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# THE WITNESS

February 16, 1975  
Volume 58, Number 7

## Church and Press

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# Letters to the Editor

*The Witness* reserves the right to condense all letters.

Enclosed is \$100 which I hope you will use as you get the new *Witness* underway. Please give me credit for as many years subscription as you see fit.

I hope that now and then you will have an article that will build the personal faith of the individual and in that way provide fuel for action. You know me well enough to know that by this I do not mean piety. I mean putting the fact theologically that in helping your neighbor you find God and your own soul in these days.

I am very proud of you and the gutsy way in which you witnessed but I am going to be just as doggone gutsy as I have to be to hold this old Church together.

Please put me down as a regular subscriber and booster for the new *Witness*.—Ivol Curtis, Seattle

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Should the President have read my article in the December 8th issue of *The Witness* ("Gerald Ford's Eccentric Conscience") he would have been confused by an error which substituted the word "with" for the word "without" in the final sentence, thus reversing the meaning. The correct sentence is: "If Americans must hear the rhetoric of Presidential theology while suffering the political consequences of the pardon of Mr. Nixon, then President Ford is consigned to endure the political unpopularity of his decision without the advantage of conscience." Now read it, Mr. President, and weep.—William Stringfellow, Rhode Island

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Thanks for all you are doing to bring us *The Witness*. We need a strong journal of opinion about matters that are close to the heart of the Church and you are performing an important work in doing this.

I'd like to suggest an additional service — we need a news page. Not a page on "clerical changes" or on the routines of the official life of the Church, but rather an evaluation of things that are happening in the Church, around the world, anywhere, that must be thought about by Christians and responded to, possibly with an analysis as to why there must be thought and response, together with some theological comment.

I think this would be good insurance for *The Witness* as well as an important service. It would be good insurance because it would give readers an overview of emerging problems as well as a focused view on the matters you choose for analysis in each issue.—Jack Carter, Virginia

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I speak as a subscriber to the new *Witness*. I am a layman, who once made his living as a writer and industrial editor. I subscribed because (a) My involvement in the life of the Church has for a number of years awakened my somnolent Christian conscience, and *The Witness* is about social concerns. (b) I have a commitment, after serious study, to the opening of the priesthood to women, and *The Witness* stressed this topic in the Special Issue.

I'm not what is generally understood as a radical — although I've done my share of marching for racial equality and with grape strikers. I expect *The Witness* will take positions to the left of mine on many issues. But I want to read a Church-related serious magazine that reflects social concerns — just as I may learn from *The New Republic* even if I'm more of a *Harper's* person.—Nigel Renton, Berkeley

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How horrified and sad I am to see your mistake in the January 12, 1975, *Witness*! I was *not* suspended from all ministerial functions. I signed a covenant of suspension of my diaconal functions and wearing of clerical attire. My priestly functions were *not* suspended!—Katrina Swanson, Leawood, KS.

**Among the Many Who Have Helped** us as consultants in charting a course for *The Witness* are the following: J. C. Michael Allen, Jesse F. Anderson, Sr., Barry Bingham, Sr., Eugene Carson Blake, Richard N. Bolles, Myron B. Bloy, Jr., Alice Dieter, Ira Einhorn, Norman J. Faramelli, John C. Fletcher, Richard Fernandez, Judy Mathe Foley, Everett Francis, David A. Garcia, Richard E. Gary, John C. Goodbody, William B. Gray, Michael P. Hamilton, Suzanne R. Hiatt, Muhammad Kenyatta, Roy Larson, Werner Mark Linz, James Parks Morton, Charles L. Ritchie, Jr., Leonard M. Sive, William B. Spofford, Jr., Richard Taylor, Paul M. van Buren, Frederick B. Williams, Gibson Winter.

# THE WITNESS

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## Golden Treasure, Earthen Vessels

by Robert L. DeWitt

The August meeting of the House of Bishops in Chicago began with the assumption that the sessions would be closed to the press. After this assumption was challenged, the bishops voted to open the meeting. This incident discloses a crucial aspect of the life of the Church today.

