enforcing. But we must begin by assessing the values we have put in place in lieu of a decent standard of living for all Americans. We have in the past proven we can, by the manner in which we first looked at homelessness in Boston. Shelters, soup kitchens, and, in general, an outpouring of generosity by the public and private resources in the late 1970s proved to be responsive to the problem. We all made attempts to alleviate the suffering of those forced into the streets. But it is time now to begin eliminating the causes for the suffering, and that requires a dispassionate look at ourselves and a firm will to stop poverty from becoming an acceptable chronic condition that keeps us in our jobs. Whatever political, social, and spiritual values we may have must be turned into a political theology that responds economically to the needs of all homeless people — and people who are about to become homeless. We have gradually accepted a Third World in America, a world we are now "managing" by maintaining shelters, soup kitchens, and food pantries. But we must stop managing and begin changing.

I frequently use a story from the Inter-Religious Task Force for Social Ministries, written in 1979. From the book *Must We Choose Sides?*, it is called "A Parable of Good Works" and goes like this.

Once upon a time there was a small village on the edge of a river. The people there were good and the life of the village was good. One day a villager noticed a baby floating down the river. The villager quickly jumped into the river and swam out to save the baby from drowning.

The next day, this same villager was walking along the river bank and noticed two babies in the river. He called for help, and both babies were rescued from the swift waters. And the following day four babies were rescued from the swift waters. And the following day, eight, and then more and still more.

The villagers organized themselves quickly, setting up watch towers and training teams of swimmers who could resist the swift waters and rescue the babies. Rescue squads were soon working 24 hours a day. And each day the number of helpless babies floating down the river increased.

The villagers organized themselves efficiently. The rescue squads were now snatching many children each day. Groups were trained to give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Others prepared formula and provided clothing for the chilled babies. Many, particularly elderly women, were involved in making clothing and knitting blankets. Still others provided foster homes and placement.

While not all the babies, now very numerous, could be saved, the villagers felt they were doing well to save as many as they could each day. Indeed, the village priest blessed them in their good work. And life in the village continued on that basis.

One day, however, someone raised the question, "But where are all those babies coming from? Who is throwing them into the River? Why? Let's organize a team to go upstream and see who's doing it." The seeming logic of the elders continued. "And if we go upstream, who will operate the rescue operations? We need every concerned person here." "But don't you see," cried the one lone voice, "if we find out who is throwing them in, we can stop the problem and *no* babies will drown — by going upstream we can eliminate the cause of the problem."

"It's too risky."

And so the numbers of babies increased daily. Those saved, increased; but those who drowned increased even more.³

Americans have always rushed to the aid of the defenseless. In fact, philanthropy is built on the altruistic impulses of middle- and lower-class donors. More funds are generated for "good causes" in America than perhaps in any other industrialized country in the world. The historic traditionalists, such as Rockefeller, Ford, and Mellon, have donated millions to charity to help alleviate human suffering. There are no current statistics on the benevolence of Massachusetts foundations during the current homeless crunch, but millions have been cheerfully donated to shelters, transitional housing, special housing, soup kitchens, food pantries, and other "emergency" type agencies during the period 1975–1990. Yet nothing has changed.

Over the past twenty years I have helped pull a lot of babies out of the stream. I have also, on occasion, gone upstream to find out who is throwing them in. But I have run into the same problem the villager who asked the question did. So I continue to do both, but as one who has a lifetime commitment to poor and homeless

women, I find my frustration level growing as I see the rising tide of poverty becoming increasingly difficult to deal with on any reasonable level.

Last year I had the honor and privilege of being asked to speak at the first Homeless Women Speakout in Massachusetts. The day-long event included many workshops conducted by homeless and previously homeless women. I have constantly been amazed and inspired at the strength and courage of my homeless sisters, who continue to be the wind beneath my wings. Together we have walked some dark and lonely nights and years together, and it is those women who have held me in my own dark hours. Who else indeed knows more about homelessness than homeless women themselves — women who have had to face the indignity of being just another face in the crowd, who have suffered the slings and arrows of a mean and hostile world? Together, with them, we have discovered that there is no middle way, that one stands with the crucified or the crucifier. I learned from poor people that to learn the truth, one must listen to those whose realities are created for them by those in power. We have discovered that to be homeless is to be an outcast, rejected, alienated, exiled.

We consider the extreme irony together, for what is Christmas but the greatest American celebration for a homeless little boy? Homeless women and I have learned together that no prophet, no politician, no provider, can call us to a change of heart more powerfully than the poor, the exiled, the alienated. I, too, consider myself an outcast. It keeps me safe and, I hope, honest. We have learned in our struggle that we must struggle to stay in that struggle, and that it is all one struggle. And that we must have faith in each other and we must never let anyone buy us off. To have the courage to speak out, to have the will to go on, to have the guts to say “We have a right to our own place, our own lives, our own dignity, our own self-esteem” is an important step in our own liberation. And one does not always find that kind of courage in a shelter.

Homeless women are the real heroines and the real experts. They are the real witnesses to man’s inhumanity to woman. Homeless women are the survivors of a terrible war on the poor. We have accommodated ourselves to a world of alternatives instead of options. The only alternative to homelessness is a home, and the only alternative to hunger is food on your table. The world of shelters, which was created as a stopgap, has become an acceptable standard of living for thousands, but it is not acceptable to us. Shelters have become the burnt offerings of the twentieth century, and we must begin to question their future if we are to have any. Millions of dollars are spent on workshops, seminars, conventions, reports, on demographic studies and research. But we know we could have saved them a lot of money by stating, simply, that housing ends homelessness — along with a job and decent education and medical access. We want the same things all those nice folks who go to seminars want: a decent standard of living.

