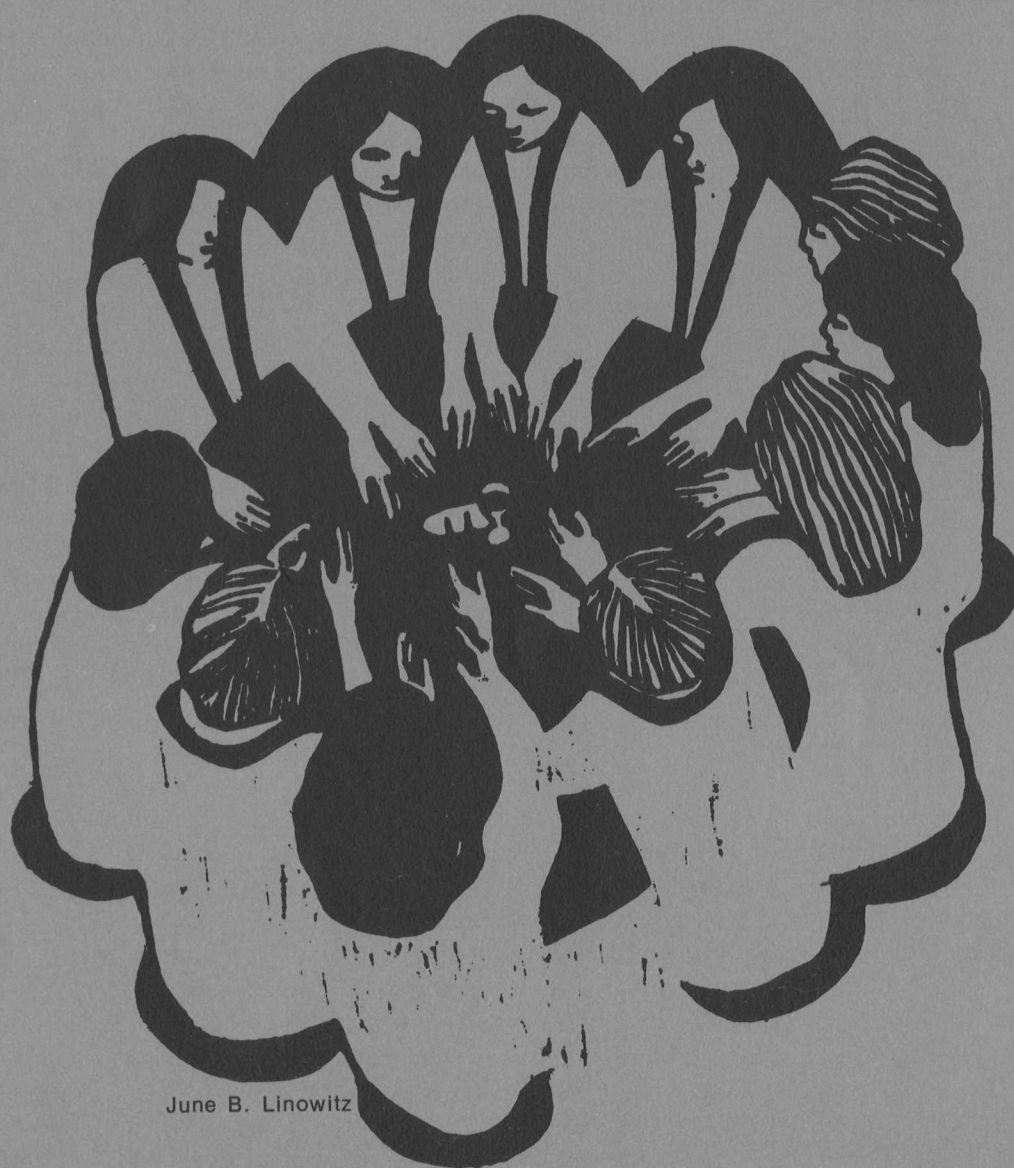


THE WITNESS

September, 1975



June B. Linowitz

The Women Priests One Year Later

THE WITNESS

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A Message From A 'Troubler Of Israel'

by Suzanne R. Hiatt

The first ordination of women to the priesthood in the Anglican Communion in the western hemisphere took place on July 29 one year ago. This event was heralded by the Religion Newswriters Association as the top religious news story of the year. Even more significantly, the events of subsequent months prove it to have been an event that touched the nerve of institutional injustice in and out of the Church.

Because this subject is so pertinent to the social mission of *The Witness* we have devoted this issue to a comprehensive review which we hope will be informative and interesting to our readers.

We welcome, as guest editor for this issue, the Rev. Suzanne Hiatt who serves on the faculty of the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge.

—Robert L. DeWitt, Editor

A year has passed. The women priests have not gone away, in fact we continue to receive more invitations to function as priests than we can accept. As we go into more parishes we see how needed is the ministry of women priests and long for some brave bishops to increase our number soon.

However, our opportunities to explain why we did what we did remain limited. I am grateful to *The Witness* for this opportunity "to defend the faith that is in me." Let me begin by saying that I will not deal with the pros and cons of whether women should or can be ordained. That question has been studied since 1919 in the Anglican Communion and no study has ever resulted in a negative answer. Since the Anglican Consultative Council of 1971, the question has not been so much whether, as when and how. Women priests have, in fact, been serving in Hong Kong since 1971. The Anglican Church of Canada will probably begin ordaining women priests early next year. Even the Church of England has said this summer, "Yes, Lord, but not yet — not here — not now."

The more pressing question is why 11 deacons and three bishops felt that the matter was so urgent they must proceed in the summer of 1974. The matter had been debated at two General Conventions, in 1970 and again in 1973. We and many others had worked hard to educate people and explain our call, only to have the question defeated twice on a vote by orders, despite the majority of deputies voting for it. This same voting procedure had delayed for 25 years the seating of women as convention deputies. We

were convinced that the same procedure would defeat women's ordination again in 1976 and that the minority who oppose it can and will subject it to endless parliamentary delays.

