

SEARCHING FOR JUSTICE

BY ROB SAWYER

What is justice? Is there justice for the prey born to feed the predator? Perhaps "Tommy", the deaf, dumb and blind child who is a character in The Who's rock opera of the same name might tell us — if he could speak? To Afghanistan's Taliban, the destruction of the great cultural heritage of others is just. To Bill Clinton (and much of the American judicial system) *Themis* is a whore sprawled on a filthy blanket aboard a corporate pirate ship. Unions slamming democracy's ballot initiative door, pharmaceutical companies paying the manufacturers of generic drugs not to, Americans saving money by purchasing products tainted with the blood of oppression...

What is justice? Not so long ago a 5 year old girl was found in a shallow grave near Eugene. Her tiny body was almost entirely covered with burns, bruises, bit marks, open sores... Her tormentors, driven mad by methamphetamine abuse, had rubbed isopropyl alcohol into wounds, enough to poison the child and ensure her last days on earth would be filled with horrible sickness and pain. Surely we must all agree Tesslynn's torment was among the worst of injustices. We care about her, if not enough to intervene on behalf of the child who is — right now, here in Oregon — being tortured to death. We simply cannot afford to maintain our lifestyles and invest the necessary resources to at least try to stop things like this from happening. Just as China can't afford not to blow her children up as they work producing fireworks.

We call for accountability, personal responsibility, as we sing the songs our leaders have taught us, but we fail to see the hypocrisy when our leaders fail to hold themselves accountable. Convicted of perjury, a young man from Portland spends time in Sheridan while perjurers of means enjoy their freedom. Leonard Peltier, a man who has widespread support among many well respected people and organizations worldwide, was probably not even considered as Bill Clinton handed out pardons to those who can afford them.

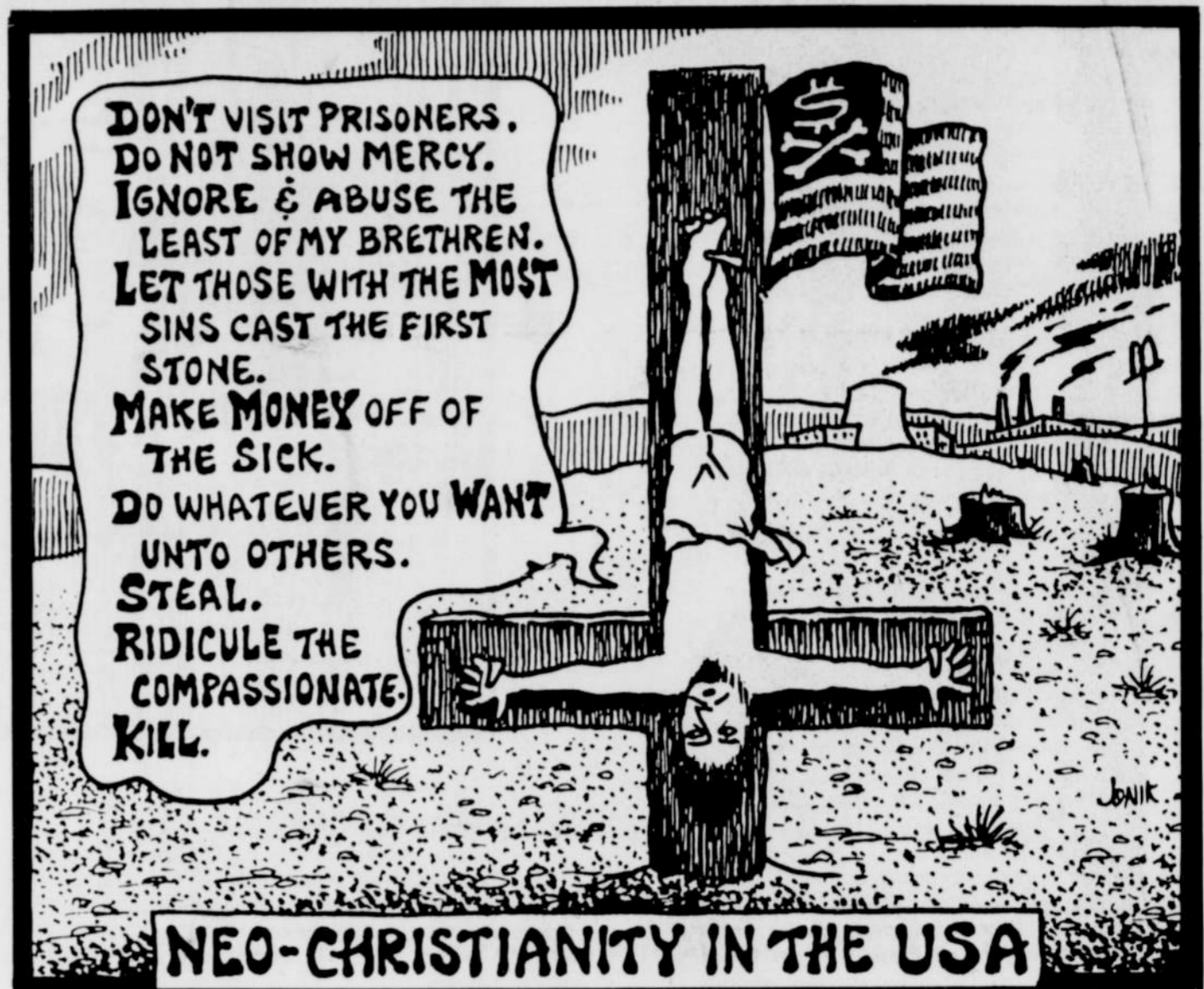
There's a religious revival, of sorts, here in America. After all, we're a religious nation — people who believe in God and his ways. Look around you. Do people worship God? No, people worship material wealth and material things, all the while professing a belief in their religious principles as their actions tell another story. Who wants to be a millionaire? It seems the answer is most of us.