The pain of being homeless — the endless waiting in welfare offices, the thoughtless dismissal, the terror of the streets, the endlessness of the long, dreary days, especially Sundays. The burdensome struggle to carry everything you own with you, the desperation of loneliness, the fear when the sun goes down, the biting cold of a careless February afternoon. The longing to have just five minutes alone with your kid for just one night, the distant memory of shared moments of joy and peace a long, long time ago. These are all real things that happen to real people. Homeless women speak to us of the real priorities and the importance of the necessities of

life, including the little things like combs and birthdays, the things we all take for granted. America denied the reality of homelessness for a long time. In fact, we allowed the government to redefine our realities, and we continue to allow the governor of Massachusetts to define reality. It is a tragic mistake.

All of us in human services live in a world of nightmares these days, and visions are hard to come by. But I do know this: scattered somewhere in all of our agonizing agendas are some common bases we must look at, to reclaim the moral vision we once held so dear. Perhaps we must learn to start all over again. We come from different experiences, but we must begin to operate out of a common base. Somehow it is important that we all speak the truth together. We can gain the strength of one another only when we operate out of a common value base. Perhaps what we must envision is a prophetic as well as pragmatic imagination. Walter Brueggemann, in *The Prophetic Imagination*, tells us one must nurture, cherish, and evoke a consciousness around oppression to develop a prophetic imagination!⁴

So we must capture the outrage of people that is not yet articulated. An accurate social and structural analysis of the remarkable reality in Massachusetts has to address specifically all the aspects of poverty, because we have accommodated ourselves and allowed poverty to be so institutionalized that it is now much more complex. Once we do this comprehensive analysis, we need to put it into some kind of structural context. This will give us, I think, the energy required for the job at hand. Then we need to hold up the analysis against the vision and let the vision be its judge. This is, I suppose, a theological reflection. I mean, here's this reality and this is what we believe it should be. We then need to pay attention to the gap between vision and reality, letting our principles be our guide. Grounded in our common values, once our principles are designed, we can then move into another phase.

In other words, action planning comes out of the sense of calling generated by the vision and the analysis. If, for instance, we feel called upon to create some housing, rather than a shelter, in a neighborhood, one must examine and analyze the neighborhood first. Do you deal with the banks first, or the NIMBYs? (This is assuming that the NIMBYs — the Not In My Back Yard crowd — have invaded the old neighborhood and are not willing to give it back.)

All of this must flow out of the analysis, which is where we get our energy, which is both personal and passionate. But if the debate becomes an intellectual debate, we lose this quality and passion. That is why a disciplined process is so appropriate. It enables people to see how their personal instincts and their personal desires to make a difference can have an impact by working as a group. It also allows us to overcome isolation. It allows us to move from guilt to responsibility, from the personal to the social, from the anecdotal to the analytical. It can even become the basis for the beginning of a North American theology of liberation, because it is the beginning of the radicalization of the privileged.

I am not a good process person. I always want to cut straight to the chase. I have learned, however, that you do need time to think. It's like those moments of conversion: you gotta give folks new knowledge, new ways of looking at new knowledge, and new ways to address the value base. The cultural Christianity we have indulged ourselves in for so long makes us all feel good, but it must change quickly in substantive ways.

By the mid-1970s the South End had become very gentrified. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, gentrification became the neutron bomb of upgrading buildings. It

“upgraded” by emptying buildings, displacing thousands of long-term low-income residents, which began a cycle of displacement that produced homelessness in its wake. The “landed gentry” were now a new social class, one that had options for education, career, and homeownership. Along with their appearance in our cities arose the “no-class people”: homeless, optionless, and frequently newly dependent on others for human resources. The new underclass was the new homeless population and included women and their children, elderly people, young street-savvy throwaways, drug addicts, Vietnam vets, people with AIDS, and the chronically homeless, including alcoholics, ex-mental patients, and singles who exhibited bizarre behavior unacceptable in the few remaining SROs (single-room-occupancy units).

Between 1980 and 1986 in Boston, 16,000 multi-apartment units were converted to condominiums. In 1977 there were only 2,000 condos; in 1980, 6,391; in 1985, 21,557, and by 1987, 30,000 condominiums. We lost thousands of single rooms and most of the residential hotels.

Between 1982 and 1984, 80 percent of Boston apartments with rentals under \$300 a month simply disappeared, while the number renting for more than \$600 a month increased 160 percent. Obviously, if you were around in 1985 and leased an apartment for \$661, you had to have a salary of at least \$30,000. Between 1982 and 1989, Boston rents jumped 64 percent.⁵ In 1990, rents in Boston increased 6.1 percent more than those in any other metropolitan area except Washington, D.C., according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. And that contributed to the surge of homelessness in Boston.

Residential hotels offering security, ambience, and various services from mail delivery to room and linen services were a way of life for many who did not want to maintain an apartment but did not like rooming houses. People lived in residential hotels near the medical services they required. Boston, by 1982, became one of the two highest-price rental cities in the country, with a one percent vacancy rate. One of the more chilling aspects of displacement, at least in the South End, was arson, including arson-for-profit, arson-for-displacement, arson-for-gentrification. Nothing moved people out of a neighborhood faster than the whisper of smoke and the possibility of fire. At one point, David Scondras, now a city councillor for Back Bay/Beacon Hill/Mission Hill, worked with a Fenway group of housing activists who could and did predict fire patterns. They existed in older neighborhoods that were invariably ones in which two groups “turfed” — those who refused to move and those who were invading. By the late 1970s to mid-1980s, it appeared the invaders had won. The scene was set for some questionable trends, and by the early 1980s, the “young and urban planners” arrived en masse.

Having been defeated in his second run for governor by Edward King in 1978, Michael Dukakis ran a third time in 1981 and claimed that homelessness was one of his major priorities. Human service advocates, having once felt betrayed by Dukakis with his mid-1970s cutbacks, were cautious about his return to public office, but agreed to support him. His promise to help homeless people was rapidly translated into shelters, with over 140 of them by the time he left office in 1990.

