

36<sup>th</sup> HOLY CROSS HISTORY ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE - 2017

Subject: Brother Bernard Adam Klim, C.S.C.

By: Joseph J. Tobin

I would like to begin by quoting a short passage from  
a novel by Stephen King:

“The stranger approached the dilapidated farm house, and suddenly the farmer appeared on the sagging porch with a Pitt Bull at his side. The dog jumped down and dashed toward the visitor growling. The owner called out, “Don’t be scared. He’s friendly!” But the snarling animal jumped at the stranger. Rushing from the porch, the owner picked up a rusted wrench and hurled it at the dog’s hind quarters to make the dog settle down.”

The subject of my paper found a way to use rusted wrenches and other metal but I doubt that he ever threw one. He was:

**Brother Bernard Adam Klim, C.S.C.**

Bernie would say, “Backwards my name spells MILK.”

Bernard Klim’s parents emigrated from Poland and settled in the heavily Polish community of Hamtramck. Michigan, which is now almost

totally Muslim. His birth date was March 29, 1930. Printed in blue (next sheet) Bernie wrote about his birth and family.

His mother died when Bernard was 2 months old. His aunt wanted to take him, but she had 7 children of her own, so the baby was taken to St. Vincent de Paul Orphanage. In his papers, I found a sepia photo of his mother but half was torn away. Bernie never knew his mother whose name was penciled on the back:

***Magdalena.***

At some point his crossed eyes were corrected, but dyslexia remained which means he had difficulty reading, dealing with flipping words or letters or possibly eye fatigue.

In Emmett, Michigan, Bernie---in the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade---completed his last year of formal education . He then found work on a farm owned by the Sullivan Family. While driving a tractor, he waved to his former classmates on the school bus traveling to the high school.

The Sullivans called him “Bennie.” He worked very hard for them. Mrs. Sullivan’s sister, Sister de Pazzi (Young), an Adrian Dominican, visited and she came right out and said she saw a

COLUMBA HALL, NOTRE DAME IND.

I Brother BERNARD ADAM KLIM, CSC.

THE YEAR OF MY 44 $\frac{1}{2}$  YEARS BREATHING  
EATING, WORKING, SLEEPING AND NOT TO  
FORGET BATH ROOM.

8:30 AM

MY PARENTS CAME FROM GROSZKO  
POLAND. MY BIRTH IN MARCH 29, 1930.

I WAS WITH CROSSED EYES AND SAW  
EVERYTHING DOUBLE.

MY FATHER BEING A DRUNK AND ABUSED  
MY MOTHER WHO DIED WHEN I WAS IN  
HOLDING ARMS.

THE STATE TOOK MY BROTHER MICHAEL  
AND ME AWAY FROM MY PARENTS.

THOUGH MY AUNT WANTED TO KEEP

religious vocation in him. He had a girl friend named Judy. 3.

Later Bennie found work in an automobile plant and there he acquired many mechanical skills by keen observation.

In the archives there is a letter of recommendation to the Brothers from his pastor, Fr. John Farrell, describing him as quiet, energetic and very responsible. The United States was beginning to enter the Korean Conflict. Bernie enlisted in the army. Before he was called up, he left for Sacred Heart Juniorate as a Brother candidate. When a letter from the army arrived, Br. Francis Borgia saw to his deferment.

At 21, Bernie entered the Novitiate at Rolling Prairie, Indiana, and a year later pronounced his First Vows. He was assigned to Columba Hall to learn mechanical skills from Br. Flavian Lambert. Once ready to go on mission, Bernie's skills were utilized as director of maintenance and gardening for a year at Sacred Heart Juniorate at Watertown, Wisconsin and then for 6 years at Gilmour Academy.

Now almost 30 years of age in 1959, Br. Bernard strongly requested to be assigned to India or Brazil. He was sent to....Rome, Italy where he served 15 years at the Generalate. Next, he served eleven

years directing maintenance at Notre Dame International School. 4.

There was no emotional scar tissue by not going to the foreign missions, because after making his initial vows, Bernard told his Novice Master, "What little I have, I give it all!"

Men like Bernie are invaluable. They accomplish every kind of repair----plumbing, automobile maintenance, woodworking, plus cooking, farming and lawn care. By their skills, they saved the Community many millions of dollars (or **lira** in Rome).

