

THE LITTLE BLUE BOOK:

A Blueprint for Radical Change

Al Fritsch, SJ



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The Little Blue Book

A growing disquiet about the current world situation beckons us to seek a model of change who is humble, inspiring, enthusiastic, and compassionate. We need someone who is one of us; we want an inspiring person who can lead; we look for a faithful person who has the Spirit within; and we want someone so transparent that we realize he or she has weathered suffering and remains merciful and compassionate. The Virgin Mary has helped in the transformational salvation event through a simple "fiat" (let it be so); Mary's song of praise, the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-54), proclaims a new creation, a coming of God. Thus Mary's proclamation can inspire us to *Reclaim the Commons*.¹ Mary's proclamation is a revolutionary prayer of the Church or, in the words of John Paul II, *the prophetic announcement of the mystery of the total salvation of humanity*. Christians are called to bear Christ to others by direct involvement in salvation history, which has expanded in recent years to include our human-induced wounded planet. Mary leads; we follow as faithful Christ-bearers.

Mary's song contains the following components of a radical change leading to *Reclaiming the Commons*: thanksgiving, joy and blessings; compassionate non-violence and grass-rooted participation; and appropriate service to others. The following reasons allow us to focus on the duty that we reflect on the words of this *Magnificat*:

- * Change cries out because a time of deliverance is at hand (e.g., the gap between the rich and poor continues to widen; demand for resources grows as millions of Asians and others enter into the overly-consuming middle class; some scientists predict a 3.5 or higher degree Celsius rise in temperature in this century);

- * The world's lowly majority respects Mary: two billion Christians along with a slightly smaller number of Moslems;

- * Compulsive reactionaries against big government cannot call this demand for change "Marxist," if *Reclaiming the Commons* is biblically-based AND inspired;

- * Mary's song, the *Magnificat*, is regarded as a liberation hymn that addresses the poor and lowly of the world;²

- * Mary's whole being is one of giving service to and for others in humble ways -- and God's ongoing favor is upon her;

* Mary is aware of urgent times, and *Now is the acceptable time* (II Cor 6:1-4) for us all;

* Mary appears to very poor people (at Guadalupe, LaSalette, Lourdes, Fatima, etc.), calling for conversion;

* A personal closeness to Mary has been experienced at Masses in the Manchester, Kentucky prison with Hispanic prisoners; and

* We must confer on the *Magnificat* the meaning of our times with responsibility and creativity as a democratic people.

*To her who is Mary,
because she is full of grace.
To her who is full of grace,
because she is with us.
To her who is with us,
because the Lord is with her.³*

1) The Creation Moment: Thankfulness and Blessings

*My soul proclaims your greatness, O God,
and my spirit rejoices in you, my Savior.⁴*

Mary is joyously thankful.

Mary proclaims the greatness of God in her whole being through praise, exaltation and glorification. Her very existence is the primary privilege in which all creation participates and in which she shows exaltation in a way that only human beings can do. Free human beings can proclaim that greatness through signs of gratitude wherein the divine greatness can shine like a special light in a world of shadows. In her joy, Mary establishes an environment of total gratitude, a sense of profound respect for what God has done for her. Through her purity and transparency, Mary manifests the openness to a total act of freedom, an act that allows her to make great or "magnify" the Creator of all. And such is pure joy.

God gives to Mary a special privilege to participate in the monumental moment of salvation history, to be through obedience a new Eve, to be the mother of the Messiah, to be the flesh and blood wherein the divine and human kiss. The entire being of Mary manifests God's majesty, power and mercy in the creative act that

now reaches an apogee in the conception and birth of the Lord. *Rejoice, so highly favored!* (Luke 1:28) Mary, full of grace, is a pure crystal from which the Divine Light within now shines forth. The Christ within allows her whole being to magnify God's love for us all; her whole being shines as a unique jewel. Mary exalts with the joyful words, "Let it be," a total act of surrender to God's will, a moment of **enthusiasm** or "the God within." Mary sees the greatness of God as giver of good gifts and, in an atmosphere of utter thankfulness, she shows the power of God in her joyful song.

Mary magnifies the Lord in three ways: in her immaculate condition she needs no purification and so her joy and love exceed those of other human beings in glorifying God's presence; Mary shares this presence with her neighbor (her cousin Elizabeth); the sharing becomes a public and magnifying act; Mary has within her womb the Lord and thus, during his gestation, Mary helps to physically magnify the Lord. Spiritually and physically an Incarnation event occurs, and Mary helps make this happen.

*For you have looked with favor
upon your lowly servant,
and from this day forward
all generations will call me blessed.*

Mary recognizes her own unique station as a humble handmaid (servant); she experiences her utter unworthiness in earning a part of the mystery of salvation. *I am the handmaid of the Lord; let what you have said be done to me* (Luke 1:38). Divine greatness shines through Mary's lowliness because she realizes her station is not from her own or any human source.

Mary blesses God in the *Magnificat*; she will be blessed by all in relation to both Incarnation and Redemption. Mary sees that her call to be the Lord's handmaid is a blessing, and her immediate response is a blessing. The first blessing is from God before human effort; the second is through God's grace as her accepting words extend blessing back to God. Mary acknowledges God as origin of all blessings; God is the divine Source of her being able to recognize gifts given -- and thus this double blessing is humbling. Mary receives the public proclamation of blessing through her cousin Elizabeth's words, and then from all who through future generations will proclaim her "Blessed Mary." Jesus, her gestating blessing, is in birth to be revealed to a waiting world. All creation is blessed by the unfolding act of salvation.

