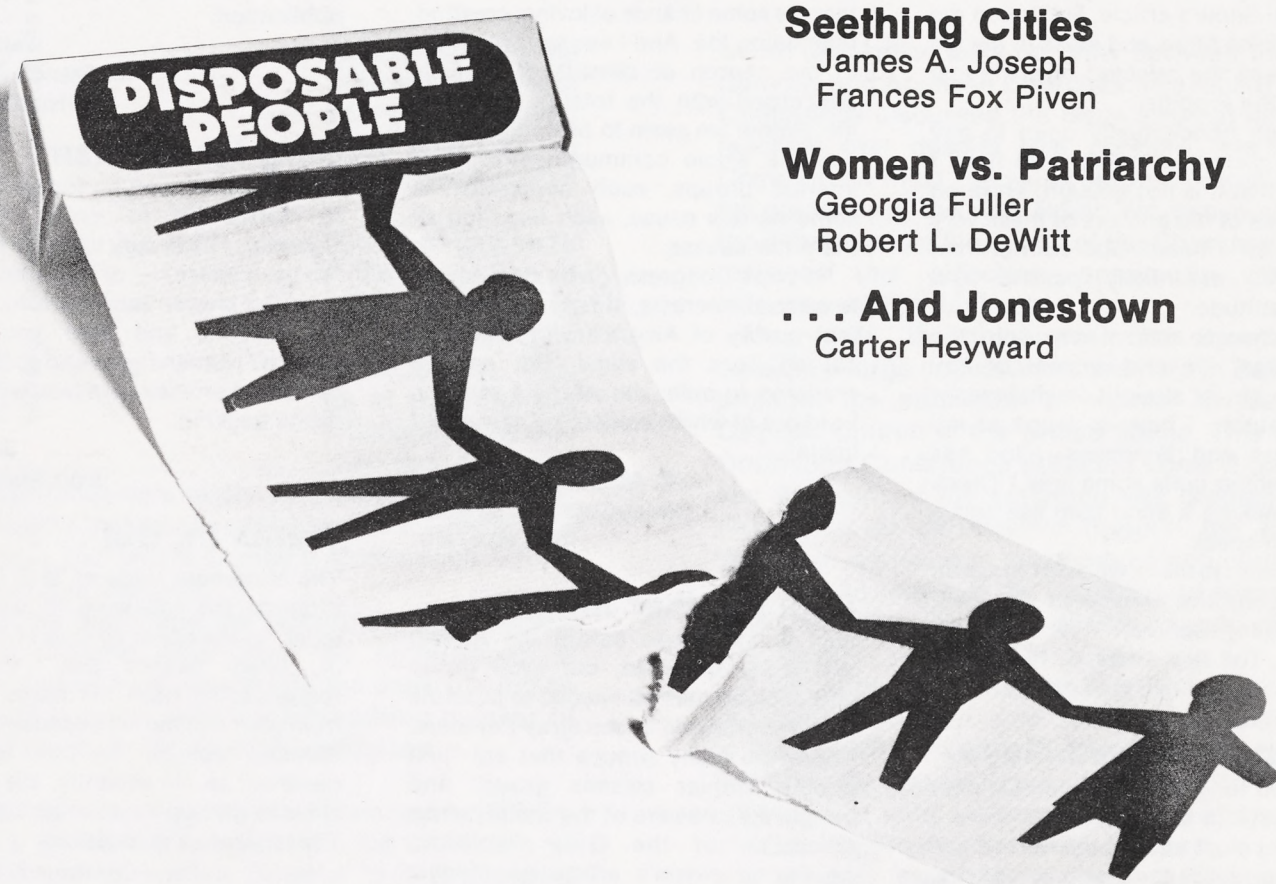


# THE WITNESS

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## **Seething Cities**

James A. Joseph  
Frances Fox Piven

## **Women vs. Patriarchy**

Georgia Fuller  
Robert L. DeWitt

## **... And Jonestown**

Carter Heyward





## Mute Man Speaks

I was greatly impressed and transformed by the recent October issue of THE WITNESS. All of the articles spoke with the freshness of Christ. As a "straight," I was particularly touched by John Hall Snow's article. He forced me to look at the times and areas in my life where I was the rejected one, the lost one and the Prodigal.

Although conceptually open to gay laity and clergy for quite some time, I now see that it is not enough. Through the witness of the authors of these very fine articles, I heard God confront me about this essentially passive and tolerant attitude.

Now I endorse and am actively for the contribution, life and witness of any person — gay or straight or whatever — in the church. I have to laugh at my foolishness and blindness. (God has been laughing quite some time.) Thank you for making a blind man see and a mute man speak.

Also, I want to thank whoever it is, who in Christian love has sent me THE WITNESS for two years now.

**The Rev. Ralph E. Richmond**  
Fort Atkinson, WI

## Calvary Resolved Gays

Thank you for your discerning October issue, "Gays in the Church: Is There a Place?" As more and more heterosexual Christians realize their own complicity,

albeit unwittingly, in our suffering, surely our release draws nearer.

Meanwhile, it is extremely important that your lesbian and gay male readers understand that our true welcome does not depend on any of this debate, that it was accomplished for us long ago at Calvary. The next General Convention won't be able to touch that guarantee.

**Louie Crew**  
Ft. Valley, Ga.

## Moved by Snow

I just read John Snow's marvelous piece, "Gay People in Parish Life" in the October WITNESS. I say marvelous because it is so intensely humane, so generous and loving. And of course he raises the central issue — that sexuality by itself cannot, must not — be the central issue to preoccupy the church — or society itself.

Far more important is how by God's grace we create communities in which there is some chance of loving, creating, redeeming life. And I see so few people in the church or outside of it really concerned with the totality of human life. Rather we seem to be on the way to being a whole community of special interest groups, each committed to some narrow cause, each negating all the other causes.

Perhaps Congress, given over as it is to special interests, simply reflects the real quality of American life. And the church does the same. But are we prepared to enter the struggle with the Lord out of which something new could come?

**J. C. Michael Allen, Dean**  
Christ Church Cathedral  
St. Louis, Mo.

## Real Panther Image

Just a few weeks before the August WITNESS appeared, our local group had decided that we needed to promote the true program of the Gray Panthers. There are many groups that are "just another senior citizens group" and people are unaware of the social justice concerns of the Gray Panthers. Lockwood Hoehl's article on Maggie

Kuhn is a good example of that true Gray Panther image and spirit.

We need to attract people who are creative. THE WITNESS article has stimulated me and given me many ideas. Maybe you will reach more people by having an occasional article on aging than by devoting a whole issue to the subject. Ageism is like racism. The people who are against aging, like the bigots on racism, avoid meeting the subject.

**Ruth Haefner**  
Portland, Ore.

## Brown for WITNESS

Enclosed is my renewal payment. As a Roman Catholic I can only hope that my church will someday look seriously at the issue of women priests; give something more than token consideration to homosexual priests; and be willing to risk its solid grip on the past for a future with justice. Congratulations on an excellent publication.

**Terry Brown**  
St. Francis Seminary  
Milwaukee, Wisc.

## Berg for Atheism

Thank you very much for the invitation to subscribe to your magazine. However, I have very little interest in the "social mission" — or any other mission — of the church (any church). Why not try atheism, and save yourself the trouble? Human rights and social justice can stand on their own feet, without any divine backing.

**John Berg**  
Dorchester, Mass.

## Wants In, But . . .

The November issue of THE WITNESS prompts the following thoughts. In a letter to the editor by Dale H. Swanson, Jr. titled "Wants Out," the writer requested to have his name removed from your mailing list because of sharply differing beliefs. As one wise man observed to me recently, the only real sin is to give up — we must keep trying. The sharper the divisions in attitudes

*Continued on page 19*



# THE WITNESS

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## Women of Rome & Canterbury

Robert L. DeWitt

One mark of the rapid changes taking place in the latter part of the 20th century is the irrationality with which many groups in society seem to be traveling without a chart, or without a compass, or both. Lacking these two nautical instruments, and with a heavy wind at sea, it is easy to get off course.