In 1969, Fr. William Hogan, superior of the house in Rome, mentioned to Bernie, "Some people weld together any junk and it often comes out well. Why don't you try it?" Bernie yanked some metal from the junk box and gave it a try. He probably started by bending and welding steel rods together. (See attached sheets)

As more sculptures were created, additional movement and emotional meaning are evident. There are sketches he made to plan sculptures of human figures. However, the sketched figures of ovals made it challenging to translate to flat, rough pieces of steel.

Bernard visited Roman flea markets where he collected old

tools and metal scrap.

5.

One of the former Headmasters of the International School told me about a Scrap Yard behind the railroad station where Bernie would go to find metal junk. One sculpture has the head of a hammer and another uses a hatchet blade almost representing a man with a hat.

The two, most fundamental methods of creating sculpture are: the **Additive** method. Starting with a piece of metal and welding more to it represents adding on. I imagine Bernie had more than one sculpture going at a time, waiting until he found the right piece to add.

By contrast, Ivan Mestrovic's great sculptures at Notre Dame are all created by carving or chiseling away material, the **Subtractive** method.

The Galleria San Marco in Rome mounted a one-man exhibition of Bernard's sculptures in 1974. For professional exhibitions, a catalogue may be available free for patrons. The booklet often describes the sculptor's education and any previous awards and prices for each piece.

Usually there's a very esoteric, artist's statement in the beginning giving the reader insight into the artist's purpose or inspiration. I suspect someone helped Bernie because his personal statement is very

straight forward. The booklet is printed in both Italian and English. 6.

Representational subjects are always more pleasing to the majority of people since they appear to be what they represent. I'll bet some sales occurred during the time of the exhibition.

After more than 20 years as a Brother of Holy Cross, Bernard began to realize something important was lacking in his spiritual life. He began studying other religious traditions, and even spent some time with cloistered monks. In 1973, he heard of a Buddhist master giving a retreat in Rome, and he signed up for a "sesshin."

On the third day, he had a deep experience. In his own words:

*"I did not know it then, but that experience would lead me to a Buddhist Monastery. After additional sesshins I asked the Jesuit retreat master, Father Enom-i-ya Lassalle, if I could spend a year in Japan. He told me it would be better for me to do this in America. I wrote to three monasteries inquiring about their programs, and it took three years to get the information and be given a sabbatical in late 1985 by my Holy Cross Community."* At that time he was 55 years old.

His sabbatical took him to a monastery at Mount Baldy,

California, also one in the Catskill Mountains of New York and  
in Dietfurt, Germany.

7.

Returning to Rome, he became an interpreter for Italians to understand the Zen *sesshin*. The color of the robe signifies the country of origin. Chinese monks wear bright yellow; Southeast Asians wear saffron, and in Japan, brown or gray. Going back thousands of years, the dyes are a complex mixture of plants, roots and bark.

***A few concepts about Buddhism:*** *(Blue sheet attached)*

On one occasion his teacher became ill, and Bernie stepped in to conduct the retreat. By this time he had become a Zen Master. He would continue Zen meditation until his final days. His favorite sayings capture his wisdom of Christian Zen: “Wisdom comes through silence.” and “Be aware of every word and every thought.”

Creating sculpture and meditation bestowed interior peace. A crucifix entitled “Submission” hangs in Schubert Villa right inside the entrance, which is characteristic of Brother’s “style.” On the crosier of Pope John Paul II, the crucified appears to be one of Br. Bernard’s designs.



Now and then, he explored the addition of other natural materials such as round rocks for wagon wheels or gnarled wood on which figures are sitting.

From the beginning of his work, I was told that he admitted it shows the progression of his spiritual journey. A late piece shows Male and Female together----under the umbrella of the greatness and everlasting love of God.

A large, magnificent sculpture hangs on the outside wall at the Generalate in Rome. Again, the figure of the crucified Jesus is in a position of total submission with the Holy Cross anchors in a creative and unique position.

In 1992, more than 30 years after his first request to go to the missions, Br. John Gleason assigned him to join the staffs at Holy Cross institutions in Uganda, East Africa. Bernie was 62, still vigorous, thoroughly prepared for planning and constructing buildings and numerous tasks.

Two years ago, Br. Richard Johnson submitted a CD

with hundreds of pictures of Br. Bernard's accomplishments in Uganda. Mud baked bricks are used for building every structure: dormitories, churches, classroom buildings, a Grotto, outdoor kitchen, wells for water and more. He worked to plan playing fields and brick seating. Nothing was below him to be with the native workers, digging in the mud or climbing ladders.

He became skilled in carving church furniture, and religious appointments. Bennie, as he sometimes identified himself, spent 21 years in Uganda. Sisters of the Holy Cross remember him vividly and how much he accomplished.

