

us with their prophetic speeches identifying resistance to Trident with economic justice.

I feel the lives of thousands of people along the tracks who, over the last ten years, have received relayed phone calls in the middle of the night — or in the middle of work schedules, home obligations, school or church commitments — and who have nevertheless found a way to be present at the tracks, so as to break the silence around these trains of death and bear witness to life.

I feel the lives of this community through these steel rails that join us, an extended community linking hundreds of towns and cities, brought together by a hope that the life and love and witness of people by the tracks, and on the tracks, will prove more powerful than the world-ending cargoes on the trains.

Holding my hands on the rails in a time of silence makes me realize more deeply than ever that the tracks are being transformed. It is true that the tracks still carry death. The end of the world keeps coming. But there is a greater life coming through these tracks, the beginning of a new world. I can feel its presence.

THE NEW HUMANITY

The present era will be associated by the future historian with two world-shaking events, viz. the discovery and release of atomic energy and the demonstration of the power of the atom to resist the power of armaments successfully. . . .

With a certitude characteristic of him Gandhiji affirmed: "We are constantly being astonished these days at the amazing discoveries in the field of violence. But I maintain that far more undreamt of and seemingly impossible discoveries will be made in the field of non-violence."

Pyarelal, Gandhi's secretary, in his conclusion to
*Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*¹

Is humankind now on the edge, as Gandhi believed, of making transforming discoveries in the field of nonviolence?

A 19-year-old student in a white shirt, Wang Weilin, stands at attention before an advancing column of tanks near Tiananmen Square in June 1989. The lead tank stops within a few feet of the solitary figure. Wang climbs onto the turret of the tank and pleads with the soldiers in it to turn back and stop killing people. Returning to the pavement, he continues to stand at attention before the tanks. Millions of people from around the world, simultaneously watching this encounter via satellite television, hold their breath. Seconds seem like hours. The tanks remain motionless. Eventually, bystanders lead Wang Weilin away into the crowd. The column of tanks resumes its march to Tiananmen Square to carry out its appointed task of slaughter. Wang Weilin, like thousands of other pro-democracy students, disappears. His friends fear he has been put to death.

But who, in this encounter between the unarmed student and the column of tanks, has really won the victory? Which of these two parties has tapped the more powerful force in the future of China and the world?

Again, in the early morning hours of January 13, 1991, in Vilnius, Lithuania, a photograph is taken of a group of Lithuanians pushing against an advancing Soviet tank. The picture, printed the next day in newspapers around the world, reveals under the tank the legs of a woman wearing black

leather boots—all that can be seen of 24-year-old Loreta Asanaviciute, who died some hours later in the Vilnius Red Cross Hospital. Loreta Asanaviciute was one of at least fourteen people killed and more than six hundred wounded, as a remarkably disciplined crowd of forty thousand Lithuanians engaged in a nonviolent defense of their newly independent republic's television buildings against Soviet troops. The photograph of Loreta Asanaviciute's legs being crushed by the tank treads on that "Bloody Sunday" became a transforming symbol of nonviolent resistance for the Lithuanian people, as they continued to stand without guns before Soviet tanks.

Can we see in Wang Weilin and Loreta Asanaviciute, and in the Chinese and Lithuanian freedom movements they represent, the beginning signs of a spiritual transformation, the nonviolent coming of God in a new humanity?

TERMS OF TRANSFORMATION

The historically conditioned term *revolution* is inadequate to describe the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe. In only one country, Romania, did the fall of a Communist regime occur with the violence we associate with a revolution. Timothy Garton Ash, the premier historian of these events, notes:

Nobody hesitated to call what happened in Romania a revolution.

After all, it really looked like one: angry crowds on the streets, tanks, government buildings in flames, the dictator put up against a wall and shot. It is, however, a serious question whether what happened in Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, or even Czechoslovakia and East Germany, actually qualified for anything but a very loose usage of the term "revolution." This doubt was expressed by several intellectuals in the countries concerned. Should popular movements which, however spontaneous, massive and effective, were almost entirely non-violent, really be described by a word so closely associated with violence? Yet the change of government, no, the change of life, in all these other countries was scarcely less profound than in Romania. By a mixture of popular protest and elite negotiation, prisoners became prime ministers and prime ministers became prisoners.²

Gandhi reached as deeply as he could into human language to come up with a term that could describe the kind of power that he experienced in South Africa and India and which we have seen sweep through Eastern Europe toppling Communist dictatorships in 1989. He settled finally on his own creation, *satyagraha*, "truth-force"—(a compound of two Sanskrit nouns, *satya*, "truth," and *agraha*, "firmness," a synonym for force), as the best word for a spiritually explosive power that he saw transforming the world. As a devout practitioner of the Sermon on the Mount and the way of the

cross, Gandhi knew that his term, *satyagraha*, was a re-creation of Jesus' "kingdom of God." He had derived his own initial understanding of non-violence from Leo Tolstoy's interpretation of Jesus' saying, "The kingdom of God is within your power" (Luke 17:21).

Jesus also used another, more mysterious symbol to speak of the transforming power of nonviolence, one expressed by the Aramaic phrase *Bar Enasha*. This intriguing symbol of Jesus will be the focus of this chapter. It is usually translated into English via the Greek of the gospels as "the Son of Man." The idiomatic meaning of this Aramaic phrase, which has so puzzled Christian scholars over the years, is more simply "the human being." As we follow "the Human Being's" unique development by Jesus, the only person in the gospels who uses it, we will be confronted by a radical vision of nonviolent transformation, which the early church developed in its own context into the doctrine of Jesus' Second Coming.

At the heart of Gandhi's *satyagraha*, and of Jesus' "kingdom of God" and "the Human Being," is an infinite force of transformation: the nonviolent power to change violence and oppression into community, the soul-based power to realize unity progressively in a person, a society, and a world. That transformation and realization is occurring in the remarkable time in which we live.

TRANSFORMATIONS OF 1989-91

We have seen it happen in East Germany, as described in Timothy Garton Ash's chronicle of 1989's popular explosion in Leipzig:

To say the growth of popular protest was exponential would be an understatement. It was a non-violent explosion. Those extraordinary, peaceful, determined Monday evening demonstrations in Leipzig—always starting with "peace prayers" in the churches—grew week-by-week, from 70,000 to double that, to 300,000, to perhaps half a million. The whole of East Germany suddenly went into labour, an old world—to recall Marx's image—pregnant with the new. From that time forward the people acted and the Party reacted. "Freedom!" demanded the Leipzig demonstrators, and Krenz announced a new travel law. "Free travel!" said the crowds, and Krenz reopened the frontier to Hungary. "A suggestion for May Day: let the leadership parade past the people," said a banner, quoted by the writer Christa Wolf in the massive, peaceful demonstration in East Berlin on 4 November. And more leaders stepped down. "Free elections!" demanded the people, and the Council of Ministers resigned *en masse*. "We are the people!" they chanted, and the party leadership opened the Wall.³

We have seen it happen also in 1989 in the streets of Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia—and in 1990-91, in the fifteen republics of

the Soviet Union. We have seen the power of nonviolence sweep through one country after another, transforming them from police states into struggling democracies.

We have seen it happen during the "Second Russian Revolution," August 19–20, 1991, in response to the attempted Soviet coup. The coup was overcome by hundreds of thousands of unarmed citizens. Some, as in China and Lithuania earlier, stood before columns of tanks. Three Russian resisters were martyred by the tanks. Hundreds, then thousands of other citizens encircled the Russian Parliament Building in Moscow as a civilian defense force shielding Boris Yeltsin and other elected leaders from an imminent military assault. All afternoon and evening on the second day of the coup, loudspeakers blared warnings to the people that tanks were rolling toward the building and planes filled with paratroopers were preparing for an airborne assault. Yet the people kept coming. In fact a further three-pronged assault was secretly being mounted against them. It was to include K.G.B. agents who had infiltrated the crowd within the building, helicopters bearing shock troops, and elite units prepared to rush into the building from twenty-four subterranean entry points whose existence was unknown to Yeltsin supporters. A Tiananmen Square in Moscow was averted only by the moral force of the resistance and the noncooperation of soldiers who refused to murder their Russian brothers and sisters.

One exemplar of the moral force which prevailed over the coup was Father Aleksandr Borisov, an Orthodox priest and member of the Moscow City Council. Father Borisov prayed with the civilian defenders, baptized them for their nonviolent mission, then confronted their opponents in an equally prayerful way. He went from tank to tank, distributing 2,000 Bibles to the soldiers who were expected to assault the Parliament. Only one soldier refused a Bible. Father Borisov then gave another 2,000 Bibles to the people on the barricades. Finally he took part in a key meeting with Patriarch Alexis of the Russian Orthodox Church who then made a proclamation that any soldiers who fired on civilians would be excommunicated.