But the Massachusetts legislature still refused to look at the root causes of homelessness, which would have necessitated a complete restructuring of the welfare system and a reordering of state priorities. The so-called Massachusetts Miracle was nothing more than “Let the good times roll,” nationally and locally. Greed was in — need was out. Furthermore, Massachusetts, because of abundant high-tech rolls and

real estate escalations, never seriously challenged the federal government, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and other government restrictions in domestic services pullouts, and ended up making up the difference. This was a real mistake but it did give some credibility to the empty "miracle." But it also, with the establishment of so many shelters and soup kitchens, Band-Aided the growing problem of poverty.

In the early 1980s, Ronald Reagan began his first term in office, and his promise of getting "government off the backs" of Americans triggered an elaborate retreat from all social services, beginning with a series of deregulations. Ultimately, as we would see, privatization would come to replace the good of the community. In eight short, brutal years, five decades of important social progress came to a grinding halt. Self-indulgence became a passport to prosperity for many. An unspoken permission was given that began with a new ethic — whatever the market would allow in the name of "free enterprise." This attitude created an atmosphere and an environment in which shelters became the new permanent housing for thousands, maybe millions, by 1985. By its refusal to build desperately needed public and low-income housing, the Reagan administration allowed the shelter society to become a shelter industry. The shame and shambles of HUD testify to Reagan's commitment to "the truly needy." The administration also assisted in the creation of millions of new poverty-stricken citizens; it allowed social Darwinism to replace social consciousness; it allowed individualism to replace community. And its fallout fell on Boston.

The need for public and affordable housing was never more apparent than during the Reagan years. Under President Jimmy Carter we got 300,000 units; under President Gerald Ford 200,000; under President Ronald Reagan 25,000. HUD, originally set up specifically for housing needs, reduced 67 percent of its budget from 1982 to 1987. Thirty-two billion dollars was removed. "They sleep on grates because — well — they like to," said Reagan of the homeless. "They go to soup kitchens not because they're hungry, but because they want a free meal."⁶

Unemployment rose. Human services were curtailed; in fact, they stopped. Banks closed. Manufacturing came to a stop. The new world order took on a new meaning, with junk bond kings, S and L bankers, Iran-scam, the contra war, the invasions of Grenada and Panama. Real estate went through the sky, jobs plummeted, the housing slump began — but too late for many. And the cost of living rose dizzily for the poor, working and middle class. Without a doubt the rising cost of the housing market was one of many contributing factors to the growing poverty problem in America. Any economic disruption can have severe consequences — a late welfare check, a layoff, an unexpected illness, an unpaid utility bill. All of these contribute to the desperate needs of a poor family or individual. And while the private economy and its inflated rental patterns created more of a need for governmental assistance, the government chose instead to remove money from the very agency designed to help public housing.

Philip Clay of MIT suggests that without a significant shift of policy in favor of affordable housing, by the year 2003 there could be 19 million homeless people in America's streets.⁷ By the mid-1980s, sheltering had become big business in America. Added to that was a new elite group of service providers, including psychiatrists, social workers, psychiatric social workers, housing and homeless specialists, teachers, market experts, vendors who contracted for state services in shelters, and a

whole host of credentialed, professional, and expensive homeless “experts” who would devise a new language, further isolating already alienated citizens. These professionals held a controlling interest in homelessness, and some would be redefining and labeling homeless people. Many of the definitions were based on their own professional criteria rather than actual economic needs of homeless people. While many homeless people require a myriad of services — related, for example, to alcoholism, mental health, and drug addiction — most were in shelters because they simply could not afford to live anywhere else, including, incidentally, their own old neighborhoods. Moreover, sheltering them is expensive. A shelter bed now costs the Massachusetts taxpayer about \$1,000 a month, an amount that includes the salaries of highly paid professionals.

This new professional pedagogy would concern itself not with the capabilities of homeless people but rather with their frailties, because the weaker they seemed to be, the more funding would be made available. These professionals would, in the course of their jobs, deliver human services, but they often ended up specializing in the custody and control and “treatment” of people who were baseline, poor, and unable to live anywhere. In the 1970s, when homelessness became a *visible* problem, the general public rushed to its victims’ aid, doing shelter shifts, writing checks, and bringing clothes and food by the carloads. Altruism was “in.” But somewhere along the line charity replaced justice, and we developed an ethic to meet the need rather than acknowledge the need for a new ethic. After all, charity is sharing what belongs to you with others, while justice is returning that which belongs to others to them. In simpler terms, charity is scraps from the table, and justice is being invited to the table itself.

Because shelters in the early eighties were becoming harder to place in many neighborhoods, particularly the gentrified ones like those in the South End, the word *transitional* became a softer euphemism. The management of poor people also increased the power of the donor — the giver of “things” — and decreased the power of the receiver. We found ourselves marching toward the management of a new class: the homeless.

Simultaneously with the emergence of the transitional concept came a new group of professionals, armed with MBA’s and MSS’s, who determined who would be eligible to move from a shelter to a “transitional” setting. This meant dealing with such things as “attitudes,” “parenting problems,” “problem solving,” “life skills,” and “life goals.” It also meant labeling and defining certain groups. As a result, this labeling became yet another barrier between those who needed help and those who were giving it. It also began to create psychic separations between people, so that there was no more equality of discourse. Even the language changed. Conversations became peppered with words like “intake.” (Whatever happened to “hello”?) This created further disorientation for those people who required help. The advocate had now become the provider, and support for shelters and transitional housing was beginning to emerge as viable moral and ethical principles. The structural conditions surrounding affordable housing were not changing. The ways to help were.