In 2013, Br. Bernard returned to the United States for medical tests and treatment. He never abandoned his Zen Meditation. He would create table decorations at Columba Hall using objects from nature: flowers, rocks, small stones, pieces of attractive wood reminiscent of the Orient.

His cancer meant continual appointments with his doctor and Br. Joe McTaggart often became his driver. Joe remembers that in the most frustrating traffic situations when he was ruffled and near cursing, Bernard would be very peaceful and reminded his driver that it was not at all worth becoming upset over.

Eventually, Bernard needed constant care and moved into Dujarie House. On one occasion, the nurse pushed open the door to his room and was astonished. Even though Bernard was seriously ill, he was sitting in the lotus position on the floor meditating.

Br. Joe McTaggart became a close friend and has been deeply inspired by his association with Br. Bernard as were the Brothers living at Columba Hall. When he was stronger, Bernie designed and created a Zen garden behind Columba Hall.

In brief, written, diary pages while struggling with cancer, he lists what he ate, when he felt exhausted and took naps, how his night's sleep was interrupted and even when he felt strong enough to work an hour in the garden. These pages day by day, cover three years of illness. Once a week he printed "Whiskey Thursday." I was totally puzzled until a Brother informed me about the Community Night each Thursday where the Brothers all gather and drinks are available.

Br. Bernard wanted to go home to Columba Hall to die. Br. Joe told me that Bennie asked him, "Joe, would you bring me a flower?"

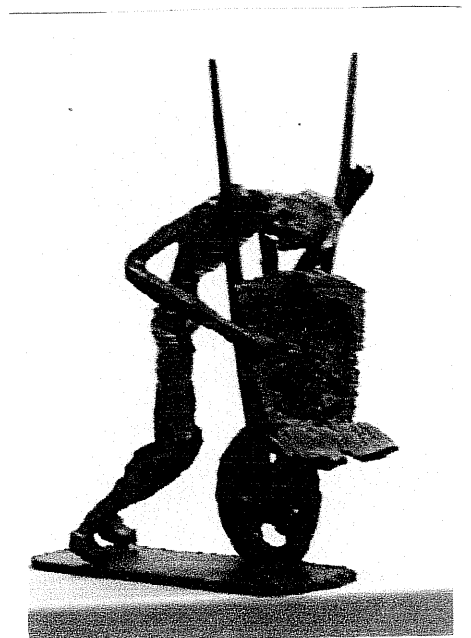
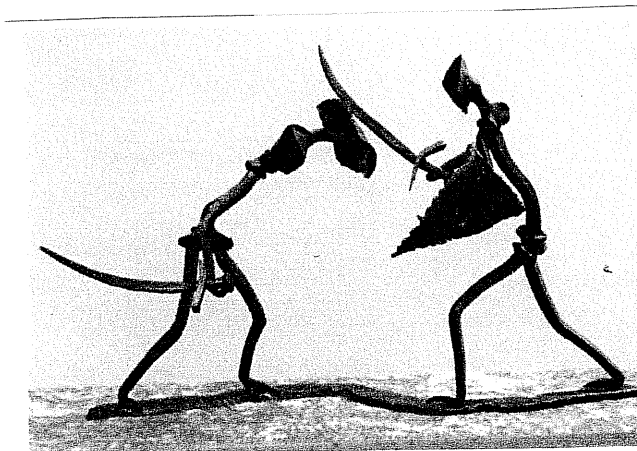
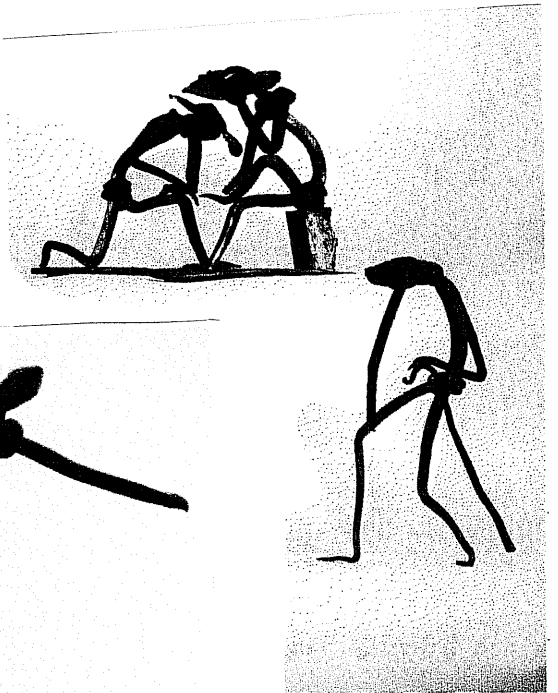
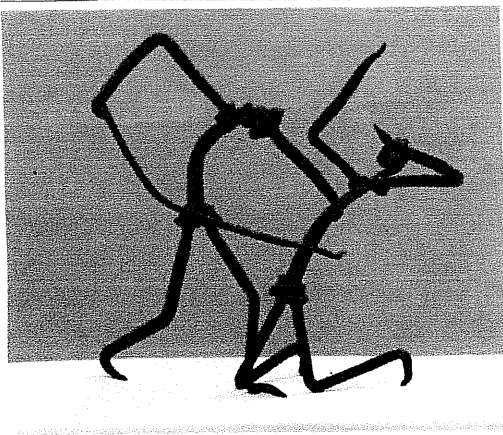
A Buddhist would see the essence of that flower in ways we cannot even dream of.

