

# THE WITNESS

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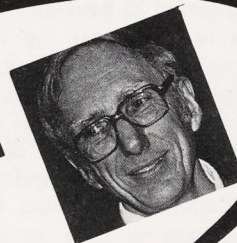
ARCHIVES AND HISTORICAL  
COLLECTIONS, EPISCOPAL  
CHURCH  
AUSTIN, TEXAS

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**Abortion Update**  
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## Poem Is a Lie

In your magazine I have read many truths and many half-truths and distortions of truth. But Christen Frothingham's poem in the February issue of THE WITNESS directly contradicts the Biblical story of Abraham.

That Sarah despaired of having a child is evident. Abraham did not tolerate Sarah, he loved her. If God had given sex to man only as a means of procreation, then obviously the desire and the act would disappear when the family is complete. That is not so. Abraham and Sarah treasured their love and each other as a gift of God and were able, perhaps, to love God better because of it.

Abraham and Sarah both doubted that God would provide them with a child in their old age. Naturally, we do not expect God to work miracles in our behalf, although, obviously He does.

But, *nowhere* in the Bible did it state that Sarah doubted God's love and went so far as to say "some God." (I cannot write a small "g"). Furthermore, nowhere are there any words that Sarah was jealous of Abraham or resented her place. Your beautiful poem is a lie and discredits you. It is worthy of someone who doubts God and Christianity.

**Kathleen Hall**  
Trenton, Mich.

## Ms. Frothingham Replies

Indeed, according to Plato, poetry is usually "a lie" — at any rate a fiction — and it makes few claims to exegetical accuracy. There are few "words" in the

received text of Genesis which tell how either Sarah or Abraham felt.

Throughout the Old Testament, however, women's feelings, women's stories, women's points of view are conspicuously absent. The male-oriented Biblical and church traditions do not do justice to the God who loves — and came to save — all of humankind. (God's action in history is not just "the Biblical story of Abraham"; it is Sarah's story, too, and all of ours.) An interpretation of Sarah's role in our history in terms of sexuality (specifically her desire or desirability) does a disservice to the wholeness of her personality, and of our heritage.

If Ms. Hall wants a cheerier reading-in-to Sarah and Abraham's story, I recommend Frederick Buechner's *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale*, pp. 49-53. If she wants the text and nothing but the text, she will have to read more carefully — and settle for less than the whole truth.

**Christen Frothingham**  
Episcopal Divinity School  
Cambridge, Mass.

## Frustrated by Power

I am a member of the Women's Ordination Conference. I have all three of the ingredients Georgia Fuller listed in her article in the January WITNESS:

*Humor:* When they put up a sign during Vocation Month, with a Roman collar and an ad, "White collar workers needed," I added a note, "We are NOT an equal opportunity employer. Women need not apply."

*Anger:* In a recent survey, our pastor asked, "Is the liturgy in its present form meaningful for you?" I responded, "It is an occasion of sin for me when I attend and see token representation of women, if any."

*Resolve:* The previous two references and my joining WOC attest to my resolve to work for women in the church.

I must admit, however, as I am frustrated more and more, my commitment to Catholicism is decreasing. My commitment to Christ is

and will always be strong, but as it comes into conflict with the abuse of power in the church hierarchy, my respect for the formal church diminishes.

I wonder if WOC can work towards a nationwide policy of acceptance of women in the lay ministry, either through a bishops' conference or attempting to get Papal permission to allow women everywhere to be able to distribute Communion. I am angry because women 50 miles from me are treated with respect, allowed as lay ministers, and I am excluded. The inequity, the frank discrimination, has me frustrated.

It is not difficult to see that a woman in an area that excludes women from the special ministry just because of her femaleness could interpret that use of authority as abuse of authority when she sees other women acting as special ministers in nearby places. It seems to me that these pockets of discrimination are going to cause much strife and great damage to the church.

My prayer is that my humor, anger and resolve will help to diminish the prejudice against women in our church because my real goal is to be able to share my love of Christ more fully in the church.

**Patricia K. Durbeck**  
Mechanicsburg, Pa.

## Plug for WITNESS

Thought you might like to see a local mailing of our Clergy Association of Utah which excerpts Robert McAfee Brown's article from the February issue and gives THE WITNESS a plug. Keep up your excellent work. We not only need the articles but they help us very much when we become discouraged.

**The Rev. E. John Langlitz**  
Salt Lake City, Utah

## What Are the Limits?

I read an article by one of my heroes, John Hines, titled "Hope in a Handful of Dust" in the December, 1978 issue of

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## Irresponsible Abortion?

by Helen Seager

*(The editorial appearing in the March 4 issue of **The Living Church** concerning the action taken by the last General Convention on the subject of abortion was of more than passing interest. Because we felt it insensitive to the human issues involved, we asked Helen Seager of the Department of Christian Social Relations of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, and member of the Western Pennsylvania Policy Council, Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, to respond to **The Living Church**).*

The March 4 editorial page of *The Living Church*, commenting on the abortion rights resolution passed by the 1976 Episcopal General Convention, focused on abortion "for convenience" and "irresponsible abortion." It also mentioned "*preferable alternatives*." (italics, LC).

Any discussion of alternatives must begin with the biological fact that the *only* alternative to abortion is pregnancy. Indeed, the word "alternative" is properly used when exactly two options exist. A woman seeking abortion already knows that pregnancy is not the preferable alternative. Her reasons, which are none of our business, likely have nothing to do with the standard categories (the woman's life, fetal deformity, rape, incest, the woman's health) approved by people who may or may not ever be pregnant themselves. Rather, she is likely to have a reason previously uncategorized.

Women seeking abortion are often, but not always, able to make the choice without researching the strengths and weaknesses of the alternative outcomes

of the pregnancy such as might be done, for example, in choosing a contractor or a course of study or even a husband. *The Living Church's* editorial writers don't seem to understand this, and conclude that the reason is therefore either "irresponsible" or for "convenience."

*The Living Church's* nervousness about "irresponsible" abortion leads the magazine to conclude that people participating in "rallies demonstrations or publications advocating irresponsible abortions for any individual or groups" are acting against the "teaching of this church." No one, least of all abortion rights people, advocates "irresponsible" abortion for anyone, just as no one should advocate irresponsible child bearing. One is left with the question, what "group" might have been the object of such advocacy? Only one group has been discussed widely in recent years in connection with abortion rights; namely, poor women. If this is the group that drew the attention of *The Living Church* to

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*"Theologically speaking, the overruling fascination with institutional survival is the sign of the demonic in a principality."*

## The State of the Church:

When the editors of *The Witness* first approached me about writing a series of articles in contemplation of the next General Convention, I felt hesitant to undertake the assignment. I had, after all, already expressed a sentiment about the present condition of the Episcopal Church in the article, "The Embarrassment of Being Episcopalian" (see *THE WITNESS*, February, 1978). That piece evoked widespread response. I received an avalanche of correspondence, telephone calls and other communications — which seemed to confirm the anguish and disgust, dismay and anger of many clergy and many laity concerning what has been happening to the Episcopal Church in the last several years. There is a point at which a Christian is called upon to dust his or her feet and move on, and I wondered, when the invitation came from *THE WITNESS* to write further about the crisis in the Episcopal Church, whether I had

yet arrived at that place.

The truth is that the Episcopal Church is now decadent enough so that it is a serious temptation to repudiate it, as, indeed, some have; or simply to ignore it altogether, as, in fact, increasing numbers do. In the end I decided to write these articles because my esteem for the Anglican genius within Christianity, together with my affirmation of my own inheritance and my love for the Episcopal Church, has — for the time being — proved stronger than such temptation.

*Superficially*, the crisis in the Episcopal Church has become focused in the overwhelming preoccupation of the ecclesiastical establishment and the incumbent church management with the internal problems of the institution and the preemption, by virtue of that obsession, of this church's responsibility and mission in society in the United States and in the rest of the world.