"I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you . . .," said St. Paul. One of the functions of the Church is to be custodian and transmitter of the Christian heritage. That heritage is a golden treasure, and the Church is its custodian. This custodianship, however, involves risks. As in the past, it contributes to a mystique about the Church. Because of its divine mission, the Church as an institution, and those who serve it, often have been regarded as sacred, not of this world, and beyond criticism. Although the "acids of modernity" have significantly eroded this mystique, it still persists. At times, the Church resembles an elderly gentleman on whom ill-fortune has fallen. He still dresses in his worn, but once-fashionable attire, and is still accorded the deference of those he meets because they know he is accustomed to it, and still expects it. And this is the danger — that the mystique will obscure the substantial difference between the treasure and the vessel in which it is carried.

For, as St. Paul also said, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us." The Church, as an institution, is of this world — human, fallible, subject to error and to sin. It must, therefore, be held accountable. Accountable to whom? To God, of course. But also to the people of God and to the world God loves.

Because the Gospel is addressed to the world, and not to a private club of true believers, it is important that the secular press be privy to Church affairs, and be free to report and to criticize. It also is important to have an independent Church press, so that within the household of faith the truth can be freely perceived and freely shared.

In this issue of *The Witness* we welcome some comments by two journalists well qualified to speak on the relationship between the Church and the press.

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The Press Probes The Church

# The First and Fourth Estates

by Kenneth A. Briggs

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Most of us remember the Sunday School show-and-tell exercise that went like this: "See the church. See the steeple. Open the door and see all the people." The opening up part, with our intertwined fingers sticking out, was always the most fun.

Something like that actually happened to religious institutions in the 1960s. They became conspicuous in a way they had not been in previous decades. They became news, something to be curious about.

They were opened up to the sometimes harsh light of the media because they were no longer understood as insipid auxiliaries to the main business of American life. They were, instead, seen as contributors to a pattern of behavior in such volatile areas as race relations and the Vietnam War. Further, it became apparent that deep divisions existed in those churches and synagogues over their role in forming public morality.

Coupled with this tumult was debate over fundamental theological issues. Was Christianity dead? Was God dead? How did social action relate to worship? Liturgy to ethics? The visible church to the kingdom of God?

The growing social unrest was enough to stir the major religious institutions deeply. It was fascinating and newsworthy, to be sure. In addition, Roman Catholics were churning in the high seas of Vatican II. In short, religion burst forth on the media map as never before.

Another reason for the immense flood of interest was the ecumenical movement. Many regarded the spirit of accomodation as one of the decade's most positive signs.

The scandal that has so bitterly divided Europeans, then Americans, for centuries, was being addressed, thanks in great measure to the Catholic Church, and to a lesser extent to Protestants across denominational lines who had already moved in that direction. Pope John, Dr. Eugene Carson Blake and Archbishop Michael Ramsey became the representatives of what appeared to be a new order of hope for unity. The media could scarcely miss the significance of that.

For the religion writer, it was good for business. Editors with curious biases toward religion, ranging from apoplectic skittishness over controversy to acute hostility toward the whole enterprise, dropped their defenses under the press of hard news. The lid suddenly came off. Priests had quietly dropped out to get married for a long time, of course, but in the context of wider unrest in the Catholic Church, married priests became, in editorial eyes, something to do more than snicker about.

Happily, under those "favorable" conditions, religion reporting began to improve. Fewer newspapers were willing to relegate the subject to the part-time duties of a police reporter or be content to treat the field as a mere bulletin board for the local council of churches. Thanks to a dedicated, talented corps of religion specialists at several large newspapers, coverage gained a par with other types of reporting. That meant, among other things, not handling the ministerial association with undue reverence. It meant saying things about organizations which weren't always received warmly by those groups. Major strides toward an honest accounting had begun.

## Tough Sledding

Most religious bodies, of course, felt they were already dealing in total candor. Yet the "truth shall make you free" precept often had tough sledding. Richard Ostling, *Time* magazine's religion editor, has recorded the problem encountered in the Catholic Church, for example, in his book *Secrecy in the Church*. It details a struggle against obfuscation and deceit. The same could have been said of many leading institutions.

Largely because the attention being paid them was unflattering, as when protestors raised fury over a church's investment policy, religious groups were not thrilled by the new flurry of publicity. Like other institutions, they had their own self-image to protect, and, in fairness, had an obligation to proceed judiciously.

After all, religion had enjoyed a great deal of deference. Its activities had been deemed just innocuous

enough to leave alone except in the most passing manner. Until recently, in fact, religion's impact on our social life has been deemed almost totally unworthy of journalism. The major lines of interaction between religion and culture have, therefore, been neglected or poorly understood.

