

INTERESTING TIMES – September 2004

— By Richard L. Kiniry

Sometimes it is a real toss-up whether it is better to live in interesting or boring times. I guess since we are in a season of constant politics with an endless election, these are supposed to be interesting times but it has become a real bore. Since our country was highjacked by right-wing radicals, we have been titillated with weekly outrages that are great fodder for excited cocktail-party talk, and it is obvious that we are at a watershed moment; if you don't find the outcome of the election of interest, you are a dunce - but does that make for interesting times? Fearful, hopeful, yes, but not especially interesting.

We may have forgotten what interesting times look like. Interesting times are times of innovation, of creativity, of change - times when people are working together to make life better, more engaging. In other words, what makes this election interesting, is the possibility of getting life going again - getting back to interesting times.

Certainly, some people are having great fun by coming up with interesting ways of taking their opinions to the doors of the opposition. Bad times can get the creative juices going, but it is defense; necessary, but it is still creativity mobilized in a fight against certain ideas and positions and only indirectly for positive ideas. The human spirit will not be crushed but the medium it has at its disposal makes a big difference.

We have been in conservative times for so long now that we fail to perceive what it has done to our common life. Conserving is commitment to the status quo - we have ours, no need to change anything. In that environment, fitting in is more important than expressing yourself. It encourages self-involvement over involvement with life. People don't take chances unless it is guaranteed to produce a profit. We are living with all that conservatism, all that lack of imagination, and it leads to neglected common spaces such as failing schools and a for-profit medical system. People become conservative in their dreams and life plans.

Life wants to change and grow, and that includes our moral sense. Life gets boring when the primary issues become protecting your property's value and your retirement fund. When the life force striving for expansion, for better life is blocked, it gets stupid and closed-minded. It becomes SUV's, mobile phones, and reality television while millions starve around the world. Yes, the Huns are at the gates and we have to be creative in stopping them but as people of faith, we have to think big and more broadly. As people who search for the meaning of their lives not in how well they serve the lord but in what kind of world they create, we should search for the source of problems in the lives of actual persons. What has gone wrong? Our ethical responsibility is not just to solve the endless problems but to help free the human spirit, including our own. The human adventure has got to be translated from one of shoving each person into a convenient niche - laborer, professional, vicariously attractive rich person, or peripherally noticed starving African - into a communal adventure of individual persons each

trying to make the best of life. The old theories have failed to produce a better world. They have given us heated car seats and universal inequality. We are different and we should live up to our different understanding of life. During the coming season of the Society, I hope we find all kinds of ways of creating interesting times for ourselves and the community.