PROPHETIC PEOPLE WHO HAVE INSPIRED US

“At the Fire” Graphic by Rufo Noriega

CATHOLIC AGITATOR
THE FRIEZE OF PROPHETS
From the moment the sacred chrism of baptism kisses our foreheads, Catholics are called to a powerful witness: priest, prophet, and king. This anointing oil welcomes us into the Mystical Body of Christ, but comes with a sacred responsibility. Despite the unconscionably gendered nature of our Church and the biological hangup so prevalent in our spaces, there is no gendered or biological predisposition towards propheticism. It is not a unique vocation only some are called to. It is a promise we make, a northern star we orient ourselves by, a grace that comes not simply from the Spirit, but from intention, commitment, and practice. To refuse it is to fall short of our holy, ancestral order; to deny it is to doubt the mandate of our Creator. Prophets are not just people who did good things or who modeled a way of being kind or compassionate. They are people who committed their lives to embodying the vision of God through their values, words, and actions. From whatever position or social locations we occupy, we are called to be people who recognize the presence of injustice, yes, but more importantly, we are called to be a people so discontented with the current social order that we are compelled to action. We are called to labor unrelentingly to excavate the roots of all injustice, to refuse to tolerate the deception and violence of the world around us, to make it our work both to speak discomforting truths, and to demand a societal conversion. We are called to be holy fools who dream of the greatness we are capable of; to enflesh God’s hopes for our world and for our very lives.

The current state of the world makes it clear that we are not doing enough to honor our baptismal call. The Catholic Worker movement has produced and celebrated a wide range of prophets and fools over the years. I have long been inspired by the story of a wall Dorothy Day adorned with prophets from a variety of faith traditions (and none) at Maryhouse. From the national to the local level, many names have become common sources of inspiration, reminders of what we are capable of. We imagine you could name a few… However, this list must not stay static. To seek constant inspiration to be shaped daily by the insights of others is to open ourselves to the possibility of our own transformation, our own growth, our own incarnation. Who might be included in your compendium of prophets? Who would adorn your frieze? Regardless of whether we know their names or whether they know the impact they have had on us, let us name those who have inspired and moved us, not to fall into the trapings of idolatry, but because calling things by their rightful name affirms their power and place.

But more than simply recognizing these individuals and communities, we want to learn from them and examine our own practices in light of theirs. We want them to inspire us to become new in such a way that not only impacts how we live our individual lives but also how we join in the needed work to build a new world in the shell of the old. By centering the wisdom, guidance, creativity, and vision of our modern-day prophets, we hope to become purified, like gold tested in fire, and grow our collective capacity to struggle for the world where the dignity of all people is reflected in our structures, values… everywhere. How can we be people our future descendants will look upon with gratitude and for inspiration? Though this issue hardly honored our hope to name our own panoply of prophets, we offer a few and hope you will help us finish the endeavor. Whose prophetic truths inspire you? How have you sought to model even a small piece of your life after theirs? What can you do to take one more step into the sacred responsibility to speak hard truths; to confront structures of evil that make it harder for people to be good, to survive, to become that which God created them to be? May this be our year of record-breaking prophets and prophetic actions.

From the moment the sacred chrism of baptism kisses our foreheads, Catholics are called to a powerful witness: priest, prophet, and king. This anointing oil welcomes us into the Mystical Body of Christ, but comes with a sacred responsibility.

By MATT HARPER

In Search of Prophets

Prophets are not just people who did good things or who modeled a way of being kind or compassionate. They are people who committed their lives to embodying the vision of God through their values, words, and actions.

WE ARE CALLED TO BE A PEOPLE SO DISCONTENTED WITH THE CURRENT SOCIAL ORDER THAT WE ARE COMPELLED TO ACTION

Matt Harper is a Los Angeles Catholic Worker community member and co-editor of the Agitator.
not (and still do not) understand or accept their own stated principles because our history over (at least) the past 500 years has been a history where dark forces of ill intent have been at work to shape our minds, hearts, and attitudes. These dark forces are specifically racism, sexism, violence, and plantation capitalism. All four of these demonic forces diminish the dignity of the human person, and permit structures of oppression to emerge that deprive millions of people of their right to equality, liberty, and justice.