An audit of the proceedings of the House of Bishops, meanwhile, during the past six years yields an astonishing record of theological illiteracy, pastoral indifference, pedantic quibblings, and uncanonical actions, not to mention episodes of befuddlement, outbursts of hysteria, vainglorious indulgences, and prolonged lapses into incoherence. This spirit of solemn chaos which has been reigning in the House of Bishops — but for some occasional interruptions prompted by reason or common sense or faith or concern for the flock — is attributable to the internal institutional obsession and the sustained neglect of mission, though I also suspect there is more to it than that. Theologically speaking, the overruling fascination with institutional survival is a sign of the demonic in a principality.

It is *that* issue which I address in these articles for *THE WITNESS*.

*William Henry Fellow*



# A Matter of Conscience

by William Stringfellow

The ordination of women to the priesthood has much to do, both as symptom and cause, with the Episcopal Church crisis. This was fated as soon as a woman publicly affirmed her vocation to the priesthood. That affirmation required every male priest and, for that matter, every layperson in the Episcopal Church, to reexamine their various comprehensions of the priestly calling and, further, to consider why there is a priesthood vested in the church at all. I consider the articulation of such elementary issues at this juncture in the history of the church to be a service, done by the women who first claimed priestly vocations, benefiting the whole body of the church and every member of it. It is essential to the integrity of the church — that is, it spares the church conformity to the world — to ask and reask rudimentary questions such as these, no matter how threatening that may be to the ecclesial status quo and no matter the tumult or consternation the same may provoke. Thus I greeted the historic ordinations in Philadelphia and in Washington with gladness and with gratitude.

I also considered at the time of these first ordinations of women that there was no canonical prohibition to them. They were both valid and regular, if unprecedented in the tradition of the Episcopal Church in the United States. And I thought that what should be done about these ordinations, so far as the House of Bishops was concerned, would be to allow their recognition by

the diocesan authorities directly affected. There was ample Anglican precedent for that, both in the transition of the church in America from colonial to national status and in the aftermath of the ecclesiastical disruption during the Civil War. I supposed further ordinations of women would happen in other dioceses, and, though some might remain recalcitrant to this change in tradition for quite a while, eventually the matter would settle throughout the church.

I have not changed these views as to what should have occurred, naive though they now might be said to have been. Instead, as everyone knows, there ensued panic and pandemonium. The Presiding Bishop, John Allin, summoned his peers to "emergency" session at O'Hare Airport, having nothing to share with the House of Bishops in the circumstances except his own hysteria. So began the long melancholy turbulence which climaxed at the Minneapolis General Convention when the ordination of women was specifically authorized by the canon law of this church.

Throughout the controversy, those who had been ordained, those who had ordained, and those who affirmed the ordinations took the risk of their position, should it be construed as canonical disobedience in any respect, that they would accept the consequences of acting in conscience. In Anglicanism, these are matters properly determined only in ecclesiastical courts. The ordained



**William Stringfellow** is a theologian, social critic, author and attorney.



women and the ordaining bishops upheld, in other words, the classical stance with respect to alleged disobedience to law on grounds of conscience by which the acceptance of the consequences upon trial and conviction upholds the rule of law, though conscience mandates what is deemed disobedience to some specific law.

None of these putative potential defendants were in fact put to trial, of course, because the church management contrived to avoid that, fearful of the ridiculous publicity that any such trial would have predictably engendered. Thus the weight fell upon two male priests — William Wendt and Peter Beebe — to stand trial in ecclesiastical courts on charges that they had, respectively, invited one or another woman priest to preside in their congregations contrary to admonitions of their bishops. Both Wendt and Beebe have certainly borne the consequences of their acts of conscience!

The Wendt case was lost on appeal in an ecclesiastical court in which at least one of the judges — a young priest — is now known to have been intimidated in his vote on the verdict, that vote being decisive in the result. The Beebe matter was won on appeal, but the defendant, thus vindicated, has yet to receive some gesture of reconciliation from his ecclesiastical authorities and has, it appears, been consigned to limbo so far as the exercise of his own priesthood is concerned.

Meanwhile, the most flagrant and notorious instance of canonical disobedience in the history of the Episcopal Church — the defiance by the Presiding Bishop of the court's subpoena to testify in the Wendt trial — remains an open issue. The ecclesiastical court on its own initiative adjudged the Presiding Bishop guilty of contempt, rendering him vulnerable to presentment for trial. I do not expect that to happen. In fact, I personally intervened to estop his presentment in part in consideration of his health and in part in hope of ameliorating the controversy formulated at O'Hare

Airport. Thus the Presiding Bishop has escaped the consequences of his canonical disobedience, even though he never pretended it to be an act of conscience.

When the Minneapolis General Convention adopted the canon authorizing the ordination of women, certain of the bishops stated that they, in conscience, would not ordain any women as priests. I took their assertion at the time at face value. That meant to me that some bishops would abstain from such ordinations, but do nothing to obstruct or inhibit them. And I realized that it might imply that some bishops would quit the Episcopal Church. Others might resign active jurisdictions. These seemed to me all to be conscientious options.

But, since Minneapolis, something quite different has taken place in a significant number of instances where the ordinations of duly qualified women have been forestalled or precluded. The matter acquired formality in "A Statement on Conscience" at the House of Bishops meeting in October, 1977, wherein the House maintains that the recitation of conscience justifies ignoring or circumventing the law of the church authorizing the ordination of women and purports to excuse disregard of this canon without risk of presentment or other ecclesiastical proceeding. The Statement even attempts to disqualify the women's ordination canon from the canon law: "*It is oversimplifying to demand obedience to (this) canon just as one does for every other canon.*"

What this extraordinary document amounts to is not just an enlargement of

the assertion of conscientious objection to the ordination of women uttered at Minneapolis but, much more than that, a unilateral (the House of Deputies was not duly consulted) act of nullification. And that is exactly the way it has been used in certain situations. It makes a mockery of canon law by naming prejudice or eccentricity or retribution as conscience and then exonerating defiance of the law of the church on the pretext of so-called conscience.

I do not think for a moment that the promulgation of this Statement is happenstance. It is wholly consistent with the behavior and apparent intent of the church management on the issue of the ordination of women. Throughout the public controversy, the Presiding Bishop was, at best, coy and evasive and supercilious as to his own persuasion. After Minneapolis he became more candid when his opinion was leaked to the press that he could abide a woman as priest no more than he could imagine a man bearing a child. What more emphatic encouragement could be sponsored by the titular head of the church to those defying the law of the church?

In any case, some of the recent schismatics have a more colorable claim to invoke the name of conscience than that furnished in the Statement wrought in the House of Bishops. And the matter goes far beyond the sham of the Statement and the immediacy of the ordination of women. If its implications are pressed, it would radically revise the polity of the Episcopal Church, rendering congregational — or even individual — autonomy in place of episcopal authority. There is, traditionally, a strong presumption that when the House of Bishops acts it knows what it is doing, but here the presumption seems facetious, for in this position on conscience, so-called, the bishops are beheld dissipating their own authority, along with that of the General Convention. Ironically, it was that same authority that so many bishops supposed had been threatened when the first women priests were ordained.

*(To be continued next issue)*

## Of Bishops and Antibiotics

**Liberation theologian Jose Comblin, asked at an unofficial press conference in Puebla, Mexico, what is the Catholic Church's greatest problem, replied with a single word: "Antibiotics." Only after considerable pressure did he explain: "They keep bishops alive years after they stop functioning."**

— *Latin America Press/Lima*



## An Interview with Robert Bellah

# 'We're in the Lull Between Two Storms'

by Lockwood Hoehl

*Robert N. Bellah is Ford Professor of Sociology and Comparative Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. He is considered to be the authority on American civil religion. His most recent book on the subject is **The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial**.*

*Dr. Bellah spoke to the Fosdick Ecumenical Convocation on Preaching recently at Riverside Church in New York City. Following the address, free-lance writer Lockwood Hoehl interviewed Dr. Bellah for THE WITNESS.*

**Dr. Bellah, in your book, *A Broken Covenant*, you said, "The 1960s appeared as a great awakening, and then prematurely withered." Where do you think all the energy of the '60s went?**