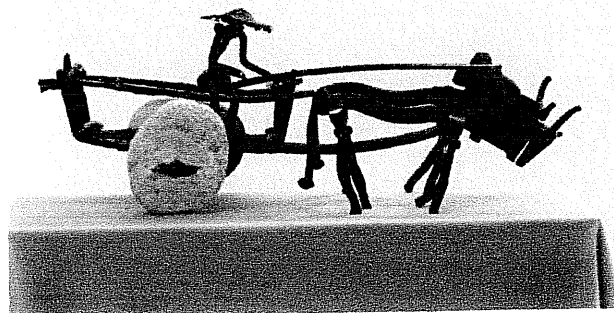
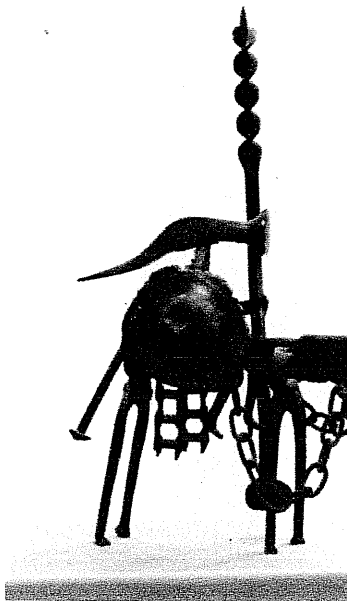
Thank-You.

Some preliminary sketches by Br. Bernard Klim as he worked out the movement of the human form.

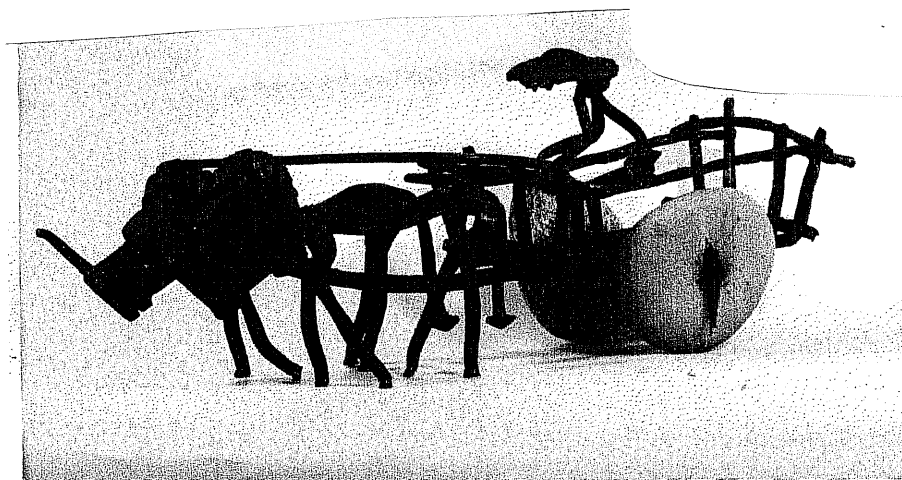


Variety of early sculptures, steel tubing bent and welded together. Most subjects are moving in masculine activity.