It must be understood that there is no way we can exercise the demonic forces of racism from our land if we do not exercise the demonic forces of sexism as well. There is no way that we can exercise the demonic forces of violence and injustice from our land if we do not exercise the demonic force of plantation capitalism and transform our economy into one of genuine opportunity for every man, woman, and child in our nation. Furthermore, there is no way we can ever free any of these evils without adopting and implementing Gandhi’s philosophy and method of nonviolence as a devoted lifestyle. The nonviolent philosophy has a simple first step—which sounds well with the principles of democracy—it encourages ordinary people to assume their inherent authority to change their world. This is the meaning behind Martin Luther King Jr.’s and Fannie Lou Hamer’s conviction that ordinary people have the power and authority to forge a society, and a world, that has the common good as its foundation. The only way this can happen is through nonviolent struggle against the forces of racism, sexism, violence, and plantation capitalism.

I am not speaking of nonviolence as “anti-violence.” I am not speaking of nonviolence as “violence prevention”—although that also is important. I am talking about the fact that our nation, the United States of America, is a nation embedded with, trapped in, and addicted to violence. We seem to believe that through violence we can become the people God wants us to be; that violence somehow will produce the kinds of changes we want to see in the world; that violence is the way to make people and the world better. Our national love affair with guns is merely a symptom of this pathological disease. The fruits of this addiction are devastating.

To illustrate my point, look at the situation between Israel and Palestine. Israel and Palestine have been stuck in an ongoing cycle of violence and aggression, with no end in sight. This cycle has been fueled by a lack of willingness on both sides to engage in meaningful dialogue and seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict. As a result, both sides have suffered greatly, and the region as a whole has been plunged into a state of unrest and turmoil.

There is a need for a new perspective in the Middle East. The time has come for a genuine effort to achieve a lasting peace through nonviolent means. This requires a willingness on both sides to engage in constructive dialogue and work towards a mutually acceptable solution. It also requires a commitment to the values of justice, equality, and nonviolence, which are essential for the achievement of peace and prosperity in the region.

It is my hope that this book will inspire a new generation of peacemakers to work towards a lasting solution to the conflict. As Mohandas Gandhi said, “In the end, we will not CD the problem. We will solve it.” The time has come to put an end to the conflict in the Middle East and to work towards a lasting peace through nonviolent means.
R
cently I interviewed Gen-
eral Dogon from the Los
Angeles Community Action
Network, who was raised
on the Skid Row streets and
born to defend. As a man who has
waded through the waters of an addiction
fueled by poverty, racism, and a cul-
ture of dispossession, it did not take
long for me to see the inadequacy of our
structural sins: mass incarcer-
a-1on and the “War on Drugs.”
Despite the unrelenting obstacles
put in his way and the countless op-
portunities stripped from his neigh-
bors, or maybe because of them,
Dogon grew into a prophet, a teller of hard
truths. Unlike the prophets of old like Job, who
saw the hand of God in the dust that has
Abut in his lungs (16:15), Dogon has
chosen a clipboard and bullhorn as his tools.
His story and wisdom offer profound insights,
both about the complex system around us,
and the betrayal of people and institu-
tions tasked with taking care of our commu-
nities. Most importantly, his story and wisdom model what we,
also, might be capable of.

Our earliest formations do not set
most of us up for success. Too many of
us try to fill in our many roles as a
true sense of who we are or where we
come from. Racist histories, struc-
tural inequalities, and the apathy that
so often amounts to a lack of know-
edness and knowledge is the foun-
dation upon which Dogon and many of
us gather our daily facts, values, and
values of empire.

Dogon walked in the front door of
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PROPHETIC PEOPLE WHO HAVE INSPIRED US

How many of us truly understand the ways that city hall, law enforce-
ment, and our criminal courts work together to harm our community?

