

EQUAL ACCESS letters and other writings by

L Donald (Don) Morrison from 1986 to 2001

EQUAL ACCESS

A Ministry of the
Church of the Covenant
4415 Boonsboro Road
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Advocating pursuit of the Essentials of Life
for All People by providing awareness of need
and prayerful words of encouragement to
people of Faith



L. Donald Morrison (Don) was born in 1923 and grew up on a 428 acre farm in South-side Virginia. He served in World War II and worked for several years in Hydroelectric Power Operations. After graduating from Lynchburg College, he was ordained as a minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and served several churches in the Central Virginia area. In 1985 Don formed the Equal Access mission of the Church of the Covenant in Lynchburg. Through this mission, he shares his reflections on earth sustainability and the imperative to share the essentials of life with all people. Don's newsletters, which he typed and regularly mailed to friends from 1986 to 2001, are preserved here and serve as a blessing to so many people of Faith and Caring. Don's beloved wife of 40 years, Mary, died in 1997. She and Don raised three endearing daughters, Teresa, Dana and Betsy.

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SELECTED WRITINGS

A PARAPHRASE OF PSALM 73 AT MY 73RD BIRTHDAY

In reality God is good to all who try to do what is
right, to all whose motives are pure,
But as for me, I should have won the lottery by now,
if only I had bought a few tickets.
That's how close I came to succumbing to my envy of
the rich and arrogant.
Thus I would have yielded to ways the wicked pursue
prosperity.

The arrogant rich seem to have no problems;
they are healthy, well-groomed and chic.
They avoid the troubles so-called lesser people
get into.
They manage to handle through their resources matters
that plague others.
They pride themselves on what they can get away with.
Violence is not far beneath the surface of their
involvements.
Their eyes light up with every chance to make big
bucks, and their hearts are entranced by
extravagant entertaining follies.
They speak disparagingly of the poor simply for their
being poor, and blindly oppress them by an un-
willingness to know them and understand
their plight.
Through the power of the media they spew out indecencies
against all that is decent and con the world
with attractive evils.
They broadcast the idea that humans know all that
needs to be known, that knowledge from on high
is not needed.
Such are the arrogant rich who are always at ease
as they pile up their riches

So it seems, that all my efforts to be upright have
been in vain, and to remain innocent of greedy
gain a futile struggle.
For every day, all day long, I am plagued in ways the
rich seem not to be.
However, if I had given in to the ways of the arro-
gant rich I would have betrayed those who look

to You, Dear God.

To make sense of how such wicked opulence seems so beneficial was beyond me; it began to get me down--

Until I went to You, O God, for understanding and could get a feel for wicked oppressors' end. For You set them on slippery slopes like that of freezing rain on solid surfaces.

A sudden shift in the economy, a drop in the stock market, and they are ruined.

As quickly and as easily as they have accumulated; just as quickly is it taken away, leaving them devastated and alone.

Theirs is like a bad dream with terrible images they would like to forget upon awaking.

When I was under the spell of my envy, for the arrogant rich I reacted out of stupidity and ignorance.

Without reason, I responded like a cornered wild beast.

Nevertheless, I have always understood and believed that You are continually available to me and that You uphold me in every way.

Your counsel guides me and I am always received and treated with honor.

I say, "Who can better fulfill my needs and answer my questionings than You who made me?".

There is nothing on earth I desire more than You.

I really feel for those far from You, for though You are always reaching out, Your love and concern are hard to receive by those who keep their distance.

But for me, I intend to stay close, for I recognize

You, Dear God, as the sustaining force of my life;

And I will diligently strive to tell others of

Your desire to bring them fulness of life.

THE ZEROS ROLLED - The Death of Greed

The zeros rolled and in my final years, I saw the
serpent die.

At last the final, fatal blow was struck, with Caring
and Peace and Good the victors.

That rationalizer of our evil was brought down.

No more would we thresh about with symptoms--
consequences--blame,

For we had dared to look the serpent in the face.

We had dared to face the Cause of all our chaos.

We looked within and round about

at what our greed worldly gain demanded,

at the destruction it had brought us.

We looked at how we rationalized our evil self-interest,
Then we dared to act.

Then we sounded the alarm and the campaign began,
the campaign against the Cause of all our woe.

Within and round we fought the foe, our greed
for worldly gain.

And I saw the serpent die.

THE ZEROS ROLLED - The End of Corporate Rule

The zeros rolled and in my final years
I saw the end of corporate rule.
No more would global powers regulate
No more would they control what happens in my town,
For we had dared to claim our rights as free and
sovereign people.

We looked at how the System worked,
at how it gave the rich more riches.
We looked at WHO the System was,
at how it included only traders seeking profit.
With no input from justice-seeking people.

We realized the system could not last,
that like a cancer, would destroy its host.
We realized the system we allowed then
had us in its power.
It had to go! It had to be reformed!

Thus we claimed the power of free and
sovereign people.
Thus we claimed the power to put down
the beast, the beast we knew to be the System.

Alert to all the ways the few controlled the many;
Alert to how humanity was being destroyed;
Alert to the ways our habitat was under siege;
Alert to how democracy was nullified;
We simply said, "This stuff has got to end!
It will end!"

So to the System WHO this word was said:
You will no longer act in secret.
You will include justice-seeking people;
You will give lesser nations equal voice.
As a global power you will yield:
You will not regulate our common natural goods;
You will not deal in water, air, seeds and genes;
You will not add new powers of authority;
But reassess your mission.

You will yield to the will of sovereign nations
that seek the common good for all.
Thus with all concerns heard at the table,

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A new millennium mission was established.
And I saw the end of corporate rule.

THE ENEMY, Greed

The serpent is the evil one.
He drives us up the wall in anguish and confusion.
And twists us 'round his finger with his cunning.
He makes us lie and cheat and steal, abuse and
 even kill to get our way.
But really he is us in all our greed.

There is a way out of hell, the hell
 our greed produces.
There is a way, another way, a better way,
 a superior way.
That way brings treasures far beyond what greed
 can give us.
It is the way of Caring.

To put an end to greed we come to grips with pride,
The pride which says we must be number one;
The pride that causes us to squander and exploit--
To have while others have not.

To put an end to greed we must be fair and just;
Compassion the attitude and action felt and
 practiced;
Supportive action the way to right the wrongs
 we have inflicted.
Caring is the way to end our greed.

To put an end to greed we must attack with Good,
 with Care-Giving.
Wrestling with the dark side of our lives, we must
 persist;
We must commit to battling on and on the destructive
 impact of our greed,
That abundant life might be the norm.

Yes, the serpent is the evil one. The serpent
 is a snake.
So in our greedy focus there's a a snake inside
 our hearts;
And Yet, there need not be, for we are free to
 put an end to greed.

ENDING GREED (A Prose Version)

If we will conquer our greedy self-interest and desire for worldly gain, we will find treasures far beyond what greed can produce. So, let us put an end to greed.

To put an end to greed will require that we come to grips with our pride. It will require of us great sensitivity in regard to what is just and fair.

The end of greed will mean the ending of hunger, exploitation of people and the squandering of earth's resources. It will bring more abundant life to all—and peace.

By dealing with our greed we will become new persons because of a new and right spirit within us; because we will become caring persons who put on or become God's love.

To put an end to greed in our world will require of us an on-going, long-range, persistent commitment and effort that focuses hard and fast on the destructive impact of our greed. It will require of us a wrestling with the powerful dark side of our lives that we so easily rationalize.

I CRY TO YOU, O GOD, - A Personal Psalm

I cry to you, O God in the midst of overwhelming odds, in the midst of calamities that seem to defy solution-
I cry to you, O God, as I ponder the plight of the poor, the plight of those with no power to raise themselves, with no sense of their own ability to affect change.
I cry to you, O God, for the hungry and homeless;
for the hungry who are at risk and may never be; for the homeless who increasingly swell our streets with no vision but for a day or two.
I cry to you, O God, out of concern for those with hoarded capacities and resources, for those who could make a difference with caring to the destitute.
I cry to you, O God, for their souls, lost in self-oriented pursuits, lost to You and all the possibilities You offer.

My cup runs over, Dear God. I am overwhelmed.
So I turn to You.

You are the ultimate- the Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, Restorer, Reclaimer, the Care-Giver of all you have made.

Let me not be overwhelmed.

Enable me to deal with tragic deficiencies and excesses.

Empower me to handle the overflow and to begin corrective processes.

MY NEED, MY AMBIGUITY, MY PAIN (A Personal Psalm)

I lay before you, Dear God, my need, my ambiguity, my pain.
I struggle for the words, the approach, the reasoning that will strike
a responding cord in people.

I struggle within myself that my own responding cord
may be struck, so that what You have provided me may be shared.

I feel called to inform others about ministries that need to be under
girded.

But we are so hung up, Dear God, on having, getting, accumulating.
How can I deal with that, both in myself and on behalf of those I
inform?

How much will it cost? I hear. How little will it require of me? is
what so many want to know.

So, How can we move from our addictions to money to the needs of people
who cry out for help?

How can we move from self-centered gratification to compassion?
That, Dear God, is my need, my ambiguity, my pain.

Yet You have shown me, O God, what is good, what is
righteous and helpful, what is merciful and just.

Lead me, then, toward all that brings life to people, for in that I
find life myself.

Help me to see good wherever it exists, and to praise the doer of it.
Sensitize me, O God, to what is amiss so that what is right may be
clearly seen and helpful action taken.

Help me to hold in check my prejudices and judgments. Let them not keep
me from pursuing what is merciful and just.

Keep before me always your love, mercy and grace.

You are my inspiration, O Lord, my guide, my instructor, my counselor.
You lead me in ways that make me a lover, a lover like Yourself, which
is my strong desire.

And as a lover I will strive to keep aware of how
our love can be expressed.

So it is that I will inform myself and others of the
needs and hurts of people.

Thus may your love pass through me and others to those who cry out in
their pain.

Thus may we devote our lives and the treasures you have provided.

PERSONAL LAMENTATIONS (A Paraphrase of Psalm 69)

Save me, O God!

A huge machine is bearing down on me, and I cannot move.
My legs are like dead rubber, I fall to my knees to crawl.
Even then my body is limp with weakness as I strain
to reach the edge of the road.
Surely I will be mangled by the wheels of this monster.

Everyone seems against me.
No one seems to understand or care as I strive to move through
this stage of life.
You know my life like a book. None of my faults are hid from
Thee.
Yet as I try to make sense of my life in these middle years, the
whole world seems to be my adversary.

I want to be your servant, O God!
Let not those who have no regard for my worth or
desire to serve have their way.
For Your sake I want to be the kind of person I see
in your Son.
So deal with those who stymie my effort and put me down.

Even my prayer life is not well regarded by those most
able to understand.
Those most able to understand think prayer itself as folly;
They are silent, not knowing what to say, how to
respond, even as I in the past have felt about a life of
prayer.
Yet I know that you will make answer to my remembering and brooding
prayer,
For there are those who do respond to say they are strengthened,
and that response coming back to me strengthens me.
For this I recognize Thee, for that is one of your ways of
strengthening.

Knowing that you care and that you are the provider of all our
needs,
I will continue to look to you,
And never abandon those you have given me to care for
I will remember them, pray for them, do all I can for them, even
though they ignore, reject or spurn my efforts.
That I will do, because that's the way You are.

A PREPARATION FOR SILENCE

Here I sit with the powers of the universe surrounding me and in me. I open myself to alignment with these powers, the powers of the Almighty.

I listen for/to God, the Almighty creating, ordering and sustaining force-power-reality, who relates to each created thing according to its nature, and so to me as a person of God's image.

I think about the Common Sense of God, who creates a world that is supportive and good, a world that puts things together in orderly, constructive and working fashion; for what other way is there except the counter-purposefulness of selfish aims?

I wait, outside myself as it were, with openness to discern what comes forth from deep within and beyond, believing that God really does speak in this kind of stillness. And so, I devote this meager time to God that I might receive God's appropriate word to me, trusting that if I am persistent and faithful in this, God will, I am sure, break through to me no matter where I am or what I'm doing.

With this faith I seek God's sustenance and leading.

SELECTED LETTERS (1986 - 1992)

DESIRING MORE THAN WE NEED

Greed for worldly gain, perhaps in combination with noble humanitarian incentives, is the drive behind so many "successful people", even the drive behind the "national interest" of our nation (USA), which Consumes the earth's Resources in amounts far out of proportion to our population. Do we or should we believe in greed? That is, we accept as right and proper the unlimited pursuit of gain (accumulation and control of earth's fruits and human creations)? Two other questions come to mind in relation to this: Do we ever think about it? and what do we think about it?. I doubt that we really believe in greed or think we should, but we find it most difficult not to be greedy in certain ways.

However, we don't have to do it that way, the greedy way. God has given us not only the freedom to choose but also the power to choose. It's something we as individuals, with God's help, can do on our very own; and we don't have to depend upon worldly regulatory powers to coax us or force us in this regard. The power of the Creator lies within us. Indeed, we can bring our own powers of encouragement and persuasion to bear upon our leaders in government, industry, business and the like to subjugate greed in their dealings and decisions.

I pray that each of us will assume our God-Given powers to make change in ourselves and foster such change in society-at-large. Now is the time to look within and 'round about at what our greed for worldly gain demands and at the destruction it brings us.

THE POSITIVE SIDE OF OUR DOUBTS

We claim as a universal truth that we "we reap what we sow." In practice we seem to deny that truth, for many have twisted the Golden Rule on it.

Instead of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," it becomes "Do unto others 'before' they do unto you." We cannot deny the hostility and mistreatment resulting from the latter. It simply bears out that we reap what we sow—that hostility and egocentric/ethnocentric actions reap the same reaction by those affected.

We seem to question this basic truth or, at least, pay little attention to it. We seem to doubt that supportive and constructive ways can reap the same to bring peace and goodwill in our towns, cities, nations and world. And so, we often give up too easily. When things seem impossible we turn away without further consideration of the thing that "seems" impossible. But if something is doubtful, it means it may or may not be so. So, if something is doubtful, then in that very doubt, is the possibility for good. Why not then look on the bright side of our doubts instead of the downside, and move in the direction of "the possible," even the seemingly impossible.

SATAN FALLING LIKE LIGHTENING

"The seventy returned with joy saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name'." (Luke 10:17) Can you not sense Jesus own excitement and joy as he relates his ecstatic vision in which he "saw Satan fall like lightening from heaven?"

Evil and destructive forces that dehumanize and hold us hostage can be defeated. They will "fall like lightening" when God's love is embodied in and spread through our caring and witness.

My prayer is that we will all go forth into areas of service and witness with great expectation, keeping before us the joy and excitement Jesus and the seventy felt, knowing that such joy is ours too through the greatness of sacrificial servanthood.

IT'S SO EASY - "NOT"

The Toyota commercial says, "it's so easy to own Tercel." With such inducement we are tempted; we are hooked into the dominant thrust of our times. It's so easy to follow the crowd, to succumb to the ways of the world, the dominant culture. It's so easy to enter the "wide gate" that leads to destruction. It's not so easy to enter the "narrow gate" that leads to life. It's so easy to "suck from the common good" as Gordon Cosby puts it. It's not so easy to take from the common good only what we need, much less feed positively into the common good.

The true servant-leader believes in and works toward the vision of a world reconciled, something "creation waits for with eager longing",: when the "lion and lamb" lie down together in peace, when harmony and potential are attained in humans and all creation.

But how in the world can we believe in and hold on to such a vision when hardly anything happening around us supports it? Murder, rape, theft, extortion, hatred and all kinds of conflict militate against it. To come face to face with specific events of these kinds and still believe God is reconciling the world to Himself is the measure of our faith. The answer to the question, I believe, lies in that "upper level" of inward being which Thomas Kelly writes about in A Testament of Devotion that parallels and speaks to the conscious dealings with that "first level" of daily worldly affairs.

Thus Kelly writes (p.36): "Between the two levels is fruitful interplay, but ever the accent must be upon the deeper level, where the soul ever dwells in the presence of the Holy One. For the religious man (person) is forever bringing all affairs of the first level down into the Light, holding them there in the Presence, re-seeing them and the whole of the world of men and things in a new and overturning way and responding to them in spontaneous, incisive and simple ways of love and faith. Facts remain facts, when brought into the Presence in the deeper level, but their value, their significance, is wholly realigned."

THE PURSUIT OF THE IMAGE OF THE CREATOR

Increasingly I am beginning to see that the basic thrust of my life is to discover and respond to the inner depths of the Creator within. We are all aware of the mystery of growth and recovery- -how a baby is conceived and brought into the world, how plants and animals have elaborate systems of reproduction that ensure survival, how seeds germinate into new life, how a tree heals over with new bark when damaged, and so on. I believe that this drive toward procreation, sustenance and wholeness is that "something" of the Creator within, and that that something is within each of us. So my vocation is to get in touch with that drive deep within myself, that Spirit the Spirit of my Maker that is planted within me as a part of me. I suppose it is the pursuit of the image of God within myself. It is, I believe, the "Light Within" that Thomas Kelly writes about in A Testament of Devotion.

So I feel the need to discover within myself that which is unique to me in relation to God's direction for my life. I need to discover my own unique self and the gifts I have to offer or develop and the life circumstances to which they might apply. For what God knows, only God knows, but what God wills I must discern as I try to listen to those silent voices that come from deed within and beyond. Then God's will can be more easily discerned. This, I believe is where prayer can take us-- to discover our own being and gifts and how they might relate to others as God would have us do.

ENVISIONING A CARING WORLD, A WORLD CARED FOR

Envision a caring world and a world cared for, a people and a World "whole."

Damage occurs in all things, the products we use, in nature, in human beings. But in God's creation there is a process going on all the time to recover, to restore, to redeem, to make whole.

If we cut our finger it begins to heal, to knit back to original wholeness, redeemed from the damage. Or if in pruning we cut off a limb or if the bark of a tree is damaged, healing begins and soon there is a new covering of bark, perhaps with scars, but nevertheless it is restored and the tree continues its growth,

A forest fire burns everything to the ground, but soon crabgrass appears along with other grasses, then weeds, and the soil is held firm by roots that prevent it from washing away. Before long seeds of trees or even shoots from roots underneath still alive give new growth--cedars, pines, poplars, maples, oaks. The ground is protected and in time a new forest appears. Recovery, redemption has come about.

Land becomes damaged and lost because of agricultural practices that fail to protect the soil or contribute to its water-holding capacity, and because of toxic chemicals that contaminate and thereby endanger people. As a result people begin to realize that the soil, which gives us life, must be cared for, must be sustained. In response the movement toward "sustainable agriculture" begins, a movement that is rapidly catching on. It is social, cultural and economic in nature but nevertheless another aspect of the redeeming process. It is nothing less than the exercise of the stewardship (dominion) given us from the beginning.

God created us as flesh-and-blood beings with all the flesh-and-blood needs for living in a physical world. But God also implanted in us God's Spirit, the very thing that makes us human, made in God's image; the very means through which our lives are to be directed toward the goodness within Creation. Damage comes when we fail to live according to the best we know, when we fail to live according to the directives of God's Spirit in us. Damage comes when we give priority to the things of the flesh.

The evidence of the illustrations given point us toward the recovery and redemption of damaged people. Reason forces us to think of God as particularly concerned about damage to those beings God made in God's image. Our Judaeo-Christian heritage speaks of a loving, forgiving, merciful and supportive God who is constantly at work caring for damaged people, desiring and moving us toward wholeness.