An illustration of this was the Church of England's failure in November to authorize the ordination of women. Although laity and bishops approved it, priests voted heavily against it. Since the concurrence of all three orders is required, it failed to pass. This, despite the fact that in churches of the Anglican Communion in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong the ordination of women has already become a reality. And despite the fact that the Lambeth Conference of 1968 found no obstacle to it, and that the recent Lambeth Conference further reinforced that position.

Finally, we might add the incongruity that a month earlier a pastoral letter from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York was read in the parish churches expressing concern over the diminishing number of ordained clergy in the Church of England.

Millions of words have been spoken and written by Anglicans in the last few years on the ordination of women, a goodly portion devoted to how approval

would jeopardize talks on unity between the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches. The recent Lambeth Conference discussed the issue at great length, and resolved that despite that concern, the Anglican Communion must follow its sense of vocation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Yet, two months later, the debate before the Synod of the Church of England reviewed this objection, apparently with some influence on the final vote.

Meanwhile, the same week the Synod was in session, a large convocation was held in Baltimore to promote the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. This Women's Ordination Conference attracted some 2,000 people and the spirit of the gathering was dramatized by a procession of participants through the streets of Baltimore, attesting to the depth of their conviction. It was also an index of the gathering of forces on the question within the ranks of that church. (See story this issue.)

It would be naive to think that the issue of church unity was the only, or even the most controlling factor in the negative vote by the clergy of the Church of England. Be that as it may, the vote affords a sorry spectacle of what results when ships attempt to get their bearings from others ships, rather than from chart and compass, especially in a time of high seas. ■



# Toward an Urban Theology

by James A. Joseph



When I was Vice President of Cummings Engine Company, I used to lecture at seminaries and people used to wonder what in the hell does an engineer have to say about theology; and now that I'm Under Secretary of the Interior people are even more confused. Well, I would like to suggest that we need to think about the nature of our theological task in the cities. But in order to do that I want to say a couple of words about the social predicament of the cities.

One aspect of this social predicament is the new opposition which has emerged. When I was organizing demonstrations in Tuscaloosa, Ala. in the 1960s, we were able to identify the opposition with ease. We saw them behind billie clubs and cattle prods crying "segregation forever." But in the present urban context the opposition is often led by our former allies. It is increasingly more articulate and privileged than the poor white folks in Alabama who failed to recognize our common predicament.

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**The Rev. James A. Joseph** is Under Secretary of the Interior of the U.S. Government. The above is excerpted from his talk before a Joint Session of the Urban Bishops' Coalition and the Church and City Conference last year.

The new opposition openly rejects the racism of the past while at the same time opposing affirmative action — opposing "federal pressure" or "judicial interference" and other initiatives which have made progress possible. Some of our former liberal allies in the academic community are now producing the theories and planning the rationale which gives the new opposition its strength and credibility.

Another aspect of the social predicament is the development of a transnational consciousness in the black community, the general concern with "roots." Alex Haley has ignited a curiosity about the past among black Americans. It has led to several forms of curiosity about Africa and I want to refer to those, particularly for you who must deal and minister to black Americans. The first form is an existential curiosity. Many black Americans are asking, "Is there something unique about me as a person which stems from the fact that my historical roots are in Africa?" This is part of a process of answering the age old "Who am I?" question. Many black Americans feel an existential kinship — a special bond of brother and sisterhood.

The second concern with Africa stems from a metaphysical curiosity. Is there a clash of views of reality



between African and Western metaphysics? When the Western world has asked the question "What is a human being?" two answers usually merge. The first description emphasizes *thinker*, as did Descartes and Aquinas. The second approach emphasizes *worker*, as did Marx and Luther. African metaphysics on the other hand has given three very different emphases to the question. The first comes from the concept of *homo festivas*, the idea that people have both the capacity and the need for celebration of affirmation. The second concept is that of *homo fantasia*, the idea that people are visionary myth makers, who imagine radically different life alternatives and set out to create them — the concept of people as dreamers. The third aspect of African metaphysics comes from the concept of *homo cumminalis*, the idea that individual identity is communal. Now those who opt for a black theology are pointing to a marriage of American and African metaphysics as a unique contribution to the understanding of people in this world.

The third form of concern with Africa is an intellectual curiosity. Black Americans have increasingly pointed to the neglect of Africa in the study of world history and philosophy. Many have come to see this neglect as a hangover from the hierarchical view which holds that cultures are divided between higher and lower. That is, the standards, values and customs of one particular group of people are seen as superior to others. Many black Americans therefore see a recovery of interest in Africa as a necessary corrective for a Western culture obsessed with a far too narrow definition of community.

The fourth and final form of concern with Africa is a political curiosity. Some black Americans are examining what Africa now has — all the systems of power, all the marvels of development — in terms of the implications for black Americans. Others ask whether or not there is an African legacy which has influenced the development of a black political culture in the United States.

Having said all this, then, leads automatically from the consideration of the social predicament in the cities to a consideration of the theological climate in the cities. The black and urban poor who inhabit the central cities have always had a certain kind of disdain for abstract theologizing. In fact, there is a clear historical kinship with Soren Kierkegaard's warning that Christianity is not a doctrine but an existence. It seems to me that the central concern for many urban dwellers is that if Christianity is not a doctrine but an existence, then what is needed is not professors but witnesses. The error is not in the study, but that the accent continually falls on the wrong place, on

penetrating and presenting, so that to do something becomes a ridiculous triviality. This may sound like anti-intellectualism, but it does raise the question as to whether or not we need to go beyond the esoteric abstractions which purvey much of what is called theology.

I want to suggest that the legacy of the civil rights movement of the '60s is not only a political and economic rebellion but a metaphysical rebellion against certain theological absolutes. In its purest form it argues with Teilhard de Chardin for a theology of creative evolution in which no creed dare be treated as final, no institution dare be treated as complete, no theology dare be treated as closed, and no ideology dare be treated as absolute. For the God who in the beginning created is the God who now creates.

Theologically this means that like Adam, we are in on the beginning of creation, for creation is not so much a distant event as it is a happening now. Politically this means that the American Revolution was not so much an event as it is a process. It was not simply a time in the nation's past, but a process of fulfillment which continues into the nation's future.

Running counter to this theological orientation is a form of moral theology which gains its credibility under the rubric of lifeboat ethics. While used originally to rationalize social neglect in the international arena, it has come to have serious implications for the urban poor. The only course is to decide who is to be sacrificed for the good of the others. We see this kind of thinking most clearly in the debate on whether our greatest problem is inflation or unemployment. It reaches its heights among those who argue that it is necessary to accept a high level of unemployment in order to maintain the standard of living for those who are employed.

The problem with this new ethic is that no one group is in possession of a secure lifeboat which they alone command. We all share the same boat. Our present predicament is like a cartoon I recall which shows two groups of people huddling at separate ends of a boat which has a serious leak in the middle. One group is saying, "Gee, that's a nasty leak. Thank God it's on the other side." What we need is not lifeboat ethics, but new political and economic standards which recognize our interdependence. The ethical question is how do we deal with the hole in the boat.

Now it is especially in the encounter with this new form of moral theology that the urban minister is uniquely equipped to provide an alternate perspective. I mentioned earlier that African metaphysics understands people as *homo cumminalis* — their identity is communal. This is the understanding which needs to become a part of the theology of the city. *It is not simply the assertion that I am what I am through the other, but I am what I am because of the other.*



Let me conclude with a word about where this theology leads us. Our mission is in fact, conservative. What we seek is simply "to form a more perfect union — to establish justice, to insure domestic tranquility and to promote the general welfare." I want to look briefly at each of these from the perspective of moral theology. Consider first the mission to form a more perfect union. The future of our cities may be determined by our ability to build a new kind of radical pluralism where sameness and difference are held together in a creative tension which enriches rather than polarizes. This is an egalitarian pluralism — fundamentally different from the hierarchical pluralism we have been practicing.

Our second goal is to establish justice. The problem here is that the 20th century has seen five different stages of consciousness regarding equality of opportunity. The century began with equality of opportunity defined as equality of preparation. These were the days of "separate but equal." Then we saw a shift in consciousness which was defined as equality of access: From the chance to prepare minorities in separate institutions to an emphasis on gaining access to predominantly white institutions. And then there was a third shift. Equality of opportunity was defined as equality of participation, because we found that access did not mean equality of participation. In the fourth consciousness, we defined equality of opportunity as equality of entitlements. We saw a revolution of rising entitlements — people demanding and arguing that they were entitled to decent health care, to decent education, to decent housing — a vastly expanded understanding of social rights. But what we found was that those with the most power too often transformed their private wants into a political definition of public need. And then we have consciousness five, in which equality of opportunity is now defined as equality of distribution — with emphasis on the redistribution of power.