*For you, the Almighty,
have done great things for me,
and holy is your name.*

Mary's profound humility is manifested by her proclaiming that these "great things" are pure gifts from God. The birth of a savior is God's great gift to us all, and we have a role through Mary's participation in this gift-giving event that is to extend in space and time. "Great things" include the greatest, namely, a person: God-man; but our bearing this gift is great enough indeed. What is done is the speaking of a Word, but Mary is first in the chorus; she realizes the great event of Incarnation, which becomes more than a moment; it is a process. More "great things" will follow for her and for us, including the privilege of being compassionate and co-suffering with the Messiah in special ways. Mary's privilege to be one with the Lord follows from her free "yes" to being the Christ-bearer, *Theotokos*.

Just as the reflection of Mary to these events, so our own reflection shows us the gifts as well. The great things done include the invitation to move beyond the Incarnation to the redemptive act itself. As we will soon see in the second part, Mary will experience a sword that pierces her soul -- *so that the secret thoughts of many will be laid bare* (Luke 2:35). A process is initiated in which we are invited to participate along with Mary in the work of the Lord during these troubled times.

*Your mercy reaches from
age to age for those who fear You.*

Mary sees God's mercy and simultaneously fears God. Mary is not a fearful person, but rather she is a very brave soul who has the deepest respect for the God of mercy -- and in that the virtue of fear of God resides. In such an arena of love, Mary seeks with her whole being to please her loving parent. Fear of not pleasing another is so utterly natural, and Mary is one of us. *Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favor* (Luke 1:30). An awe for the greatness of God elicits the deepest emotions from faithful people. Fear of God, a gift of the Holy Spirit, involves Mary's deep respect for her Creator. Mary asks Jesus when finding him in the temple, *My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you* (Luke 2:48). Mary experiences concern when raising and educating Jesus just as any parent; her concern extends throughout his public ministry, and extends to our work today in bearing Christ to a troubled world.

We are thankful for living at this time in history and we

appreciate God's creation as great and beautiful and worth saving.

Some of our **first** spiritual moments are creation-directed; we find joy in our parents and family, in the view of a sunset or waterfall. God gives us many good gifts for which, upon reflection, we can return thanks: life itself, parents, home, good food, health, neighborhood, church community. The bounty all around us is a sight to behold -- and thus creatures fill us with joy to which we can verbalize what they cannot, namely, a "thank you" to God in an atmosphere of freedom involving a free choice to say "yes." Being moved to praise, we Christians, Jews and Moslems offer one chorus of praise for the greatness of God. We magnify the Lord. In an extended sense all people of good will do the same.

In a **second** moment we express our joy and enthusiasm for what God has given us, our God within. Mary's visit to Elizabeth is the happy sharing of two expectant mothers with all the joy that this entails -- and far more. In a similar but lesser degree our enthusiasm can be experienced by others, and they can catch the contagion of praise. We find that we are to bear Christ to others and that this is a magnifying moment, for our hope is that this bearing will itself bear fruit.

Our **third** moment of magnification involves extending the glory of God. We not only observe and express ourselves in the joy of our hearts or bearing witness to the world; we now work at making others bearers of Good News as well. Our inner enthusiasm incites us to proclaim God's greatness through words and deeds. We seek to make the world a better expression of God's goodness. Like Mary we are doubly blessed through being able to serve. Our own ancestors were called to do many "great things." We have a very serious current calling; we must help save an endangered planet that has been damaged by human misdeeds. This special mission has added opportunities for exaltation and inner enthusiasm.⁵

We must be more than dreamers; reality brings us down-to-earth; our planet is in trouble and we are called to act here and now. We must reconstruct the global social order through tools of modern science and technology, AND we must work together. *Reclaiming the Commons* requires more than amorphous "masses;" like Mary, we are uniquely free persons with our individuality contributing to a total process; we must have a trust in the midst of a cynical world, just as Mary is utterly trustful that great things will happen. Snowflakes are unique and yet part of a lovely snowscape; we share uniquely in a

promise and future vision.

We are endowed with the power to serve others -- and this is truly a blessing.

How well we know and are reminded that our deeds are imperfect and bear our human imprint; with God's grace our work can have a divine quality -- and we can become other Christs to an awaiting world. Though unworthy, we are called to enter into God's divine work and to realize that our obedience gives birth to Christ among us. Just as "law is the handmaiden of justice," so each person becomes a unique handmaid of the Lord; the more we join with others in the Lord, the more profound our ultimate work. Through our shared Liturgy we magnify the Lord; we find our place in creation, not as individuals acting alone, but as persons acting cooperatively -- a Trinitarian insight that unfolds with joy, respect and thanksgiving.

Our first response to the gift of creation is a sense of gratitude that includes service offered. Mary shares a blessing when Elizabeth becomes the first of many to call her "blessed;" we too are blessed by divine favor and partake in God's family. In acknowledging our blessing, we become all the more blessed. In Mary's blessing we discover the grounds for our own, for now we are blessed to bear Christ to others -- and thereby we are doubly blessed as gift receivers and gift givers. She, who is the *theotokos* or bearer of God, goes before us and leads us to bear and spread the Word of God to others. Ultimately, Mary's assumption into heaven anticipates in time what we will be in glory at the final judgment; so Mary is blessed as first to receive Christ; we are blessed in being able to follow in her wake through sharing with her in the fruits of the Risen Lord.

