

centerings



a well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed



Pulling the Trigger



Last month I sat reading *The Book Thief* on the Brown line on my way into work as I had been doing for several weeks. As many of you know, the book is a novel about a young German foster child who befriends a Jewish man living in her basement during the peak of World War II. It is narrated by Death. It

is not a happy tale. That day on the train I reached a point of particular anguish in my reading, and the tears started to flow. My weeping probably came as a surprise to my fellow commuters, but not to anyone who has spent any significant amount of time with me. Never wanting to dwell too long in my sadness, later that day I flippantly declared to a friend, “I’ve gotta finish this book before Christmas, or it’s really going to put a damper on my holiday.”

I’ve thought back on that comment pretty shamefully since then, especially as I reread the articles we feature in this issue, particularly Chris Eagan’s reflection and Renny Golden’s poem. The immense suffering felt in our world – from the Holocaust to gun violence on the streets of Chicago – cannot be confined to the pages of a book or a newsletter and neatly tucked away when it’s inconvenient to think about it.

Conversations on violence and suffering are pretty commonplace here at 8th Day, as you might imagine. We analyze systemic violence during our staff meetings. We mull over the latest news stories about brutality in the streets of Chicago during our daily lunches together. We talk about violence and suffering so much that at times all the statistics and stories begin blurring together, and it can be easy to grow cynical, or even numb. Things were put into harsh perspective, however, on a Monday in October when Chris Eagan told us that Reggie, a young man who he worked with through Old St. Pat’s Kinship Initiative, was shot to death in an alley in the West Garfield Park neighborhood of Chicago. Reggie and his friends participated in 8th Day’s annual Good Friday Walk for

Justice last year.

This news came right as we were deciding what our theme would be for this issue of *Centerings*. We were approaching the one year anniversary of the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School; we are at a mind-boggling stand-still with gun control legislation; and now the numerous victims of Chicago’s rampant gun violence – usually just represented as aggregate statistics in the news each week – had become someone connected to us. And so, in this issue we attempt to take a look at the many factors that lead up to pulling the trigger – from our culture of militarism to the millions of dollars invested in maintaining lax gun policy to the economic inequality that forces people to end up in the line of fire each day.

Ken Butigan lays the foundation for our analysis by pulling out the key cultural elements that have created a society where mass violence is fostered and allowed to continue. **Chris Eagan** offers a reflection on how economic inequality pushes young men like Reggie onto the streets to become victims of gun violence. **Mary Fabri** discusses the psychological roots of violence from her perspective of working in Chicago Public Schools. We also feature an article recently published by **Marion Wright Edelson** about the insufficient resources being put into gun control research and legislation. Finally, **Renny Golden**, through both reflection and poetry, explores the common question of where God is amidst all the suffering of gun violence.

Despite the rapid escalation of gun violence in this country over the last several years, the avid gun supporters seem to be raising their voices more than ever under the banner that people’s right to protect themselves with guns is more valuable than the horrifying number of lives that are lost to gun violence each year (see the statistics in Ken Butigan’s article). We hope this issue of *Centerings* offers a perspective that counters those voices with the tragic realities that will only worsen if we don’t take action.

Mary Ellen Madden is the 8th Day Center Staff Member for the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The main issues she focuses on at the Center are women’s issues in the Catholic Church and society and School of the Americas Watch. In her free time she enjoys cooking and singing.

Image on cover Connecticut Post.

Breaking the Spell: Challenging Our Deep Belief in Violence

December 14 marked the one-year anniversary of the Newtown massacre, where a gunman opened fire on twenty children and a handful of teachers in a Connecticut school. Though ours is a society inured to chronic violence, this horrific carnage briefly penetrated the elaborated defenses we've built to ignore the ongoing catastrophe of guns in America. The movement to end gun violence was suddenly revitalized, marches were organized, Congressional hearings were held, statements were made.

But very little changed. In fact, since the bloodbath at Sandy Hook Elementary, thousands of people across the United States have perished from gunfire. (According to Slate.com, 10,945 gun deaths occurred since Newtown as of September.)