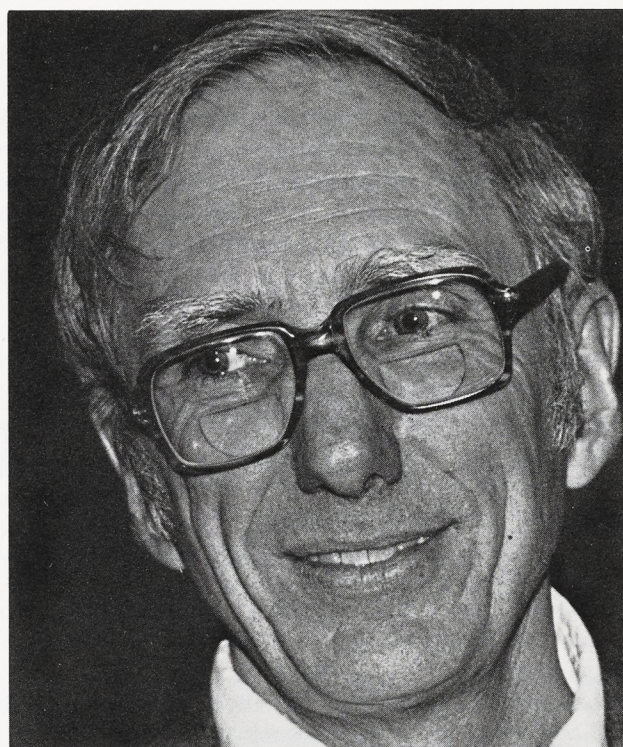
Well, with regard to the cultural revolution phase of the '60s, when all kinds of things seemed to be possible — history just smashed that.

I think a great disillusionment set in on the part of the people who had gotten the notion some how that it was going to be easy to effect change. I also think that much of the religious, symbolic effervescence in the late '60s was fairly shallow, and even, to some degree, self-serving. The doctrine of Original Sin suggests to me there was no corner on purity on the part of youth, that the various destructive impulses were working there too.

But on the other hand, I don't want to put down what I think was, in many respects, a groping for a new symbolic conception of reality, with its possible attendant social forms that would be more fulfilling, and that would get away from some of the narrowness, restrictiveness, and the overly aggressive and violent features of American life.

That came to a screeching halt, and the '70s have been characterized by a kind of cynical return to normalcy.

But the themes of the '60s are still around — in the consciousness of people whose lives were permanently



Robert Bellah

changed by the experiences they went through, in the imagination of many college youth today who have a nostalgic envy of that period. They see themselves as a far fall away from a greater day, cheated, anxious, ambivalent. They see their present situation as terribly mediocre compared to a more exciting moment, and since the basic problems that created the upheavals of the '60s have not gone away, my feeling is that we're in the lull between two storms.

**So the "spiritual energy" of the '60s is dispersed, but you see it coming back?**

Yes. And anything we can do to keep alive a sensitivity to these issues is vital — any effort we can make to create centers of reflection through journals or study groups or church activities or universities — these are the seedbeds, so to speak, when the challenge comes. And we never know when that's going to be.

For instance, Martin Luther King would never have been projected onto the national scene had not Rosa Parks refused to move back in the bus. We know not when there will be a Rosa Parks who lights that tinder and the spark starts burning.

On the other hand, if we hadn't had a Martin Luther King, with his particular formation, his sensitivity, his having read



Gandhi, his linkages to the Social Gospel, his experiences in Boston, together with his deep piety, we wouldn't have had the results. I don't think we can engineer history. History is not a conspiracy in which a few people arrange things to happen, so there's no point in trying to second guess the specificities. But we can do everything possible to make the resources available, and to have sensitive human beings around so that when the challenge comes we can respond as Martin Luther King did instead of in some ineffectual or negative way.

**Robert Altman, the film maker, said in a recent interview that 10 years ago students would criticize his films, challenge him, and make him contemplate what he was all about. Now, they ask him questions like, "Who is the most beautiful actress you've worked with?" Do you find an analogous situation in your classes?**

Yes. I would say it was much more exciting to teach in the period from 1968 to 1972 than it is today, because students were challenging, full of ideas, and desperately wanted to be creative. Today, they come in and say "How do I get an 'A' in this course?"

But, although the average student now is about the worst mediocre grade-grubber I've seen in 20 years of teaching, the very best students are as good as I've seen. They ask deep, philosophical, moral questions, and they are willing to work incredibly hard. That is very encouraging to me.

**Many educators say students are mostly interested in employment. Seems that you'd agree with that.**

Young people today, instead of being concerned with apocalyptic visions, are mainly concerned with, "Am I going to get a job?"

The fact of the matter is that three-fourths of them are not going to get the job they hoped for. But, at the moment, they're more concerned with, "I'm going to be the one who does, and those other three the ones who don't." They aren't asking, "What kind of society is it in which only 25% of the people have any chance for a fulfilling job, and can we do anything to change it?"

So, the privatism, the egoistic self-interest thing is in again. And yet, everybody knows that something is wrong. It's not a naive reassertion of baseball, mother, and apple pie. We know there's something very wrong. And, at the moment, we just want to make sure "we" get our own, because "they" will get it instead. It's not a very nice, a very positive thing.

**That's not a very pleasant or hopeful description of our condition.**

Well, we're not going to see just an endless prolongation of this present mood of privatism and cynicism.

I wouldn't say when it's going to change. We won't see a return exactly to the atmosphere of the late '60s. But, there will be some return towards a more public involvement — a more activist, a more questioning, and a less privatistic response to our problems.

I just don't see that it can be avoided — we're going to have it. Society is creating sufficient problems that it will stimulate a renewed radical critique of itself.

**Has your training in Far and Middle Eastern languages affected your development as a sociologist of religion?**

Yes. The kinds of questions I ask are large, comparative questions, and the work I did on civil religion in the United States has a little bit of the quality of an anthropologist from another culture coming back and looking at this one. I was able to ask questions about how religion functions in America because I know how it functions in China, Japan, the Middle East, primitive society, and so on. And what seemed to me a fairly obvious sociological analysis of the place of religion in America was actually very upsetting to a number of people either who were specialists on America or simply intellectuals who didn't care to think about religion in that way.

**Has your objectivity with regard to religion in the United States caused you problems in worship?**

I'm not sure I like the word *objectivity*. There are various places to stand and one gets what one can out of that. But everywhere one stands is somehow in the human condition, and in my view there is no "objective" social science because we're not Martians, drifting on some other planet looking at this one. We're all human beings dealing with other human beings. It is true that getting a sense of the relativity of one's culture by deeply immersing oneself in another calls into question certain naive ways of accepting the validity of the society in which one lives or the religion in which one has been raised. But today I don't think that's *exclusively* the problem of the intellectual. Everybody knows that there is Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, etc. and no one can live in the religion of their parents or Sunday School and just imagine that's all there is and that everybody outside is a bunch of heathen. We all know at some level or other that to choose a religion means there are other options that quite profound, sensitive, moral human beings have chosen that we have not chosen. That's a new situation. Only in the past few decades have large numbers of people understood that.

**Then autobiographically, how has the Bible affected your life?**

At a certain period in my life, Biblical symbolism became very important for making sense out of the world to me. It



was a kind of return to my roots. I certainly did not think of myself as a Christian, for example, when I belonged to the Communist Party.

And I would also say that while I think Christian symbolism is very determinative in terms of my own personality and the way I look at the world, I have also been deeply formed by my long immersion in Buddhism and Confucianism. Not that I try to make a synthesis, but there are certain ways in which those Oriental traditions look at reality that have been most illuminating to me, without replacing the meaningfulness of Christian symbols, but adding a different dimension.

**You said after your talk at Riverside church, in response to a question on the sexual revolution, that the connection between the acceptance of women and the acceptance of our bodies is important. Would you elaborate on that?**

I think that the tendency to derogate women and to consider women to be inferior beings is linked to the fact that women are alleged to be more emotional, less restrained, and less self-controlled. The stereotypical male image is of someone who is more in control of his emotions and his body — less at the mercy of the whole somatic complex.

This need to look down on women really is saying something about the male personality too. It's an effort to reject whatever is viewed as feminine in the male, and, therefore, is linked to a repressive attitude toward one's physical self.

For instance, it's taboo to cry, and often to express physical affection except under very, very narrow constraints. So that, one relates to one's body as an instrumentality in a highly repressed and controlled way. Often that instrumentality is viewed chiefly for the purpose of aggression. And military discipline, if you will, is a prototype of a body that is an instrument in the service of some kind of abstraction.