The third goal to which the theology of the city must speak is the effort to assure domestic tranquility. The problem here is that we have law and order theologians just as we've had law and order politicians. They have treated law as the fulfillment of love rather than love as the fulfillment of law. They forget that where people have a stake in society, they're more likely to work for order in that society.

But even the good deeds of those who wish the urban poor well have often been lost in the failure to affirm and enhance the dignity of those who were beneficiaries of their deeds. The problem is best illuminated by referring to an incident which occurred in Indonesia in the 1940s. According to the story, the British had been asked to leave and while they were packing their bags the Governor General was overheard to say, "When we came here these people had no

roads. They had no schools. They had no hospitals. Malaria and typhoid were everywhere. We built new roads. We built new schools. We built new hospitals. We did away with typhoid. We did away with malaria, and now they ask us to go. Why?" A peasant overhearing this question interrupted to say, "It is easy to understand, Your Honor. Everytime you look at us you have the wrong look in your eyes." Transfer that to 20th century America.

The final task to which I want to refer is that of promoting the general welfare. And I want to do so by looking at what a genuinely open and informed theology must say to the large institutions which have come to dominate our lives. The corporate charter makes business a trustee to the public good. It is no longer free simply to function as a specialized economic institution, but it assumes a responsibility to consider what it needs to function as a social institution which impacts people in their communities. The corporation is responsible to a wide variety of constituent groups with a stake in its operation. The shareholder is only one of many stake holders. These stake holders include employees, customers, consumers, communities in which the corporation does business and even governments — local governments as well as nation-states. Profit is a reward for producing a product efficiently or providing a service effectively.

Now if all of this sounds like a big order simply remember the message which the Apostle Paul sent to the Christians, "If anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold the new has come." ■

**I am READY, GOD,  
I am COMPLETELY READY!  
I WILL SING AND PRAISE YOU!  
WAKE UP, MY SOUL  
WAKE UP, MY HARP AND LYRE!  
I WILL WAKE UP THE SUN  
I WILL THANK YOU  
AMONG THE NATIONS, LORD!  
I WILL PRAISE YOU AMONG ALL PEOPLES!**

PSALM 57





## What Can the Church Do?

*The following is excerpted from **To Hear and to Heed**, the report on the public hearings sponsored recently by the Urban Bishops' Coalition of the Episcopal Church.*

John McDermott, editor of *The Chicago Reporter*, gave the Episcopal Urban Bishops' panel a programmatic prescription for the church's role in the urban crisis:

- Be the church — provide a vision of hope.
- Operate from strength, involving the *whole* church, not just the fringes.
- Plan well, institutionalize what you do, so people know you are serious.
- Pick one or two things and do them well. Don't try too much.
- Work for inclusive communities, racially and economically.

Many of these same themes recurred as each subsequent hearing addressed the core question of the role of the church. At times it was a search for a *unique* role — one that no other institution could perform as well or at all. At other times the issue was with whom do we collaborate to do the things that need to be done.

Common agreement existed that the bias of the church should be toward the poor. Liberation theology, incarnational theology, any theology that takes the world seriously must lead to that bias. But perhaps the church is too much a part of the established principalities and powers really to incarnate that bias, said others.

Images of the church abound in the reports: funder of needed action, conscience of the city, embodiment of social justice, beacon of hope, the one institution the poor can trust, catalyst of coalitions, advocate, servant, celebrant of life, witness, friend of the outcast. Each implies a different role.

But there were other images of a less flattering kind,



implying other roles: chaplains of the establishment, a propertied elite, a mirror of classist society itself, cavalier white male club, racist, sexist, obsessed with its own survival, afraid to be openly Christian, permissive, citadel of individualism, incompetent privilege, collaborator in the repression of militants.

Several clear calls emerged.

1. Set the church's own house in order. Rid it of racism, sexism, and other internal inhumanities.
2. Speak with moral authority from a clear biblical and theological framework.
3. Support local revitalization.
4. Use property and investments in socially responsible ways.
5. Intrude in public policy matters on the side of the oppressed.
6. Work ecumenically.
7. Think and plan well.

On some issues the church could work with little internal controversy, e.g., the elderly, mental illness, the physically impaired. For these "throw-away" people raise problems that cut across lines of race and class.

But other issues such as the criminal justice system, unemployment, and homosexuality provoke internal conflict. They require wisdom and courage if the church is to have a role in their resolution.

Thought and action are indeed both required as the church addresses the present condition of urban America, the kind of cities we want and need, how we get there, what particular role the church has in both the seeing and the doing.

The public hearings have provided a beginning for the church's thought and action.



# Private Anger and Public Protest

by Frances Fox Piven

The bottom line of U.S. urban economic policies today is to be found in the actual, tangible experiences of our inner city poor. The bottom line has to do with the persistence of unemployment, so enduring as to deprive the poor of their physical and psychological capacities for work and for normal life. The bottom line has to do with the utter collapse of the low rental housing market with the result that whole neighborhoods have been reduced to rubble. And under these circumstances the *communities* of the poor collapse, so that whatever they have in the way of infrastructure or a capacity for self-help is gone.

At the same time, and as a result of the so-called fiscal crisis, whatever neighborhood services the older cities once provided for the casualties of our economic policies have been cut back. The paltry services, the centers for senior citizens, the drug programs — all these are going. With the opportunity to work and to live a normal life denied, the people of the inner city are forging an alternative culture of their own. It is a culture built on despair — a culture of social suicide, a culture of drugs and a culture of crime, which leads many of us, of course, to castigate and to scapegoat them even more. In short, the bottom line of our economic and social policies is the destruction of the urban lower class in the United States today, and there is no more moderate way of stating it. We are destroying the lower stratum of our population.

The puzzle is that in American political principle none of this should be happening. During the 1960s we experienced what might be called the

blossoming of reform and of plans to implement these reforms. We generated good ideas about how our government could act to secure a more human kind of life for people at the bottom of American society.

The second puzzle is that the toll has been most catastrophic on inner city blacks. In the 1960s black people won an impressive victory. They won the right to vote in the South and the right to representation in the North. But in the wake of the grand promises attached to the franchise, the circumstances of the black, urban poor are worsening.

The reason for these failures is that great profits are made through existing economic policies and therefore, there is powerful resistance to change. In the face of that power, the right to vote is a very weak weapon, indeed. Throughout American history, gains have never been made by poor people simply through propounding good ideas. Rather gains by people who are at the bottom of American society have been won only through mass protests, through large scale defiance and as a result of subsequent institutional and political reverberations.

If that sounds like an outrageous statement, let me suggest some evidence for it. In 1933 the poor in the United States won for the first time a national relief policy which provided for the unemployed a minimum of subsistence in the face of economic catastrophe. It was a victory won only over powerful resistance. How then was it won? In the early 1930s, the unemployed themselves somehow found the courage to make trouble in the cities in which they were concentrated. They engaged in actions called rent riots in which they gathered together and resisted the marshal and refused to be evicted. They engaged in relief riots, taking over private relief agencies or

local relief agencies which gave out coal and food baskets. The institutional impact of this movement of the unemployed was severe. In city after city mayors and local businesses were confronted on the one hand with an insurgent unemployed population and on the other with a circumstance we know now as fiscal crisis. So that in 1933 in the wake of a dramatic electoral turnabout, Franklin D. Roosevelt in the space of 45 days initiated the first major national relief program in American history.

Another victory won in the 1930s was the right of industrial workers to organize. That also was over the opposition of industrialists who had commandeered the courts, the government, their own private police, and the whole community propaganda apparatus in which industries were located. Industry was determined that workers not organize. But in the face of the depression, wage cuts, and with the inspiration created by a New Deal in Washington, workers began to walk out in large numbers; to sit down in factories; to organize their self-defense against the company police and the militia who had in American history always destroyed strikes. And in the face of that massive movement of militant protesting workers, FDR put his support behind the Wagner Act and later behind the "Wages and Hours Act." He then appointed pro labor representatives to the new NLRB. And this was all won by industrial workers through massive protest.