UNITL WE ALL GET OVER THE MOUNTAIN TOP

By MATT HARPER

“All I have is a voice to undo the folded lie,
That trails in the brain the blight of the
Of the sexual man-in-the-street.
Whose buildings grope the sky:
There is no such thing as the State
Annexed by its many systems. This loss
of root-
ture but prophetic honesty. The ob-
stacles are not diverse political affilia-
tions but lies and obscured priorities.
There is only one theologically ap-
propriate response to a City Council
that creates motions that criminal-
ize poverty so that business can run
“as usual.” We claim our power and
use our voice. We “refuse to accept
anything that will cause more deaths
of my friends, our neighbors,” Dogon
asserted. “If you don’t want anything,
what will happen? Nothing.”

Since we are going to mow the
lawn, Dogon added, “I believe in
cutting the grass. We cannot
accept half truths or leave a problem
half solved. When you chop it all
later because you already did it, it
is already done.” Seeing how our
elected leaders love to wheel and
deal for major donors and those with
powerful holocrons, we can’t leave
our community to be sold down the
river when greed gets its hands on
our interests. There is no room for
bargaining when five people die
day. “Which side are you on?”
Dogon posed. And more so, “All that
shit that you leave undone is what
we come back to and face out.”

Whether through the lived experi-
exer of being the primary target of
these systems, or because we have cast
our lot with the dispossessed, we must
expand our ability to see through their
vision. If there is one thing shared by
prophets it is their unceasing drive
to see complicated realities and
derstanding the deepest truths there.
Every day we must resist simplistic
answers and deepen our political analysis.
We must move with skepticism of those
who hold an unequal amount of pow-
er and resources not because they
are not reflections of the People of God
but because unequal power and resources
are the result of sinfulness.

Tragedies like houselessness do not come out of the fault of any one individual
or single structure. The deeper we un-
derstand the factors and players that
lead to it, the intentional structures and
interacting forces that make it
inevitable, and what is gained from
its presence, the more we will un-
derstand our systems’ responsibility
for this problem far exceeds that of
individual actions; the counter-narrative wastes our time and
keeps us from our most effective,
most life-giving paths.

How many of us truly understand
the ways that city hall, law enforce-
ment, and our courts work together to
harm our community?

When Philip Alston, the U.N.
Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and
Human Rights, visited Dogon and
the rest of the Los Angeles Commu-
nity Action Network, his assessment
was clear: the only thing keeping
the unhoused of resource-rich L.A.
in squalor is political will. “That’s it,”
Dogon reminded us. “It is not
about places; it is about the
resources stolen for ours.
It is arrogant not to see how
the chaos of others’ lives is directly linked
to our policies, narratives, and opportuni-
ties stolen for ours.
When Philip Alston, the U.N.

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THE BOXER
By Jeff Dietrich

He arose abruptly, cracking his knuckles before he turned to face the crowd. He had been waiting for this moment for months. His fists were raised, and the referee signaled the start of the fight. Everyone held their breath as he stepped into the ring.

Light interconnected with the force of his challenge. He knew that the other fighter was strong, but his own determination was just as powerful. His visions of victory were unbreakable. He took a deep breath and charged forward, ready to give his all.

Amidst the crowd, the referee announced the results. The boxer had emerged victorious, and the cheers filled the arena. It was a moment of triumph, of overcoming adversity. The boxer knew that he had achieved something special, and he savored the moment with every sense.

This was his story, his moment in the ring. He had trained hard for this, and he had come out on top. His victory was a testament to his dedication and perseverance. The boxer smiled, knowing that he had earned this moment of glory.

THE CONTENDER
By James O'Neill

The Contender was a young man, full of promise and potential. He had been training for this moment for years. His eyes were locked on the prize, and he was determined to take it.

The Contender walked into the ring, his fists clenched tight. The crowd roared as he took his place, ready to face his opponent. He knew that this was the moment he had been waiting for. The match was on.

The Contender fought with all his might, giving everything he had. The crowd was on its feet, cheering him on. He was a force to be reckoned with.

