

A LARGER VIEW

*A Commentary On How Current Events Reflect—
Or Not—Our Spiritual Search*

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As is our custom, the last bulletin of the year focuses on items that help us understand some form of progress, or movement towards a better world, what some call good news. There are many such stories which we have no room to mention, for example the progress being made banning the sale of Ivory including on EBay. We thought we would make our point by just giving a small sampling.

The pieces will be or are reposted from some of the entries in The Inner Compass blog www.innerlifedirections.com/blog

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Expanding the Good

Sister Emmanuelle died recently at the age of 99. Few in the United States know her name and yet her work is as important as that of Mother Teresa. French born, Sister Emmanuelle moved to Egypt in the early 1970's spending more than two decades working with the poorest of the poor in Cairo's slum, the *zabbbaleen*, garbage collectors who make their living by scavenging through mounds of garbage. She lived alongside them and helped create a network of schools, clinics and gardens to help the area's children. Long recognized, particularly in Europe, as an advocate of the poor and the marginalized, the association she founded continues her work and now operates in several Middle Eastern and West African countries.

In this media age we tend to assume that if we haven't heard of it, it doesn't exist. Sister Emmanuelle's work reminds us that we are wrong, that people often devote themselves to unpopular but noteworthy causes without need of recognition, people who, like she, expand the good around us.

Free at Last

A few months ago we wrote about Ms Mani, a woman from Niger, who was suing the state for having been a slave. She was sold at age 12 and her master also used her like a sex slave fathering 3 of her children. Her case, championed by London based Anti-Slavery International, was being watched because her victory could have repercussions for thousands of people held in slavery in Niger, as well as in neighboring Mali and Mauritania. And now, the West African regional Court of Justice at the end of October convicted the state of Niger of having failed to protect Ms Mani from slavery. The victory will at the very least help Anti-Slavery International use this verdict as a legal precedent against those states where slavery still remains an issue whether or not it has been outlawed. The sum awarded Ms Mani is about \$19,000. She plans to build a house and send her children to school as a way to protect them from ever having to be slaves. One day there will be no slavery. Until then we hail every step along the way.

Investing More in AIDS Research

It's not often that good news come from pharmaceutical companies, but in this instance due credit must be given. Seventeen of the largest companies such as Abbott Labs, Pfizer or GlaxoSmithKline met with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and other U.N. officials last October and agreed to "invest further in research and development of new HIV-related medicines adapted to resource-limited settings to be used safely in children, adolescents, adults and pregnant women," jargon saying the agreement is to make drugs available to people who live in poverty.

More to Africa Than Misery

It is true that the global financial crisis may affect the developing world in severe ways even endangering the fragile peace existing in places. But that reality is not to overshadow an accomplishment that is too often forgotten, the progress that many of that continent's countries have made. In fact the 48 sub-Saharan countries have been growing at an overall rate of about 5% a year, higher than the recent growth rate in the United States. This points to the existence of a promising mechanism being in place, and to the reality that Africa is more than the crises that usually come to mind when we think of the continent.

The Case of Malawi

For years we have been accustomed to thinking of Malawi, a small Central African country, as one of the poorest on Earth. Now Malawi has become an economic miracle, to use a description used by the BBC, going from begging bowl to bread basket. Agro-science experts are helping subsistence farmers to cope with climate change and in just two years Malawi has managed to have a food surplus and has done so by applying a mix of crop breeding, soil management, irrigation and diversification. What this means is that Malawi is not only going green, it is showing that green is economically efficient. If all this sounds too good to be true, here is another way to look at the shift that occurred: During the last decade, Malawi suffered six successive years of food shortage. In 2005, one third of the population, about 4.5 million people, went hungry. By 2007 Malawi was exporting more than one million metric tons of maize, its staple crop

Web Guidelines

Two human rights groups have helped Google, Microsoft and Yahoo come up with a set of guidelines which are meant to reduce the abuse by repressive regimes like China. Through this signed agreement the internet companies have agreed to comply with censorship and other such measures only when they have received a formal legal request. It is hoped this measure will bring a layer of transparency and help narrow the range of censorship activities. The current system is based on vague guidelines which while they allow the internet companies self-censorship also leave officials wide latitude to punish individuals and companies who do not toe the line. It would be preferable not to need censorship but given that is not yet possible, it is an important step.

To Ponder On

"It is far better to grasp the Universe as it really is than to persist in delusion, however satisfying and reassuring."

Carl Sagan

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