Examples abound from more recent times. In the late 1950s and 1960s black people in the South mounted a massive protest movement. These were people who had been displaced by the mechanization of plantations, a labor intensive form of agriculture that threw out the day laborers, sharecroppers, and

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**Dr. Frances Fox Piven** is professor of political science, Boston University. The article above is excerpted from her talk before a Joint Session of the Urban Bishops' Coalition and the Church and City Conference.



farmers it no longer needed. And many of these people migrated to the Southern cities. There they began to demand some of the Civil Rights other Americans had been enjoying. They found the solidarity first to boycott on a massive scale and then later, beginning in Albany, to fill the jails on a massive scale. They found the courage to engage in freedom riots and marches. And they were helped to find that courage in the late 1950s and the 1960s by their church.

Finally black people were offered concessions which had to do with Civil Rights and ultimately, with the elimination of terror from the arsenal of political controls over blacks in the South. Black people did win the franchise, but only through a vigorous protest movement.

The moral of the actual history of struggles of people at the bottom of American society is very different from the civics lessons we are wont to preach. It is that poor people and working people sometimes do win, but only through protest. They win only when they find the courage to defy the institutional rules and the authorities which ordinarily keep them quiescent. They win only when they create sufficient trouble in the institutions of

American society, so as to make political leaders worry.

Today the inner city poor are quiet. And the economic policies which have generated their poverty and their destruction are moving forward unfettered. Many of the gains that were won in the 1960s are being reversed, and the disintegration of life at the bottom is accelerated. If the process is to be halted it can only be through the development of mass protests comparable in extent to those that won earlier concessions.

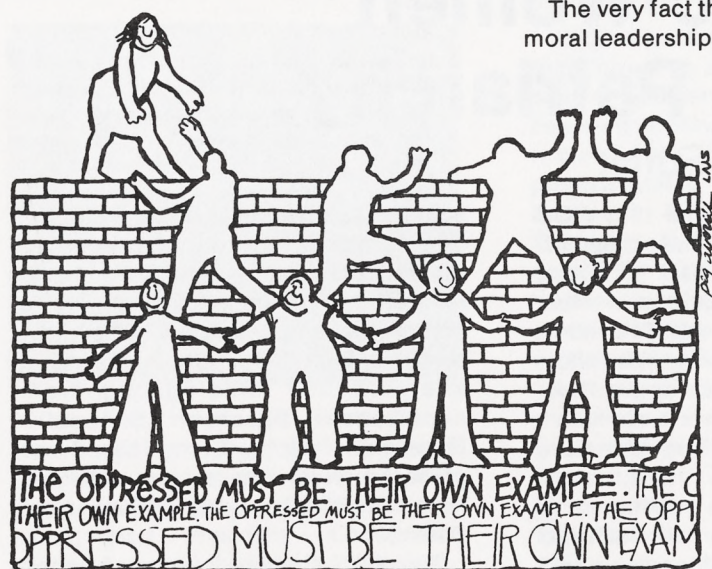
What role then will the church play in all of this? The church provides much of the moral leadership and the community leadership in poor and working class communities. How that role is acted out makes a difference one way or the other. Through most of our history the church has used the transforming power of the gospel to transform low income working people into quiescence. Through most of its history, the church has used its capacity for leadership to teach people to accept state authority and economic authority, and to look for salvation in another life. But sometimes the church has played a different role. It is worth looking backward at what some church leaders did both in the Civil Rights movement and in the ghetto movement, and what the Catholic Church is now doing in Latin America and even in our cities today.

The very fact that the church provides moral leadership to a community means

that it is virtually determining whether the poor and working people think that the grievances, the sufferings which they experience are justified or unjustified; whether they are inevitable or can be changed. That moral role — the capacity to help people turn private anger into public indignation is crucial. Also, the church through its moral authority can help people to define the ingrained prohibitions which deter people from making demands, from asserting rights.

Moreover, the church is in a position to help promote and to facilitate collective defiance and to do that not only by lending the moral authority of the church to rent strikes, to the demands of welfare recipients, to the school boycotts and to demonstrations over employment; but also by lending the physical facilities of the church to those protest movements that do emerge. That also was done during the Civil Rights movement of the '30s and '60s, and in the ghetto movement in the late '60s. This is not to say that the church made those movements emerge. Movements of low income and working people in the United States emerge from forces far larger than even the church can command. What is important is that, as in the recent past, the church not restrain those movements but rather, encourage them.

Now it is also true that the church can do many other things and do them usefully. The church can make recommendations to the American ruling class about how to reorganize the economy. The church can work out policy positions, detailed plans about how that organization ought to proceed. But I propose that the transforming power of the gospel in the United States today is not likely to achieve its greatest effects in its attempts to transform the wealthy. Rather, the transforming power of the gospel, if it is truly to be a nourishing and vigorous force, ought to orient itself to the poor, to the working people who are the victims of wealth and power. And there comes a time when a truly religious mission is a political mission as well. ■







The second Catholic Women's Ordination Conference (WOC) opened with action and song. We pulled an anchor, (symbolizing our hope) from the Baltimore Harbor and marched with 2,000 feet of chain (symbolizing our years of oppression) to the Civic Center. We sang through the streets, that Nov. 10 — priests, nuns and laity — 2,000 strong! "Oh Freedom, Oh Freedom, Oh Freedom over me."

Two years ago this January the Vatican issued its *Declaration* excluding women from the priesthood because only men can "image Christ." "It was the greatest favor Pope Paul could have done the Catholic feminist movement," concluded Dolly Pomerleau, Conference Coordinator. Within eight weeks grassroots Catholic support for women priests had jumped 10 percentage points.

When the *Declaration* appeared, the hierarchy recommended we pray. We met on the steps of St. Matthew's Cathedral in Washington to "pray our anger." We were only 200 then, bolstered by the presence of Episcopal priests Alison Cheek and Lee McGee. We have come a long way since the first WOC meeting in 1975 — spurred by the hierarchy and inspired by the ordinations of Episcopal women. **G.F.**

## 2,000 Catholic Women Challenge the Patriarchy

by Georgia Fuller

**When will women be ordained priests? Sometimes I am optimistic... but when I remember the 83 year old woman at the 1975 Conference who felt herself called, then I know it will not be soon enough.**

Not soon enough! Still, remarkable changes have occurred in three years. The international media listed women's ordination as a major issue facing the

recently elected popes. The 1975 WOC meeting was 90% nuns. They called for "bonding" and chose a Core Commission that was 50% laywomen. The 1978 Conference was 61% nuns, 31% laywomen, 3% laymen, 1% brothers and 4% Reverends (including the Revs. Alison Cheek, Alla Bozarth-Campbell and Kathryn Plccard). The new Core Commission has six nuns, eight laywomen and one male priest.

The 1975 Conference featured scholarly critiques of past theology, with

some work on women and priesthood. The 1978 Conference presented Liberation Theology and was explicitly feminist (a characteristic of some controversy and criticism). The plenary sessions included in-depth structural analyses and theologizing from experience. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, of Notre Dame, based her presentation on the stories collected from the 450 women in WOC's Project Priesthood.

The 1975 Conference was attended



largely out of curiosity. The only act was to mandate a national membership organization. The 1978 Conference discussed actions in their tracks: Priesthood, Strategy and Theology. Sunday's schedule was rearranged so the entire body could affirm or disaffirm resolutions from the tracks. With overwhelming affirmation and applause, a resolution directed to those who had defeated women's ordination in the Church of England for fear it would endanger union with Rome, read: *"We are over 2,000 strong. We are here and we do not intend to go away!"*

The growing WOC membership, which also met in regions and hired a grassroots organizer, is spawning a feisty, witty leadership. When Archbishop John R. Quinn, President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, declared discussion of ordination inappropriate, they publicly recounted the presence of women — last at the cross and first at the resurrection. "It is our observation," concluded their official response, "that the bishops, like the apostles, always arrive a little late — and slightly out of breath."