Now what I'm suggesting is if you don't need to look down on women, and you don't need, therefore, to look down on any part of yourself as a man that you might think of as feminine, you might be able to accept your own impulsive and emotional life.

All that means the male can accept more of a totality of his bodily being, if he is not so threatened by femininity that he has to keep down women out there and anything allegedly feminine inside himself.

**How does this affect sexual relationships between men and women?**

Men are supposed to be — in a stereotypical culture — very powerful sexual beings, instantly potent, and all of that.

The woman is viewed somehow as the temptress, as the one who calls forth these sexual feelings. Therefore, sexuality is linked to this.

Sometimes, of course, male sexuality is linked only to a certain kind of woman — not a "nice woman." Sometimes, some men can only have sex with a woman they can look down on. That's rather sick.

So, to accept a woman as a more total human being, and not to feel threatened by a woman, would mean one could accept more of one's sexuality. One would not need to view sexuality so much in the context of dominance and submission.

And, one could accept a whole range of emotions and feelings — not just in sexuality — but in the areas of pain, of the ability to express grief, to express compassion, to express affection.

So, I think the liberation of women sociologically is linked to the psychological liberation of an overly controlled male personality that's controlled too much for the end of aggressive dominance.

**How does this tie in with our society's attitude toward homosexuality?**

It is linked to the question of homosexuality, because one of the deepest fears of the traditional American male is "Am I a woman?" The meaning of homosexuality in that context is to be like a woman. That would mean you're not dominant, you're submissive; you don't screw, you get screwed.

All the contempt that's felt for women is felt for the homosexual side of the male. Therefore, if we have any suspicion or doubt at all — as all males do — that there may be a little teeny piece of us that's part homosexual, that is very upsetting, very threatening.

Keeping that under control strengthens this whole repressive character structure that, again, emphasizes dominance and aggression, rather than a polar range of emotional response.

My own guess is that if less anxiety about homosexuality were possible for the American male, it would probably actually reduce the number of people who choose homosexuality. People wouldn't be caught in that bind of either renouncing it totally or adopting it exclusively.

**That's exactly opposite to what Anita Bryant and her people are saying. If you put a homosexual model in front of children, they say, then you create homosexuals.**

Yes, exactly. The hidden assumption behind the Anita Bryants of this world is that homosexuality is really so exiting, thrilling, marvelous — you know, intensely sensual

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## Waiting Through Bruises

Colorado is a most peculiar place. Our Lt. Governor is a woman. The Equal Rights Amendment passed years ago. Denver has a reputation for being wide open to professional women. In a July 1978 popular woman's magazine article, entitled "*Where Do They Love You the Most?*," Denver ranked third out of 10 cities chosen as good places for women to live and work. Recent as some of these developments are, in the secular world, women are included in the human race.

It would take a sociologist to explain why, but the Episcopal Church here is not quite convinced. We have a bishop who claims he finds no theological reason to oppose the ordination of women to the priesthood; yet is the only bishop who voted yes, and then no, on the issue at the Minneapolis Convention in 1976. He has repeatedly said that while the issue of women's ordination is important, the unity of the church is more so.

The theology preached here, with a few welcome exceptions, is essentially masculine in perspective. Certainly, the language used to convey it is masculine: God is in His heaven, and God is definitely Male. Many persons who serve in positions of authority on Diocesan Committees and Commissions have acquiesced to the paternalistic tenor of theological thinking here.

My family and I moved to Colorado from Arlington, Va. in mid-January, 1977. I arrived still in a state of euphoria. Minneapolis was behind us and we had won a great victory for our church with the canonical change allowing women to be ordained to the priesthood. On January 2, 1977, with bells and music, and great joy, my friend Pat Park was

ordained to the priesthood. We rejoiced for her and our church. It was a grace-filled moment which I carried across the country to Colorado.

I cried all the way through the first church service I attended in Colorado, and the next, and the next. I sang hymns like *Onward Christian Soldiers* and *Faith of Our Fathers*. I heard numerous sermons which spoke of God the Father, and never mentioned God the Mother. Women, when they were mentioned, were addressed in terms of "God bless the ladies, or mothers, or wives." It was three months before I heard a female voice read as a lector in a service.

Nevertheless, I began to attend the church closest to our house rather than drive 15 miles across Denver to a "liberal parish." I joined the women's Bible study group, and promised myself that I would leave the church if things got too hurtful — and I made it clear to God that such was my intention.

Lent was a bleak time. I raged, screamed, cried at God. And read Jeremiah. I had seen the vision of shared male/female ministry work, and I knew the wholeness arising from that ministry. I felt cheated, hurt, to have it taken from me. To be in a church in a diocese which not only had not experienced the reality of shared ministry, but also was not even sure it recognized the validity of it, was extremely painful.

If Lent was bleak, Easter was death. The gap between the Eschaton symbolized in the Easter service and the reality in which I found myself was almost too much.

Above the sanctuary in our church hangs a large, empty, wooden cross. It is a powerful symbol to me of the final liberation, the risen Christ — indeed an Easter symbol which applies to me as a child of God, who happens to be female. That Easter though, there was a poignancy about its symbolism. The

message conveyed in Scripture readings, the Gospel, and liturgy was one of wholeness, of shared witness. The persons conveying that message were all male. I understood, for the first time, on an experiential level, the sense of what Letty Russell calls "prolepsis" in her book *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective* — the knowledge that we live in the now and the not yet; that the Kingdom is both here and not yet here.

Well, God wasn't talking to me that spring; or to be more accurate, I didn't hear God. I read a lot of Psalms, as I often do when life becomes hurtful. Somehow, I kept returning to Psalm 46, and the verse which says, "Be still, and know that I am God."

I saw a lot of rainbows that spring, and like Noah, I, too, clung to the Covenant.

Thirty years ago, Dorothy Sayers posed the question, "Are women human?" She concluded that although the Scripture indicates God responds with an unqualified yes, the church has been reluctant to endorse God's opinion. Certainly, the "record" of this diocese corroborates Ms. Sayer's observation.

On Jan. 25, 1860, a committee of 13 "ladies and gentlemen" (according to a *Rocky Mountain News* account cited in Allen Breck's *The Episcopal Church in Colorado, 1860 - 1963*) was appointed to find a place to hold their church services the following Sunday. Four days later, the congregation held their services in the Union School House on Cherry Creek McGaa St. The moment was important because that group became the founding congregation of what became Denver's cathedral: St. John-in-the-Wilderness, so-named because it was isolated. (The nearest church was 700 miles away in Topeka.) It was also an important moment because that was the last time women were involved officially in the decision-making process in the

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# for Blessings to Come

by Margaret F. Arms

church for over a century.

A mission diocese until 1887, isolated by its geography, Colorado saw change come slowly. The knowledge that historically the diocese has resisted change becomes the rationale, and sometimes the excuse, for continuing the pattern. For example, it was one of the last dioceses to allow women to serve on vestries. The first woman was not elected to the Diocesan Standing Committee until 1972, five years after the Constitution had been amended to allow it. Colorado did not send women to General Convention until 1973. It has ordained only one woman (the Rev. Betty Noice) to the diaconate and has yet to ordain a woman to the priesthood. On Feb. 12, 1979, the Standing Committee rejected the application of the Rev. Kay Ryan for ordination to the priesthood. No reason was given, but no one doubts that the deciding factor was that the Rev. Ryan is female.

"This is a conservative part of the country, and we may be even slower," said Nancy Lodge, Acting Director of Theological Education in the Diocese. Although she sees no insurmountable problems, and is encouraged by the attitude of the bishop, she believes change will be a slow process.

The Diocesan Episcopal Church-women help to a certain extent. They provide a structure which is acceptable to the institutional hierarchy and which gives some women a legitimate outlet for ministry. Kay Harlan, newly elected Diocesan ECW President, indicated that her Board will encourage "valid" ministries for women, which include active participation of women on vestries, in Diocesan Committees and Commissions, and community ministries. She did not envision the Board issuing an official statement on the ordination of women to the priesthood: I don't see our Board as a pressure group." She personally is not

convinced that the priesthood is a valid ministry for women.