Nancy Fraser, a Chicago feminist economic theorist, tells us that in a welfare capitalist state there are three elements: the need, the interpreter of the need, and the need’s satisfactions. Invariably, the needs that get satisfied are those of the interpreter.⁸

The response to homelessness as a crisis in the eighties has developed altruism into an art form. Altruism always has meant a concern for the well-being of others. Altruism gives one a good feeling, so there is a certain degree of self-interest involved. It also, like its cousin charity, alleviates some of the suffering, but it does not necessarily change the conditions that create suffering. Justice, the Bible tells us, is a kind of sorting out of what belongs to whom and returning it to them.

For example, President George Bush and his "thousand points of light" pale in comparison to the incandescent light of radical change, a change that could eliminate the necessity of a thousand liberal candles. Moreover, George Bush — and his predecessor and their allies — *set the terms of the debate*. And in setting the terms of the debate, the debate itself becomes academic. In my view, we have the capacity but lack the political will to stop poverty, and until we reclaim the moral and ethical vision America once had, we will continue to accommodate ourselves to the unethical and immoral spoilers of America, which include many of our elected officials.

In addition, if we had the economic wherewithal to conduct one of the most expensive wars in the history of humankind during the greatest deficit this country has ever known, then we have the economy to conduct an equally expensive peace. As it stands now, if every city and state stretched itself to its fiscal limits to raise housing funds, the combined total would not fill the vacuum left by the federal government's retreat.

A New Hostility toward Homeless Populations

The number of homeless people in America has risen sharply over the last decade, reflected in the proliferation of urban shelters — up from 1,900 in 1984 to 5,400 in 1988, and over 6,000 today.⁹ People are no longer touched by homelessness, they are hostile toward it. They don't want to see homeless people lying in the streets or panhandling on street corners. You ask, Was it this bad five years ago? Ten years ago? Fifteen years ago? Why have we allowed it to continue? The latest buzzword in social science groups these days is "compassion fatigue." They seem "tired" of being kind to homeless people.

Some publications suggest that the homeless problem has four ingredients: housing, poverty, drugs, and mental illness. I disagree. The homeless problem has one major ingredient: a prearranged system of priorities that allows the government to wage war with other countries and not pay attention to its domestic problems, which in turn allows social conditions to get worse with each passing decade. According to Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, the federal government deliberately engineered two deep recessions in 1980 and again in 1981–1982 through a combination of tight monetary policy and large cuts in social programs, including such entitlements as unemployment benefits, Social Security benefits, farm subsidies, food stamps, and welfare assistance. People were then forced into a labor market that actually created unemployment. As a result, both unionized and nonunionized workers had little leverage with which to demand higher wages or job benefits and often were forced into major concessions by management.¹⁰ President Reagan, in his first ten days in office, put a freeze on more than 170 pending regulations. By the mid-eighties it was painfully evident that deregulation and its soulmate, privatization, would have a significant impact on the country's economy.

But other forces were at work, too. Reckless financial speculation, marginal airline safety measures, bank failures, corporate raiders, junk bonds — the whole schmeer — were just the beginning. The doctrine of laissez-faire was being revived in America while the entire underpinnings of America's social structures were coming apart at the seams. We have reached that watershed moment. We are at a time when the institutions of our society, created in earlier centuries, are unable to meet the current crises. What we are faced with are not crises but chronic conditions. Crisis in the family, in housing, in education, in medical services, in public transportation; crisis in banking, crisis in the church, in business, in labor unions. And the problem is not regional or parochial, it is global.

The period we are living in is critical. The social service institutions set in place in America in the 1930s and 1940s are overwhelmed and cannot any longer support the growing number of citizens requiring assistance. Geographical and political changes have occurred, but the institutions are lagging. We have come to that point in our history when charity is not enough. A reordering of priorities is essential to our survival if we are to continue as part of the human race. Change must take place. But there is a natural human tendency to hang on to what one has. There are those who gain from homelessness, from poverty, from hunger. *Cui buono?* — the great lawyer's question — means "Who benefits?" As change takes place in America today, what is the direction? Who will gain? Who will lose?

Do You Give Away Fish or Teach People How to Fish?

It's cheaper to have shelters than to support a decent standard of living for every American, even though Massachusetts last year paid out over \$200 million for "programs for the homeless." Maintaining shelters is still cheaper. A federal study undertaken several years ago found that between 1960 and 1985, federal and state cash assistance programs grew 105 percent in real terms, while noncash programs for services and commodities grew 1,760 percent.¹¹ By 1985, cash income programs amounted to \$32 billion, while commodity and service programs totaled \$99.7 billion. In 1984, the share of the national income received by the wealthiest 40 percent of families in this country rose to 67.3 percent, their largest share since 1947. Correspondingly, the poorest 40 percent of all American families received 15.7 percent, their lowest percentage since 1947. During the Reagan years, the combination of spending cuts for the poor and tax cuts for the rich produced an enormous government-induced redistribution of wealth.¹² But even though the cost for homeless programs has skyrocketed, it is still cheaper than restructuring a standard of living that might prevent homelessness. For example, programs for the homeless in Massachusetts in 1983 amounted to \$9.915 million; in 1987, \$142.260 million; and by 1988 the price had soared to \$158.365 million. From 1983 to 1988, homeless programs increased by 150 percent.¹³

Hunger and Homelessness: The Roots of Poverty Are Spreading

This country virtually eliminated hunger in the 1970s, but because of federal cut-backs, the blight has returned. By a common definition of hunger, some 15 million

children and 10 million adults are hungry. By 1982, more signs of hunger were showing up; increased numbers of people were coming to churches and social service agencies because they did not have enough to eat. A number of reports, including those prepared by Dr. Larry Brown of the Harvard School of Public Health, who chaired a task force on Hunger in America, concluded that hunger had reappeared as a serious national problem. By 1985, the Physician Task Force on Hunger in America calculated that hunger afflicts some 20 million Americans.¹⁴

In 1978, I started the Boston Food Bank in an effort to deal with what seemed to be a heat or eat proposition. People in Boston were making serious choices — did they provide fuel for their families or feed them? In 1990, we distributed over 6 million pounds of food to over 700 direct feeding agencies — and it was not enough. Evidence suggests that in 1991 the problem of hunger in America had grown worse. In 1984, Second Harvest, a national network of food banks, tabulated its three-year battle against hunger: in 1981, its members distributed 15.2 million pounds of food; in 1982, 30.3 million; in 1983, 45 million, and the lines kept growing.

