

THE WITNESS

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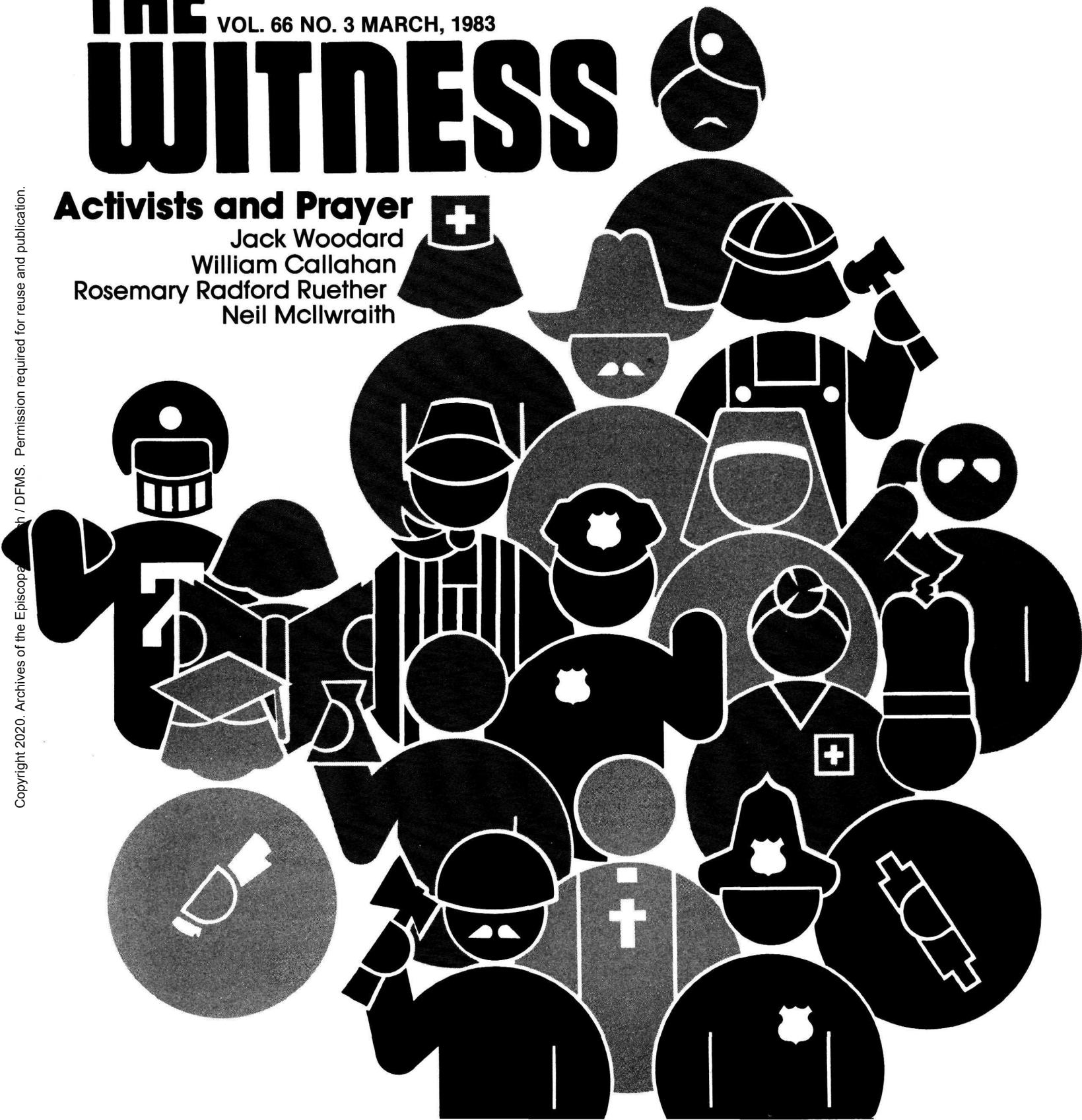
Activists and Prayer

Jack Woodard

William Callahan

Rosemary Radford Ruether

Neil McLlwraith



LETTERS LETTERS LETTERS LETTERS LETTERS

Varied Forum in January

Thank you for your continued excellence in providing a forum for the discussion of important issues of our time within the context of the Gospel. Your January 1983 issue, including fine articles on youth cults, women's eating disorders, tithing, reveals your understanding of the relevance and essential primacy of the spiritual in all aspects of our lives — mental, physical, psychological, emotional, sociological, political, and economic.