In the end, it was the Contender's determination and skill that saw him through. He emerged victorious, and the crowd erupted in applause. The Contender knew that this was just the beginning. He was ready for whatever came next.
Book Review
*Detroit: The Spiritual Path of Jesus for 21st Century Men* by Craig S. Pesti-Strobel
Resource Publications, 2021, 252 pages, $28.00

By DAVE BELLEFEUILLE-RICE
author Craig Pesti-Strobel, a United Methodist pastor. Weaving together his experiences of marriage, divorce, jobs, and freedom and forgiveness with well-informed spiritual, psychological, and sociological scholarship, he offers us a quite readable book of Gospel-inspired stories to serve as one guide along our journey.

He describes a spiritual awakening at a high school church camp when he clearly heard "Jesus ask, "Who do you think you're fooling?" That awakening remains in his life. *Detroit* offers the reader insights into how our personal being can be enmeshed ominously with interpersonal and social systems. Rather than simply offering an assortment of discussion questions, this book suggests additional individual and group work for the readers, presented in a variety of creative forms. As for his focus on masculinity, Pesti-Strobel noticed in the gospels, Jesus spends a lot of time working with his group of males, when in their own first-century systems to contend with. He finds in the Jesus gospel narratives and teachings a male spirituality. As the oldest of eight boys, son of a beloved father (that's me!), and a father himself, he does not presume to be able to offer a spirituality to anyone but men.

The author begins in naming one crisis before us: a world-wide, in which men play a dominant, destructive role. He quickly moves into engaging male readers about injustice, violence against women, nonviolence, and disengaging from the Domination System. He writes about these things as if they were happening, church pew friendly, Jesus-loving concerns, not leftist-only passions. Isn't that true?

This ordained Christian is not much interested in systematic theology. He wants men to walk the path of Jesus, the road that leads us into seemingly unanswerable questions and deeply murky waters. He invites us to pursue the way of living that can feel like dying. To him, what counts is not so much what we know as how we live. Whatever path you are attempting, does nonviolence make sense? And don't we all need encouragement and company to practice living any path of peace?

The beating heart of the book is Pesti-Strobel's marriage story, told memorably in just a few paragraphs. He is on his third hyphenated last name. After entering into determined to devote himself to healthy, egalitarian, happy family life—for family's sake—and to set an example of sanity for his congregation, he is now nine years sober. Bewildered and sorrow forced him to ask himself what one does when determination just does not work.

To his credit, this author does not reveal (for the price of a book) a success recipe he has gleaned from his mistakes and from the Bible. Don't we all know deep down that even when a good recipe can help, it is not enough to sustain us when we are lost in the mine?

Pesti-Strobel urges the path of Jesus, a path he has been attempting since his high-school awakening. He has found it endlessly fruitful. In facing his questions, though, one may want to go deeper, though it seems he is not quite sure where that will take him. The challenge is to go deeper, and one can imagine what his most feared opponent would say. Taking my cue from him, urge a friend to consider reading this book, although I imagine anyone else who describes, personal, political, dignity. Most of us human beings have witnessed the crumbling of some personal and social systems. Rather than seeking to understand what has happened, we can appreciate the country we had, the one we never had, think what a vastly superior, dedicated to feeding the world's poor, think what a vastly superior, nation we would be. Our national inclinations towards violence and oppression. Consider this: If the hundreds of billions of dollars invested in these social systems that we have come to regard as "normal," then at least the illusion is okay to appreciate the country we had. Is it to be free from the "cruel and unusual security in their property and possessions." Then a skip loader would scoop up the cart and told to "move on," they need to think of him as an icon of Skid Row. I think of him often and fondly. Despite his unvarnished behavior, I think of him as an icon of Skid Row. He was a "boxer and a fighter by his trade, and he carries the reminder of every glove that laid him down and cut him till he cried out in anger and his shame, I am leaving, but the fighter still remains." (*The Iceman, Simon and Garfunkel*)

