

The George Dana Boardman Lectureship in Christian Ethics

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XXIX

Homelessness: A Challenge to the Gospel Message

Delivered Before
The University of Pennsylvania
November 1, 1990

By
Mary Scullion, RSM

Including Responses to the Lecture

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Philadelphia
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Foreword

The twenty-ninth George Dana Boardman Lecture in Christian Ethics at the University of Pennsylvania was delivered by Sister Mary Scullion, RSM (Religious Sisters of Mercy). Her presentation was the sixth since the reinauguration of the series in 1984 by the Department of Religious Studies, ending a twenty-three year hiatus. The terms of the Boardman Lectureship in Christian Ethics Foundation stipulate that a printed statement of the history, outline, and terms of the Foundation be included in the publication of each lecture. These materials, composed at the turn of the twentieth century, are a product of their time. Some may be amazed that the Lectureship continues to have a place at our secular and pluralistic University. The relevance of the Lectureship today reflects a transformed understanding of "Christian ethics." Sister Mary's lecture is not about the exclusive moral superiority of Christianity. It reframes ethics as trans-religious, as the concern for justice in the world, and speaks to a diverse audience, one committed to thoughtful reflection on what constitutes "right action in the global, inter-faith community we share. As Akila Malik, a respondent to the lecture, astutely noted, "conquering the problem of homelessness requires many visions." Homelessness, which knows no boundaries of religion, can only be conquered through the cooperation of people of all faiths.

Sister Scullion's lecture was delivered in the afternoon of November 1, 1990, with a panel discussion following later that evening. The panel was moderated by Dr. E. Ann Matter, Professor and Chair of Religious Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. There were five respondents to the lecture: Steven Gold; Leona Smith; Amata Miller; Reverend Paul Washington, Jr.; Akila Malik.

I did not have the pleasure of attending this lecture. Yet in the course of transcribing the audio cassettes, I was often moved to tears by the simple eloquence of human beings working for justice. I would like to dedicate this publication to Jealous Street, a person without a home, whose words as recalled by Steven Gold, humbled me.

I would like to thank Professor E. Ann Matter, especially for her assistance in transforming spoken words into written text, and Marie Hudson, Leonard Primiano and Professor Robert A. Kraft for their assistance in the preparation of this publication.

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**HOMELESSNESS: A CHALLENGE TO
THE GOSPEL MESSAGE**

HOMELESSNESS: A CHALLENGE TO THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

It is truly an honor and privilege for me to be with you this afternoon. I would like to begin by offering an alternative title to this talk, that is: "The Gospel: A Challenge to Homelessness." It speaks more truthfully to the reality with which I am familiar.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Ann Matter and Leonard Primiano for their efforts in arranging today's activities. The Boardman lecture provides an important forum for discussing critical social issues from a Christian perspective. The ideas put forth here are just a beginning, which I am sure will be deepened and improved upon by this evening's panelists.

The reflections I offer today come from a graced history, one filled with struggle, suffering, and hope. To give credit to all who have influenced this reflection would simply be impossible, but I would like to try to name a few. First to the catalyst community who turned my world, and the world of others like me, totally upside down: to Chris Sprowal, Leona Smith, Alicia Christian, and Steve Gold. To those with whom I have worked most closely: Kathleen Schneider, Clare Schrant, Joe Ferry, Eileen Campbell, Chris Simiriglia, Anne McNichol, Marguerite Pessagno, and especially Joan Dawson. And to those whose thoughts and writings have deeply affected me: Dorothy Day, Jon Sobrino, Mary Rose D'Angelo, Will O'Brien, Thomas Berry, and particularly Vincent Donovan. And finally, to those who have lived life with such tremendous courage and profound truth: Kathleen Sullivan, Ben Verdile, Bob Simpson, Billy Banks, Patty Burns, Joan Buckley, and each and every person who has lived homelessness and especially all the women who have ever lived at Women of Hope.

The Tragedy of Homelessness

What does homelessness mean? For Georgianna, it meant two long years sleeping on the cold concrete, waking to the bitter cold. And one day she awoke to find that her toes were blackened. She described how she went into Thomas Jefferson Hospital's emergency room where they told her they would have to amputate her foot. She told them, "Let me the hell out of here!" She bought

a pint of gin and woke up the next morning to discover that nine of her toes had fallen off. They were frostbitten. Georgianna describes that period of her life living without a home as if she were in a war. Each day was a battle for survival. Just like a soldier she survived by eating out of cans, bathing out of sinks, and being totally exposed to the elements.

For Jacob who lives here in the streets of West Philadelphia, it means living twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week with voices that trouble him and alcohol that quells the voices. It means panhandling money for alcohol, buying it, drinking it. It is a vicious, deteriorating cycle.

For Jeffery Two Feathers, a Native American, homelessness cost him his life. While he was living on the streets he was beaten by skinheads with two by fours until he became unconscious. He was hospitalized for a few days, only to be discharged to the streets. He died there a few weeks later of complications due to his injury.

For Mike homelessness is a vicious trap from which he cannot escape. Mike is an alcoholic without a medical card or health pass. Therefore, detox can be virtually impossible. To obtain a medical card can be a very tedious process. You need an address and proper identification. You must keep your appointments at the Welfare office and then your card will come in time. If Mike would be so lucky as to eventually receive treatment, it lasts at the most seven days and upon completion he will be discharged to the streets with little or no resources and no support. Yet people wonder why he does not just pull himself together and get a job. It makes one wonder: why should he even try?

Homelessness is destructive. It destroys people physically and emotionally. It is part of the institutionalized violence that slowly but surely kills its victims.

The lives and deaths of our homeless sisters and brothers are a powerful prophetic voice in our midst. Their lives and deaths are a statement of anger, condemnation, and judgement. Their lives and deaths are also a statement of hope: hope that all who hear may be angered; that all might enter into the experience of suffering and condemn; that all might reflect upon the sources of misery and judge, and then act to crush the structures that are crushing our sisters, our brothers, our children, and our souls.

Tonight if we walked down the streets in West Philadelphia or if you came with me to Center City and walked along the beautiful parkway, people sleeping on the vents or in doorways would be visible to anyone with eyes to see. You would also see the magnificent Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul with its beautiful doors locked and people forced to sleep on the cold concrete outside. You would find the same scene here and at most Center City churches and synagogues. And tomorrow you will see thousands of very busy and important looking people hurrying to keep appointments and work schedules, stepping over people in the streets. You might wonder where are we really going and what are we really doing that is so important that allows us to pass our hurting brothers and sisters? And you might wonder if we realize how we are helping to create the illusion about the city as the place that offers the good life, and opportunities to be participated in by all, and how we contribute to the lie that the city is the place where all class distinctions are erased. And you might wonder if we realize that the failure of the city symbolized by the homeless is our own failure.