Connie Cohrt
New York, N.Y.

Cults Exploitive

Your articles on cults (January) woefully misrepresent the far reaching effects of these exploitive groups.

It is safe to take the civil libertarian stand allowing everyone to "choose their own poison." However, the deceptive techniques used by many so-called new religions often prevent the option of choice thru misinformation and manipulation of naive idealism with coercive tactics — some as simple as sleep deprivation and peer pressure, others as extreme as physical life-threats.

True, the origins of our faiths may be similar to those of many cults, but the cliché concerning the product of two wrongs is not inappropriate here, particularly in light of the damage to the lives of young people and their families which I (and many youth advisors) have encountered.

Cults challenge the church to re-

evaluate its priorities and commitments, especially with respect to youth. If THE WITNESS agrees that a goal of ministry is to support people in their search for meaning and a faith to live by, and that to help make this possible we must offer love and truth, you will print further articles on the cult phenomenon detailing other facts of their effects and the issues raised by them — good and bad!

Sunny Hallanan
Coordinator, Diocesan Youth Council
Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

Emotional Theme

The twin articles on cults in your January issue set forth an emotionally charged theme. It may be impossible to view cults with anything approaching prim journalistic objectivity. As Episcopalians, however, we should strive to maintain our theological balance between (in the words of the Book of Common Prayer) "the two extremes, of too much stiffness in refusing, and of too much easiness in admitting any variation." Just as one man's education is another man's indoctrination, and vice versa, so one man's religion is another man's blind faith, and vice versa.

The Bible records that the earliest Christians dwelt communally (Acts 2:44,45) just as thousands of contemporary people do in numerous and various monasteries and convents. These communal institutions, sustained under the auspices of the church, often exact uncompromising submission to authority and a full measure of physical and spiritual conformity from their members. Could not these respected societies be classified as "cults," differentiation being largely subjective?

The long-established "cloistered" communities have, of course, withstood the test of time, and thus retain acceptance as worthwhile and beneficial hosts for alternative lifestyles. But ought the passage of time be the only touchstone for judging validity here? All our ancient religious orders were once new.

William Dauenhauer
Willoughby, Ohio

New Index Helpful

The index in the January WITNESS is super, do keep it up! I've used back issues many times in study groups and seminars and the index will make the preparation a breeze!

I am also reminded that a friend walked off with my July 1982 issue and I would like a replacement if you've got one. I didn't even get a chance to read it!

Carol Cole Flanagan
Erle, Pa.

(Copies of the January WITNESS which includes the index of all articles published in 1982, are available free of charge from THE WITNESS, Box 359, Ambler, PA 19002. — Eds.)

Tourism Article Chosen

It is time to select the articles for the annual supplements to the volumes on 32 topics in the Social Issues Resources Series. We are requesting permission to reprint "Third World Tourism: Who Wins, Who Loses?" by Ron O'Grady in the July 1982 WITNESS.

SIRS photocopies articles — maintaining the original format when possible — from newspapers, magazines, government documents, and professional journals. Our major objective is to encourage dialogue among students about the issues confronting society, and to acquaint them with the excellent informational resources that are available.

Our staff reads thousands of articles before a selection is made of the most exemplary for each topic. We would like to include the above-referenced article in our volume.

Elaine Weingarten, Assoc. Ed.
Boca Raton, Fla.