It was this moral force, embodied in the lives of thousands of willing martyrs ("witnesses") to the truth, which rendered the Soviet coup impotent.

The changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union are chapters in the greatest story of our time, and of all time: the nonviolent coming of God in a new humanity. Evidence of this profound change is surfacing throughout the world. As nonviolent theorist and trainer George Lakey has put it, " 'People power' is being discovered as a resource for justice and transformation in Burma, Nepal, Eastern Europe, China, the Middle East, Latin America — more places and on a larger scale than I know of at any time in history."⁴ We live in both the time of the end — the time of nuclear weapons, mass starvation, global warming, and the hole in the ozone layer — and the time of the beginning, the time of God's coming in violence-transcending ways we could not have imagined only a short time before. Massive

scending ways we could not have imagined only a short time before. Massive United States intervention in the Middle East and Soviet repression in the Baltics can both be seen as desperate, last-ditch attempts to reassert a reign of violence that has been losing ground in the world to its alternative, a nonviolent transformation of humanity.

"THE GLORY OF THE COMING OF THE LORD"

In the last hours of his life, Martin Luther King expressed his belief that there was already such a nonviolent coming of God. On April 3, 1968, King had returned to Memphis, Tennessee, to march with striking sanitation workers. That night before his death in Memphis has become a source of contention concerning King's own moral code, due especially to the description of it by Ralph David Abernathy in his autobiography.⁵ Before the publication of Abernathy's book, however, it was well-known from other studies of King's life that Martin King died before overcoming sexual weaknesses in himself that he was deeply aware contradicted his fundamental beliefs.⁶ Dr. Martin Luther King was a great prophet as well as a man killed before his own transformation was complete. We need to hear the prophet, while acknowledging his flaws.

On April 3, 1968, King's assassin was stalking him and would fire a bullet into his head the following day. In his last words to the striking sanitation workers, and the world, King envisioned being asked by God, "Martin Luther King, which age would you like to live in?" He said he then took mental flight through the most eventful periods of history until he arrived at our time, and he continued:

Strangely enough, I would turn to the Almighty, and say, "If you allow me to live just a few years in the second half of the twentieth century, I will be happy." Now that's a strange statement to make, because the world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land. Confusion all around. That's a strange statement. But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough, can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that [people] in some strange way, are responding — something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; or Memphis, Tennessee — the cry is always the same — "We want to be free."

And another reason that I'm happy to live in this period is that we have been forced to a point where we're going to have to grapple with the problems that [people] have been trying to grapple with through history, but the demands didn't force them to do it. Survival demands that we grapple with them. [People], for years now, have been talking

about war and peace. But now, no longer can they just talk about it. It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence in this world; it's nonviolence or nonexistence.

That is where we are today. And also in the human rights revolution, if something isn't done, and in a hurry, to bring the colored peoples of the world out of their long years of poverty, their long years of hurt and neglect, the whole world is doomed. Now, I'm just happy that God has allowed me to live in this period, to see what is unfolding. And I'm happy that [God's] allowed me to be in Memphis. . . .

Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And [God's] allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.⁷

What Martin Luther King said about the signs of our time is a way into the nonviolent coming of God. What King saw, while speaking to the black sanitation workers of Memphis, is what Moses saw from the mountaintop for his people struggling through the desert, and what Jesus saw among poor Palestinian Jews: each saw the coming of God in and through an oppressed, suffering, and freedom-loving people; each saw the glory of the coming of the Lord. They saw that transformation is possible, that it is happening right now, that the kingdom of God is at hand. Our eyes can see the glory of the coming of the Lord, if only our hearts will let us.

NONVIOLENCE OR NONEXISTENCE?

But vision of God's coming has a counter-vision. Just as Jesus knew that the kingdom of God was at hand, he also knew that the destruction of the Jewish nation by the Roman Empire was at hand. These alternative sides of Jesus' vision correspond to Martin Luther King's alternative of God's nonviolent coming in the beloved community as against the deepening threat of the world's destruction by nuclear war: nonviolence or nonexistence. Either possibility, the kingdom or annihilation, was just as much at hand in the Israel of Jesus' time as it is globally today. Because of nuclear weapons, the consequences of our choices have increased astronomically. But the stark choice was the same for Jesus and his people as it is for us: Choose the nonviolent kingdom or the razing of Jerusalem. Today Jerusalem has become the world.

I have tried to understand by analogy, in my own experience, what Jesus and his people had to face as poor, colonized Jews in an outpost of the Roman Empire. My analogous experience came from twice being a prisoner in the Los Angeles County Jail for civil disobedience actions. What I witnessed in the Los Angeles County Jail serves as a model for the oppressions of colonial power: ten thousand prisoners, mainly African American and Hispanic, controlled by a few hundred guards, with the less visible, white bureaucracy, above them: the means of control, systematic brutality. The question drilled instantly and reiteratively, day and night, into every prisoner, was the question of survival: How can I get through this experience? The sense of violence and oppression in the L.A. County Jail was thicker than its concrete walls. The question of survival deepened for some into questions of conscience: How can I live through this experience in a human way? in a nonviolent way? in a faithful, compassionate way? How am I liberated from the oppression of fear?

The point is that the prisoner in the L.A. County Jail cannot avoid such questions of survival any more than the third-world peasant can—or the poor Palestinian Jew living under the oppression of the Roman Empire and a collaborating aristocracy in the first century C.E.

We can see the systemic violence of the Palestine in which Jesus lived through an archaeological discovery. In 1968 a team of archaeologists discovered four cave-tombs just north of Jerusalem, the burial site of several families of Jesus' time. The discovery has become famous because it includes the only extant bones of a crucified man, whose name was Jehohanan. His bones have made it possible to reconstruct the terrible ordeal of an execution by crucifixion under the Roman Empire. Perhaps as significant, the site reveals the over-all systemic violence in the time of Jesus. The four caves contain the bones of thirty-six individuals, at least ten of whom were killed by oppression or violence. Specialists have determined that three of the children died from starvation; a child of 4 died from an arrow wound in his skull; a boy about 16 years old was burned to death bound on a rack; a slightly older girl was also burned to death; an old woman was killed by the crushing blow of a mace-like weapon; a woman in her 30s died in childbirth, with her unborn child in her pelvis, because of the lack of a simple intervention by a midwife; and the man Jehohanan was crucified.⁸ This was the oppression and violence suffered by Palestinian Jews in Jesus' time.

Christians have paid slight if any heed to this systemic violence as the real situation out of which Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God. As with so many of the world's peoples, then and now, Jesus had to decide how to respond to the overwhelming oppression surrounding and bearing down upon him. His response was a deepening vision of a nonviolent transformation of his people, in which the kingdom of God, and "the Human Being," became his principal terms for expressing a new reality.

THE COMING OF THE HUMAN BEING

This chapter will deal with that mysterious dimension of Jesus' vision which he called, remarkably enough, "the Human Being," *Bar Enasha* (or *Bar Nasha*) in Aramaic, usually translated through an intermediate Greek phrase *ho huios tou anthropou* as "the Son of Man." It is a commonplace of biblical scholars that *Bar Enasha* is the most authentic layer of Jesus' self-identification in the gospels. As John McKenzie puts it, "The very fact that the phrase is attributed to Jesus [82 times] and to no one else in the Gospels is a persuasive consideration that the phrase goes back to Jesus. It then becomes a question of what he meant by the phrase."⁹

The question of the meaning of *Bar Enasha* has mired scholars in endless debate, even as they have (perhaps not coincidentally) accepted "Son of Man" as the term for that debate. Two thorough scholarly studies which uncover the root meaning of Jesus' term without, however, ceasing to use "the Son of Man" in their own titles and texts are *Son of Man* by Maurice Casey and *Jesus Son of Man* by Barnabas Lindars, SSF.¹⁰ But as McKenzie points out concerning "Son of Man" and its Greek derivation, "the phrase was as meaningless in Greek as it is in English."¹¹ The Aramaic idiom, with the nuances given it by Jesus, transcends what McKenzie calls the "excessively literal 'Son of Man.'"¹²

To begin to understand *Bar Enasha*, we may need to see it through a more nuanced translation, as well as through those dimensions of our own experience which parallel most closely the human reality Jesus was probing. Walter Wink has suggested a linguistic approach to *Bar Enasha* emphasizing its collective meaning. Concerning "Son of Man," Wink says, "'son of' is merely a semitic idiom meaning 'of or pertaining to the following genus or species.'" He adds, in a comment upon this chapter: To translate *Bar Enasha* as "the 'True Humanity,' or 'the Human Being,' or your own 'divinely revolutionized humanity,' or M. L. King's 'Beloved Community' would all be better [than 'Son of Man']."¹³

Thus, perhaps it is in terms of the Human Being — understood personally, collectively, and interchangeably with the synonyms suggested by Wink — that we can begin to understand this self-designation of Jesus, fraught with overtones of something about to happen:

"But that you may know that the Human Being has authority on earth to forgive sins" — he said to the paralytic — "I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home" (Mark 2:10-11).