Even to classify those suffering people as "the homeless" contributes to the maintaining of class distinction, implying a "we" and a "they" -- they who are homeless and we who have homes. We look at such people not as persons, but as people who live in boxes. "Homelessness" then becomes a label we have placed on them, which somehow takes away our responsibility to them as fellow citizens -- our sisters and brothers -- and leaves us comfortably different than and separated from them.

The cry of these suffering people is really like the cry we hear in a moment of fear or terror and mistakenly think it is someone else crying -- and it is in reality our cry. It is the cry of all those hungering and thirsting for justice. It is the age old cry of a people that murders its prophets and awaits its Messiah.

Homelessness and the Gospel: A Crisis of Faith

The murdered prophets are the suffering and marginalized of our world. It is through such suffering that God most often chooses to reveal knowledge and truth. Story after story in the Christian and Jewish Scriptures personifies a God of compassion,

a forgiving God, a personal God, a God who is willing to get directly involved with people. The God of Jesus is one that cares very much for the world in which each and all of us live.

The Gospels profoundly challenge our cultural norms and attitudes toward the poor. The Spirit of the Gospel clearly calls us to get involved with the suffering that confronts us everyday. The stories of Jesus, from the Good Samaritan to the many cures of the sick, demonstrate over and over again his compassion and willingness to heal the suffering of his time. William O'Brien points out:

Not only does Jesus offer healing to individual persons suffering from sickness, brokenness, and rejection; he is also constantly challenging the social structures and corrupt cultural-religious values that created an apartheid-like system of clean and unclean, worthy and unworthy, acceptable and unacceptable.¹

As Richard Rohr described recently in a talk given here in Philadelphia commemorating the tenth anniversary of Bethesda Project, Jesus was overturning the "economy of status" in his society which relegated power to a few and kept others marginalized.²

One of Jesus' parables, in particular, that of Lazarus and the rich man, offers us a powerful image that cannot let us be complacent with the inequity of the distribution of our resources.³ The poor man Lazarus, deprived throughout his lifetime of both basic needs and any human attention to his suffering, is gathered into Abraham's bosom. The rich man, meanwhile, who was oblivious to Lazarus' suffering, is cast into hell where his torment is unrelieved. The rich man then pleads to God: "I beg you to send Lazarus to my father's house, since I have five brothers, to give them warning so that they do not come to this place of torment too." "They have Moses and the prophets," said Abraham, "let them listen to them." "Ah, no, father Abraham," said the rich man, "but if someone comes to them from the dead, they will repent." Then Abraham said to him, "If they will not listen either to Moses or

¹ William O'Brien, Unpublished Manuscript.

² Richard Rohr, Address at Old First Reformed Church, Philadelphia, October 11, 1990.

³ Luke 16.19-31.

to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead." (Luke 16:27-31) We must hear the terrible relevance of this parable to our world today, forcing us to question how we can give tax abatements to wealthy persons moving into million dollar housing, and then turn around and insist that we cannot afford to offer anything more than a cardboard box to house others.

The Gospel message also challenges those good intentions of people in our society who on one hand express charitable sentiments toward the needy, but on the other hand refuse to accept them in their communities. All too often we hear the attitude, "Do not house any of the disabled in my neighborhood." The Gospel challenge is just the opposite. Jesus did not simply minister to those in need, he built community with them. We are called to do the same. It is essential that we welcome the poor, the marginalized and the suffering.

We are constantly shielding ourselves from the suffering in our midst. We want to believe that somehow "these people" are different from us. We convince ourselves that people have chosen poverty and homelessness, chosen to have AIDS, chosen to become mentally ill or addicted to alcohol and drugs. It is their fault and it is their problem. In drawing the lines to separate them from us, we hope that it relieves us of any responsibility. "I am not my brother's keeper" is a prevailing social attitude.

It seems that we as a society do not want to accept our own brokenness. We want to believe that we are so much better than all of those whose hurts and wounds are so physically obvious. We want to believe that because we work hard and think we can take care of our self and sometimes our families, that it all stops there. No wonder we are bored in America. Numbed at the suffering and pain all around us, secluded in our nice neighborhoods, protecting our standard of living, believing that we have rights not to have to look at homeless people. We want them arrested so we don't have to walk over them anymore. Or we want the person living with AIDS quarantined, so as to further isolate them. This protects us from both their suffering and pain -- and from our own suffering and pain. Our cultural idols of patriarchy, individualism, and greed have named the lepers of today. Take the lepers out of our sight and let us go on living our empty, comfortable lives. In fact, I would suggest that the apathy and

indifference to the suffering in our world is the primary indicator of the current crisis of faith that exists especially in our country.

Homelessness and Idols

The crisis of faith manifests itself today as it has in other critical periods throughout the history of the world. Vincent Donovan writes: "There are spiritual and historic ties between the slaves who built the cities for the Pharaohs, and their contemporary counterparts in the urban poor surrounded by marketeers and developers."⁴

In the Bible the city is presented as a place of pride where people feel secure to affirm that they are all powerful against God in their indifference to human beings. Sodom, Gomorrah and Babylon are symbols of cities under God's judgement for idolatry to riches that strangle the poor.

But the city -- the city of Philadelphia and every other city in this country -- has been abandoned. The wretched and the weak are its occupants. It is beyond the city walls where the conspiracy against God's poor and homeless is taking place. The city is less and less protective of its inhabitants. It participates less and less in national and social advances. The powerless are trapped in urban convulsions where the process of extermination of human beings and the crushing of their souls takes place in the midst of concrete, stench, noise and an utter lack of compassion in the face of profit. All this is taking place in the crucible of religious and political indifference, corporate greed, and a culture that is stealing our souls from us.

In our culture property enjoys an absolute right and defense within our economic system, while no such right or defense is extended to the human person. A person's worth is totally dependent upon how much he or she produces that is marketable, whether what is marketable enriches or demeans human existence. Efforts that focus on human care and enrichment, even such as services to the homeless, are penalized. Such an idolatrous creed rewards belligerence, human indifference, greed, and theft, exemplified by the Iran-Contra scandal and more recently, the

⁴ Vincent Donovan, Unpublished Manuscript.

Savings-and-Loan scandal. There is no doubt about it that in our society, the human person is subordinated to property and is valued by external measurements. And there is no doubt that we have an idolatrous attachment to our present economic system. Thomas Berry, in his remarkable book, *The Dream of the Earth*, makes this insightful observation:

The only suitable interpretation of Western history seems to be the ironic interpretation. This irony is best expressed, perhaps, by the observation that our supposed progress toward an ever-improving human situation is bringing us to wasteworld instead of wonderworld, a situation that found its finest expression in *Endgame* by Samuel Beckett.⁵

The idol of greed is also connected to the idol of power. The military establishment that defends our industrialized mode of existence is paid homage to by the resources that it exacts from the earth and from the poor. The present idols demand human sacrifices to survive. There is a vital connection between the one million Salvadorans who have been forced to leave their homes because the military government has destroyed their villages, and the three million homeless people in the United States. Each day in the name of the American people, in our name, Congress sends one and a half million dollars to aid the military government of El Salvador.