The 1978 WOC Conference broke ideological ground in four areas with significant discussions of power, new ministry, sexuality and the conflicts of diversity.

**"If anyone thinks I want to challenge the male clergy on their own turf, they're dead wrong. I'd love to shout from the very dome of the Vatican, 'Hey, fellas! You can have the power and the glory of your carpeted offices and big musty churches. Just give me the street, the home, the lonely, the elderly, the rebellious youth, the dying — The Kingdom!'"**

"Clericalism," said the Rev. Cletus Wessels, O.P., "is the grain which must fall on the ground and die in order to bring out a full harvest." The Dominican priest, past President of Aquinas Institute, opened the Priests for Equality

**Quotations appearing in shaded boxes throughout this article are from personal stories of Catholic women in the tabloid, *We Are Called*, published by the Women's Ordination Conference, 34 Monica St., Rochester, N.Y. 14619. Single copies \$1, postage included.**

Conference which was coordinated with the WOC sessions. PFE, with over 1700 members, began in July 1975. A major action was their sending letters of support to the Episcopal bishops just prior to the 1976 vote to ordain women.

Wessels suggested consciousness raising techniques to enable priests to become aware of the power that oppresses them and the power they have over others.

Sheila Collins, of the Executive Committee, Theology in the Americas, analyzed power from a social and feminist perspective at the first WOC plenary.

Following her talk, Dominican Sister Marjorie Tuite, one of the conference organizers, waved happily to friends in the balcony and shouted, "She moved it!" Tuite was observing that by beginning with structural analysis of the causes of non-ordination of women as linked to racism, sexism, and classism, Collins had added a dimension not present at the 1975 meeting.

WOC organizer Dolly Pomerleau feels that "power is at the root of refusal to ordain women." Much discussion centered around whether to fight the incumbents from a position of powerlessness, or turn to alternative sources. A paper circulated by Rosemary Radford Ruether, resource person for the Theology Track, argued for the base community as an alternative source of power.

"We contend," summarized Ruether, "that despite all the superstructures the church has developed historically in various forms, the basic concept of the church is rooted in the local congregation." She further proposed that Catholics nourish themselves for the long struggle and break the impasse

of unresponsive hierarchial power through recovery of "their own recognition of the community base of all sacramental power."

To many, this meant congregational ordination (a practice reported in THE WITNESS, December, 1977). Congregational ordination is seen as an intermediate strategy, and does not extend beyond the congregation. It looks forward to official recognition "as a part of healing the whole Church of the sins of sexism that presently deprive it of full universality."

The Conference addressed power through resolutions, turning first to visible power. Overwhelmingly affirmed were statements urging bishops to implement their study supporting team ministry; opening the office of preaching; pushing for a feminist columnist in diocesan newspapers; and extending ministerial education. More radical structural challenges passed by slight margins, lacking sufficient consensus for immediate action. These included a financial boycott and a Strike Day, echoing Fiorenza's stirring call for "a spiritual hunger strike." This latter resolution, which urged *women* to abstain from the Eucharist on April 29, was amended as voices shouted, "and men!"

Appeal to an alternative power base was also narrowly affirmed: "We recommend that unless the priestly ministries of women are officially recognized by the hierarchial church in the next five years, we, ourselves, will publicly celebrate the church's affirmation of the call of women to priestly ministry."

**"Reflecting on my vision of ordained ministry, I am aware that it bears little resemblance to the present format. I see my femaleness, my marital status (mother of five) and my living in the world not as liabilities, but indeed as strong assets to the kind of ministry I am called to."**

New ministry means making the desert blossom while calling the Holy City to



repent. Desert situations discussed in my section of the Strategy Track applied to the woman hospital chaplain, the woman hearing spontaneous confessions, the retreat director and the leader of a women's group that suddenly wants to celebrate its work and growth.

Other desert areas now ignored by the church are inhabited by poor and minority peoples, many of whom attended the Conference on scholarships. The gay community was represented at the New Ways Ministry booth. Third World women are also finding themselves called in dramatic ways to perform priestly functions in Latin America, for example, which has only 1 priest for every 7,000 people.

The ministry of these deserts was most graphically described by a young Mexican grandmother who works in a leprosarium. One of the patients, who was dying, asked to be anointed. The grandmother ran to town while her son-in-law kept the man alive through artificial respiration.

"No," said the first priest. "I'm busy."

"No," said the second. "Those people are contagious."

"No," said the last. "People with leprosy look so awful, I'll just throw up."

So the grandmother entered the church alone, respectfully took a consecrated host and stole the oil. She returned in time to anoint the dying patient and give him the host. Later, she told this story to a trusted priest.

"Did you confess it?" asked the trusted priest.

"Hell, no!" responded the young grandmother.

Echoing this sentiment, the WOC Conference overwhelmingly affirmed a resolution recommending "that an invitation be made to the Vatican to send emissaries to this country to experience the reality of women ministering."

An awesome extension of new ministry is experiencing God's presence, especially sacramentally, where the canon says it cannot happen. The small group section in which I participated was organized for those who had experienced themselves as sacramental ministers, wanted to build

networks, and devise a "coming out" strategy. About 12 of the 50 shared their stories. But all were reluctant to put anything on the record, define themselves or be defined. Sacramental power can be frightening, particularly if one's roots say it is a no-no. How great is the price of saying yes to the Holy Spirit? How can one stay Catholic when it looks like the Holy Spirit isn't? The resolution finally drafted by my section and supported by the entire Conference read, "We affirm those who act in obedience to the Spirit by preaching, anointing, reconciling, presiding and serving in a pastoral and/or sacramental way as called forth by the human family."

**"I want to be a lady with a baby, and a priest, was my naive but determined reply to what I wanted to be. I would beg the pastor to let me be an altar girl. 'If only I were a boy,' I thought. But that wouldn't work either. Then I couldn't be a lady with a baby!"**

The issue of sexuality was a major point raised by Wessels at the Priests for Equality Conference. Living up to male stereotyping is as oppressive for men as female stereotyping is for women. Wessels said it is even more oppressive for the Roman priest, who has no wife or children to "prove" his masculinity. So he turns to authoritarian role playing, put downs of gays, crude jokes about women and pursuit of sports.

The Rev. Richard P. McBrien, WOC panelist, said that the ordination of women, celibacy and contraception form an interlocking set of issues. They constitute a perspective that underlies all work for social justice. McBrien's contention is supported by *Are Catholics Ready?*, a social science survey of 5,492 churchgoing Catholics. Support for an anti-abortion amendment correlated strongly and positively with support for priestly celibacy, opposition to artificial birth

control and remarriage after divorce and condemnation of premarital sex by engaged couples. And those supporting restrictive sexual morality were more prone to support the death penalty and the need for U.S. military superiority and more inclined to feel that racial equality had gone too far.

Plenary speaker Mary Hunt, Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley, called for a renewed theology of sexuality.

Hunt began this renewal by redefining the traditional religious vows — poverty, chastity and obedience. Hunt redefined poverty as sharing the earth's resources with the earth's people. Chastity is being responsible for human relationships. Obedience is found in community accountability for decision making. A small step was taken toward a renewed understanding of sexuality with only a "slight affirmation" of recommendation to "establish a task force to facilitate the inclusion of lesbians and gay men in the public ministry of the Church."

Diversity was apparent from the beginning of the WOC Conference. The opening plenary featured an international panel from Mexico, Paraguay, Uganda, India and Belgium, moderated by a Chicana. The closing meditation was delivered by Dominican Sister Shawn Copeland, former Director of the National Black Sisters Conference. A resolution was affirmed for an International Conference in Rome in 1980, coinciding with the Bishops' Synod.

Ideological diversity was also apparent. Most agreed that structural change is necessary. The debate was when and how. Some would enter the priesthood and work for change from within; others would demand change before entering. Aware of this diversity, the Conference planners structured it into the program. The Strategy Track featured a debate, "If the Pope Would Allow the Ordination of Women, I Would/Would Not Be Ordained."

Also anticipated was the dissension over the Saturday evening liturgy. Some, saying they could not worship with a male celebrant, planned an alternative liturgy.