Bar Enasha stands at a theological junction. Besides having been Jesus' way to refer to himself, *Bar Enasha* was to become the basis for the Christian church's doctrine of Jesus' Second Coming. In almost every passage of the gospels that has been interpreted to mean Jesus' Second Coming, Jesus refers specifically to himself as the Human Being. A vivid instance is Jesus' *parousia* saying, "The coming (*parousia*) of the Human Being will be like lightning striking in the east and flashing far into the west" (Matt. 24:27).

As we shall see, that *Bar Enasha* or "Human Being" by which Jesus identified himself and his vision has, in its original context in the Hebrew Scriptures, a collective meaning as well. *Bar Enasha* bridges two powerful concepts. What was to become for the church a statement of Jesus' return in glory was, for Jesus himself, a vision of Israel's and the world's nonviolent transformation. The Palestinian Jew, Jesus of Israel, envisioned for his people, and strove to create, a nonviolent society based on faith, a reality which for us remains all but unthinkable. A recovery of his vision, within the visions of the synoptic gospels, can mean our seeing for the first time the nonviolent coming of God, both then and now.

I believe that the Second Coming of *Bar Enasha*, the Human Being, Jesus Christ, is happening right now. Christ, the Human Being, is coming into the world today, as Martin Luther King realized when he said, "I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that [people], in some strange way, are responding — something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today . . . the cry is always the same — 'We want to be free.'"¹⁴ But this Second Coming of *Bar Enasha*, as identified prophetically by Martin Luther King, has been repressed in our consciousness and has gone unrecognized.

The reality of the Second Coming of *Bar Enasha* is seldom recognized as it was by King, when it happens in nonviolent revolutionary movements all across the world. The point here is similar to one that was made by William Stringfellow, when he was pressed by a friend to declare whether he really believed in the Resurrection. Stringfellow paused and said, "Phil Berrigan going to jail."¹⁵ The transforming point for our consciousness concerning the related doctrine of the Second Coming is, as Stringfellow himself put it in *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land*, that "for all its mystery, the Second Advent is faithful to the mission of the First Advent, and is no disjuncture or disruption."¹⁶ Thus we can recognize a Second Coming, "faithful to the First," whose humble yet transforming power can be seen today in *Bar Enasha*, the Human Being, all the way from Phil Berrigan going to jail, to Chinese students being machine-gunned in Tiananmen Square, to the crumbling of the Berlin Wall (remember those who died earlier in its shadows), to the devastating impact of international sanctions upon the economy of South Africa's apartheid regime (remember Nelson Mandela's twenty-seven years in prison). It is this Second Coming of *Bar Enasha*, rolling across the world in the creation of a nonviolent humanity, that can be identified with the radically hopeful vision Jesus of Nazareth had for the Human Being, a collective Human Being, almost two thousand years ago. Jesus' vision of a nonviolent coming of God in *Bar Enasha*, which in the early church's understanding became Jesus' Second Coming in himself, is happening today.

SEEING JESUS' SECOND COMING WITH NEW EYES

One reason why it is so difficult for us now to reconnect the church's vision of the Second Coming, with that of Jesus behind it, is that the doc-

trine of Christ's Second Coming has been twisted out of recognition by evangelists of oppression. There is a kind of preaching in the nuclear age that seems almost driven by demons to nullify the radical power to change the world inherent in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in a resurrected *Bar Enasha*. This transforming coming of a new humanity, initiated by God in the Human Being, Jesus, has in its gospel roots the power to free the world from every kind of violence and injustice. But it is the preachers of Jesus' return in judgment on a nuclear cloud who, through their media evangelism, have defined for the public the doctrine of the Second Coming. Neither Jesus' own humanity, nor the new humanity he proclaimed, has any role in that Second Coming. The nuclear evangelists' Second Coming has in fact become so distorted and militarized a doctrine as to become indistinguishable from a Pentagon war scenario.

Thus we see popular Armageddon theologians such as Hal Lindsey in his *Late Great Planet Earth* trying to ease the pain of a violent fatalism in our culture by identifying God's will with nuclear war. It is said by Lindsey and by Jerry Falwell, along with many other writers and preachers, that the final war we United States citizens are now paying for with our taxes, has been foretold by prophets. They say this ultimate evil with which we are cooperating was known already thousands of years ago by the Hebrew prophets (who were in fact talking about their own wars). Moreover, they claim such a war was prophesied especially in connection with the Second Coming of Jesus and must therefore be necessary for his coming in glory. In *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon*, Hal Lindsey illustrates these claims by an account of his speaking at the Pentagon some time after his having already spoken at the American Air War College:

One year later I was invited to speak at the Pentagon. It seems that a number of officers and non-military personnel alike had read *Late Great* and wanted to hear more.

A meeting was set and when I arrived I was amazed to find hundreds of people jamming the room. Outside, others were trying to crowd in. All of these people wanted to hear what the prophets had to say about our destiny. When I finished, the response was overwhelming.

After my talk, one officer told me that various Pentagon officials had independently come to the same conclusions I had reached regarding the future of the Middle East. They had reached those same conclusions with virtually no knowledge of what the Hebrew prophets had predicted 2,000 to 3,000 years earlier.¹⁷

Confirmed in the nuclear fatalism of his interpretation of the prophets by "various Pentagon officials," Lindsey asks us to believe in a returning Jesus who would "rapture" us from the earth before the war we are preparing for is waged on others. He asks us to believe in a Jesus who would

thereby save us from the consequences of our own deliberate choices.

Because of such nuclear evangelism, the promise of Jesus' return and the threat of nuclear war have become closely linked in American religious culture, especially where it supports the nuclear weapons industry. In Amarillo, Texas, where nuclear weapons are assembled at the Pantex plant, the image of Jesus coming on a nuclear cloud is at the heart of religious culture. In her portrait of that culture, *Blessed Assurance: At Home with the Bomb in Amarillo, Texas*, A. G. Mojtabai has described how Amarillo churches affirm a Second Coming that repudiates the peacemaking message of the first:

Going from church to church in Amarillo, the impression is unavoidable: some of the most ardent born and born-again Christians are writing Christianity off as something that did not, could not work—at least, not in the First Coming. The conviction that mankind is bent on its own destruction, that goodness cannot succeed in a world so evil, the constant recourse to the Old Testament (to the most bellicose sections), the turning for betterment to the dire remedies offered by the book of Revelation, the only light left to the Second Coming—all this strangely negates the "good news" of the Gospels and the First Coming.¹⁸

Catholic Bishop Leroy Matthiesen, however, brought the good news of Jesus back to Amarillo in August 1981 with a single sentence that electrified the local community and the national media: "We urge individuals involved in the production and stockpiling of nuclear bombs to consider what they are doing, to resign from such activities, and to seek employment in peaceful pursuits."¹⁹ The furor caused by this beautifully simple application of the gospel indicates the life-and-death struggle between our own violence and the new humanity of a truly returning Jesus.

To see Jesus' Second Coming with new eyes is to see, first of all, the term which helped give birth to the idea: *Bar Enasha*, "the Human Being." "The Son of Man" as a translation of *Bar Enasha* is misleading because it narrows to a single male individual the scope of the Aramaic idiom which has both personal and collective implications. "The Human Being" or "the New Humanity" is the fuller meaning of this frequent expression of Jesus, a meaning which gained depth as he continued to use it. Like his kingdom of God parables, the term was Jesus' strikingly simple way of cracking open a new world. Perhaps it is because Jesus transformed *Bar Enasha* through his experiments in a new reality that the meaning of the term has been mystifying scholars ever since. It may be that we can understand that New Humanity of his only as we experience it.

Bar Enasha is a transforming concept for Jesus in three kinds of sayings: 1) present sayings, in which *Bar Enasha*, the Human Being, often breaks through the recognized limits of the present; 2) passion sayings, in which

Bar Enasha is to be transformed through suffering and death; 3) future sayings, in which the coming Human Being transforms the world.

