

SECTION II: SHARING

The Spirit Which Queries

by Jennifer Haines

EARLY IN 1971, my family's home was destroyed by fire. One of us sensed something in the middle of the night, got everybody up and out, and five minutes later the place was an inferno. It burned to the ground.

With it went all the things of my past, my childhood home, mementos of happy times, things I'd created, gifts I'd been given, all wiped out. My first reaction was shock, the need to adjust to a new reality. Close on its heels came, incredibly, relief. I had been suddenly and effortlessly released from the burden of many, many things I didn't know what to do with but was too attached to to get rid of; and I realized that what really mattered about them all was already safe in my memory. The event marked a milestone near the start of my journey toward simplicity.

After that, I continued the journey more consciously. I became painfully aware that no one can serve two masters, and that I spent most of the moments of my life serving mammon, attending to cares and possessions. I saw that I could never come close to God without freeing myself of things and attachments; and I knew that there was nothing more important to me than serving God. So I worked on prying myself free of things.

It helped tremendously when I stopped once to ask myself what was the thing I owned that I cared for the most, that was most in danger of possessing me; I identified it, and, after great inner struggle, gave it away. I tasted freedom. It helped tremendously when I tested my determination not to own a car by living without one five miles from work and from public transportation and seven miles from Meeting. I cycled, and I walked. I tasted freedom again, and joy. It helps tremendously to be living now in community, to be letting go of the things I still use through sharing them. I find freedom, and peace.

That has been the story of my journey toward simplicity; a struggle to let go, a painful tearing loose; and then freedom, joy, and peace. The journey is far from over. I need still to work on attachments to people, to prestige, to approval. I need still to simplify my time commit-

ments. Life in God is ultimately simple, and I have not arrived.

But the journey has also another dimension. Simplicity is not a purely personal process. My style of living affects all of the world, and my love of God cannot exist apart from my love of neighbor. So I have been concerned about the state of the world, knowing that there are barely enough material things to go around, that my taking more than my share necessarily means that others have less than they need.

I find myself right away in a dilemma. For simply by being a middle-class American, I am taking more than my share. The present world annual income per person is about \$1000 a year. It has been estimated that, with good management, the earth could even support resource use at the rate of \$2000 per person per year. More than that is unquestionably more than my share.

Well, living on less than \$2000 a year in this society is possible, if you're lucky. I am, in fact, doing it, and loving it. But that is obviously not enough, and perhaps not of first importance. People are still starving in Asia; people are flocking to Latin American cities where they can find no work; people are living in squalor and hopelessness, even here in the United States. And I can see that even reaching out to these my neighbors in love—to try to ease their burdens, help them put food on their tables, teach them the skills they need to make a better life for themselves—though good and perhaps necessary, is still not enough, may even be something of a luxury that does more for my own self-esteem than for them. Because more fundamental than the need for love is the need for justice.

It is not an accident that the rich and powerful people and nations of the world use the largest, and increasing, shares of its resources. It serves their interests to do so. Selfishness is the fundamental principle of our capitalist world economic system; the idea being that if everyone looks after his or her own interests, trying to get the best deal and make the most money, then these efforts will all

balance each other out to everyone's benefit. In fact, of course, they balance out to the benefit of those with power. So a handful of the powerful control the major economic decisions of the world system; and the majority of the world's people suffer.

Developing nations are not poor because they are somehow backward or incompetent, but because they have been kept poor by the rich. Colonial powers, seeking wealth, went so far as to actually destroy established industry in their colonies, as Great Britain did the textile industry in India, in order to use the colonies as sources of their raw materials and markets for their manufactured goods. This system is continued today, not so much politically as economically, through such means as tariffs that discriminate against processed products, aid tied to purchases in the donor country, and investment by multinational corporations in countries where "cheap" labor and other "advantageous" conditions guarantee more profit to the owners in the home country than they originally invested.

So our world economic system supports and perpetuates injustice, maintaining the privilege of the few at the expense of the many. And we support this system. We give our assent to assumptions such as that the goal of corporations is to make profits, that competition and selfishness and greed are the proper cornerstones of economic decision-making. That's the way capitalism works.

I say "No." Everything that is religious in me cries out against these assumptions. There is nothing of Quakerism or Christianity, of Jesus or love, in such a system. Rather, cooperation and concern for each other should be the basis of our economic, as of all our other, relationships.

If we agree with this, if we believe in it, we can work to bring about changes. We can challenge the present system, the present structures, which teach selfishness and maintain injustice. We can build alternative, cooperative structures for living, producing, exchanging goods and skills. We can find ways to distribute the world's resources fairly. Our Meeting communities can become the inspiration and model for our life in the global community, a daily life of work and relationships filled with the Spirit—the spirit of love, the spirit of God, the spirit which queries, "But if we have the world's goods and see our brothers and sisters in need, yet close our hearts against them, how does God's love abide in us?" (I John 3:17)



Jennifer Haines coordinates the Right Sharing of World Resources program at the office of Friends World Committee's Section of the Americas. This issue originated as her idea.

Jesus the Liberator

by Robert McAfee Brown

Editor's note: The following excerpts from Robert McAfee Brown's keynote address at the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held last November in Nairobi, Kenya, seem appropriate for this issue on Right Sharing of World Resources.

"...Who is this Jesus Christ who frees and unites?"

Negatively, Jesus the Liberator frees us from the false securities by which we try to make our lives secure... If I seek security in my whiteness, I discover that Jesus does not love us according to our skin color. If I seek security in my maleness, telling myself that this is a man's world, I discover that, in Jesus Christ there is "neither male nor female." If I seek security in my class situation, attempting to hold on to the benefits of being relatively affluent, I discover that Jesus' message is addressed centrally to the poor, and that my attempt at class privilege impedes rather than furthers the doing of his will.

Positively, he frees us *for* the possibility of seeing the world through eyes other than our own. One thing becomes increasingly clear: there is a convergence today between the biblical view of Jesus the Liberator and the cry of oppressed peoples for liberation.

For our own day, to "see the world through eyes other than our own" has simply got to mean seeing it through the eyes of the poor and dispossessed. When the story of Jesus and the story of human oppression are put side by side, they fit! They are simply different versions of the same story. The cry of the hungry is overwhelming. The cry of the politically and economically exploited is overwhelming. The cry of those in prison and under torture is overwhelming. The cry of parents who