In addition, each of us had taken her own application for priestly ordination as far as she could in her own diocese. When my vestry requested the standing committee to approve my ordination they were told national canons forbade the ordination of women. The vestry asked the chancellor's opinion on canonical impediments. He ruled that he could find no canon forbidding the ordination of women, but it was his opinion that the General Convention had taken the matter under consideration, and therefore, the standing committee should not act.

As to events leading up to July 29, some of us had been talking with diocesan bishops about ordaining us since before the 1973 Convention. We felt, and still feel, that ordination decisions properly belong in the dioceses and not with the General Convention. No General Convention ever debated the fitness of Blacks or Indians for priesthood — bishops simply started to ordain them. Many diocesan bishops share that view. Some are currently on record as saying they are willing to begin ordaining women if the 1976 Convention fails to approve it. But in the summer of 1974 no diocesan bishop was ready to proceed. Several had indicated their willingness to license women priests, but have since changed their minds.

Why then were we not more patient when a more regular way of being ordained within the next three years looked possible? As I mentioned, we had no hope for General Convention. We had had assurances from other bishops that they would proceed after the 1973 Convention. We also observed that the bishops who plan to proceed several years hence are close to retirement. Indeed, one has retired since he took that stand.

But most important the urgency of our vocations did not permit further delay. Some of us have felt called to priesthood for as long as sixty years. I graduated from seminary 11 years ago and despite 10 years of professional ministry as a laywoman and a deacon I could not shake the nagging certainty that I was called to priesthood. In the year since I was ordained priest I am more certain than ever that this is where God wants me to be.

As a seminary teacher I have seen the number of women seminarians double every year for the past four years. Today close to 20 percent of the students in

Episcopal seminaries are women. We now have nearly 150 women deacons in the Episcopal Church. What is to become of these women, most of whom have priestly vocations, if the church that has educated them continues to refuse to allow them to serve? Furthermore, the denial of priesthood on sexual grounds is a badge of the second-class citizenship of all women in the Church and hence a failure to preach the Gospel.

It is for these women and for the Church itself that I stay. I will insist that the Episcopal Church deal with me in accordance with its canons and theology, not its internal politics. That insistence is my ministry for now and I welcome and rejoice in it.

"I was told I was *precipitate*, that I ought to wait, that things might mend. But *when* or *how* they were to mend I was not told. Only general hopes and future expectations were held out to me."—*The Rev. Samuel Seabury, commenting on his reception by English bishops from whom he sought consecration as bishop of Connecticut, 1784.*

Notice To Our Readers

Beginning this month *The Witness* will become a monthly publication. We believe that we can serve you better as an advocate and interpreter of matters of Christian concern with more time to develop editorial material of importance to you. If you are already a subscriber, your subscription will be automatically extended so you will get the number of issues you are entitled to receive.



On Being Haunted By The Angel Of The Church At Sardis

by William Stringfellow



To the angel of the church at Sardis write: "These are the words of the One who holds the seven spirits of God, the seven stars: I know all your ways; that though you have a name for being alive, you are dead. Wake up, and put some strength into what is left, which must otherwise die! For I have not found any work of yours completed in the eyes of my God. So remember the teaching you received; observe it, and repent."

—Revelation 3.1-3a

This is a moment of remarkable uncertainty for the destiny of the Episcopal Church.

I do not suppose that the public existence of this church is threatened: there is sufficient accrued wealth to maintain the ecclesiastical fascade of the Episcopal Church in the United States indefinitely. The issue, instead, concerns the viability of this church as an institution. What is urgently and poignantly in question is whether this church is capable, in the foreseeable future, of being worthy of the commitment and participation of human beings. Having "a name for being alive," is the Episcopal Church consigned to death? The angel of the church at Sardis now haunts the Episcopal Church.

What has lately brought this situation into sharp focus is the contention about the ordination of women to the priesthood, and, most specifically, the actual ordination of 11 women to the priesthood.

There might readily have been some other precipitating issue and event — it could have been anything directly

implicating the recognition and acceptance of persons in full dignity. Thus, I think this church would be approximately where it today is even if the ordination matter had not become timely. That view is verified by the fact that other churches in America, of comparable vintage and status, simultaneously suffer profound crises.

Indeed, to place it in comprehensive reference, the Episcopal Church's tribulation is but an instance of the disintegration in the present day of the Constantinian Accommodation, which has shaped Christendom in the West since the Fourth Century, by which the Church, refuting Apostolic precedent, acquired a radical vested interest in the established order and became culpably identified with the institutional status quo in culture and society, in economics and politics, in warfare and imperialism, in racism and sexism. At last, as Kierkegaard anticipated more than a century ago, the comity of Constantine is collapsing, coincident with the disruption and retraction of Western domination of the world, and the churches privy to the Constantinian arrangement have been plunged into turmoil.

The signs of the fragmentation of Constantinianism in this day, in this country, are plentiful, not the least of them being the widespread revulsion against the "just war" sophistry which the church patronized for so long. The trouble in the Episcopal Church is an episode in this far greater drama. If anyone feels compelled to fix blame for the precarious position of the Episcopal Church now,

I beg them to spare both the women priests and the incumbent bishops. I suggest they blame Constantine.

Renewal and Recovery

In any case, the outcome for the new priests ordained on July 29, 1974, in Philadelphia is apt to determine whether the Episcopal Church is any longer capable of significant change for the sake of reclaiming an authentic life as a Church of Jesus Christ, as a Church having "a name of being alive." In this connection, I hope it will be recognized that the cause of the women who are priests and of those associated with them is not militant, not aggressive, not iconoclastic, not revolutionary. The cause is one of renewal, of recovery, of restoration, of reformation.

The controversy has reached a juncture which breaches degeneracy. The Episcopal Church is in a state of disfunction, or, if it can be said to be working as an institution, it is so only in a grossly inappropriate manner. Recall what has happened:

- At the so-called emergency meeting of the House of Bishops at O'Hare Airport last August, the Presiding Bishop stated, and it was then widely disseminated by the official, national press agency of the Church, that the bishops had "ruled" the Philadelphia ordinations "invalid" despite the truth that the House of Bishops lacks juridical or legislative competence to utter any such ruling.