In a discussion of the problem, Boston Food Bank's executive director, Westy Egmont, added this bit of information: Second Harvest continued to distribute millions more as the years went on — in 1986 it was 128 million pounds; in 1987, 152 million; in 1988, 172 million; and by 1990, close to 190 million pounds.

In 1991, the Boston Food Bank distributed over 7.5 million pounds of food, and the statistics throughout the metropolitan area keep going up. Also in 1991, requests to the Springfield Salvation Army tripled; Worcester had a 300 percent increase of need; the First Baptist Church in Beverly, 100 percent more need than in the previous year. Yet all the soup kitchens in the commonwealth, plus the food banks we have established, are not stopping hunger from rising in Massachusetts. Furthermore, the 140 shelters that are state funded, and the shelters that are not state funded, have not stopped the increase of homelessness in Massachusetts. Compounding this is the fact that today we have to deal with AIDS among the homeless population, which is a larger problem than the commonwealth would have anyone believe.

Midcentury, Boston lost its manufacturing base and instead became a service industry town. But jobs in service industries, such as McDonald's and Mrs. Field's, do not pay the rent, do not pay for the groceries, do not pay for medical or educational or transportation expenses. In my opinion, Ed King, the former governor, was weak. The surpluses generated by a quick-fix economy and the technocratic liberalism of a Michael Dukakis kept the Reagan wolf from the door. Indeed, one of the myths of the Massachusetts Miracle allowed the state to shore up the federal take-away that began in the early eighties.

Governor William Weld has begun to "correct" this error by cutting all human services to ribbons, and we are now faced with an extreme ideological right-wing interpretation of how to make government work. The poor will continue to pay the highest price for the new domestic new world order being imposed on the commonwealth. In Weld's brave new world, none but the strong and the rich will survive the draconian cuts.

Part of the problem of finding a common voice, with a common goal among advocates and providers, is that we are all fighting for small pieces, rather than demanding something that makes sense for the commonwealth.

Exiling a Class of People Will Not Solve the Problems of Poverty

Walter Brueggemann, a Protestant theologian, tells us that real criticism begins with the capacity to grieve, because it is the most visceral announcement that things are not right.¹⁵ I believe we must grieve openly for the things we have allowed to happen in our good name. We have, by our silence or indifference, allowed poverty to become so institutionalized that we once again numbly accept the idea of almshouses. There is a danger in this, that we succumb to the notion that shelters are better than nothing. By imprisoning thousands of people in shelters, we exile a whole class of citizens whose rights are being taken away, even as we read this. Do we continue to implement bad policy, a policy that continues to perpetuate a brutal two-class system, or do we set the terms of the debate?

Over the years there has been a cultural and societal acceptance of sheltering that cannot be continued if we are to continue to call ourselves members of the human race. We have, by the acceptance of shelters, allowed the government and the private sector to get off the hook.

The private/public partnership, devised by the Reagan administration in the early 1980s, was a useful but sterile plan. Purportedly it was a way to work with government. But it did not change government. It supported it. It did not challenge government. It allowed it to retreat further from its domestic policy, that of caring for all Americans, particularly those so financially marginal that without government help those citizens would die.

The philanthropic community, already overburdened in the eighties, suddenly had to stop what they were doing to concentrate on housing and hunger. This is not an appropriate role for all of the philanthropic community. In my view, philanthropy should be there to enhance the quality of life. Why did the people in philanthropy accept this without challenge? In the March 5, 1982, issue of the *Wall Street Journal*, Carol Hymowitz wrote one of the first stories dealing with the Reagan welfare cuts shifting the "charity" burden to religious groups.¹⁶ President Reagan was quoted at that time as saying, "If every church and synagogue in the U.S. would average adopting 10 poor families, we could eliminate all government welfare in this country."¹⁷ Reaganomics created homelessness, and hunger, and poverty itself. Churches and the philanthropic community alone cannot make up the difference. Only the American people can turn priorities around. And now with evidence of the middle class surreptitiously wending its way to the local food banks, perhaps the time has come to remind us that we *are* our sister's sister (not her keeper), but we cannot make it by shelters and soup kitchens alone. Rather, we need a responsive government to *all* citizens' needs, not just the rich, who have truly made it in this country in the last two decades.

"The Gospel calls us to feed the hungry and we will do that," said the Reverend David Sieplinga of the Madison Square Christian Reform Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.¹⁸ But handouts "can't replace the right of every person to a job that earns him enough to buy his own food. The goal shouldn't be replacing dependency on the government with dependency on churches."¹⁹

That soup kitchens and shelters have become fixtures in one of the wealthiest countries on earth says something about America, about Americans, and our leaders.

When everything in human services is the priority, what's the priority? The terms of the debate determine who gets what. The problem is, the disenfranchised are pitted against one another: tots fighting elders for resources; vets fighting welfare moms; the working poor against the nonworking poor; retarded people against the mentally deficient. Class against class, women against men. No wonder we can't get anywhere! When the current budget crunch began in October 1990 with Dukakis, and continued with the Weld administration, shelter providers formed a tidy alliance, but left welfare advocates out of their conversation. When we were all told that some shelters would be spared, but that 7,000 people over forty-five who were on welfare and had no reading skills would be thrown away, nobody budged an inch. Governor Weld closed off the 707s, which ended homeless prevention programs that housed previously homeless families, but now they, too, would be thrown to the wolves.