Our idols of wealth and power have claimed human victims. Remember Maura Clark, Jean Donovan, Ita Ford, Oscar Romero, the six Jesuit priests, Elba Ramos and her fifteen-year-old daughter, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Mitch Snyder, Michelle Martin, Pat Reed, Steward McKinney, Chico Byng, and Jeffery Two Feathers. These men and women died for the same reason that Jesus of Nazareth died. They denounced the idols of wealth and power and they spoke the truth. They were part of that prophetic presence that favors the poor and the oppressed. Again, it is the age old cry of a people that murders its prophets and awaits its Messiah.

⁵ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), p. 17.

The Homeless: A Prophetic Voice

We are confronted by the prophetic voice in our midst: the sick and suffering, people with AIDS, throwaway children, refugees, the unemployed, the homeless, and even the earth itself as it suffers the ravages of pollution and industrial devastation. How are we to hear these prophetic voices? What is the Gospel saying to us through them?

The Gospel summons us to become involved with those who are suffering -- involved in such a way that we are standing squarely on the side of the poor and oppressed. It is precisely in the realities of darkness and death that the possibility of salvation is most present. Anyone who has been privileged to meet Christ in the suffering poor knows the depth of their tremendous courage and unwavering hope. The rich promise of the Beatitudes is made real and concrete. How blessed are the poor, the gentle, those who mourn. How blessed are those who hunger and thirst for what is right. How blessed are the merciful, the peacemakers, those persecuted in the cause of right. To stand with the suffering and the marginalized is a process of letting go of our cultural idols. It is an act of faith. In the tension and the chaos that this leap of faith will create (and it will) we will grow in understanding of the unfathomable blessings of God's Kingdom.

"Perfect love casts out fear," says Saint John.⁶ What we need is an infusion of love to cast out the fears that produce racism, sexism, classism and indifference to the suffering of the poor. We need the "harsh and dreadful love in action" that Dostoyevsky wrote about in *Brothers Karamazov* and that Dorothy Day so often cited in her mission with the Catholic Worker.⁷ When one of our sisters or brothers has a problem, we have to see it as a community problem. We have to be there as a community for them. This is a reality that the most technically underdeveloped cultures in the world accept as a human imperative. Anyone's problem is a community's problem. There is no such thing as homelessness in these communities as long as there are people with homes, no such thing as hunger as long as there are people with food.

Opening ourselves to another's pain is just the beginning. In breaking down the walls that separate us into countries, classes,

⁶ 1 John 4.18.

⁷ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), p.66.

racess, tribes, we find our interconnectedness. The old adage, "There but by the grace of God go I," becomes ever so real. To be able to identify with the mentally ill, people living and dying with AIDS, to feel the anguish of the mothers of the disappeared, to know the longing of the refugees to come home, is a rich source of healing and strength. For the suffering in our midst is a source of ongoing conversion. We can resonate with the Australian woman who said, "If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

There are communities of hope rising up in today's society. Communities who speak and act truthfully in the face of the idols they confront. Communities like the Advocate Community Development Corporation, a North Philadelphia neighborhood housing corporation that is dedicated to the revitalization of its neighborhood. Or ACT-UP, a community of HIV-positive persons who have organized to secure the basic rights of people living with AIDS. Most recently, they have had to struggle to allow Betak, a care facility for people with AIDS, to open against much resistance. The Catholic Worker movement has established communities committed to acts of hospitality, mercy, and peace while challenging the injustices of the social structures. There is Project SHARE, a mental health consumer-run organization giving a potent voice to those suffering from mental illness. The Committee for Dignity and Fairness for the Homeless was the catalyst for systemic change through the empowerment of homeless people. This was the lead organization for the political advancement of issues related to homelessness. Out of the Committee for Dignity and Fairness, the Union of the Homeless was born. Chris Sprowal and Leona Smith were responsible for forming grass-roots communities to address four key areas impacting the homeless poor: education, employment, health care and housing. Since March, the Union of the Homeless has taken over thirteen HUD houses. These buildings were vacant and owned by the federal government. Now they are housing thirteen homeless families. Through the efforts of the Committee for Dignity and Fairness, and the Union, Dignity Housing was created. This is a housing development corporation founded and managed by homeless families. They have currently rehabilitated and occupied over 100 houses in Philadelphia.

These communities of hope, all of which take their power from the struggle to establish justice, have begun to break the deafening silence in America. These are communities that refuse to worship the idols of wealth and power. These are communities made up of women and men of vision. They are believers in the dignity of the human person. People who have heard the cries of the poor, who think critically and take seriously the message of the prophet Micah: "This is what Yahweh asks of you, only this: to love tenderly, to act justly, and to walk humbly with your God."⁸

We must respond to the crisis of homelessness and the many other crises in this society, not only to relieve the immense human suffering in our midst, but because the integrity of who we are as human persons is at stake. Our very witness to the Gospel is at stake. Albert Camus once said,

What the world expects of Christians is that Christians should speak out loud and clear, and that they should voice their condemnation in such a way, that never a doubt, never the slightest doubt could arise in the heart of the simplest person ... what we need are people resolved to speak out clearly and pay up personally.⁹

If we do not speak and act truthfully, we will not only fail our sisters, our brothers, and ourselves, we also fail the Gospel.

Since this lecture takes place in a scholarly setting, we should consider the particular challenges for the university community. In his book, *Companions of Jesus*, Salvadoran theologian Jon Sobrino suggests that the university can be an important partner in the struggle for justice.¹⁰ Knowledge is a powerful instrument for change. Economics, Law, and Health Care, can be taught from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed in society. It is a key opportunity to effect systemic change. The preferential option for the poor must be part of the "particular nature" of the university and not just an extra-curricular activity. Efforts like the West Philadelphia Partnership and the policy of the Law School to have students work for the poor are to be commended and

⁸ Micah 6.8.

⁹ Taken from *Common Life* (Newsletter of the Philadelphia Catholic Worker), January 1990.

¹⁰ Jon Sobrino, et al., *Companions of Jesus* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989), pp. 147-151.

strengthened. Ignacio Ellacuria, president of the Jose Simeon Canas University of Central America (UCA) who was among the six Jesuits brutally murdered almost a year ago in El Salvador, expressed his hopes for the university in these words:

This does not mean that only the poor study at the university; it does not mean that the university should abdicate its mission of academic excellence -- excellence needed in order to solve complex social problems. It does mean that the university should be present intellectually where it is needed: to provide science for those who have no science; to provide skills for the unskilled; to be a voice for those who have no voice; to give intellectual support for those who do not possess the academic qualifications to promote and legitimate their rights.¹¹

Together, if we do act, if we do respond to these challenges before us, we will rediscover our human roots of community and compassion. We will know as never before the promise of the Gospel that God's reign is at hand, present in our world. As Teilhard de Chardin put it, "Someday, after we have mastered the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love. Then for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire."

¹¹ Ibid., p. 150.

