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A parable that distinguishes between reaction and pro-action

Mary Ann McGivern | Oct. 25, 2012 NCR Today

This is an old story. I first heard it and began to tell it when I was working at the Institute for Peace and Justice at St. Louis University in 1973. I don't know the source. It is still a good story, and perhaps younger readers have never heard it. Perhaps older readers can still learn from it.

A woman was sitting by the river, meditating on beauty, when she saw movement in the river. It was a baby.

She shouted for help and dove into the river to rescue the baby. A passer-by called 911, and soon, EMTs were treating both the baby and the exhausted woman. Then someone shouted that there was another baby in the river. Two swimmers dove into the river. Another ambulance was called.

As more babies were spotted in the river, the Red Cross put up tents and Children and Family Services began televised adoption appeals. A human chain was maintained continuously across the river.

Then a man disengaged himself from the human chain and began walking upstream. People shouted for him not to go. He was needed here.

He said, "I'm going to see who is throwing the babies into the river."

It is such a lovely parable, distinguishing charity from justice, reaction from pro-action, and identifying systemic evil. Who is throwing those babies in the river?

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