My purpose here will be to see the nonviolent transformation expressed in all three dimensions of *Bar Enasha*, as background to an understanding of Jesus' Second Coming. In what follows, I can only suggest what may have been the original meaning of Jesus' Second Coming, underlying the already interpreted sayings of Jesus in the gospels that were set down decades later. In other words, Jesus himself understood *Bar Enasha* in ways that are not necessarily the same as the meanings of Matthew, Mark, and Luke when they later cite Jesus using *Bar Enasha*. I offer this reflection less as a reconstruction than a testimony. I hope it can serve as a testimony to good news in Jesus' time that is also good news in our time.

Behind this approach is the hypothesis that Jesus is probing the world's limits of thought and action. As those limits are broken by him or by the human being following him today, humanity experiences the nonviolent coming of God.

LIBERATING THE PARALYTIC IN US

"'But that you may know that *Bar Enasha* has authority on earth to forgive sins'—he said to the paralytic—'I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home'" (Mark 2:10-11; par. Matt. 9:6, Luke 5:24).

The setting in Mark's gospel for this transforming saying is a house at Capernaum where Jesus is living, probably Peter's house. Jesus is preaching to his people, poor and oppressed Galilean Jews, who are packed into the room. "And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men" (Mark 2:3). "They" are perhaps the paralytic's parents. Blocked by the overflowing crowd around the doorway, the parents and friends take the paralytic up on the roof. They dig through the earth over the beams and rafters, make an opening, and let down the stretcher on which the paralytic is lying. When Jesus sees their faith, he says to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven."

We know that illness and sinfulness were linked in Jesus' culture. The disciples reflect the conventional prejudice of their day when, in John's gospel, they ask Jesus about a blind man, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus, rejecting the premise, says that neither he nor his parents sinned and restores the man's sight (John 9:2-7).

In Mark's scene at Capernaum the paralytic-sinner was probably destitute. Unable to work, immobilized on a pallet, the man was totally dependent on others, who as Galileans would have been poor themselves.

But the stretcher-bearers and the paralytic had faith that Jesus would heal him. For Jesus to do so, he first had to address the cause of paralysis: sin. Because the paralytic's illness was seen as a punishment for sin, his sins had to be forgiven before he could be healed. Jesus says that they are

in fact forgiven, using the passive tense to indicate the forgiveness of God.

The idea that sin caused the oppression of the paralytic was not unwellcome to those in the room who are higher in the social order, such as the scribes. These scribes are a more modest version of church and state functionaries who control modern sins. It is not surprising that those with a greater stake in God's order say to themselves, "Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Then Jesus responds to the question in their hearts: "'But that you may know that *Bar Enasha* has authority on earth to forgive sins'—he said to the paralytic—'I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home.'" The man had already been released by *Bar Enasha* from his sins. Now he is released as well from the culturally imposed consequences of his sins: paralysis and oppression. He rises and leaves the room.

Most of the people on earth today are paralyzed by what are said to be the consequences of their sins. The destitute of the world have it hammered into their consciousness—by those who, like the scribes, have the power in our day to define sins—that they are poor because they are lazy; or that they are poor because they have mismanaged their resources; or because they have squandered opportunities; or because, in the most blatantly evil definitions of guilt, they are black or female or homosexual or members of whatever part of humanity the powerful choose to define as subhuman and sinful. Paralysis, hunger, homelessness, and early death are, according to the rich and powerful, the direct consequences of the poor and powerless having sinned in one way or another.

In Mark's story Jesus as *Bar Enasha*, the Human Being, frees the paralytic from both sin and the consequences of sin. Jesus, then, is himself a transforming *Bar Enasha*. But it is Matthew's account that confirms that *Bar Enasha* bridges the senses of a single human being and humanity. In his version (Matt. 9:1-8), after Jesus cures the paralytic, Matthew 9:8 then reads: "When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to . . ." As Walter Wink points out in correspondence concerning the meaning of *Bar Enasha*, precisely here is where we would expect Matthew of all people to write "Jesus": "and they glorified God, who had given such authority to Jesus." But, in fact, the sentence concludes "and they glorified God, who had given such authority to *humanity*." This is, as Wink says, a "powerful confirmation of the corporate interpretation; at least *Matthew* clearly understands it thus."²⁰

Moreover, Jesus' way of using *Bar Enasha* suggests that the liberating interaction between himself and the paralytic has the authority of a new humanity in the making. The paralytic walks away because he has become a new human being. Transformed within and without, he is freed from paralysis. The source of his freedom to walk again is *Bar Enasha*, a new humanity with a forgiving, transforming power of God within it that Jesus extends to him and that he simultaneously discovers in himself.

The paralytic is like all the wretched of the earth who are viewed as

guilty by the dominant orders of society for the inferior status those same orders have imposed on them by racism, sexism, poverty, oppression in all its forms. But all have been forgiven both their real sins and the paralyzing sense of sin imposed from within and without. All are forgiven in *Bar Enasha*, the presence of God in a new humanity. That *Bar Enasha*, in which God's abolition of every sin is realized, is telling all of us to take up our pallets and walk. There is no reason on earth for paralysis, because the God in us all is calling us to stand up. Yet that new humanity's liberation can sometimes begin by sitting.

LESSONS IN LIBERATION

On December 1, 1955, seamstress Rosa Parks refused to stand up in a Montgomery, Alabama, bus when ordered to surrender her seat to a white passenger. Her example was the spark that ignited the new humanity of black Americans in the civil rights movement. In his later formulation of a transforming nonviolence, Martin Luther King would speak of the need to create a crisis in the conscience of the nation whereby its people could then undergo conversion. In his own case, it was Rosa Parks's refusal to obey a racist law which created the crisis of conscience that resulted in King's conversion. Rosa Parks had to sit down before Martin Luther King would stand up.

When word of Rosa Parks's jailing leaped from house to house in Montgomery's black community, Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, an English professor at Alabama State College, put into execution a plan formulated by black women to organize a city-wide bus boycott. As president of the black Women's Political Council (WPC), Robinson had initiated the boycott plan months earlier. In a letter written on behalf of the WPC to Montgomery Mayor W. A. Gayle on May 21, 1954, more than one and a half years before Rosa Parks's arrest, Robinson insisted upon improved conditions for black riders of city buses and threatened a boycott if city and bus officials did not offer significant improvements.²¹ As black passengers continued to be abused on city buses in 1954-55, the Montgomery women drew up plans for the distribution of "fifty thousand notices calling people to boycott the buses; only the specifics of time and place had to be added."²²

Once she learned of Rosa Parks' arrest, Jo Ann Robinson, with the assistance of two of her students, worked through the early morning of December 2, 1955, mimeographing tens of thousands of leaflets announcing the bus boycott. Thanks to the distribution system already set up by the women, practically every black man, woman, and child in Montgomery knew of the bus boycott within a few hours. Robinson wrote later, in a memoir on this turning point in American history:

No one knew where the notices had come from or who had arranged for their circulation, and no one cared. Those who passed them on

did so efficiently, quietly, and without comment. But deep within the heart of every black person was a joy he or she dared not reveal.²³

The first day of the boycott was overwhelmingly successful. That night a nervous, 26-year-old minister, Martin Luther King, about to be drafted from his first pastorate in Montgomery to lead this movement, addressed a church overflowing with thousands of boycotters. These were people who, like the paralytic and others at Capernaum, knew the lifelong paralysis of a sin as defined by their society. In Montgomery the sin was being black, a sin defined by whites, paralyzing the masses whom it segregated and dominated.

Martin King, like the master he followed, spoke with the authority of the Human Being, who can awaken the Godly humanity of the paralyzed:

"And you know, my friends, there comes a time," he cried, "when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression." A flock of "Yeses" was coming back at him when suddenly the individual responses dissolved into a rising cheer and applause exploded beneath the cheer—all within the space of a second. The startling noise rolled on and on, like a wave that refused to break, and just when it seemed that the roar must finally weaken, a wall of sound came in from the enormous crowd outdoors to push the volume still higher. Thunder seemed to be added to the lower register—the sound of feet stomping on the wooden floor—until the loudness became something that was not so much heard as it was sensed by vibrations in the lungs. The giant cloud of noise shook the building and refused to go away. One sentence had set it loose somehow, pushing the call-and-response of the Negro church service past the din of a political rally and on to something that King had never known before.²⁴

The Human Being Jesus spoke of and embodied has the authority on earth to act as Rosa Parks and Jo Ann Robinson did, to speak as Martin King did, and thus to raise a new humanity from the paralysis of oppression.

In this first political address of his life, Martin Luther King, like Jesus at Capernaum, becomes an apparent blasphemer. As he articulates more and more the rising humanity of the thousands of his people around him, King cries out to them, "If we are wrong—God Almighty is wrong! If we are wrong—Jesus of Nazareth was merely a utopian dreamer and never came down to earth! If we are wrong, justice is a lie!"²⁵

The blasphemy is obvious: "If we are wrong—God Almighty is wrong!" It is just as obvious as the blasphemy of Jeremiah and Isaiah when the prophets became one with their suffering people and God spoke in the first person singular through the mouths of suffering prophets.