PANEL RESPONSE

ANN MATTER

Our panelists tonight represent a number of different views on the issue of homelessness in America. Steven Gold is a lawyer who has worked with homeless rights groups in Philadelphia for years. He said I should introduce him as a friend of Mary Scullion and the person who gets her out of jail when it's necessary. Sitting next to him is Leona Smith who is the president of the National Union for the Homeless and the director of the Homeless Project, and also the subject of a film called "Home Girls," which some of you may have seen on Channel 12 last month. Amata Miller is an economist and the education coordinator of NETWORK, Washington, D.C., which is a Catholic social justice lobby. The Reverend Paul Washington, Jr. is the formal rector of Philadelphia's Church of the Advocate and a well known voice for the homeless in Philadelphia. Akila Malik is the student director of the University City Hospitality Coalition and is a student in the School of Nursing at the University. So I turn the panel over to them.

STEVEN GOLD

It's hard to respond to what you are asked to respond to with Mary Scullion. What you heard tonight is truly Mary's struggle in the sense of the depth and the incredible reserve. I'd like to respond to one question that was asked in the question and answer period that really threw me, because the question suggested Sister Mary's full meaning simply wasn't getting through. The question said something about "do you expect homelessness to grow in this country?" I've had a nightmare that it is New Year's Eve in the year 2000. I'm walking down Center City, it could happen to any number of us, and there are not two or three homeless people, there are twenty, thirty, forty homeless people in the streets. And it's very much like, India, Calcutta, although I've never been there, I've seen some pictures. That's what's happening here. It is going to get significantly worse in this country in the next fifteen, twenty years.

There are a number of problems which cause it. Our school system is a total hoax; just a total throwaway for problems, the public school system. It is absolutely petrifying and frightening that every year kids, ninth and tenth graders, are clearly the potential homeless in my dream of the year 2000. They are not being taught to read adequately, they do not know how to do math properly, and sure as heck don't know how to use a computer. It's almost, if one were cynical or paranoid, as if people understand this, expect it, and say "it's ok." We may have much, much more to fear than two societies. The urban cities are the one society that we have been talking about. Detroit is a good example. Newark is a good example. Philadelphia has become a good example.

The second reason is the housing market. The statistics on the housing market are abysmal. I'll give you 1979 to 1990. The relationship between the welfare grants and the median rent here in the city is a total farce. It's impossible. The thing that is amazing to me is that why in 1990 there aren't more homeless. The welfare grants were up by 17% percent and the median rent has gone up something like 87%. People just don't have the money to afford housing. So you have no income, you have no market for housing, and you have a population of homeless people. It's almost expected and understood that there will be homeless.

Then the question came up, someone else asked, "what are we supposed to do, what can we do about it?" One thing people don't appreciate, when Mary kept saying "it's not me," that she's absolutely right. She has not been humble. It's not her. She quoted Camus,

What the world expects of Christians is that Christians should speak out loud and clear. They should voice their condemnation in such a way that never a doubt, never the slightest doubt could arise in the heart of the simplest person . . . what we need are people [not just Sister Mary] resolved to speak up clearly and pay up personally.

That's a great point. That is truly the message, I think, of Sister Mary. And what Camus says, Mary personifies.

And it's not just what, in the preparation for tonight, Mary

and I for the last few days, have gone back and forth about in every telephone call. She kept saying why don't I just read a few of the gospels? What's the point here if I don't have any knowledge? She's pushing me to read Isaiah, Luke and everything, just to try to understand. The one I thought of reading myself was Tolstoy. He wrote, "What then must we do?" which in my research I found was from the Old Testament. Tolstoy says,

I sit on man's back, choking him and making him carry me. And without getting off I assure myself and others, that I am very sorry and wish to ease his life by all possible means except getting off his back.

I think that is where we are. But what Mary does is to say, "I'll deal with you, I'll deal with you as a human being."

Let me give you someone who has suffered. The best example is the one that I like to tell in terms of that story. Some of you remember, but anybody could have done this. You don't have to be a Sister of Mercy. You don't have to be a nun or a minister or rabbi. Do you remember the homeless person who caused great havoc with the American Friends Service Committee, Jealous Street? Jealous Street was a person who, unknown to me, Mary had met at one time on the porch of the Cherry Street Meeting House. I met him at another time on the porch at the Cherry Street Meeting House and then we sort of communicated back and forth. Jealous Street is a person who is very, very religious. A person who is a Vietnam vet. A person who has lots of psychological scars. And I was dealing with him and Mary was doing the same. And the Friends handled it better than most organizations and agencies would, but even they were having trouble. He finally chose to move out and I lost contact with him.

One night, Mary and I were driving, and she said, "we have to stop." And we stopped on a bridge on Nineteenth Street right at Callowhill, between Spring Garden near the park. And she said, "Jealous Street is down there." And she looked at the end of the bridge into the railroad tracks and it was totally, totally dark. "Jealous! Jealous! Jealous, it's Sister Mary." "Be up in a minute, Sister Mary. Be up in a minute." And we saw a shadow, nothing but a shadow climbing up the steps of the embankment there. And he comes up and he talks to Sister Mary for about five

minutes and there's no pretense, it's almost unimaginable. Just one human being dealing with another human being. "How have you been Jealous? It's been really cold out, it's going to get colder. Are you warm enough down there? Are you sure?" I mean, he's just totally destitute. "Are you sure?" "Yes, Mary, I'm doing fine. God is with me. I'll be all right. Don't worry about it."

Unknown to her, because I now knew where he lives, I went there once or twice too. And unless I use the magic words, "Sister Mary sent me," he doesn't come up. "Jealous, it's Steve Gold." Nothing. "Jealous, I'm a friend of Sister Mary's" and he came up. This was at Christmas time and I just wanted to wish him a happy holiday; just to say "hello," that was it. About a week or two after Christmas, maybe a little longer, Mary told Jealous to come over because she had something for him. And he came over, it's about an hour and a half walk. She said that she had gotten long johns for him and a pretty sweater. And it was really cold and this guy is not well dressed. And she tells the story that Jealous says, "Sister Mary, I really could use them and very much appreciate the long johns. I'm always cold. But I just don't deserve the sweater." And she lifts it up and she says, "What do you mean?" "Well, just look at me. It's such a beautiful sweater. I just don't deserve it." And she looks up and says, "Jealous, I see you as more than who you are in that sweater."