How do we explain this lack of meaningful change—and the fact that the same patterns of destruction carry on? Clearly, the lobbying muscle and strategic relentlessness of the National Rifle Association accounts for part of this. While President Obama scrambled to build on the immediate public revulsion to push for gun safety legislation, the NRA outflanked the administration and defeated any significant reform. The NRA's clout—with its millions of members—ultimately trumped the president's action, and the first serious challenge to the United States' gun culture in a generation evaporated.

But it is not enough to point to widespread gun ownership and the political power it exercises to explain this ongoing violence. We will never achieve the needed seismic shift in America's gun culture if we only focus here. These realities are themselves rooted in a larger, mesmerizing framework that makes such widespread ownership—as many as 300 million privately-owned guns exist in the U.S.—thinkable. Without this larger cultural worldview, the ubiquity of guns—or, for that matter, wars, economic inequality, human rights violations, and environmental destruction—would lack the requisite legitimacy, force, and commitment necessary to establish and maintain them.

This larger paradigm is a deeply entrenched belief system. Widespread guns are possible because there is a deeply rooted belief in the value and effectiveness of guns. Transforming American gun violence hinges on a deeper transformation of the nation's belief in violence.

The late theologian Walter Wink in *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (1992) identified this belief system as “the myth of redemptive violence”—a deep faith in violence. As he writes: “The belief that violence ‘saves’ is so successful because it doesn't seem to be mythic in the least. Violence simply appears to be the nature of things. It's what works. If a god is what you turn to when all else

fails, violence certainly functions as a god... It demands from its devotees an absolute obedience-unto-death.”

As Wink suggests, we grow up, are trained, and subsist in a “violence belief system.” Like every belief system, it requires our allegiance, fervor, and ongoing practices and rituals. Consciously or not, in our society we undergo a life-long formation process through a violence “catechesis” (provided by the media, education, family training, and the nation's values and policies) and reinforced by regular “sacraments” of violence (destructive personal, interpersonal, and social attitudes, practices, and behavior).

This violence belief system is not unique to the United States. Most societies and nations operate out of it. But the U.S. has enshrined and extended this system at home and abroad in powerfully troubling ways. Perhaps this is because, as my colleague Fr. Alain Richard has suggested in *The Roots of Violence*, the U.S. has overcompensated for the original inferiority it experienced as a British colony by aggressively valuing what he calls “number one-ism.” Or perhaps it is because the U.S. has stubbornly refused to recognize what historians are now highlighting: its independence was largely achieved through nonviolent, not violent, struggle. (See *Recovering Nonviolent History*, 2013.) Seeing our myth of origin as violent has likely encouraged and ratified our history of military, economic, and political violence.

Fortunately we are living in a time when the alternative is dramatically demonstrating its power. As Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan establish in their groundbreaking volume that studied 323 cases over the past century—*Why Civil Resistance Works* (2011)—nonviolent campaigns are twice as effective as violent ones. For the past half-century, nonviolent people-power movements have been effective in bringing down dictators, establishing human rights, and working for peace and justice. At the same time, many new tools for nonviolent change have appeared, including restorative justice, peace circles, anti-racism training, anti-trauma healing, and nonviolent communication.

To envision the spread of nonviolent power is not to expect a utopia. Conflict will always be with us. Instead, it is to imagine a world where people everywhere are increasingly equipped with the tools to wage conflict more nonviolently and effectively. This will depend on an emerging “nonviolence belief system” inviting us to break the spell of violence—and to unleash creative nonviolent power for the well-being of all.

http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/crime/2012/12/gun_death_tally_every_american_gun_death_since_newtown_sandy_hook_shooting.html

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There's More Behind the Barrel of the Gun: Economic Inequality & Gun Violence