What happened to religion reporting in the 1960s was an attempt to do a better job recording a great factor in American social dynamics that had been sadly overlooked. Inevitably, the situation was exciting and nerve-racking for both reporters and religious establishments.

To make matters somewhat worse, the furor in religion arose just when religion was beginning to notice disturbing readings in its vital signs. Simply put, growth and income began to decline. Under pressures from the emerging controversies, the slump would continue at a fairly rapid clip.

Religious officials were sometimes caught in a tangle of perplexing issues: Should the establishment, in a return to "primitive" Christianity, divest itself of worldly possessions, as critics of its wealth often suggested? What actually did it mean to "die" as an institution in order to have new life?

As first conflict over race, then Vietnam became reflected in religious bodies, the media responded and religious officials often felt as if everything was coming apart. Those most sympathetic to the causes of justice and peace found themselves up against constituents who violently disagreed. Discharging their responsibilities to the angry faithful on both sides of an issue was extremely delicate. Media attention sometimes helped, but often it stirred more hostility. I cite but one example: The United Presbyterian Church's gift to Angela Davis. Sometimes, by not reporting an issue fully, the media were guilty of distortions and, as such, contributed further to the squabbles they were writing about.

### **Setting the Stage**

Moreover, the uproar generated by the religious wing of the overall cultural upheaval set the stage for a more enduring place for religion in the news. After the confrontation period was over, the media responded more vigorously, even gleefully, to the religious revival that was already underway, with its gurus and tamborines, Pentecostalism and fundamentalism. As a breath of fresh air on the grey face of the "ordinary" news, the new movements were fun; more than that, they signalled a genuine concern for the "soul" in the world-weary after-

math of the war and social agitation.

That curiosity has died down considerably as the "revival" has itself slackened. In media terms, it becomes harder for the religion writer to justify his or her existence. There are excellent reasons, of course, but in media thinking it remains to be seen if they will be judged sufficient (the main one being the obligation to report on what remains one of the most significant areas of American life). It becomes even more crucial, then, to ask what the period of acute media responsiveness to religious institutions told us about the institutions themselves.

For one thing, scrutiny of religious affairs revealed all the warts and foibles common to any human organization. The media made plain what loyal followers always knew: that the faithful fight with each other, nit-pick, procrastinate, let the high purposes of the Bible's calling collapse into pettiness and self-centeredness. The spotlight revealed flaws.

Though some preferred the veil of sanctimony to shield the public from such folly, the overall result was beneficial. First, it made the religious bodies more credible as human establishments. Second, in focusing on the real problems, the sometimes exaggerated myths about those institutions were challenged. So, for example, when anti-war protestors seized on the religious establishments as yielders of enormous clout, it allowed the truer picture to emerge — namely, that these institutions possessed far less power and wealth than the radicals preferred to believe.

We all learned more about the earthen vessels, therefore, and though it wasn't all pleasant, at least it permitted a more accurate portrait of formal religion to be drawn. And, to be sure, there were cracks in the foundations.

Religious groups had not been accustomed to having so much dirty linen washed or so many of their affairs analyzed. At first many of the responses were bitter. Church officials challenged the right of the public to know the Church's business. They were frequently reminded that since the public bestowed certain privileges on them, they were accountable. Besides, said the intrepid reporter, why should you fear openness when faith is presumably built upon it? Is there anything to hide?

### **Opening Doors**

Gradually the doors have opened. Religious groups

have become increasingly aware of the value of good public relations. It is no longer assumed that the press doesn't care or can be easily shooed away. In dealing with religion writers, religious leaders have often had to match institutional self images against the image that outsiders have of them. I have attended conventions for example, where much fanfare was given an issue that the media cared little about. I am not placing relative values on the institution's versus the outsider's view of priorities, but only wish to suggest that sometimes what the religious official thinks will be a hot item is ignored.

Exposure to the world has, therefore, evoked contrasting sets of feedback. On the one hand, it indicated how saleable religious news really was. On the other hand, it tended in many instances to show how little of the intended message was getting through. Of course, there will be different matters of importance to insiders and outsiders. The crunch comes when the religious household mistakes its reputation in the neighborhood.

Though initially many institutions were chagrined by some aspects of expanded coverage, most have responded in what I would regard as a basically healthy manner. The storms and changes that have buffeted the institutions have been induced to a considerable extent by a spirit of self-criticism.

