

A Prayer for the World

on the brink of the Jubilee Year

by *Lee McKenna DuCharme*

Oh Holy One, Spirit God,
You, who satisfies the hungry heart
You, who provides words to poets:

Oh God of the Exiles
We are your people;
we feel that this is no longer our home
we're not sure at all that we like life
on the edge...

We know too well the threat of the cross;
we have glimpsed the danger of the resurrection;
we have taken tentative steps on Jubilee's road to costly liberation.

And...we're not sure we like it.

How can we sing the Lord's song?

The happy tunes of a gospel of certitude
and privilege
have long been dissonance to our ears.
Yet still we feel the urge to hang our harps
on trees:

Jubilee is hard saying!

Who can hear it?

Who can accept it in this culture of Seinfeld
and SUVs

and self-cleaning appliances
and not feel offence?

But yet, we know, deep in ourselves,
that you do hold the words of life.

We see your church in foetal position,
desperate to protect what it used to be
its running after order
in a disordered world,

its race for Easter without Good Friday...

And your poets yearn.

Widows and orphans die in the streets...

canaries in coalmines;

(continued)

The IMF and the World Bank and the WTO
organise our debts
oblivious to Jubilee.

We stand in the 49th year:

The people of Kosovo and of East Timor cry
for their return
to the lands of their ancestors
The people of Aceh and West Papua dream of life
out from under the hand of oppression
The children of Sierra Leone learn the craft
of war and dismemberment,
their childhood the stolen property of overlords
Boatloads of Chinese labourers, indentured,
sold into slavery in their search
for the Golden Mountain,
sweating out their lives so that we can enjoy cheaply
the benefits of the “free” market

The people of Sudan and Nagalim die
in their hundreds of thousands,
silent to our ears
Ugandans, Zambians and Malawians
bury entire generations of AIDS victims
never dreaming of life-extending drugs

Women, children and men...
God! How can you can stand it!?
wander homeless in the streets
of the cities
of the richest countries
in the world.

We lie shackled to Empire that invites us
into denial, despair, amnesia
and when that happens,
your people become
shoppers.
Empire’s mantra tells us to
GO ALONG
if we want to
GET ALONG;
Our churches sit dormant under the narcotic
of liturgies
designed to accommodate the people to Empire,

producing custodians of the dominant power,
making them feel good enough to carry on,
but not guilty enough to do anything dangerous.

In the face of the demands of Jubilee,
we sometimes find ourselves
acting and believing that there is no one greater than
Nebuchadnezzar.

O God of the Exiles,
give words to your poets

For poets make no concessions to Babylon;
They write poetry that undermines
the prose of Empire;
They dance;
Poets speak the ordinary things of faith
that the Empire considers outrageous.

Give strength to your people who believe—
that we are saved for the world, not from it;
that peace, like war, is waged;
that discipleship means being redemptively involved
in the world’s pain
at some cost to ourselves;
that, if not outrageous,
poetry has no power to give life;
that the principalities and powers are not
in charge of this world.

Give words to your poets
these repairers of breaches
and restorers of streets to live in
your poets
who know that, while words of release
are dangerous,
they emancipate.
They give life.

Because of Christ
in whose name we pray. Amen

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Church, Decatur, Georgia in October 1999.

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