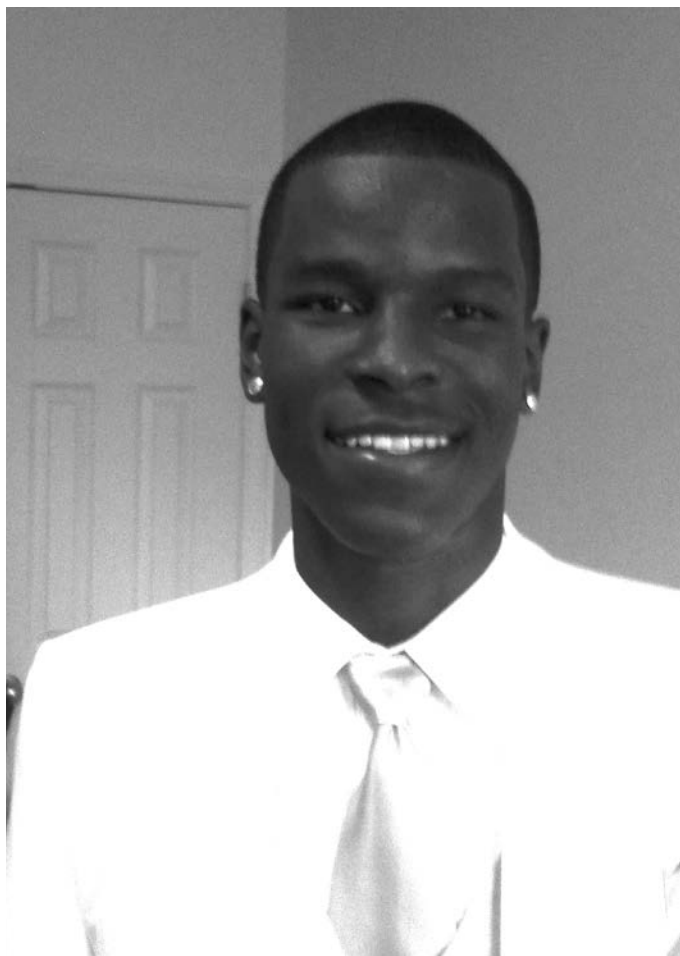
It is fitting that this murder would take place at night on a dimly lit corner of a forgotten neighborhood. It is unerringly the kind of thing that happens in a place designated as 'blighted'. It happens to those people in those situations. Those merely becoming a placeholder for the misappropriated understandings surrounding poverty or race by folks who have never spent substantial time with the people of Chicago's West Side. At first glance, the loss of our dear brother Reggie is no more than an addition to the tally of the lost. Seemingly, his death justifies the fear of the neighborhood, reinforces the apprehension towards its ability to change, and opens the door to cynicism that those people are capable of doing well for themselves or their own.

These are the reactions of a city deeply conditioned to pit us against them, to demand answers but reject blame, and of a community content to levy fault on the most burdened. Each and every death has its own backstory and comes brimming with complexity. I know from experience that Reggie was a loving brother, son and cousin. My faith only affirms what I know from experience, that Reggie is not disposable but instead a beloved son of God made full of inherent dignity.

Unfortunately, newspaper articles summarizing shootings tend to unconsciously skew to a narrative highlighting the brokenness within blight. The sheer volume of deaths in Chicago and the rigor of capturing the news prevent journalists from accurately and deeply investigating the circumstance surrounding these deaths. Therefore, in memorializing Reggie's death, I hope to shed light on the depth of one young man but also to use his story to unravel a broader conversation around gun homicides in urban neighborhoods. My assertion is that there are large systemic forces that contributed to Reggie's death and that this reality invites us to participate in community transformation instead of being excused from it.

Reggie is a product of the grossly disproportionate Chicago Public Schools system. His address, like those of his neighbors, constrains his access to public resources ranging from quality grocery stores to well-stocked libraries. However, I contend that the first domino that needs to fall to break the chain of generational inequity would be access to employment. The hurdles surrounding employment along with a general acceptance of large scale joblessness cause havoc in our communities. The most insidious expression of that havoc takes the form of gun violence and this cause and effect is how economics helps pull the trigger.

Incorporating access to employment into the circumstances



Reggie Jackson

of Reggie's shooting certainly adds complexity but it does not offer an alibi for the shooter nor relieve their moral culpability. Likewise, remembering the frustrations of his job hunt does not ameliorate the burden of Reggie's distraught mother asking, "Why?" Yet, it does generate a fuller picture of factors that led to Reggie's death which, in turn, leads to a better grasp of the root problems.

Reggie had submitted numerous applications and had become frustrated with the mounting rejections and, worse yet, lack of responses. Here is a young man just trying to get a foothold in the lowest rung in the economic ladder. Many family members could not help wondering aloud that, if he had gotten a job in the last two years, might he not have had the time to be out at the corner that evening? Reggie was killed on a weekday night during a time he would have otherwise been resting up after a long day at the office or headed to a night shift.