Not only did the media take up interest. Religious adherents also raised a fuss. Knowing that their churches were in the throes of seismic tremors, they sought to identify the problems and to deal with them. They did not totally ignore war and racism at the highest institutional levels. Self study became the rule of the day. There were signs of a decaying establishment in almost every quarter but rarely did those in charge stand absolutely pat. (Though, of course, they did not respond with the boldness or aptness that many desired).

### **Restorative Powers**

The heightened awareness, promoted by the media with a generous hand from those inside religion, has been a sobering experiment to many. Religion has been openly identified as a hand-maiden of social ills and injustices. Some ran to stick their heads in the sand; others faced the facts. The divisions and frustration caused by a legacy of dubious theology and self-serving leadership were underscored. I mention the issue of women's rights in the Church as but one example. The religious groups were fallible, even crumbling, as it turned out. Defensiveness or denial by the hierarchy

availed not. The situation spoke loudly for itself.

At the same time the Church was found not to be without restorative powers. The prophetic tradition was re-awakened (with media help) and the core of the faith became more critical as the prospect of its loss through secularism seemed ever so possible.

Religion had lost its innocence, had been stripped of its protective shield and was the better for it. The central issue between the Church and the media was trust. It was painful to learn, first-hand, that officials could not always be trusted and, even more shockingly to the liberals among us, that the protestors could be terribly manipulative of our services.

Once the shock of the loss of innocence wore off, I think the institutions were better prepared to deal with the distressing realities. Formal religion is, to all intents and purposes, a minority shareholder on the American spirit. Through the turmoil, publicity and controversy, religion became somehow more aware of itself and began sorting out the truths from the pretensions. I think that circumstance bespeaks a more hopeful future than we might otherwise expect.

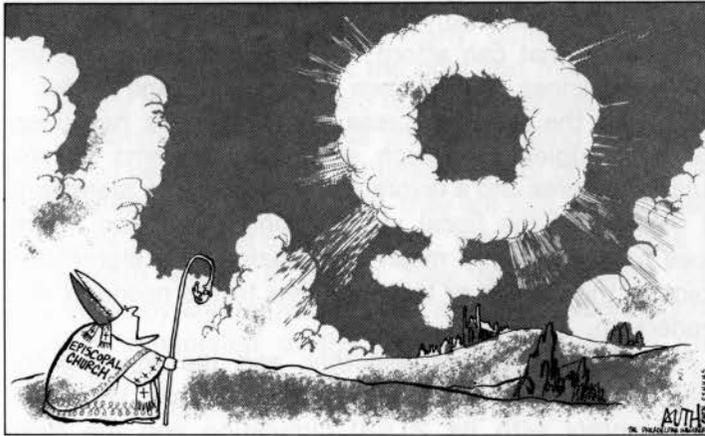
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**Kenneth A. Briggs:** Former religion writer, *Newsday*; now religion editor, *New York Times*.

# Cartoonists View the Church

"Chicago (RNS) — The 'irregular' ordination of 11 women deacons to the Episcopal priesthood in July was the top religion news story of 1974, according to the Religion Newswriters Association (RNA)."

In the immediate back-wash of the Philadelphia ordinations last July cartoons appeared in the secular press across the country. A half year later it is interesting to ask whether the cartoonists' discernment was accurate.