What is true in the physical realm is also true in the realm of the Spirit. As surely as we trust the sun to rise each day, just as surely we can trust the forgiving love, mercy, redemption and undergirding of God as an on-going reality.

So let us envision a caring world and a world cared for, a people and

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a world whole."

EQUAL ACCESS

I believe the impartiality of God is the basis for the equality of all people; and being equal we should have equal access to the essential materials and considerations of life.

We are blatantly bombarded with how we can invest our money so as to become rich (be a millionaire at 28), have the most prestigious things, and with contrived incentives to buy-buy-buy. But beyond the blatant lie the behind-the-scenes and less obvious moves and arrangements that entice us to buy-buy-buy, especially those non-essential things. Most of us don't want to be greedy. Greed to most of us is a very negative and rather obnoxious word. But because of our desire for the good things of life (not entirely Bad), many yield to the point of "wanting it all." so to speak. Don't we yearn to be free from this kind of bombardment and manipulation? We can be, but it takes effort.

I firmly believe that the ending of hunger, exploitation of people and the squandering of earth's resources requires the ending of or at least the creative control of greed. We must be made aware of what our greed does to us and the world's economy, but more than this, we need to come at it with a positive approach. What we really want for all people is "access" to the essentials of life, a positive approach.

THE PRAYER OF THE RIGHTEOUS (James 5:16)

We are without integrity if we do not work toward the things we pray about. The prayer of a righteous person has great power in its effect, and righteousness involves us in the pursuit of what is right, honorable, just and good, things we usually include in our prayers of concern for people. So, the effectiveness of your prayer life and mine is integrally related to our genuine pursuit of what is righteous.

Our gifts and interests lead us in many different directions, but whatever the concerns we have, our lives lived with integrity have great Godly power.

QUOTES FROM E.F.SCHUMACHER

Important to me as an advocate for "Equal Access" to the basics of life for all people are the following quotations from E.F. Schumacher's book. Good Work.

On page 29, Schumacher says there are four main characteristics of modern industrial society which must be accounted four great and grievous evils:

(1) its vastly complicated nature; (2) its continuous stimulation and reliance on the deadly sins of greed, envy and avarice; (3) its destruction of the content and dignity of most forms of work; and (4) its authoritarian character, owing to organization in excessively large units."

On page 100 Schumacher says the following: "My only business, the only real jobs we have, is to look after, to the best of our ability, the little people who can't help themselves. If education and the advantages that we have from society are only so that we might form a sort of trade union of the privileged then our soul is so burdened with darkness that life is not worth living. The requirements of these little people are very simple. They don't want to go to the stars; they just want to know where tomorrow's meal is coming from. They want to have housing, they want to have clothing, they want to have a little culture, and if, as a society, we turn over some of our resources to the study of these humble requirements, then I think the road is free."

Schumacher never feels discouraged, because the "ideas" of freedom and justice are becoming more powerful as we become more aware of blatant excessiveness and destruction. He says: "The masters are authoritarians (but) with a bad conscience." (p.33)

I believe with him that we "make visible" a viable future by even small things we do now.

FREE TO BE FAIR

Few things bespeak the love, mercy and supportiveness of the Creator than does the simple matter of being fair.

A young couple very close to us, in their early thirties, spends ten, twelve and more years in preparation for their careers in some of our finest universities. The husband finds a position to his liking, they move 600 plus miles and settle in. The corporation bears the cost of moving them, but after six months they change their minds about the position. It is no longer needed or desired. He is out, unemployed. There are many other situations, like sudden catastrophic illness or various forms of mistreatment that bring forth the agonizing words, "It just isn't fair."

We are aware of course that many of the ways Of our World are not always fair. This reality calls us to our homework, our various missions. As people of faith we believe in a fair and impartial Maker, One who looks to us for the dominion that provides controls and actions befitting the declaration that creation is "very good." Thus it behooves us to pursue the fairness that's in line with the direction the Creator reveals to us.

We can always bank on the fairness of a gracious loving and merciful Creator. In the freedom we are granted, though, we so often go to excess or fall into neglect, but may we always realize that we are most certainly free to be fair.

CHOOSING AND CHANGING

Basically, we humans can choose and change. If anything can be said about our nature, that is it. We can either take responsibility for our actions to change human culture or accept the bad things in it as "givens." Change in the form of restoration, redemption, transformation, healing and so on is a constant reality in all of Creation.

We humans are remarkable in our capacity to overcome various kinds of damage. We can be made whole again, restored and saved from the destruction damage brings. Our faith is vital to this process. To know in our very being that we are God's "beloved" and that God's favor rests upon us is most powerful in setting us on a positive, constructive and humane course.

As the children say in the blessing for food, "God is great and God is good." God's Creation is "very good," a condition God means for us to maintain through the dominion assigned us. Our bent toward violence and war is part and parcel of the clashing, exploding, repelling and otherwise destabilizing aspect at work in creation and humankind. Violence and war is the rule of disorder because it reaps more of the same*

But we have, through God's empowerment, the power to choose and change. Creative cooperation, restitution, rehabilitation and differences seen as contributions are needed for positive change. There is a thrust in creation toward ordered creativity; growth, recovery and advancement. Without these we approach the outskirts of hell. But we can choose and change to shape a better world.

SENSORING

The story of the sculptor who sees in the block of stone an image he wants to "let out" can remind us of our own pilgrimage to discover and "free" the image of the Creator in ourselves. We simply chip away at it as the sculptor chips away to free his image, the creation he brings into being.

Certain devotional readings have revealed to me the image of "sensor." Like the photoelectric cell that senses when it is dark enough to turn on street light and when it is light enough to turn them off, so we can image ourselves as being like that for God.

We, being placed amid all the things happening in the world, can sense, become aware of and analyse what is good and what is not so good. Being made in the image of the Creator and having been given dominion, we can report to God what's going on. We can articulate and cry out to God how people are starving, how some are ravaging the earth, how cruel and dreadfully devastating life is for so many people.

"History belongs to the intercessors," says Walter Wink. We thus co-create with God through prayer. As intercessors we cry out the world's pain and communicate in ways that sensitize others to that pain. Thus sensitized, they may respond to numerous calls of God to bring alleviation and solutions.

"Social action without prayer," says Wink, "is soul-less, but prayer without action is just plain stupid. Why should we choose between them when neither is valid without the other." (Sojourners, Oct.1990)

PEOPLE KEEPING / EARTH KEEPING

The basic and vital relationship between "people-keeping" and "earth-keeping" involves an understanding between the "Spirit and Values" that give life and the "materials and livelihoods" that keep us alive. That understanding includes the fact that the "Spirit and Values" of human life determine the accessibility of the "materials of life" and the "livelihoods" out of which life is maintained and humane living is possible.

Thus as gentle bearers of the truth we focus on how human attitudes and practices affect the way the earth keeps us. Those human attitudes and practices determine how well we care for the earth and in turn how well the earth keeps us. The prevailing "reverence for excess" will mean eventually a decline in the way the earth can care for us. A "reverence for simplicity" is more in line with a respectful caring for the earth.

A reverence for simplicity fosters the "spiritual sensitivity" and "Knowledge of values" needed to support the earth in the manner we want the earth to care for us and the future generations. Through actions that demonstrate as well as words that communicate, we bring people to awareness of the spiritual sensitivity and knowledge of values needed. As we observe and listen with our hearts as well as with our ears, we can find in our daily rounds opportunities to apply with sensitivity and knowledge our gifts. Thus we may care for the earth. Thus we may care for people.

When a person has enough to live comfortably but finds his or her livelihood continuing to return handsome profits, what does he or she do? find additional investments for those profits and thereby live excessively with fancy eating and drinking and exorbitant pleasure-seeking? Or, being freed up financially, does he or she invest himself or herself in causes that uplift people through what he or she can do and contribute personally?

The late E.F. Schumacher advocated not only more democratic structuring of business enterprises, but also the devoting of a certain portion of profits to causes that uplift workers and their communities. In dealing with the idea of "bigger barns," he recognized the importance of scale, that is, the scope of operation, which says that beyond a certain appropriate scale or size, nothing can be gained. In fact when operations and structures become too big they become inefficient and oppressive. For instance, due to large agribusiness ventures, where once we had thriving small-town communities, we now have hired employees living in deteriorating villages and towns. There's little difference in efficiency but a big, big difference between being an owner/worker and an employee subject to a large conglomerate. The difference also lies in the community support provided by farm laborers and migrant workers as opposed to that provided by well-established small farmers. The tendency seems to be that of adding field to field (See Isaiah 5:8), but Wendell Berry and other "sustainable ag" people say farmland needs to be in the hands of more and more people who love it in order for it to be properly cared for.

Another for instance: Bureaucracy, with its administrative costs can eat up much of the resources appropriated. We need to find an appropriate scale to prevent the present tendency to add layer on layer of administrative and regulatory supervision, so that people get needed attention without so much administrative waste. While efficiency and supervision are important, they must not overshadow humane treatment. The farther they move from one-to-one involvement--one person helping another--the farther we move toward bureaucratic structures.

The hungry of the earth and the whole mix of contributing causes from jobs to food production and distribution to how land is cared for offer opportunities for "sensitive and knowledgeable" application of our gifts. Homeless victims of an economy gone astray and governments that have lost effectiveness in governing offer other ways to apply our abilities and expertise. The need for soup kitchens, clothes closets, food pantries, housing and household basics offer still more opportunities that are much more down-to-earth for those of modest abilities and resources. The support of and involvement in sustainable agriculture is directly geared to earth-keeping.

Still more opportunities lie in the ares of conflict resolution, relief from tensions that frustrate and depress, for healing words and actions to damaged people who in turn cause damage to others. Always there are opportunities for supportive action by caring people in caring communities.

To counteract the reverence for excess there is great need to give gentle, helpful, compassionate assistance toward those whose lives are torn apart, deprived, misguided, confused and ever so fragile. Such sensitivity enables us to see how so many are hurting and how we might be continuing to do the hurting. Only that awareness can bring us to the point of responding with the compassion needed. Only that awareness can bring us to the point of "spiritual sensitivity" and "knowledge of values" needed.

The opportunities are daily before us, and the power of the Creator lies within us. We can therefore extend and expend ourselves in making people-keeping and earth-keeping a priority.

A REVERENCE FOR SIMPLICITY

The parable of the rich farmer (Mat 12:16) who wondered what to do with an enormous crop yield, decided to build bigger barns and then relax with eating, drinking and merry-making. Today we have people building "bigger barns," bigger portfolios we say; and along with them goes excessive living --a reverence for excess.

The root of the problem: We seem always to be caught in this notion that bigger is better, this reverence for excess. A reverence for simplicity leads to communities of appropriate size and structures that allow us to know, relate to and care for one another. Beyond that appropriate scale

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there is excess and hardly any community at all. We seek the brotherhood/sisterhood of humankind. Community is everything in the quest.

CHANGE THROUGH ONENESS, SERVANTHOOD & CONNECTEDNESS

The hope that lies within us causes us to desire change. In desiring change we of course want change that makes things better, but some change makes things worse. Because this is so, many react as though all change is bad and therefore resist it. Those who advocate change, even change that can be good, will be opposed. Oneness, Servanthood and Connectedness will, I believe, bring hopeful change.

For instance, the ways that Protestant and Catholic Christians have moved to a more accepting and cooperative stance over recent decades is movement toward Oneness in Christ. The ways people of all faiths pull together in responding to human need from community level to world-wide efforts speaks of our Oneness related to our common humanity. The many ways that people with different orientations reach out together to our human brothers and sisters declares a Oneness that expresses hope through a more humble style of serving. They declare also the essential quality of a servant lifestyle.

The Servanthood that is lifted up in both the Old and New Testaments counteracts the excesses of pride and the squabble to accumulate more and more among both people and nations. It fosters a humility of spirit that seeks only the good of others, and is willing to do some honorable "footwashing" to bring that good. In places like Festival Place in Washington, D.C., the training of people in servant-style ministry, as put forth by Jesus of Nazareth, is being done. Such training attempts a more authentic and faithful way of living out our Faith. The great promise of a Servant Leadership School at Festival Place is that it is being replicated in other localities across the country. Such programs and movements that foster a more caring and supportive role for people offer affirmation for the hope that is in us.

By Connectedness I mean our connection to the source of our being, the earth and all that's in it. It is a connectedness to Creation and Creator. The industrial revolution has brought us so many good things, but done so in ways that have disregarded and destroyed our environment in so many ways. The damage resulting threatens life itself--plant, animal and human--like acid rain, a contaminated water table and polluted streams, not to mention the air itself.

The idea that God's directions to subdue and have dominion gave us a license to do whatever we wanted with the provisions of earth has been a misreading of what God wanted. The whole movement toward sustainability, which I have been following nearly two decades, has led me to see that we may be on our way to recovering from that misreading of God's directive. The correct biblical understanding of God's directive to subdue and have dominion lies in the stewardship given. That stewardship is to care for our home and its inhabitants so that the earth is maintained and all life is thereby sustained.

The destruction of one thing has its repercussions in many other ways. This means that any action that misuses materials of earth bringing

damage moves us to more and more damage; whereas those actions that sustain and buildup move us more and more to recovering from the damage we have wrought. We can't do that without a reverence for God's Creation of which we are a part. It is simply recognizing our Connectedness to all aspects of God's Creation. This movement toward the proper interpretation of our dominion is another affirmation for the hope that is in us.

As we are called to deal with change, then, may we support or resist it because it is the right thing to do according to the goodness, equity and sustainability God wants to foster or maintain. So, as we deal with change, as so often we must, may we be guided by that which God has written upon our hearts in our search to know God.

A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

As we move into our later years (retirement is the term) and beyond, we join a "cloud of witnesses¹" (Heb 12:1) that includes Abraham, Moses, Jesus and the Disciples, plus all the saints and great servant-leaders of the ages. Most of us want to witness personally in ways appropriate for us as long as we are able. We want to do all we can to witness our faith before it's time to be written about, talked about and quoted. I feel that nothing is more important than to do just that--to undergird those who follow, to strengthen our congregations by sharing our own journeys of faith and our sense of God's beckoning direction.

My own focus comes through a heightened awareness of God as Creator and Caretaker of Creation. That focus is sustainability of the earth and its people, with particular emphasis on soil from which all life springs. I pray and write out of this concern, realizing that it takes a world awakened to avert catastrophic destruction, and that our greatest hope for change lies in people of faith.

All people of faith seeking to do what they can to make God's ways real and operative in the world need encouragement and support. That has been my reason for remembering and writing over the past ten years. I am guided by such words as these from E. Herman's Creative Prayer: "If we would be true priests of intercession, we must be willing to 'serve the altar' for a lifetime, if need be, without seeing any result." Results, however, do come, and believing in prayer as a moving and motivating reality, I can't help but feel that down the line this kind of persistent focusing by as many as are called to it (regardless of age) will bear fruit.

A PHILOSOPHY OF REALITY

It is said that regardless of the depth of one's thinking about it, we are bound to have a philosophy of the reality of the world of which we are a part. As for myself, I continue to seek in that vein the grounding of my faith. Basicly it means being in "synch" with the created Reality. Alignment is another way of putting it.

All observations from ancient to modern times reveal that the created Earth is a pretty nice place; that it is good, very good. Why is it good and how does that goodness impact upon us? We are encouraged and admonished to do good and not evil, to overcome evil with good. WHY? What is the ground of goodness and why do we align ourselves with goodness?

I understand that it is the nature of the elements of creation to clash or compliment, repel or combine, be in turmoil and unstable or become settled and stable. The complimenting, combining and stabilizing aspects are what I believe give us the Earth as the presently apparent "garden spot" of the universe. Though clashing, exploding, repelling and otherwise destabilizing aspects are evident and real; the ordering, stabilizing and constructive aspects of creation on our earthly habitat have "majority rule" to give us a world of growth, healing, recovery and ordered advancement.

Being part and parcel of this earthly segment of creation, we humans are given through our very being this thrust toward ordered creativity, growth, recovery and advancement. So it is, I believe, that the idea of goodness is within us by our being a part of the make-up of a habitat that is basicly ordered, creative, constructive and supportive. This to me is the genesis of the human spirit that seeks alignment with this thrust toward goodness. It is in our very Make-up. Beyond this, as we experience life as sustained, propogated and nourished, we evaluate this as good. Unfortunately, those destabilizing and destructive elements are there also to play upon our spirits.

The creativity, order, actions and interactions of all the powers and processes that have culminated to produce the human spirit leads persons to envision a supreme intelligence behind it all. The name given this Supreme Reality is called God. Whether or not one believes in a supreme being, it is difficult to deny the reality of creative and ordering powers and processes in the world. Whether this Reality, which is beyond our comprehension, can be known or knowable is a matter of faith.

My faith is that the creating and ordering power and processes have the upper hand and will prevail. My faith lies in a life devoted to alignment with the basic thrust I see in the world and the people around me. So it is that I seek undergirding for that alignment.

But how does one pray to the Reality that is beyond one's comprehension? If God is the name we give the creating and ordering powers and processes of the universe, how can such an immense Reality be related

to? To begin with, the creating powers and processes relate essentially to the very being of all things--things organic and inorganic, things living and non-living. This Reality thus relates to a dogwood tree in terms relevant to a dogwood tree, and in like manner to a human in terms of personhood.

We speak to and speak of God in personal terms simply because that's who we are, persons. It would be most difficult to conceive of the Reality as a person by any stretch of the imagination, but we know that those creating and ordering powers and processes are within us and are that which makes us persons, beings of spiritual discernment. So it is that we relate to or communicate with The Reality in personal terms just as would a fish or a cat in terms of their being. But all the while we realize we cannot completely comprehend the total dimensions of The Reality.

To be in conflict with that creating, ordering, redeeming and up-building Reality is not unlike wearing out my car tires and fighting to steer the car when the wheels are out of alignment. Thus I would align myself with those who share the ability to respond as stewards of the Earth and can align themselves as beings of the Spirit.

THE AFFECTION OF PETS

Have you ever known the affection of a pet?

Phoebe is our 13 inch Beagle and Heidi is our yellow tabby cat. Phoebe used to use Heidi's cat door in the basement door to come and go. She knows the circuitous trail back of our home that takes in a segment along Burton Creek, but she never goes on it alone. She always awaits anxiously for me to take her. *Why* does she want me to take her? Why the companionship? And why does Heidi sometimes follow along? It's almost a mile around the trail.

I believe it's because they like me, like to be with me. They quite often hang around when I'm working in the yard or garden. Come to think of it, they do have reason to like me, for whenever I pass by them I pet them and speak to them often using sweet baby talk.

All this helps me to see my connection--our human connection--with all living things and with all of Creation. It also says something about affection. We humans are admonished to care about and care for one another, even those we might consider enemy. Considering our own personal behavior toward others, isn't it much better that the others have reason to like us? With so much suspicion, contention, hostility and violence, we can make a difference through the attitude of friendship and the actions of caring. This our pets can teach us.

SELECTED LETTERS - 1993

MAKING VISIBLE A VIABLE FUTURE - Jan 15

(The hunger in our world as evidenced in Somalia and the need, for other essential needs of people lead me to share again (with a few changes) the writing I did for Dec 1, 1989. I do so to encourage and support involvement toward a more caring world, an emphasis a number of us began in 1986 when I first began my letters. The original had the shape of a sweet potato drawn over it.