Returning to Ms. Sayer's point: This diocese doesn't quite want to say that God is wrong — that women aren't human — but it doesn't quite want to agree and say, "Yes. Amen!" either. So, it does what people and institutions often do when they are afraid to disagree. It hedges. Many clergy, who tell me that they are not opposed to the ordination of women to the priesthood, continue to say that they consider it too divisive for Colorado at this time, or that the unity of the church is at stake.

One priest told me that when God shows him it is possible to ordain a woman to the priesthood, he will support it. Until then, all these studies, and reports, and commissions are useless, he said. I asked if the fact that there are women who have been ordained priests in the Episcopal Church indicates anything to him about God's Will; his response: "No."

Other clergy (and many lay persons, including not a few women) have other variations on either "Yes, women, but . . ." or "No, women, but . . ." Usually, the "but" ends with a statement to the effect

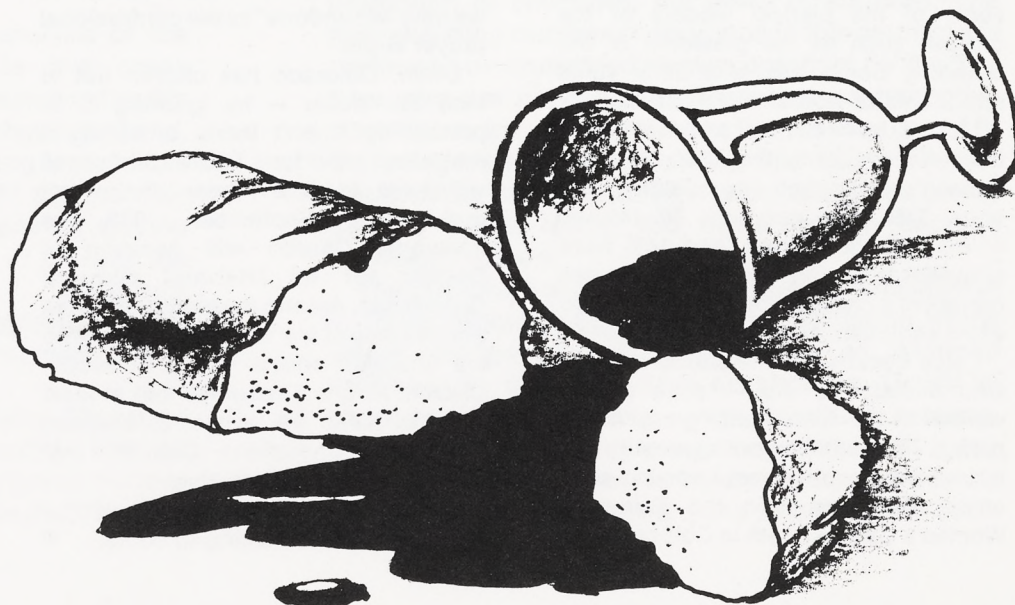
that this is all quite interesting, but it isn't very important when compared to the "real" work of the church which may include among other things, feeding the poor, being a good shepherd to the Body, unity, fighting injustice in the world, etc.

Which is, of course, a way of saying that women don't matter very much — unless they function in roles which men have determined are suitable for women.

"I feel like a non-person," one woman said. Another confessed, "I am finding it increasingly difficult to remain in the Episcopal Church here." Pat Washburn, who was the Province VI regional coordinator for the National Coalition for the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood and the Episcopacy, says: "For myself, pushing for ordination would interfere with my ministry. And that's a tragic statement about the church."

So, back to square one — and why do I stay?

I am by heritage, tradition, and belief an Episcopalian. During the first dry, painful months the Eucharist brought me back again and again. The





affirmation that I felt lacking in the "official" persons of the church was present in the liturgy. It was at the altar, during the sacrament of Holy Communion, that I knew: Yes, I am a child of God, a co-heir of creation. If this particular diocese feels a need to put stipulations and limitations on who I am, God defines me.

Hopeful signs are few within this diocese, but there are some. In conducting a survey of 50 out of a total of 53 Colorado Episcopal parishes in January, 1979, I discovered that although the issue of women's roles in the church may not be settled, it is not as bleak as I had suspected. In fact, my suspicion is that we have been duped. The impression given by clergy and lay persons who would keep women "in their place" is that they reflect the thinking of the majority of the diocese. The data from my survey indicates otherwise, at least among the clergy.

All parishes have women serving on the vestry; most have, or have had, female acolytes; most have women lay readers. Slightly more than half of the parishes do not have women administering the chalice, although that figure changes as more parishes allow women to perform that ministry.

The most unexpected discovery concerned the clergy stand on the ordination of qualified women to the priesthood. I expected an overwhelmingly negative figure, given the stand of some of the clerical leaders of the diocese such as the president of the Standing Committee, and other vocal opponents of women's ordination.

I found, however, that of the clergy in the parishes I contacted, 43% supported women's ordination for qualified persons, 34% were opposed, 9% refused to commit themselves, and 14% were unavailable for comment. Those figures represent a change from three years ago when sentiment was definitely negative.

I stay because of the caring persons who minister to me — such as the women in the Bible study group in my parish. They often do not agree with me, but we have grown from knowing each other. The women in the Episcopal Women's Caucus, both in Colorado and

on the national board, provide an invaluable support system for those of us who believe that we are also human.

Finally there are the women deacons in Colorado — three in number. The Rev. Betty Noice has exercised her ministry as a deacon with quiet dignity and courage. Her retirement in July leaves more than a slot to fill on the staff of the Christian Education Committee. The Rev. Kay Knapp is a member of the Order of the Holy Family in Denver, and fulfills her ministry as Oblate Sister Katherine in that Order.

The Rev. Kay Ryan is the only one of the three who feels called to the priesthood. On Feb. 12, 1979, she went before the Standing Committee to be approved for ordination to the priesthood. She went with the full support of the vestry in the parish where she is an assistant, and the approval of many others in the diocese. Many of us were saddened by the decision of that committee not to approve her ordination.

There is a feminist song entitled "*Face the Music*." It deals with the fears, loneliness, and scariness of coming to grips with who and what we are:

*Hoping for blessing to ease  
the bruising*

*And still you know you  
choose to face the music.*

The song is about judgment. It is about those moments when we see with clarity who we are — "what we have done, what we have left undone" as the confessional prayer states.

Often, Colorado has chosen not to face the music — by ignoring it, or pretending it isn't there, or saying it really isn't important. Soon, this diocese will have to face "those things left undone." In September, 1979, the Episcopal Church will convene in Denver for its triennial General Convention. Among the clergy-deputies will be some of the 100-plus women who are ordained priests in the Episcopal Church. And one assumes that at least some of these will expect to exercise their priestly functions. Colorado will have to face the music, then.

In the meantime, we wait, through the bruising, for the blessing to come. ■



## If I Gave the Wafer

The poem below is from *God Still Calls: The Testament of Winefred Marcus*, a song-cycle in progress. The persona of these poems is a Roman Catholic woman who received a call to the priesthood in 1960, but died before having it recognized.

If I gave the wafer back to him

(it's only bread)

And closed my hands and said

"I thirst" instead,

What is the worst that he

would do?

He'd casually stop me over tea

with, "Winefred,

My girl, what has come over you?"

And, I could say, "I'm born,

as you are, too,

To claim my given name, God-known.

In mine, 'bread' is corrupted:

'Fred' I'm shown. But 'win' and 'wine'

are first, and clear to me.

Can you not see?"

From antiquity we become  
what we are named.

There, it is, I stake my claim,  
to that quality

Which, by God's grace, I am  
from birth: thirsty.

—Ann Knight

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*Continued from page 9*

— that, if anybody really had that as an option, why, they would madly choose it.

That's what happens when you have to work too hard to repress something. Then it gets all this secret, hidden over-evaluation. My sense is quite the opposite. If it were demystified and accepted as one of the possibilities of human life, it would have less impact. If some people choose that as their option, OK, but it's not something one needs to get hysterical about.

In any case, I do think that contempt, anxiety, and fear about homosexuality is directly linked to contempt, anxiety and fear about women. And, I think lessening the anxiety about it would be healthy all the way around.

