



¡Presente!: DelBene 1999¹

NICARAGUA
REFLECTIONS ON PASSING THE PEACE

RON DELBENE

NICARAGUA 1985

Church of people
singing swaying.

Blood of martyrs
flowing freeing.

Cry of mothers
weeping burning.

Peace of God
yearning being.

Song of sons
silent dead.

CRISTO
VIVA



BASSO PROFUNDO

Song sweeps the cavern dust
sails the golden throat
strings along a melody
of
passion, pride and power
joining in the sweet suite
of the owl of the universe.

PROPHET

Double barreled word shot
full of seed already
moistened in the humus
of our listening heartmind.

GRAFFITI

Tuesday, March 13, 1985

Walking into the remains of the cathedral in the center of Managua was, for me, a symbol of walking into the whole country of Nicaragua. The roof is gone and a thick layer of hard packed dirt covers the marble floor. My eye is drawn to the high altar. As I walked closer to the front wall I experience a sense of despair. The huge marble slab top from the altar lay across the steps about sixteen feet away, thrown there by the earthquake of 1972.

Everything of value had been stripped away, including the tabernacle that fit into a niche in the center of the high altar. All that remains is the indentation where the golden box had been. Scrawled in black paint on the back panel of the indentation was graffiti. Two phrases: *Cristo Viva*, *Cristo Viene Pronto* "Christ is alive," "Christ is coming soon." And between these two declarations is the word *Presente* "Present" proclaiming Christ as the first and central martyr among us.

I thought of the first Easter morning when, from inside the tomb, the messenger said, "Why are you looking among the dead for one who is alive? He is not here; he has been raised." In this country where the land is so scarred and the people suffer so greatly, someone who believes in the liberating power of the Christ had scrawled a prophet's call for liberation. I wonder what this prophet looks like? Young? Old? Male? Female? Fingering a rosary? Carrying a gun?

In the early Spring of 1985, I was invited by the National Episcopal Church to travel to Nicaragua as their representative with an investigative delegation of twenty-five other Americans from various backgrounds. The trip was part of my church's ministry to support peace and justice; upon return the group prepared a report that was delivered to Congress.

DRESSING UP

Sunday morning time
invites
cosmic colored costumes
to shawl my mind and heart
for walking the anamnesis way
conjuncting
all altar-table storytellers
from upper room till now.

I am not alone
as table feeding
truth teller,
dancing movements
through the words
consecrating ordinary
again
and again
and again—
our flesh and blood
consciously present
in the Presence.



THE STOLE

Sunday, March 17, 1985

As I entered the church of St. Mary of the Angels in one of Managua's barrios, I saw my stole. Well, not actually *my* stole, but the priest behind the altar was wearing a stole identical to one I often wear back home in Alabama. His has the same colors, the same designs. Both had been woven by Indians in Santiago Atitla, Guatemala.

I'm struck with the fact that there really is only one altar around which we stand, no matter where we are. That's why I have stoles from many different parts of the world. When I celebrate the Eucharist wearing a stole from a distant place, I experience a deep sense of oneness with people whose customs and language are different from mine yet who share a common story. But I've never been in another country and seen someone wearing a stole exactly like mine. It took me some time to recover from the shock.

When we celebrate together all of us say the words "Heaven and earth are filled with your glory." That cosmic presence is the Good News which leads me to wonder if the Good News in Managua is different from the Good News in Alabama.

*Whenever you do this,
do this in remembrance of me.*

CRISTO
VIENE
BRONTO

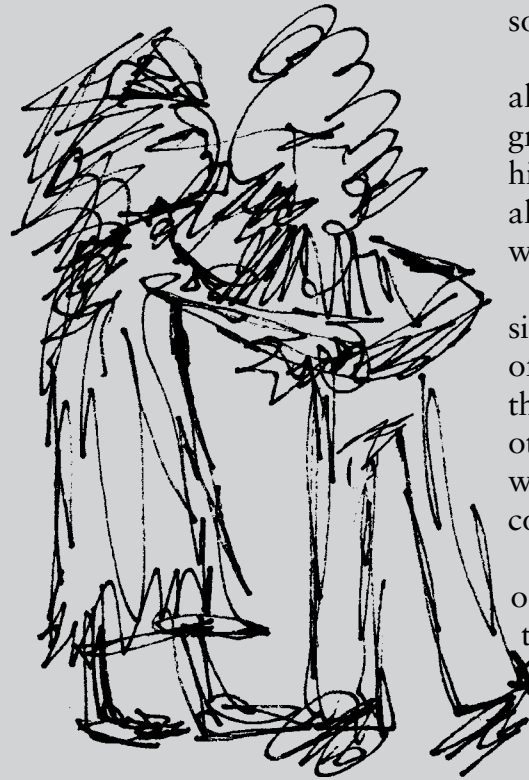
FREEDOM

When my insides
clamor to be heard
no one's hand
can slap the sound silent.
And I shout!