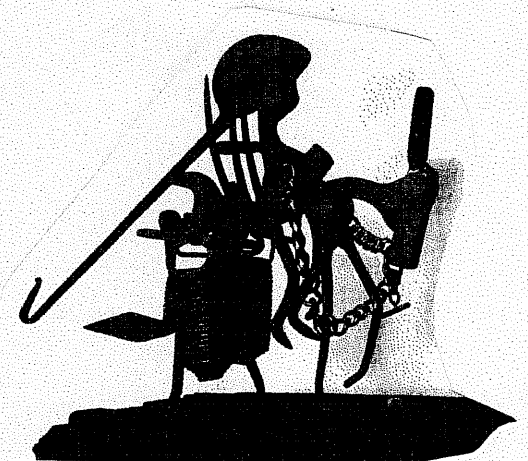
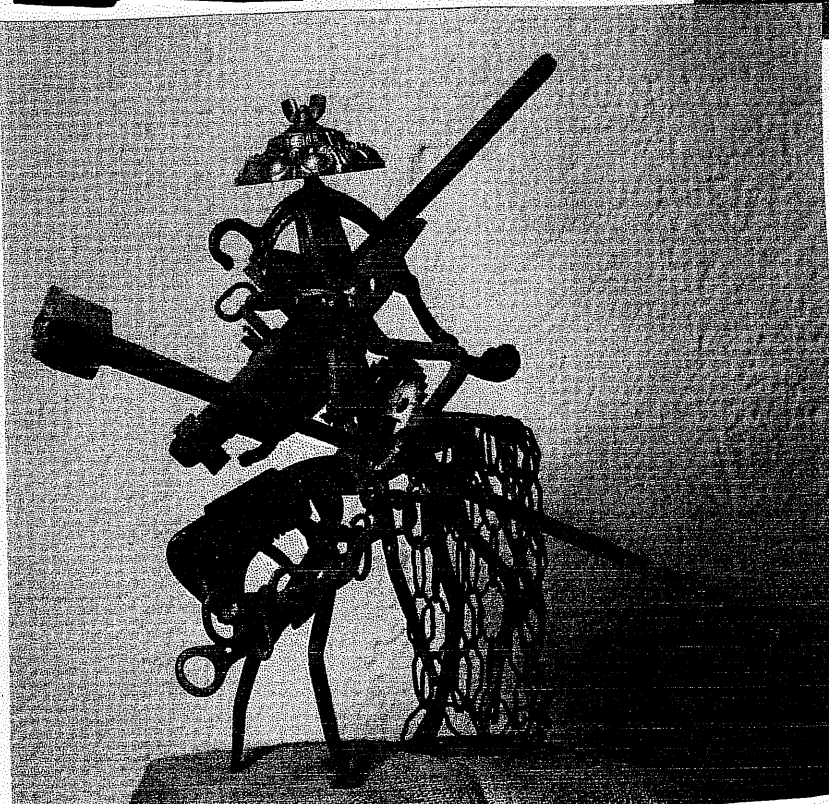
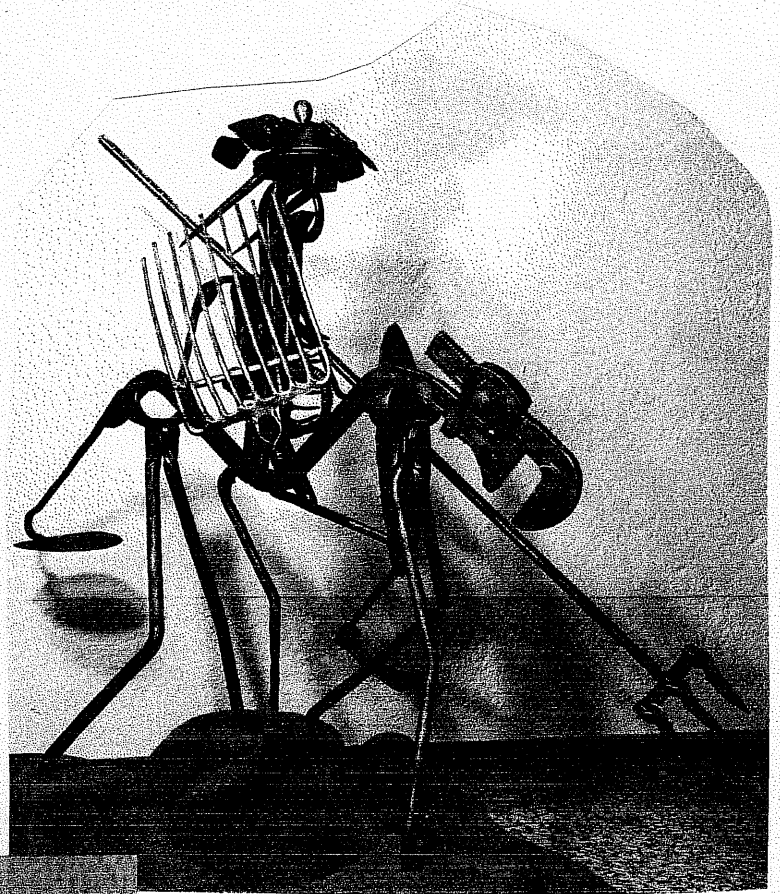
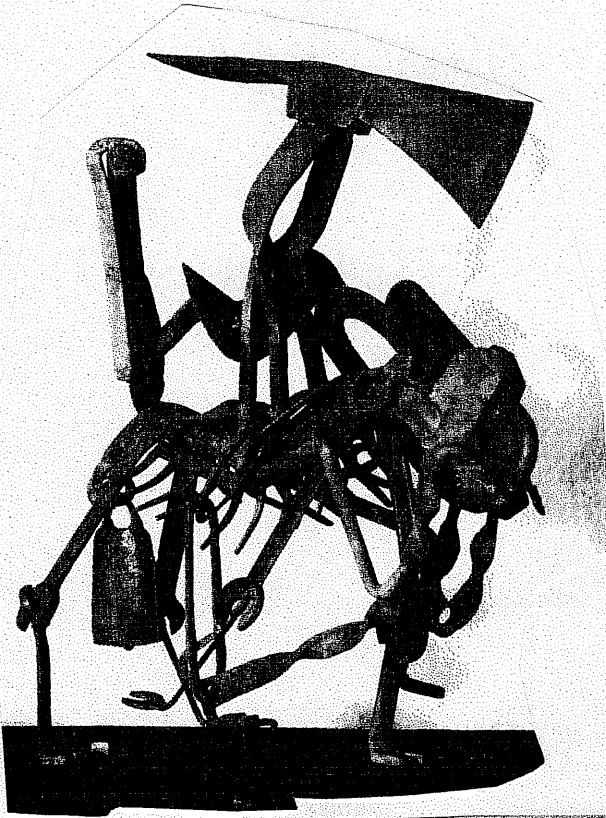