**Kathleen O'Toole, co-director of the Quixote Center, calls upon women in diverse ministries to unite in their desire to be free at the WOC Conference.**

The alternative liturgy was held simultaneously with the planned, and was announced in all regular sessions. About 250 attended, reading scriptures in English and Spanish, a group penance and a group consecration of the "bread that is broken and wine that is shared as we continue to strive to share our lives with those with whom we minister."

Less anticipated dissension arose in the planned Eucharist. The celebrant, William Callahan, S.J., national

**For those who wish to order resources quoted in this article: *Called to Break Bread?*, a psychological study of 100 women seeking ordination to the Catholic priesthood, is \$4.45 postage included. *Are Catholics Ready?*, an 8½ by 11 monograph, the political/sociological study of 5,492 churchgoing Catholics, is \$7, postage included. Both books are available from the Quixote Center, 3311 Chauncey Pl. #302, Mt. Rainier, Md. 20822.**

secretary of Priests for Equality, preferred to consecrate with a "Canon of Equality." Further, he wanted everyone to read the consecration and make the gestures. A hot debate ensued from conservative elements and Callahan was overruled. But several women distributed a few copies of the approved canon and encouraged others to recite from memory. A mini rebellion broke out during the regular Eucharist with enough of us gesturing and belting out the canon to be noticed by all.

The biggest issue facing the new Core Commission when it meets this month will be diversity. How to bridge the debate on "when" ordination? How to approach tactics such as boycotts, strikes and congregational ordination? How to approach the issues of sexuality? Whether to include other women's issues, such as continued support for the Equal Rights Amendment, on the WOC agenda?

Ideological diversity is a source of pain for many. For others it is to be lifted up and shared, symbolized during the regular Eucharist in the call of the spirit of present ministry to the women of the West, East and Third World.

In reviewing my eight years in the secular feminist movement and witnessing the first steps of the Catholic feminist movement, I see three ingredients necessary for success: humor, anger and resolve.

We laughed as we stood during the closing plenary on November 12, singing Happy Birthday to Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Several hours later, as the conference planners collapsed in a restaurant for the first good meal in three days, we raised a rousing verse of "For We Are Jolly Good People." Humor is present in writings and meetings. Hopefully it will grow.

Catholic women will never be short on anger. The hierarchy will see to that! The only problem will be feeling and expressing it within the context of the Gospel of Liberation. An offensive, perhaps even a recalcitrant hierarchy, could resolve ideological disputes. For example, the longer it takes the hierarchy to accept those willing to

enter the priesthood as it is, the closer they will be pushed toward their sisters who demand wide-sweeping change.

Franciscan Sister Fran Ferder, who spoke at the Priesthood Track regarding her book, *Called to Break Bread?*, summarized the situation: "I was impressed by the sense of seriousness among these women who seek ordination. They seem to be acting out of a Gospel call. They currently appear to have a great desire to stay within the present church and to operate within its framework. It is difficult to know how long they can sustain their excitement and hope for the present church in the face of a hierarchy which appears not to take them seriously."

I also see a great sense of resolve in the Catholic feminist movement. It is expressed by leaders such as Pomerleau: "I was raised a religious object. I am in the process of becoming a religious subject — joining hands with other oppressed women and caring men to create a renewed church." ■

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**The Rev. Alla Bozarth-Campbell, Episcopal priest-author of *Womanpriest*, at the Wisdom House booth at the Conference.**



## A Response to Jonestown:

# Looking in the Mirror

by Carter Heyward

*On Nov. 18, five persons were shot to death in Guyana by members of the People's Temple. Shortly thereafter, at the directive of Temple leader, Jim Jones, hundreds of his followers drank a cyanide-laced potion and died within minutes. Most did so apparently without physical coercion. At last count the death toll was over 900.*

It would be easy to write it off as an anomaly, a macabre exception to an otherwise good rule: To feed the hungry, clothe the naked, work for the common good, take seriously the life and teachings of Jesus. Many Christians will declare with an air of certainty that the problem was Marxism; that Jim Jones was a phony Christian, a socialist manipulating Christianity as a recruitment instrument. Jones' wife Marceline said as much in a 1977 interview: "Jim used religion to try to get some people out of the opiate of religion." (*N.Y. Times*, 11/26). Marxists and socialists, on the other hand, may well contend that the problem was religion, an illusion of spirituality permeating the American culture out of which Jones and his people came and which they attempted to purify in Guyana — a spirituality that duped Jones and, finally, more than 900 others, shielding them from the reality of history itself.

There will be much buck-passing. What happened at the airstrip and later in the commune will be lamented as the result of socialism, communism, capitalism, religion, the churches, moral decline in a rootless society, the jungle, the U.S. government, the Guyanese government, the cults, the parents, narcissism, masochism, homosexuality. Or, perhaps most will contend, the psychosis of one person, the Rev. Jim Jones.

Early in Thanksgiving week as reports began to trickle in, I found myself distracted from the work I had intended to do over the holidays — reading contemporary theology. As the news from Jonestown mounted, so too did my distraction. I had difficulty reading or writing, concentrating or looking



Carter Heyward

ahead toward my field exam. I wanted to talk about Jonestown — constantly. Yet in conversation my friends and I would find ourselves nervous about what felt like our voyeurism: Gawking at the scene of an accident; gasping, repelled by what we saw and heard, yet drawn again and again to see and hear.

For the first time, I experienced panic about a friend's involvement in a fundamentalist biblical group centered around one charismatic male leader who champions abundant living in the name of Jesus.

I was also enraged that the People's Temple had defined itself as both Christian and socialist, and was perceived as such, thereby undercutting two complementary perspectives that seem to me critical to ministry in the world.

Moreover I knew that we would begin to hear much about the sexual mores of the commune and the sexual attitudes and practices of Jim Jones himself, thereby feeding into the already hysterical anxieties of Americans about sexual abnormality.

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Related to these concerns was my own sense that it could have been me. Far from distancing the Jonestown affair, I felt aware somewhere in the deep recesses of my own consciousness that Jim Jones and his people had "acted out" my own capacities . . . to participate in destruction, to live into the transformation of good to evil.

Needless to say, through issues raised by Jonestown, I discovered that far from being distracted from contemporary theology, I had been immersed in it all week. Jonestown helped me to confront the issues with which I have been struggling, grouped loosely under two headings: *Dreaming Dreams*, and *Authority*.

### Dreaming Dreams

*Some people see things as they are and ask, "Why?"  
I see things as they might be and ask, "Why not?"*

*Paraphrase, Robert F. Kennedy*

What went wrong? How does it happen that a Christian vision of a socialist utopia becomes so grossly distorted? It is inadequate to lay the blame on the inner workings of the leader — to suggest that Jim Jones was all along a power-hungry and paranoid individual suffering delusions of self-deification. All of this may be true, as is often the case with "successful" religious leaders. But it is an inadequate explanation of what happened not only to the 900 others, but also to Jim Jones himself.

We need to take very seriously the "social construction of reality" (Berger) e.g., of ideologies such as Marxism, Christianity, utopia, sexism, racism, classism; and ways of experiencing and organizing reality, such as work, sexuality, worship, leading and following, economic distribution, social/racial relations, male-female relations, and even mass suicide. Jonestown makes clear, if ever there was any doubt, that the vision is neither pure, nor enough.

*The vision is not pure.* The dream is constructed out of pieces of the historical-cultural situations of the visionary and cannot be extracted from the context of social reality. To paraphrase Margaret Mead, the dreamer, the leader, the follower, cannot remain "uncontaminated by any knowledge of the people" in the United States, Guyana, the world, without cutting him/herself off from the possibility of making a constructive difference to the people of that world, including him/herself. Jonestown blows the lid off the illusion of a constructive separatism from the world — be its theoretical impulse that of the Word of God, pure theology, socialist utopia, radical feminism, mythological reconstruction, or psychological-spiritual retreat.

*The vision is not enough.* Jim Jones' dream, as he articulated it some 20 years ago, is a Christian dream that cannot be surpassed. It is regrettable that it will be rejected by many on the basis of Jones' inability to persevere toward

its fulfillment. The problem was not his religious/socialist vision, but rather his incapacity to sustain it. The end will not sustain the means. The goal will not produce the methods. The vision is not enough.