MOTHER TIME

O Time,
the Mother of all wombs of death,
become a lotus
to pluck from the head and sing.

Sing space,
into the unspace of inside-out,
within which I sing life
in praise.



THE PEACE

Sunday, March 24, 1985

Last Thursday a young man from the Nicaraguan congregation we were visiting was killed by the *contras*. Now it was Sunday and the Eucharist was his memorial. Questions and conflicting thoughts filled my mind. Would that young man have been killed if my government had not been supporting the *contras*? It's hard to realize that I am in a country that my own country could invade, even while I'm here. What would I do? For some reason, his death seems far away.

Then I hear his last letter home read aloud, listen to a tape of his talk to a youth group the last time he was home, weep with his mother who talks about her son, hum along with his friend who sings a song he wrote for him.

What does it mean when a mother who sits two pews ahead of me says that the blood of her dead son is the blood of freedom for the people? When the young man and two others from the parish are called martyrs, why are my feelings of sorrow tinged with confusion?

From the altar the priest says, "The peace of the Lord be with you." While I am trying to sort through the tangle of my thoughts, people for whom war is a way of life embrace me and say, "*Paz.*"

SACRED WORDS

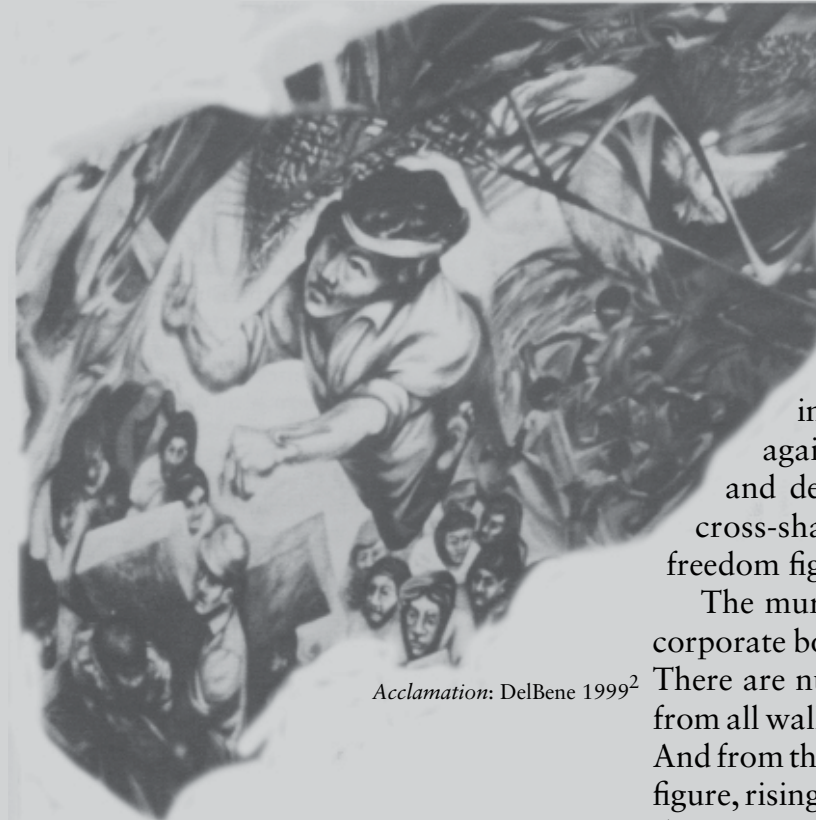
Heartwords
cascade down
spear tipped love
and lay unformed
on earth-dried mount
up into the
world womb
knitting together
building bit by bit
a people birthed through
water breaking and the blood.

LIBERATION

Abandon!
Abandon!
Fly away.
Rage is danced into the sky.

AGAIN

Ever expanding universe
me...exploding...imploding
ever again and ever again.



Acclamation: DelBene 1999²

THE ACCLAMATION

Tuesday, March 19, 1985

*Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.*

Since sharing these words with my sisters and brothers gathered around the altar last Sunday, I will never say them in the Eucharist in the same way again. As a reminder that freedom and death are ever present here, the cross-shaped cement block from the freedom fighter's bunker sits on the altar.