- That misrepresentation — and defamation — left the new priests little alternative except to affirm their ordinations straightforwardly by exercising their priesthood respectively where invited by parishes or missions to do so.

- No canonical charges have been prosecuted against any of the Philadelphia priests and, in fact, there has been an elaborate strategy to avoid ecclesiastical trials of these women.

- Similarly, the Board of Inquiry convened to investigate charges against the ordaining bishops resorted to fantastic and convoluted exegesis of the heresy canon in order to evade their trials.

- Meanwhile, two rectors — William Wendt and Peter Beebe — who, with the support of their vestries and parishioners, invited women priests to preside at celebrations of the Eucharist have been tried and convicted in diocesan courts.

None of these events need have happened. There is no canonical impediment to the ordination of women in the

Episcopal Church. The various dioceses are free and able to ordain women as priests now. It is custom only which is challenged; the canon law or the Church constitution require no alteration, addition or amendment. The General Convention may legislate, but such is not a mandatory prerequisite for the ordination of women by dioceses disposed to ordain women to the priesthood.

By this same token, as well as according to ample and venerable precedent in the Anglican Communion, including the recognition accorded the irregular consecration of the first American bishop, what has been needed, in the aftermath of the ordinations in Philadelphia, is the recognition by the bishops and the standing committees directly concerned with each of the women ordained in Philadelphia as priests.

The Women Priests Exist

This has not occurred yet. The bishops with jurisdiction over the women priests have been reluctant to act "unilaterally." It is said to be preferable to await action of the General Convention for the plenary ordination of women and to thereafter — perhaps — somehow — deal with those already ordained. The argument sounds appealing, but it has been overwhelmed by history. The church could await the leisure of General Convention only so long as the ordination of women remained a hypothetical issue. Since July 29, 1974, the matter has not been hypothetical. There are, now, those women priests. The pretense cannot be maintained that they do not exist. It is pastorally elementary that they be confronted as persons. It is precisely on that point that the great reluctance to put any of the Philadelphia priests on trial has significance. Whatever their fate in any such proceedings — from recognition to deposition — at least they would be treated as persons and rendered accountable as such for their actions. As it has developed, however, they have had to endure the absurd humiliation of witnessing others, in the position of accessories after the fact of the Philadelphia ordinations, brought to trial, so that the quashing of proceedings against the principals represents a penultimate condescension.

Whatever else may be said to have transpired that famous day in Philadelphia, the indulgence in a protracted, general policy debate on the ordination of women was obviated. After that, the matter ceased to be hypothetical; it became embodied in human beings; then the issue could no longer be dealt with, responsibly, politically, legally, theologically or pastorally, except by confronting those women who have been ordained.

That this has yet to be done has explanation in (pardon the expression) the gentleman's agreement wrought in the House of Bishops — embellished though it be in a pseudo-theological rhetoric of "collegiality" — to restrain diocesan recognition of women already ordained and to stop new ordinations of women pending the uncertain result of the byzantine politics of the General Convention. I fear this means an appalling pastoral failure in the House of Bishops.

Can there be any reconciliation? Does the Episcopal Church retain a capacity for reconciliation? Reconciliation has no sentimental character. Reconciliation involves facing the truth and saying the truth, as hard as that may seem. Reconciliation does not mean political trading. The Book of Common Prayer cautions that reconciliation has preface in repentance and in restitution.

A sign of reconciliation, now, for the Episcopal Church would be the recognition of those ordained in Philadelphia in their various dioceses forthwith. A similar sign would be the ordination of women to the priesthood by those dioceses disposed to do so forthwith.

Perchance such signs would prompt the angel of the Church at Sardis to haunt some other place.

William Stringfellow: author, social critic, attorney and theologian.

Adapted from a commencement address given at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, June, 1975.

Letters And Comment

Re: July 29, 1974

We need you, Bishop; we believe it is God's will that women serve Him as priests. I believe you think so too . . . When the disciples were fishing and the Lord called them from the shore, they recognized him — "It is the Lord!" The disciples brought their little ship carefully to the shore. But Simon Peter, hearing it was the Lord, cast himself into the sea and swam directly to Jesus.

It is God's will that women bring their talents to the priesthood, we cannot wait to bring our "little ship" to Minneapolis. We need a bishop who will "cast himself into the sea" — to go directly, impulsively, to the Lord with no thought of earthly risk . . . I wish to High Heaven

I could do what instead I petition you to do.—*Layman to bishop, June, 1974*

This letter is to inform you that I have withdrawn my permission for you to function in any manner as a minister, or as a lay communicant to take part in any public gathering or meeting of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of _____. Your scandalous participation in a so-called ordination to the priesthood makes you persona non grata in this diocese.—*Diocesan bishop to woman priest, July, 1974*

Forgive us — bishops, Church, all — our sins and blindnesses. Help us to forgive yours. Let us support one another as we seek to become free in Christ. Thank you for helping us to come face to face with our Lord's burning love . . .—*Bishop to woman priest, August, 1974*

Having voted for the resolution in Chicago I find that I am in contradiction with myself, and I must recognize the fact that your orders, though highly irregular — are certainly valid. That I have been persuaded of by several of the papers and arguments which I have read. I would like you to accept my apology for voting the way I did in Chicago . . . —*Bishop to woman priest, November, 1974*

I pray for you often in concern for what you are bearing on behalf of us all.—*Diocesan bishop to woman priest, November, 1974*

I am mindful of the pain and pressure of your present circumstance. The ambiguity, the tentative not-yet-ness of it. The time of limbo with its peculiar quality, so different from either heaven or hell. Is *this* your vocation? For the time being, it would seem. And the time being as Auden said, is in many respects the hardest time of all.—*Bishop to women priests, December, 1974*

You are all fools — fools for Christ's sake. May his spirit continue to guide you.—*Telegram from priest to ordaining bishops, July, 1974*

. . . It seems to me that if [the women priests'] ordinations are not valid, then neither is mine. In my mind it follows that if they are not permitted to perform the sacerdotal functions, then I should not perform these same functions. I cannot imagine my ordination being

valid while theirs somehow misses the mark . . .