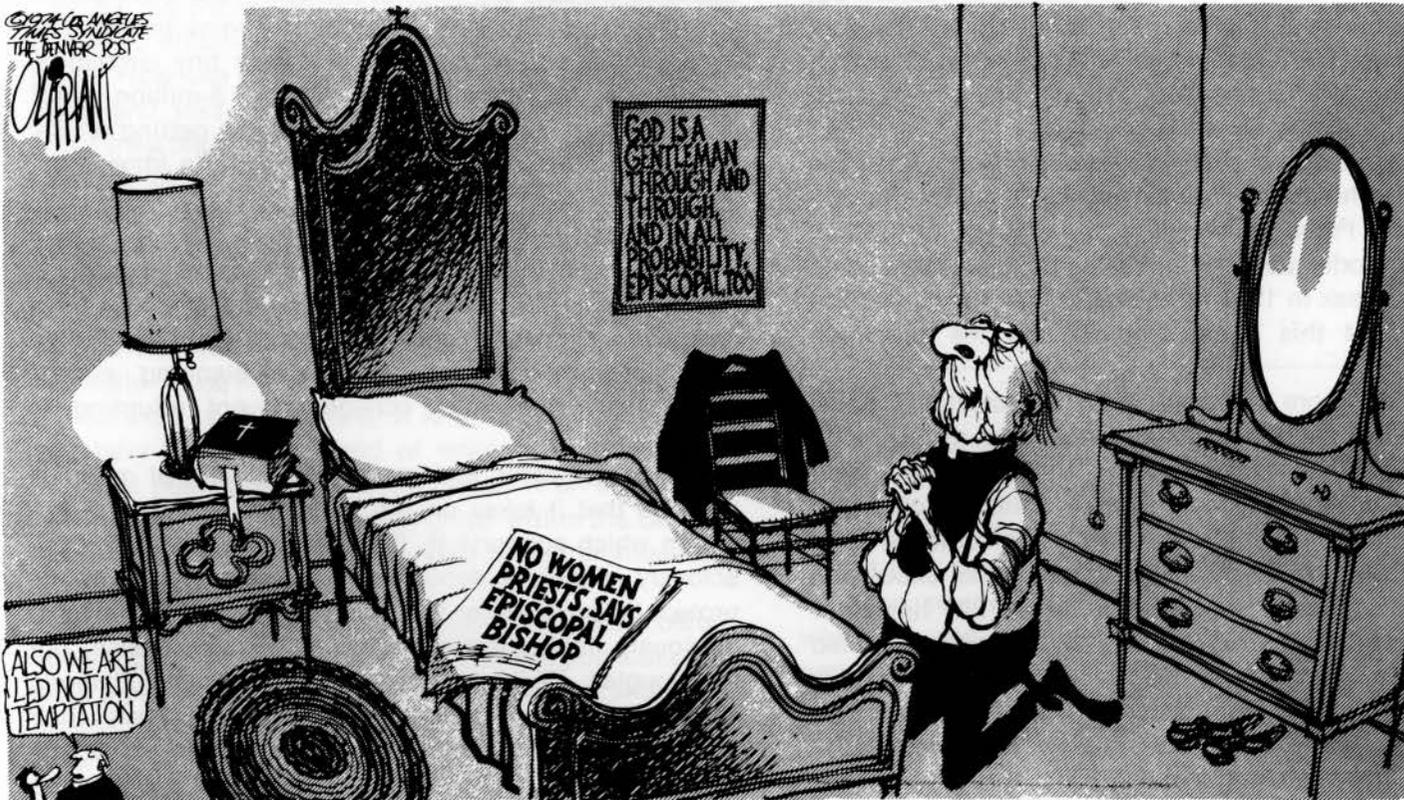


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**'I AM PLEASED TO REPORT THAT THY WILL IS BEING DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN!'**

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# The Religious Press: Perils and Promise

by Alfred P. Klausler

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The debris of folded magazines, secular and religious, is scattered across the publishing landscape. One of the latest casualties is *The PTA Magazine* which discontinued publication with its November 1974 issue, thus joining *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Look*, *Life*, *Colliers* and others. In its years of glory after World War II *The PTA Magazine* reached a peak circulation of 162,000 but its last issue went to only 52,007 subscribers. The post mortem contained the usual familiar facts: spiraling production costs, climbing postal rates, no more subsidies from the parent organization.

America's religious press is by no means immune from the troubles harassing secular publications. The Associated Church Press, representing the majority of Protestant and Orthodox denominational periodicals, reached an impressive peak in 1968 of 23,008,185 combined circulation; in 1974 this figure dropped into the 16-million range.

One of the more dramatic cases of circulation decline was *Together*, the official United Methodist magazine. In 1960 its circulation reached the impressive high of 925,000. But from that date on, despite editorial and promotional efforts and a church merger adding a large number of potential new subscribers, the circulation began a disastrous downward slide. The 1974 figure for total copies distributed under its new name, *United Methodists Today*, is 219,365.

Similar instances have occurred within other denominations, and editors and their boards have attempted a variety of measures, some of them successful, to combat the declines. Nor is the situation peculiar to Protestant-

ism. Roman Catholic periodicals have faced similar declines and frequently lost the circulation battle. *Jubilee* and *Ave Maria*, two prestigious periodicals, are gone, and *Commonweal*, a lay-edited weekly which reached a peak circulation of 49,000 after Vatican II, is now down to 24,769, and has become a bi-weekly.