We are blessed to bear Christ within, to bear Christ out to others, and to be energized and enthusiastic in recognizing these blessings -- just as Mary perceives her blessings through her purity and transparency. Realizing how we share in the community of blessings, calls us to seek further purification so that our efforts might be all the more meaningful. Mary's purity is eternal because she remains faithful to the Eternal Word. Our initial purification is through the gift of Baptism, and our ongoing purification becomes a process involving our entire mortal life, so that the Divine Light may shine all the more clearly through us. Mary affirms her unaltered commitment to God; we reconfirm our commitment through sacramental life. Mary is first to bear Christ; we also bear Christ as Good News to others. Mary proclaims the holiness of God's name through her participation in the mystery of salvation. Mary sings "holy" to the son within her; so

ought we.

Doing "great things" includes responding to the profound call to help save our planet.

Through Baptism we are born into the Divine Family; we bear the Word to the world through our lives and our sense of gratitude. Like Mary, our privileges are spiritual, not earthly wealth, power and fame. The more we see our God-given gifts, the more our proclamation is enabling. Just as Mary experiences the Divine within her womb, a gift of which she is totally unworthy, so we see our own Christ-bearing potential as God-given, not from our merits. We thank God for all great things, and show this in word and deed. We first pronounce that Word in Baptism when we are conceived spiritually into the Church, the Body of Christ. Through cooperation, that Word is transformed into deed, a consecrating act through magnifying gifts received.

Our cultural and political expressions intertwine and enter into our piety and reverence. As citizens in a democratic society, we express our devotion differently from those who live in authoritarian states. Yes, we are patient witnesses to God's work as are people living under oppression, but we bear a responsibility to be acting citizens in free democracies. We are privileged to be members of Christ's Body who hear and spread the Word to a needy world. Mary bears Christ to the world, a privileged service; through Baptism/Confirmation and our active working with God, we are privileged to bear Christ to others.

Mary's exaltation involves her whole being freely given to God; in turn, Mary is invited into the redemptive act. The "great things" include addressing the vast social ills afflicting so many people and Earth herself. To those of us who come and touch the Calvary rock we hear Jesus saying, "See what they have done to my Earth." This lamentation enters into our entire being. It is great that we are called into the Divine Family; it is also great that as democratic people we can perceive a critical need and work together to heal our wounded Earth.

We carry on the mission before us with the deepest respect, lest we hurt some people and creatures by inappropriate actions.

It is not possible to act perfectly, and so we move cautiously. Our relationships with our neighbors always need to be reviewed and

mended. People can be hurt; our wounded Earth is fragile; we can mean well and yet do things with unforeseen consequences. It is precisely the lack of respect for creation and for people that has brought on the exploitation and destruction of the planet. Our silence in the wake of such destruction allows these misdeeds to continue and even grow. Social harm is done through our inaction. Like Mary, we reflect on these things in our collective heart.

Respectful observation and listening is part of our expanding mission. If we listen attentively, we hear a cry to heaven coming from those who are hurt -- and from Earth herself. That cry becomes a global wail when military and financial power continues to ensure the vast chasm between wealth and poverty. What have we allowed to happen? What are we doing? How should we confront those who show no fear of God? Our very fears, which move us to anticipate facing the judgment seat of God, cause us to reassess our roles and our mission. As responsible citizens we cannot stand idly by. We must act. Some individuals and groups show no fear of God or others, and they continue to exert their destructive influence on the current world condition. With the gift of fear of God, we have the courage to confront a dysfunctional world order.

As imperfect human beings, we know that our faults hurt this world order, and we sense an inability to effect change. As God-fearing people with a certain degree of freedom to act, we accept social responsibility for our individual and collective misdeeds. Our limited remediation work brings on some fear and trepidation, for what if we fail to repair a damaged world? Risks and sacrifices lie ahead. We do not want to hurt God or further damage any part of God's creation. However, we must not allow inaction to be justified in any way, for accepting the status quo is a partisan and political position. Change requires courage, and a responsible people must act even with the risk of being unsuccessful.

2) The Redemption Moment: Compassion

Mary enters fully into the saving work of Christ; she takes pains to act as a mother raising and educating her offspring, but she does more. Mary is the first to truly suffer with the Lord, for Simeon foretold that a sword would pierce Mary's heart. *And a sword will pierce your own soul too -- so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare* (Luke 2:35). Secret thoughts include the aspirations of a lowly people, which are articulated in the primer of sufferings. The sword (lance) involves her co-suffering with her son and with co-sufferers in Christ. Jesus suffers because of the wrongdoing of this

human race. However, perceiving misdeeds in their full impact is not the immediate experience of perpetrators, but rather that of those who are impartial and honest onlookers.

Mary is compassionate.

Mary perceives evil and thus for countless generations people pray that she intercedes: "Pray for us sinners." Our misdeeds cause suffering and a disturbance of the social order, and Mary is acutely aware of this.

*You have shown strength with your arm,
you have scattered the proud in their conceit.*

Mary recognizes the power of God, a spiritual phenomenon not a physical or military power, though power all the same. God's power exposes the proud of heart and their weaknesses -- and Mary perceives this power at work. God works wonderful signs for the people of the Exodus; God guides the chosen people to the Promised Land; God reproves Israel through the prophets; God routs and scatters the conceited but does not mercilessly destroy them. The divine victory is founded in hope that ultimate salvation descends gently and mercifully from above. Kingdoms come and go; humble people remain. Mary stands on the side of humble folks who are closer to God through suffering and patient endurance.

