

Starting a Magazine: A Guide for the Courageous The Short Happy Life of *Jubilee*

By Edward Rice

Editor's Note

Edward Rice was Thomas Merton's fellow student at Columbia University, his godfather, and his first biographer (*The Man in the Sycamore Tree*, 1970). More than two dozen articles by Merton appeared in *Jubilee*, the magazine Rice founded in 1953 and edited until September, 1967, an experience he details in the following memoir. Merton's first piece, "Bernard of Clairvaux" (his preface to Bruno Scott James' edition of Bernard's letters) appeared in the magazine's fourth issue (August, 1953), while his last, "Death of a Holy Terror" (on the maverick French Trappist Frère Pascal) was published in June, 1967, the second last issue of the Rice era. (See following article.) In between, such significant Merton work as "The Tower of Babel" (October, 1955), "Boris Pasternak and the People with Watch Chains" (July, 1959), "Herakleitos the Obscure" (September, 1960), "Classic Chinese Thought" (January, 1961), "Gandhi and the One-Eyed Giant" (January, 1965) and "Nhat Hanh is My Brother" (August, 1966) first appeared in *Jubilee*. In addition to the Frère Pascal piece, other uncollected Merton articles appearing only in *Jubilee* include "Notes on Sacred and Profane Art" (November, 1956), "Peter Damian" (a review essay on the saint's Selected Writings on the Spiritual Life) (August, 1960), and "Let the Poor Man Speak" (on Dom Primo Mazzolari) (October, 1960). *Jubilee* also published a photo article on The Catholic Hour television presentation of "The Tower of Babel" in March, 1957 and ran a cover story / photo essay on Merton in the March, 1966 issue, featuring many Rice pictures of Merton that would subsequently become very familiar. Other Columbia friends of Merton and Rice who were published in the magazine include "Roving Editor" Robert Lax, a frequent contributor of both prose and verse, Ad Reinhardt, Barry Ulanov, and Jim Knight (described in the notes to the November, 1953 issue as "now managing editor of the Paris edition of The New York Herald Tribune [who] was co-editor of the Columbia Jester with Thomas Merton). Other Merton friends who appeared in the pages of *Jubilee* over the years include Brother Antoninus (William Everson), Daniel Berrigan, Ernesto Cardenal, Jean Daniélou, Dorothy Day, Aelred Graham, John Howard Griffin, Jacques Maritain, Thich Nhat Hanh, Ned O'Gorman, Sr. Thérèse Lentfoehr (who served on the editorial board) and John Wu. As this catalogue of contributors suggests, *Jubilee* was a significant force in the awakening of the American Catholic Church to the wider world in the post-war and Vatican II period.



Editor and publisher Edward Rice (seated right) with *Jubilee* staff, c. 1966.

Some forty-five years ago (and how recent it seems) I was deeply involved in founding a new magazine, a Catholic magazine with a pictorial format and a commitment to the Church's social teachings, *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*. I had just spent three years as director of publicity for RKO-Pathé, a New York subsidiary of RKO Radio Pictures. I had been a member of the class of 1940 at Columbia College. During my Columbia years I had passed two summers in a kind of early "beat" community with some close friends, among them Thomas Merton, the poet Robert Lax, the painter Ad Reinhardt, the writers Robert Gibney, Nancy Flagg, James Knight, Peggy Wells and others of similar interests. Then came a series of jobs in publishing and public relations, all of which worked me hard over long hours but gave me the kind of experience that could not be gained in journalism school. My first job was as an artist in an advertising agency. Then, at Dell, I was editor of various movie magazines, getting hard-earned experience not only in editing but in production and graphic design. I then worked for Crowell-Collier's as a book editor and for *Look* as a writer-editor, gaining even more experience. So by the end of 1950 I was ready to embark on a long-cherished venture dreamed of since college, starting a new magazine. Meanwhile I had found a job writing documentary films and newsreels (this was before the days of TV news) at Warner-Pathé.

During this period – the early 1950s – I was trying to raise money for the new publication, Catholic in orientation but universal in appeal. It was to be entitled *Jubilee*, a term of many meanings both liturgical and popular, with the association of cheerfulness and joy. The parent company was to be known as the A.M.D.G. Publishing Company; A.M.D.G. – "for the greater glory of God" – was a phrase often used by medieval writers, poets, musicians and artists.