I wish to go on record as placing my ordination in the same category as those of the eleven women. Until such time as their position is validated, I will assume my ordination to be invalid and will act accordingly in terms of my sacerdotal functions as a priest.—*Priest to his bishop, October, 1974*

I still am not convinced that the ordinations were the best way of hastening the Church's action; however, in the aftermath, and especially in view of the House of Bishops' foolishness, I have come to be very grateful that you all did what you did.—*Male priest to woman priest, September, 1974*

I have been exhorted to remember that other issues facing the Church are more pressing and important: world hunger and racism and the arid secularism which is choking the life out of countless human souls and so on. I understand what they are saying, and I understand what they mean when they say that the ordination of women is an "in house" issue. But I disagree with their conclusion that therefore we can wait to deal with the issue. Common sense as well as biblical injunction highlight the incredibility of exhorting others to righteousness when there are questionable areas in the order of one's own house, especially when those areas are clearly contrary to the presuppositions on which one is addressing exhortations to others. Our theoretical ideals and our abstract wisdom may decree that more lofty issues ought to be central at any given time, but in the reality of finite, historical, human existence God is obeyed and faith *actually* alive only in the givenness of what actually lies before us.—*Seminary dean to clergy meeting, April, 1975*

There may be those who say — on this feast of SS. Mary and Martha of Bethany — that I have chosen "the better part" by not seeking ordination today. I know, however, that were it not for my sisters and their radical, shocking obedience to God's claim upon their lives . . . there would be few to hear me or to take seriously my own deep sense of having been called to priestly ordination.—*Woman deacon to her diocese, July 29, 1974*

You are absolutely out of your minds. Thanks to your meglomania many of us will never live long enough for the Church to admit us to the priesthood . . . You have

given reality to the fears that are rampant about women clergy. *Who* will hire you? Who will ever believe women have their heads on straight? I am appalled, shocked, disgusted, and dismayed.—*Woman deacon to women priests, July, 1974*

The eleven members of our diocese who attended your ordination to the priesthood have been moved beyond words by the wonder of that service. Personally, I feel if I never experience it again just for once I have seen the Church as she is supposed to be . . . We discovered many things at the service, including the fact that the 16th century English of the B.C.P. really isn't what needs renewal, but the Church itself.—*Woman deacon to woman priest, August, 1974*

The church hierarchy is bothered by you now, but it wasn't bothered at all last year at General Convention, when it voted for brutality to women, called its vote a fluke, and declared the subject closed for the next three years. Courage! The nation endorsed morality last week; perhaps our church may too.—*Laywoman to woman priest, August, 1974*

Women do *not* remain "peripheral", there are too many wonderful, beautiful things to do in our present world, but women like *you should* be ignored and *removed* from the Episcopal Church. You are *all egotists* and a *discredit* to our Church.—*Laywoman to woman priest, October, 1974*

I am writing for advice and perhaps a pep talk. I am a (college) senior and a daily communicating Episcopalian. I think I could be a good teaching priest. But I too was born with the crippling, congenital disease, womanhood. Given the situation now, is there hope of being a priest without it (womanhood) being the central fact and focus of one's ministry? Can a woman ever preach the Gospel without having to defend the legitimacy of the ordination and ministry of women?

. . . I don't think I have the courage to defend my credibility every Sunday morning. It seems crippling . . . I give thanks for your work. If it were not for you I do not think I would consider going to seminary. But now there are women priests, and I may follow.—*Laywoman to woman priest, June, 1975*

The Women Priests Review The Year

Merrill Bittner: I am presently working in a ministry to women in jail and prison, as a staff member of a group called The Women's Jail Project. It's an exciting ministry, providing a positive balance to the current struggle with the Episcopal hierarchy. Meanwhile, a community of Episcopalians have called me as their priest for the Episcopal Church in Exile. Beginning in the fall, we will come together once a month to celebrate the Eucharist, and to proclaim the hope of full ministry for all persons in the Church, lay and ordained. Since we have no home at this time in Episcopal parishes for such a celebration, we are accepting invitations from other communities to use their facilities. At present, invitations have been accepted from the Webster Baptist Church and the YWCA. Our first celebration will occur on September 21, 5 p.m., at Webster Baptist Church. Indeed, in Rochester we are alive and well, and living the hope for a new day.

Alla Bozarth-Campbell: Early this spring I read a paragraph in *The Living Church* (!) announcing the passage of a Special Unemployment Act granting federal unemployment compensation to clergy and members of religious orders. On Good Friday I walked into the local Employment Office and joined a long line of claimants. In a sense I am glad to have the opportunity to share the humiliation of this experience with others, just to be made strikingly aware of the great waste of human potential that is taking place . . . in church and in society. My schedule has been richly filled during most weeks in the past year with various activities in freelance ministry: teaching, preaching, healing. The hard fact remains that I am a disenfranchised priest. Because I am made by God a woman, my priesthood and personhood seem of no use to the institutional church. Still I praise

and thank God for these holy, if sometimes hard, gifts — of womanhood and of priesthood!

Alison Cheek: This past year has been one of rich and varied ministry. I have explored the nature of Christianity with media personnel, given talks and held discussions, preached, presided at eucharists, officiated at baptisms and marriages, counselled, made hospital visits, testified at two ecclesiastical trials, maintained a continuing ministry at Christ Church, Oberlin, Ohio, and a continuing association with St. Stephen's and the Incarnation, Washington, D.C. I have recently accepted appointments with these two churches as priest-associate. I have asked the standing committee of the Diocese of Virginia for recognition as a priest or for due process. They have declined to act on either count. I continue to define myself in the light of the Gospel and seek to be faithful to that Gospel as a priest of the church. I have continued with my private practice of psychotherapy: it is one of my ways of doing the Gospel.