You have deposed the mighty from their thrones and raised the lowly to high places.

The humble and lowly are exalted while the materially prosperous are pulled down -- and Mary sees this within the arena of compassion, though the true dynamics become more clear throughout her lifetime in her own growth in faith. Mary's words have proved a monumental embarrassment to status quo seekers; she utters words of ultimate liberation, a continuation of Israel's trek to freedom from Egypt. Through the birth of the Lord in lowly circumstances (within a remote Roman province, by a humble people, in a stable for a birthing place, to escapees from the wrath of the ruler), we find Mary and Joseph lowly amid their hidden greatness. Theirs is a deep and exalted spiritual mission, which gradually unfolds in salvation history.

Worldly princes of every age appear important to the secular mind. However, their reigns are short-lived; their roles are tiny in comparison to that of Mary. The lowly ultimately win; Mary repeats Hanna's words –

Yhwh makes poor and rich, humbles and exalts, raises up the poor from the dust, lifts the needy from a dunghill, gives them a place with princes, and assigns them a seat of honor. (1 Samuel 2:7-8).

Mary's starting point is not the grief of being barren, as was Hanna's, but the far deeper spiritual insight that God has done great things for her and wants to do great things for a fallen world. It is evident that Mary is steeped in the Old Testament traditions and wording.

You have filled the hungry with good things, while you have sent the rich away empty.

Mary realizes the differences between the haves and the have-nots -- the rich and the poor, for class differences do exist in virtually every age and certainly did in the time of the Roman Empire. Mary's sensitivity is to all the hungry, those hungering for divine favor and those who lack the physical essentials of life. The good things given to the poor include both a sense that victory will ultimately come and that the poor will be victors. To divorce the spiritually from the materially hungry would be a mistake, for such a division fails to see that our needs are both spiritual and physical; we seek God as integral human beings. However, the good things also include the emerging belief that the poor and hungry will not just be given good things passively. Rather, an awareness is growing that we as poor must work together actively to take what is rightfully ours for the sake of our needy brothers and sisters. The poor are not bystanders; we are an integral part of the liberation process -- the fulfilling process.

Mary is the first to be acquainted with the person of the Savior and to reflect on his mission. *His mother stored up all these things in her heart* (Luke 2:52). The person within her womb is divine and human. Of all human beings, Mary is foremost in reflecting on the divine and the human, on the spiritual aspirations and the physical needs of people. If and when the hungry seek and place their trust in God, they perceive good things that have both spiritual and physical content; if the rich trust in material things alone and are devoid of spirit, they journey on a sure road to ruin and will be brought down.

Mary's compassion allows her to enter into the saving work of Jesus in a very special way. In our effort to transform word into deed we look to Mary for guidance. *Near the cross stood his mother* (John 19:25). Jesus gives her to John who stands in place of believers

down through all ages: *This is your mother* (John 19:27). Here in this supreme act of compassionate sharing, Mary becomes the mother of us all; this is a mission she continues to carry in an ongoing Calvary that occurs today. Mary enters in a special way into the supreme sacrifice of suffering performed by her son; she takes the lead in an act in which all of us are invited to participate. Jesus in giving up his life gives up everything, even his mother. Mary accepts this being given -- to John and to all disciples of Christ who stand at the Calvary of today. We respond with John by caring for our mother, the Church and the world who also are mother to us.

The proud of heart and materially privileged need to be confronted by citizen power, an awakening people who discover their own empowerment through acting together.

The sacrifice of Calvary is an invitation to us to enter into the redeeming work, both by perfecting ourselves, and by extending compassion to others. Our imperfections get in the way and so we humbly try to purge ourselves of them with God's help, for they blind us to the needs of others -- to true compassion with the Lord. Mary is first to be compassionate with the Lord since she perceives the effects of sin during the ministry of her son and at Calvary itself. Through her purity and transparency Mary perceives the sufferings of others and the misdeeds causing these sufferings.

Jesus Christ redeems us all -- a universe of all creatures and all people. In this sweeping redemptive act we all become neighbors with concerns about each other. We are not mere onlookers at the stage of the redemptive act; we can join in through a sense of compassion or suffering-with the Lord; we can join Jesus and Mary as co-sufferers also with compassionate people throughout the world -- our journey of faith similar to that in Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. Being made in God's image and invited into the Divine Family through Baptism, we discover God's powers within us. We may be tempted to strike out using this new-found power, but this impulse can be tempered through corrective efforts by our community. We look to Jesus and Mary, accepting the ravages of sin without trying to deny them, excuse ourselves, or escape to other arenas. Like Jesus who takes upon himself the burden of our sins, we join him at the cross.

As imperfect human beings we realize first that our giving birth to the Word is imperfectly executed. Imperfections reduce our sense of compassion and we become increasingly aware of the humanly-induced causes of the Calvary event; these are due either to our

direct action or our inaction and avoidance of responsibility. We seek God's mercy in a world damaged by our collective overuse of resources, the resulting pollution and degradation, and our hesitation to change the system. We have moments of disgust, depression and inability to find the right direction. We are aware that we have personally offended a loving God. Here, unlike Mary, our human awareness of failure burdens us down and requires some remedial action, some act of contrition. Still we are confident that God, who is ever so quick to forgive, can and does work wonders with us. Through the mercy of our forgiving God, we can make fresh starts -- and the past becomes a lived experience but not a hindrance to future action. Although burden colors our past, we can still be renewed in the risen Lord.