Surveying the newspaper and magazine publishing field, Emory Cunningham, editor of the *Progressive Farmer*, recently commented that with the increase of postal rates plus the other inflationary problems, the written press eventually will be controlled by, and read by, an elite that can afford to pay exorbitant prices for good magazines, out-of-town newspapers, and books.

Perhaps the religious press in recent years has been too preoccupied with such statistical concerns as circulation figures and a favorable profit-and-loss statement at the end of the fiscal year. A high circulation figure does not necessarily mean a magazine is a significant voice of the Church or that it speaks to the needs of the readership.

*Harpers*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the *New Yorker* each hover around the 400,000 - 500,000 mark. *Washington Monthly* with its 20,620 circulation and the *New Republic* (92,923) are opinion molders. And what author would not prefer having a laudatory review in the *New York Review of Books* with a relatively tiny circulation rather than in *Woman's Day* with its 5-million plus? Fortunately, most of the religious press is getting off the circulation kick. And the editorial quality is improving.

## How much Control?

But there are still some perils which the religious press faces. Since 1958, according to a variety of polls, there has been a slippage in church attendance, not to mention church membership, and, even more alarming, reports signal that youth after college are not returning to church.

One of the perils facing the denominational religious press is that it takes on the coloration of the denomination which supports it, financially or otherwise. Consciously or not, a denominational periodical seeks to protect its protector or to advance the protector's cause. Obviously, this is not altogether evil by any means, but as Douglas Roche, editor of the *Western Catholic Reporter*, wrote: "Editors too often look over their shoulders at those in authority and we obscure the genius of the Christian message. The genius is that while Christianity is an institution, it is also a mysterious

presence of love throughout the world.”

The point is that the institutional church represents for many modern people one more corporate form which threatens individuality. By the very nature of its commitments, the Church is determined to survive. There are vast investments, endowments, pension funds, real estate holdings. These cannot be imperiled without bringing fiscal disaster upon thousands of individuals dependent upon sound corporate management.

The danger is that this concern becomes the dominant note in the thought and action of the church and it is this concern that is questioned by many, quite vigorously at times. No editor dare rock the boat too much.

Closely related to this peril is the ever-present problem of censorship. There seems to be a feeling that there ought to be a kind of discretionary control of editors. As responsible as editors may be, they are still held suspect by those who make church policy. While the old type of censorship within a church may have partially disappeared, by and large there is a newer and more subtle type of censorship of the denominational press: the subsidy may be reduced; staff members replaced by more sympathetic personnel; diminished circulation-promotion efforts.

Of all the perils facing the religious press today, the economic situation seems to overshadow all the other perils. How can any publisher battle the rising cost of paper and ink? No matter how many economies the editor may practice, there are only so many inches to be trimmed off a page and only so much ink to be sacrificed. The Postal Service will continue to increase its rates and it's a hopeless task for an editor to fight city hall.

### For the Record

Despite these — and many more — problems, the printed word is still needed. It is for the record. This is especially true in the world of religion. And here, the unofficial publication, addressed either to an ecumenical audience or to a special interest group within the Church, has a significant role to play. This is the promise and hope of the religious press.

Unfortunately, it's necessary to count the costs before launching an unofficial periodical. For any publication to show a profit or break even would be nothing short of a miracle. There must be commitment on the part of the editors and those supporting the publication. And an audience must be found. This audience may be small; but high circulations, after all, do not automatically spell

success in getting the message across. And, finally, anyone establishing such a publication should know that prophets are seldom loved despite the truth of their message.

While magazines may be dying in alarming numbers these days, there are also new magazines appearing which are finding an audience. Two recent examples are *New York* and *New Times* which were launched with relatively limited capital and managed to survive. Thus a new religious periodical stands a good chance for success if it keeps a wary eye on shenanigans in the establishment and makes an eloquent pitch for the truth. All this may antagonize some, but it will also bring comfort to those searching for a voice to express their discontent.

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Alfred P. Klausler: Former executive secretary, Associated Church Press; editor-at-large, *The Christian Century*.

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## Graffiti Found at St. John's University

Jesus said unto them: "Who do you say I am?"

And they replied: "You are the eschatological manifestation of the ground of our being, the kerygma in which we can find the ultimate meaning of our interpersonal relationships."

And Jesus said: "What?"