Br. Bernard Klim, CSC  
working in his shop  
in Rome, Italy.



Two sculptures created from a wide variety of metal parts. They could represent otherworldly creatures attacking our universe, abstract human figures riding strange animals or whatever can be imagined.



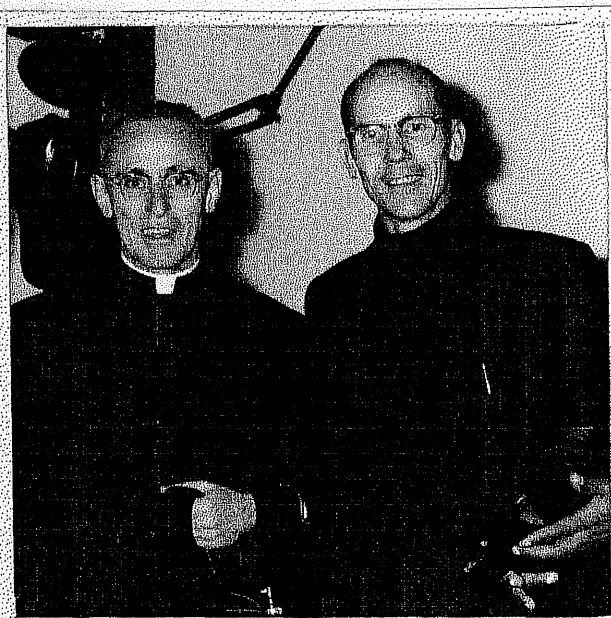
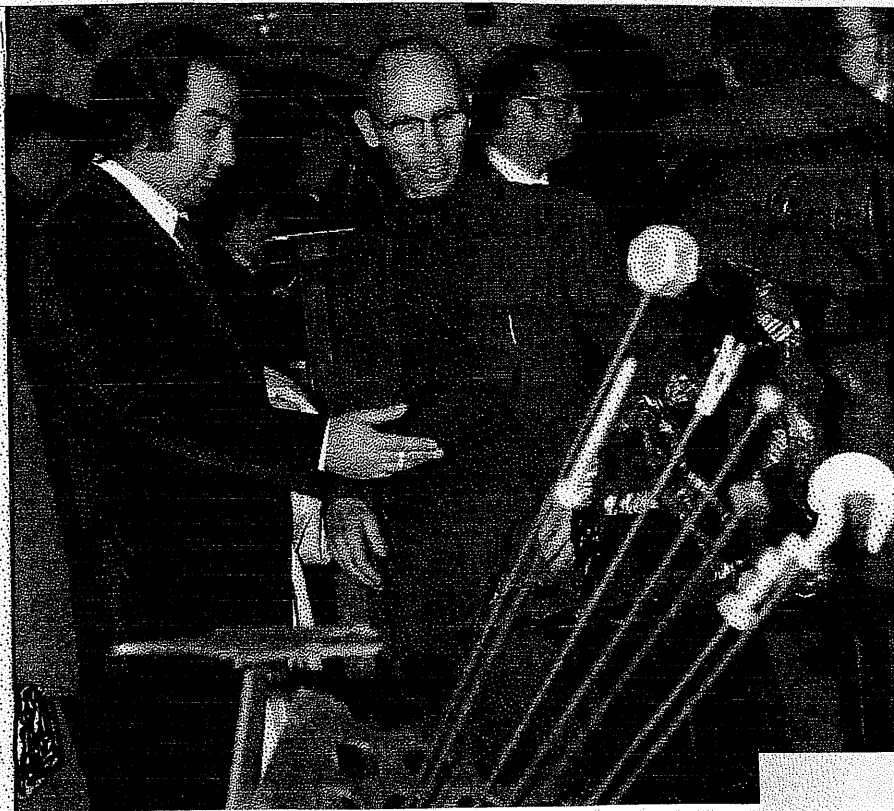