**So far you've described a huge shift in our consciousness. How do we accomplish it?**

Of course, there are still objective social and political structures that have to be talked about. But in terms of psychology, I would say that much of this hinges on changes in child rearing patterns. By that I mean a more egalitarian kind of marriage, in which the father takes a more active role from the very earliest days and weeks for the care and nurturing of the child.

**Did you participate equally in the rearing of your children?**

I did, but I was a rather aberrant case. It actually had to do

with the fact that when I was in college I was a member of the Communist Party. It had a very strong teaching about, what was called then, male chauvinism instead of sexism, and a very strong sense of feminine equality. Women should not have to do all the housework and all of the child rearing. So, really, a generation before all this hit, my wife and I had a sense we should do all these things together.

Given all the sociological realities of our society, I think it's very important for a woman to have a firm sense of her own identity as an economic, political participant in the society, and that she have a sense her father was there somehow at a very deep emotional level from very early on.

That men won't touch a diaper, or even feed a child, is saying from the very earliest experience of the child that there's a hierarchical thing here: Dealing with these issues is somehow beneath the dignity of men. And, people who do deal with them — namely, women — are not supposed to be involved in achievement in the larger public sphere.

Equally shared responsibility for child rearing would make the inner split between male and female sides of ourselves — for both men and women — less extreme. It would enlarge the range of options, so that we could call on both the maternal and paternal traits that have been deeply internalized from early on. ■

*Continued from page 3*

the non-issue of "irresponsible abortion," it is not the first time that free choice for the poor in a matter affecting their own lives has made editorial writers nervous.

More disturbing than the editors' analysis of the General Convention resolution is the crass insensitivity and further class bias revealed in the flip query, "Does a healthy young wife, whose husband, other children, and parents all are looking forward to a new member of the family have a right to terminate pregnancy . . ." (any list of bad reasons for staying pregnant has pressure from relatives at or near the top!) The query continues, offensively, ". . . because a lecturer at a club to which she belongs promotes this as a liberating experience for today's woman?"

We would like to challenge *The Living Church* to produce first hand evidence that any serious lecturer of either sex ever promoted among any group the idea that having an abortion was ever vital to the liberation

or fulfillment of any woman, or the idea that abortion was in any way a good which every woman ought for her own good to practice. We have often heard of such promotion of childbirth, but never of abortion. The overwhelming number of abortions in this country are performed on unmarried women pregnant for the first time who are unhealthily ignorant of contraceptive techniques, and whose "reasons," since they do not fit the categories described above, *The Living Church* would list as "irresponsible." Irresponsibly, *The Living Church* would rather see these women become unwilling mothers.

The final point of the General Convention resolution is "unequivocal opposition to any legislation which would abridge or deny" the right of an informed individual to decide to have an abortion. Denial of abortion for any reason, even frivolous reasons, amounts to compulsory pregnancy. Childbirth is too profound a natural event to be undertaken frivolously or under compulsion. Ask anyone who has given birth.





Abortion Rights:

## Critical to Women's Freedom

Abortion has not been an easy issue for some of us. As a religious if unorthodox Catholic who came into the movement through the pacifist direct action community, I had gratefully managed to avoid the whole debate and uproar around the liberalization of the New York State law in 1970. I was preoccupied with the struggle against the Vietnam war and had been part of a newly formed consciousness-raising group for exactly three whole months. Basically, I didn't know what my own position on the legislation was until one State Assembly member, George Michaels — from a conservative upstate district — took his conscience and his political future in his hands and cast the single vote by which the reform bill passed. It was my physical reaction of relief and thanksgiving when I heard his vote that informed me of my gut position on the issue.

I continued to have some pretty grave and probably self-righteous reservations until I came to know more and more women who, at one point or another, because of their immediate and very particular life situations, had felt obliged to end an unintended pregnancy. In the face of these women and their realities, my whole relationship to the issue changed.

I've also learned over the years that many of my misgivings about abortion emerged much more than I had realized from my Catholic background — with its particular set of attitudes toward sexuality and toward women — and were simply not felt by most of the Jewish and Protestant women with whom I shared my politics and some of my deepest values. My recognition of these changes had been sharpened during this past year by my involvement in work on the religious argument in the *McRae* case mentioned in the article which follows.

There's more, however, than just religious backgrounds and attitudes that complicates our thinking about this issue. All of us bring a set of intricate, deeply personal experiences and emotions to questions of sex and pregnancy. I sometimes think that some of the enormous psychic energy that some anti-choice people invest in this issue arises from a fierce sense of identification with the fetus, a deep and anxious questioning of their own early and present "wantedness." That possibility sets off some of the bursts of empathy that mingle with my rage at the Right to Lifers, and sometimes makes my work around this issue so conflicted and draining.

And all of us, no matter whether we've experienced it directly or not, have particular and highly charged feelings about pregnancy. *The* defining issue in our feelings about our own or another's pregnancy is whether it is wanted or unwanted. It is that distinction, and the incredible *particularity* of each woman's situation, that I think we must bear in mind if we want to develop a loving and human way of approaching this issue.

*Janet Haller*



# The Bottom Line Feminist Issue

by Janet Gallagher

Women have always used (or sought to use) abortion to end unwanted pregnancies just as they have always used some form or another of birth control in an effort to forestall them.

Before the 19th century, no laws existed prohibiting an abortion done in the first few months of pregnancy. Between 1860 and 1880, at least 40 states and territories enacted criminal penalties for abortion. Among the reasons urged were protection of maternal health; Victorian concerns with morality and the role of women; the need to establish the dominance of "regular" doctors (invariably male) as legitimate practitioners of healing at the expense of "irregulars" (frequently women); and fears of a diminishing birth rate among WASPs in the face of a growing immigrant population. Last, and least emphasized, was concern for the fetus.

It's hard sometimes for people to understand why so many women regard abortion as *the* bottom line feminist issue and why we fight the anti-choice people so fiercely over a question that some find paralyzingly complicated. Abortion is not, for us, just an issue of women's health or even of women's right to privacy or to religious liberty. The right to decide whether and when to bear a child is absolutely basic to a woman's control of her body, her sexuality, her life choices.

Campaigns to restrict birth control or abortion have frequently been efforts to ensure the containment of women's sexuality within marriage. They have, on occasion, also reflected women's attempts to force men to take responsibility for the consequences of their sexual relationships. Indeed, this the rationale put forward today by the so-called left wing of the Right to Life movement. But *involuntary* motherhood precludes self-determination. Within the economic realities of our society, it almost

invariably forces women into economic dependence on husbands, relatives or welfare.

Abortion is a necessary supplement to the unreliable and unsafe contraceptive technology presently available. The drive to eliminate abortion is inevitably linked, no matter how it may be justified, to a set of beliefs that regard pregnancy as a punishment for sexual behavior. It reflects and reinforces the patriarchal attitude that procreation is the only excuse and motherhood the only redemption for women's sexuality.

The assumption that unwanted pregnancies happen only because women are "careless" about birth control is simply not true. Contraceptive information and devices are not always easily obtainable. For many women, there are family, religious, legal or social obstacles to seeking out birth control information and devices.

All of the currently available methods of contraception have some rate of failure. Even the pill's actual *use* effectiveness is only 90-95%. Most methods of birth control are much more dangerous to a woman's health than an early abortion: The methods heavily pushed by doctors and family planning professionals and described as most "effective" — the pill, the IUD and sterilization — are also the most dangerous. Women using the pill subject themselves to heightened risks of cancer and blood clots; and IUD complications can include perforation of the uterus, pelvic inflammatory disease and heavy menstrual bleeding.

In June 1977, the Supreme Court announced three decisions that rekindled the fierce and emotional public struggle over a woman's right to choose abortion. While the cases did not overturn the 1973 decisions that had recognized women's constitutional right to abortion, anti-choice forces viewed them as opening the door to legislative and administrative efforts to cut off funding and drastically limit the availability of abortion services. The issue has surfaced in a diverse number of contexts. There has been a renewed burst of harassment against abortion clinic patients and staff; incidents of vandalism, firebombing, and threats of violence have occurred in a number of localities; and public officials throughout the country vie with one another

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to develop new ways to impede access to abortion.