—*Mysterion*, January 1975

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# Network Reports

## Boycott of Ford's Clemency Program Succeeds

It is clear to all concerned that President Ford's "earned re-entry" program has failed, and that over the past four months war resisters, deserters and concerned citizen's groups have carried out a successful boycott.

The earned re-entry program has come under severe criticism from many different sectors of the American public. Its punitive aspects, inequities, questionable constitutionality and lack of any considerations for principled objection to the Indochina war has compelled many people and organizations who were originally cooperating with the Clemency Board to join the boycott.

Immediately following Ford's proclamation on Sept. 16, 1974, an International Conference of Exiled American Resisters was held in Toronto. One week following Ford's announcement, the Toronto conference called for:

- a boycott of the earned re-entry program;
- an end to American aid to the Thieu and Lon Nol regimes;
- implementation of the Paris Agreements;
- rejection of the concept of punitive repatriation;
- an end to support for the dictatorial regime in Chile;
- a single type discharge for all veterans;
- full pardons for all who have served prison terms for refusing military service in Inochina; and
- full benefits for all war veterans.

For more information, write: National Council for Universal and Unconditional Amnesty (NCUUA), 339 Lafayette St., New York, N.Y. 10012.

## Ordained Women Approved For EDS Faculty

After more than six months of work, the search committee of Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, MA., consisting of four faculty members and four students plus a co-dean, responded to the Board of Trustees' decision to move toward a faculty appointment of an

ordained woman. At the January 23 Trustees' meeting it was reported that the Search Committee, after visits of candidates and open hearings and after an overwhelming endorsement by the community of EDS, had reported its findings.

The faculty had previously met and considered and recommended to the Board of Trustees the invitation of appointment of the Rev. Suzanne Hiatt for the current half year and, beginning July 1, 1975, the appointment of the Rev. Carter Heyward together with Ms. Hiatt on a shared (half-time each) basis for the next two and a half years — each as assistant professor in her field. Such an appointment automatically carries the responsibility for officiating at eucharistic worship in the chapel on a rotating basis with other faculty members.

The academic and other pertinent qualifications of the recommended candidates were reviewed in detail in the Trustees' session which devoted itself virtually exclusively to this question. The Board of Trustees approved the recommendation by a vote of 8 to 5. Members of the Board made clear their intention to stand with the majority vote on this matter.

## Bishop Spears Rejects Standing Committee Advice

Robert L. Spears, Jr., Bishop of the Diocese of Rochester, rejected on January 17 the advice of his Standing Committee which said "that the irregularity in the ordination of Merrill Bittner can and should be corrected at the earliest possible opportunity." The Bishop said, "I am convinced that a harmful backlash of severe proportions would have been created by regularizing now."

Early in January, after reviewing a 24-page report by four theologians, the Standing Committee declared by a vote of 7 to 1 that Merrill Bittner's ordination in Philadelphia on July 29, 1974, was valid, but irregular.

In a second resolution, by a vote of 6 to 2 the committee advised that Merrill Bittner's priesthood be regularized by the Bishop at the earliest opportunity.

The theologians were: Albert T. Mollegen, retired professor of New Testament and Christian ethics at Virginia Theological Seminary; Richard A. Norris, Jr., professor of dogmatic theology at General Theological Seminary in New York; Eugene R. Fairweather, professor of divinity at the University of Toronto; and James E. Griffiss, Jr., professor of systematic theology at Nashotah House in Wisconsin.

Bishop Spears gave two reasons for delaying:

“First, there is a substantial body of informed opinion in the Episcopal Church that no bishop or diocese acting unilaterally can correct the irregularity of the Philadelphia ordinations until the General Convention has stated its position in some formal manner. There is no uniformity of opinion as to what the General Convention’s action should be: canonical change, constitutional change or simply passage of a resolution embodying its position. I state now that I will regard any indication by the next General Convention of its acceptance of the principle of ordaining women as priests as sufficient to permit me as the Diocesan Bishop acting in concert with the Standing Committee to regularize the priestly status of Merrill Bittner.

“Secondly, I am convinced that if I were to act now to regularize the status of one of the persons ordained in Philadelphia it would damage seriously the chance of General Convention adopting the principle of ordaining women as priests when it meets next year.”

Spears intends his delay “to contribute to an orderly process of changing the church’s present opinion about ordaining women as priests.”

He said: “I will be attentive for the response to this action of mine, particularly from church people who plead for more time to help church people to adjust, and trust that such pleas do not turn out to be simply another excuse for resistance and delay.”