Mary did not have a personal experience of sin as such, but she knows the effects of misdeeds done to a loving God. She stands beneath the cross at Calvary, a public witness when most of the disciples fled and hid. Reluctantly, through a deepening faith, we find ourselves willing to be present at Calvary, even when pain is often so very deep. We ask soul-searching questions: Will we be saved at the end of our journey of faith? Will our planet be saved from the misdeeds of others? Ought we to redirect our attention from individual practices to confronting others whose misdeeds are disturbing the entire social order?

The monumental work ahead demands humble people who do not regard material privilege as something that can go unchallenged. We begin to challenge the privileged who deny others the essentials of life. Pride and self-esteem of the privileged wealthy can blind people to the cry of the needy for justice. We have a noble mandate, namely, to help fill up what is wanting in Christ's sufferings (Col. 1:24), which are ongoing in the Calvary event/process that transcends space and time. In order to accomplish and succeed in this awesome mission of compassion, we need courage and guidance. We come to realize that risks and sacrifice are involved. Mercy tempers action, even profound change and revolutionary action.

Through humility we develop a down-to-earth spirituality that sees the power of Redemption that now pervades the glory of Creation; this is part of the total divine plan that is filled with love and mercy. In her lowliness and sense of reflection, Mary has come to understand this. She is our model of one who comes to understand God's mercy at work, not a merciless god with hardness of heart. Mary is confident that Jesus will act at Cana -- and so he does in this first public sign of his ministry. The confidence of Mary, triggered by

a compassion for people in need, must be our constant guide and with her at our side we are able to confront a dysfunctional system. Just as we exult in God's creative works, so we enter into the divine saving works that include our creative participation in fundamental change -- something that becomes a twenty-first century sense of mission.

The lowly will rise and take what is rightfully theirs, and the privileged must concede to this change, all acting nonviolently.

God loves us all and has a special **divine option for the poor**; God knows that a common bounty destined for all has been sequestered by the privileged and powerful few. The God of justice is offended by what has happened to the **anawim**, the poor. However, God does not walk away; throughout salvation history, God's favor is present. All too often it is the lowly who take on significant roles (Abraham the herder of flocks, David the shepherd, the prophets who were common laborers, the apostles who were mostly fishers). The lowly are close to the divine heart, but more; God grants to these lowly people special favors in a world where favorites are those of fame, power and wealth. We are called to be God's instruments just as were Mary and Joseph who heard God's word. To effect profound change we must be poor with the poor and we must experience the vicissitudes of lacking resources. God is with the poor and humble; we must be among the poor and humble as well.

A first level of humility is to become aware of the poor. In order to see people in poor conditions, we must give up allurements and the deadening influence of luxury and affluence -- and become sensitive to the world around us. Our first impulse is to run away, for such conditions are unbearable. At this level seekers become sensitive to the hurt done by affluence-induced insensitivity; they accept a surging sense of suffering caused by inequality, and they ponder the basic demands of the needy.

A second level of humility is working with the poor, but this still involves a distance from the poor. At this level, seekers share at their own discretion with those who are needy. Still the poor are a "they," and solidarity is limited by a certain distance. Thus being poor is not fully realized at this level with its continued allurements and comfortable living. At this level, seekers can freely withdraw and rest at a distance from the poor, and thus reserve the resources they deem worth sharing or not at their own discretion.

A third and deepest level of humility is to become poor with the poor. This requires a down-to-Earth spirituality. "Becoming" does not

mean a sham where we pretend to be poor. Distance is now surmounted and one can say "we" the poor and that includes the risk of being scorned and laughed at because we are now at the lowly grassroots. This change must be from the bottom up, and so the lowly participate in *Reclaiming the Commons*, and lead the way -- a form of rising up of all people.

Those hungering for justice now feel power surging up; the privileged find desperation in lack of security and hollowness in depending on false security and military strength.

Reclaiming the Commons involves both bringing down those in high places and raising the lowly. It cannot be merely a charitable giving by the powerful, lest this be another exercise of power at their discretion -- and the world will be even more deeply harmed. Nor can this action be by violent revolution by the lowly, lest they become the new princes in high places, dwelling in an atmosphere that lacks mercy and justice. Rather, God brings down the mighty, and this cannot be expected to occur by waiting for a miraculous intervention, but this is something in which we must become involved through humble service that includes regulations and taxes. Mary, the first agent of change, encourages us to action at all levels of human activity: individual, local, regional, national and international. Through her intercession, we can act as change agents committed to serving others and with a growing understanding that through action comes greater empowerment.

Empires rise and fall, sometimes slowly and sometimes quite rapidly (e.g., the fall of the Soviet Union). The poor trust that a small action somewhere can trigger the fall of that which is oppressive. Will the present order fall rapidly? High places do not last forever. They can be brought low in the suddenness of a bolt of lightning. In God's mercy those in high places are allowed a chance to step down gracefully, for their act of surrender is truly graceful. However, high places deserve no particular deference. If and when the high ones refuse to descend, a second action is called forth -- that frightens the appeasers of those in high places. The lowly participate in bringing them down, not violently, but through a radical redistribution of resources.