There is something wrong in our thinking, in our assessments, in our economic skills when we allow such a condition to prevail. Fundamentally, what is at stake here is quite simple: service system lobbyists and advocates see the competition for limited public resources as a competition between various service providers and systems. They rarely acknowledge, however, that the net effect of their lobbying is to limit cash income for those they call needy and increase the budget and incomes of service programs and providers. The results become a piling up of publicly funded services and a stagnation in commitments to income. Poor people need income, choice, and economic opportunity, not service, therapy, and labels.

As the power of professional and service systems ascends, the legitimacy, authority, and capacity of citizens descend. The consequence of this professional persuasion is devastating for those labeled people whose primary "need" is to be incorporated into community life, not isolated from it.

By analogy, according to Professor John McKnight at Northwestern University, in *Do No Harm*,

each individual service program is like a tree. But when enough service programs surround a person, they come to live in a forest of services. The environment is different than the neighborhood or community. And people who have to live in the service forest will act differently than those people whose lives are principally defined by neighborhood relationships. And though the residences of those living in institutions, such as shelters, are in a neighborhood, their lives are lived as in a forest.²⁰

Shelters are not homes. You cannot invite someone in for the evening. You cannot have a beer with a friend or two after 9:00 P.M.; you don't have a *key*; you have precious little privacy with your child; and you can't stay in bed in the morning if you feel like it. In your own home you can do all these things. Well, it's better than nothing, you say. I'm not so sure anymore. Shelters, even the best of them, afford you no life of your own. And well-meaning advocates build on your frailties and deficiencies instead of your capabilities.

"She has no house skills," they might say. Or no parenting skills. "She does not relate well to her children," they might say. All of this might be said at some time for all of us, and I resent the language that separates homeless people from the rest of society by virtue of the fact that they have no money to live anywhere else. Human service professionals focus on deficiencies and call them "needs," and each per-

ceived deficiency gets a label, which is probably fundable. The second structurally negative effect of the use of the human service tool is its effect on public budgets. A shelter bed should not cost \$1,000 a month. But it does now. There are choices to be made here, and I think they should be publicly debated. Beginning with the national budget, should we have more land-based bombers or more missiles? Or should we instead have more jobs and housing and education? Should we maintain a shelter (read poverty) industry or should we begin to re-create a decent standard of living for all Americans?

The terms of the debate are set by those who would profit from the conclusions. Shelters, for instance, are fundable. Housing is not. Jobs are not. Education is not. Sheltering the homeless is not going to change anything. It will shore up the institution of sheltering, however, and create jobs for a professional pedagogy in human services. It already has. No shelter should have a marketing director, but I'll bet some do.

We must make housing affordable and available. In some neighborhoods in Boston, rents have increased over 300 percent! The waiting list for Boston housing alone is over 27,000. And private housing is out of reach for a growing number of citizens. In Massachusetts we are suffering the highest rate of unemployment in almost twenty-five years. Unemployment compensation is running out for many. Housing, according to the real estate market, might have slumped, but not enough for our crowd. In fact, I would be willing to bet that most middle-class people are now paying close to 50 percent of their incomes on housing.

Expiring use — that is, developers who twenty years ago got loans from the government if they allowed a third of their housing to be used for low-income families — is now reaching a precarious position in Massachusetts as well as elsewhere. The mortgages are all paid off, and the developers can now do what they want with their property. Over 40 percent of the expiring-use mortgages in Massachusetts are in the city of Boston alone. Unless we sit down and decide what is going to happen to all of us, that light we see at the end of the tunnel might be another train!

It seems pretty simple to me, perhaps too simple. What we have to decide on is an appropriate standard of living for all citizens, and then work toward that end. This means we need to provide jobs that pay salaries that pay the rent, to create reasonable access to medical and educational resources. Is that too much to ask? Why is it that poor people have to settle for alternatives, while the rich have options? We need to set the terms of the debate again so that human resources will be a priority, not a special need.

Do we need shelters? Sure we do. It's too late not to have them now. But we also need to look at sheltering differently, just as we need to look at taxes differently. Thirty-eight states have a more progressive tax base than Massachusetts. We need to look at jobs. Fifty percent of American workers today are living perilously close to the poverty line. They're not kidding when they say, You are all living two paychecks away from disaster. All of us know what increases have meant to our paychecks. What college costs now. What apartments and housing cost now. What has happened to us is that we have lost a sense of community. We have lost a sense of the common good, and we desperately need it back again.

Young people are our greatest resource, and we are killing them by depriving them of housing, of medicine, of education, of jobs. As we speak, young kids' dreams are not only being deferred, they are being denied. Kids are finding that they

have to leave college. Babies are being born at Boston City Hospital with nutritional deficiencies that will prevent them from ever living productive lives. Young kids are killing each other over a pair of Nike sneakers. They have discovered that the shoes you wear are far more important, image-wise, than who wears them. Young people are suffering the same concerns their parents and grandparents are, because their grandmothers' and grandfathers' medical services are being taken away from them. Young people out of college can't find jobs or housing, so they are moving back with their parents, who can't afford them. And young people everywhere are dying for rich old men's profits and lust for power.

But if we are strong and passionate and committed, we can set the terms of the debate around survival. We live in a world with a lust for power that defies description. Do we need a walk for hunger? A stroll for AIDS? A fund-raiser for shelter? Sure. What we really need is a world without homelessness, without hunger, without AIDS, without war. We need a vision of how the world can be rather than an agenda based on the personal and political desires of the most powerful.