### **Merrill Bittner Responds To Bishops Spears**

In the meeting of diocesan clergy where Bishop Spears read his statement, the Rev. Merrill Bittner responded: “My brothers and sisters, for we are brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, sometimes in spite of ourselves:

“This is not an easy time for me. I hope you’ll bear with me for a few moments, for I need to stand before you alone right now to share a part of myself with you.

“There are many of you that I have never had a chance to talk with, and I’m sorry for that. For many of you I am a stranger, ‘that woman’ who seems to have no respect for the church and the procedures by which it functions. I do not intend to plead a defense of my actions at this moment in time. Rather, I would like to affirm a part of who I am — for you to accept as you will.

“I love this church — and I have been and continue to be willing to give my life to its ministry — to the healing

of brokenness, to the spreading of the good news of new life, to a world so desperately in need of wholeness and a vision of hope.

“I, like you, have been called to this curious vocation of ordained ministry within the body of Christ. I, like you, have passed through moments in my life when I have wished it were not so — for the demands of servanthood are great, and so often we do not feel equal or nearly adequate to the task before us. But I, like you, nevertheless came to that time in my life when I stood before God and said, ‘Here I am, send me.’

“The journey has not been easy since that time — and yet it has been and continues to be the greatest joy of my young life.

“In spite of what I see in the Church which needs to be changed, in spite of all the injustice and indifference to human need that seems to be perpetuated by various structures and procedures of the Church, I remain convinced that its foundations embody the hope that moral decisions of a healing, caring nature can be made by those of its members who seek to be true to the faith.

“I rejoice in that hope, and I’m strengthened by the gifts along the way that give me strength to ‘keep on truckin.’ The recent decision of the Standing Committee of the Diocese of Rochester on the Feast of the Epiphany was and is one such gift. The struggle, the pain and the anguish, as well as the joy and the faithful witness that were part of their deliberations and decision, were for me signs of hope, flashes of light on the landscape, that can never be diminished or forgotten.

“And now it is January 17 and I have been told that the church is not yet ready to affirm women as priests in its midst. I do not harbor resentment over this decision — I have no inclination to assume judgment on such matters. Rather, I am sad, deeply sad, that matters of injustice can be accepted and tolerated in deference to procedure. In this case, the exclusion of women from areas of ministry in the church, regardless of the call they perceive or the qualifications they demonstrate, is accepted in the name of order and political expedience I think of the Pharisees, I remember the Gospel witness — and I weep.

“And yet, I am committed to turn my face to the light, and with the decision we have received today I rejoice in a new sense of vocation and ministry now more clearly defined.

“God willing, I shall continue to be a priest of the Church in your midst. I will not go away. What forms this

ministry is to take, I do not know. I do know that I am ready — a bit scared — but ready nevertheless to proclaim life in the midst of death — in all its guises. I will call you brother, even if you will not call me sister, and I will continue to pray that one day we will labor side by side in the work of the Lord. Amen. So be it."

### **Bittner's Attorney Urges Regularization**

While deliberating whether to advise Bishop Spears to regularize Merrill Bittner's ordination, the Standing Committee of the Diocese of Rochester received the following counsel from Emmelyn Logan-Baldwin, Esq., attorney for Ms. Bittner.

"The failure to regularize The Rev. Merrill Bittner would be an act of denial of the Christian faith itself. Since this issue has arisen, there has been a lot of talk about the 'timing' of the Philadelphia ordinations. There has been a lot of talk about whether the ordinations were 'politically' the best thing, and now there is consideration of whether it is 'politically' the 'right time' to regularize.

"Such talk is supreme irony for Christians. There is no 'politically' right time to obey the command of a moral imperative and do what is right; there is no postponement of the event. The Rev. Merrill Bittner is a priest and the command for all Christians is that they affirm that priesthood.

"This religion grew out of God sending a son in most unexpected fashion in an era of acute political turmoil, both within the Roman world and within the religious world of Judaism. From many points of view, and from the viewpoint of those in established Judaism, all Jesus managed to do was to create trouble by his teaching of

immediate obedience to moral imperatives notwithstanding the conventions or forms of the 'church.'

"In the last analysis, this diocese does not have the 'luxury' of time in merely urging the 1976 General Convention to take appropriate steps to regularize the Philadelphia ordinations. The mandate of the Christian faith is to do so now."

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