Emily C. Hewitt: A thought about the law and the Gospel, from a priest entering Harvard Law School: In the past year I have witnessed at close range the spectacle of my church's dealing with a Gospel matter — the status of women ordained as priests — almost exclusively in procedural terms. Persons in positions of authority — diocesan bishops, standing committees, the House of Bishops — have used what they are terming "the law" as something behind which to hide themselves from what I (and many of them) take to be the clear



Susan Le Van

implication of our doctrine of Baptism. But why is it that it was the two lawyer-judges and not the three clerical judges in Washington's ecclesiastical court who found Bill Wendt not guilty? Perhaps the law is really more friendly to the Gospel than many of those in ecclesiastical authority would like to think.

Carter Heyward: In its own strange way, the year has been splendid! I have grieved over the slow, painful death of some Episcopal structures, as they have been unable to welcome new life within. And at the same time, I have been invigorated, encouraged, and excited by what is happening among people throughout the church. Thousands of people are asking questions about the faith and making corporate commitment to a *renewed* church. I am increasingly aware that both we as individuals and the Episcopal Church itself have been irreversibly changed, and that whether or not the institutional church is ever able to accept us as its priests, our vocations are cut out for us. We are called to be priests among the countless numbers of Episcopalians, and others, who want to worship God rather than ecclesiastical idols. Where we go from here, God only knows. But my faith has been strengthened this year, and I find myself delighted to journey on with sisters and brothers towards places that are yet unknown.

Suzanne Hiatt: In the past year I have seen many kinds of courage. There is the courage of bishops vilified by their "brothers" and friends of thirty and more years. Male clergy have risked jobs, careers, reputation and vocation itself in quietly courageous affirmation of their sisters' priesthood. Women deacons have affirmed their sister priests when it would have been simpler and far more advantageous to them to ignore or condemn us. Laypersons have doggedly continued in an institution that treats them with contempt, insisting on their own vocations as well as ours. As for the women priests, the hardest part of decisive action is awaiting the response. In a situation where the typical response is no response, we are growing daily in the art of waiting courageously.

Marie Moorefield: This year has been a time of struggle, decision, and transition. I completed my Clinical Pastoral Education program at Topeka State Hospital, and I have begun work as Chaplain of the United Methodist Home, a retirement home in Topeka. On June 8th I was officially accepted as a Probationary

Member of the Kansas East Conference of the United Methodist Church. I made this move after much thoughtful, prayerful consideration; I felt this to be the best direction for me to take in order to live out the full pastoral ministry to which I have been called and for which I have been trained.

(Ed. note. In June Marie's ten sister priests sent a letter to her Methodist bishop expressing their support for her and her ministry and their regret that the Episcopal Church had made her move necessary.)



Susan Le Van

Jeannette Piccard: Following a directive from the Presiding Bishop, my diocesan bishop inhibited me from functioning as a priest. He has a presentment asking for deposition and a petition not to act. I have had many opportunities to speak and preach in Roman Catholic, Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Unitarian Churches and Jewish synagogues. I also speak to secular groups, both male and female. In addition to radio and TV appearances, I spoke to over 10,000 people from September 1974 to June 1975. I have been appointed official chaplain of the Hennepin County Bicentennial, invited to give the invocation at meetings of the International Women's Year and be on the Board of Governors of the National Space Institute. The Episcopal Church still ignores me. I remain in limbo.

Betty Bone Schiess: The Diocese of Central New York seems to be suffering from ecclesiastical schizophrenia. A Committee of Inquiry, appointed by Bishop Cole in the fall of '74 found no grounds for presentment because no ordination took place on July 29. At the same time the

standing committee and the diocesan convention called for regularization of the July 29th ordinations and the commission on ministry and the standing committee gave me formal approval for the priesthood.

In December Grace Church, Syracuse, called me as priest-associate. The Bishop refused to recognize me as a priest and threatened that "processes beyond our control would be set in motion" were I to exercise my priesthood. Because of the anomalous situation this created, I resigned.

Concerned laypersons and clergy are working as best they can to clarify matters, expressly to test whether or not the diocesan bishop can refuse to enroll me as a priest solely because of the opinion of the House of Bishops. In the meantime I have decided to exercise my priesthood whenever and wherever called on to do so in order to avoid abandoning it.

Katrina Swanson: As I look back at my first year I am prompted to look at Christ's first year of adult ministry as told in the Gospel of Luke. He was full of the Holy Spirit (4:1) and led into the desert by the Spirit, tempted by the Devil, rejected at His home town. He taught and healed and preached and called the first disciples and answered many questions. He prayed.

As I try to follow Christ many of these seem to be part of my witness in this past year and probably for the rest of my earthly life.

I thank God for the support and prayers of many people during this tremendous year. God bless you!

(*Ed. note.* Comment to Katrina from her husband: "I think the ordination has been good for you. I don't know why exactly, a sort of validating of the real you.")

Nancy Wittig: This past year has demonstrated the necessity of July 29, 1974. While it is difficult to characterize my ministry this year, it has been full of the Good News. The year has been pregnant with feeling, responsibility and creativity. It has not been easy but then the birthing process is laborious.

The communities of the faithful around the country have provided the necessary strength and support for this birthing experience within me and within the Church.

I celebrate and give thanks for this the first anniversary of my priesthood.

(*Ed. note:* Nancy and Richard Wittig became the parents of Alexandra Constantine Wittig, born May 23, 1975.)

Four Organizations for Women in Ministry

In February of 1974, an Initiating Committee of the Episcopal Women's Caucus set out to reestablish networks of persons throughout the Church to deal with the ordination issue. 135 persons from 39 dioceses, 10 seminaries and 6 national church organizations gathered at the Dayton Conference in October from which emerged the **National Coalition for Women's Ordination to the Priesthood and Episcopacy**.

The Coalition is committed to seeking canonical change at the 1976 General Convention affirming the right of women to seek and accept ordination. The group believes constitutional change is unnecessary. The 20-member national board has met in Chicago and St. Louis and will meet again in Houston in October. Sixteen organizers are at work on the provincial level. The Rev. George Regas of the Diocese of Los Angeles serves as Chairperson with the Rev. Pat Merchant Park of Virginia as Co-chairperson.