Political Theology and Public Moral Values: A Call to Conscientious Action

What is happening in Massachusetts is a microcosm of what is happening all over this country, and it is dividing us. We are alienated from each other. The haves. The have-nots. The wannabes. The privileged and the not-so-privileged. What is happening is a kind of class continuation of the war on the poor and middle class, using both groups to cancel out each other for smaller and smaller pieces of the pie. We need a realistic public policy around standards of living. Standards of ethical behavior. We need public policies around the necessities of life. Social action can change things. Social services provide only a minimal service, based on what other people think poor people should have. We need to take sides. We took sides on civil rights a long time ago. We took sides around the Vietnam War. Now we need to take sides for human rights.

Our moral vision has been usurped in hundreds of ways, and we have accommodated ourselves to a selective morality that excludes all poor people too. In Dorothee Soelle's most recent book, *The Windows of Vulnerability: A Political Spirituality*, she speaks of the theologizing of politics:

After the attack on Grenada, Robert McAfee Brown, a leading Presbyterian theologian, wrote an open letter to Christians outside of America, in which he showed how much civilian control of the military (one of our most cherished traditions) had been replaced by military control of the civilian population (one of the best tests for the beginning of a turn toward military fascism).²¹

What could be clearer to us today, after we listened to every two-bit general telling us how the war was going in the Persian Gulf? — in the name of national security — while the media acted like lapdogs, wagging their collective tails. The political debate has become militarized and, as we shall see, theologized, as well. This means the end of the liberal era and especially the end of its thesis about the secularization of society. What has been emerging for several years is the alliance of a certain kind of theological element with the extreme political right. The great revolutionary liberation movements in the Third World were repressed by coups, by

economic boycotts, by CIA plots, and, when necessary, wars. Necessary to the capitalist intent, I might add, or even to distract attention from national scandals such as public deficits, S and L scandals, HUD scandals, bank scandals, and so forth.

There are reasons for this drift toward militarism and conservatism. Our national conscience was so wounded by the loss of the Vietnam War and by the oil crisis, if you recall. But the extreme right had a steady answer for all that, demanding a political strength, not justice. Justice has already been dismissed as un-American, and it is diffused into the already polluted air. The new American chauvinism, as Soelle calls it, suggests the need for a Club 707 in which Christians are instructed to articulate their faith politically and a preoccupation with wealth and power is a religious tenet of the religious right.²² No sympathy wasted here on those who do not work, or for the lame, the blind, the old, and God knows, the crazy. In the context of Reagan and Bush's economic policies, that means no health care for all of the above. And while we're at it, no housing or jobs, either.

In *Listen America*, according to Soelle, Jerry Falwell speaks of his favorite economist, Milton Friedman, who appears this time in the role of evangelist, stating that every form of welfare aid, of solidarity with the weaker, is regarded as not only counterproductive, but also anti-biblical!²³ So, setting at liberty those who are oppressed is not a part of Jerry's biblical imperative. We need to reclaim the moral imperative as it was handed down to us by that lowly Jewish carpenter from Galilee who came into the world not to seek reform but to transform society itself. He and his raggedy little bundle of outcasts — the most despised, least listened to community of misfits in all of Judea. Were this same man on Boston Common today, rabble-rousing as he did then, we would be much kinder. No heavy wooden cross these days for such a loud mouth. A zap of Thorazine perhaps, and then pink-slipped into obscurity.

Felix Rohatyn, the investment banker and civic leader, said, "A democracy to survive must at the very least appear to be fair. This is no longer true in America."²⁴ I couldn't have said it better myself. Our time is running out. Our problems are overwhelming but not unfixable. Bad politics inspire bad public policy. We need to change that, and it begins with a personal ethic. The sixties gave us a sense of community. The seventies gave some of us a sense of altruism. The eighties gave us permission to be individuals — to "just say no" to everything that did not enhance our own power base. What will the nineties bring? Who will we be? Is that already being determined by the likes of William Weld and George Bush? I sincerely hope not.

Individualism is supported by a personal piety. The loss of community to individualism is part and parcel of the cultural Christian movement, which has had a dramatic impact on the American standard of living, as well as the government's retreat from social policy. Witness: prayer in schools, abortion, states' rights — but you cannot pray away, sing away, or bumper-sticker away poverty in America and in Boston. There is a cultural/political/social accommodation to all of this that sifts down to the most basic of human aspirations. Public (or civic) ethics demand that we take a stand. The interpretation of ethics tells us where we stand. As godless as the sixties were said to have been, people still had enough concern left to care about the destruction war creates, the necessity for civil rights and its implementation, and the need for shelter and food for all.

The Old Testament prophet Amos was right on target when he spoke of burnt offerings. Hunger and homelessness in America have reached catastrophic pro-

portions, maybe even apocalyptic proportions. The age of volunteerism and points of light have also reached gigantic proportions. Shelters and soup kitchens have become the burnt offerings of the twentieth century. I must confess that I, too, have played into the burnt-offering theory, and for a while I felt pretty good about it. But as of today there is more hunger and homelessness and hurt in America than ever before. And I have to look at that.

Last year I went on a public fast as witness, a critique of the administration that would callously dismiss from the welfare services seven thousand people, all of whom were over forty-five, most of whom were women — mothers at that — and most of whom were illiterate and had been told years before that they were unemployable. Since that threat, cutbacks have been carried out by a younger, leaner, meaner administration. I went on that fast for atonement, for what was being done to poor people in my good name as a taxpayer. I fasted for redemption, for I truly felt that redemption was not far behind if atonement was to be part of the screaming hurt, and I felt that it was my Christian mandate to bring this kind of hurt into public scrutiny. We must grieve openly, as Walter Brueggemann tells us. I began the fast for repentance, to beg the forgiveness of the poor of Boston to whom this was being done in my name as a taxpayer.