The final Jonestown vision — bloated decomposing bodies, layered in circles, linked arm in arm — is dramatic and nauseating witness to the incapacity of either the Christian or the socialist dream to sustain itself in the absence of engagement with historical realities and in the absence of thoughtful means by which to affect these realities from a participatory position. To rely upon the vision to sustain itself is to betray the substance of Christianity and the method of Marxist analysis.

Disengagement. Isolation. Contempt for the people of the world and the realities of opposition and struggle. Passion for one's own commitment without compassion for others in the society whose commitments are different from one's own. Within the Peoples' Temple, this defensive contempt undercut the historical possibilities for the making real of a dream. As such, it rendered almost predictable the mass suicide as the final act — itself a liturgy of defensive contempt for the realities of human life in the world. Perhaps this was the only way the visionary people could opt for the last word. The other option would have been engagement, communication, the taking of responsibility for relationships to those outside themselves.

### Authority

*Where the world is understood biblically, that is, as moving toward an end, a goal, an authoritarian obedience cannot adequately express the will of God for the world. It is interested solely in the preservation of order and consequently displays hostility toward the future.*

*Dorothee Solle  
"Beyond Mere Obedience"*

The most *apparent* problem was the manipulation of people by a demented leader. But the most *basic* problem was the willingness of the people to submit themselves totally to the authority of a leader — sane or insane, creative or destructive.

Throughout the "Jonestown week" the media raised the question of authority from a variety of perspectives: The U.S. government was accused of not interfering, undoubtedly by many persons who otherwise have plead, worked, and voted for less interference by government in their lives. Parents were televised lambasting cults and yet lamenting the lack of structured authority in the lives of their children; indeed, some of the same parents who, before the deaths, had spoken of the beautiful sense of purpose and meaning Jim Jones had given their children, were shown



after the fact to be outraged by Jim Jones, whom they called, a dictator, a fascist.

The *N.Y. Times* and other media reported that what began as a commendable and effective social mission in the 1950s and '60s turned bizarre as Jones began to focus on his own messianic role, denouncing all opposition within and without the Temple. Finally, it was reported, Jones claimed to be Jesus, "God's incarnation." And the people were willing to give him this ultimate and absolute authority over their lives — and their deaths.

What is extraordinary about this is that it is not at all extraordinary. Not only are there historical precedents for murders or suicide pacts inspired by religious conviction (Masada, the phenomenon of Holy Wars and smaller scale acts such as those of the Manson cult); but also, and more significantly, the willingness of people to submit totally to the judgment and the worldview of others, is commonplace.

Today it is manifest in Christian cults, where the biblical interpretations of one leader are assumed to be the Truth and are given their legitimation under the guise of the infallibility of *Scripture* (not of the leader, who characteristically disclaims all authority for what he says). Psychologically, it is a small step between humility such as this (even if genuine) and others' perceptions of such a leader as "godlike," perceptions which in turn are bound to affect the leader.

A case can also be made for the expectation of total submission to the church, whether under the guise of tradition, discipline or scriptural authority. Roman Catholics are expected to obey the dictates of papal authority. Ordained priests and ministers take vows of obedience to superiors. And baptized Christians are expected to submit to Christ, whose person and will is interpreted by those in authority.

Such submission is manifest also in the many forms of patriotism, such as anti-communism, militarism and defense, national security, the equation of God with country, the capitalist system of economy, the nuclear family, the headship of men over women, and obedience to authority (of parents, teachers, husbands, bosses, bishops, generals) regardless of whether the authority is just or unjust, beneficent or cruel.

Those of us in the liberal contingents of the church are ready to assert the problems inherent in authoritarianism and mindless obedience to a leader, whether civil or ecclesiastical. But Jonestown pushes us further. Because many of us — feminists, black, liberationists, liberals, post-liberals, radicals, democrats and socialists, gay and gay advocates — have shared and struggled within the context of the People's Temple's *anti-authoritarianism*. We too have

been resistant to the policies of the U.S. government; we too have been ridiculed and written off for a lack of patriotism; we too have been denounced as blasphemous and perverse by Christians who have been scandalized by our searches for new ways of living in community, and by theologians who have been scandalized by our "relativization" of biblical authority.

We can despise the People's Temple. We can denounce its methods. We can distance ourselves from its death. But the People's Temple and the Jonestown incident was us. It was not "the enemy." It was not anti-black, anti-communist, anti-gay, anti-social change. It was us, our vision and our values, stripped to the terrifying bareness of our own vulnerability either to manipulate, or be manipulated by, *the madness of our passion for a better world*.

And so Jonestown invites us to reconsider the norms of our authority. From what, or from whom, do we take our cues for the shaping of our values? The positing of our goals? The means by which we intend to move toward these ends? The doing of our deeds? The definitions of ourselves as meaningful, productive, worthwhile people? These questions are fundamental to the doing of theology as well as to the living of life. ■

### 'Authority' in Retrospect

*Did you miss the July, 1978 WITNESS devoted to the issue of Authority? Articles include "Authority as Nurture," by John Skinner, professor of theology at Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge; "Authority as Parable," by William Stringfellow, theologian, social critic, and attorney; and "Authority as Myself," by the late Don Thorman, former editor of the National Catholic Reporter, with responses to all by the Rev. Alison Cheek, psychotherapist and pastoral counselor.*

*Also available from last year is Carter Heyward's meditation on "The Enigmatic God," lead article in the April, 1978 issue of THE WITNESS. The April and July issues are available for \$1 (for both) from THE WITNESS, Box 359, Ambler, PA 19002.*

### Welcome to Pittsburgh

**With this issue of THE WITNESS we welcome to our circle of new and renewed subscribers 107 clergy of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. This is currently the only diocese to have 100% of the parish clergy receiving THE WITNESS. The cost is being met partially by persons from the diocese, partially by THE WITNESS.**