Soon after Christmas Mary's father died and she went to Ireland. It was a Sunday or a Monday when she flew over and the following Saturday night, I get a phone call from the Outreach Program looking for help, saying, "Steve, Sister Mary just called." I don't know, I thought she might be in New York, in Boston. "Where is she?" "She's in Ireland." "What's going on?" "Well, she said you know where Jealous Street lives." "Right." "Well, she's been bringing special supper for him on Sunday nights but she's away. So, would you bring him food tomorrow night?" And I said, "Sure, I'll do it." I say facetiously, being a cynical human being, "Is there anything special?" "Oh, yes" and she picks off a list of what Jealous wants: chocolate Tasty Cakes, a hoagie and some kind of fruit juice. This is amazing. She's in Ireland and she remembers another human being. And then I jokingly think to myself how cynical the world is and I say, "Did she tell me where to buy it?" She says, "Oh yes, there's this Wawa . . ." And that Sunday

I go the long way, I go to the Wawa, and buy exactly what she says and that night I go and say, "Jealous, Sister Mary sent me." "I'll be right up." And he comes up and I tell him that she is really sorry that she couldn't come because her father died. "She wanted you to know that she didn't forget you. She asked me to pick up this food for you because she knows you like it." It struck me that I used to pass homeless people all the time: this is nothing special, to end despair like that; if Jealous is no longer homeless. It will take time, one on one but it's a real possibility. Thank you very much.

LEONA SMITH

You know Steve, I can really relate to what you are saying. I've gotten all my strength from Sister Mary. I've watched her, many a night, when we went out on the streets, and I certainly haven't been out there as often as she has. Every homeless person knows her, I believe, all the way down from Front and Market, all the way up to 30th and Market and that is a fact. And do you know why? It's because she's been out there, she's giving people hope, and she let's them know that she cares. And in return they love her and know her and respect her for it.

Many people are afraid of us because they never took the time out to understand us. Many people label us as doing crime, as anything bad that goes on out there. But let me tell you, I was the director of Community Affairs for the Homeless where I worked three jobs. Everything that went on in the community we were automatically blamed for it, ninety-nine percent of the crime in this city. But we were too busy wondering, number one, where we were going to get our next meal from and where we were going to sleep for the night. And when you have those kind of things on your mind, you don't have time to be dealing and doing bodily harm to somebody else because you are trying to save yourself. But many people are afraid because of that myth that's out there that we are the horrible, horrible people on the face of the earth. And I'm just here to say tonight that's not true.

The problem is many people feel guilty. And that's not what I want you to feel, guilty, tonight when you leave here. Get out and do something. Give us a chance to know us and then we will

be able to understand this. I look at her sometimes when she's tired. It's just not her. It has to be required of each and every last one of us to make social and political change so we don't have another death on the streets in the city of Philadelphia and across this country. I've watched her. I've gone to burial ceremonies. I call them celebrations, because I believe there's more to life. Everyone deserves to be buried, including homeless people who didn't have family, who had no insurance. And I've watched her time and time again take on that responsibility to give them a decent burial along with a religious ceremony. She's doing something. And I think that she doesn't deserve to do it by herself.

I just had to say that because that's what I'm feeling right now. She doesn't have to do this thing by herself and I am sick and tired of seeing her do that. I want to see other people get involved and take on the responsibility to relieve some of the pressure off of her. I want to see her be able to go away and not have to worry about Jealous because she knows somebody else is going to be out there to take care of him. She doesn't have to worry about who is going to feed homeless people from Front and Market all the way to Thirtieth and Market because she knows she has more people who are going to do it. That's what we need to be talking about. That's what we need to focus on because it's not just her.

I just want to tell you about Sister Mary who I have had the pleasure to know for five years and who has been a model of strength. She says to stand up for what you believe. And when you are involved in the struggle to do and make social and political change it's not easy. It's hard. Often I hear my staff and Steve worry about Sister Mary. A whole lot of other people who work with us say they worry because you have a lot of burdens and a lot of pressures. It's so awful. Even less than what's happening with us. People who are organizers and activists don't realize the pressure that is placed on us all to know what is actually going on inside of us as well. You are dealing with a multitude of people's problems to end homelessness. Because of Sister Mary, because we started out together, we knew that Philadelphia was going to be OK in terms of the struggle to end homelessness locally. And because of her, Chris and I were able to travel nationally. And I am proud to say that we have nineteen chapters throughout the country. You see we wouldn't have taken a role if we didn't have people like her. Because homelessness is not a local problem,

you know, it is a national problem that is growing each and every day.

I've traveled around this country and I know the problems are getting worse. If we don't collectively do something about it, I think we all are going to be guilty and responsible for the deaths that will occur here in the city of Philadelphia, because we sat back and did nothing. We have to begin to write to our legislators. We have to put pressure on HUD who is responsible for housing. Sister Mary talked about the S&L scandal, we talk about the HUD scandal because the crooks stole the money and now they're telling us that we have to pay for it. We are all responsible here because they're going to take our tax dollars, that they stole, and make us pay for it. So you are automatically involved even if you don't want to be because they are going to rip you off, just like they've ripped us off. They have stripped us of our dignity, tried to anyway, and our pride as decent human beings in society.

You know, as I sit here, thoughts are running through my mind and I'm scared. I am really scared that they want to label us as alcoholics and drug addicts, and that's what I want to talk about briefly. I don't care if people have problems with alcohol or drugs: the one thing we don't deserve is to be out on the streets. We don't deserve for a person to say that because of the value of their house or the value of their property we don't have rights in the community where we are trying to relocate ourselves. We deserve a fair chance.

I think the real issue here is we did not bring drugs into this country in the first place. So therefore once again that myth is out there. Once again we are the victims. They say that it is our fault when the real crooks who have brought these drugs to plague our people are going scot-free. I think we collectively have to begin to address this government, to say that they are the ones responsible. I think it is genocide, destroying our American people. And they are doing it not only with the plague of these drugs but they are also doing it with the stealing of the scandal of the S&L. I think that they also want a war. You know they have a war in the Persian Gulf. That's going to take the American public mind off the crooks who are responsible. We can't let that happen.

They talk about the property we've taken over. There's a reason for that. We didn't just decide whether we should take over government properties. We have a Housing Program. Back in 1988

along with Mitch Snyder of CCUV and the National Coalition for the Homeless, we got together and did a 73 city housing takeover. Philadelphia was the most successful program in the housing takeover, than any other city, because we held out the longest. We were in those properties for two and a half weeks with no water, no electricity, and no heat. In some instances the community organized against us and said, "I don't want any homeless people, at least not next door to me." But we stayed there and the media didn't cover how the community threw bricks through the wall. They didn't cover how they threw rocks through the windows. You see we had a mission. We had a goal. We had a dream. We were on the streets anyway and we had absolutely nothing to lose. At least we had a leaking roof over our heads and we stayed in there anyway and we went through all that and we won partially. We now have a housing program that Sister Mary talked about and once again the government has reneged on us. Since 1988 they promised us Section Eight certificates that they have not delivered to this day.

That is another thing that you can do if you want to help. Write your letters to the HUD regional office down on Seventh Street, 105 South Seventh Street, and say we are doing something good. We have over 453 men, women and children in Dignity housing. Without those Section Eight certificates we are going to lose our program and we are going to have to return back to the shelter and back into the streets. So you see we have a housing program that's working under the home ownership program and they tell us that they don't have any resources. There is something wrong with this government and we are going to take over properties again and again and again until HUD and this government realizes that the very people that built this country have a priority first, before we can talk about somewhere else.