Anyone who has looked for work in the last few years knows how tight the job market is. The difference being that many of us have built-in safety nets that help us bridge the lean times. We must recognize that there are those among



Vigil in Chicago after shooting of Hadiya Pendleton. Photo: The Daily Beast

us who are put into grave danger when unemployment lingers. In fact, they are literally put in the line of fire. It cannot be hard to see how the same logic that has the unemployed seeking jobs to meet their needs eventually gets redirected to pursue other illicit opportunities. Drug dealing, just one form of hustling, embodies characteristics of entrepreneurship that, in any of other industry, would be praised. The significant difference being that the drug business requires associates to place their lives in the balance because the industry operates via fear, intimidation, and outright violence.

With such high costs, it is an industry most would rather avoid, and so the industry preys on the desperate. Drugs are often the only viable business in economically depressed communities. For decades we have diagnosed adverse byproducts of rampant drug dealing such as addiction, dilution of the family unit and siphoning of public funding for increased policing. But it is unclear if we have ever made the connection between employment and gun shootings strong enough that we resolve to never let 'at-risk youth' mire in unemployment ever again.

To what degree was Reggie involved in any (if at all) illicit activity? Was Reggie's shooting just a part of the indiscriminate collateral damage we have become accustomed to with the drug trade? Some of these questions can only be answered in partial truth because the complete answers are obscured. In the spirit of embracing complexity,

I hope we also ask ourselves questions like: Was the shooter also unemployed? Would they have been in the situation to pull the trigger had they been given the opportunity and dignity of honest work? How many in this neighborhood are victims to a medieval criminal system that prefers punishment over rehabilitation? How can we expect more from people whose criminal record is a scarlet letter that can induce decades of unemployment?

I hope Reggie's death illustrates the pivotal and immediate need for diverse employment opportunities for all who seek them. This is not a vision of community divorced from accountability, but of one that has shed its ignorant preconceptions of the disadvantaged. We must be willing to work tirelessly toward transitioning those most vulnerable to gainful employment. That way, our troublesome outcomes involve disgruntled employees rather than murdered members of our communities. This would be progress and this would represent momentum towards a stronger community. Gun violence is a complex issue, but by taking into account the economics of unemployment and creating opportunity accordingly, we can peel back some of the fingers that end up pulling the trigger.

Chris Eagan is the 8th Day Staff Member for the Viatorians and Our Lady of Victory Noll Sisters. His main focuses at 8th Day are economic justice, community development, immigration, and foreign policy. Chris enjoys playing ultimate frisbee and attempting culinary excellence (and falling very short).

Violence Takes a Toll on All



Understanding the psychological roots of violence is a complex endeavor. As a psychologist working in west-side-Chicago Austin High School's health center and in Cook County's Adolescent-Young Adult Clinic at Fantus Health Center in 1985, I learned from teens and their parents about challenges they faced in their neighborhoods.

One student became despondent when winter vacation approached; she described being forbidden to go out for the two weeks because "it's

not safe." During an intake with the mother of a 15 year-old girl, I listened to what had become a sad, but familiar family history of major losses of a brother, an uncle, and a husband to violent deaths. A 16 year-old healthy male athlete, when asked what he hoped to be doing in five years, replied, "I don't know if I will be alive, so why think about the future?" It was pause for thought.

In addition to a psychological understanding of violence, we must consider how race, economics, and cultural attitudes contribute to violence in general and gun violence in particular. Frightening statistics are reported about gun violence from reliable sources such as the Centers for Disease Control, Children's Defense Fund, American Academy of Pediatrics, and American Public Health Association. Consider the following statements:

Estimates of civilians who own guns in the U.S. are as high as 310 million, representing about one gun per person in the U.S.

In all children and teens between the ages of 1 and 19 years, guns are the second leading cause of death. Among Black youth in the same age range, guns are the leading cause of death.

Since 1963, three-times more youth have died from guns in American neighborhoods than U.S. soldiers deployed in wars abroad.

Statistics go on, but in the end, we live in a scary society. Fear and anxiety is a common response to threat. When someone experiences real or perceived threats to their wellbeing, there is an acute stress response, commonly described as flight or fight. A person's response is dependent on their biological, psychological, and social make-up. This is important to understand. Persistent stress, especially traumatic stress, alters brain functioning and physiological responses.