Where does a young man (I was thirty-two) wanting to start a Catholic magazine go for financing? To rich Catholics, of course. I drew up a prospectus outlining my plans and the rich were approached. Joseph P. Kennedy said he "never encouraged the young," although I was the same age as his son Jack. Clare Boothe Luce told me to "get a job on *Life* and make it a better magazine." The Grace family, with shipping, industrial and other interests,

saw only a drain on “good” money. Others were equally negative. During my wanderings in search of financing I came across a printer’s representative, Peter J. McDonnell, who knew a lot of people. He directed me to Max Geffen, the publisher of *Omnibook*. Geffen, though not a Catholic, seemed interested but his assistant thought *Jubilee* too vague – “call it *Catholic Pictorial Monthly*,” he advised. “If you were doing a gardening magazine you wouldn’t call it *Green Thumb*. Something more like *Gardening Monthly*.” *Jubilee* it stayed. (And I thought *Green Thumb* a great title.)

After nine months of frustrating meetings with Max Geffen I realized that he had no intentions of proceeding with *Jubilee*. What to do? I had recently read a book called *All Things in Common* by Clare Huchet Bishop, a French Catholic, dealing with the communitarian movement in Europe, in which the workers themselves, not the state (as in Socialism), or the capitalists (as in most of the industrial world), directly owned the means of production. That is, the people immediately involved controlled the factories, mines, mills, canneries, offices, etc., where they worked. So I developed a plan based on this thesis. The true owners of *Jubilee* would be the people who read it and the staff that produced it. This was not an easy idea to work out, although in its final form it sounded simple. I had trouble getting advice, and the Securities and Exchange Commission had to approve the project – I suspected that some of the SEC staff wondered if this might be some kind of stock swindle. But approval finally came. In brief, two types of stock were to be offered. One was a package of preferred stock at \$100 per package; it included twenty shares of stock and a lifetime subscription. Second was an unlimited number of \$5 stock packages with one \$1 share and a one-year subscription (subscriptions could also be bought for \$4 without the stock).

I didn’t talk about the “communitarian” inspiration behind the financial structure of *Jubilee* as it smacked of “anarchism,” an explosive term in the 1950s. My plan was for staff and readers alike to share in *Jubilee*’s success, if success was to be in its future. And if *Jubilee* failed, no one could be blamed or held responsible except the founder. The only people to lose money would be those daring souls who had bought a few stock pages at \$5 each (but they got subscriptions along with their stock shares) or those more courageous who had bought \$100 packages. I no longer have the records; my impression is that most \$100 investors bought only a single package, a few two or three, and five would have been rare. I think I spent \$50 on early printing and postage. From my apartment I mailed prospectuses to college alumni and alumnae, to friends, to well-known Catholics, to the mastheads of other publications. I sent out press releases about the new magazine that were widely published. Shortly stock packages got sold and subscriptions began to come in. People who heard about the venture came around, volunteers and job hunters, new friends, potential contributors, seminarians, Catholic activists. In about six months some \$35,000 had been received. In today’s terms this would be the equivalent of roughly \$150,000, hardly adequate for a new magazine but somehow it seemed to be enough on which to launch *Jubilee*. A loft was rented in one of New York’s secondary business districts. A talented

mid-westerner, Robert L. Reynolds, who had heard of *Jubilee* in Chicago, where he had been editor of *Today*, a Catholic action magazine, was taken on as *Jubilee*'s managing editor. Others appeared, among them a young photographer, Jacques Lowe, who was one of the best in a crowded field and later became famous for his photographs of President Kennedy.

The first issue appeared as of May of 1953, and *Jubilee* was off to fourteen bumpy but interesting years in which an unusually broad variety of subjects was covered, from the Cold War to first communion dresses to corruption on the New York and Manila waterfronts to children's cut-outs and bestiaries, cooperatives, contemplation, the Desert Fathers, very early reports on South Africa (1953) and Vietnam (1956), the problems of raising children in a secular age, new music for the Church, saints' feasts, book and movie reviews, cooking recipes, profiles of people – the scope was virtually inexhaustible. As “a magazine of the Church and her people” *Jubilee* set no boundaries. The eastern rites were presented to the amazement of Catholics who had never heard of them, and the Orthodox churches in all their glory and tribulation, and other faiths, including Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Thomas Merton regularly sent in articles from Gethsemani; *Jubilee* probably published more of Merton than any other publication. In late 1955 Robert Lax returned from Europe where he had been living in a Dominican House of Studies, to write occasional pieces. Wilfrid Sheed, son of Frank and Maisie Sheed of Sheed and Ward, eventually joined the staff as book and movie critic.