The blasphemy of prophets is obvious when God's presence in a suffering

people goes unrecognized. In his passionate outburst to his people, King fused as one their own cause in Montgomery, a transforming justice, Jesus of Nazareth, and God Almighty. Such electrifying words to the oppressed can be nothing but blasphemy, if a human being has no authority on earth to transform paralysis into freedom. If God can't be seen in their humanity, the people are paralyzed. The charge of blasphemy comes from privilege. In condemning the prophets, it condemns the people to paralysis.

How does one distinguish the true prophet from the blasphemers? Jesus tells us: "But that you may know [he was speaking here to the blasphemy critics] that *Bar Enasha* has authority on earth to forgive sins, I say to you [here to the paralytic], rise, take up your pallet and go home."

Are the people rising? Is their paralysis gone? Are they walking? If they are, it is not blasphemy but the presence of God in the Human Being. God is walking with that suffering people in their new humanity.

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH SUFFERING AND DEATH

As seen in his interaction and words to the paralytic, a present *Bar Enasha* saying, Jesus was proclaiming a new humanity for his people. Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, and the movement they helped initiate have seen a new humanity begin to break into view in our time. The *Bar Enasha* Jesus spoke of is the Human Being he lived, whom we have only begun to live in our time. God is profoundly present in *Bar Enasha*, in the Human Being we are all invited to become. Yet our sense of our God is still too remote and unforgiving, our sense of our humanity still too sinful and paralyzed, for us to live through fully with Jesus the divinely human miracle of *Bar Enasha*. Nevertheless, *Bar Enasha* is emerging. As Martin Luther King said, God is working in some strange way so that people are responding. Something is happening in our world, beneath the surface of people and events, to take humanity from oppression to freedom, to invite us all into inconceivable possibilities. That emerging nonviolent humanity, in whom a forgiving, transforming God is more present than we think possible, is *Bar Enasha*.

A further step taken by Jesus into this new humanity is represented by his passion sayings, in which *Bar Enasha* is transformed through suffering and death.

"And he began to teach them that *Bar Enasha* must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31; par. Matt. 16:21, Luke 9:22).

"For he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, '*Bar Enasha* will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise'" (Mark 9:31; par. Matt. 17:22-23, Luke 9:44).

"And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen

to him, saying, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and *Bar Enasha* will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise'" (Mark 10:32-34; par. Matt. 20:17-19, Luke 18:31-33).

The specific details of these sayings have likely been heightened after Jesus' death to correspond to his passion, as in the third saying. The less detailed first and second sayings indicate the original direction of Jesus' thought: The Human Being (who according to the idiomatic *Bar Enasha* is Jesus but not only Jesus) must suffer, be rejected by the ruling powers, be killed, and rise again. Resurrection was thought of by Jews at the time as the resurrection of a great community as a whole.²⁶ To rise again was to be part of a great corporate resurrection.

The Human Being that Jesus shows us by the example of his life must suffer and die so that a new humanity will rise. This idea of a corporate passion is a recurring theme in the gospels: "Once the idea that Passion predictions were concerned with a corporate body, to which they themselves belonged, had established itself as a working theory in the minds of the disciples, there were a good many sayings of Jesus that would tend to confirm it."²⁷ The disciples fear to follow Jesus to Jerusalem, because he tells them exactly what is demanded of their humanity. It is no different than the demands placed upon himself. The only specific mention Jesus makes anywhere of the executioner's cross is just as relevant to those following him as it is to himself: "He called the people and his disciples to him and said, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let that person renounce self, take up the cross, and follow me'" (Mark 8:34).

As Mark makes abundantly clear, the disciples were careful to follow the Human Being only at a distance, and at the critical moments, not at all. The clear implication of the gospel story is that Jesus wanted the disciples with him all the way, as a new humanity. Instead, he was crucified between two believers in violence; no one else in his own community would then walk a nonviolent way as far as the cross and enter with him into the new humanity.

Whatever Jesus says in the gospels about *Bar Enasha*'s suffering and death, he then says specifically about the disciples in a barrage of statements that terrify them. Again and again they are told that to follow him into a new humanity will mean hatred, contempt, torture, and finally death by the Roman Empire's means of executing revolutionaries, the cross.²⁸ Whatever Jesus says about the startling mission of *Bar Enasha*, he applies directly to those in his own community. Not surprisingly, they resist it at every turn. They repeatedly misunderstand or reject this teaching about the life-giving route into a new humanity, just as readers and hearers of the gospels have been doing ever since. The point of it all, according to Jesus' sayings, is that through the human necessity of suffering and execution *Bar Enasha* is transformed. A new humanity will rise on both sides of death. A new people

will be born. The cross in-forms life and re-creates life anew in the resurrection of humanity. Saving one's life is losing it; losing one's life is saving it. To see all this in the transforming depths of a new humanity, as Jesus explores it and shares it step by step, is to see the overwhelming implications in one's own life. For *Bar Enasha* to rise, for the new humanity to increase, you and I must die.

WHY MUST THE HUMAN BEING BE KILLED?

On March 24, 1980, Archbishop Oscar Romero was shot to death while once again preaching the gospel of nonviolence to the Salvadoran people. The rifle bullet that smashed into his chest that morning was the almost inevitable conclusion to the relentless words of nonviolence pouring out of him week after week, as violence to his people and death threats to himself mounted.

Why must the Human Being be rejected by the powers and killed?

In his February 17 homily at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in San Salvador, Archbishop Romero had spoken of the poor and of institutional sin. Through the poor the church was learning to understand better the nature of sin, whose fruit is death, "the death of Salvadorans, the rapid death of repression or the slow death of structural oppression."²⁹

In a pointed commentary on such sin, the archbishop read for the people's approval his draft of a letter to United States President Jimmy Carter. He asked the president — "if you really wish to defend human rights" — not to send more military aid to El Salvador and "to guarantee that your government will not intervene directly or indirectly, by military, economic, diplomatic, or other pressures, in determining the destiny of the Salvadoran people."³⁰

The letter, approved by the people's applause, was sent to the president. The next day a bomb placed by the far right destroyed the Salvadoran Catholic Church's radio station, on which the archbishop's homily had been broadcast.

Why must the Human Being be killed?

On Sunday, February 24, a Costa Rican short-wave radio station began broadcasting Archbishop Romero's homilies to all of Central America. That morning Romero made an appeal to the oligarchy and revealed a threat to himself:

I hope that this call of the church [to social justice] will not further harden the hearts of the oligarchs but will move them to conversion. Let them share what they are and have. Let them not keep silencing with violence the voice of those of us who offer this invitation. Let them not keep killing those of us who are trying to achieve a more just sharing of the power and wealth of our country. I speak in the first person, because this week I received notice that I am on the list

of those who are to be eliminated next week. But let it be known that no one can any longer kill the voice of justice.³¹

On succeeding Sundays Archbishop Romero addressed ever more urgently a series of government and rightist killings. On Sunday, March 9, he said a Mass in the basilica for a Christian Democratic leader who had been murdered. Many Christian Democratic leaders were present. The next day a workman discovered a suitcase with seventy-two sticks of dynamite in it, enough to destroy the basilica and the whole block.

Why must the Human Being be killed?

On Sunday, March 16, Archbishop Romero preached a long sermon on reconciliation, addressing every sector of the society, making specific appeals to the oligarchy, the government, and guerrilla groups. The next day, in response to a general strike, government military forces killed at least sixty people throughout the country.

On Sunday, March 23, the day before Romero's death, the church radio station was back on the air. Once again his homily was broadcast to the nation. The Costa Rican station had been bombed but continued to carry the archbishop's words. The Vatican was urging him to tone down his preaching. Death threats had intensified.

In this final Sunday homily, Archbishop Romero recounted the violence of the previous week. Then, with the people interrupting him frequently with applause, he made the appeal to conscience that likely sealed his own death sentence, but will never be forgotten by suffering Salvadorans:

I would like to make an appeal in a special way to the men of the army, and in particular to the ranks of the Guardia Nacional, of the police, to those in the barracks. Brothers, you are part of our own people. You kill your own campesino brothers and sisters. And before an order to kill that a man may give, the law of God must prevail that says: Thou shalt not kill! No soldier is obliged to obey an order against the law of God. No one has to fulfill an immoral law. It is time to recover your consciences and to obey your consciences rather than the orders of sin. The church, defender of the rights of God, of the law of God, of human dignity, the dignity of the person, cannot remain silent before such abomination. We want the government to take seriously that reforms are worth nothing when they come about stained with so much blood. In the name of God, and in the name of this suffering people whose laments rise to heaven each day more tumultuous, I beg you, I ask you, I order you in the name of God: Stop the repression!³²

Why must the Human Being be killed?