I hope I have been a fighter, too, someone who remained anchored to my own personal Afghanistan, Iraq, Vietnam. It is my personal refugee camp that keeps me honest when plagued with personal and political disillusionments. I have a picture, hanging over my desk, every day before I begin my work, the picture of a long ago cold spell. I think of him often and fondly. However, the core of our work has always been our attempt to feed hungry people, creating a sense of community, dignity, and listening to their stories in our beautiful dining garden. *Taking my cue from him, I urge you to read this book. Dearest Friends, does this not make sense? And don't we all need understanding? Do we not all need understanding, a way to answer the seemingly unanswerable questions of our time, to appreciate the country we had, the one we never had, think what a vastly superior, nation we would be. Our national inclinations towards violence and oppression. Consider this: If the hundreds of billions of dollars invested in these social systems that we have come to regard as "normal," then at least the illusion is okay to appreciate the country we had. Is it to be free from the "cruel and unusual security in their property and possessions." Then a skip loader would scoop up the cart and told to "move on," they need to think of him as an icon of Skid Row. I think of him often and fondly. Despite his unvarnished behavior, I think of him as an icon of Skid Row. He was a "boxer and a fighter by his trade, and he carries the reminder of every glove that laid him down and cut him till he cried out in anger and his shame, I am leaving, but the fighter still remains." (*The Iceman, Simon and Garfunkel*)

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As concerns about the threat of nuclear weapons re-enter the public consciousness, it is important to know that humankind is not without an answer to the nuclear threat.

STATEMENT ON THE EXISTENTIAL THREAT OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND ON THE TREATY ON THE PROHIBITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The power to initiate a global apocalypse lies in the hands of the leaders of the nine nuclear nations. As 122 nations of the world indicated they adopted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in July, 2017, this is unacceptable.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which entered into force on January 22, 2021, provides a critical pathway to the elimination of the nuclear threat. We call on all nuclear armed states to take immediate steps to: engage the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, attend the First Meeting of States Parties, and sign, ratify, and implement the Treaty.

We also call on the U.S. media to recognize the existence of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and to include the Treaty in discussions, articles, and editorials regarding the nuclear threat and methods available to address it. Thus far they have refused to do so. The Nuclear Ban Treaty Collaborative will release this statement and list of endorsers to the U.S. media on June 7. You can sign on to this statement at: nuclearban treaty.org/statement-on-the-nuclear-threat/
NEW reading glasses 250 and higher strength.
CANES–either adjustable metal or wood, gently used or new.
Also, men’s large crew or tube white socks.
Thank you. Many blessing

WILL YOU HELP PLANT SEEDS?

The Catholic Agitator, like many publications, for a variety of reasons continues to experience a declining readership. If you believe this newspaper is prophetic, thought-provoking, and valuable, we need, and would greatly appreciate, your assistance scattering seeds of faith that these works of mercy might carry on no matter what crises sweep the world. Please help us keep growing by sharing this issue with someone, or e-mail info@lacatholicworker.org if you do not yet receive this newspaper or if you need extra copies to hand out. Thank you.

SHARE YOUR EXCESS BACKYARD FRUIT

If you have fruit trees, specifically citrus fruits, on your property and have an excess, our kitchen guests would certainly appreciate whatever you will not use, especially during this pandemic.

Citrus fruits help strengthen the immune system.
Please consider donating. Thank you. Many blessings.

The Catholic Agitator

SISTER HOUSE NETWORK:

Los Angeles Catholic Worker:
https://lacatholicworker.org
1. Ammon Hennacy House of Hospitality
632 N. Brittaina St., Los Angeles, CA 90033-1722
(323) 267-8789
2. Hospitality Kitchen (aka Hippie Kitchen)
821 E. 6th St., Los Angeles, CA 90021
(213) 614-9615

St. John the Baptist House of Hospitality
500 W. VanBuren Ave., Las Vegas, NV 89106
(702) 647-0728 https://lvcw.org

Isaiah House of Hospitality
3121 W. 38th St., Philadelphia, PA 19101
(215) 426-0364

Sadako Sasaki House of Hospitality
1321 W. 38th St., Norfolk, VA 23508
(757) 423-5420

House of Grace Catholic Worker
1826 E. Lehigh Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19125
(215) 426-0364

Kieran Prather House of Hospitality
672 2nd Ave., San Bruno, CA 94066
(650) 827-0706
https://catholicworkerhospitalityhouse.org

Beatitude House
267 Campodonico Ave., Guadalupe, CA 93434-1501
(805) 343-6322

St. Benedict House of Hospitality
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