Some years ago the Triumph sport car, with its wedged shape, was advertized as "the shape of things to come." Since then most cars have become wedge-shaped with the keenly sloping front. On this letter (the original) is the outline of something symbolic of things to come, it is the outline of a sweet potato I grew in 1989. It weighed 2 lbs 5 oz and was grown on a reconstituted gravel parking lot formerly owned by Adams Motor Co. in Lynchburg.

E.F.Schumacher, in his book Good work, writes that we make visible a viable future by even small things we might do. This sweet potato might be a symbol of that kind of movement.

The worldly culture encourages us to think big; and so, in the production of food we have the huge agribusiness conglomerates in California, Texas, Florida and so on; and we even have foreign countries involved in ripping out rain forest and the like to produce for us. Well, let's think even bigger. Let's think of billions and billions of families growing sweet potatoes and all those other good things to eat on what- . ever fields, patches, plots and backyard spaces available to them.

What's it all about? It's about ending hunger, exploitation of people and the squandering of earth's resources. It's about enabling the "little people," the marginalized Schumacher mentions, to have equal access to the basics of life like food, housing, clothing, a little culture.

As we move out from the recent Holiday Season, we find opportunity offered us to reflect deeply on life and matters of ultimate significance. I pray that all of us will look for and consider what we can do to shape a better world for the marginalized.

**FORERUNNERS - ACCESS - SUSTAINABILITY - SIMPLICITY April
15**

Right now it seems many people are afraid to hope, because we get many of the same old tired answers to what we face in the nation and the world. I recall a few baseball hitters who would take a step forward when the pitcher delivered in order to swing just ahead of the curve. So many of the things we do are reactions to problems already upon us, "in the curve" so to speak, and about all we can do is strike out with too little too late.

Whether we're ready for it or not, I believe it is time to listen for and to some forerunners. Forerunners are, of course, change agents when the valid things they offer are heeded and acted on, Abbe De Tourville, in his Letters of Direction to a friend, had some things to say about forerunners, some of which follow.

"In every age God has scattered forerunners in the world. They are those who are ahead of their time and whose personal action is based on an inward knowledge of that which is to come. If you or I should happen to be a forerunner, let us bless God for it, even though, living a century or two too soon, we may feel ourselves to be strangers in a foreign land."

"Rejoice then in the light which you have been given and do not be surprised that it is so difficult to pass on to others. It really is making its way not so much through you or me as through force of circumstance.

You are simply ahead of your time; it is a good thing to have long sight and to let your soul be illuminated as soon as you are aware of the light."

Wendell Berry, in The Unsettling of America, wrote of "margins." Forerunners come in from the margins with ideas, practices, policies and the like that are not "mainstream." The move toward sustainable agriculture began in a marginal way with focus on organic fertility^ less dependence on manufactured chemicals and greater conservation practices. That movement is steadily pressing in from the margins, fostering sustainability not only in agriculture but in other areas as well. One day it will be mainstream.

Forerunners can offer us the kind of change which gives promise to the Oneness, Servanthood and Connectedness I wrote about earlier. In addition to these three, I suggest also Access, Sustainability and Simplicity.

Simplicity gives us the frame of mind to reduce our bent toward excessive accumulation. Our greed, of course, is behind that bent. Those of us who are greedy accumulate excessively and gain power through our riches. That power enables us to support or make decisions that affect everyone, Being greedy, those decisions tend to support and feed our greed. That's why the rich get richer and the poor poorer, the reason so many are denied access to the essentials of

life. Can we not then start with the simplicity that brings stable, sustainable societies in which all have access?

Simplicity brings reversal to the excessive demands of greed to fill our gluttonous, outlandish material appetites. I believe most of us want to know and need to know how to simplify our lives. Sister Jose Hobday, in a presentation to the Ministry of Money, offers a way to start.

"As a Franciscan I'm called to be especially simple so I do not have to explain anything to the poor. Each of us needs to find our turf. My turf is to appear so that the poor are not embarrassed. I live in such a way that others don't want what I have."

"Decide what simplicity is. Be honest about what it is for you. Think through the aspects of food, clothing, shelter, work, recreation, transportation. What are your needs? Meet all of your needs. What are your preferences? Meet most of your preferences. What are your druthers? Meet some of your druthers. What are your luxuries? Meet a few of your luxuries."

"Strip yourself down to this level of living. Give yourself a year to test it. Find out what you left out that you want to add and what you kept you don't want. Then operate on the principle of replacement instead of accumulation. Give the new thing away. The latest level of buying is fad (this year's trend), then fashion (lasts 5-6 years), and then style and quality (lasts 25-30 Years). So buy for style and quality. The things that matter to me get our front, naturally, playfully."

May you be blessed in what you do to bring about what is right for yourself and others. I give thanks always for the good you do.

WHY ACT AGAINST OTHERS? - June 1

Psalm 103 is a thanksgiving for God's goodness, and emphasizes God's redeeming action through God's steadfast love, mercy and compassion. "For God knows how we were.,made; (God) remembers that we are dust." (v14)

The point I would make is that a creation of God cannot surpass God as Creator. We humans are from the earth God made, and though we are made in the image of the Creator, we fall short in the living out of that image. We do not always know what we are doing.

Jesus, as he was dying on the cross, said of those who were responsible for his crucifixion: "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34) These words show a basic understanding or misunderstanding of us humans.

Such actions of rejection by violence and denial of justice and human dignity show how far we humans can fall short. We don't always know what we're doing. However, we come closest to knowing what we're doing when our actions and responses are supportive in enabling people to be and achieve their best. When we fall away from that caring, supportive stance we fall short of God's intended purpose for us.

What, then, causes us to speak and act against fellow human beings? To me there are two basic reasons: (1) We don't always know what we're doing, and (2) We think we know what we're doing.

In normal relationships it makes no sense to act against another person, so that when we do, we act out of ignorance, of not knowing, of not having an understanding of how our words or actions impact upon the person. We intend no harm, but harm is done anyway, through not knowing what we're doing. We cannot always know the life experiences, feelings and thinking of those to whom we relate. So, if we ourselves have been deeply hurt by someone who may not have intended harm at all, I believe the realization of the truth that we don't always know what we're doing can bring much needed release to our hurt.

But what if we're reasonably sure the hurt was intended? What if the person speaking or acting against us was acting as though he or she knew what he or she was doing? That kind of action is, of course, well and good as long as the intention is to produce positive results. But so often, when we think we know what we're doing, it is intended to put someone down, tell someone off, relieve personal guilt, elevate self at another's expense and so on.

Why should we act this way? Is it not caused mostly by hurt or damage within ourselves. Is it not usually reactions coming out of ways we ourselves are damaged? So, if we have been hurt by someone who intended to harm or hurt, we can realize that some hurt or inner damage in that person has caused it. Such realization, then, can be cause for compassion and forgiveness whereby our own hurts are much relieved.

We most certainly will reap what we sow, but why must we sow what we will surely reap, that is, why must we let our own damage lead us to inflict damage on others? If we can keep in mind that we don't always know what we're doing, even though we may think we know what we are doing, we can act and respond with much greater sensitivity and supportiveness.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR? - JULY 15

In Scripture we read: "When Jesus saw them (the disciples of John) following, he said, 'What are you looking for?'" (NRSV) That is a critical question for us right now: What are we looking for?

It is a question to ponder deeply and with the purest of motives, for without spirit-direction and human uplifting answers communicated to our various leaders, we will not see an increased understanding of how our systems favoring the rich impact against the poor. We will not see industry and business pay proper attention to the welfare of workers and consumers, and we will not see congressional gridlock end.

Our unwillingness to budge and move toward needed change in our nation is, I believe, placing us in a precarious position leading to the "Future Shock" Alvin Toffler writes about in his book by that title. He says that an uncontrollable, accelerating rate of change can throw us into what he calls future shock; and that a society in that state is one that is the victim of change, not the victor over change.

There is a rapid pace of change taking place in things like national and ethnic self-determination and its subsequent cost in human lives, livelihoods and essentials of life; in worldwide economic shifting and relocations, in increasing health care costs and so on. These things tell us, I believe, that we are courting future shock or may already be entering it.

My understanding of a church, or any other faith organization, in the state of future shock would be one torn apart and thoroughly frustrated by having little or no sense of where to go or what to do in the community and the world. This can happen when we are not serious about what we're looking for, that is, about our purpose as people of faith.

Toffler tells us that the future is rushing toward us at ever increasing speed, and that if we do not think and plan ahead we are left with nothing to do but react to what the future brings, having little or no control over it and becoming victimized by forces we can't even identify or pin down.

The strategy for survival, Toffler says, is to gain control over the pace and content of change; that we anticipate needed change and assume conscious and intentional control over it through a process requiring input from all sectors of society; and that planned change is the only answer to racing, oppressive and victimizing change.

All this may lead us to ponder how we are presently responding to change. Are we acting on change or reacting to change

There is much discouraging, disheartening and tragic news these days in all areas of life from personal to national to worldwide. It tends to get us down. But there is something we should be aware of to give us a more positive outlook. It lies in the realization that most news is an aberration of the norm, that is, a turning from or violation of what is normal and right. So most of the news we get is about things not normal or commonplace, things that go wrong. Whereas, we can rejoice, I believe, in the realization that the great majority of actions and happenings in the world are normal, stable, constructing and uplifting. They are things we seldom hear about. They are the "no news" that is "good news," and for me it is good to "hang in there" with the good news that surrounds us and keep us alive.

But deep down and in the final analysis, the all important question is "What are we looking for?". It is important because when what we are looking for is communicated effectively to the decision-makers, it determines in large measure what we will get. It may be good It may be bad. It all depends on what we are looking for.

EXCESS AND DEFICIENCY - Sept 1

Excessive amounts of rain in the mid-west and lack of rain in the southeast serve to remind us of the destructiveness of excess and deficiency and the folly of control. For us in our Servant Leadership School, these realities can bring matters into sharp focus as we begin our study of the nature of divine power as contrasted to dominant controlling power.

On our vacation we traveled west from St Louis through Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, the Dakotas, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Minnesota and Iowa. Except for a few days in Vail Valley with our daughter, we drove mostly in rain, one shower after another. As we looked for breaks in the clouds that never came, we got a feel for what many flood victims were experiencing, wondering "When will it ever end?". Though we hadn't planned it that way, as we traveled that circuitous route through much of the Missouri/Mississippi watershed, the rains we experienced were the very ones that broke the barriers and flooded the area west of St. Louis we had previously passed through.

The destructiveness of that excess rainfall has been devastatingly clear through the news media. Likewise, the lack of rainfall in the southeast is having its life-denying impact. This timely natural imbalance can be seen as a lesson to us. That lesson: extreme excess and extreme deficiency are always destructive. They always occur when excessive practices prevail that in turn cause denial and deficiency. In other words, imbalance happens when excess prevails. That's why we share--to recover the balance, so that "He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack." (Ex.16:16)

There is another lesson also. It has to do with the folly of control. Many depend upon the Federal Government, the Corps of Engineers and so on, to control the flow of rivers. The assurance of and dependence on that control has placed many in jeopardy. One of our excessive notions is that we can control almost anything. That excessive notion feeds our technological bent and our engineering genius. The rivers are telling us, I believe, that there are limits to our control. For instance, we know we can't control a hurricane, so we simply track it, and we're good at it. There are other limits to be recognized.

Wendell Berry writes about having a respect for "wildness," which means a respect for the way things are in nature, like the way grasslands and woodlands prevent erosion and gradually enrich the soil by what is given back. That respect calls us to cooperate with nature rather than control nature to the point of disregarding the sustainable, up-building aspects of the wildness.

Our rivers are a part of this wildness. They need a certain amount of "flow space" when the big rains come. It is folly to think we can control them completely. When we encroach too far on their territory we place people at risk. So we need a healthy respect for the flow space our rivers need.

There is a long overdue focusing now on the care of our planet that calls for the respect that Berry and many others advocate: the Ozone layer, sustainable agriculture, and other matters of environmental soundness. There is, I believe, a strong movement toward aligning ourselves with the "positives" of our natural world that includes recognition of appropriate limits.

In October my Wife, Mary, and I will attend the E.F. Schumacher lectures at Yale University where Wes Jackson will talk about some positive actions he and others are working on toward this strong movement. Jackson is founder of The Land Institute, Salina, Kansas, where they are developing perennial grasses that grow grain from a sod, and where a broader genetic base for essential food crops is a serious pursuit. He is also a strong advocate for family farming and viable communities, and will share in the lectures about an ecologically sound and economically viable farming community they hope to develop at Matfield Green, Kansas. They have purchased a portion of this more-or-less abandoned village so typical of many rural communities today. We went to Matfield Green as we drove west, so we are anxious to know what they plan for this village with such a unique setting and developmental potential.

I give thanks always for all the good you and all others can do. May you be blessed with a knowledge of appropriate limits, but also with vision toward which you can apply your own potential. May God enable you to be the person you most want to be according to spiritual insight and direction.

A THIRD WAY (Walter Wink on Jesus) - Oct 15

I call your attention to a book entitled Engaging the Powers: Discernment and resistance in a World of Domination. It is written by Walter Wink, Professor of Biblicational Interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary, New York. It is the third in a series on "Power" the other two being; Naming the Powers, The Language of Power in the New Testament, 1984 and Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence, 1986 I share it here because of the way it has spoken to me. It is therefore a review from that standpoint, for I am not scholarly enough to grasp the thoroughness of this Biblically grounded and documented work.

The "Powers" are those entities of government and other institutions and organizations that maintain the control that orders society. The key understanding of the Powers are: they are good, they are fallen and they must be redeemed. The purpose for the Powers is good, to order life, as the Apostle recognized (Romans 13). But they are fallen in that they become corrupt and order life unjustly in many ways. They must then be redeemed by those who expose the fallenness and work for positive change.

Wink goes to considerable length to help us understand how the Powers have come to accept and employ violence as a dominating force, in that violence is seen as redemptive, a means of settling matters. Violence as redemptive is one of the "delusional assumptions" he lists as holding sway for the Powers, enabling them to form a "Dominating System."

The first of these delusional assumptions is "The need to control society and prevent chaos requires some to dominate others." The second is: "Those who dominate may use other people as a means to achieve their goals" (p.95) Thus he speaks of the controlling powers of today as a Domination System. And when the Apostle Paul writes of "putting on the whole armor of God" in resisting the "principalities and powers," he too is writing about resisting a domination system. (Eph.6)

For myself, I can more easily identify with Jesus who was crucified because he advocated a way to resist the domination system imposed by Rome. It was a system that included Jesus' fellow Jewish subjects who had to curry favor to maintain their own stations of power.

Pointing out that "flight or fight" are two instinctual responses to violence, Wink shows how Jesus offers a "Third Way," that of nonviolent engagement. (Ch.9 pp. 175-193) The text for it is Matthew 5:38-42_f "Turning the other cheek, giving the coat and cloak and going the second mile" are shown as ways in which those who are dominated can creatively reclaim their own humanity and refuse to be humiliated by the Powers, even though no change is possible under present circumstances. He shows how nonviolence is of a piece in Jesus' proclamation of the Reign of God, in that they behave with dignity in recovering their humanity. They don't have to wait for Rome to fall or

for their land to be returned and so on.

Jesus does not propose armed revolution, but lays the foundation for social revolution* , Wink refers to Richard A. Horsley who points out that social revolution becomes political when it reaches a critical threshold of acceptance, (p. 183). He points out that Jesus' own people had responded with such critical acceptance when in 26 c.e. "Pilate introduced idolatrous Roman standards into Judea. Jews by the thousands prostrate themselves around his house for five days. When Pilate threatened to kill them all, they offer their necks to the sword but will not move. Pilate removes the standards." (p.244)

So Jesus was not advocating something foreign to them but was raising it from occasional or spontaneous use to a central element in the coming of God's reign. (P.177)

To me, in light of Rome's overwhelming might, the Jewish powers under Rome's thumb felt they had to find a way to stop Jesus. Jesus was offering a way to come to grips with a fallen domination system. The Powers resisted in order to maintain control.

But "by refusing to be awed by the power of the Powers, the powerless are emboldened to seize the initiative, even when structural change is not immediately possible,"This message," says Wink, "is a practical strategic measure for empowering the oppressed, and it is being lived out all over the world today by powerless people ready to take their history into their own hands (p.179)

He reminds us that history is written by the Powers-That-Be. Thus students learn largely about powerful rulers, wars and empires. Nonviolent resistance, even when successful is neglected, seen as impractical, unrealistic, an unrepeatably oddity. The sovereignty of the Powers-That-Be depend to a large extent on deciding what stories will be told, Hence an impoverished view of nonviolent engagement. (p243)

Wink points to an accelerating use of nonviolent action in our time. He says, "I have found it helpful to draw to people's attention the enormous volume and variety of nonviolent actions as a way of breaking the andromatic (male) monopoly on history. As we become aware that nonviolent direct action is not unusual and that it has been frequently and successfully used, we can envision its further application in our time. Learning the history of nonviolence is another way of rehearsing it. Furthermore, our ability to act may depend every bit as much on a knowledge of nonviolent methods and spirituality as on our fortitude." (p.243)

What I get is that Jesus moves us toward a "partnership" society in which everyone contributes and receives as equals. It is a movement from a dominating society that acts on many "delusional assumptions," especially on violence as redemptive, to a Domination-Free society based on love as the acceptance of all humans beloved of God. The strategy is one in which people can creatively respond in freedom to expose what is amiss in a way that even the oppressor can see his

oppression and repent.

I give thanks always for all you do or will do in the movement toward the just and peaceful partnership society which Jesus initiates as our mission.

MY CRUCIBLE - LOOKING AT CALL - Dec 1

This letter marks the end of a three-year interim at Gordonsville Christian Church in Virginia. It was a very special time for Mary, since she had just retired after having colon cancer surgery--a most freeing and unpressured time. The evening of our final service I began to have angina pains that would not quit. My doctor put me in the hospital where I had quadruple heart bypass surgery. Writing this letter offered me a time of ease as I recuperated.

The dictionary says a crucible is a heat-resistant container used for melting various ores. Another meaning is a severe test or trial. I'm sure a quadruple heart bypass can be thus classified. However, for me as a crucible, it was not so much a severe test as a relief over what had been building up healthwise over the past five or ten years. As a crucible it has brought me to an awareness of my own mortality in a more meaningful way. It has caused me to refocus myself on God's call upon my life.

When you go through the wierd, wild and crazy kind of dreaming the medication and so on brings under such circumstances, one might wonder if there is anything that might be construed as speaking to call. So let me tell you about a specific dream which seemed to say something about call. Just keep in mind the vagueness as well as the wierdness.

I visioned a box, a rather segmented box almost broken in two but still intact. The implication was that the box was to be opened, so I said to the few people around me, "Open it up. Let's see what's in it." The vagueness should tell you there was no way for me to recall what was in the box. At that point my mind began to focus on my own present call, which includes my writing. The question came forward: "Is this a time for a new call?" Since then I have wondered if the revitalized heart given me might have been in the box.

In the box were all kinds of things: tools, resources, gifts and the like that could be used in some area of call. Another question comes: "Is a call of God to be based solely on materials and resources available to one or upon one's deeply felt inner feelings of what is right or what one feels compelled to do?" Still another question: "Would whatever materials or resources in that box be suitable in response to a call?" Though we do take into account who we are and what we have to offer, many or most of us have found that in response to a call the materials, resources, gifts and so on have to be found, brought into being in order to engage ourselves.