Stress occurs, the body responds. We can remove ourselves from the situation (flight), or stay and 'fight' the situation/person, or 'freeze,' unable to flee or fight. When 'everyday' stress resolves, the body resumes normal functioning. When stress is strong, persistent, and perhaps even traumatic, the body may not resume

its normal physiological functions, but remain in 'high gear,' creating 'wear and tear' on physical, emotional, and social wellbeing.

Research in social psychology suggests that environmental cues contribute to aggression. Such cues include weapons, violent behavior, and excessive alcohol consumption. Add exposure to aggressive cues to sustained stress and perceived threats and potential for violent behavior increases.

Add access to a gun and potential for lethal harm increases. Sixty-six percent of gun deaths among youth between the ages of 1 and 19 years and 32% of adult gun deaths, 20 years and older, are homicides. Developmentally, teens generally have less impulse control, are more likely to be reactive when threatened, fearful, and angered, and as the statistics demonstrate, are vulnerable when guns are accessible.

The possible roles in a scenario of violence include perpetrator, victim, and bystander. Violence takes a toll on all.

Consider a parallel process for individuals/families/communities/societies. Just as individuals become fearful and anxious in response to persistent stressors, so do the other communal layers. As a country, we are fearful and anxious and live under persistent stressful conditions – racial, economic, and health disparities. Despite being one of the wealthiest countries, the U.S. has **lower** life expectancy, math and literacy rates, levels of trust in others, and social mobility and also has **higher** rates of homicides, imprisonment, mental illness, teenage births, infant mortality, and obesity. As a nation, we are exposed to violence domestically and globally. We are perpetrators, victims, and bystanders. Violence has taken a toll on us all.

As a clinical psychologist, I assist survivors of violence and their families to cope with trauma. Learning to cope with responses to violence, however, does nothing to prevent violence. Violence prevention involves protective factors. Positive attitude, constructive models of coping, close relationships, positive educational settings, and nonviolent neighborhoods are a few of the correlates of nonviolence identified in reliable studies. A good place to start in violence prevention is with the disparities that exist in the U.S. More equality supports protective factors that promote nonviolence. Another pause for thought.

Dr. Mary Fabri, is a clinical psychologist and former senior director of Heartland Alliance Marjorie Kovler Center. She is an international consultant on mental health and trauma.

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"We keep Little Red Riding Hood out of schools because of the bottle of wine in her basket why not assault weapons?" Moms Demand Action.org

It's Not Rocket Science

"In the 1960s, when my grandfather was teaching me to drive in his little red Ford Falcon, there was an epidemic of deaths on the highways in the United States, and young people were dying in very large numbers." That's how Dr. Mark L. Rosenberg, president and CEO of The Task Force for Global Health, and former Assistant Surgeon General and former director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, recently began talking about today's public health crisis for young people. He continued: "And this country said, 'We can't let this happen. We're going to stop it,' and they took \$200 million and said, 'We're going to invest in research on how to stop young people from losing their lives on the highway,' and they did an amazing, amazing thing.

The research that they supported—and they started the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration—that research led to redesigning cars completely . . . The front end of the cars we drive today crush like an accordion to protect us. We have side-impact protection, rollover protection, airbags. . . We redesigned the roads. . . We've gotten drunk drivers, to a huge extent, off the roads. . . What we did in the '60s, redesigning the car, redesigning the roadway, redesigning the drivers, was a result of scientific research, and as a result we have saved, between the '60s and the beginning of this century, 325,000 lives. That's the result of science."

Dr. Rosenberg is confident that America can save lives being lost in the current epidemic of gun violence that is the second

leading cause of death among children and teens ages 1–19 and the number one cause of death among Black children and teens. He believes this public health threat must be attacked just like all others—by using the power of science and evidence-based research: "We can apply the same science to firearm injuries and deaths of children, and it's not rocket science."

In Washington, D.C. on October 20th, the Children's Defense Fund partnered with Washington National Cathedral for a special Children's Sabbath service and activities, including a forum with leading experts on gun violence as a public health issue where Dr. Rosenberg shared his experience. Under his leadership the CDC conducted key research in the 1990s.