Brother Bernard Klim, CSC explaining an abstract sculpture to an Italian Man.

# KLIM SCULPTURE EXHIBIT

1974

GALLERIA  
SAN MARCO



Fr. Germain Lalonde, CSC, Superior General with Br. Bernard, CSC

# BUDDHISM

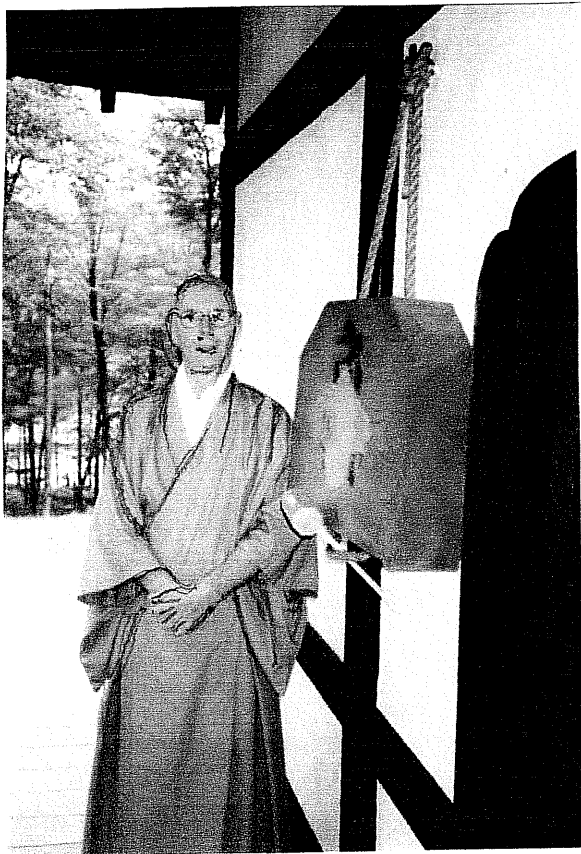
**BUDDHA = MAN, NOT GOD**

- **FOUNDED 2,600 YEARS AGO**
- **BY SIDDHARTHA GAUTAMA**
- **SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND  
HUMAN SUFFERING**
- **CONTROL OF BREATHING**
- **ENLIGHTENMENT THROUGH  
MEDITATION (ZEN)**