One Missouri case, *Poelker v. Doe*, authorized public hospitals to refuse to perform abortions. This decision simply legitimized what had already been an intense problem for women in many parts of the country, especially in rural areas, where no clinics existed. The technical *legal* right to choose to end a pregnancy has very little relevance when there is no medical facility nearby, especially for the poor and others less able to travel long distances to seek assistance.

A second set of decisions, however, set off the greatest furor and has had the most serious impact. In *Maher v. Roe* and *Beal v. Doe*, the court declared that the states were not required to pay for poor women's "elective" abortions under Medicaid. Congress had already tried to cut off abortion services to poor women by amending the Labor and Health, Education and Welfare Departments' budgets with a rider that forbade all abortions except in pregnancies that actually endangered the life of the woman. Enforcement of arch-conservative Illinois Rep. Henry Hyde's budget rider, which had been halted temporarily by order of a Federal Court Judge in Brooklyn, went into effect in August of 1977. By then, however, the term of the budget and its restrictive rider had almost expired, and a new Labor-HEW budget was being debated. Congressmen — many of whom had voted for the original Hyde amendment because of heavy anti-abortion lobbying, but had assumed that the courts would disallow it — wrestled with their consciences and their mail to try to come up with a "compromise" version.

Eventually, a Conference Committee composed of 18 congressmen and senators was chosen to hammer out the terms under which poor women would be "allowed" to terminate an unintended and unwanted pregnancy. The group, which did not include any women or any doctors, debated just *how* life-endangering a pregnancy must be and whether rape or incest were really sufficient grounds to warrant permitting poor women a personal choice in the matter. The stalemate between the more "liberal" Senate and the rigid House positions continued for five months and totally stymied approval of the budget of the two federal departments which provide for society's most basic social and welfare needs. The Conference Committee itself finally became so deadlocked that the House and Senate leadership had to step in and work out the final language through a series of alternating "compromise" votes in both houses.

The final "liberalized" version allowed Medicaid funding for abortions in cases in which the woman's life would be endangered if the pregnancy were carried to term; in instances of rape and incest (but only those reported to law enforcement or public health officials within 60 days); or in cases in which two doctors were prepared to officially

"certify" that "severe and longlasting" physical health damage would result if the woman were forced to carry the pregnancy to term.

As of this writing, 39 states (the states not only administer, but also provide a share of the cost of Medicaid) have adopted restrictions on abortion funding. In 20 of those states, the legislation is actually more severe than the federal restrictions. In eight states, the new laws are not being enforced because of federal or state court orders which require the funding of "medically necessary" abortions; and one other state is under court order to fund at least those abortions covered by the "compromise" Hyde Amendment.

By the summer of 1978, government figures revealed that the number of Medicaid funded abortions in states affected by the cutoffs had dropped 98%. It is clear that doctors and clinics have been so intimidated by the new regulations that they are failing to certify even those cases which fall into the "compromise" categories.

The attempts to eliminate funding have been resisted in the courts, with varying degrees of success. One of the hardest fought and lengthiest legal battles is the Brooklyn case, *McRae v. Califano*, a class action suit brought by poor women who need abortions, doctors who want to be able to provide Medicaid abortions for their poor patients, and the Women's Division of the United Methodist Church. Much of the evidence in the case has dealt with medical issues surrounding unwanted pregnancies and emphasize the staggering implications of the cutoff of funding and of access to abortion, especially for poor and young women.

If anti-choice forces have their way, we will return to the pre-1973 situation in which women were forced to seek out unsafe, back-alley abortions. HEW studies indicate that if all Medicaid funding in the United States were eliminated, we could expect 250 to 300 women to die each year and as many as 25,000 to suffer serious medical complications from self-induced or illegal abortions. Before legalization, for example, 6,000 women every year were admitted to New York City's public hospitals for incomplete abortions. After legalization — and with Medicaid coverage — the number of yearly deaths from illegal abortions fell from 40 to zero.

The health dangers of cutbacks and restrictions go beyond the problems of death and back-alley abortions. Pregnancy and child-birth always impose health risks; inadequate nutrition and health care make these risks even more serious for poor women. These risks are readily assumed by women for *wanted* pregnancies. But it is an unconscionable violation of the bodily safety and dignity of poor women to force them to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term.

Government funding for Medicaid coverage for poor women is only one of the targets of the anti-choice



onslaught. They are chipping away at every woman's right to exercise personal choice in this area. During the last two years, Congress has: (1) cut off abortion funding for armed forces personnel and dependents; (2) gagged the U.S. Civil Rights Commission by forbidding it to study or publish anything connected to women's constitutional rights in regard to abortion; (3) passed a long-awaited pregnancy disability bill that specifically excluded any employer obligation to cover abortion under employee sick leave or insurance plans; and (4) denied abortion coverage to Peace Corps volunteers.

There is another and even more threatening level of legislative attack on abortion rights. A serious, well-funded and well-organized campaign is underway to force a constitutional amendment that would make abortion illegal. The "Human Life" amendment would define the fetus as a legal person from the moment of conception (fertilization). It would probably make use of the IUD and some birth control pills illegal, since they are thought to prevent implantation of the fertilized egg.

Strategy around this constitutional amendment takes two routes. One method relies on getting it passed by Congress and sent out to the states for ratification. The other strategy, favored by the more rightwing elements of the Right to Life movement, has been to push state legislatures to adopt resolutions calling for a national constitutional convention to draft an anti-abortion amendment.

The constitutional convention ("con con") route is particularly ominous. While the provision for such a convention is in Article V of the Constitution itself, we've never had one before and no one quite knows how or what it could do. It's not at all clear, for example, that such a convention might not be able to propose the elimination of key constitutional safeguards — like the Bill of Rights. Resolutions calling for a convention have, in fact, already been passed by Right to Life pressure in 14 states. Recently, 26 states have been spurred by Proposition 13 fever to pass similar "con con" resolutions in order to adopt an amendment requiring a balanced federal budget. If 34 states adopt such resolutions around either one of the proposed amendments, Congress would have no choice but to set up such a convention.

Pro-choice activists fear Congress will panic as the "con con" resolutions mount and will pass the "Human Life" amendment on to the states like a political hot potato to avoid the uncertainties posed by the convention. That would force the women's movement and its allies, still hard-pressed to win passage of the ERA, to begin another bitter round of state by state struggles.

Not all of the attacks on abortion rights have been on the national or state levels. Municipal governments have come

under intense pressure to adopt all sorts of procedural requirements that subject clinics or hospitals to administrative harassment, from deliberately over-stringent building regulations to demands for burdensome record-keeping. One of the more offensive trends has been the demand, on the part of local Right to Life groups, for the names of those doctors who have received reimbursement for Medicaid-funded abortions. The names are then printed in local publications, sometimes the Catholic newspaper in the area, to create social or economic pressure on doctors and discourage them from making abortion services available. A number of places around the country (Akron, Louisville, and Niagara County, N.Y.) tried to impose regulations, under the label of "informed consent," that requires doctors to force women seeking abortion to read or listen to a litany of mis-information that refers constantly to the fetus as "your unborn child" and is deliberately geared toward making abortion a traumatic and guilt-laden experience.

The anti-abortion pressure on Congress and state legislatures is extremely well-organized and heavily funded. The National "Right to Life" Committee, which includes most of the anti-choice groups, claims a membership of 11 million and has a \$3 million annual budget. The Committee has affiliates in all 50 states. Minnesota alone has some 200 chapters of "Citizens Concerned for Life." Since they generally operate as a single issue pressure group, the anti-choice forces can exercise influence on politicians far beyond what their mere numbers would seem to warrant. (In N.Y. State, for example, the new Right to Life party won only 2.6% of the total votes in the race for governor, but their ability to swing — through endorsements or by running a "spoiler" candidate — even that small percentage of voters in close races gives them real clout with professional politicians.) Anti-choice groups make use of direct mail expert Richard Viguerie, who orchestrates grassroots fundraising and letter-writing campaigns on behalf of a wide range of conservative causes.