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*It may be that communities do not meet basic issues head on,  
but encounter them only as obliquely expressed in trivial  
concerns . . .*  
~~~~~

# Beyond Triviality

by Alan C. Tull

The triviality of the issues which preoccupy and divide communities is a common and frustrating condition of human life. Simply to note this triviality is oftentimes to miss that within and under the issue at point are other issues which are central to the very life and self-understanding of the community itself.

It may be that communities do not directly meet basic issues but encounter them only as they are obliquely expressed in particular, more immediate and often trivial concerns. It may be as well that communities cannot directly debate mightier matters but can consider them in a controversial context only when the issues have become trivialized or, to be kinder, domesticated and humanized. "Humankind cannot bear very much reality," T.S. Eliot noted.

We might call this the *foreskin principle* after the issue by which the earliest Christian community determined its relation to Judaism and the Torah of the Old Testament. It was the issue of the foreskins of the male gentile converts upon which Paul argued the place of the gentile in the

New Israel and the total sufficiency of grace apart from law. The fourth century debates on the relation of the Second Person of the Trinity to the First Person found expression in the debate over an *iota* in the spelling of the Greek word used to express the relationship between the persons. The fundamental and overwhelming issue was the relation of the developing Christian community to the Hellenistic religions and philosophies of the Roman world. To have used *iota* and the word *homoiousios* would have made the persons of the Trinity fundamentally two different beings of like substance, two separate Gods. The *homoousios*, ultimately accepted at Constantinople in 381, asserts that the persons are the same substance and that there is only One God in a Trinity of Persons.

One may observe similar instances of this principle at different times in history. And one may also note a corollary of the principle: Communities develop styles or favorite modes of trivialization. Learned communities, such as college faculties, often prefer to debate an issue in terms of the punctuation of the resolution. Similarly Anglicans tend to work out issues in

terms of their liturgical expressions and implications. This seems to be a basic characteristic of Anglican life and is certainly indicative of the importance of liturgy for Anglicanism.

The foreskin principle does not imply that communities are always consciously aware of the implications and other aspects of the issues being debated. It does not mean either that the controverted issues are necessarily without merit in themselves. What the principle does suggest is that communities often resolve profound issues in terms of more superficial expressions. It also suggests that communities in debating seemingly trivial matters are in fact coming to grips with fundamental issues.

It is in terms of this principle that I would like to suggest that, in the controverted issues now before it, the Episcopal Church is also dealing with a matter much more basic. On the top of the debate are controversies over the ordination of women, liturgical reform and prayer book revision, and the ordination of homosexual persons. In and under all of these questions is another issue which is fundamental to the life of the Church.

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The question, to put it bluntly, is whether the Episcopal Church is a religion or a Christian entity. I mean "religion" here in the sense that Barth used it: The human attempt to give sacral and divine justification to the human situation and, especially, the *status quo* of a human society. I use the word "Christian" fundamentally to stand in opposition to religion in this sense, but I have in mind Christian life and Christian community as living freely in terms of grace and faithfulness and perceiving in the cross and resurrection both the form and hope of God's love and kingdom in this world. It is a faithfulness which is always called to creative response in the contemporary world and to bear the hope of the resurrection for peace and justice in the world's particular situations and needs.

Religion, in these terms, seeks a static justification to preserve a static *status quo*. A Christian community, caught up in the judgment and hope of the resurrection of the crucified Christ, seeks to serve the new creation in the possibilities and changes of ongoing historical life. There are other significant differences but, I believe, these remarks delineate the contrast. It is fundamentally a difference between the attempt to create an otherworldly sacral sphere which justifies actively, or passively ignores, the social and economic *status quo* and the attempt faithfully to live out in a changing world and society the hope found in the resurrection of Jesus.

The attempt to make the church a religion is threatened by the issues before the church on three levels. In the first instance the mere possibility of change in the life of the community of faith raises implicitly the question of change in the society to which religion would give sacral justification. A sublime and beautiful liturgy of the 16th century raises few questions about obedient and faithful living in the society of the end of the 20th century. For religion, faithfulness is the denial of change in the forms and modes of life in the church; the possibility of change in these areas suggests the need for

judgment and change in other areas. But it must be asked for Christian life whether change is contrary to faithfulness. Is it not the case that faithfulness has to do with an obedience which undergirds and calls into question all forms and modes of life and would see each in terms of its historical context? "New occasions teach new duties" as the old hymn put it.

A second level of threat to religion lies in the fact that many of the changes which are before the church are parallel to changes in the wider society. The use of modern language in the liturgy is a clear recognition that we are a changing community which is related to an historical society. Even more threatening is the perceived fact that the issues involving ordination are parallel to the issues of women's liberation and understandings of human sexuality which are in question in society. Religion realizes that the acceptance of such change in the life of the community threatens the social *status quo*. Religion, therefore, attempts to prevent such change in the life of the church by maintaining that the issues for the church derive from the social questions and are, for that reason, to be ignored. For religion this is a consistent judgment; changes which arise from the world or parallel those in the world are almost by definition excluded from consideration.

A quite contrary and positive attitude towards movements outside the church was expressed by St. Augustine in the fifth century:

*Thus, the heavenly City, so long as it is wayfaring on earth, not only makes use of earthly peace but fosters and actively pursues along with other human beings a common platform in regard to all that concerns our purely human life and does not interfere with faith and worship.*

Augustine does not view the church as a religion but as a pilgrim people "wayfaring on earth" through the history

by which God achieves God's purpose. The pilgrim church is, therefore, free to make common cause with all those seeking human peace.

It is on a third level, however, that the conflict between religion and Christian faith and life becomes most serious. Here it is that Christian faith says that Christian life must take seriously the historical world and live in it with both judgment and creative participation. The actual issues of justice and peace are the terms in which Christian obedience are worked out. For Christian faith so understood the liturgical life of the community will express the historical setting of Christian life. Although much of the debate over liturgical revision seems to take place on the aesthetic level of literary style, the new liturgies offer a far more substantial threat to religion than the use of contemporary language. The baptismal promises, for example, speak of justice and peace among all people and the dignity and worth of every human being. This makes almost specific the Christian concern for these issues in contemporary society. In a similar way the intercessory prayers bring into the concerns of worship the life and needs of the contemporary world. It is typically Anglican that the basic issue between religion and Christian life should find expression in the liturgical controversy.

The threat to religion on this level is less immediately apparent in the questions having to do with ordinations. It is in the form of the various arguments, however, that the larger issue emerges. Religion tends to recognize only scripture and tradition as authoritative and treats each of these in a special way. Against this are arguments which claim reason as a third area of authority for the church. Reason in this sense has two meanings: It is a method for appropriating scripture and tradition as well as a body of data from the empirical sciences. The rational use of scripture and tradition at a minimum insists that each be seen in its various historical contexts and conditionings. This means that neither scripture nor tradition can



become the sacral artifacts of religion but must be understood and allowed to speak from their own position in God's redeeming activity in this world. Such a methodology requires a rational consistency in principles of interpretation. Rationally one cannot demand literal conformity to scriptural maxims in one area, sexuality for example, without making a similar demand for maxims in another area, economics for example. Yet the proponents of religion do just that.

Christian faith must also consider its own historical period, and this means that the material of theological reflection must include the data of the empirical sciences. Contemporary psychological, sociological, etc. study of human sexuality cannot be simply dismissed as profane or secular by

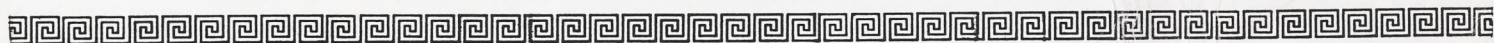
religion. The data of these sciences have to do with the life Christian commitment calls us to live.

The use of concepts of image, symbol, archetype and icon by conservatives in the ordination and sexuality controversies is significant at this point. These notions at their best seem to suggest a static eternal realm to which historical existence must conform. At their worst they derive from cosmological myths whose function was to provide divine sanction for an existing society. The point is that those who wish to prevent change in the church are arguing from categories which deny historical existence and suggest the eternal *status quo* of mythological religion.

Much more needs to be said about the place of reason and the methodology of

our present debates. I am simply suggesting that there is a methodological difference between religion and Christian faith and this difference has an important theological base which in fact expresses to a large degree the Christian challenge to religion.

The Episcopal Church now faces a number of issues, some of which may seem to be ultimately quite trivial. I have tried to suggest that under and in these issues another issue is also being controverted. The point is that we must look at our debates and differences in a larger context and in a more analytic manner. The trivia often rest upon a profound theological difference and we must not allow it to be lost. The fundamental question now is the manner by which we understand God's action in our present world. ■



### Letters continued from page 2

and beliefs in the Episcopal Church, the greater the need to maintain communication between the divided groups.

Also, the November issue, as much of your past writing, deals with racism, generating some feelings and thoughts I wish to share.

- All attempts to load this and future white generations with the racist sins of our fathers will breed continued racism. Christ forgives us our sins as we are heartily sorry for them. Blacks and whites must forgive each other for their present transgressions, not past.

- Lest we forget, racism today is color blind. It exists and is nurtured in black and white minds. We are all capable of this sin. Much of the writing is light on love and understanding for those who commit sins of racism. I am looking for more of the theme of brothers and sisters in Christ, of love of enemy. (If only Christ had not asked us to do that, it is so hard.)

- Our country, our church are imperfect as all man's institutions must

be. May God bless both and continue to give us the spirit to continue the struggle in love.

I want in, even though I often disagree.

**Albert P. Schmitz**  
Kensington, Conn.

### Against Minor Messiahs

After having read several issues of THE WITNESS magazine and having also read your *Struggling with the System, Probing Alternatives*, I was so astounded at the contents of both the magazine and the booklet that I fully intended writing you. Why so-called ministers of the Gospel can't stay within the field for which they were trained, instead of considering themselves minor Messiahs who believe they can cure the ills of the world, is beyond my comprehension.

**Richard W. Hobbs, Esq.**  
Hot Springs Natl. Park, Ark.

### Flout Not Flaunt

Your magazine is so provocative I have to re-subscribe for 3 years. Each issue

(especially July's and September's) makes me think, and, in annoying me, stimulates me tremendously intellectually. But — please — don't confuse "flaunt" with "flout" — as in the Editor's note, September issue.

**David King**  
Elizabeth, N.J.

(Editor's note: We are grateful to reader King for catching the error, and most grateful that he reads THE WITNESS so thoroughly! Thanks to another careful reader, we should also note a mistake in the August issue which stated that Katrina Swanson's bishop "would not recognize her priesthood in the Diocese of Kansas." This should have read, "in the Diocese of West Missouri." Sorry.)

### CREDITS

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