3) Resurrection: Loving and Merciful Service

*You have come to the aid of Israel your servant, mindful of your
mercy --
the promise you made to our ancestors --
to Sarah and Abraham
and their descendants forever.*

The sacred mission of Israel is to bring the world's people into unity in worshiping the one true God and in living together as brothers and sisters. A majority of people believe that the world is on a definitive course contained in the promise made to Abraham. All three of the Abrahamic religions (Jewish, Christian and Moslem) focus on the **exclusive** worship of God alone -- no false gods; to varying degrees all call for **inclusive** service to all the world's people. Furthermore, they believe that this call to Abraham is a perpetual calling that has never been rescinded. Christian service, founded in belief in Jesus Christ as Messiah, is part of this universal call, a call found in Mary's life and in her whole being. Through faith, Mary reflects on this deeper mystery; for major portions of the Christian world, Mary becomes the model to help fulfill this eschatological promise through our needed service to our brothers and sisters throughout the world.

Mary is an ideal servant.

Mary is an Israelite, a person who is mindful of God's mercy and a believer in the divine promise -- the covenant with Abraham, the father of the faith. She knows the three divine promises to Abraham: to form a great nation; to possess the land of Canaan; and ultimately through him to recognize all nations as blessed. Mary is the one in whom the fulfillment of that ultimate promise becomes present, but this fulfillment is not in a single event but through an ongoing process. Thus this ultimate promise includes the future; it is a cooperative venture involving commitment to work together in service. This fulfillment of the promise is a collective journey of faith.

Mary is committed to service. Upon hearing that Elizabeth is with child in her old age, Mary responds immediately. *Mary set out at that time as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah* (Luke 1:39). She considers this responsible service at the birth of a child. *Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back home* (Luke 1:56). Service comes to Mary in an instant and involves awareness of those in need. At the marriage feast of Cana, Mary is sensitive to the embarrassing condition of hosts who run out of wine, and she moves with confidence to draw Jesus' attention.

However, his reply is that his hour has not yet come. Mary knows Jesus, her son, shares her sensitivity, and so she tells the servers at the feast, *Do whatever he tells you* (John 2:5). Through her sensitivity she opens the way to Jesus' first public miracle. At the foot of the cross her courage and sensitivity become deep compassion; she stands in place of all fearful followers who hid themselves from public view, and she is together with future believers who suffer with the Lord.

Pentecost is when the Holy Spirit comes to the assembled followers of Jesus. A radical transformation occurs in the consciousness of those present. A mission to go out to all the world begins at this moment, but that mission does not follow a rote recipe of action but rather a pattern initiated at the Incarnation. Jesus increased *in wisdom, in stature, and in favor and Mary stored these things in her heart*. (Luke 2:52). So too, Christ's body, the Church (Acts 2:1-13) increases in age and wisdom. The travel narrative of Jesus in Luke's Gospel demonstrates that initial unfolding of mission; the travel narrative of the Church in Acts confirms a parallel development.

Mary, as part of this faithful group, affirms by her presence the unfolding of the divine promise, a growth in mission. *Blessed is she who believed that the promise made to her by the Lord would be fulfilled* (Luke 1:45). Mary's faith is growing through her presence; she is a key part of an individualized community that is open to the rushing Spirit; she is present praying at the birth of the emerging Church's experience of grace -- "as individualizing, fruitful and creatively co-responsible for the transformation of creation in the image of Jesus."⁶ At the solemn assembly preparing for Pentecost, all are *joined in continuous prayer, together with several women including Mary the mother of Jesus* (Acts 1:14); all grow in faith. Pentecost is the definitive beginning of the revolution to transform the world in Christ -- and Mary is present.

Mary hears the word of God and reflects on it; reflection leads to sensitivity and compassion; and this awareness of need extends to her service. Just as the Spirit descended on the Apostles with Mary present, so Mary's presence with the heavenly court helps us hear, respond, and put the Spirit's prompting into practice. *My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice* (Luke 8:21). Coste says this is not a devaluation of Mary, but rather it indicates that "her biological motherhood was assumed in complete faith and total obedience to the Word of God."⁷ Mary is joined closely with the entire brother/sisterhood of believers and thus

Jesus can truly give a sweeping gesture to the crowd to include all those hearers here present and beyond into one company. We not only hear the Word; we must act upon it so as to be included in this company.

Down through history Mary appears to members of this believing company; she appears to poor folks (at Guadalupe, LaSalette, Lourdes, Fatima, etc.), not to the rich and notable. One of the first recorded apparitions was to St. Gregory the Wonderworker, who died about 270 AD. Apparitions continued through the Middle Ages. We need only emphasize that Mary has NOT been a foreteller of future events, but the one who calls us back to faithful practice. Our mention of these appearances is to emphasize that Mary has not left us; Mary remains close to the poor, encouraging all to pray and encourage others, and that mission is by poor people. While some dismiss such appearances, one who is poor finds an authenticity here, and this is of emerging importance in the tasks ahead. Robert Sears says about such appearances that what is needed here is discernment, not a black and white dismissal.⁸

We are to give service by *Reclaiming the Commons*.

The Spirit of Pentecost inspires to spread the word and work for justice. Through our willingness to be servants of God, we draw all people of good will to fulfill their calling to greater service. This faithful service to the Lord is ennobling, not in a sense of blood, entitlement or human favor,⁹ but through the action of democratic people who are privileged by being called to service. The English word "Service" has many applications: military service, auto repair, housecleaning, religious duties, etc. Along with a wide range of circumstances comes an equally large number of descriptive words: diligent, slovenly, cheerful, sloppy, and on and on. We look to Mary, who is servant of God in the sense of Isaiah's suffering servant; she is our model of loving and merciful service in doing what God calls her to do. So ought we.