At that point I came to realize that the call I have felt since 1986 remains intact. Various readings, personal responses received and personal involvements have served to reinforce and reaffirm my call to bring prayerful encouragement and awareness of need in the pursuit of the essentials of life for all people. Certainly a vital aspect of that call is to share various "Steps in Access" which we see happening or coming into being. You see, there is so much coming in from the

"margins" of life that offer new insights, new ways of seeing and doing, and even old ways still viable, that move us away from the drags and dregs of domination, excess and injustices past and present. I hope I can be on that cutting edge.

STEPS IN ACCESS - A REPORT FROM YALE - Dec 1

Can you imagine a money system and economy that provides steady, dependable, non-inflationary stability?

On October 23 Mary and I attended the Annual E.F. Schumacher Lectures at Yale University. The featured speakers were: Wes Jackson of The Land Institute at Salina, Kansas; Winona LaDuke of the White Earth Recovery Project, a Native American region in northern Minnesota and Wisconsin; and George Davis, an international consultant/organizer for ecologically sound regional economic development. While there is a lot I could report from their sharings, I happened, however, to get hold of a book entitled An Interest-Free Inflation-Free Money System, written by Margrit Kennedy an architect of some international recognition.

Ms. Kennedy writes about three kinds of growth: normal growth, mechanistic growth (my word) and exponential growth. Normal growth is like normal human growth in which there is rapid growth to about twenty years, after which growth is gradual and of a more qualitative pattern. Mechanistic growth is more or less straight-line growth in which production is based on specific inputs of resources and labor. Exponential growth is growth resulting from our present interest/investment structures. Its growth begins slowly and steadily advances at an accelerating pace until, as shown on a graph, it goes through-the-roof so to speak.

Lest we think exponential growth the obvious choice, it is the one that has caused many problems. It's the one that feeds our greed. My observation is that such growth is most difficult to keep stable and dependable as far as human welfare is concerned, because this system breaks down with depression and crashes every once in a while. We may wonder about the billions that get lost in trading ever so often.

So, can you imagine a money system and economy that provide steady, dependable (not exorbitant), non-inflationary growth that enables people to work toward a future in which sufficient means (not opulent means) can be provided for the lean years and the later years?

Ms. Kennedy gives illustrations from the past of such money systems that have worked on local and regional levels, but which were turned away from when they reached the dominating authorities higher up the chain of governmental command. She suggests that had Lord Keynes adopted a more or less fixed-fee system for money use as opposed to the interest/investment structures for maximizing national income, we might have a different story.

Can you imagine or envision anything different and better than what we now have? You can probably still get Ms. Kennedy's book from the E.F. Schumacher Society, Great Barrington, MA 01230 - 413-528-1737.

At that point I came to realize that the call I have felt since 1986 remains intact. Various readings, personal responses received and personal involvements have served to reinforce and reaffirm my call to bring prayerful encouragement and awareness of need in the pursuit of the essentials of life for all people. Certainly a vital aspect of that call is to share various "Steps in Access" which we see happening or coming into being. You see, there is so much coming in from the "margins" of life that offer new insights, new ways of seeing and doing, and even old ways still viable, that move us away from the drags and dregs of domination, excess and injustices past and present. I hope I can be on that cutting edge.

SELECTED LETTERS - 1994

ADDRESSING THE WORLD WITH TRUTH - Jan 15

At our New Year's Sunday Service we were asked to share the deepest longing of our spirit as we move into the the new year. For me it lies in a search for and exposure of the truth about our pursuit of social justice through ecological and economic stability and sustainability. The truth I'm working with is that the world, the earth and its inhabitants, are to be cared for in ways that are just and sustainable.

The columnist, Bill Maxwell (Lynchburg News, 1-4-94) quotes Jean-Francios Revel's book, The Flight from Truth; The Reign of Deception in an Age of Information; "The fact is that we do not use our minds to seek out the truth and to establish facts with absolute certainty. Above all and in the great majority--if not the totality of cases--we use our intellectual faculties to protect convictions, interests and interpretations that are especially dear to, us."

I appreciate so much the words of Robert Fulgum in his Maybe, 1993, "Never, ever, regret or apologize for believing that when a man or woman decides to risk addressing the world with truth, the world may stop what it is doing and hear."

It is especially uplifting to me to observe how the thinking of various people converges around some common truth. I recall Wendell Berry's writing the following: "There is an uncanny resemblance between our behavior toward each other and our behavior toward the earth. By some connection we do not recognize, the willingness to exploit one becomes the willingness to exploit the other....It is impossible to care for each other more or differently than we care for the earth." Wes Jackson, in writing and speaking on the care of the earth and its people emphasizes that it is a spiritual undertaking. Margrit Kennedy in her book, Interest Free and Inflation-Free Money, recognizes this when she writes: "In spiritual terms, everything we find in the outside world is a reflection of our inner selves, our belief systems, our wishes and our thoughts. A transformation of the outer world, therefore, requires a transformer of the inner world. One without the other is not possible." They are all dealing with the truth that the world is to be cared for in a just and sustainable way.

Robert Fulgum, in his Maybe, is writing about our secret thoughts, feelings, ideas and the like, that most often we keep to ourselves. He writes, though, in such a way as to reveal the creativity and potential within us. The truth, as it relates to his final story, as I understand it, is that we are of the truth when we live with integrity according to what we have to offer, that is, when our words and actions expose the truth to others. His story is about a cellist of the Sarajevo Opera Orchestra.

He begins his story, however, as a fable, a futuristic projection. The year is 2050, the place a large Eastern European city in which there is an open square with a bronze stature in the center. The stature is not that of a soldier, nor a politician, nor a general on horseback or a king, but a rather ordinary man sitting in a chair playing his cello. The cellist is the national hero.

People asking about the statue and its story are told of conditions of strife like that today in Sarajevo. With music stronger than fear, the cellist plays in the open street of the city. Then, in time, the fighting stops, but the music and the city and the people live on. Thus the fable ends.

But the cellist, Vedran Smailovic is real. In our time he plays twenty-two days in the middle of the street in Sarajevo, sitting in a cafe chair near the breadline. For twenty-two days he braves sniper and artillery fire to play Albinoni's Adagio in G Minor. Then in Seattle, Washington, after learning about him in the New York Times Magazine, July 1992, Beliz Brothers responds. She organizes 22 cellists to play in 22 places in Seattle for 22 days. The final day they all play together in front of a bakery displaying 22 burned-out bread pans, 22 loaves of bread and 22 roses. The story was made known to Vedran Smailovic to let him know his music had been heard and passed on. Others began to play in other cities. In Washington, D.C. 22 cellists played the day our new president was sworn into office.

The place where Vedrah played has become an informal shrine honored by Croats, Serbs, Muslims and Christians alike. They commemorate the hope that must not die- "that someday, somehow, the best of humanity shall over come the worst, not through unexpected miracles but through the expected acts of many" Fulgum concludes with the question: "Who shall say the monument in the park in Sarajevo will never come to pass?" I pray that we may "never, ever, regret or apologize for believing that when (you or I or anyone else) decides to risk addressing the world with truth, the world may stop what it is doing and hear."

STEPS IN ACCESS - Life-Giving Programs and Activities in Lynchburg, Va.

Lynchburg Covenant Fellowship - initiates and administers programs broadly supported by the people and congregations of the city.

The Wood Ministry - provides emergency firewood to those who are marginalized.

New Land Jobs - job preparedness and placement for the hard core unemployed.

New Land Industries - basic job training and employment to the unemployed through recycling.

Samaritan Inns, Inc. - housing and recovery for homeless men at the Gateway and for homeless women at Miriam's House.

Housing for the Handicapped - in Lynchburg and Madison Heights, Altavista and Appomattox.

Housing for Battered Women - at Carey House

Housing for the Elderly and Low-Income Families - at Lynchburg High and Frank Roane Apartments.

Home Ownership for Low-Income Families - through Habitat for Humanity and Lynchburg Covenant Fellowship.

Emergency Human Services - through Lynchburg Community Action Group and the Interfaith Outreach Assoc.

Free health Services - to the marginalized through the Free Clinic.

Daily Bread - noon meals to those in need.

Lynchburg Peace Education Center - witness to and awareness of issues related to peace and the reduction of violence.

One response leads to the need for other responses, as with the need for emergency firewood leading to the need for jobs and to the needs of the homeless. The call and commitment of one person triggers in another a like response to some other service. Thus positive human action grows into supportive networks. We live truthfully and are of the truth when our words and actions reveal the truth about the world and its realities.

STRUGGLES THAT BRING HOPE - Mar 1

Frustrations, resentments and even righteous indignation describe my feelings in relation to matters that lay heavily upon us through the world's dominant ways of thinking and doing. I resent the fast pace the world thrusts upon us. Everyone seems in a big hurry. For instance, it seems we can't get our computers to work fast enough. I resent all manner of violence and the illusionary notion that violence is redemptive, that it finally resolves things. I resent the prevailing desire for comfort and material excess, as illustrated, for example, by news from Bosnia followed immediately by a travel commercial touting a weekend in Jamaica. I resent usury whereby excessive interest and interest-taking in general impacts upon all people, especially the poor, and how it destabilizes economics the world over.

I am grateful, though, that I struggle to understand my resentments, because I don't like being resentful, that is, I don't want to turn sour and negative and offer nothing but complaints. If I understand why I am resentful, then I should be able to respond in a positive and helpful manner.

I realize there are two basic reasons I resent these worldly addictions. First, they work against a free, just and sustainable world; and second, they have me hooked in so many ways, which means I am part of the process and problem. But knowing I am hooked means I can to a degree act to get unhooked. But it is hard and I resent it. My resentment is eased somewhat against those who are more or less full participants in these worldly addictions, because they too are hooked and so many do not realize they are.

It is through our loss, our pain, our brokenness that we become aware of the steps that need to be taken to deal with what we face. They thus call us and direct us. The loss brings with it a gift. That gift is a mission to act in some way. We can allow God to channel our resentments toward positive, life-giving action.

I often feel at a loss doing things that counteract the evils within our addictions to speed, violence, comfort and usury. That is the greatest loss or frustration I feel. It is a loss I mourn and grieve, and mourning brings with it a deep urge toward positive action. It means that the loss I feel brings a gift, a reason not to give in, a reason for living. The gift is a mission to pursue a just and sustainable world that adequately provides for everyone. I have been calling it Equal Access. I still do.

So I am grateful for an engagement I know to be acceptable to God; and that gratefulness is amplified through the knowledge of and acquaintance with those engaged in like struggles and missions through spirit-filled words and actions.

In case you haven't noticed, the world is money-crazy. Money is such a central and pivotal issue that is critical to all human endeavors and needs. The Apostle Paul reminded Timothy that "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil." Jesus, of course, said that you can not serve God and mammon, meaning wealth or money. The following statement though, by a prominent industrialist, is rather telling in its impact:

"Capital must be served." That's saying that money is not meant to serve but to be served, so that interest is charged according to what the traffic will bear. Many then, find themselves on the side of money (mammon) and ignore the idea of servanthood.

We pay interest not only on what we personally borrow but also on what government (federal-state-local) borrows, and on the things we buy, the price of which covers interest costs of manufacturers, distributors, etc. -30 percent or more. We are dealing with government debt that builds up faster than income can handle due to the exponential effect of compound interest. For the same reason, third world countries pay hundreds of millions into the coffers of rich developed nations. Also, interest and inflation feed on each other. All in all most of the world's money systems favor the rich over the poor, making them unjust systems and in many ways unconstitutional systems.

From Biblical times and before, through the Dark Ages, the feudal years, and the Industrial Revolution that extends to us, the few have controlled and manipulated the many. Shall it always be this way? Assuming that the gap between rich and poor continues and widens, and that this disparity keeps the majority in various states of hopeless need; how is it that the few can thus hold sway over the many, and what actions can spirit-led people take to bring adequacy to the many?

I am aware that "affirmative action" is a politically loaded term these days; nevertheless, it is a term that enables me to address the oppressive use of interest. And since the use of interest is oppressive in so many ways, it can properly be call "usury."

I understand affirmative action as action taken to redress conditions adversely affecting the poor, the powerless and those not considered "mainstream." In the days of Moses such action was sought from Egypt on behalf of the Hebrews. Later, as they established their own code for community living (the ten commandments and the Law) they ruled against charging interest to one another as they moved into the Promised Land where they lived in proximity to those foreign and hostile to their faith. It was affirmative action they themselves promoted within their own community. They did not, however rule out charging interest to their foreign neighbors.

Coming to the Christian faith instituted by Jesus of Nazareth, we find that the people addressed were living under the oppressive rule of the Romans. Walter Wink, in his Engaging the Powers, gives us a pretty good idea of the affirmative action Jesus proposed. When he instructs them to turn the left cheek when struck on the right cheek, to give their creditors their undergarments as well as their outer garments, and to carry a soldier's pack a second mile (which the soldier could not compel)-all these are given as creative ways to expose the oppression so that even the oppressors could see it for what it really was.

These illustrations are then followed by instructions to "give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you." This is saying to the poor and oppressed people to look out for one another and unhook yourself from the grasp of those who enslave you with interest charges and other unscrupulous ways. Avoid them by helping each other.

It appears to me that the Biblical understanding against interest is a bottom-up focus rather than a top-down focus. The focus is on what people themselves can do,, not on what they expect and depend on those at the top to do for them. You see, what we can do, we can do. What others at the top can do for us may or may not ever be done. But doing what we can do shows the way for others, even those at the top.

My action in writing is to help us all be aware of what we continue to face by relying on the use of interest-taking that becomes usurious in so many ways. Another action I hope for and am pursuing is to be involved in some local focus or entity that allows those of us who have more than we need to use it to lift others to adequacy through economic viability.

What we need to move away from, to use Margrit Kennedy's words, is creating that "private tollgate where those who have less than they need (must) pay a fee to those who have more than they need." I point this out because it is in this way that the poorer folk thus make the rich richer.

TO ACT OR BE ACTED UPON - April 15

"To act or be acted upon" reminds us a lot of Shakespeare's "to be or not to be." With so much action and control coming down from above by those who have been given power or who have assumed power and authority, many of us today feel "acted upon." We feel there is little we can do, few actions we can take, enabling us to feel we are not being controlled and manipulated; because the powers and authorities who act on a national or international scale are able to make deals and call shots that act upon us all. All we need to remind ourselves of this are those like the keyboard traders who work the world's markets whereby they affect world and national economies. And so, we feel there is little or nothing we can do. But this is not so.

In hope we are saved. We can find the right ways to respond, to act. The Apostle Paul adds these words about hope: "Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see we wait for it with patience." (Romans 8:24-25) The key, I believe, is waiting with patience. Such waiting with patience is a spiritual thing. It is what spirituality oriented people of faith are able to offer. But as Henri Nouwen points out as he views it from scripture, the nature of such waiting is not passive but active waiting. (From a "spirituality of Waiting," The Weavers Reader: Living with God in the World, Upper Room Books, Nashville, 1993. He says, "A waiting person is a patient person. The word "patient" means the willingness to stay where we are and live the situation out to the full in the belief that something hidden will manifest itself to us. Impatient people are always expecting the real thing to happen somewhere else and therefore want to go elsewhere." Such waiting for something to be revealed is a spiritual thing. It calls us to stay put and be actively alert to what's happening and not try to run away through some sort of escape.

Waiting is not easy for us. Maybe that's why we are so addicted to speed. We feel we must get going and take some sort of action. Sometimes we say any kind of action is better than just waiting and doing nothing. That's where we get into trouble, for so often the actions we take are retaliatory upon those who act upon us and they become violent responses and we in turn act upon others to their own hurt.

The scale (size) of business and industrial enterprises and the scope of commerce illustrates to a large degree the numbers who are in control and the numbers who are being acted upon. The larger the scale and broader the scope, the smaller the controlling group, relatively speaking, and the larger the number being acted upon-- For instance, money systems show us the extent of economic activity. In the U.S. a national currency where circulation of money is state to state and coast to coast means a national economy controlled by the larger scale enterprises and entities; This means, as happens many times, that one city will lose an industry and jobs to another city with little or no say-so.

Step that up to the international scene where money is circulated worldwide through computer networks and the like, and instead of cities losing and gaining, it becomes countries losing and gaining. The number ratios remain relatively the same but the increase frightening and deadly.

One of the slogans going around is, "Think globally; act locally." A world or national economy that determines so much of local activity makes much of that activity, an acceptance of "what is" with little choice.

-Unless-Unless we decide to do things the way we want to do them; unless we want to have a considerable degree of local control over our own localities, there are things we can do to accomplish that.

A good friend and I (Graeme, a VISTA worker with New Land Jobs) are exploring ways for economic development and control. This I will share in "Steps in Access."

I pray for you and all your associates the spiritual seeking and orientation that enables you to offer sound and uplifting ways to "act," especially when adversely "acted upon."

STEPS IN ACCESS - Local Economic Development

E. F. Schumacher's Small is Beautiful has been prophetic in warning against bigness. He felt that appropriate size (scale) is the key to viable and equitable economic endeavors. Since bigness tends to put more and more people under the control of relatively less and less people at the top, economic entities needed to be structured more democratically and on a scale appropriate to the scope of operation. In effect, he pointed out that the bigness we seek will not stand. The structuring of corporations and the decentralization we now see bears this out.

People will not for long submit to being acted upon. Inappropriate

reactions often take place, but there are also positive actions being taken to engage *more* people in active economic participation. We are exploring some of these programs that might be pursued in Lynchburg. Barter Enhancement through the use of local script money is one. The argument for it is, unlike national currency that makes a few transaction and leaves town, local money stays and circulates over and over thereby creating jobs and generally strengthening the local economy. For a number of years people associated with the Schumacher Society have used the "Berkshare," backed by a cord of wood as a trading medium in the Berkshire Hills of Massachusetts. In Ithaca, N.Y. Paul Glover oversees the use of "Ithaca Hours," based on an hour's work for local trading. He reports that numerous other communities across the country are instituting this kind of local economic action. When I wrote for the plan, he gave me the names of two others in Virginia who asked for it, one in Galax, and another in Staunton.

Employee stock Option Plan (ESOP) is a growing phenomenon in the country which will bring *pp*\$fg democratic involvement through employee ownership, another of the things we are exploring.

Micro-Enterprises is still another. Entrepreneurship is another growing economic trend. Micro-enterprises are particularly suited for the economic empowerment of the more modestly educated and simpler skilled people who can most likely better do their own thing than work for minimum wage.

Others are the use of Credit Unions, Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS), the Grameen Bank program and the like.

REFLECTIONS ON COMMUNITY - June 1

Genesis 2:18-25 tells of God's desire for man to have a suitable helper or partner, because "it is not good that man should be alone." God then created the animals that man named, but none were worthy as a suitable helper or companion. God then proceeded to bring into being woman as the suitable helper g. partner. The word for helper, "ezer," according to Phyllis Tribble (God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality), means more than a subordinate person, but "a companion who has the power to bring fulfillment." I believe we do well to look more to God's interest in ensuring that humans had companions with the quality for true intimacy and friendship rather than dwelling on male domination.

A number of times I have heard Bev Cosby mention hearing a speaker at UVA in Charlottesville, Julian Hart, emphasize that the one thing God wants and humans have rarely achieved is community. In this writing I am reflecting on community.