And I just want to say thank you for giving me the opportunity to share with you because winter is coming. And that's another thing; we need food, we need kerosene. We still have no heat and we have men, women and children in those properties. And if it hadn't been for Sister Mary feeding us we would not have lasted. We have been there since March 5 of last year. It's going on a year. And if it had not been for Women of Hope, if it had not been for Mercy Hospice, if it had not been for Bob Simpson, we could not have made it this far. We have children in these properties. We

have babies living in these properties. We need to fight for their lives are at stake. I just want to say thank you for allowing me to share.

AMATA MILLER

It's difficult to follow that. The topic that I was asked to address was "Political Response to the Homeless." And we've heard, I think, already a lot about that theme. When I think about political response I like to remember the words of Liz Morancy, another woman from the Mercy tradition, who says, "The political is making private pain public." I think it is that sense of the social, that inclination toward co-responsibility and the common good that moves people to act together, that is what we lack here. Dorothee Sölle, one of the past speakers in this lecture series, says that the stages of response to injustice and oppression are: first of all, people are mute and assenting; and the second stage is to be aware and lamenting; and the third stage is to bond together for change. I think that what we're now experiencing is the poverty of political relationships, lack of political will, which is really at the root of the housing scandal, the housing crisis, of which the most obvious symptom is homelessness.

The failure of our political will at this point in our history is causing homelessness in this country. We are not living in India. We are not living in Bangladesh or Ethiopia or Mexico or Nicaragua or Grenada where it would be physically impossible for those economies to house everyone. That is not true in this country of ours. We could deliver housing for everyone if we chose to do it. So the reason in bold, plain, language, the only reason we have homelessness, is because we want it. Or another way to say it is that we don't yet have the political will to do anything about it.

In 1949 this country passed a National Housing Act which said that housing is a right; it is the policy of this nation, to provide for every citizen, decent housing. And we went about it carefully. We started by recognizing that we would have a whole lot of veterans coming back from the Second World War to start new families, and so we would design our tax policies so that there would be an incentive for people to buy homes. We would design

tax policies so that there would be incentive for builders to build new homes for young families. We would design new institutions at the federal level which would insure mortgages for first time home buyers and provide terms which would make them accessible to young families just starting out. We set up a whole set of secondary institutions to buy and sell mortgages to make it possible for those in the middle class or working class people to own their homes. And so home ownership rose from 44% to 65% by 1980. Since then it has slipped.

At that same time we recognized that the private housing market would never deliver low income housing. That we would have to have federal, state, and local government policies to cooperate with the private sector in order to deliver housing for the lowest-income people in society. And in the beginning we did it by building housing, by subsidizing the building of public housing. In the middle of the sixties we started subsidizing people's rent. And in the 1980s we decided we weren't going to do either for the poor. And so at the same time as we were giving tax deductions of 50 billion dollars a year which encouraged people who already had one and two homes to buy two and three, we were starving low-income housing.

This happened at the same time as the economy was slowing down and earnings were stagnating for most Americans. The data shows that the average earnings for males in the United States dropped by 8 percent from 1973 to 1986, whereas in the fifties and the sixties the average earning rate for males rose by 25 to 30 percent. The people who were entering the labor market, women raising families, young people raising families in the seventies and the eighties, were not experiencing that kind of income growth. The people who would have bought their own homes were not buying homes. They were crowding into rental housing which in previous decades would have been filtering down to the lower income people in the society. So we have two things causing homelessness at the root. You've got the housing shortage and you've got poverty. Two things. And the reason for both of them is this lack of political will.

I think that it has been obvious to us that we have come to a period in our history, the past twenty years in particular, where we have had a poverty of public relationships. Robert Bellah, and the other authors of *Habits of the Heart*, say that what we have

seen is that the forces which previously held our excessive individualism in check in our society have weakened. The two forces were: 1) the adherence of most members of our society to some faith which built into it a sense of responsibility for your neighbor; and 2) that sense of democracy, republicanism with a small "r" which meant that we were co-responsible for the shape of our society. The effects of the weakening of both of those things in the seventies and the eighties, is what we are seeing in problems like homelessness and throwaway zones for our society.

I am a bit more optimistic than the previous speakers that we are at a different moment in our history because there is widespread evidence, if you look across the whole spectrum of social issues, that the American people are politically in a different place now than we were in the early eighties.

In the beginning of the eighties we believed Ronald Reagan when he said the problem is the poor; the problem is the government; we have made these problems worse because the government has had programs which have been active on these issues. So according to Reagan the thing to do was to get rid of the government and social spending, and then poverty and those problems would go away.

Well, we are into the nineties and we have seen something different as a result of his approach. And the American people have shown in many ways that, if they are not morally outraged by homelessness and hunger, under-educated children, and cities where we can't walk the streets, people are at least embarrassed. In the city of Washington tourists come from all over the world and they say, "How can this be? This is the richest country in the world."

The struggle we have politically is the reality that what the neo-conservatives did was destroy the consensus, the political consensus which had supported the ability of conservatives and liberals in Congress to work together. But they didn't replace it with anything else. So liberalism, meaning activist government, became a dirty word. But there was not a replacement of it with a conservative consensus that was operational. So what we're left with is people recognizing that we have seemingly intractable problems. People are now in a mood of what Isabel Sawhill calls "tough-minded compassion." People are saying we need to do

something but we are not going to do the things we did before which seemed to add to the tendency for dehumanizing, and simply acted as if we threw money at programs, that would be enough. We need to do something different. We need to build on the experience of the sixties and seventies which taught us about the power of partnership between public agencies, the private sector, labor, the not-for-profit sector, involving churches, involving community organizations; programs that are empowering, not in the sense of power domination but in the sense of relational power.

So we are at a moment, then, when we have, many observers are saying, a moment of opportunity. A moment of opportunity because people recognize that, something has to happen, but we don't know what to do. But things have been happening so creatively at the grass roots level all over the country. Examples such as we have had here: Sister Mary and the people who work with her, the wonderful things that are happening all over the country with names like Women of Hope, Mustard Seed Community, Rachel's Place, My Sister's Place. All of these kinds of things are demonstrating the political power of people who are organized and take charge of their own development. At the national level, we were starved, as people said, for ten years. There hasn't really been a coherent, national movement to end homelessness. The successes have been where they need to be, at the lower levels. The stories that you've heard multiply.

But we need also to have the activity at the federal level. And fortunately I can tell you tonight some of the things that did happen in Washington, that got lost in the budget fiasco. The Housing Act of 1990 did pass and it is the turning away from the 1980s. It is a turning of a corner. It does provide additional funds, not enough yet, but it does enhance the amount of money for housing; 27 billion in fiscal 1991 and 30 billion in fiscal 1992. It does create new housing programs and home investment partnership programs which will give block grants to state and local governments for rehabbing sub-standard housing and property acquisition, all targeted to family incomes below 60 percent of the area needs. The targeting level has been lowered, concentrating more on those who are suffering the most and are in crisis.

