

May 4, 1986

Occasionally something extraordinary happens which clears away the mists which obscure from our sight the true nature of our situation.

Thus when the space shuttle exploded we suddenly saw that we are all astronauts. We are all passengers on this small spaceship earth, a spaceship to which has been attached various explosive mixtures which could be ignited at any moment by accident or by human folly. Whether we want to be or not we all are, in some sense, space heros.

And the recent disaster at the Russian nuclear power plant reveals our interdependence. It is obvious that how the Russian authorities build and operate nuclear plants is not of concern to the Russian people only, but is everyone's concern. How Cuba will operate the two plants being built there by the Soviets is of concern to Mexico and the United States; the fact that the American government operates six antiquated reactors without containment vessels is of concern to more people than just we citizens of the U.S.A.

The official State religion of America posits that we are all separate and independent beings, free individuals set loose on this spaceship to pursue our own wants and needs, with the single proviso that we do not inhibit in any way a similar pursuit of their personal wants and needs by other members of the community. But is this idea of individualism really plausible? Is there anything we could possibly want that does not in some way inhibit and constrain others in the community? Is there any move we can make, or any desire we might have which does not, if it is realized, change the lives of others in some way? Is it not true that even the proverbial act between consenting adults, when thought about deeply, can be seen never to be a strictly private affair?

And is it possible that 200 million people, each of whom in their daily lives becomes so well practiced in pursuing strictly private needs will, when the big issues come along, like nuclear power, have the capacity to make, in the aggregate, the best decision in the interests of the common good?

However we may regard the career of Jesus of Nazareth, he stood for a different approach. For his death on the cross is a paradigm for a way of life which puts the good of everyone, past present and future, ahead of an individual's wishes.

Each of us may not be called to die on a cross. But every day we face the need to re-educate our desires, in everything we do, both small and large, so as to put the well-being of others first. This is the daily cross. There is clearly no future for

humankind unless more and more people are willing to assume the daily cross. Someone once said that true freedom is the forging of true bonds. This, then, is our true freedom--a lively sense of bondedness to the well-being of everyone.