The concept of community is grounded in the recognition that everything depends upon and is related to everything else, which means that nothing really stands alone in isolation. The early Hebrew structure (Leviticus 25) makes provision that all persons living within their communities be adequately cared for, that none should be "left out." Community in nature, with all the interdependent relationships, tends toward maintaining a sustainable balance that promotes growth, perpetuates species and keeps community among all the varied life forms. Our human tendency to focus on certain things in more or less isolation interrupts that balance when dealing with nature, but also in dealing with Human Nature.

Scientists recognize that the introduction of anything new, for instance, a tomato with qualities more suitable for shipping, can bring unpredictable results in other areas due to how relationships are affecting in the growing and handling of it. Not unlike this, the community within communities we once knew has been seriously interrupted by high mobility and the fast pace ~ of living. Margaret Mead warned years ago of how mobility would affect family life and structures. Mobility makes it difficult to be "at home" in a place because we are uprooted so many times. The understanding of Native Americans gives us a clue when they say, "People don't own the land; the land owns the people." This is true particularly of people who live on, work and depend on the land. In reality it applies to everyone.

We understand that transplanting plants is quite a shock for the plants. For that reason I avoid transplanting Romaine lettuce by sowing the seed in the hills and thinning to one plant. Likewise, when we are transplanted in a new place there is the shock of adjustment, of becoming rooted again in that place. Thus mobility and the fast pace of living continually force us to struggle to become rooted in community in a new place. The result for many is a sense of isolation and even of real isolation. When we think of ourselves as strangers and are thought

of as strangers, we are open to many negative feelings and relationships. The essential interdependence of community is not always there for us.

My mother at 92 enjoys looking back at times we once knew. Those looks tell us something of the loss in community that has occurred. One particular thing I can say about my mother is that she is a community person. She has a way of quickly becoming rooted wherever she is. She gets to know her neighbors. I remember a widow with a small girl child who moved into our neighborhood. In spite of the fact that she never told exactly where she came from my mother did not let this keep her from relating with friendship and help. She involved me in that friendship as well by having me treat kindly the little girl. She would have me take her riding in my Radio Flyer wagon.

Community life was important to Mom. She was vitally involved in the Home Demonstration Club. I still remember the picnics and the plays they sponsored, with Mom and Dad taking leading roles in the plays that were presented at the local school. I remember a picnic in which I split the seat of the union suit I was wearing. Mom made it from bleached Smith-Douglas fertilizer bags. Those were the Depression Days when such creativity was needed.

We were always involved in other shared experiences of the neighborhood, in both work and play: wood cuttings, corn shuckings, wheat threshings, ice cream suppers, fishfries, and music-making on Saturday nights. All these were the involvements and relationships that made community in our neighborhood.

My mother has lived in four different places since marriage, all within close proximity except for where she now lives. My wife and I are now living in our tenth place since we were married. Wherever Mom was she always got to know her neighbors and kept frequent and helpful contact, with some on a daily basis. Right now she has a friend who visits her daily in the health care facility where she receives therapy for a fall. I must admit to my failings when she has visited me and gotten to know the neighbors I had not gotten to know.

People I try to acquaint myself with in relation to sustainability, equal access and fairness are all people who recognize and advocate community. E. F. Schumacher (Fritz to those who knew him) was always on the side of the "little people," the marginalized, for whom he desired food, clothing, shelter and a little culture. Wendell Berry reflected on the loss of community in his own neighborhood, but more adequately and eloquently than I have done. Wes Jackson and his wife Dana are now in the process of building an intentional community in Matfield, Kansas, where fairness to people and the environment are the goals.

All these and many others I read about recognize the essential place of community as sought through the cultivation of the Spirit that leads and empowers us. Today when we remember our faith history, that remembrance which the Spirit provides is more than a recollection of data, it is a remembrance of the past that enables us to deal with the present. Remembering the past we can, with an attitude of present

thanksgiving and obedience, shape a right response to God in the present-

For myself and everyone, I pray for an attitude in which we approach all persons as friends and neighbors. We may risk getting a negative response, but that first approach gives us our cue for caution if it is needed* Otherwise, there is such beauty in reaching out and assuming that friendship, neighbor!!ness and community are possible.

TRADITION, COMMUNITY, GIFTS - July 15

This past month or so three subjects have come to occupy my attention: Tradition, Community and Gifts.

On Sunday, June 26, 1994, we attended a celebration at Macedonia Christian Church in Orange County, Va. On September 7, 1993, fire set by vandals gutted the Sunday School rooms and water and smoke damage made the sanctuary unusable.

Having myself served the congregation three years in the late 60's, I became personally aware of the very strong tradition of the congregation as an *open*, loving and giving people. For years and years they have consistently given as much budgetwise to outreach causes as for local operations. This liberal, loving and open tradition enabled their faith to "kick-in" following this devastating loss. It enabled them to pull together to evaluate resources, make prompt decisions and work faithfully together.

Tradition can be like a well-laid railroad tract that speeds us on our way; or it can be like a rutty road that slows us down and even get us stuck. Tradition can facilitate renewal or make it almost impossible. As the process of making things standard practice, tradition should enable a group to maintain the strength and vitality that brought it into being.

But when that strength, vitality and purposefulness is eroded so that less desirable practices prevail, then come the ruts. So often such erosion comes because money has been thought to be handled in a questionable manner or doctrinal views are held so strongly as to negate tolerance toward holders of other views. Tradition reflecting such attitudes make renewal very difficult, making it hard to get where we need to be in regard to purpose, a right spirit within, and right relationships.

The result at Macedonia: Within the year the church building was made like new, and we celebrated with them as a renewed congregation in their debt-free facility.

Community: Communities must have something in common in order to exist, to have a sense of community. The farming community of the depression years that I experienced as a boy had the common glue of survival to hold it together. Many such communities, as people living in definite locations, no longer exist. Common circumstances and strivings related to the locations themselves have been supplanted. Community as that sense of similarity and agreement in the pursuit of the common good is missing. Disruptions have come due to bigness and mobility. These realities have destroyed the livelihoods of many marginalized people or caused them to move hither and yon in order to stay alive economically. The demands and consequences of bigness and mobility tend to make us look for answers at the top. We tend to expect the president, or Congress, or business and industrial leaders to solve things. Thinking there is not much we can do, we shift the burden to them, so often forgetting that the leaders we choose or allow to call the shots are

pretty much what we are.

What we get are other kinds of communities: the business community, the academic community, the insurance community, the industrial community, the health-care community and other communities of self-interest who have the common good of their particular community at heart. Somehow their interests need to contribute to the welfare of society in general.

The building of community needs to take place in our local areas. To me that puts the ball in our court. It calls us to assume some of the burden we shift to the top. Fortunately, there are two other kinds of community to which these self-interest community members also belong. They are the extended family and the faith community. These two communities can cut across the others to give a more true sense of the common good.

Joe Nangle, O.F.M., in the July 1994 Sojourners, writes about a community "heart person." This is a person who is consistently at the center of the community's life, a servant-style person who is in touch with people and does the little essential things that makes things run smoothly.. I believe some very creative things can be done to enable our families and congregations to have a positive impact upon special-interest groups and society in general. I can envision a person who facilitates family members and congregational members in the sharing of what's important to them—what they are doing that contributes to the best we seek. We all have families and all of Us can belong to a faith community. There is a lot that can be done here.

Gifts: Recently I came to realize there are two kinds of gifts, what we call "pure" gifts and "derived" gifts A derived gift can be illustrated by the application of people's gifts to arrive at or develop the surgical procedures and other modern medical advances we have today. A pure gift is one we discover without all that application. We sort of stumble on to it.

Chelation therapy (key-lay-shum) is an intravenous therapy given to accomplish such health goals as removable of toxic metals, improve circulation, reverse hardness of the arteries, aid in the removal of vascular plaque and other age-related diseases. (I call it vascular therapy.) It could eliminate the need for many of the heart bypass operations being done today..

The active ingredient is Ethylene-Diamine-Tetracetic-Acid (EDTA), first used to treat victims of chemical warfare after WWII, and later used in the U.S. to treat for lead poisoning. Its use led to the discovery of improvement in persons with problems of angina, arthritis, etc. With further exploration and the development of proper dosage and treatment procedures, numerous patients have been offered a second chance at health in the face of limited and often drastic options such as bypass surgery and amputations.

Chelation therapy, like so many drugs and procedures awaiting approval by the powers-that-be, is pursuing that approval. If all that is claimed for it is true, then the discovery of the benefits are "pure

gift."

Through traditions that maintain our purpose and zeal; through community life that more truly pursues the common good; through our openness to receive the pure gifts, and through our willingness to work toward the derived gifts, we can better assure access to the basics of life for all people.

I pray for you as a person with the capacity to contribute to the good life God means all people to have.

WRESTLINGS - Sept 1

I write to share my own recent wrestlings, hoping it will in some way reinforce your own and thereby be an encouragement.

To begin with, I understand two kinds of gifts as distinguished from pure gifts and derived gifts dealt with in my last letter. The two are: gifts of the Spirit and gifts for doing things. The gifts of the Spirit as given in Galatians 5:22-23 are: love, joy, peace, patience kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. The gifts for doing things as described in Romans 12: 6-8 are: prophesying, ministering, teaching, exhorting, giving with generosity, diligence in leading and cheerful compassion. I find that just as the gifts of the Spirit keep us committed to the good things we do, so also our prayer life and openness to the leading of the Spirit undergirds the gifts of the Spirit.

Being now in the midst of some very enlightening and challenging reading, I need that openness to the leading of the Spirit. I am finding more and more that by reflecting on my dreams I get insights and some sense of direction; but when the dreams are mixed up and confusing they can also show the state of flux I'm in. I suppose that in our sleep our minds are free from so much conscious thought that our dreams give us a less cluttered view of where we are. Thus they can show our confusion and reveal insights.

For heart and health's sake I walk every day. I find also that the quiet of early morning, the steady automatic rhythm of stepping and breathing and arm-swinging, are conducing to freeing up the mind so that I am not prone to think about what I'm going to think about. Whatever comes comes. Some things you let pass while other thoughts you can take in and reflect on. I find that this kind of openness to free-flowing thoughts becomes a spiritual exercise as well as good physical therapy.

Before going to sleep the other night Mary read in a book she was reading a quotation by Fred Craddock, professor of preaching at Candler School of Theology. With that in my mind I dreamed about a minister who was meeting with my mother in some sort of counseling session. It seemed as though the minister was more interested in his personal professional performance than in hearing my mother's concerns. Upon later reflection on this insight, I thought about the matter of professionalism among people who minister that is more secular than faith oriented. It seems to me the focus should be more on competent care than on personal performance, as important as that may be.

I get back now to the reading that has me in a state of flux. It relates to Equal Access, the pursuit of access to the basics of life for all people in an equitable and sustainable way. It includes many concerns such as hunger, jobs, the economy, money systems, trade and whatever puts people in dire circumstances. But in the final analysis it comes down to the use and care of the habitat we call Earth.

Properly used and cared for we can make it into the future, otherwise we will find ourselves in a hell of famine and violence like that in some of the African countries. Increasingly I read and study those who say we must find a way out of our squanderously, wasteful and disproportionate distribution of earth's resources. When I read of the cosmic or universal nature and consequences of what we face, I am somewhat at a loss as to how I need to proceed with my writing ministry. That's my state of flux.

Where do I come down in what I do? Realizing that any and all efforts to lift people to adequacy and decency are part of the total picture, do I focus on one particular effort or do I try to deal with the big picture?

Recently I began exploring membership in the Samaritan Inns Mission Group where my wife is involved. I realize that whether significantly involved or involved in a larger overall supportive sense, it is important to be involved with a person, otherwise I won't know what I am about. I won't have a proper grasp of what's involved in ministering to someone or they to me through their need. All of us need to devote ourselves to some special uplifting cause. Yet some of us need to devote ourselves to remembering, reminding and trying to figure out what's ahead. That leads me to stay engaged in the latter, realizing how blissfully unaware so many people are. But with someone to relate to in a helpful manner I can know the meaning of all our efforts in uplifting--persons.

To let you know what I'm reading I need to go back to people like Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson.

Wendell Berry: "The earth is what we all have in common, it is what we are made of and what we live from, and we cannot damage it without damaging those with whom we share it. There is an uncanny resemblance between our behavior to each other and our behavior toward the earth. By some connection we do not recognize, the willingness to exploit one becomes the willingness to exploit the other...It is impossible to care for each other more or differently than we care for the earth."

Wes Jackson: (on sustaining the soil) "Because we are a fallen species, and by this I mean a species out of context with the nature that spawned us, we are now forced into being participants in the Creation in a manner unprecedented by any other species probably in this part of the sidereal universe. Though the chance to be a participant in the Creation may be in the category of adventure, it is a frightening adventure, for we might fail. For openers we may not have the ethical stretch in this paleolithic being of ours. We could get tired before we really begin."

I just finished Thomas Berry's The Dream of Earth in which he calls us to take up the creative role that Wes Jackson refers to. He reminds us of something many have overlooked or kept down, that humans are a species of nature as are all other living beings. He sets forth for us the role of making and keeping the earth as the beautiful and supportive habitat it is meant to be. It is a role in which we recognize and make real our kinship with all other life forms, and

give them their place and due. He envisions the undertaking Jackson alludes to as the beginning of a new age, the Ecozoic Age, which is the title he gives another book.

Right now I am reading Original Blessing by Matthew Fox. In it he gives us an understanding of where we got off base to become squanderers, wasters, destroyers and the oppressors we are. He points out that the theological concept of original blessing goes much farther back than that of original sin as put forward by St. Augustine. He asks why Western Christian theology has given a more important role to original sin than did its originator, St. Augustine. He believes the reason is political, that an exaggerated doctrine of original sin, employed as a starting point for spirituality "Plays into the hands of empire-builders, slave-masters and patriarchal society in general." (p.54) He sees, on the other hand, that Blessing is politically dangerous because when people savor the good things of Blessing, they are aware of how they are denied, which means that Blessing leads to justice-making and a passionate criticism of controlling powers.

May this prayer by Walter Rauschenbusch speak to you of new possibilities in a world that blesses everyone.

O God, we thank Thee for this universe, our great home; for its vastness and its riches, and for the manifoldness of the life which teems upon it of which we are a part.

We praise Thee for the salt sea and the running water, for the everlasting hills, for the trees, and for the grass under our feet,

We praise Thee for the arching sky and blessed winds, for the driving clouds and the constellations on high.

We thank Thee for our senses by which we can see the splendor of the morning, and hear the jubilant songs of love, and smell the breath of the springtime.

Grant us, we pray Thee, a heart wide open to all this joy and beauty.

***THOUGHTS ON COMPASSION, CREATIVITY,
EQUALITY, INTERDEPENDENCE and CONSCIOUSNESS - Oct 15***

Questions to Ponder:

Do we create or do we destroy?

Can we accept as our equal both high and Low?

What's wrong? What's right? What's possible? These Questions we need to work with as people of Faith who have a redemptive role in the world. We can only know what's possible by evaluating what's wrong and what's right so as to act in bringing about the most meaningful and helpful possibilities. Dag Hammarskjold's question: "Do you create or do you destroy?" is crucial.

Another question: How do compassion, equality, interdependence, creativity and consciousness relate to the right-wrong-possible process? As I read and reflects words like these stand out as realities enabling us to move toward present possibilities. Thomas Berry describes contemporary creativity as consisting in "activating expressing and fulfilling the universe process within the possibilities of our historical moment." (Original Blessing, p.178) Our consciousness or lack of consciousness about the importance of realities like equality in relation to the possibilities within compassion and creativity is crucial. So much of the things that are wrong relate to the way the earth is cared for and the way people act or are acted upon. They center in a basic satisfaction with the way things are: the way things are for the poor, homeless, ignorant, sick, etc.; the way things are with the too-wealthy and too-powerful; the way things are with violent treatment of classes of people; the way things are with unthinking destruction, misuse and waste of earth's resources; the way things are with unjust economic systems; the way things are with war as a degrading way to solve differences; or to simply summarize, the way things are.

Certainly though, there is much being done that is right in dealing with these negative, oppressive, degrading and unjust ways. They form the basic agenda for governments and other entities. But more needs to be done if we are to be about our redemptive work; and more is being put forward by thoughtful, intuitive people who are daring enough to offer and employ different ways of thinking and acting contrary to the status quo.

As I read Matthew Fox and people like Dorothy Day, Meister Eckhart, Albert Einstein and many others whom Fox brings into his writing, I see two vital areas of awareness for us. This is where consciousness comes in. One is the consciousness of our own creativity (powers that create and powers that destroy), described as the "fearful creative power of God" in us, which is responsible for what's wrong and what's right and also for that which can be made right. Our redemptive role is to use our creativity toward worthy human goals that are a blessing to the earth and its inhabitants. Following are some of

Fox's words about creativity.

"Creativity is not tiptoeing through the tulips; it is not a Donny and Marie Osmond entertainment program. Creativity—whether we are talking about the powers to make a Trident submarine or the nuclear missiles that go on it, or the power to build a table for the living room or to write a poem to a loved one—creativity is so divine that it is awesome. Truly it is a 'fearful creative power,' as Eckhart pointed out. We need, both as individuals and as peoples, to face creativity and the fears it conjures up...learn reverence for it, a deep, divine "fear of the Lord* reverence. We need to befriend creativity, embrace the shadow it extends over all of us, and love it as we have never learned to love any enemy or any friend in our whole lives. We need to wrestle with creativity the way Jacob wrestled with the angel."
(OB.182)

Another area of awareness is the consciousness of the reality that equality in relationships is basic to friendship and peace. To put it negatively, subject/ object or superior/inferior relationships set us at odds with one another from individuals to nations. Equality, it seems evident to me, grows out of interdependence. Hildegarde of Bengin describes interdependence this way: "God has arranged all things in the world in consideration of everything else;" and Meister Eckhart with these words: "One creature sustains another, one enriches the other, and that is why all creatures are interdependent." (OB.279)

When the Apostle Paul describes the Church in terms of the human body (1 Cor.12), he describes interdependence in which the lesser parts are just as significant as the major parts. This leads us to recognize, in relations to the contributions of various people, that there are no lesser gifts, no high or low, no superior/ inferior relationships. So to understand interdependence is to understand equality.

To understand compassion is to enter into a consciousness of interdependence and equality. In Luke 6:36, Jesus is quoted as follows: "Be you compassionate as your Creator is compassionate." The equality God recognizes, revealed as showing "no partiality," is vital to the meaning of compassion. To define it as being about relationships among equals is therefore correct.

But a recent definition in the Oxford English Dictionary, as pointed out by Fox, terms this definition "absolute," a misdefinition says Fox. In current usage the dictionary definition is described as a superior/ inferior relationship. Though common usage is what defines the words we use, it changes radically the meaning of words like compassion, a word of singular importance to Jesus and his message. To give it a subject/ object definition of relationships opens up to guilt-reducing actions, a salving of conscience as we respond out of a supposed superiority toward the so-called inferior, not to mention what it does to receivers whom we might term lesser persons. It is clear to me that we need to redeem compassion from what the world thrusts upon us through common usage. It is clear to me that compassion requires equality in relationships, not subject/object relationships.

I pray for an increasing awareness of our powers of creativity, the

powers that enable us to create or destroy, but powers that bring into being the "possibilities of our historical moment." I pray also and equally for our awareness that compassion and right relationships requires a consciousness of the equality of all people, for when we think deeply about it, it is what enables friendship and peace to exist. As always, I pray for you in relation to all the good you are doing and for all the good you can, would and will do.