The Community Housing Partnership part of the Act makes not-for-profits, who have been the most successful actors in this whole situation (providing housing, providing transitional housing,

providing rental housing, and providing shelters) more equal partners. Fifteen percent of the money has to be put aside for not-for-profit investors. And a good portion of that money has to be put aside for the services community housing organizations want to provide for their tenants like counseling, vacations, the long term things that were never in housing programs before. It also provides assistance to community based housing programs for technical assistance and for the pre-construction costs which were always what precluded people from trying to build the right housing for low-income sales.

There's the new National Mortgage Trust which is a revolving fund to provide low cost mortgage financing and down payment assistance. And then there are the home ownership opportunity programs which have attempted to expand the definition of first-time home buyers to include people like displaced homemakers, divorced women who may have not been homeless before, and who would have not before met the definition of a first-time homeowner. There are also special terms of Section Eight to provide particularly for the populations among the homeless who are suffering from AIDS, on drugs. There is also a government service committee which provides support services.

It's clearly not enough money yet and the National Housing Coalition estimates that we need to have at least 45 billion for housing in order to provide decent housing for every American. We need to get it up to 32 billion just to get back to where we were in 1978. But the fact that this housing legislation passed, is in the direction of the kinds of things that housing activists like Mary called for when, from all over the country, they came together at NETWORK (National Catholic Social Justice Lobby in Washington, D.C.) last fall to draft a vision statement for a just housing policy. Many of these elements have been put, based on their experience, in the legislation.

In addition, the Act includes strong incentives for investors whose housing contracts are about to expire, not to leave low income housing. Low income housing advocates believe that most of the units on which contracts are about to expire will be saved.

So there is some movement, and although it seems minuscule, at least we've turned the corner and are moving in the right direction. So I think we need to recognize we're at the moment of opportunity. We need to get the message of the kinds of stories that

we heard here today to Capitol Hill. They listen. If the elderly do it, they listen. If the Gun Lobby can do it, they listen too. If we can mobilize enough political will we can make it possible for the homeless to come and tell the stories, for their voices to be heard. As Leona said, we need more of us in the community to be a part of it.

Kevin Phillips, one of the most outspoken conservative Republicans in the country, wrote a book called *The Politics of Wealth and Poverty in America*, and he describes what people like Mary, Steve, and others of us have been saying for the past ten years. He documents what the terrible cost of this ten year period of public policy neglect of social problems really is. Kevin Phillips argues that the 1980s were like the 1920s and the 1880s, a gilded age, an age of growing inequality, of gross neglect of the poor, of conspicuous consumption; and he argues that after the 1880s and after the 1920s, and he argues after the 1980s, comes a time of a new rebirth of populism. He says that there are four conditions necessary for a rebirth of populism and all of these are in effect now: First, economic downturn that spreads (when GM starts closing nine factories and laying off hundreds of thousands of workers); Second, that people perceive that the creativity of capitalism has been turned to speculation instead of to production to meet their needs. That is clearly like the building scandal, like the S&Ls, etc; Third, that there is a widening of economic inequality; Fourth, that the voters perceive that the politicians are on the side of the wealthy. He argues that the new populism, the new reverting to popular participation, the new reawakening of citizenship is a very real probability at this time.

So the message, I think, for the group here today is that there is a moment of opportunity. It is not just a matter of whether we feel we want to be political again or not. What is at stake is the humanity of our society. And what is at stake for people of faith is the integrity of our faith. So I think that rebuilding political will for a just and humane society is both a political and moral challenge for us. As people who believe in the god of the New Testament and Old Testament traditions, we are a people whose God tells us that the basis for the divine judgement about the quality of our faith is how we deal with people among whom we live. In particular, our tradition, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, says we will be judged on the basis of how we deal

with those who are the least privileged in our society. And so we must be a people who are about the painstaking but crucial process of relationship-building and the initiatory action which will generate the people power necessary for originating and sustaining the long term possibilities for change. So a reawakening of our social conscience, relying on the strength of God to do what none of our actions can do alone, is part of our challenge; part of the challenge for us that comes out of the message of the reality of homelessness and the message of our faith tradition.

In conclusion, I think we need to take heart from the observation of anthropologist Margaret Mead who says, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

REVEREND PAUL WASHINGTON, JR.

I don't recall having been given a particular topic to address. I have prepared some thoughts that have come to my mind from being here this afternoon and this evening. The first thing I want to say however, is that I am certainly well acquainted with the activities of Sister Mary and the other people on this panel. And thank God each one thinks so much of the other. I think that's good. But each has been chosen and made by God to do the particular thing. Steve, I sometimes wonder how you make a living. But Steve has his particular calling and he is being faithful. Leona, you are doing God's work. And Mary, you are doing God's work in the things that you do. I think of a passage in the gospel according to Saint John, "the word was made flesh and dwelt among us." That speaks to the doctrine of the Incarnation. And I see words which are articulated, incarnated, into lives. You take those words and you make them live. And as a result of what you do, it makes a difference.

The American public has gotten complacent. They can see the suffering and somehow they have become so callous they are immune to that which they see. I think of one of the many, many statements made by Martin Luther King, and that is, "the day may come when we shall have to repent, not because of the vitriolic deeds of evil people but because of the appalling apathy of good people." America may pride itself, despite all they are saying about drugs and everything else, America prides itself on being a nation

of good, hardworking people. But it is the appalling apathy of the millions and millions of good people that causes the scandal and sin of homelessness. Steve, you spoke about your dream of the year 2000 and what you saw. As long as there is that kind of apathy, homelessness will continue to grow.

But speaking again about this apathy, I happen to be the chairman of a small foundation and Chris Sprowal made an application to this foundation for a grant. And one of the first things we asked Chris was, "if we decide to give you the money that you are requesting, do you think you can get the people off of the streets?" Chris was very astute in his answer. He said, "if I can get all of my grants responded to affirmatively, I can get the people off the streets." And so the trustees voted to fund Chris' proposal. And again; apathy. Too many people don't care about the problem of suffering; the brother we just don't want to see anymore. Get the people off the streets so we can't see them, and after that, we don't care what happens to them. But I thank God that the people who are homeless are not going to hide so that they cannot be seen. They will remain visible. They will be on Chestnut Street and Market Street and Walnut Street and downtown where people will not be allowed to deny that in the streets there are homeless people.

It reminds me of the story of Dives and Lazarus. Dives was a rich man who lived sumptuously. Lazarus was a poor beggar who sat at his gate, who had sores all over his body and flies were all over his body eating on the sores. And the story goes on to say that Dives lived the good life and Lazarus lived in abject poverty; he was a beggar. And they both died and Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom and Dives was in torment. The thing that is interesting about that story is that Dives never said a word to Lazarus to demean him or to dehumanize him or to insult him. He never said a word to frighten away Lazarus. But for those who may know the story, when Dives wanted to be relieved from his torment, he does not speak to Lazarus. He speaks to Father Abraham. He says, "Father Abraham, I am in torment. Send Lazarus to my brothers that they may bring some water so as to cool my tongue." This rich man, who had never talked to Lazarus in his lifetime, even in torment, instead of saying "Lazarus, would you go to my brothers and tell them to bring me some water," he does not even talk to Lazarus but he talks with Father Abraham:

"Tell Lazarus to do this."