There is a response to this question in the gospel text on which Archbishop Romero was preaching when he was shot the following day. In the

text, Jesus responds to this question in terms of the transformed Human Being: "The hour has come for the Human Being to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:23-24).

Speaking with a reporter two weeks before his death Archbishop Romero also responded to the question. He, too, spoke in terms of humanity, the rising humanity of his people:

I have often been threatened with death. Nevertheless, as a Christian, I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I shall arise in the Salvadoran people. I say so without meaning to boast, with the greatest humility.

As pastor, I am obliged by divine mandate to give my life for those I love—for all Salvadorans, even for those who may be going to kill me. If the threats come to be fulfilled, from this moment I offer my blood to God for the redemption and for the resurrection of El Salvador.³³

The paradox of Jesus restated by Oscar Romero is that by the Human Being's nonviolent gift of life in death, the people will rise. They are rising now.

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE SECOND COMING

Jesus of Nazareth was familiar with *Bar Enasha* in another way suggesting human transformation. Variations on this phrase occurred in the Hebrew Scriptures that Jesus would have known by heart from his childhood. The most significant of these was a well-known passage from the Book of Daniel (7:13), which referred to the one "like a human being," *ke-bar enash*. Traces of this Danielic human being are found in Jesus' sayings. This passage from Daniel provided Jesus with the perspective on the transforming Human Being that was to become, in turn, a vision of the Second Coming.

The primary source in the gospels for the belief in the Second Coming of Jesus is a courtroom scene (Mark 14:53-72; Matt. 26:57-75; Luke 22:54-71). When thinking of this scene, we should be very conscious of how courtrooms function to legitimate violence. From Jesus' day to our own, courtrooms have legitimized the imprisonment and execution of rebels, identified by those courts as criminals, so that the violence of privilege and power can carry out its legally sanctioned will.

In the synoptic gospels' account, Jesus' guards have led him to an arraignment before the high priest (identified by name as Caiaphas in Matthew) appointed by the Romans. The high priest was a key collaborator in Rome's imperial rule over Palestine, able to remain head of the Temple's

Pilate. In the courtroom, witnesses accuse Jesus of being in revolt against the Temple establishment, which the judge himself heads. Some of the witnesses claim Jesus said he would destroy the Temple, but their testimony does not agree. The high priest is therefore frustrated in getting charges that can be brought before Pilate. The logic of the narrative, as Walter Wink has pointed out to me, is that "none of the charges can be corroborated, so the high priest tries to make Jesus incriminate himself."³⁴

The high priest therefore asks Jesus a political question, in a politically explosive context. The priests, scribes, and elders present at this arraignment, who also act as judges with the high priest, are intensely aware of their own equivocal position and the threats to it. They know that while they hold a power over the Jewish people which mediates the final power of Rome, the hope of an oppressed peasantry is said by various popular movements to lie in a messiah ("anointed one" or "christos"). Peasant leaders periodically identified themselves as a messiah, a popularly based king of Israel, whom God would give the power to liberate the people from foreign and domestic oppressors.³⁵ For a suffering peasantry doubly taxed by Rome and the high priesthood, the recurring hope raised by such messiahs was that of liberation from foreign rule and from the oppressive power structure of the Temple aristocracy. The head of that power structure, the high priest, asks the Jew accused of revolution, Jesus, point blank if he is the revolutionary messiah whom the people are awaiting.

Concerning Jesus' response to this dramatic question, Walter Wink writes: "Both Matthew and Luke in their parallel accounts show Jesus *not* answering affirmatively. They both have an ambiguous answer whose meaning can be either 'That's what you say' (= no) or 'You said it' (yes)."³⁶ Mark has him answer unequivocally, "I am," but some manuscripts read the more ambiguous, "You say that." Jesus' refusal, in Matthew and Luke, to give a direct answer to the high priest's question is borne out by all three synoptic accounts of the trial before Pilate. There Jesus says, "su legeis" ("you say"), which Pilate interprets as no in all three gospels. As Wink emphasizes, we therefore have six and possibly seven (if we follow Mark's variant reading) synoptic versions where Jesus refuses to answer over against one Marcan, "I am": all three synoptic descriptions of the dialogue with Pilate; Matthew's and Luke's parallel account of the response to the high priest; Luke's special source where he has another version of an ambiguous, noncommittal answer (Luke 22:67); even some Greek manuscripts' renditions of the otherwise exceptional Mark 14:62, which instead of "I am" read "You said that," meaning "I didn't." Wink suspects that "a later scribe changed Mark to 'I am' after Matthew and Luke had already used a version that said 'You said that.'"³⁷

After his ambiguous, noncommittal "You said that," Jesus continues responding to his judge's question of revolution with those words which are today the primary source for the belief in his Second Coming: "And you will see *Bar Enasha* sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62; par. Matt. 26:64).

This statement by Jesus, as given in Mark and Matthew,³⁸ is considerably

more complex than the popular visions of the Second Coming it has spawned in the church. In the first place, it combines two distinct symbols, which in a literal interpretation pose a problem for the imagination: You will see *Bar Enasha* sitting at the right hand of Power, and *coming* with the clouds of heaven. "The only way one can take this [literally] is to visualize Jesus sitting on the right hand of God, and both of them (God and Jesus) approaching the earth."³⁹

If we try to draw from Jesus' reply to the high priest a literal picture of Jesus' Second Coming, then we in fact have Jesus and God sitting side by side and descending from the sky in a vision that looks uncomfortably like a divine roller coaster. We can doubt if that is the intended meaning.

Exegetes are agreed that the statement is not to be taken literally.⁴⁰ They point out that what Jesus is doing is drawing upon the different symbols of two well-known scriptures, Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13, to tell the high priest that the judge in this case stands under a higher judgment. In Psalm 110:1, a triumphant king of Judah is enthroned at the right hand of God. Jesus, in citing the psalm, has replaced the king by "the Human Being" (now given the further dimension of Daniel 7:13) to avoid any sense of the glory of a military victory. In Daniel 7:13, which is the controlling text, the one "like a human being" (in the Aramaic of Daniel) is portrayed as coming with the clouds of heaven to the courtroom of God, where this symbolic figure is given the kingdom of God. When Jesus says to the high priest that he "will see the Human Being sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven," he is suggesting to the priest-judge, for whom those scriptures have a divine authority, that the defendant standing before him will somehow lead a successful revolution, to be vindicated in God's courtroom. Matthew (26:64) and Luke (22:69) make this assertion even more explosive, prefacing it with the words, "From now on," thus making the revolution and the divine counter-judgment simultaneous and immediate. The high priest reacts by the formal, judicial gesture of tearing his robes, saying that Jesus is guilty of blasphemy. To this, the other judges agree.

This classic Second Coming scene from Jesus' trial is held by C. H. Dodd to have provided (specifically in Mark 14:62) the only explicit prediction of Jesus' Second Coming in the earlier gospel tradition.⁴¹ Yet the interpretation given it thus far suggests a Second Coming far different from the one to which we are accustomed. Perhaps this text can tell us more about the meaning of the Second Coming, if we follow it to its source in the Book of Daniel.

A COLLECTIVE HUMAN BEING IN DANIEL

Another reason for returning to Daniel is that Jesus' other sayings in the synoptic gospels from which the doctrine of the Second Coming has been developed (Mark 8:38, 13:26; Matt. 10:23, 24:44, 25:31; Luke 12:40,

17:24, 26, 30, 18:8)⁴² are made up entirely of *Bar Enasha* statements, all of them heavily influenced by Daniel.⁴³ For example, Mark 13:26, "And then they will see *Bar Enasha* coming in clouds with great power and glory," is like Jesus' trial statement, nearly a direct quote from Daniel. In the synoptic gospels Jesus' Second Coming is identical with "the coming Human Being," a vision drawn from Daniel. To determine the original meaning of this vision, we need to look at its prior frame of reference in the Book of Daniel.

The Book of Daniel was written as a primer of Jewish resistance during the religious oppression of the Jewish people by the Hellenistic King, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, in the 160s B.C.E. A century later, when Palestine was occupied by another foreign power, Rome, the Book of Daniel again became the people's resistance manifesto. Oppressed Jews were inspired and strengthened by Daniel's stories of Jewish youths, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace, Daniel in the lions' pit, each upheld by their God as they refused to obey the blasphemous laws of a foreign ruler. Daniel's stories and his apocalyptic imagery would have been for oppressed Jews the equivalent of anti-establishment political cartoons in modern newspapers. And Jesus would have known much of the Book of Daniel by heart.