I once asked a lawyer to pursue something I perceived to be just — to hold a municipality accountable for passing an ordinance prohibiting free speech, then using it to silence me. He filed a claim for about \$2,000,000 against the town. I told him my entire existence — if reduced to a cash value — would not be worth so much money. Besides, my goal was to simply hold the people responsible accountable and recover what they had actually cost me. The lawyer told me the only thing people understand is money. Yes, sadly, like the lawyer, the only thing too many people understand is money. Like pigs wallowing in the filth beside the trough, we clamor over each other, jostling for position, thrusting our snouts into the cash, gorging ourselves until our bloated bellies drag in the muck. But when we eat so much, we must shit as well. And the shit is piling up in our pen, as each generation sells the succeeding one out further. We're, maybe, chest-deep, but without drastic change that comes quickly, our descendants may be in over their heads.

We know, without a doubt, the burgeoning population of the world is in trouble. Perhaps some kind of apocalypse will resolve the problems we abdicate to the future. More likely we'll fuck future generations to death trying to get things now that we don't really need at all. We can skin the world to make a coat we like, but in the end the earth is dead and we have no place we can wear our coat.

What is justice? Justice is mostly a myth, like those of *Themis* and *Aphrodite*. It's a myth we should cherish, strive to realize, but a conceptual myth nonetheless. A better question to ask ourselves is what is right? Better yet, ask a small child. Before we teach them to lie to avoid consequences, children, by nature, tell the truth. They see, with great insight, the things we learn to be blind to, and seem to, almost instinctively, know what's right. Before the jaded blade of experience cuts their souls, small children are shocked by the concept of harmful lies and appalled by the suffering of others. They know the unadulterated compassion Christ tried to share with us, the spiritual cosmos that is the blood of existence. So do we. We've only forgotten. The hour is not too late to open our eyes wide.

How much do we really need? Surely we can be happy without so much. I recently took the Max-O-Matic into Portland. As I rode along a man wearing army fatigues boarded, parking his wheelchair across the aisle. He was older than I, maybe 60 or so, very dirty and drunk. Both of his legs were entirely gone. The man sat staring at me until he caught my eyes, then continued staring as I looked into him. It wasn't uncomfortable — more like looking at an artist through a painting. The artist



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had suffered greatly, learning, growing through his pain. At first I felt pity for the man, but as I gazed into his aged gray-blue eyes, he silently, compassionately spoke to me. As he left the train he quietly voiced what he had already told me, saying "simplify." SIMPLIFY! And so the man I began pitying took pity on me, becoming my mentor. It's a lesson we can all learn, i.e. simplify, use what you need, leave the rest.