The mural behind the altar depicts the corporate body of Christ carrying his cross. There are nurses, soldiers, farmers, people from all walks of life bearing the huge cross. And from the midst of death is a giant Christ figure, rising from the dead. The wounds are the same wounds we see on any rising Christ image, but the face and clothes are different. The Rising Jesus is a young campesino. He seems to rise out from the wall into and above the congregation.

Presente

CALL AND RESPONSE

Patterns

like bones upon the sands of one's vast desert,
dry and bleach the truth to death.

Can these bones live?

Risking to call the breath,
dry-throated screams beat the primal scorching wall.

Can these bones live?

The winds gather in
sandstorm, mindstorm, heartstorm, bodystorm.

Can these bones live??

The calling breath is prisoned
by closed-throat protection against destructive seeds.

Can these bones live?

The spirit calls to life again;
joining bone to bone, sinew, flesh,
in mighty power
from the dryness blessed by tears and wails.

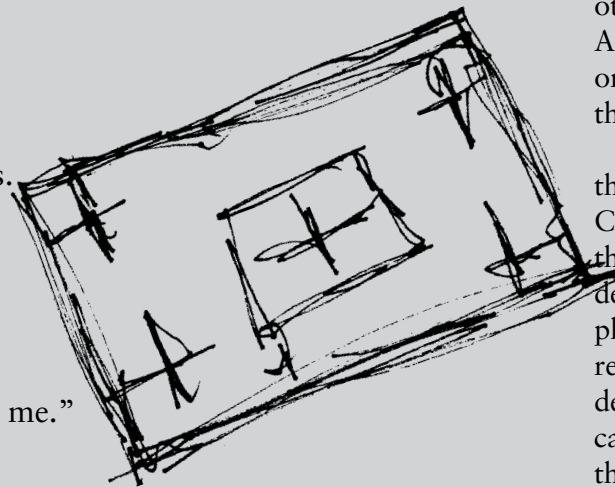
Can these bones live?

Shame and rage cascade the cliffs of voice.
And birthscreeams are the wind's response.

Can these bones live?

"It is not fair" becomes "I am free." "I am me."

These bones live!



iPRESENTE!

Thursday, March 21, 1985

I keep reliving Sunday's experience in church. During the Eucharist there was a pause and the congregation was silent. Then someone called out a name. In one voice everyone responded. "*Presente!*"

Another name was called out. Again all responded, "*Presente!*"

At least twenty names were called out, and each time the response was the same: "*Presente!*"

I didn't fully understand what was happening until I heard the name "Oscar Romero." Then I knew that the names were of those persons who had died, and I joined in shouting "*PRESENTE!*"

I learned that *presente* is used by school children to answer roll call. But the word has other meanings that are more difficult to define. At the Eucharist, *presente* means "in our midst" or "present with us." It is a way of proclaiming the reality of the communion of saints.

I recalled the woman at the beginning of the service referring to the dead as martyrs of Christ for freedom. Were we then celebrating the Eucharist over the bones of martyrs? I understand in a new way the ancient custom of placing the bones of martyrs in the altar. These relics make the martyrs present to us just as the dead victims are present when their names are called out. There was no doubt in the minds of the people that those who have died were there with us.

And therefore, we join our voices with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. . . .

QUESTION

Simple sentence.
Is there ever?



Ron DelBene has been doing spiritual direction and leading programs in the areas of prayer, spirituality and personal development since 1963. Ron holds a Master's degree in Theology and a Doctor of Ministry in Spirituality and Organizational Systems. He has done additional postgraduate work in education, psychology, and counseling. He is an author, poet, artist and Episcopal priest. He was an assistant professor of theology, director of a campus ministry center, and national consultant in religion for an education division of CBS.

Since 1980, Ron's organizational system's leadership has been primarily in churches, empowering them in understanding their mission, goals and structure for effective and creative ministry. Ron and his spouse, Eleanor, reside in Trussville, Alabama, and have two grown children and two grandchildren.

NOTES

Poems, journals, sketches and graphics by Ron DelBene.

¹ Adaptation of a 1985 photo by Larry Menefee.

² Adaptation of a 1985 photo by Larry Menefee.

If any part of this booklet is reproduced, the author requests that the following be attached: *copied by permission of the author, see www.delbene.org*

If you found encouragement for your journey from this booklet, please consider a donation to The Hermitage, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation devoted to providing opportunities in personal and professional growth and direction.