Ultra-conservative leaders are making a systematic and well-funded attempt to build a base for a new right wing by playing on people's genuine fears and confusion over changing values and life styles. They use the "pro-family" issues (anti-abortion, anti-ERA, anti-gay rights) as an organizing vehicle to defeat liberal legislators and push for a return to a more "traditional" society.

At last summer's Right to Life convention in St. Louis, observers noted that the "new right" element had taken a much stronger leadership role in the national movement. Despite claims of being a "new civil rights movement," the convention featured nuts and bolts workshops led by associates of Joseph Coors (of Coors beer), whose



Committee for a Free Congress works to support candidates who oppose busing, gun control, abortion and other liberal legislation.

The political struggle around abortion has been deeply affected by religious forces. While there are several religious denominations which officially oppose abortion — the Mormons, Orthodox Judaism, some fundamentalist Protestants — none have been as active or as influential nationally as the Roman Catholic Church. Evidence presented during the *McRae v. Califano* trial indicated widespread and intensive church involvement in the legislative battles. In fact, some 15 different religious groups and organizations filed a friend of the court brief in support of the *McRae* claim that the Medicaid cutoff represented an establishment of religion and a violation of the religious and conscientious freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment.

The Catholic bishops, and many of the more conservative laity, base their opposition to abortion on the claim that the fetus is actual human life from the moment of conception or fertilization. It is that claim of "personhood" on behalf of the fertilized egg or fetus or embryo that requires continuation of the pregnancy despite the conscientious choice and the health and the well-being of the woman and her family.

The religious community as a whole is deeply divided over the question as to when human life begins and on the issue of the morality of abortion. Most Protestant and Jewish groups reject the doctrine that the fetus is a human being and believe that the woman must make a conscientious decision, in accordance with her faith or deepest convictions, about whether to end a pregnancy. Even religious groupings like the Baptists and Jehovah's Witnesses, who view abortion as posing a serious moral and spiritual problem, oppose government intervention on the question.

The 1973 Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* that affirmed women's right to choose abortion recognized the deep divisions on the issue and observed that, "When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to the answer."

One does not have to be a member of a specific religious group with an official pro-choice position in order to demand the human and constitutional right to make such a deeply personal decision without government interference. The *McRae* brief likens the decision to bear or not bear a child to conscientious objection to military service and declares, "Pregnancy presents for every woman ultimate questions of life and death, in both a physical and spiritual

sense. . . . The suffering and damage inflicted by forced childbearing, whether it be described as psychological or spiritual, is one which a woman can never escape either during pregnancy or thereafter . . . (T)he state must stand back."

The feminist/left wing of the abortion rights movement differs in some basic respects from the more "establishment" supporters (Medicaid providers for clinics, doctors, Planned Parenthood, National Abortion Rights Action League) and from the radical groupings that worked around this issue when legalization was being sought in the late '60s and early '70s.

The most striking change is in the heavy public emphasis on *choice* — on a woman's right to choose when and if to bear a child and on her right to be free of conditions and pressures that limit that option. The Medicaid funding cutoff has created even more pressure on poor women to undergo irreversible sterilization procedures rather than risk an unwanted pregnancy. The women's movement had become increasingly aware over the last several years of how heavily sterilization abuse was already affecting black, Hispanic and Native American women.

While most groups, like the New York City-based CARASA (Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse), have chosen to concentrate their emphasis on maintaining abortion funding and access and on doing educational and organizing work against sterilization abuse, they have been open and responsive to a whole range of other issues that can broadly be labelled "reproductive freedom." CARASA, for example, has a principle of unity that states:

*Reproductive freedom requires: abortion rights; guarantees against sterilization abuse; safe, well designed birth control; sex education in the schools; good and accessible health care; and the right to conduct one's sex life as one chooses, regardless of marital status or sexual preference.*

*Reproductive freedom depends on equal wages for women, enough to support a family, alone or with others; welfare benefits for an adequate standard of living; decent housing to provide a comfortable secure place to live and rest; reliable, skilled child care and schools to enable our children to become healthy adults.*

Further information about CARASA's work and goals can be obtained from CARASA, P.O. Box 124, Cathedral Station, New York, N.Y. 10025.

*(The above article is reprinted from the March 8 issue of WIN magazine, 503 Atlantic St., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217. Subscriptions, \$15 a year.)*



*Continued from page 2*

**THE WITNESS.** I think Bishop Hines is still more in touch with what is going on today than most of the active clergy in the church.

In that same issue I came across the article, "Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves" by Bill Yon, a priest whose thinking I regard as highly (almost) as I do John Hines. It is a fine article which avoids belaboring the problem and offers specific solutions. What was helpful to me was that Yon valued those who work from the "Innocent as Doves" position. I am basically and increasingly a gap filler and though I know that that is not enough, I have resented people, some of them even writing in **THE WITNESS**, who make me out as the enemy.

I recall experiencing my powerlessness a good many years ago with a run-in with our mayor. The city's only big swimming pool had been turned over to seals rather than let integrated swimming go on. A group of us powerful clergy, most of them from First Churches, met with the mayor to warn him of the long, hot summer ahead and of our concern for black children who had no place to swim and for black anger. The mayor assured us he would do something. Early the next morning the pool was drained, blown up, filled in with dirt and a rose garden planted. I have since come to understand that the mayor did not do this because he was powerful and we were weak. His action rather reflected his own sense of powerlessness. Within the parish there are many days when I can sit at my desk feeling that there is nothing I can do to implement and enrich the programs going on in the church. Many believe that power begins at my office door, but that is never my experience. The vestry and I will reflect upon both Yon's reflections.

I did have some problems with the article, too. The idea that a diocese might plunk down a million dollars for work outside of itself first and then see how it can meet its own needs is exciting, but is it achievable? Is it a

realistic goal? Further, what are the limits to the outside needs? I see people willing to support a few parish staff, willing to be quite generous in mission work and giving, where there are quite specific goals, because that's the size job that they can handle, that they can evaluate, in which they can see results. I see many of the same people resistant to taking on great social problems, such as hunger, precisely because it is so overwhelming that there is no way of telling if sacrificial work and giving is of value.

I remember thinking in seminary that by the time people got to be my age, they would have lots of answers. I have an abundance of questions.

**The Rev. Robert Riegel  
Greenville, S.C.**

## Rev. Yon Replies

My self esteem took a quantum leap at being mentioned in the same sentence with John Hines. I had been sufficiently flattered by being included in the same issue of **THE WITNESS** with him.

Bob Riegel's question about whether or not the goal of giving away our money is "realistic" is rather insistently being asked by many people. I am becoming increasingly frustrated with the question. What I said in the article was that it could not be done if people decide first what they want to spend on themselves, and then and only then look at what is left over to give away. I said that it would become possible if one first decided what to give away and then went to work on how to do what has to be done at home with what's left over.

I have been struggling to understand what people mean by "Is it realistic?" The best I can do is when we decide to do something and do it, it becomes realistic. When we decide not to do something and don't do it, it becomes

### CREDITS

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unrealistic.

Example: In December of 1977, our Diocesan Council proposed a budget for 1978. Diocesan programs had been cut to the bone. A month later, through a considerable amount of effort by the Department of Church and Society, \$33,000 had been transferred from "inside" programs to "outside." That budget was adopted by the Convention and the diocese lived on it for a year. I have not heard anyone say that we were living on an unrealistic budget.

To the final point: What are the limits to the outside needs? They are, of course, for all practical purposes, unlimited. The final comment from a council member before the vote was taken on this year's diocesan budget was, "There is no end to worthy causes." The great social problems, such as hunger, are immense. The question I would raise is: Why do even a little? If a million dollars would be wasted, would \$10 be less wasted? Is the church's operational philosophy: Problems are so great that we should do at least, but no more than, a little?

**The Rev. William Yon  
Chelsea, Ala.**

## Coming Up . . . in **THE WITNESS**

• How does the nuclear crisis at Three Mile Island in Middletown, Pa. relate to judicial censorship of *The Progressive* magazine's story on the hydrogen bomb? Sam Day, managing editor of *The Progressive* and former editor of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* will tell you next issue.

• Robert McAfee Brown, Carter Heyward and T. Richard Snyder will explore new theological perspectives, and William Stringfellow continues his analysis of "The State of the Church."

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