

OPENERS

Inside NCR

NCR couldn't last without our readers

This is a plea. Not especially an enjoyable task, but a necessary one. Truth is, we depend on you. As we like to think you depend on us — to be the very best Catholic newsweekly we can be.

NCR is reasonably healthy — but struggling. Nearly all U.S. newspapers are hurting. Many reasons are offered. The recession. The young read less. People take less time to read. News junkies look more to cable.

We are holding our own (barely) at the 50,000 circulation mark. That's good news, considering many Catholic publications are experiencing falling circulations. We like to think we are holding our own because we give you information and analysis you simply cannot receive elsewhere. And that our Catholic lay voice is caring and independent!

What's our problem? Skyrocketing costs, including tortuous mail hikes. There was a time the U.S. government assisted idea-oriented publications. The belief was that they are healthy in a democracy. Remember the "postal service"? If you are *Time* or *Cosmopolitan*, you can readily pass recent increases to your plentiful corporate advertisers. It is not so easy if you are a nonprofit religious publication.

Our advertising base — mostly

Humility could redeem us in sea of hubris

By JOAN CHITTISTER, OSB

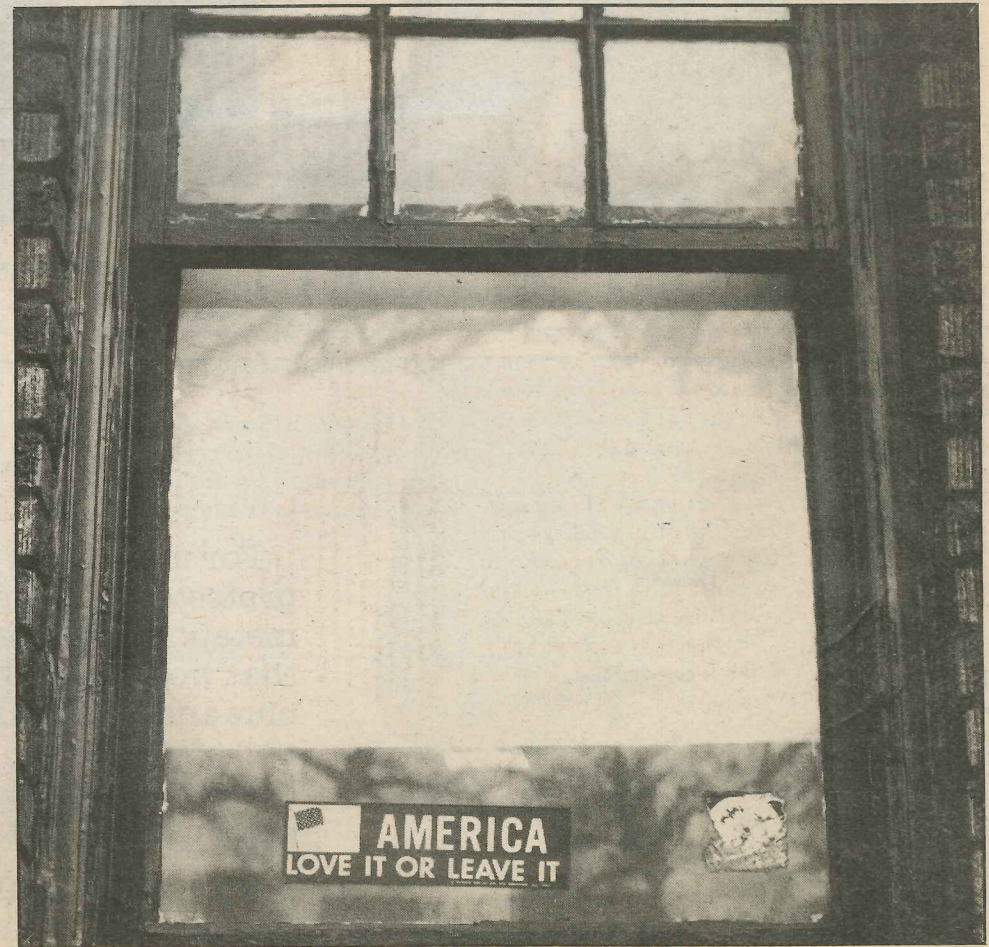
We spend a great deal of time detailing the scenarios of greed and evil that surround us. We deplore the S&L bailout. While the Marshall Plan cost \$50 billion in today's money, we are told, the S&Ls will cost the American taxpayer the price of rebuilding Europe 10 times.

We fear the violence of our children in gang wars across the nation. We are dismayed at the deterioration of U.S. infrastructure that comes from preferring guns to butter. We watch with horror the emergence of hero status to Ollie North, a person who lied to Congress and subverted the law to run his own war under White House auspices.

We find ourselves shocked by the hackneyed and unworthy arguments used, in lieu of proof, against the testimony of Anita Hill — that she was attention-seeking, delusionary and vindictive for reasons never documented — all of which we fear may well reveal the real attitudes toward women in this country, even at the highest levels of the land.

We view with alarm the rising number of poor in the richest country in the world. We are overwhelmed by the calloused approach to the subject of abortion by those who would far rather pay for the elimination of a child than for its lifelong development.