"We set out to show that you could start a research program to find out how to prevent gun violence, just like you could reduce the number of fatalities on the roads, and I think one of the most striking findings from our research was designed to answer the question: Does having a gun in your home protect you, or does it put you and your family at risk? Because the people who make and sell guns and the NRA [National Rifle Association] had a very strong vested interest in telling people, 'You should get a gun and have it in your home for protection.'"

"So we tried to answer that question scientifically, and what we found was that not only did having a gun in your home not protect you, but it increased the risk that someone in your own home would be killed by a gun, not by 10



MomsDemandAction.org

percent or 20 percent—that’s how much of a risk you have to show to take a drug off the market; not by 100 percent or 200 percent, but 300 percent increase in the risk. And the risk that someone in your home would die from suicide with a gun—and I need to remind us that two-thirds of all gun deaths are suicides—the risk that someone in your home would die from gun suicide went up not 300 percent, but 500 percent. These were extraordinary findings that bringing a gun into your home increases the risk that someone in your home will die from a gun... these research findings have been replicated again and again in many studies. So they’re not something that we question. This is the truth.”

This research was not well received by the gun lobby, and Dr. Rosenberg says they started a campaign to get rid of the whole gun violence prevention research agenda. The NRA successfully lobbied their allies in Congress to stop the CDC’s gun violence prevention research funding. As a result, funding for gun violence prevention research at the CDC fell from an average of \$2.5 million per year in 1993-1996 to half that in 1997-2000.

Two decades later, the CDC is spending just \$100,000 per year on gun violence prevention research. Meanwhile we are spending 2,500-times that amount on research to prevent traffic fatalities, even though traffic accidents and guns kill a similar number of people every year. We must not let this continue to happen. The President has requested that Congress authorize \$10 million for gun violence prevention research at the CDC, and another \$20 million to set up a nationwide system to better track gun deaths. This would still be only a tenth of what we are spending on traffic deaths, but it would be a vast

improvement over where we are right now.

Dr. Rosenberg also said: “There’s this sense of fatalism that people sometimes have, and you say, ‘Oh, there’s 300 million guns out there in the country. The problem is so big, there is nothing we can do about it, and besides, we’ve lived with violence from the beginnings of mankind. It’s just out there.’... But we’ve learned that violence is not ‘just evil,’ but violence is specific types of problems: child abuse, child neglect, dating violence, youth violence, intimate partner violence and gender-based violence, rape and sexual assault, child sexual abuse, elder abuse, suicide. Violence is a set of specific problems, and we can apply these same four questions—What’s the problem? What are the causes? What works? And how do you do it?—to each of these types, and they can be prevented.”

Our nation’s gun violence epidemic is not inevitable. Scholars must be allowed to do the desperately needed scientific research that will help parents, policymakers and the public determine how we can all work together to stop it. The NRA cannot be allowed to continue to block the truth at the cost of so many lives.

Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children’s Defense Fund whose Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. For more information go to www.childrensdefense.org. Mrs. Edelman’s Child Watch Column also appears each week on The Huffington Post. Permission to reprint this article was granted by the Children’s Defense Fund.

Violence and God's Silence

Mayor Rahm Emmanuel is a tough manager. But he can't stem Chicago's rising murders. America is armed and dangerous. The United States sells 78% of the world's weapons. As if a national epidemic, alienated youth unleash bloodshed on teachers and each other.

How to make moral sense of senseless violence? It is as if America's permanent wars, gun fetish, and homicides have infected the imagination of those most troubled. The violence displaced to distant third world nations, to ghettos of the US poor, has come more and more to the "safer" areas of white middle class culture. We all face the horror of the suffering of the innocent. How does God permit it? How do we?

Job's question lure everyone. It's inscrutability defeats or anesthetizes or wakes up. It is not a leap to suggest that the ability to distance ourselves from violence by use of drones that kill civilians in remote areas in Pakistan does have a psychic cost in terms of our collective unconscious. Drones make us all guilty bystanders.