WON (Women's Ordination Now) emerged first as a support group in Ohio when charges were brought against the Rev. Peter Beebe. In February, 1975, WON became a national organization affirming the priesthood of the women ordained in Philadelphia and supporting all those against whom charges were brought. WON seeks regularization at the diocesan level of the priestly status for the women ordained in Philadelphia and immediate ordination for those women deacons who are ready for ordination to the priesthood. Edna Pittenger of Cleveland, Ohio is chairperson of WON.

The Episcopal Women's Caucus is working to establish a National Resource-Relay Center. The purpose of the Center is to facilitate the flow of information and educational resources throughout the Church on the underlying issues of the role of women — lay and ordained — in the life of the Church. The long range goal of eliminating sexism in the Episcopal Church was adopted at the March, 1975 first Annual Meeting of the Caucus as an incorporated, tax exempt organization.

POW (Priests for the Ordination of Women) came into existence at a clergy association meeting in Chicago in May of 1974. The Rev. Lou Temme and the Rev. Warren Davis, Jr. of Pennsylvania are coordinating POW's efforts.

The spectrum of the approaches represented by these organizations is diverse. Commitment to the full acceptance of women in all aspects of church life is the underlying principle of unity.—*Nancy Schiebner*

Reflections on July 29, 1974

The Whole Church Was Watching

by Mary Hennessey

"Society can never think things out;
It has to see them acted out by actors,
Devoted actors at a sacrifice—
The ablest actors I can lay my hands on."

Thus does Robert Frost have God address Job in "A Masque of Reason". But it was actresses (no longer content with associating that word with play things), not actors; it was a Church and not Society at the Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia in July, 1974.

I think that for most of us there, female and male, black and white, there was a communal sense of solemn

ratification of the act and therefore the change being enacted. Here was not the thought but the reality of women priests.

Now, one year later, how would I assess the impact of those ordinations? As an outsider looking at their effects upon the Episcopal Church, I see them as far more important than I first believed. I know that the whole problem is supposed to be due process and licitness. I know that as that one bright moment became part of every day life there have been foolishnesses on all fronts; the issue is no longer immaculate. But I cannot believe that the divisions that are reported between clergy and their bishops, parishes and their priests, dioceses and seminaries are due solely to the problems of good order. The question of authority is part of the problem but to deal exclusively with this indicates to me how difficult it is for Christian Churches to change their conceptualization of female/male in relation to priestly power and function. That is why the act of July 29th becomes more important.

Generally, I do not find "main-line" Protestant women as intrigued by the implications of July 29th as Roman Catholic women. Some do not see why the women did not avoid all the fuss by simply joining another denomination in which ordination of women is already legitimized — in letter if not in spirit. They see what so many have overlooked: that seeking ordination as Episcopal priests was ultimately an act of fidelity to that church, not a rejection of it, a concern for its betterment rather than its destruction.

For many Roman Catholic women the concept of women priests has only recently emerged from the category of "thinking the unthinkable". While there have been small groups of women banded together to address the issue for over 50 years, it has only been seriously raised for the Church at large in the past two years. (Some reject it, not through adherence to the past but because they feel that at this time, when the Roman Church is trying, under the influence of Vatican II, to re-emphasize the priesthood of all the baptized, it would again place undue importance on clerical ordination.) At any rate, I believe the quantum leap in the frequency with which the issue now arises is due more to the July ordination than to any other factor. One could point to the International Women's Year, ERA and the Women's Movement generally, but the new association of the words "women" and "priests" is what is pivotal, and this comes from the act in Philadelphia.

Conspiracy of Silence

Some would have it that the ordination was “unfortunate” for the growing rapprochement between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. If the success of the ARC dialogues was to rest on a conspiracy of silence about women priests, then bless July 29th all the more. The June consultation held by ARC Commission members on the ordination of women, their public acknowledgment that old answers will not do, indicate the happy pressure that the eleven women have had upon the dialogue.

For many reasons — not all of them good — Roman Catholic Sisters have provided the most prominent and organized voice within that church to urge action on the issue of women priests. (Not many take the official Roman calls to silence on the matter very seriously; church history reveals that “definitive statements” usually usher in a complete reversal in theory and/or practice in the area so defined.) This strong influence of religious women seems to be affecting the emerging strategy in the Roman Catholic Church. For example, a fall national conference on “Women in Future Priesthood Now: A Call for Action” makes primary the theme stressed by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious: that of making the talents of women fully available for ministerial service.

At any rate, there is clearly more searching, more questioning and more vigor in the way Roman Catholics are looking at the ordination of women since July 29th. For this we thank you.

Sister Mary Hennessey: Director, Boston Theological Institute, a consortium of nine theological schools of different denominations in the Boston area.

The woodcuts used on the cover and on page 4 of this issue of *The Witness* are available in poster form (22½” x 30”) for \$2.50 each, from Margaret Simpson, 4414 Garrison Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016. Proceeds from their sale go to the defense and action fund for Father Wendt.

Step I: Naming The Demons

by Susan E. DeMattos

In her first homily as a member of the Episcopal Divinity School faculty, Suzanne Hiatt mentioned that no one had asked her why she had been led to be ordained to the priesthood. She posed the question herself and answered in terms of Christ’s death and resurrection. It was a brief but important moment. The fact that that question had been posed and answered liberated us from a time of politeness, sympathy, silence, and pain.

The Louisville Convention had had a shattering effect on this seminary community. Students were stunned and angry. We were a broken community. And, naturally enough, reflection on woman’s place in the Church shifted from theological debate to pastoral concern.

It was a pastoral concern in part that raised up the desirability of hiring an ordained Anglican woman. The only Anglican woman on the faculty had resigned just before the convention. Only one woman, a Roman Catholic sister, remained on the faculty. Such a heavily male faculty seemed to underscore students’ fears that there really was no place for women in the Episcopal Church.

Thus, partially as an effort to demonstrate that women did have a place in the Episcopal Church, E.D.S. began a search for an ordained Anglican woman and enrolled the largest percentage of women in its history. E.D.S. should have been an ideal place for women this past year. Instead, we were still a broken community — uncertain of the Good News, unable to come together in solidarity and support, inarticulate in our pain. E.D.S. was still a place of politeness, sympathy, silence, and pain until Sue Hiatt spoke boldly about her actions.