We spend very little time, however, trying to determine why there is so little expression of outrage about any of these things. After all, we continue to insist



—Vernon Sigi

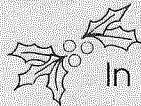
Starting Point

United States, it is not a virtue at all. It is seen as the antithesis of personal development, as a kind of mealy-mouthed

books, conferences, universities and other nonprofit organizations — is far smaller. And our advertisers work with tight margins.

Also, like other smaller companies, the National Catholic Reporter Publishing Co. yearly seems to face frightening increases in health insurance, sometimes about 30 percent.

Meanwhile, we do everything we can to avoid raising the price of *NCR*. To balance our budget, to remain healthy, to grow, we very much need



In the spirit of giving...
give *NCR*!

your help. I am not asking you for a donation, although we are most gratified when we receive one. Rather, I am asking you to help us by giving *NCR* as a gift this Christmas.

In this and some coming issues you will find a Christmas gift order card. Please take it out now and put it in a safe place. Think of a friend or relative who would benefit from *NCR*. Maybe a son or daughter starting a young family. A student. A brother or sister. Or someone connected with a parish or local service organization. *NCR* as a Christmas gift is a multifaceted gift — to the recipient, to us and to yourself (for it assures *NCR*'s health).

That's my plea. Simple. Think of us when you put together your Christmas list. Think of it. *NCR* is a fitting Christmas gift — a yearlong gift!

Meanwhile, thanks for all your continued support.

Tom Fox

that we are people-driven democracy, but the people are saying very little about any of these situations. The people, if we are to believe the polls, applaud Ollie North, ignore the S&L situation, love American militarism, prefer Clarence Thomas' unsubstantiated denial to Anita Hill's lie-detector test and generally pooh-pooh every other concern as the outpourings of basically unbalanced extremists.

The media provide the information and are called "liberal" for their efforts in the most demeaning of ways. Some shoestrapping organizations run up feeble flags about it and are called "liberal" for it, too, and written off as radicals. A few politicians introduce the notion of community compassion every once in a while and are called "big-spending liberals" for it and soon thereafter are threatened at the polls.

The voices of concern are these days a thing of ridicule. Rugged individualism is back in spades. The federal government handles the military machine, which is still the only sure growth industry in the country, nuclear cutbacks or no nuclear cutbacks. And Washington handles foreign affairs, of course — everybody's foreign affairs. The human agenda has been shifted in large part to the states, whose funding base is uneven at best and inadequate at the very least.

The real question is not who did these things, but how can all of this possibly be happening and have the most churchgoing people in the world say so little in a free society?

The answer, at least in part, may be that the bill for mechanized religion has finally come in. The price for privatized religion has finally been tallied. And the cost of self-absorption is inordinately

Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister is a writer and lecturer.

high.

The generation that grew up using religion as a message and an insurance policy to the next life is now in charge. Obviously, the connections they make between the moral and the social are distinctly obscure.

The problem, of course, is to determine how to retrieve the essentially human in public affairs. How far will we have to dig to find the kind of bedrock that develops people who can function as whole human beings with one another.

My feeling is that it is not goodness itself that is lacking. Surely, people are as good as they ever were. In some ways people may be even better than in the past, if education and altruism and volunteerism count for anything at all.

The laws detailing public expectations of justice are there. The literature examining the ideals of the human soul is there. The legal system is there. So what's missing?

In the "Rule of Benedict," a sixth-century document that has undergirded monastic spirituality for more than 1,500 years, there is, I think, a clue to what's lacking in this society now. Benedict makes the keystone of his rule of life a chapter on humility that was written for Roman men in a culture that valued machismo, power and independence at least as much as ours.

He described 12 degrees of it, in fact: 12 steps or elements that lead to the achievement of a state of mind that renders us capable of living a truly human life with other human beings. Humility in this spirituality has nothing to do with humiliation. It has all to do with the achievement of the gift of community. It is humility, I am convinced, that may well be what's missing in our own understanding of the stuff of human community right now.

Humility is not a popular virtue. In the

diminishment of the limitlessness of individual.

I would argue that our degree of discontentment in life and the lack of harmony in relationships, both personal and national, spring from our loss of the concept of humility as the glue of human community and the essence of spiritual life.

We have exhausted religious techniques: *cursillos* and flying novenas and yoga and transcendental meditation and formula faith have all left us short the mark. We are still a people for whom "enough" is always "just a little more." We are still a culture that prefers violence to negotiation and things to values. We are still a people who value control over equality. We are still a nation that sees itself as the center of the universe.

In columns to come, I will explore the role of humility in contemporary society from the point of view of social science, monastic spirituality and global reality. Einstein wrote once, "The true value of human being is determined by the measure and the sense in which they have attained liberation from the self." And Viktor Frankle wrote, "Everything can be taken from us but one thing — the last of the human freedoms: to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances."

The question becomes, what is self-orientation and what does it mean to life in a world where the self may be the only shrine at which we really worship? What attitudes are wanting in a society where the attitude is domination, whose sense of community is in disarray and whose place in the world has all the characteristics of a campground pitched on a melting ice-cube?

It is time, perhaps, to look again at what we see as the ultimate in human development and the foundation of human community. ■

Self-Transcendence