We are to act mercifully and without violence.

As human beings we can be prey to imperfections of every sort. Moved by needs and in the face of injustice we may be tempted to follow the route of modern terrorists and resort to violence. Enough is known and exposed about the mishaps and misdeeds of individuals and groups to warrant emotional reactions -- a thrashing out in every direction. However, love and mercy should color our reactions. Some well-meaning people may want to be activists -- but not yet; they can

succumb to a perfection "trap," that focuses on individual perfection to such a degree that one can neglect improving social relations or looking out for the needs of others.

The two great commandments stand together; we love God with everything we have; we manifest this love through loving service to our neighbor. An overly personal focus must not be at the expense of our social activity, which must also improve, if we are to do ever greater service for love of God and neighbor. Our focus should be on our imperfect action and thus we should undertake exercises that lead to further perfection. The trigger is the desire to work more perfectly for and with others, not to first reach an unattainable perfection before taking any action.

The Church is to be involved in bringing about a transformation in which our awareness of individual freedom grows as the community expands in space -- a symphony of the spiritual and the material. The believing community overcomes imperfections together through mutual trust in God and enhancing service to others. Thus our mission improves and develops through mutual discernment. Awareness that time and mortal life are short already exists; we are impelled to spread the Good News, and the "we" includes a wide variety of humble and professional people.

In the process of *Reclaiming the Commons*, all can participate through service. Should the more onerous tasks receive the higher pay? Or should all people have work available to them and receive a living wage? Mercy involves giving service by all who must not: **deny** the tasks ahead, nor **excuse** themselves from the work at hand, nor be lulled to arenas of **escape** (drugs, alcohol, etc.). Massive amounts of work need to be done for all to live a human quality of life. Work needs are abundant; laborers are plentiful; however resources are tied up by the privileged few. Mercy involves liberating the tied-up resources (now in bank accounts and tax havens), so workers can work and tasks can be achieved. A new economics is demanded; a new political will is required.

Our hope goes out to the entire world and to all brothers and sisters in the human family.

The sensitivity of Mary at Cana and her compassion at the cross are templates for our action with the needy. Mary's service is empowering, because she trusts solely in the Lord, the Provider of all good gifts. Through redistributing resources for those in need, we

enter into the divine trust; we are the hands of God providing all good things "fairly and justly." As Gandhi says, this world has enough to satisfy needs but never enough to satisfy material wants. Our discerning minds must make this reflection a reality. As spiritually-motivated change agents, we fulfill authentic needs and curb excessive wants. Our sensitivity by being with and among the poor helps us to understand the paramount and urgent needs of our time. We feel the terror in a parent who cannot feed a child today. The challenge is to act.

By acting mercifully we discover our true kinship with others, especially primitive tribes who treat natural resources gently. We discover that selfish civilizations misused resources and crashed (e.g., Rome in the fifth century A.D, China's Ming Dynasty in the seventeenth century, the Bourbon monarchy in the 1790s, the Soviet Union in the 1990s).¹⁰ Our loving service is urgently needed to heal our wounded Earth; we must discern wisely and act immediately. The Northwest American native tribes were known to have the potlatch, or the redistributing of abundance and therein are credited with respect.¹¹

Throughout history many primitive people have experienced the horrors of the greed of "developing" exploiters as destructive of community. In contrast, a Kwakiutl chief was known to be of service by redistributing 18,000 Hudson Bay blankets, a dozen canoes, bracelets, sewing machines, outboard motors, pots, pans, clothing and much food. Service for that tribe had been a mark of distinction and gratification; the results came in giving and not in receiving. From authentic examples of history we should learn the pattern our global service must take.

Our *Reclaiming the Commons* is more than a dream; it is a Christian duty in a dysfunctional world. Practicality calls for change, not the status quo. Laced in biblical imagery this order also stands within the tradition of global missions, of the American Revolution, and of the exodus of slaves to a Promised Land. Karl Marx was influenced by a primitive Christian community that gave to all according to their need, but his followers forgot their biblical roots. Today, with those same biblical roots and with Mary as our model, we hope to save our wounded Earth from the ravages of exploitation. The *Magnificat's* harking back to the promises made to Abraham rings in our ears. Mary's thankfulness, compassion, and service as handmaid of the Lord inspire us to help create according to our unique gifts within a believing community, a global community committed to act.

Conclusion: *Magnificat* as Preamble

*I say that we are wound with mercy
 round and round as if with air:
 the same is Mary, more by name,
 she, wild web, wondrous robe,
 mantles the guilty globe,
 Since God has let dispense,
 her prayers his providence...*
 Gerard Manley Hopkins¹²

Mary, a perfect precursor for the process of *Reclaiming the Commons*, was involved in the most important moment of creation (the Incarnation); she reflects on the saving work of her son and stands with him openly at the foot of the cross; she is present at Pentecost in the launching of the work of the Church; now down through the ages she has been involved in the work of the lowly and poor in the economy of salvation. These three epochs of Mary's life are: the Incarnation; the mission, death, and Resurrection of Jesus; and Pentecost and the extended life of the Church. These are a trinity of basic moments in which Mary has a major role to play. Mary cherishes her acts of thanksgiving, compassion and service. All these are found in the threefold aspects of the *Magnificat* -- a preamble for *Reclaiming the Commons*.