The difficulties women have experienced as seminar-ians arise in part from the liabilities of being members of

Quotations from The Washington And Ohio Verdicts

a liberal community. We have been the victims of an unforeseen “multiply and conquer” phenomenon. Many assumed that E.D.S. had fulfilled its institutional obligations to women by accepting more women. Unfortunately, that assumption speaks more of tolerance than acceptance. The liberal community is always willing to give one a seat in the theater, but is often blind to the fact that that seat is in the back, behind a post. Having been given a seat, it seems impolite to mention the post, but the post is still there.

Benign Neglect

Seminaries are still very difficult places for women. Designed primarily for single men, seminaries provide a variety of supportive environments for them. Women and married students and their spouses suffer a benign neglect. But because the network of support for single men has been built up over years and without being explicitly stated, it is difficult for most people to see the advantages men have over women.

In addition to the adjustment women have had to make to a male environment, a silence hung over the seminary this year that became truly frightening. Somehow when the focus on women shifted from theological debate to pastoral concern, theological reflection and real dialogue seemed to disappear from our corporate life. The deans repeatedly asked for questions and comments as the search for a woman faculty member narrowed. We repeatedly remained silent. There was such a mood of sympathy for women in the church that few were willing to enter into a discussion of the issues. We remained polite. We remained silent. We remained ignorant. We remained divided.

The hiring of Suzanne Hiatt and Carter Heyward broke our silence and our politeness. It made us face up to the fact that our diversity as a community was often unreconciled division. The hiring made clear the brokenness of the seminary community and the larger church. But because that brokenness was brought out into the open, there have been opportunities for healing. Real dialogue has begun again. The presence of two women priests on campus incarnates the issues facing the church and makes them unavoidable. Rather than silence and sympathy, we have been given the opportunity for proclamation and reconciliation.

Susan E. DeMattos: graduated with honors from Episcopal Divinity School this June.

Late in May an ecclesiastical court in Washington, D.C., brought in a 3-2 split decision, with the clergy (majority) members of the court finding Father William Wendt guilty as charged of disobeying a “godly admonition” by inviting the Rev. Alison Cheek to preside at a eucharist in his parish. The majority declared that “The question of the Ordination of women, although not an issue in this trial, is an issue of great concern to the Church and the world. This Court has been urged to find that the Ordination of the 11 women deacons at the Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia on July 30, 1974 (sic) were valid and thus to recognize the validity of the Ordination to the priesthood of the Rev. Alison Cheek. For the resolution of what we perceive to be the central issue in this trial, the validity of the Philadelphia Ordinations is at best peripheral and no judgment as to their validity or invalidity is necessary.”

However, they then added: “There is no question that the Bishops in Philadelphia intended to ordain eleven women deacons to the Sacred Order of Priests. There is no question but that certain conditions being met, they had authority through their Episcopal office, the same never having been revoked or set aside, to ordain. There is no question but that the eleven deacons met the qualifications for Ordination to the Priesthood in terms of training, preparation, and piety of life. Had they been men, the Philadelphia event would not have occurred.”

The minority report of the two lay members of the court (both lawyers) raises some interesting points. They maintain that Alison Cheek is a priest and therefore it was entirely proper for Father Wendt to invite her to celebrate the Eucharist.

“In our opinion, the majority of this Court is preoccupied with episcopal authority and thereby misses

the central issue in this case We recognize, as we must, the priestly status of the women who were ordained last summer in Philadelphia. Such status occurred in the specific context of our godly scheme of enabling all people to reach and enjoy their full potential. No Bishop of our acquaintance would maintain for one minute that episcopal authority takes precedence over advancement of the good news.” . . .

Double Whammy

“We believe that there is only one way in which the Philadelphia ordinations could be invalidated. And that is by disciplinary action against the ordained women under Title IV of the canons, resulting in deposition after trial in ecclesiastical courts. We feel confident that would not be done. And the General Convention itself would not and could not invalidate those ordinations, for a resolution to that effect would be a bill of attainder.” . . .

“In fact, in order to convict in this case, it is necessary to construct a ‘double whammy’ in which Alison Cheek is deprived of her status, without due process of law, not once but twice. She was ordained a priest in Philadelphia. First, the Bishop of Virginia, without ecclesiastical trial, reduces her to the status of a deacon. Second, the Bishop of Washington, for the sake of collegiality, describes and treats her as a deacon here. They cannot do this, even after a trial, because section 3 of Canon 12, Title IV says:

‘Whenever a Minister is deposed from the Sacred Ministry, he is deposed therefrom entirely, and not from a higher to a lower Order in the same.’ ” . . .

“A great moment in church history is before us and the majority of this court is allowing it to pass by.

For the reasons stated in this opinion, we are impelled to dissent. We would find the Reverend William A. Wendt not guilty.”

Power of Bishops?

The Washington majority is silent on the “decree” of the House of Bishops re validity, but the dissent states: “We are not unaware of the Resolution of the House of Bishops in Chicago on August 15, 1974. A resolution of the House of Bishops is entitled to respectful attention, even where we disagree, as we do in this instance. The House of Bishops is only one of the two bodies necessary for legislative action, and in that instance it had no judicial power to declare the canon law. Thus the House of Bishops’ [resolution] . . . was only an opinion,

not binding on us because there was neither legislative nor judicial power or function in that meeting.”

The Ohio court, in convicting the Rev. L. Peter Beebe on similar charges, took notice of the resolution of the House of Bishops “declaring the Ordinations in Philadelphia . . . in effect, invalid.” The court stated: “This decree is utterly without precedent in this Church. Its effect may have been to exercise what amounted to a compulsive influence, if not an effect of prior restraint, upon Diocesan Bishops who, under the normal process of decision in this Church, would severally have made the determination of validity or invalidity in regard to any specific ordination . . . When the House of Bishops, acting collectively (collegially, as they styled it) interposed its judgment in this matter, it may have effectively intruded into the licensing system a compulsive or restraining influence.