The Human Being to whom Jesus referred in his arraignment when confronting the high priest was the *Bar Enasha* of his own transforming experiences in Galilee. But this was also, in a growing vision of transformation, *ke-bar enash*, the one "like a human being," whom Jesus knew from the seventh chapter of Daniel.

There, in a dream which begins with a vision of four terrible beasts, Daniel sees "the Ancient of Days," God, take his seat on a courtroom throne of fiery flames. The last of the beasts, which represents the persecuting kingdom of Antiochus IV, is condemned by the court and executed. The dream continues with the coming of one like a human being:

I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a human being,
who came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
And to the human being was given dominion
and glory and kingdom . . . (Dan. 7:13-14).

An angel interprets this dream for Daniel, explaining that the human being who has been given the kingdom of God is "the saints of the Most High" (Dan. 7:18), and later, "the people of the saints of the Most High" (Dan. 7:27), those who had been persecuted by the fourth beast.

T. W. Manson, the late British scholar, pointed the way to an understanding of Daniel's human being:

What the symbol stands for is made crystal clear in verses 18 and 27 of this same chapter, where we are told that "the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever"; and again, "The kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High: his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him." Just as the beasts stood for the pagan empires, so the Son of Man stands for Israel or for the godly Remnant within Israel.⁴⁴

The human being of Daniel's dream, then, "who came to the Ancient of Days," Manson identifies as the symbol for a people, not an individual. The one "like a human being," *ke-bar enash*, is a people of enduring faith, the Israelite people persecuted by Antiochus Epiphanes, or more narrowly, "the godly remnant within Israel" who maintain their faithful noncooperation with the king's laws. Living in the midst of the persecutions whose end he presents, the author of the Book of Daniel has, in effect, set down a promise by God to a faithful, suffering people: The kingdom of God will be theirs.

This is the meaning in the Book of Daniel, a collective meaning, of the human being. When combined with its original Danielic imagery of clouds, the coming human being became the basis for the belief in Jesus' Second Coming. In its original context in the resistance manifesto of Daniel, the human being is a collective humanity, "the people of the saints of the Most High," whose faith under persecution results in their being given the kingdom of God.

Being given the kingdom of God does not mean, however, that either the Book of Daniel or the vision of Jesus is beyond history. In Daniel's vision the coming of the human being is not the end of the world. It is the symbolic representation of a new world or a new time, beyond the overwhelming persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes. The power of God will respond to the patience of the saints by giving them such a new world, the kingdom of God.

In the same way, in Jesus' teaching and practice, for *Bar Enasha*, the Human Being to come, means that a people is given the power of God to break out of oppression and violence into a new age of history. As one exegete has put it, Jesus' references to the coming of *Bar Enasha* on the clouds of heaven were "never conceived as a primitive form of space travel, but as a symbol for a mighty reversal of fortunes within history and at the national level."⁴⁵ For Jesus, the coming *Bar Enasha* was a symbolic representation of a continuous nonviolent revolution empowered by God.

There is no question that "the Human Being, as understood by the writers of the synoptic gospels, applied, first of all, to the person of Jesus. Their application of the vision to the visionary was right. It was Jesus who had initiated the new revolution of the kingdom of God, and who, in the

early church's eyes, became that revolution. Thus, as Lloyd Gaston puts it, "when the evangelists use the phrase Son of Man they use it nearly consistently as a designation of Jesus, but when Jesus used the phrase he used it just as consistently as a designation of the community he came to found."⁴⁶ What is being suggested here is that Jesus himself, in his awareness of the collective meaning of *Bar Enasha*, applied it to his own people, and through a transformed and transforming people of God, saw a transformed humanity.

In Mark's story of the paralytic at Capernaum, noted earlier, Jesus used *Bar Enasha* to describe a new humanity. Matthew's version of the same story provided us with a striking confirmation of the corporate interpretation of *Bar Enasha*—Matthew's use of "humanity" where we would have expected him to say "Jesus" (Matt. 9:8). Thus we see Jesus suggesting, in the interaction between himself and the paralytic, a new *Bar Enasha*, a new Human Being: personal, collective, and transforming, bearing the presence of a revolutionary God within it. In the passion sayings that new Human Being is transformed through suffering and death.

The Book of Daniel's use of *ke-bar enash*, the one "like a human being," as a symbol for the faithful of Israel, gave Jesus a further basis on which to explore a new humanity. Jesus' sayings on the coming Human Being carry a deeper Reality. Taken both in themselves and in relation to Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God, the Second Coming statements envision the nonviolent coming of God in a widening historical movement. In that sense they make sense of Jesus' own history. They also cast a new light on our history.

"ALL FLESH SHALL SEE IT TOGETHER"

In a sermon that he gave early in his public life, Martin Luther King envisioned this nonviolent coming of God, a vision that would return to him in a transforming way the night before his death. In his early sermon King in effect combined the different dimensions of Jesus' new humanity that have been outlined here: a new humanity that is present, suffering, and coming in transformation.

In March 1957, King returned to his church in Montgomery, Alabama, from a trip to Africa. There he had attended the independence ceremonies marking the transition from the Gold Coast to Ghana, the first free nation of sub-Saharan Africa, led into independence by Kwame Nkrumah.

"The thing that impressed me more than anything else that night," King told the members of his church, "was the fact that when Nkrumah walked in with his other ministers who had been in prison with him, they didn't come in with the crowns and all of the garnish of kings, but they walked in with prison caps and the coats that they had lived with for all of the months that they had been in prison."⁴⁷

From the inspiration of having seen the people of Ghana transformed

through suffering to freedom, King turned to the words of Isaiah and the transformation of humanity:

Then I can hear Isaiah again, because it has a profound meaning to me. That somehow "every valley shall be exalted, every hill shall be made low, the crooked places shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." And that's the beauty of this thing. *All* flesh shall see it together. Not some from the heights of Park Street [in Montgomery] and others from the dungeons of slum areas. Not some from the pinnacles of the British Empire and some from the dark deserts of Africa. Not some from inordinate, superfluous wealth and others from abject, deadening poverty. Not some white and some black, not some yellow and some brown, but all flesh shall see it together. They shall see it from Montgomery! They shall see it from New York! They shall see it from Ghana! They shall see it from China! For I can look out and see a great number, as John saw, marching into the great eternity, because God is working in this world and at this hour and at this moment.⁴⁸

Jesus saw God working in this world and at this hour and at this moment, in the already dawning horizons of a new Human Being. He saw that new humanity rising in his people in response to a terrible crisis of violence.

"When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before *Bar Enasha* comes" (Matt. 10:23).

Sometime during his ministry (the gospels cannot be relied on for chronology), Jesus sent his disciples on a missionary journey of the utmost urgency. Traveling light and fast, greeting nobody on the road, wasting no time in towns that would give them no hearing, the disciples were to keep moving across Israel. They could expect trials and persecution from sanhedrins, governors, and kings (Matt. 10:17-18). They would experience hatred and torture (Matt. 10:22, 17). Jesus' words to his disciples on the eve of this journey sound rather like those of a leader exhorting his troops before a terrible battle. But in their battle the disciples' only weapon would be that they become as "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matt. 10:16), always reliant on the Spirit.

G. B. Caird has proposed that Jesus' sense of urgency with his disciples came from his awareness that he was "working against time to prevent the end of Israel's world, that the haste of the mission was directly connected with the many sayings which predict the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple."⁴⁹ Jesus was profoundly sensitive to the sufferings of his people beneath the violence and threats of a several-tiered power structure. The purpose of this missionary journey was to initiate a divine/human revolution in Israel and avoid a national disaster.

In the instructions for that critical mission, Matthew's gospel cites Jesus

saying, "When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before *Bar Enasha* comes" (Matt. 10:23).

The meaning is that the Human Being comes within history. There is to be a revolution, but a revolution with divine roots. Jesus envisions the revolutionary coming in his time of a faithful, nonviolent people, who like the faithful Israelites in Daniel can expect to experience not only persecution but also a realization of the kingdom of God. In response to a mounting crisis, Jesus is engaged in a radical experiment with his disciples, sending them out through all the towns of Israel to realize a revolutionary divine hope before it is too late. In terms of both his faith and a nonviolent social program, Jesus has gone beyond the Book of Daniel. But the new humanity Jesus hopes for, in response to a collective crisis, is also a fulfillment of Daniel's vision.

Jesus' response to the high priest, however, comes at a time of abandonment by his followers. The suffering and death that he had said must come for transformation is imminent. Nevertheless, combining the vision of Daniel and his own experience of *Bar Enasha*, he still professes faith in a new humanity: "And you will see *Bar Enasha* seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62).