I don't recall anything in the Bible about God giving humanity domination over the animals so we could drive them to extinction. Likewise, I don't remember anything in the Bible that says God created the world so we can destroy it. But, as we all know, what the Bible says is open to interpretation. The commandment not to kill is interpreted to mean don't kill unless it is socially sanctioned. Now we're going to use more public funds to finance church activities. I recall working alone one evening when a homeless person came to me asking for food. Unable to leave, I called a local church and was told all the churches in the small community pooled their resources, giving them to the police department. So I called the police department and was told there was enough money to buy a family gas to get out of town — if they had a car. The church I called that day later bought a number of low income housing units, evicted the tenants, razed the structures and paved the area for parking.

The radicals and outcasts are no less out of touch than the people who inhabit excessively large homes, driving around in vehicles that look like they could have been made by Mack or Freightliner. Who is greater, those who consume little, or those who consume much? Those in grand homes, or those who wander? Those who serve the high corporate priests, or those who resist them? Assuming there is a God, who will she cast into the fire?

Ah..., the sweet songs of the politician, heavy metal pounding as they angrily sing of the very place they have led us to — the soft, gentle lullabies promising change in lyrical lies. As corporate shepherds guide them with cash canes, our leaders become followers, adherents to the corporate mantra: Profit above all. Lulled to half-conscious states by the constant drone of the money machines, we forget the corporate atrocities of the past and how companies scurried like hungry rats to gnaw profits from the burnt bones of war and holocaust. As more and more power consolidates in fewer hands we see our courts, our political institutions, our lives increasingly controlled by entities that exist only to profit.

Let the social bloodletting begin. Who's to blame for social ills? Oh yes, it's the poor. The lazy scoundrels rest in subsidized flats sucking from the checks of we who work so hard. If the poor had the lobbying resources available to them that the wealthy do, we would know that the money spent providing welfare benefits is not much compared to the vast resources squandered subsidizing corporate activities. Did the poor benefit from the S&L fiasco? No, but we piled on lots of national debt taking care of a mess created by people handing out unsecured loans and fat salaries to people who walked away largely unscathed. The examples range from apple growers in Washington State to defense contractors in Florida, and everything in between. The poor have been used as scapegoats by commercial interests that don't want the American public directing attention to their activities.

No, poor people do not contribute much to the problems in America. The issues, like most social issues are complex with many variables and factors to consider. However, the most obvious seems to be nearly unbridled corporate profiteering. We can understand pharmaceutical companies passing along the high cost of research and development to consumers. We understand that they should be entitled to profit exclusively during the patent period. But when the patent expires and the pharmaceutical companies find it profitable to pay generic manufacturers not to manufacture the drugs many need but can't afford, we've crossed over to the dark side.

Here in Oregon our courts have decided that the bribery of politicians is free speech. Somehow the voice of the people failed to reach the court's ears while the sound of moneyed interests was heard clearly. How this happened is no mystery to the people who make it a point to see judges sympathetic to their interests are elected and appointed. Don't believe it? Check the campaign contributions of the owner of Shilo Inns.

So, lots of problems — how about solutions? If someone tries to rape you, do you turn on the television, grab a beer and bend over? No, of course not. The best way to avoid being raped is education, i.e., don't put yourself at risk and know how to deal with it if it happens. Americans have been repeatedly financially raped. Take a look at the national debt (debt in trillions \$\$\$, not deficit), the demand for taxes, the prices we are forced to pay for essential goods. We can let the rapists fuck us to death, or we can educate ourselves and do something about the problem. For instance, if you know Senators Wyden and Smith want to expand the guest worker program for personal reasons, you can help vote them out of office. The need to expand the guest worker program is justified by Wyden and Smith by a perceived labor shortage. Never mind the government report that says there is no labor shortage and farm laborers have seen declining wages. Never mind the fact that Smith — a produce processor — stands to benefit at the expense of farm workers if the guest worker program is expanded. Don't worry about the campaign contributions coming to Wyden from the high technology sector — a group that wants to drive wages of software engineers down further by bringing less costly workers from a pool in India. You see, if we know how corrupt these guys are, we can knock

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