We, who believe in an ever-enriching movement of the Spirit, are imitators of Mary's gratitude and blessings. In a first moment of awareness, we are overwhelmed by the grandeur of God's creation -- and we marvel and are filled with joy. We sense that our existence is a gift from the Creator and acknowledge this in a spirit of gratitude and praise. We also are called to be Christ-bearers to the world; however, our imperfections require our special attention.

In a second moment of self-awareness we find suffering abounding in our world and our planet in trouble due to human misdeeds; unfortunately we are partly to blame. We learn through the compassion of Mary to suffer with others who are in need. We discover that we are to defend the weak by actively confronting the privileged few who oppress the many by sequestering world resources meant for common use. We are drawn to opt with and become one with the lowly so that all can radically share from God's bounty.

The third moment goes from awareness to loving and merciful

service; we are strengthened by Mary's appearances to the lowly with messages of promised change and benefit. The privileged must abandon excessive wealth, and the limited resources must be shared with those who lack essentials of life. Authentic liberating actions are non-violent and filled with love and mercy. The affluents' race to consume available resources at the expense of the needy is in urgent need of attention. Our efforts at *Reclaiming the Commons* indicate the existing limits of available resources that must be shared by all. For specific details see our website <earthhealing.info>.

May this icon of Mary be portrayed, not by painting or carving, but by our written word and our resulting service.

Notes

1. Originally it was thought to give a title to the result of what is intended, namely a "New World Order." However, that result will have to be decided by the efforts of a world community working together. More precisely we wish to undertake a process, namely that of *Reclaiming the Commons*.

2. Rene Coste, *The Magnificat: The Revolution of God*, (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1987).

3. Charles Peguy, "Le Porche du Mystere de la Deuxieme Vertu" in *Oeuvres Poetiques Completes*, p. 211.

4. Wording of the "Magnificat" are from *The Inclusive New Testament*, Altamira Press, 1996.

5. The serious ministry is understanding the spiritual impact of human wrongdoing that threatens the very existence of Earth. Other generations have understood the need for human salvation and the massive impact of personal sin; however, they did not see how much social harm to the planet itself is done by careless use of resources and resulting air, water and land pollution.

6. Robert Sears, SJ, "Opening to God: Mary and Life in the Spirit," (2005). p. 97. Available from <www.familytreehealing.com/books>.

7. Coste, p. 21.

8. Sears, p. 98.

9. We use the titles "Christ the King" and "Queen of Heaven." This is not to acknowledge earthly royalty, but to show spiritual leadership. In contrast to a century ago (1910) when the world's majority lived in kingdoms and empires, now over 90% of the world's people live within republican forms of government (though some are not truly democratic). We, who experience democracy within a republican form of government, reject privileged leadership by blood or wealth; we do not give fealty or the vassal's duty to an earthly monarch; we elect leaders from our ranks

for fixed time spans. While other cultures and ages may have seen Mary differently, we look upon Mary as highly privileged by her calling to bring oneness to a divided world. Mary is first and ahead of us as servant of God, and we are privileged to be able to follow her.

10. Niall Ferguson, "Complexity and Collapse: Empires on the Edge of Chaos," (Foreign Affairs, March/April, 2010), pp. 18-32.

11. Sean Dwan, (*Columban Mission*, February 2010), pp. 4-5.

12. Gerard Manley Hopkins, "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe," *Poems and Prose of Gerald Manley Hopkins*. Ed. W. H. Gardner (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1953), p.55.

Discussion Points

Are the following good examples of exalting the lowly?

1. **Express** the basic right of all people to life. This includes the basic right to health. Both of the individual and of the entire community that includes all creatures on this planet.

2. **Promote a realistic dream** that all our sisters and brothers on this planet will go to bed tonight with a full belly under a decent roof and with basic security. We cannot allow our nighttime dreams to wither in the daylight of reality.

3. **Encourage the democratic process**, wherein all participate in determining their own destiny and through which they can assist in taking what is rightfully the commons that belongs to all -- provided this taking is performed in a non-violent manner.

4. **Champion the right** of everyone to have an opportunity to work and earn a living, with our governments as ultimate employers.

5. **Create a Global Development Fund** to alleviate world hunger, lack of housing and major health problems.

6. **Organize** individuals and groups to effect these changes.

Are the following good examples of pulling down princes?

1. **Invite the wealthy** to give up their privileges and to do so for their own deeper joy and ultimate salvation.

2. **Restrict incomes** to a set amount dependent to some degree on the cultural conditions of the place, thus an "excess" tax on the wealthy.

3. **Tithe the military budgets** and comparable amounts from other rich nations for emerging and poorer nations. The peace dividend could become additive over time.

4. **Promote a spiritual profit-motivation** by discouraging a material profit motivation -- for in this needy world material profits for some are at the expense of others. Support non-profit organizations as examples of what the entire world can become.

5. **Tax excessive wealth** so that there are limits to what individuals can retain (if not earn). At the same time reduce the tax burden on lower-income people, but retain taxes on luxury items and on items and practices linked to substance-abuse such as alcohol and tobacco and tanning salons. This includes removing tax havens for the wealthy through concerted global efforts -- and redistributing this wealth to those in genuine need.

6. **Organize** individuals and groups to effect these changes.

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