OUR GREATEST MEANING AND JOY - From Visions of Despair to Visions of Hope - Dec 1

Having gone through what many describe as the most negative political campaign, we are quite aware of the many negatives of life. They are negatives of suspicion and hostility that can lead to meanness of spirit, violence and all manner of injustice. Such negatives give us great difficulty in fighting off visions of despair.

What might it take to turn us from visions of despair to visions of hope? Something seems to keep us from focusing on what we really want—peace, justice, adequacy, sustainable lives and so on. Due to all the negatives we face in our day, so many are unable to experience the excitement and meaning that comes in responding to a call of God. My own experience and that of others I know is that there is nothing like it. There is nothing like giving oneself to a particular calling that fits within a broader vision of hope, a vision embracing God's agenda.

My greatest desire is that more and more people come to know this kind of involvement and the excitement, meaning and joy it brings. My concern is how we can move from visions of despair that numb us and hold us back to visions of hope with expectancy toward all the wonderful possibilities before us. I write out of that concern.

The truth that "without vision the people perish" stares us in the face. The word "vision" is of course neutral, meaning we can speak of visions of despair as well as visions of hope. Yet I believe most of us as people of Faith see vision as positive. Our orientation tells us that vision takes in those seemingly impossible things like bringing an end to hunger, exploitation of people and the squandering of earth's resources.

So we envision a caring world and a world cared for. Visions are those seemingly impossible possibilities toward which God leads and calls us. The calls within those broad visions are those specific things people undertake as steps toward one of those visions, as tiny and as insignificant as the call may seem. Yet we who are called know with an inner conviction and confidence that we are taking a definite step toward the vision. We take them trusting that others will take their own unique steps so that the combination of calls responded to make the movement toward the vision much more discernible. That trust enables us to hang on, not burn out, especially when we learn of and are inspired by the calls and efforts of others.

Everyone of us has the need and the desire to contribute in some way to the common good. That need and desire leads to a calling, a calling in which we give our selves to something that fits our capabilities and a deeply felt obvious need. Responding in this way, though simple in approach and demanding in practice, gives us a meaningful life. How then, can we overcome those visions of despair that hold us back?

First of all we can realize, I believe, that most of the news we are fed is an aberration of the norm. If we can always be aware of that it

can provide a much more positive outlook as we deal with all the discouraging, disheartening, and tragic things that are the news of the day. Most of the news we get is news because it is a turning away from or violation of the norm. So what most of the news we get is about things not normal or commonplace, things that go wrong; whereas, we can rejoice, I believe, in the realization that the great majority of actions and happenings in the world are normal, stable, constructive and up-building. They are things we seldom hear about. They are the "no news" that is "good news."⁴¹ With confidence in the good news we are not overwhelmed by the bad, so that we can act to deal with the bad.

Secondly, we act as sensors. By being sensors we can come to grips with the bad news. Being placed amid all the things happening around us, we can sense what is good and not so good. Being made in the image of the Creator and having been given the responsibility of dominion, we can report to God what's going on. We can articulate and cry out to God how people are starving, how some are ravaging the earth, how cruel and dreadful and devastating life is for so many people.

Walter Wink tells us that "history belongs to the intercessors." This means we can co-create with God through prayer. As intercessors we can cry out to God the world's pain and communicate in ways that sensitize others to that pain. Thus sensitized they may respond to numerous calls of God to bring alleviation and solutions.

A third thing we might do in moving toward visions of hope is to be advocates for persons exploring call and to those already engaged in called ministries. That's where I am at this time. A basic reason for my writing is to provide awareness of need and prayerful words of encouragement to people of Faith. Having just completed our Servant Leadership on call, I am considering a a further step, that of working as a mission advocate. This would be a localized mission providing enabling support to those seeking clarification and affirmation of call and continuing support for those already engaged in various ministries.

New Land Industries, New Land Jobs, and the Samaritan Inns (The Gateway for homeless men and Miriam's House for Homeless women) are among existing ministries that need our intercessions and basic spiritual under-girding. Prison ministry, animal rights ministry, ministry to the handicapped, sustainable economy, sustainable agriculture and so on are some of the callings various people are drawn to.

A very basic responsibility of the Church is to call forth persons gifts in the discovery, clarification and affirmation of their call, which is relevant to enlisting people in the Christian Faith. The existing ministries already mentioned have come into being only after much prayerful support and exploration. Please keep us in your prayers as we work to fulfill the "calling forth" responsibility for our congregation. We most certainly pray for you as you seek to enlist and engage people in genuine ministry.

The step for me personally is one of moving from awareness and encouragement to working in an active way with those who have been

sensitized to the world's pain as it exists in our community.

Perhaps there's something here for you and your community. We believe such calling forth and support of people can make real the peace and goodwill that was announced that first Christmas.

SELECTED LETTERS — 1995

IN WHAT DIRECTION? - Jan 15

In what direction are we moving? Will that direction foster the world God wants for humankind and Creation?

Prophetic people read the signs of the times and through these signs the perceived realities people respond to. Thus they can tell you what's going to happen. When we act as though something is true, be it true or not, we begin movement toward what we perceives to be true. There is a close relationship, I believe, between the truth that we reap what we sow and the idea of self-fulfilling prophecy. The direction we take determines our destination. A nation that values or believes in individual freedom can predict that individual freedom will prevail.

In the Jan 3, 1995 Lynchburg News and Advance, columnist Tommy Denton wrote about Alexis de Tocqueville, a French political scientist, historian and politician who felt that "A manifest commitment to individual freedom in the American political and cultural fabric (was) necessarily admirable--within limits. The greatest danger he thought, was the perilous potential for the emergence of a philosophy that would fray the tenuous strands of common purpose that holds a people together.

Denton goes on to describe how he feels Tocqueville's greatest fear has already been realized. His description included words like coarse and uncivil, narrow factionalism, distance between people, freedom as an absolute right, impersonal financial decisions, political gridlock, moral vacuum and the like. He quotes Amitai Etzioni who helped found a movement called communitarianism. In his book, The Spirit of Community, Etzioni wrote about moral transition and said, "Moral transition often works this way: Destruction comes quickly. A vacuum prevails. Reconstruction is slow. It is time to reconstruct."

Denton concludes: "In an age of confusion, a people that hopes to have any influence over its destiny, must finally concede the futility of worshipping individual rights at the expense of the common good that protects and preserves the rights of all."

Tocqueville could see what unbridled freedom might bring. To me, the pursuit of individual freedom beyond appropriate limits sucks from the common good. The real objective is to hold people together through common purpose. It is time now. to get real.

Included in Elizabeth O'Connor's Our Many Selves is an account about a blind twelve-year-old boy taken out of school because he was supposedly out of touch with reality (pp 153 ff) (The story appeared in The New York Times, Jan 4, 1959, written by Howard A Rusk, M.D., and was

entitled "Light in Darkness,") Having been born blind, the boy could not understand all the talk about integration and how people were so concerned about color, the color of people's skin. He felt lucky not to know anything about color.

Being very dependent upon a sense of hearing, he told about losing his bearings when this sense was interrupted by very loud noises, or when he got off a known way by an obstacle that suddenly appeared in his way. These experiences brought a loss of direction, an awful feeling of not knowing where he was, which way to turn or which way to go. He felt that the worse thing is to lose all sense of direction.

He said that if wishes could come true, he would wish to see; but if he had only one wish he would not waste it wishing to see, but that everyone could understand one another and understand how a person feels inside.

This little story says a lot about who is in touch with reality and how vital a sense of direction is.

My greatest desire is that more and more people come to know the meaning of excitement, joy and fulfillment in responding to a call of God, that more and more people discover, develop and engage in that particular thing that fits within and embraces God's agenda for humankind and Creation. My greatest desire is that more and more people come to know the direction of God's leading and find the engagement that corresponds to that direction.

In what direction are we moving? Will that direction foster the world God wants?

A new Year offers us a chance to consider the direction in which we are moving. I have chosen some treasured quotations that help us think about who we are and where we're headed. To get real and get on with the reconstruction needed, I believe it helpful to consider these time-tested quotations.

We are haunted by an ideal life, and it is because we have within us the beginning and possibility of it. —Phillips Brooks

The spirit of man is stronger than anything that can happen to it. — Robert Falcon Scott

There is no power on earth that can neutralize the influence of a high, pure, simple and useful life. —Booker T. Washington

I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving. —Oliver Wendell Holmes

The pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; The optimist the opportunity in every difficulty. —L.P. Jacks

What is required of us is that we love the difficult and learn to deal with it. In the difficult are the friendly forces, the hands that work

on us. -Rainer Maria Rilke

The Apostle Paul recognized "The friendly forces" when he wrote in Romans: "We boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." -Romans 5:3-5

I asked a man what made his life so radiant and bright. He answered: "Looking, looking toward the Light- -Anonymous

Jesus' words: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." -Matthew 12:37-40

Paul's words: "Owe no one anything except to love one another; for the one who loves has fulfilled the law. The commandments....are summed up in this word. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." -Romans 12:8-10

I want to live with the assurance that my words, actions, use of resources, etc. do not wrong a neighbor; do not bring denial of anything my neighbor needs or bring any kind of embarrassment or hurt. But more than this, I want to be engaged in that particular thing that fits within and embraces God's agenda as revealed by the One we call The Christ.

I pray that you and all others as well may respond to God's leading as it relates to the way God has equipped you to serve.

***THE THRESHING MACHINE AND THINGS - A look at the way
technology relates to and impacts upon livelihoods
and community - March 15***

Ever since the first hungry caveman threw a rock to kill a rabbit technology has been with us. It is a determining factor for livelihoods as well as for community. It is usually restrained or advanced by the powers that-be. For instance, several years ago a man in Florida developed an engine technology that would deliver 75 miles per gallon for a car. What happened to that technology? What restrained it? Automotive interests tied to petroleum interests?

The "Low Tech Page" of [Plain Magazine](#) got me to thinking technology and the role it plays in our lives, and how it needs to be appropriate if it is to impact for our good. Gene Logsdon writes in [Plain](#) about a wise use of the plow in which fields are plowed every four or five years in a crop rotation plan. At no time, except briefly, are fields left bare of vegetation. Even the plow, which turns the soil up on edge, does not completely stop the growth of the clover sod being plowed to winter over before seedbed preparation in the spring. So he writes about "green fields forever" and that only small farmers can execute such ecologically sound farming.

He writes to show an ecologically and economically sound alternative to large-scale, no-till or low-till, herbicidal-spraying practices in prominent use these days. It is high tech versus low tech. It tells me there is room for both and for the technologies in between. It re-enforces for me E.F. Schumacher's appropriate technology.

My Grandfather Morrison moved his entire family from West Virginia to Virginia around 1910, and put his sons to work plowing the cornfields of the big plantations along the James River west of Richmond. Some time after that they purchased the 428-acre farm where I was born. I remember now the old Fordson tractor with the steel-cleated wheels they used when I was a boy-for plowing, disking, wood-sawing and pulling the grain binder.

At grain harvesting time they would cut our grain and some of our neighbors. They would also go outside our immediate neighborhood to do this custom work for which a toll in grain was taken. The bundles of grain would be made into shocks in the field and stay for a while, after which they were taken to a central location and made into large stacks ready for threshing. Mr. Loftis or Mr. Kuhn would then make their rounds just as Dad had done with the binder.

The particular time I recall now was after I cut my foot splitting wood for the kitchen stove. This time Mr. Loftis came. With my foot on the mend I hobbled over to where they were threshing. I can still see Mearl, my older cousin and Dad up on the front of that Machine. Mearl would be cutting the strings off the bundles and Dad would shake them

loose a bit as he fed them head-first into the hopper where the heads were stripped from the stalks. Others would be handing the bundles over to Mearl from the stack. Meanwhile Mr. Loftis would be down on one side at the bottom about midway with his measuring buckets catching the grain as it was augured out. And at the back my older brother William and some others would be taking away the straw and stacking it. It would take eight or more people to keep that machine going.

Sometimes several neighbors would bring their grain to the location to be threshed. Quite often a big meal would be a part of the event. But meals together would be done on other occasions as well: for wood-cuttings, corn-shuckings, and harvesting of other crops. But few things brought us together for work like the threshing machine.

But there were times, very meaningful and enjoyable times when we came together: for ice cream suppers, Home Demonstration Club picnics, music-making, and plays at the local school house. My Dad was reasonably proficient with the guitar, banjo, violin and mandolin otherwise known as the "Tater Bug." He and Mom most often took lead parts in the plays. We once had a big laugh over one of Dad's WVA speech quirks. His line was "That's correct." He said, "That's CRACKED." What we're dealing with is community, community among rural people of the 1930's who needed one another to make it. They found that their work together brought the desire to be together for other reasons— for enrichment and fun. It was the Bowman's, for example, who took my brother and me to our first Sunday School at Ephesus Methodist Church up next to where my Great-Uncle Archer ran a store.

In that early Christian community in which Barnabas sold the field to meet the needs of those in want (so no one would be in want) (Acts 4:32-37), we see the sharing and caring community brings. We see creative actions to meet the needs of the group as they pursued an alternate way to the empire-dominated way of Palestine under Roman rule. For this they needed one another.

Common need is essential to community. Without it we are "play-acting," It is contrived, like children at play who say to one another, "Let's play like." In my boyhood community of the 1930's we needed one another. It's the same in your community and mine. As people of Faith we have faith needs. Our Faith needs to be under-girded, nourished, inspired, affirmed, etc. This we need to do for one another. In the ministries we undertake there are those who need the services we provide, and for us, we need to provide them lest we become cynical and dry up inside. Each of us needs to have our needs met according to the needs we have.

The rugged individualism that has been touted over the years says something else. It says we can make it on our own—that we can and ought to make it on our own. In many ways that kills community. Self-reliance is essential, of course, but it's not enough. It feeds on greed and down-plays the caring spirit. It just does not connect with the human bonding, the human solidarity we need, which God has revealed in God's Word. Thus community is the essential we strive for.

The powers-that-be have been the driving force that has developed the large-scale agricultural technologies. By Powers-that-be I mean agricultural interests tied to business, industrial, investment and governmental interests. Working with farm machinery manufacturers, chemical corporations, and other counseling entities, agricultural interests through grants to our land-grant universities for projects they want done, have developed technologies suitable for large-scale food producing conglomerates. The technologies appropriate to keeping small family farms viable have been wanting.

The result is joining field-to-field and farm-to-farm to the extent that small farmers are squeezed out and farm workers move to the cities to become the "permanently unemployed," to use Wendell Berry's words. (Plain Magazine) This is the way technology in the hands of the power brokers has worked to the detriment of small farmers. But when we consider that quick bucks and bigness are the way things are today, we realize it has worked against all of us as well. Big production requires selling and an ever increasing gross domestic product. It requires a consumer-oriented society that leads to obsolescence and many unnecessary and useless products the advertisers say we need.

But the Amish will have none of it. David Kline, an Amish writer says, "The majority of Amish have attempted to preserve the working together of communities by restricting the use of certain machines on the farm. When the machine in question replaced the need for help of neighbors, the church leaders said, "No, too much will be lost." (Plain)

The Amish can speak to us if we let them. We also can take a measure of how technologies impact upon our relations with one another, particularly how they affect community and livelihoods. So, recognizing our need for community, I see two areas of promise.

The first is the growth of employee-owned enterprises as an alternative to owner-employee arrangements that always seem so confrontational. In employee-owned enterprises all persons need one another. They are all in it for their own livelihoods. Thus they have the key essential for community and the enrichments that come in many other ways than the mere economic advantage.

The other possibility lies in the creative use of high tech to initiate and enhance low tech endeavors. This is what I believe computer technology can do. For instance, instead of huge food producing conglomerates filling completely our grocery shelves, why not bring more local and regional producers on line. It would seem that computer technology is ideal in establishing the networks and structures needed whereby the products of small farmers can be brought together in amounts suitable for supplying much of the food needs of the people of a region.

A particular concern of mine and the leaders I respect is getting more and more people back on the land who will care for it properly. More creative distribution and marketing could do it. I feel it is only right that there be a place for those who want to plow and hoe and

otherwise work with their hands. Some, many I would say want to do that; and there are others who have only the lower skills. They should not be denied their place, their chance, for economic returns that enable them to make it.

It is more than nostalgia; it is a matter of justice. Without a broader movement than the present rush toward high tech, we ignore the technologies appropriate to the varied capacities and abilities of people to engage in viable livelihoods, care for the environment and build supportive and sustainable communities.

I pray constantly about such matters as I am sure you do too.

A SCIENCE FICTION DREAM - Three Economic Systems-May 15

I believe we are all aware that basic to the idea of Equal Access is the socio-economic system that provides such access. Because of a wide-awake dream I had I am led to think about three systems of socio-economics.

The first is that which is presently operating in the world-at-large, based on capitalistic investment and the consumerism that goes with it. It is a system that tends toward an ever increasing ownership or control of properties, goods and services in the hands of fewer and fewer people with less and less for the majority, and which leads to basic denial to many who are left holding an empty bag so to speak.

The second system is what my dream is about, which has brought me to the subject of this letter.

The third system is one that is suggested in the New Testament in Acts 2:43-47 and Acts 4:32-37. It is a system in which communities such as the one described is one in which there is the kind of caring and sharing that results in the meeting of all basic needs within a community. It is a socio-economic system brought into being through the duplication and multiplication of such caring and sharing communities. That is the great promise I believe Christian and other religious faiths are meant to bring into being.

Now, the second socio-economic system, the dream, a science-fiction scenario of sorts: (To avoid, confusion of tenses I tell it in the past tense,)

The Dream: I died at eighty-five when taken off life-support machines, after having agreed my body could be used for scientific purposes. After being pronounced dead I was resuscitated, given a special experimental treatment and placed on a spaceship with a group of people on a twenty-year voyage to a habitable planet. The group traveled, taking turns in suspended animation so that someone was always on duty to follow and direct the journey of the spacecraft. I remained under continuing treatment which over a period of time brought me to wholeness.

Considerable discussion went on among most of those who had lots of time taking turns to keep the spacecraft on course. They were discussions that centered on the kind of life, the kind of society we would establish. Most felt that what we had had on earth was not what we really wanted.

We knew it had to be democratic and that every person should receive what he or she needed for a decent and fruitful life. What we came up with was a system in which there was no such thing as money, no buying, no selling, no trading, no working for any kind of pay. It was a system based on the contributions of people according to their gifts and the

development of such gifts that would provide what everyone needed.

At first we did things, made things and grew things, which we simply gave one another, making sure no one was left out. Living and doing this way, our greatest pleasure and our most meaningful involvements came to be the creative use of our gifts to provide for one another. This became the internalized and traditional drive that characterized our labors and our life together.

Needless to say, even though we shared extensively, we had to be more self-sufficient than we had been on earth. As the years passed and families grew, other arrangements for distribution of goods and services evolved. An example was the storehouse into which each person brought the things they made or grew, and received from it what they needed. A detailed record, openly visible to all, was kept on what each person or family contributed and what they received from the storehouse. This provided a means of accountability so as to discourage abuse of the system.

As additional people arrived from other voyages, mainly couples, they were most receptive to our system and became willing participants and advocates.