**RESPECTS ALL RELIGIONS**

- **MONK = STUDENT**
- **MASTER = SOMEONE WHO  
HAS BEEN GIVEN TITLE FROM  
ANOTHER MASTER (TEACHER)**

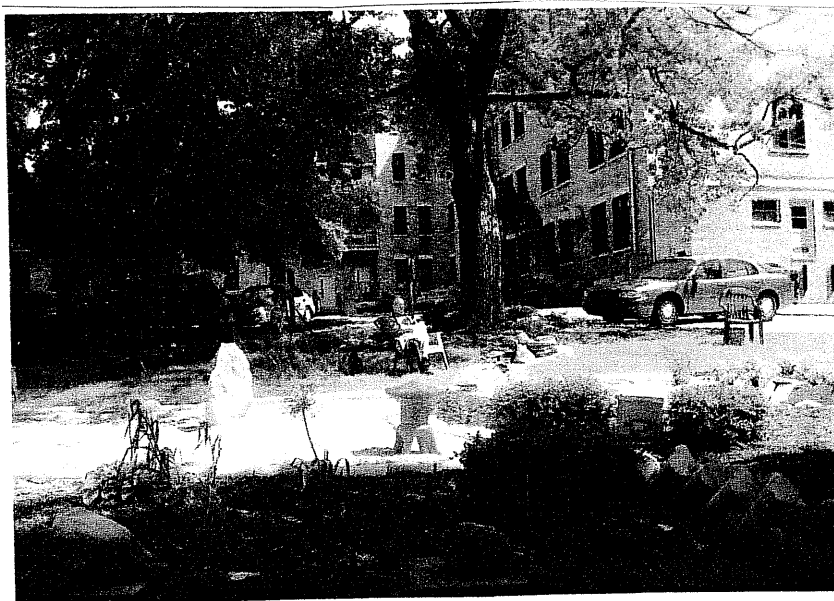
Br. Bernard, the Buddhist Master  
in the Catskill Mountains of New York



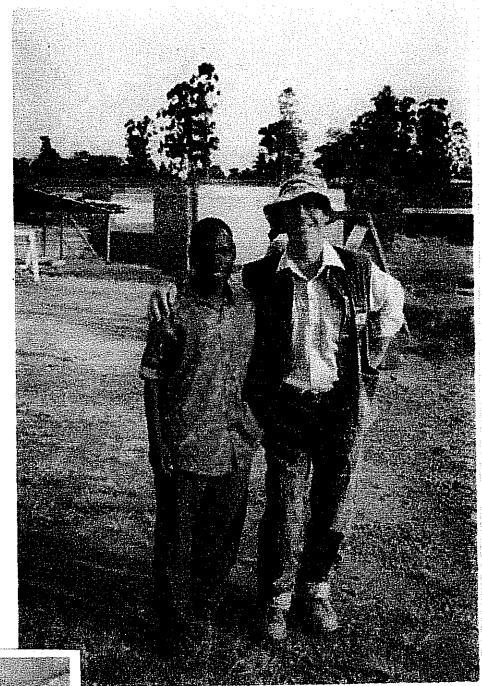
Bernard's Crucifix  
"Total Surrender"



The Zen Garden behind Columba Hall,  
Notre Dame, Indiana



Various photos of work in Uganda, East Africa. 2013 -1992 [21 years]

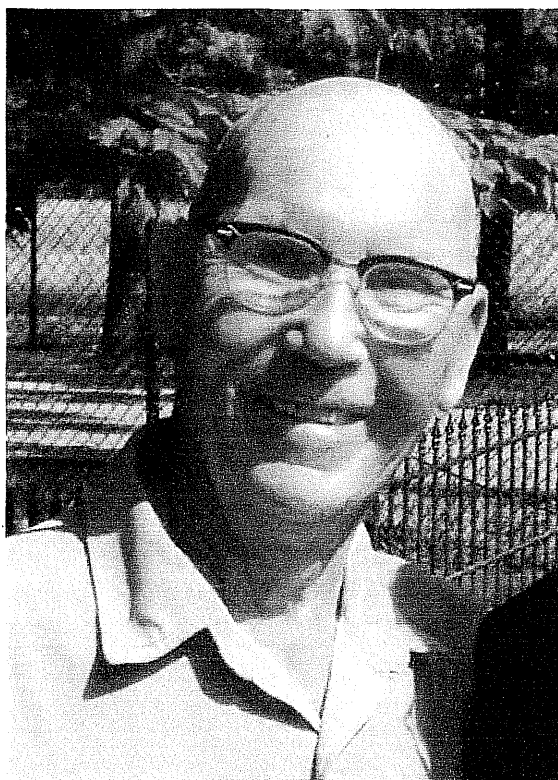


Stations of the Cross carved by Br. Bernard Klim, CSC



Generalate  
Rome 2015

Sculpture by Brother Bernard Klim, C.S.C.



## **Brother Bernard Adam Klim, C.S.C.**

*Born: March 29, 1930*

*1<sup>st</sup> Vows: February 2, 1952*

*Died: October 4, 2015*

**"YOUR HAPPINESS IN TIME AND IN ETERNITY  
DEPENDS UPON THE IMITATION  
OF JESUS CHRIST."**

*– Blessed Basil Moreau, C.S.C.*