In response to the high priest's question of revolution, as we have seen, Jesus refuses to give a direct answer. But with his *Bar Enasha* response, he shifts the focus of revolution from a leader ordinarily associated with war, the messiah, to a nonviolent people, "the saints of the Most High," with whom he identifies in his mission and in its divine vindication. Although Jesus stands alone and abandoned before the high priest, he still says in faith that a collective nonviolent transformation is already taking place through God's action in his life and work. (When Martin Luther King kept saying in the darkest moments of his life and history, "I still have a dream," he was echoing this act of faith by Jesus.) According to an added phrase in Matthew and Luke, this divine/human revolution is happening "from now on": "But I tell you, from now on you will see *Bar Enasha* seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64).⁵⁰ In Jesus' faith, that revolutionary new humanity—"the people of the saints of the Most High"—is already coming with the clouds of heaven into God's presence: "From now on . . ."

A DIVINELY REVOLUTIONIZED HUMANITY

The point of this exegesis is that beneath the symbolic language which has been developed into the Second Coming of Jesus Christ we can begin to discern the possibilities of a new humanity based on the humanity of Jesus. These coming *Bar Enasha* sayings are identified by Rudolf Bultmann as containing very old tradition. He believes they are "probably original words of Jesus."⁵¹ These words convey Jesus' vision of a faithful community,

which will be vindicated through the power of God to experience a transformed world.

What Bultmann and many of the writers on this question have ignored is that the "Human Being," like the "kingdom of God," was Jesus' inspired response to his people's oppression. The life situation I am suggesting for these symbols is a first-century imperialism and a nonviolent revolution initiated by God in Jesus. Its closest analogy in history is Gandhi's "constructive program" in India, with its focus on a *swaraj* or freedom that began with the Self-liberating steps of the poorest Indian villager. The key for both Jesus and Gandhi was not the action or reaction of the imperial power over them, but the independent freedom possible to the most oppressed villager each encountered.⁵²

At this point in our discussion, the "Human Being," while a literal rendering of the Aramaic *Bar Enasha*, has become an unnecessarily long translation of Jesus' real intent. The Human Being in Jesus' vision of transformation simply means Humanity, a divinely revolutionized Humanity. It is Humanity, a New Humanity transformed by God, which Jesus envisions as seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven. This nonviolent coming of God in Jesus, in Israel, and in all of Humanity was Jesus' experience of God, an experience which spilled over from the symbol of the kingdom of God to the symbol of the Human Being, Humanity.

In the very depths of his heart and soul Jesus experienced both the suffering of his people and the Spirit of God overcoming the powers of evil that bore down on them: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). He especially experienced that overcoming Spirit of God in his healing: "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20). Satan's fall corresponded to the coming of the kingdom, God's rising revolution in Humanity, overturning the world's powers of evil. Jesus experienced a revolution from within which he saw transforming the very life of Humanity.

Before his death, Jesus' final way of saying that "the kingdom of God is at hand" comes in his words, "from now on you will see Humanity seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." This is the vision of a divine/human revolution that will explode through Israel and the Roman Empire. The Second Coming envisioned by the accused revolutionary standing alone before the high priest was to be the communal coming, "from now on," of a suffering, faithful people, empowered by God in their history to break through to a nonviolent Humanity, the kingdom of God. Abandoned by his followers, alone before his judge, anticipating execution, Jesus still saw that total divine revolution coming from within Humanity. He knew that God would somehow make it happen, and he was determined to embody it by his own death. He did, and the nonviolent coming of God took over.

Remember that lone 19-year-old student in the white shirt, Wang Weilin,

standing at attention before the column of tanks rolling toward Tiananmen Square. Remember him finally being led away, to disappear like thousands of his brothers and sisters since June 1989, passing down corridors of death into the heart of a new China and a new Humanity. And recall the legs and black leather boots of Loretta Asanaviciute beneath the Soviet tank treads advancing through Vilnius, Lithuania, on "Bloody Sunday," January 13, 1991—an empowering symbol of nonviolent resistance for her people and all people. Wang Weilin and Loretta Asanaviciute were saying to the masters of the tanks, just as Jesus was saying to his judge, "From now on you will see Humanity seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Remember Jo Ann Robinson and the other black women who used the spark of Rosa Parks's arrest to light the fire of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the civil rights movement. Reflecting three decades later on how slow black Montgomery ministers had been, prior to Parks's arrest, to pick up on their congregations' grievances, Jo Ann Robinson wrote:

At first the ministers would soothe the anger of their congregations with recommendations of prayer, with promises that God would "make the rough ways smooth" and with exhortations to "have patience and wait upon the Lord."

The members had been patient and had waited upon the Lord, but the rough ways had gotten rougher rather than smoother. As months stretched into years, the encounters with some of the bus drivers grew more numerous and more intolerable.⁵³

In those days of desperation, it had been the Women's Political Council who had said, in effect, in their prophetic boycott letter to the Montgomery mayor, "From now on you will see Humanity seated at the right hand of Power [on Montgomery's buses!] and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Once Rosa Parks had gone to jail and the women had flooded Montgomery with boycott leaflets, as Robinson says, "the time had come for the black people to stop 'waiting on the Lord,' and to help God to 'make rough ways smooth.' The Lord was opening the way; everything had pointed to it."⁵⁴ The time had come in Montgomery for a New Humanity to emerge. The nonviolent coming of God took over.

Again, remember the four cave-tombs north of Jerusalem. Remember their revelation of the violence of Jesus' time. The bones of thirty-six individuals were found by archaeologists, of whom at least ten were killed by violence and oppression—starved, shot by arrows, burned to death, smashed by crushing blows, abandoned in childbirth, and crucified. Remember, too, that of those ten victims of violence, eight were women and children—corresponding roughly to the proportion of women and children in the enormous toll which systemic violence continues to take daily among the oppressed of the world. It was to this depth of suffering, in forgotten

victims such as these, that Jesus addressed his revolutionary kingdom.

Whereas the male disciples despaired and fled in terror from Jesus' execution, many of the women disciples stayed to witness Jesus' death: Mary of Magdala, Mary who was the mother of James and Joset, Salome, and "many other women who had come up to Jerusalem with him" (Mark 15:40-41). In a striking demonstration of the New Humanity, a group of these women had been disciples of Jesus ever since Galilee (Luke 8:1-3). Contrary to every dictate of their society concerning women, they had remained with Jesus all the way to Jerusalem. In the final events that shattered and dispersed the male disciples, this core group of women continued, in spite of their fear, to "look on from afar" (Mark 15:40). Perhaps because of their experience as women, the people most devastated by violence as revealed in the cave-tombs, they could understand more deeply the price and the hope of the kingdom. They become the foundation of the New Humanity, the decisive community for the continuation of the Jesus movement after Jesus' arrest and execution.⁵⁵ When three of them go to anoint his body in the tomb, they are the first disciples to be overwhelmed by his resurrection (Mark 16:1-8).

Here, among the most radically powerless and oppressed of the world, is where the nonviolent coming of God begins, at that moment when faith catches fire in their hearts. Jesus himself experienced such a beginning. The little-noticed basis of the entire Christian faith is that moment when faith moved the poor Jew, Jesus, living under the heel of an empire, to believe in the transforming power of the kingdom of God. Once that fire was ignited in Jesus, nothing on earth could extinguish his faith in the nonviolent coming of God, nor God's actual coming through that faith. No empire has ever had the power to stand against such faith. The British Empire had as little success with Jesus' Hindu successor, Gandhi, as the Roman Empire had with Jesus and the early Christians. The nonviolent coming of God is a growing force in Humanity that will not be denied its full flowering in the world.

When Martin Luther King on the night before his death expressed his faith in God's unfolding will in this century, he was deeply aware of the nuclear violence threatening to burn up all humankind. But a more powerful fire was burning in Martin King's heart. When he said we no longer have a choice between violence and nonviolence in this world, that now it's a choice between nonviolence or nonexistence, he was recognizing the infinite darkness on all sides of us. But that same faith in God's nonviolent coming, that Jesus expressed on the eve of his cross, had caught fire in Martin Luther King's heart on the eve of his bullet. Just as Jesus had seen the Roman Empire's cross coming and had told his disciples to expect it, King as one of those disciples said yes to his own death, because with that yes to the death of self went a yes to the nonviolent coming of God in the world's oppressed.

Jesus told his judge that he would see a nonviolent Humanity coming

with the clouds of heaven, transforming the earth through God's power. In his last public words Martin Luther King told not only his people but also his waiting assassin, and all those whose hatred had loaded the assassin's gun, the same truth Jesus had spoken:

"I want you to know tonight, that we as a people will get to the promised land. And I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."