Once again that speaks of the hardness, the callousness, of many, many human hearts. We never see and we do not even think of speaking to those who are living in poverty. They are so totally dehumanized as was the case of Lazarus, that Dives would not even speak with him but to Father Abraham; "Tell that thing over there to do something for me." What does Abraham say? "There is no point in Lazarus going back from the dead and talking to your brothers. They do not hear the prophets, neither will they hear one who rose from the dead."

But Sister, you mentioned a while ago that you don't necessarily feel as pessimistic as some may feel. I received a paper the night before last when I was in another meeting dealing with the Middle East. It was from the Church of the Poor in the Decade of the Nineties, by a theologian from Costa Rica. He writes: "I think we are moving from a political/military confrontation with imperialism toward a confrontation basically of a cultural, ethical, spiritual, and theological nature." He sees a shift from a military confrontation with imperialism to a spiritual one. Then he goes on to say that we must learn the ethical life, affirm human life as absolute, as a radical criterion of discernment between good and evil, beauty and ugliness, the true and the false. In the spiritual domain the confrontation occurs between the God of life and the idol of death. The world of the poor is the privileged place for the experience of God. The imperialistic system is fundamentally an idolatrous system. Finally, in the theological field we will have to develop a radical opposition between the kingdom of God and empire. It is impossible to announce the kingdom of God without threatening the empire.

I think the Church today is almost like Caesar and Christ. But instead of the Church confronting Caesar I think that Caesar and the Church have happily become bedfellows. I do not see the Church assuming the prophetic role which I think the Church should take. I can recall speaking to my own bishop shortly after the ordination of a woman, (this was the first it happened in our church, it took place at the Church of the Advent of which I was rector), and I said to my bishop that the one thing that I regret so much, is that the church is not prophetic. And he said to me that institutions are never prophetic. The institutions may indeed raise up prophets. They may even give support to some of the

prophets, but don't expect an institution to be prophetic. And I understand that very well. I think of the Episcopal Church as a place where people go of their own free will. Some are on the right, some are on the left, some are in the middle, and the Church has to make sure that it doesn't offend anybody. And so it goes on from day to day, from year to year, never going too much to the right, never too much the left, but making sure to stay in the middle. So as an institution it will survive, with the result that the Church as an institution is really losing its integrity. And I realize that those are strong words, but I cannot despair. I cannot despair because there are prophets in the church. Mary, you are taking stands and you will say things that your Archbishop would not do. God knows what he thought when he saw this sister being loaded into a paddy wagon to go to jail. I can't see him going to jail. No, he wouldn't go to jail but he will tolerate this call of the various prophets. That is one thing, which I suppose institutions should do.

But I can say that in my own particular case as Rector of the Church of the Advent for twenty-six years, there were times when there were officials who were glad that I did what I did, but they could not offer support despite their friendship. I don't know how to deal with it, it's just one of the realities of life itself. And so as we look at the problem that is before us, we must face the fact that this is an imperialistic society. It is a capitalistic society. The name of the game is money. And people see the government, as well as the financial and economic system, as idols to which many will sacrifice their souls, both for country as well as for capital.

I see today people in a dilemma; people who know that Bush is not there because he has righteous indignation but because of what the business man is doing to the plebes. Where was his compassion during Panama? Or his compassion during Grenada? We heard no outcry. We saw no outrage. And the full story has not been told of the number of people who were destroyed in both those countries. Where was the indignation then? The name of the game is capitalism and power and no way in the world would Margaret Thatcher or George Bush want this pointed out. They have that much power in the world.

I'll get back then to the talk which I prepared and that has to do not only with the appalling apathy of good people but also to point out what can happen when just a few people moved by

the spirit of righteousness and goodness, what a few people can do. Chris Sprowal went on a fast on the day that they started city cutbacks for shelters. Chris decided on that day that he was going to start a fast. And so he fasted. And as he lost weight he was visited by various people. He was visited by the governor of the Commonwealth, and the governor made a promise to Chris that he was going to put something into place to pay for the shelter.

I want to leave this one thought with you. To be able to overcome the evil in the world does not necessarily depend on how great our numbers are, but how right our position is. The people in this room, if we were to confront, if there were occasion to confront the president of this university, or somebody else, a group as small as we are, if we had a righteous cause, a moral position, and we took that stand, we could bring about change. We need to know that God, by whatever name given, all faiths consider God to be omnipotent. And I personally believe that I am serving an omnipotent God, and therefore whatever I feel like doing, I am going to do it because I am not dealing with finite, frail human beings. I am dealing with a God who is all-powerful, who will lead me to peace and his will. We must know that we have the power to change things. We must repent not because of our vitriolic deeds but because of our own appalling apathy.

AKILA MALIK

I was asked to speak on why I volunteer, and what I am going to say, I say as a nurse and as a Muslim. But religion to me is not about why I help the homeless. I feel that religion and culture can play an important role in developing a person's personality, to influence their concern, to influence the activities of one person. It's a Christian ethic to help the poor, but the same ethic applies to most religions. I think what is important is the individual offer to help the needy. It's characteristic of the faith you have. Where is the compassion and dedication? Dedication, as Sister Mary mentioned earlier, is only the first step in helping the homeless.

Dealing with homelessness is not just dealing with a person, but it is literally dealing with a person who does not have a home. The conditions in which people live when they are homeless in

this society removes them from the normal structures of that society, legally and culturally, and that's what is meant by the definition of the word called "homeless" in the English language. I think that my nursing career says more about my commitment to help the homeless than my religion. In nursing, I must deal with the physical, mental, emotional, psycho-social aspects of a person, and any other problems a person may have.

I find that my religion is more of an asset than a reason for what I do. That is not to say that I can't help a non-Muslim who has the same needs. I'm not saying that nurses and Muslims or Muslim nurses are the best advocates for helping the homeless. What I am saying is that conquering the problem of homelessness requires many visions. It is not a condition that will be resolved overnight. It's not a problem which will be solved by religion alone. It needs the help of everyone of every sex, race, religion, and color, and especially of the University. You can really make a difference. You really can help solve the problem. There are many times when I just want to give up. I can't volunteer all by myself and make a difference and neither can Sister Mary or any of us. And if you put us together you can count us on one hand. We can't make a difference by ourselves. We need your help. And so, sometimes, I want to give up. I just want to say, "Forget it. I'm a student. I've got enough problems already." But then, somebody will come along and say "thank you" and those two words are so overwhelming that that's what keeps me going for a long, long time.