The magazine was well-received but financial success was not to be *Jubilee*'s, nor long life. In looking back over the bound volumes I see it getting better, wiser, more mature with each issue. The material is deeper, broader, more responsible to the reader, the graphics and photographs better, even superlative. But *Jubilee*'s sense of responsibility to its audience – and to the Church – was also its undoing. Vatican II was in the offing, and then in the present. Urgent matters were to be considered, and a survey of *Jubilee*'s readers showed that marriage and birth control, education, remarriage were among the issues that were thought important. But there were people who believed such matters should not be discussed and said the boat – or the Ark – should not be rocked. “The matter is not open to discussion,” a priest wrote in answer to the questionnaire about birth control. But others, the laity especially, thought the issue could not be ignored, and had to be explained better and more lucidly than in the past, and said so.

Jubilee never advocated the use of contraceptives. What it asked, in articles, surveys, and letters from readers, was for the Church to rethink its traditional stand, state its teaching in terms more comprehensible to the twentieth century and embrace the fallen who were struggling with severe moral and practical issues in their lives. Unfortunately *Jubilee* began to suffer in the place where it hurt. Subscriptions fell off and parish outlets were cancelled. A brief anecdote may capulize the issue. A Knight of Malta came to me with a message right out of the New York chancery office: “If you continue to run articles about birth control, you'll never be a Knight of Malta.” Well, *Jubilee* refused to censor itself, and

I am not a member of that most prestigious and noble Order.

Even without such problems to cope with, there were tragedies along the way, including the deaths of two important young staff members – one, Stuart Carr, only twenty-six, the other, Eileen Good, in her early thirties. The magazine attracted more than its fair share of misfits. I fired one man four times for incompetence. The first time he was getting married and had to have a job. The second and third times his wife was pregnant. The fourth time was between pregnancies, and out he went, leaving chaos behind. Then there were the people who quietly let it be known that it was they who had actually financed *Jubilee*, even though untrue. A prominent brewing family, devoted to the arts, was one of the offenders; in fact, they had bought two \$100 stock packages, then a few days later requested the return of their money. Then there were the people who openly and repeatedly, to the detriment of the magazine, claimed to be the editor or the publisher or even the founder. There is still abroad a man of immense charm and blithe tongue who came to *Jubilee* late and got fired early for breaking furniture in temper tantrums who passes himself off (recently in *The New York Times*) as the creative power that made *Jubilee* what it was.

But in general the staff was superbly responsible and self-motivated and especially dedicated. I think most of Bob Reynolds, now deceased, a staff member from the first issue, who was so important in helping *Jubilee* to a successful start, and of our last managing editor, Oona Sullivan, who was just as great and gave the publication a steadiness and maturity of vision that made it professionally respected.

Of supreme importance to *Jubilee* were the dozens of volunteers who came Wednesday nights to help with mailings and to type manuscripts. Some of the magazine's staff came from the volunteers. *Jubilee* was also unique in the number of young photographers, artists and writers to whom it gave space, leading to some very distinguished careers on other publications, and in academia and television. And then there were established photographers like Frank Monaco and Bob Willoughby and artists like Emil Antonucci and Franklin McMahon who worked for *Jubilee* with a complete lack of self-interest, offering their services to advance the publication.

Then the end came. *Jubilee* just stopped. It ran out of money. It had shown a surplus in only five of its fourteen years. Debts were not overwhelming – a few thousand dollars a year in bad times – but enough to make one nervous about the future. My plan for a sharing of profits with readers and staff was never fulfilled; still I think almost everyone got some kind of satisfaction out of *Jubilee*'s fourteen years.

The American branch of a European publishing house ghoulishly took the corpse but could not breathe life into it and gave up the ghost after less than a year. In looking back it seemed that *Jubilee* had lived its life, had served its purpose. I am always amazed when it is recalled by new acquaintances, or mentioned in magazines or referred to in books. It was one voice of many in a kind of twentieth-century Golden Age of the Church, when clergy and laity were joined in a common vision and worked together. It gave inspiration and sustenance; it showed vistas that had been unsuspected; it documented the struggles of people (far from all of them Catholic) to live the Word given us so long ago.