

# Religion April can be a very depressing month

By JIM RYAN  
Fifth Sunday of Easter  
John 15:1-8  
April 28, 1991  
Jim Ryan

April has been a difficult month. (Read: I'm depressed.) I wouldn't call April cruel. Difficult will do.

Why difficult? Because it's a month of transitions, and we all know how difficult transitions can be. But even more than transitions, April is a month, especially this year, of unfulfilled promises, or at best, ambiguous promises.

To find the roots of this unhappiness, let's break down reality into three spheres: Nature, State and Church.

## NATURE

The first one is easy. April is the month of natural transition: winter is transformed into spring; new life comes out of death with the help of fertilizers.

But aren't we surprised by the tenacity of nature? We give her a token earth day, one in three hundred and sixty-five, meanwhile

toxic levels escalate.

Is there any guarantee that spring has to return next year? Or can spring, like the jobs of most people during a recession, be eliminated?

What if spring didn't return next year? What if the earth and the natural cycle just seized up and stopped turning? (Ironically, too much oil in the system.)

## THE STATE

Let's move on. The State. Now there's a hard one. Especially this year. Weren't we all promised a new world order? The transition was from war to peace; the promise was of an as yet unrealized future of peace and justice. We've had promises of new world orders before, but in other years, the war outlasted our memories of the promise. Not so this year.

This is what really depresses me. Having heard about the triumph of American war technology during the winter months, I now see American helicopters clumsily killing Kurdish citizens of the new world



Religion and Reality  
by Jim Ryan

order on the hillsides of northern Iraq with friendly bombs: cartons of food, tents and blankets. There's an irony for you.

(I sit in my warm, somewhat waterproof house in Halton Hills, and watch my son grow up in comfort, while Kurdish babies are buried in shallow graves.)

American and British T.V. can celebrate victory and the return of the troops, but who can swallow it?

(The wintry blossoms of yellow ribbons that appeared on trees and car aerials are now bedraggled and colorless reminders of

empty promises.)

But if I can visualize a time when spring won't return, I can't visualize a time when politicians won't call elections and make promises of new life and new growth.

## THE CHURCH

Finally, the Church. Perhaps the hardest of all, because while it offers the Easter promise to us in April, we still see our own failures. We see our own inability to rise above petty differences.

Every year we celebrate Easter, every year we make the transition from Lenten fast to Easter resurrection joy, and yet who of us isn't overwhelmed by the failure of the resurrection in our own hearts?

This could be the time to talk about the Kingdom of God, present and yet not realized.

But today I'll settle for a practical and partial answer: a solution to depression.

First, as Walker Percy writes, you'd have to be insane not to be depressed in a world like ours. This realization is the first step

toward a cure for depression.

Second, as T. H. White has Merlin advise his pupil in A Once and Future King, "The best thing for being sad is to learn something. That is the only thing that never fails. You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your veins, you may miss your only love, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honor trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it then - to learn. Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting. Learning is the thing for you."

Let's hope that the rains of April bring out new, honest, sustaining blooms of hope for our Mother Earth, and for us, her children.

Endnote: The Once and Future King, 1976, p. 181.

## Hope is in our giving

By Rev. Mary B. Campbell B.A., M. Div.

Minister at Noral, and Union Presbyterian Churches  
"Blessed are you who are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." (Luke 6:20)

From generation to generation the church has clung to this precept that our struggle will all be worth it one day, and God will bless us for our grappling with economic concerns. We have seen religious enthusiasts with aspirations toward ascetic living and the denunciation of worldly possessions in order to achieve a state of poverty, believing that it is a "spiritual" state to be poor, which carries with it God's blessing. The concern with this kind of thinking is that it endorses and reinforces the concept that those who already have will continue in their already secure future while those who have not, will continue

to be "blessed" in poverty.

What we have failed to see, is that although we do struggle with mortgages and interest rates, and G.S.T.'s, we, you and I are not the poor - we are the rich! Did you realize that if you own your own home you stand where 98 per cent of the world's population will never stand. Think of it, millions of people who share our earth, will never own their own home. Three quarters of our world will never know what it means to have enough to eat. We are obsessed with diets and overeating while most of the rest of the world grapple with how to feed their children.

Somehow the church let God's grace be transformed into a graciousness we bestow upon ourselves. We are perhaps sympathetic toward the real poor, but we are not prepared to enter into their suffering because we know,

there is nothing blessed about poverty. As we watch the current plight of the Kurdish people we see the reality of the absence of God's will for human dignity, justice and righteousness.

The church of Jesus Christ must take sides. It must side for the Christ like love that cuts across the meaning of having. Our hope - is not in our having - but in our giving. This is the spiritual truth that came with Easter morning, with the message of resurrection and is primary in our hope of reconciliation for all people and creation. If we believe it, I mean not in our heads but in our lives - it will shatter our complacency not only in our churches, but in a social structure that has no room, no hope, no love for those who are "the least of these".

God grant His Church the courage to be HIS church.

## United Church congregations urged to give for Africa

United Church congregations across Canada have been urged to collect a special offering on Sunday, May 5th for the people of Sudan and northern Ethiopia.

This offering was suggested in response to an appeal for food aid made last December by the United Nations. That appeal warned of the impending threat of a massive famine in Sudan and northern Ethiopia, due to the continuing civil war and drought in the region.

"The need in the Horn of Africa is critical, as desperate as it ever was," says the Reverend Vince Alfano, director of the Department of Stewardship Services. That department, along with the General Council Division of World Outreach, is coordinating the special offering.

"Unfortunately what's happened is that the Horn of Africa's ongoing crisis is being over-

shadowed in the news by the desperate situation of Kurdish refugees in Iraq," explains Mr. Alfano.

"That's the terrible dilemma we always face when trying to deliver aid. The need always exceeds our capacity to do it all," adds the Division of World Outreach's General Secretary, the Reverend Fred Bayliss.

In 1990 The United Church of Canada received approximately \$750,000 through a year-long effort to respond to needs in the Horn of Africa.

"But, given the grave situation in Sudan and northern Ethiopia, it was apparent that we had to do even more," says Mr. Alfano.

"While the publicity surrounding the special offering on May 5th may make it seem like we're targeting one area and not another, that's not how it works," explains Mr. Bayliss.

"This offering is a special response, planned in advance to focus the energies of United Church congregations on a very serious need," he explains. "Ongoing aid and emergency situations are responded to by the United Church as they emerge."

Comments Mr. Alfano, "I guess for instance, you might call the immediate response of \$20,000 which we sent last week to help finance humanitarian aid to the Kurdish people, the silent work of the United Church's Mission and Service Fund."

"The special appeal for the Horn of Africa will go ahead as planned," he adds, "but the United Church will also be responding, as we always do, to other requests for assistance, including the Kurdish refugees, through the World Council of Churches," says Mr. Bayliss.

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