“In his testimony, the Bishop of Ohio stated that each Diocesan Bishop retains to himself the licensing and regularizing authority, notwithstanding the House of Bishops’ decree. It appears to this Court, however, that a decree by the House of Bishops that a particular ordination is invalid would constitute a serious restraint of a local bishop even though *the Court believes the decree itself to be utterly without legal standing in this Church.*” (Italics added).

Roman Catholic Priests Organize “Priests For Equality”

A group of 75 Roman Catholic priests has recently formed an organization to work for equality of men and women in church and society. The group supports passage of the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment) and ordination of women as Roman Catholic priests. “Priests for Equality” has 75 founding members and is headed by the Rev. William R. Callahan, S.J., of Mount Rainier, Maryland.

Confessions Of A Midwest Macho Liberal

by Richard W. Smith, Jr.

It was the spring of 1965 and my adversary was a Max Rafferty type. Although he was from California, his accent made him sound as if he had spent three weeks at Oxford and couldn't dislodge the style. We were debating the ordination of women to the priesthood, and true to who he was, my opponent was entrenched on the medieval side of the question.

Toward the end of the debate, having exhausted facts, logic, and articulation, I did what all suave debators must eventually do: I got personal.

"You know, Clarence (names have been changed to protect the guilty), last year a woman graduated from this seminary cum laude. She preached one of the best senior sermons I've ever heard.

"And what bothers me, Clarence, . . . what bothers me more than anything else . . . is that she can't be a priest and you can."

Exit Clarence. Curtain down.

For a good many years, I rested on the issue using my Clarence story whenever necessary to show that I was past the cutting edge on women's ordination. However, the more I used the story the more uncomfortable I became. I suppose my discomfort came mainly from the fact that words without commensurate action always left me cold.

I had always rationalized that there was really nothing I *could* do. Not being a bishop, I could not ordain; not being a woman, I could not demand I be ordained.

So, when the diocesan convention of 1972 considered the issue of women's ordination, I once again resurrected my Clarence story. The story got its share of laughs and in a rare occurrence I found myself on the majority side. As the epitome of our hollow triumph, we memorialized the General Convention as to our action. The clergy deputation from our diocese went on to divide on the issue at General Convention and be counted as a "no" vote.

Then July 29th, 1974, came to pass . . . but without the presence of this lily-livered liberal.

As if my guilt didn't sting enough, the text that Sunday was the Mary-Martha story. I chose to preach what is commonly called a dialogue sermon. Now it is the usual custom in my parish for such a sermon to consist of my voice, responded to by the silence of the parishioners.

That Sunday, however, nine people spoke (breaking the old record by eight) and all supported the ordination of women as well as the Philadelphia event. Two subsequent parish polls showed that 74 percent of those who responded favored the ordination of women and 61 percent affirmed Philadelphia. These were rather startling figures considering the all-white, lower middle class, conservative nature of the parish.

Besides the sermon and the polls, I'd considered writing the bishops calling for ratification of the ordinations; refusing to perform sacerdotal duties until women were recognized as priests; and even leaving the ordained ministry. But in the end I did what most liberals do. I did nothing.

Perhaps I should qualify the "nothing." I did decide that if the women changed their minds about performing priestly duties I would invite one of them to concelebrate. After a little more soul searching, I decided that a conference on Women and Religion capped by a celebration would be appropriate.

I explored this possibility with the local N.O.W. chapter, which was receptive. Eventually the parish, Downriver Detroit N.O.W., and the Episcopal Community for the Ministry of Women co-sponsored a weekend conference on Women and Religion, featuring Suzanne Hiatt as keynote speaker.

I went to the vestry asking for their support, and they voted 8-0 to stand behind me in any decision I made concerning Sue's participation in the Sunday service.

Later on when arrangements were still unclear, our senior warden, at the urging of the vestry, wrote Sue affirming her priesthood and urging her to concelebrate.

During this time I was in constant contact with Bishop McGehee, trying to keep him informed at every stage. Always helpful, he never attempted to dissuade me and constantly maintained a pastoral attitude toward me and the planned events.

As the date approached, I became somewhat apprehensive. As soon as I picked up Sue at the airport, whatever apprehension I had evaporated. Anticipating a large crowd (an unusual problem for our parish), we scheduled an extra service for Sunday noon. Two unique worship services resulted, the most meaningful of my life.

It seemed so right being at Sue's side at the altar . . . animus, anima, the wholeness of person, whatever . . . it seemed right. Taking the elements from Sue was deeply moving, and no awkwardness marred the concelebration. About 250 people attended — 50 more than at Christmas or Easter. My most vivid memory of the congregation is the joy on the faces of the women who received the eucharist from their ordained sister.

Whereas the first service had been impressive in its majesty, the second was beautiful in its intimacy. Four of the priests in attendance accepted our invitation to concelebrate. Sue and I invited the 60 or so worshippers to join us around the altar at the great thanksgiving. The euphoria of the first service was sustained at the second.

It's now five months later. The vestry has tendered Sue an open invitation to St. Luke's and formally commended me for my leadership. The N.O.W. chapter, which made such an invaluable contribution to the conference, continues to support women in religion. The cooperation between the parish and N.O.W., which began with the conference, continues. The Community for the Ministry of Women grows and is active in the life of the diocese.

Yet a certain futility persists. In the Twentieth Century, it seems absurd that the Episcopal Church, which professes to serve the Lord of history, continues to debate the personhood of women. How long, O Lord?

Richard Smith: Michigan State University graduate, 1961, and E.T.S., 1965; ordained to the priesthood, 1966; presently rector, St. Luke's Church, Allen Park, Mich.

I Am Not An 'Other'

O God,
No Adam's rib am I
Nor am I an "other."
Will you tell my brother?
I have been mother,
Wife,
Lover.
I have been to their feasts.
Now, you have called me to yours.
Though I come late,
Is it my fate
Never to be a part
Of sacred wholeness?
"Feed on Him in thy heart."
Am I never to say it
To those who need Him?
God, forgive them,
They are learning what they do.

—Anne Law

Anne Law: communicant, St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Glenside, Pa.

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