I lived among them for fifty years, having been brought to wholeness by the treatment I continued to receive periodically. At that point I decided to take the twenty-year voyage back to earth. When I arrived I was 175 years old with a 200-year life expectancy, and had much to tell about my healing and the new way of life. (End of story)

This science-fiction system is one extreme. Our present system is the opposite extreme. The main differences are: money versus no money, working to give versus working for pay, incentives for caring versus incentives for greed. To me the ideal is somewhere between these two extremes, something like the system begun by the people described in Acts 2 and 4.

Funny thing: It worked for them way back then. It has worked for many communities over time. It has happened. It is still happening. It is working in communities to this day. My dream, my real dream, lies in its duplication and multiplication across the lands. We can take whatever communities we have today, as weak as they may be, and move them toward the reality of seeing to it that no one is in want. We don't have to wait until we are a hundred and seventy-five years old.

CAPILLARIES AND COMMUNITY - Oct 15

Over the past 20 years or so most of us have observed, I believe, a steadily accelerating concern and movement toward societal sustainability, particularly in agricultural, environmental and economic sustainability. Increasingly this movement has moved in from the margins of society toward a more central position of concern. Two very promising aspects of this movement are: (1) a growing awareness of and knowledge of alternative treatments and natural products available in the health field, and (2) the emphasis on more local and regional production of food.

Since I am working with my health in certain alternative ways and am also concerned about viable communities, I am struck by a comparison of capillaries and communities. The societal role of communities can be compared to the role of capillaries in one particular way. Both are where the action is, where the rubber meets the road as is said. Like the vascular system that feeds our capillaries, so our social and economic systems supply our communities. The question to be seriously considered is: What kind of stuff is going into our capillaries and our communities?. A second question is: Who is in control? The second question is of course vital in getting at what kind of stuff we get.

"Capillaries are perhaps the most underestimated part of our circulatory system" according to Dr. Richard Passwater, M.D., who emphasizes that capillaries "are where the action takes place." He explains: "The sole function of the circulatory system is to exchange nutrients for waste products. The heart merely pumps the blood. What is important—but usually overlooked—is that the capillaries allow the cells to live by exchanging nutrients for waste. A significant improvement of capillaries will help both the nourishment and detoxification of cells, which in turn help every other function of the body (From "Back to the Garden," Winter, 1994-45, p.15)

This of course makes the intake of food, drugs and supplements supplied through the circulatory system vital to the nourishing and detoxification needed. It therefore makes sense to consider carefully and wisely our intake of these essentials.

Here are some points to help us understand the conventional system that has been developing over the past 50 years. In this country the average food item comes from 1300 miles away to reach our tables. "Fruits and vegetables are refrigerated, waxed, colored, irradiated, fumigated, packaged and shipped--none of which enhances food quality, but merely enables distribution over long distances. Including processing, distribution and preparation, ten calories of energy are required to create one calorie of food energy. (Plain, p.16)

In spite of all kinds of fruits and vegetables that can be produced in nearly every region of the country, this is what's happening. "Food production has increasingly become dominated by faraway, monolithic,

machinery-and-chemical-intensive operators specializing in single crops. The environmental repercussions of these farming practices have long been known. Much of this long-distance distribution is done in the name of economic efficiency. In fact, quite the opposite is true. The farther food is transported the more waste is created in terms of fuel, packaging, refrigeration and spoilage. (Plain, p.16)

Globalization of trade done by mega-corporations according to Jerry Mander (IFG), is increasingly responsible for most of what is produced in the world. "It destroys whatever sovereignty indigenous people have managed to gather up, and such corporations will have in the future real power over sovereignty." (Plain, pp.32-33)

Let's look then at the alternative of bringing food closer to home. Do we know who produces our food? Is there a farm or farmer associated with the food that sustains us? An answer to the accelerating agri-giants and supermarket conglomerates is emerging in Community Supported Agriculture and other arrangements whereby local and regional farmers market their produce more directly to consumers.

Daniel Imhoff describes Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) as follows: "Farmers and consumers join together to create markets for reasonably priced, pesticide-free, seasonal foods. In a CSA, the consumer pays a "share" in early spring to meet the farmer's operating expenses for the upcoming season. In return for their investment shareholders receive a steady supply of edible dividends throughout the growing season. Offerings include a variety of organically grown vegetables, fruits, honey, herbs, cut flowers, meat, eggs and milk, even firewood. (Plain, p.16)

Other arrangements include Farmers' Markets where farmers come to sell their produce and Farmers' Cooperatives in which farmers organize to provide in quantities sufficient to supply the retail market.

The most sensible, efficient and sustainable way to provide food is to do so as close to the customer as possible. This is true also of anything else produced. Even the agribusiness conglomerates could do a better job in this regard, I'm sure. But for them and all of us, it means growing food wherever it can be grown: on farms large and small, gardens, lawns, backyards and patches of all kinds. It is the most obvious answer to feeding hungry people.

We need to be aware of the entities that give us access to the things we need, especially the things we take into our bodies. We also need to be aware of how access to these things can be denied us through lack of information. I am grateful to those persons who made me aware of alternatives I have for my health, access I would not otherwise have. I am also grateful to those persons who have made me aware of pioneering efforts in sustainability and community-building lifestyles and endeavors. People of Faith are, after all, people who pursue alternative ways to the ways of the world devoid of spiritual orientation.

I pray that people of Faith will "Powerfully define, proclaim and live

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(their) understanding of an alternative vision of community where the relationship between the Creator and created is affirmed, and enhances life for all, over time. (Sojourners, Sept/Oct 1995)

**ON SCALE AND STEADY-STATE ECONOMICS - Kirkpatrick Sale -
Nov 20**

I've just finished reading Kirkpatrick Sales' *Human Scale*, which is about the appropriateness of scale in all matters relating to human life; that is, the right size and scope of things that make matters understandable, sensible and manageable--the human scale. He writes about so much of what I have been focusing on in my Equal Access letters over the past nine plus years. Central to his writing is ecological soundness in relation to basic economics and the way people live.

My current interest in ecology and economy began with the focus on sustainable agriculture as it relates to hunger issues and as it relates to access to the essentials of life for all people. Ecological concerns become economic concerns because of consumptive interests over conservation interests. A growth economy depends on ever increasing consumption and the ever invasive commercial appeals that entice us to consume. So we become excessive in so many ways. We are encouraged, even conditioned, to buy so many things beyond what is needed for basic human comfort. Thus our excessiveness, extravagance and opulence become the basis for our economy that is constantly driven by the enticements to buy. And so, consumption and accumulation become the way of life that is reaching the limits of what earth's resources can bear. Just as we must live within our financial means, so too, as a matter of faith stewardship, we must live within our ecological limits--those earthly provisions provided in a continuing way and depending on non-depleting practices.

We can allow our world to keep on going the way it is, but we should be aware of the dangers of self-perpetuating bureaucracies that always seem to want to be bigger and bigger; that is, those that seem to concentrate controlling power in the hands of proportionally fewer and fewer people, which simply nullifies our votes in many ways, making a mockery of equal access.

I am very encouraged to know that this need not be the way of our future, but that we can have, if we choose and adjust, an economy that can provide all that we could ask for in basic human comfort without destroying our habitat. That economy is called "Steady-State."

The following comes from John Stuart Mill's Principals of Economics, 1848. "The increase of wealth is not boundless. Capital will eventually cease to produce any sensible return for the capitalist when the cost of extraction, manufacture and disposal become great enough and when the redistributive tax systems of the state become expensive enough. At that point there will no longer be any point of being a capitalist: the breed will vanish. In place of the 'Progressive State,' the 'Stationary State,'" (Quotations used by Sale in *Human Scale*, p.329)

Additional quotes Sale uses from Mill include his confession that he is not at all pleased with the idea that the struggle to "get on" is the

normal state of human beings, that the "tramping, crushing, elbowing and treading on each other" is the most desirable thing for humans. He feels that the best state involves conditions where no one is poor, yet no one desires to be richer and is not threatened by those who want to improve their lot. He further states that stationary conditions would not imply less human improvement, indeed, that the "mental, cultural, and more moral and social progress" would be more likely to improve the "Art of Living" than the art of getting-on. (pp.329-330)

What is posited here is a Steady-State economy as opposed to a Growth economy. Sale points out that little attention has been paid to Mill's ideas until fairly recently. With the revival of interest in ecology, the notion of a stationary economy that fits modern conditions is being seriously re-examined. This re-examining has been taking place over the past 25 years and more. Such writings as Ezra Mishan's Cost of Economic Growth, the Club of Rome's The Limits of Growth, and Herman Daly's Essays Toward a Steady-State Economy, are just a part of this movement, not to mention E.F. Schumacher and the thrust of those identifying with him through the on-going E.F. Schumacher Society. (p.330)

Sale describes the differences this way: "A Growth Economy uses up scarce resources, emphasizes consumption over conservation, creates pollution and waste in the process of production, and engenders inter and intra national competition for dwindling supplies. A Steady-State economy minimizes resource use, sets production on small and self-controlled scales, emphasizes conservation and recycling, limits pollution and waste, and accepts the finite limits of a single world of a single source of energy, (pp.330-331)

Central to a Steady-State economy is the practice of truer, more direct democracy and appropriate sized jurisdictions that make it possible. Such democracy would be more like that practiced by the Early Greeks and is still alive in the New England Town Meeting and certain of the cantons of the Swiss Federation.

We should be aware that democracy is about more than just governmental elections and procedures, that it involves the right of people to have a say about anything that seriously affects their lives. It involves the right to hold accountable those who produce products and services. Should we not be seriously concerned about the big and powerful conglomerates who coerce favors from our congressional leaders through campaign contributions? For the most part, they are not structured democratically, yet their influence makes a mockery of our vote that places these leaders in office. They even affect, and often determine, who is on our ballots--a genuine undermining of governmental democracy.

If we are in control of our localities, we are less likely to let the powers above put anything over on us. Steady-State democracy involves communities of a size conducive to more direct personal participation and input, the use of consensus to handle differences amiably, the use of workplace democracy and the like. It makes it possible for neighborhoods, small communities and towns, small cities and regions to be self-governing and increasingly self-sufficient, so that the coercive powers do not oppress and dictate how life is to be for the

people. It really involves people in the communities of regions having control of their own economics to the degree that the ups and downs of national and international forces do not adversely affect them.

Real democracy gives the "Little People" a chance to control their lives. Realizing that those with wealth and power always seek control, I pray that "the mighty be put down from their thrones, and that those of low degree be exalted." (Luke 1:52) I pray for the simplicity of basic human comfort.

SELECTED LETTERS - 1996

WORKING WITH TRUTH - Jan 1

Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?". That is a question we always need to work with, particularly what the truth is that so many have to search for and figure out in relation to the situations and happenings of today. Two special concerns I have are (1) how we search for truth and (2) how we respond to truth.

The word "compute" and the word "data" are words that have become quite familiar to us. For accurate computing we have to have accurate data. With accurate or truthful data computers can be programed to do many useful things.

A psychologist whose book I read refers to the brain as a computer, meaning not that the brain is like a computer but that a computer is like the brain. Our brains are often described as the world's most complete or most perfect computer. However, they need reliable data if they are to give us the right decisions to program our lives in the right direction. Our brains must have the truth or they do not compute; or if they do they give us the wrong answers.

As people of Faith we believe that when God judges, the computations are based upon truth because God always deals in the truth. So God's judgments are correct and completely reliable. But so often when we make judgments we are not able to make good judgments because we don't have sufficient data. Most of the time the decisions and judgments we make are made using some incomplete or questionable data. And so, we always come up with answers that are short of perfect, even incorrect. But this is the way we are in our humanity. I believe it is important, then, to realize this so that we will always and forever search for truth.

When Jesus stood before Pilate, Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?". Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth, everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." (John 18:37-38)
In other words, everyone who recognizes the priority of truth, who searches for truth, who is of the truth, responds to the voice or

message of Jesus. Pilate then asked, "What is truth?".

A good dictionary will give you a number of definitions^ but the meaning I want to deal with is that given in Harper's Bible Dictionary, which defines truth as "the sum total of the reality of the universe of God, and the correspondence of the known facts of existence with that reality." So truth is reality, meaning that which exists and is real. This is the basic aspect of truth, and it includes the unknown as well as the known. The other aspect, the corresponding aspect, embodies all known facts and all relationships that correspond to reality.

Reality as truth includes all that exists in whatever form. The fact that water runs downhill due to the pull of gravity is a truth. This means that when we design pumps to pump it and turbines to reap its power, we are making truthful application to this truth.

Reality is also non-physical. Love is a non-physical reality. Through faith we accept as a truth that God is love. Love is therefore the basic truth upon which our spiritual existence depends, for when we fail to put on love we are a little less the spiritual beings God created us to be. When our thoughts, words and actions do not correspond to the truth of love we are not of the truth. To say we believe in love and the good love calls for, and not do that good, is to live an untruthful life.

Love is truth because nothing that corresponds to love can be false, deceitful or degrading. So truth is not only reality but our harmonious response to reality, which for us people of faith is our positive response to the reality of love. That means that truth is not only what is real and correct; it is also conduct—how we behave.

So often we fail in our search for truth because we are confused about it. An article appeared in Reader's Digest a number of years ago about a master practical joker named Hugh Troy. When he was a student at Cornell, he and a friend came across a waste basket fashioned as a rhinoceros hoof. With it they faked a trail across a snowy campus to the lake from which the university community got its drinking water. When the tracks were identified, erroneously of course, half the people stopped using tap water and others reported they could taste rhinoceros in their drinks.

It appears that something like this may be happening among our government leaders, that is, among those seeking political advantage by making it appear that someone has fouled up. Various trails are faked it seems, leading to pinning someone down for wrong-doing. It leaves many of us confused about the truth and leads us to believe bad things about those under attack. The process is even more confusing because the truth in many cases is diligently and legitimately sought and arrived at. So, we are confused when it is hard to distinguish between legitimate probing for truth and that of probing for political advantage.

Truth that has been twisted out of shape holds us captive as we seek to make corresponding response. Certainly a biased search for truth is

untruthful, something we need help with in determining the genuineness of others' searchings.

So many of our actions are based on things that are false, half true or partially known. They cause prejudice, misjudgments, controversies and hostilities and all sorts of critical and undesirable situations. The world situations of today can surely benefit from such examination of our actions and in honest searching for the truth that lets us see one another in new lights. Jesus said, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." I'm sure we can see the practical side of this statement when we realize that the truth does free us from the shackles of prejudice, hatred and misunderstandings. I'm sure we can see the binds that rampant racism, nationalism, ethnocentrism and biased searchings cause because of judgments made based on preconceived data, insufficient data, and relevant data that is simply ignored.

Natural tendencies due to our animal nature cause us to respond to the unknown with suspicion and even hostility. But our spiritual nature causes us to yearn for the truth which can set us free from suspicion, fear and hostility.

We are dealing with an overriding truth in this country and around the world. The question is how we are to respond to the fact that the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. A "winner-take-all" philosophy is operating that causes great destructiveness to people and the earth itself. An Example: downsizing that takes away livelihoods while those making it happen receive higher and higher benefits. What are we to do, for we know this runs against God's impartiality and desire for equity? Are we to ignore this understanding of the Creator? To respond truthfully to this reality will mean being aware of it, and taking whatever actions open to us to bring environmental, economic and societal sustainability—access to sustenance for all.

OPPOSING THE SYSTEM - Charles Reich - May 15

Over the door in Tabor Retreat Center, Lynchburg, Va. is a poster that reads: The poor may always be with us, but we're working to get the numbers down." (Refer to Matthew 26:11) That in a real way, describes much of what Charles Reich's "Map of New Territory" is all about in his book, OPPOSING THE SYSTEM.

In his "Existing Map of Reality," he proclaims that our present economic "System" is based on a number of false pictures or assumptions about what is real in American life, which we are constantly led to believe is the true picture. For instance, we are led to believe that poverty is mainly the fault of the poor, something beyond the power of society to remedy, that only moral renewal can uplift the poor. In contrast, the answer as given through several authoritative persons he quotes is that "poverty is caused by the concentration of wealth and the disappearance of jobs engendered by giant corporations." (p.156) They see no solution "Without an equalization of the distribution of work itself." (P-157)

In his "Opposing Map of Reality, Reich gives his description of the way things really are. Among the things he mentions are: unacknowledged social change, Managerial Economy that controls what is called the "Free Market," the Steep Pyramid with the privileged at the top and the deprived and desperate at the bottom, workplace rights largely exempt from the Bill of Rights; Surplus People due to downsizing and other job reductions that, bring Economic death to middle-aged workers, unmeasurable Costs and Values, and so on.

His "Map of New Territory" is offered to give us areas of concern for which we can formulate theories and strategies to challenge the Existing System's view of reality, Among the areas of this New Territory are: an understanding of what an economic system is for, the Constitutional Renewal needed, a New Social Contract in which managers deal with their responsibility to society as a whole, Human versus Economic Development, Replenishment in which labor-intensive tasks are well paid and can fulfill a commitment providing meaningful work to all who seek it, a Post-economic thrust that overcomes the conflicts that have torn society apart, and a genuine effort to be informed citizens able to promote greater democratic action and influence through the exercise of our freedom.

I suppose the first question we can respond to is, "Do we see the need for changing the way things are?". The second question, if we see the need, is: "Are we willing to change ourselves to bring change?". The third question: "What area or areas of change do we give priority to or where do we begin?".

Different ones of us would, I am sure, choose different areas, and that's good, because all of them are a part of the changes that need to be made. It also enables us to deal with being overwhelmed when we can

focus on one particular area, knowing that others are choosing other needed areas.

As one who sees the need to oppose and challenge the System, my priority is to see if I can't get above or beyond the System in order to speak to the System, which is what I try to do in my writing.

To act above the System has in the past been done mainly by people of faith who opposed the systems of their time. Moses had to deal with Pharaoh's system. Jesus had to contend with the Roman system as did the Apostle Paul, and since those days other systems have come and gone to bring us to our time and our System.

Moses and his people in order to oppose Pharaoh's system had to escape it. They didn't change it I am sure. But having escaped, they had to develop their own, which they did based on the Ten Commandments. Even though they had such ideas about economic justice as through Jubilee (Leviticus 25), their system evolved into one that still did not deal with economic reality, to which the prophets were constantly called to speak. It seems there were always those who were left out, marginalized. The great contributions on behalf of justice were made by the prophets whose words and ideas are still with us to guide us.

In Jesus' day it was the Romans and their system. The Roman world was as much Greek as Roman, since they took on much from the superior Greek culture. This being the world of Jesus' day, the idea of democracy along with other ways of thinking were apparently floating around. But still in the Roman system there were those who were left out. When Jesus talked about turning the left cheek as well as the right, about giving one's undergarment as well as the outer, and about carrying a burden a second mile instead of the regular one mile, he was suggesting ways to expose and oppose the Judaeo/Roman system of his time. This system too was one that did not deal with economic reality for society as a whole.

From New Testament times until now various systems have existed, and somehow those who gained control always left out those over whom and from whom they gained control. It seems that always these systems have not dealt with economic reality for society as a whole. The same is true for our time and for our System.

In spite of what we know about Jubilee and the economic justice it can bring; in spite of all we now about the equality God's Word gives us; in spite of all we have caught from the Greeks and others about democracy and citizen action; we still have left undone the rendering of economic justice for everyone. Our System does not deal with economic reality, for we allow non-democratic entities to exercise undue persuasion over our democratically elected leaders and decision makers.