Where is God in the midst of the violation of children and civilian populations without the power to protect themselves? Philosopher Terry Eagleton refuses to turn away from the scandal of the brutalization of the powerless, insisting that from such crucifixions, there is not an explanation to the mystery of trauma and evil, that God does not prevent violence, but enters into it, accompanying the targeted and the survivors:

"We need to have faith that against all appearances to the contrary, that the powerless can come to power. Only by preserving a steadfast fidelity to failure, one scandalous to nations that despise a loser, can any human power prove fertile and durable. It is by virtue of this impossible, stonily disenchanted realism, staring the Medusa's head of the monstrous, traumatic, obscene Real of human crucifixion full in the face, that some kind of resurrection may be possible. Only by seeing this as the very last word, seeing everything else as so much sentimentalist garbage, ideological illusion, fake utopia, false consolation, and ludicrously upbeat idealism – only then might it prove to be the last word of all."

Eagleton is Irish and his tragic realism is no surprise for one whose ancestors experienced the genocide of An Gorta Mor, the Great Hunger, in which half the Irish population starved to death or were made exiles within a two-year

period. What all people, who have nothing but faith to see them through the horrific, believed was that the Divine, hidden in their midst, was present. They, like Job, did not have answers as to why God 'permitted' their suffering. In El Salvador during the war years of the 1980s, I met a brutalized people who, too, clung to the God of losers and the traumatized.

El Salvador was the place where Eagleton's notion that the mutilated body of the world's despised became reality for me. I have no words to convey the transformative impact of meeting campesinos who, like the Irish of the mid 1800s, suffered annihilation. Salvadorans clung to their own superstitions, denials, and myths. But they resisted, too. Staring down the hideous, they believed against all logic and rational assessment, that the Divine had never abandoned them. I had never come that close to the God of the expendable.

After the holocaust many philosophers declared God dead. The God of power, the invincible One, the 'comprehensible' God was dead. The elusive Divine, present in all that is, remains for us the great Mystery. Like Job, we are confounded by inflicted suffering and death. Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, who lost his brothers and parents at Auschwitz, and who spent time in a work camp himself, faced the mystery of the human capacity for violence. Violence occurs when the other person can be seen as an object which can be manipulated, made efficient, productive, governable.

He said that the face of the other person places a moral claim on each of us. We are responsible for the freedom of the other person. The face of the other (representing the irreducible uniqueness of each person) has a trace of the Divine which points to transcendence. Thus, the other is both enigma and mystery, whose unarmed vulnerability presents a moral prohibition against reduction to stereotype of difference, weakness, uselessness – or the ultimate refusal of the other – murder. In summary, Levinas, having journeyed through the corridors of terror and death, believes the human face is an epiphany of the Divine.

I am still asking Job's question, the question I asked in fourth grade. The mystery of suffering. (See poem next page)

Renny Golden's poetry book *Blood Desert: Witnesses*, published by the University of New Mexico Press, won the WILLA Literary Award from Women Writing the West 2011, was named a Southwest Notable Book of the Year 2012, and was a Finalist for the New Mexico Book Award 2012.

The Question By: Renny Golden

The child's soul musters strength
where the holes are torn

Adrienne Rich

From my moonlit porch bed on Dante Avenue
I hear a train rumble our star-dazzled prairie.
I am eight, adrift in this night music,
a spaniel barking in the distance.

My uncles have no war injuries.
I have asked no questions of God.

That October, Sister Mercedes told us
we could perform a sacrament. I was alert, girls, too?
Two boys were playing in boxcars,
Sister began. Mortality floated into that room
welcome as the angel of death. We held our breaths.
When the train lunged it slammed the door
on one boy's head. His friend cradled his head, child,
He said the Act of Contrition with his dying frier

Not one third grader moved.

That day on my way home from school I walked
past Kelly's store, did not buy one penny candy,
walked past Victory gardens, never checked my carrots.
I saw that bloodied child choking on his dying prayer,
blood staining his friend's shirt. I saw him die and
I did not care about forgiveness or sins.

After that I was late for everything: dinner, mass,
piano practice. I arrived at school after the bell
fumbling a lunch box with a faded Dumbo,
my fat notebook spilling sheets
of the wrong arithmetic assignment.

How could God let children suffer?
I knew my mother had no answer and that somehow
I'd been given a grief that changed the
solace of night outside my porch window.

My manifesto of inchoate refusals:
I will barely show up;
I will never be on the right page;
I will keep my question.



Art: Jeremy Collins

SSSSSS HHHHHH

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