I chose the words of Amos, who had much to say about burnt offerings:

You people hate anyone who challenges injustice and speaks the whole truth in court . . . You have oppressed the poor and robbed them of their grain . . . I know how terrible your sins are and how many crimes you have committed. You persecute good men, take bribes and prevent the poor from getting justice in the courts. And so keeping quiet in such evil times is the smart thing to do.

Amos would also find it tough sledding on Boston Common today, I think. Amos went on with his tirade:

I hate your religious festivals. I cannot stand them. When you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Stop your noisy songs; I do not want to listen to your harps. Instead, let justice flow like a stream, and righteousness like a river that never goes dry. (Amos 5:21–24)

Harsh words to the privileged, I think. No thousand points of light for Amos, thank you. Our “burnt offerings” become alternatives to justice — shelters and soup kitchens and food banks, some of which I started myself. For the past several years I have spoken out about setting at liberty those who are oppressed. Maintenance efforts threaten to recreate the almshouses and the orphanages of the nineteenth century. The Band-Aid solutions are wreaking social havoc. We have already seen the results of raising children in the unstable and unholy and impermanent environments of shelters and welfare hotels. They not only expose our children to violence and criminal activity, but they also serve to break down traditional family roles and discipline. And they ultimately can cause mental and physical anguish that frustrates any normal development. Ah, you are probably saying, she doesn’t like social workers. I don’t dislike them. They simply haven’t changed anything, any more than I have. To continue what we are doing might perpetuate the problem, not solve it, and we have to look at that.

Physicians are asked to take the Hippocratic oath. Perhaps we should do that. Perhaps social workers, shelter workers, and all of us in human services should take

that oath to do no harm, as Professor McKnight suggests. Even reform needs reform now. And I think it begins with those of us who have tried to justify every breath we took all those years of Band-Aiding, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless. Our world has become a vast shelter, where we maintain a particular class of people. It is time to set them and ourselves free. It is time for all shelter and hungry people to demand justice, not more funding for shelters and programs.

Ah, she's a purist, you're saying. I'm not a purist. I'm a realist. "Kip is such a pessimist," you are saying. I am, rather, an informed optimist, and I have spent the last five years working with progressive economists, who agree with me that poverty is a question of economics. Who gets what? When? And who does not? Had I known these simple truths twenty years ago, I would have spent more time demanding to be let in on the terms of the debate itself, as I believe we should be doing now. I have infinite hope that we can make it, you and I, through that dark and lonely night together. One voice. One common vision. One goal. One vision, not a menu of funding agendas.

But even in my rage, I continue to offer burnt offerings. For the past year I have been working with a group of women I admire. We have started raising funds for homeless women who have AIDS. We call our house "Ruah," which is Hebrew for "a breath of life." Just as over seventeen years ago I watched women passing as men to get a meal, I am now watching homeless women living with AIDS whose realities are denied daily by human service workers in the welfare departments and in Social Security offices. "They're not sick enough" is the customary answer. We have a lot to learn about compassion. And need. Whose needs are being met when we tell them they are not sick enough?

The political theology by which I try to live my life is not particularly comfortable. It is a matter of consistent reflection. *Cui buono?* Who benefits? It is not easy to try to find my own tangled spiritual roots. I find I must step back into history and try to remember that carpenter who listened to those whose realities were being created for *them* by those in power. To those of us on the urban scene, a frightening and devastating landscape, we must continue to allow ourselves to be evangelized by the poor, the misfits, the disillusioned, the disaffected — and yes, the disappeared. We in the city politic see the forces of evil and power colliding in the rawest of forms. We have the opportunity to challenge this force, this rawness, this evil. We have the rare and sacred opportunity to see the faces of the poor, over and over again, in the frightened, sad, empty, disillusioned eyes of the young, the old, the lame, the blind, and God knows, the crazy.

The city is living history and is located at the intersection of all cultural and historic forces. It is here, at the core, that the strength or weakness of any society is most accurately measured. It is here, at the core, where unnumbered human souls will be sacrificed. And it is here, at the core, where one discovers that history is created if not by the spiritually mature, then by the spiritually depraved and degenerate. And finally, it is here, at the core, where prayerful hands become clenched fists and the presence of God is most discernible in rage. I have this rage. I have this hope, that we will have the source and faith to reclaim the moral vision, and our goal is not necessarily to obtain eternal life, but life now. The goals we set for ourselves and our little bundle of raggedy outcasts is to transform society together, today. So that there will be a tomorrow for all the disenfranchised of Boston.

We Must Ask the Right Questions to Find Answers

Dan Berrigan, in the foreword to Hombs and Snyder's *Homelessness: A Forced March to Nowhere*:

What of the system, the web? The system does not strike at random, strike only once; it is a trip hammer, nicely calibrated to deliver repeated blows, death by the hour, the day, the lifetime. But what fuels so horrid an engine? Who devised it? And how to dismantle it? And finally, what to put in its place? The persistence of evil; that is the first understanding, and then to counter with a persistent goodness, a life of active virtue, a community in which it is less difficult to be holy; as a sign of a holy future, available to all. Meantime, a faith that does not give up. This, I take it, is nearly the best we can do in a time when almost everyone, in one way or another, gives up.²⁵

Dearest Dan: I couldn't have said it better myself! We must never give up!

All of us have agreed to write for this journal out of a sense of hope. We appear here at your invitation, not because we find some answers, but because we may find some new questions together. We are all here because we care, because we love, because we continue to hope against all possible odds. Because we dream, because we must find a common goal, a common ethic, a common moral, by which we can live our lives as successful members of the human race. Without that common vision, we are alone, all of us. But with it, we will move mountains. We will fulfill the promise of Amos, and we will let justice flow like a stream, and righteousness like a river that will never run dry. 🐼

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