So I would give priority to being able to transcend the System in order to speak to the System. Moses, the prophets, Jesus and the Disciples, and the great saints and servants of the ages have always spoken to this matter of justice for those who are left out and taken advantage

of. These are people of faith who who engaged in prayer and dealt with the issues of life. That's where we begin in order to transcend and speak to the System.

With different ones of us choosing different priorities we can begin to take action in various ways. When all such actions come together in concert, they bring about the changes that need to be made. It's like all the parts of the body making the complete body as the Apostle Paul describes.

Individually we can all be aware of what the System is saying and doing to us. Groups of us coming together in prayer to deal with whatever issues we feel called to deal with, can bring forth the strategies and actions needed and can be the reinforcement needed for us as individuals in our daily living.

In one of his essays Wendell Berry says: "The real work of planet-saving will be small, humble, and (insofar as it involves love) pleasing and rewarding. Its jobs will be too many to count, too many to report, too many to be publicly noticed or rewarded, too small to make anyone rich or famous." That, to me, describes the work of challenging the present economic system that leaves out and takes advantage of so many. It calls us to the more simple tasks and choices of daily living. Add to our prayers and intercessions the strategies and actions we can take and we're on our way.

***INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON GLOBALIZATION, (IFG) - July 15
Preliminary Draft***

As things seem to be developing now, in the future we will need to remember Gandhi and how he enabled the people of India to gain their independence. It was an economic thing then for them. It is now and will be an economic thing for us worldwide. The economic hold the multinational corporations are gaining worldwide is like unto the economic hold the United Kingdom had on India. My understanding is that we will increasingly need to do for ourselves on a more local and regional basis in order to counteract the powers and influence of excessively large corporations.

I recently received a packet of papers from my friend Graeme in West Virginia, which contained material from the International Forum on Globalism. It came from a Teach-In he attended at George Washington University May 10-12. The following explains the structure and aims of The Forum: "The International Forum on Globalization is a new alliance created by sixty activists, scholars, economists, researchers, and writers to stimulate new thinking, joint activity, and public education in response to the rapidly emerging economic and political arrangement called the global economy. (IFG booklet)

This and other materials have come to me on the heels of Charles Reich's *Opposing the System*. There seems to be a quickening of concern and activity in response to the "principalities and powers" that exercise excessive influence and control over us. We are being offered ways in which we can be more informed about things that are often withheld from us by those who want to determine public information. We are being offered ways in which we may become active in determining what our world is to be rather than relying on the spin of the "global economy."

In spite of the destructiveness of those more concerned with profits than people, some good things are happening. We don't have to take it any more! We can do things for ourselves to find out what's really going on knowing there are others beginning to question a lot that is thrown at us by dominant thinking and practices We can lift up what is life-affirming while exposing what is life-denying.

I have written to IFG in San Francisco to take membership and have received a couple of additional booklets. I have also written for more information on the Citizens Alliance movement, New Cambridge, Mass. I have just learned that the Festival Center, Washington, D.C. will be focusing on globalization in their Thursday evening sessions later this year. In addition, several books are out or will be soon, dealing with the impact of globalization, including Charles Reich's *Opposing the System*. Haynes Johnson and David Broder (*Washington Week in Review*, PBS) have one called *The System*. Dr. William J. Wilson, a University of Chicago sociologist scholar, has one coming entitled *When Work Disappears*, a serious work on Chicago ghettos. Wendell Berry has a new

book of essays entitled Another Turn of the Crank. In addition, I have from The Forum a list of 37 books and articles on various aspects of the globalization issue.

With all these writings and the coming together of serious and competent people I am greatly encouraged. I am amazed at the proliferation of various organizations over recent years that are working to question and change the way the global economy affects the way we live and the use of earth's resources. That is why I believe we are being offered ways to be rightly informed and can find ways to take positive action. We are a part of all that is going on through our vested interests and by what we do. Our understanding of democracy tells us we have a right to actively participate in all matters that affect our lives. So we can no longer allow "the economy" to be a neglected area for democratic action and application.

The following "preliminary draft" of the Cape Cod Alliance's Program Statement for Citizens' ALLIANCE" gives us a pretty clear view of actions that are in line with the IFG's leading.

The Preliminary Draft:

"Our aim is to unite citizens who want to reclaim democracy at its deepest level, in a society where corporate wealth dominates politics, economics, information and culture.

We want to include all people in this alliance, resisting all attempts to divide us along lines of race or sex, to set native-born against immigrants, or middle-class against the poor.

We want to assert the right of all who work, whether as employees in the workplace or parents in the home, to a fair share of our country's great wealth, and to the dignity that every human being deserves.

We believe that every child, whatever its race or class origin, should be given an equal opportunity for full development, in mind and body, making available to it whatever resources the society has."

On economics I have dealt with things like usury through interest-free money, a whole system of how money could be handled by using a simple fee for its use. I have also dealt with democratically operated enterprises like Employee Stock Option Plans (ESOP's) and other arrangements that enable local regions to be more independent of the big corporations and powers. I have done what might be called book reviews like Bruggemann's one on "Empire," Walter Wink's Engaging the Powers, and Charles Reich's Opposing the System.

From dealing with hunger, homelessness, joblessness and the like, I have searched for the real causes and have found that greed is still the culprit. But over the past decade or so I have noticed a growing awareness of and pursuit of the sustainability needed in ecological, societal and economic terms. As I shared in my July letter, I

discovered through my West Virginia friend The International Forum on Globalization, the purpose of which is to oppose the downside of globalization, namely the Transnational Corporations (TNC's) that increasingly pursue control of our world economy. Now I know where the real greed is concentrated.

The real danger is a world ruled by the TNC's. We have a taste of their control through the election contributions to our national candidates. The real danger, though, to a world increasingly in pursuit of democratically run governments is for such governments to be under the thumb of the non-democratically run TNC's, that increasingly work together to form a single worldwide system that they control. It's a system that puts profits ahead of people and causes all kinds of destructive abuse to the environment and increases imbalance between rich and poor. It is a system that uses GATT, NAFTA, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and the international Monetary Fund to their advantage, causing poor nations to exhaust their resources through an "export or die" coercion that leaves people bereft of the essentials of life, like food.

I could go on telling about the downside of globalization and the tyrannical system that seems to be developing, but I want to do something positive. I want to go "upstream" to name some of the corrective measures that can be taken to counteract the powers of the TNC's. I want to look at visions and initiatives that give the kind world we want to live in.

"TO further these objectives, we propose as a start, the following changes"

1. Reform the political process to end big money control of elections and to remove obstacles to independent political candidates.
2. Strict regulation and control of corporate powers, ending the subsidies and tax breaks which constitute a welfare program for corporations, and eliminate corporate control of information and the mass media with a new expanded "Fairness Doctrine."
3. Creation of a fair tax structure, steeply progressive to relieve the burden on the middle-class and the poor, to end a situation where 1% of the population controls 40% of the nation's wealth and to make large sums available for human needs.
4. Removal of the health system from the control of insurance companies and the profit motive, emulating those countries where health care is universal and equal for all people regardless of income, with the government as a minimum administer (The single payer system), and patients choosing their own doctors.
5. Guarantee of jobs at a living wage for everyone willing to work, and a guaranteed annual income for all those unable to work, to replace the present welfare system.
6. Support the rights of unions and union democracy after a long period of attacks on unions by employers and governments.
7. A drastic reduction of the military budget, and using those hundreds of billions of dollars to fund basic needs: education, housing, child care, health.
8. Stop the poisoning of the environment by bold action against the

corporations to try to restore the ecological integrity that once existed on this continent.

May your alignment with our Maker be such that you are always undergirded in your need and empowered in your serving. And may that serving be such that all you do contributes to the genuine well-being of every life you touch.

We want a world, I believe, in which ecological wisdom enables us to heal ecological damage. We want a world in which people are alert to social injustice and can act to correct it. We want a world that increasingly promotes democratic involvement, particularly at the grassroots level. We want a world in which nonviolent opposition brings the changes we desire. We want a world in which the development of viable, caring communities gets priority. We want a world that fosters sustainable local and regional economies not dependent on the "TNC's. We want a world in which diversity is respected and valued. We want a world in which citizen sovereignty and democratic processes prevail.

We begin locally to encourage worker and community-owned alternative arrangements like a community-owned public nursing-home system and a profession of caring for handicapped and neglected people. We begin locally by insisting that voting be done on non-working days so as to increase citizen involvement. We begin locally to foster locally owned and operated enterprises. We begin locally by studying, discussing and becoming informed about the issues of life affected by powers that impinge upon us. And upon discovering such powers, we move upstream to exert our sovereign will.

Exerting our sovereign will upon our democratically run governments, we enable our federal, state and local governments to gain control of the charters through which corporations are able to do business in our counties, state and country. Through restrictions our governments can impose, the size of corporations can be reduced. They can be prevented from buying up one another to form monopolizing cartels. We can even empower our governments through referendum to strip away such constitutional rights granted corporations that are meant to apply to natural persons only. We, of course, can enable our governments to prevent corporations from contributing to any candidate's election to government office or later unduly influencing that person in his or her office. Through the democratic action of our sovereign will we can enable our governments to shift favoritism from corporations towards the rights and welfare of sovereign people. After all, all these laws, regulations and perks are the reason our corporations are able to operate almost with impunity in our country and worldwide.

GOING UPSTREAM - Sept 15

On a recent trip into West Virginia I had some very meaningful discussions with my friend Graeme on what needs to happen to deal with the tremendous imbalance of the goods, substances and amenities of life available to people. He said that we need to go "upstream." As you know, the Appalachian region is the source of rivers flowing east and west that begin with wonderfully clear mountain streams. The James River, for instance, by the time it reaches Lynchburg, has become polluted in various ways. To find out why we have to go upstream. That's symbolic of where my quest in writing has led me.

I want to share with you the progression of my thinking in relation to dealing with the world, the dominant culture. It is a progression I call "Going Upstream." You might also call it "going against the flow."

In my letters I have tried to balance the spiritual and the appropriately worldly concerns of life. First it was the hunger issue of the early eighties that got me started. I came to realize that greed causes the excesses of the few that ultimately results in the denial that brings deficiencies for the many. Instead of focusing too much on greed, though, I have focused on access, the positive answer to greed.

Being a person of the soil, a farm boy, the hunger issue led me to focus on the health of the soil; hence organic gardening and farming as a serious way to sustain the soil. This of course led me into sustainability of not only the soil, land and general ecology, but also into other areas where sustainability is essential for maintaining viable supportive systems for human life.

The message from Leviticus 25 on the Sabbatical Year and the Year of Jubilee has been so critical to me as Biblical grounding for sustaining the land and people and a just economy. The reason I value so highly the writings of Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson is that they deal with the spiritual dimensions of caring for the land and the people. Both understand what it does when field is joined to field, farm to farm and corporation to corporation.

So I have written numerous letters that focus on qualities that foster community: our oneness, the connectedness of all life, simplicity, fairness, servant-hood and intercessory prayer. People like Walter Bruggemann, Thomas Kelly, E.H. Herman, Parker Palmer and Walter Wink have been most helpful in dealing with the spiritual dimensions of intercessory and centering prayer.

I share with you now this quotation from The Forum written by David Korten. It is from his book, When corporations Rule the World. "Healthy societies depend on healthy, empowered communities that build caring relationships among people and help us connect to a particular piece of the living earth with which our lives are entwined. Such societies must be built through local-level action, household by household, community

by community. Yet we have created an institutional and cultural context that dis-empowers the local and makes such actions difficult if not impossible.

To correct the deep dis-function, we must shed the illusion of our cultural trance, reclaim the power we have yielded to failing institutions, take back responsibility for our lives, and reweave the basic fabric of caring families and communities to create places for people and other living things. It is within our means, but it will require transforming the dominant belief systems, values, and institutions of our society comparable to the Copernican Revolution that ushered in the scientific/industrial era..."

Wes Jackson has put it this way: that we are now being forced to participate in what we might call the frightening adventure of Creation. He says it is frightening because we could fail; we might not have the staying-power. But therein, I believe, lies the opportunity.

I must say, though, that not all globalization is bad, only that which is destructive to us humans, our home, the earth, and the democratic process. We don't want to knock the positive handles that provide support and life-giving possibilities. But increasingly we need the transformation, the spiritual discernment, that enables us to tell the good from the bad. We need to be aware of the delusional assumptions through which the world economy operates, delusional assumptions that victimize everyone including the powers that control.

The biggest challenge is one of the Spirit -- to become transformed to the point we can discern what has happened upstream. That way we can prove what prevents us from having the world God wants. That way we can discern and prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect regarding the Way the world functions.

THE RIGHT OF CONQUEST - Nov 15

When Joshua called the tribes together to renew their covenant (Joshua 24), the occasion when he challenged them to "choose this day whom you will serve," he reminded them that they were followers of the one true God, and, in their view, were favored as they fought their way into the Promised Land of Palestine. They viewed God as giving them a "land on which (they) had not labored, and towns that (they) had not built, and (in which they live); (How they) eat the fruit of vineyards and olive yards that (they) did not plant (V.13)

This suggests to me as giving them the "right of conquest," an ethnocentric view in which they saw themselves as favored by God and as having the right to conquer and occupy the land of others. Regardless of what this may mean in the establishment of monotheism, it is an old, old story that is still so much of the way of the world today.

We see how this supposed right of conquest was used by the European nations as giving them the right to conquer and colonize other peoples who were even considered savage. Our own country followed this assumed right of conquest as we dealt with our own native tribes we called "Indians." Even to this day we have real difficulty getting this false right out of our systems. Need I say more about these kinds of doings as they are being played out in the world-at-large today?

What next then? Who will conquer who? The truth in the whole world is up for grabs. This assumed right of conquest plays its deadliest game in the pursuit of wealth wherein the rich get richer and the poor poorer. It is now, as it has always been, a pursuit of wealth and power, an economic thing. Richard Barnett writes about *The Global War Against the Poor*, a small booklet that sketches out how the accumulation of wealth by the few spreads poverty for the many.

In my September 15, 1996 letter I suggested that the real danger to a world increasingly in pursuit of democratically run governments, is for such governments to be under the thumb of non-democratically run transnational corporations that increasingly work together to form a single worldwide economic system that they control.

"What happens when we realize that the real power to rule is being exercised not by governments and their agencies but by TNC's? Over the past decade and a half the number of TNC's has skyrocketed from 7,000 to more than 35,000, and today, 50 of the top 100 economies in the world are TNC's, and a mere 1% of them own half the total stock of direct investment. At the same time the new free trade regimes (Eg. GATT, NAFTA) have created a global environment in which TNC's can move capital technology, goods and services freely throughout the world, relatively unfettered by the regulations of nation states or democratically elected governments. Through these processes, TNC's have effectively secured a system of rule and domination in the new world (of Father Bush.)

"IN effect, we are living in a new age of globalization which is characterized by forms of corporate tyranny. For this world order has been designed to protect the rights and freedoms of transnational capital, not the basic human and democratic rights of people. It is no longer a prime role and responsibility of governments to defend or protect the economic, social and environmental rights of its citizens. The real power of governance is wielded behind the scenes by an elaborate system of transnational corporations wherein the financial sector in particular, plays a dominant role in dictating priorities of national governments. In turn, the operations of governments and their agencies, including key sectors of the media industry, largely serve to cover up these forms of corporate rule. Today these realities are further augmented in many countries by corporate right-wing political strategies which are designed not only to carry out a massive downsizing and dismantling of the basic roles and responsibilities of governments along with a corresponding re-definition of the rights, freedoms and responsibilities of citizens in a democratic society."
(Dismantling Corporate rule: from IFG)

Recently on a weekend in October, my wife and I attended a conference sponsored by Community Service, Inc. of Yellow Springs, Ohio, the theme being "The Value and Future of Simple Living." A number of the participants had attended earlier the Second Luddite Congress at Barnesville, Ohio, a conference on technology, materialism and community. Some suggestions I gleaned coming out of the congress as written up in the Community Service newsletter are: caring for a bit of land if it's only a flower box--driving less--eating more locally grown food--cooking our own food--inviting neighbors to dinner--slowing traffic in the neighborhood, or just plain slowing down the pace of life and taking more interest in the concerns and imaginations of children and being conscious and critical of what we consume.

From the same article, Bill Felker of Central State University, Wilberforce, Ohio, makes these suggestions: respect for Sabbath as times for rest from production and consumption and time for solitude, listening and waiting--support for local libraries--finding limits based on our values and innature itself--developing livelihoods free from corporate control--helping one another to be sufficient--living locally and doing for ourselves in more ways.

On Saturday morning at the conference, as we spent about an hour in Quaker-style silence, I jotted down things I had been turning over in my mind. Here are a few of them: big enough but not too big--cooperation versus competition--limiting profiteering on others' labors--democratic business structures--labor-intensive work--sensible surplus.

Big enough but not too big means determining the size of producing and serving organizations according to the available market and workforce needed. Too big comes from the desire to expand into areas that someone else can cover. Decentralization can help us from getting too big.

Cooperation versus competition means gearing production or service to

an appropriate market-share that respects the pursuit of livelihoods of those in like businesses. Big marketing groups who compete in such a way as to drive smaller business out of business are out of line in this regard. The only legitimate uses of competition is to prevent monopoly and gouging.

Limiting profiteering on others' labors involves us in the use of interest and usury. An article on Money by Melvin Leasure in which he draws on New Money for Healthy communities by Thomas H. Greco, and Interest-Free and Inflation-Free Money by Margrit Kennedy (Community Service Newsletter), provides a good distinction between interest and usury. The legitimate charges for interest should be that percentage that covers the cost of managing loans, cost of loan loss, and cost of inflation. Many charges beyond these legitimate charges to make money on money invested is usury. Interest and usury are ways of making money on someone else's labor or enterprise. It is basically the way people get to be millionaires and billionaires. They don't earn it. Other people earn it for them. Though usury is condemned Biblically, our economy is based on usury. We don't have to do it that way. We can, instead, pull together to establish loan funds made up of our surplus income (savings) that charge legitimate interest to those who need loans. Our money would retain its value and we would not be guilty of usury. It shows us that there is a difference between "saving" and "investing."

Democratic business structures should be the rule. Adequate input by all who are affected by a product or service should be provided: for heads of operations, for owners and investors, and for workers and consumers. Structures need to be provided for such appropriate input.

So much of labor-intensive work has been done away with by labor-saving and time-saving technology. Charles Reich in his "Map of New Territory" (Opposing the System), writes about "Replenishment." "A second great shift in the economy is needed to direct our work and energy into restoring the personal sector, where much of the damage caused by the System has occurred. All the forms of caring for others should carry the prestige and economic rewards of work. Child care and help for the elderly should be well paid. A shift to labor-intensive tasks of the personal sector will dovetail with a commitment to promote meaningful work to all who seek it. There is an unlimited amount of "People Work" that needs to be done to reverse the damage of recent decades."

A sensible surplus is needed from our earnings or profits to provide savings for times of greater need, for contributions to community needs and enrichments, and so on. It is simply mind-boggling to myself and many others how our system's structures make it possible for some to pile up riches in millions and billions. That's not sensible surplus. Sensible surplus, to me, means enough surplus to meet our basic needs and life-giving enrichments, and the needs and aspirations of those around us and within our reach.

I hope these quotations, comments and suggestions enable you to reflect on how we might come to grips with this so-called "right of conquest." as it takes us deeper and deeper into the greed we abhor

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and the separation and destruction it brings. May you find ways of living the life you truly want that is free from the "principalities and powers" of what we might call our present darkness.