About to Have Baby

I was shocked and saddened once again to read the irrational thinking about women as priests expressed in Mike Polavich's Letter to the Editor in January.

But the first time I read of it was in Urban Holme's otherwise inspiring book,

Continued on page 18

THE WITNESS

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THE WITNESS

Editorial

As Others See Us

Within the past 12 months, THE WITNESS has printed a number of articles on international issues, particularly articles about Latin America. Why this emphasis on the international dimension?

Because we are concerned that the so-called "free flow of information" in this hemisphere is largely a myth. A recent issue of *Latinamerica Press* (LP) from Lima, one of the alternate press services from which we get our news, alleges that information is overwhelmingly controlled by a handful of international power centers. Globally, the flow of such information is largely from North to South. "Five large agencies, United Press International (UPI), Associated Press (AP), French Press Agency (AFP), Reuters and Tass are responsible for 80% of world-wide news cable traffic," LP reported in its first issue this year.

Other data presented by *Latinamerica Press*:

- Two-thirds of the foreign news appearing in major Latin American dailies comes either from UPI or AP.
- Over half the movies shown in Latin America are from Hollywood.
- Three First World broadcast networks provide all the daily international TV news footage aired in the Third World.
- Two-thirds of all advertising in Latin America is controlled by U.S. based firms.

The recent Latin American Conference on the Church and Communications, meeting in Sao Paulo, summed up its concerns in these words, "Under the present system, the mass media are in the hands of business corporations and are thus controlled by a small minority of the population. Instead of being used for the benefit of all society, they disseminate material designed to reinforce established values and neutralize the people's desire for change."

The heavy communications bias is magnified because what is transmitted by the communications giants, says LA Press, "is a culture, an entire constellation of ideas and values. Through the electronic and print media, and even more powerfully through advertising, an entire way of life is inculcated."

"One study of the impact of electronic media on the poor showed that exposure tends to blur their perception of class differences and to create an almost magical belief that having or not having the products displayed on TV is a matter of luck. It also, in the words of the researcher, 'creates the impression that happiness, achievement and being White all have something to do with one another.'"

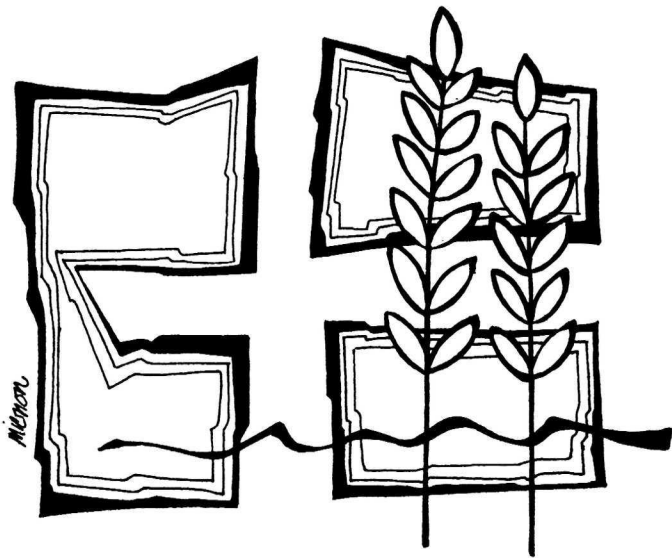
This indicates that church editors, to overcome this news bias, must if they have not done so, begin to connect with the network

Continued on page 19

Avoiding Burnout

How Can Activists Stay Spiritually Fit?

by Jack Woodard



Using *activist* and *spiritual* in the same sentence is still fairly novel. Augustinian dualism with its dichotomy between the temporal and the spiritual, the sacred and the profane, still profoundly affects our religious outlook 15 centuries later. But today, the activism of the '60s and the spiritual emphasis of the '70s seem to be melding into a holistic self-understanding. Christians are beginning to learn that to attempt activism without a spiritual discipline is like trying to make wine without first making grape juice.

Further, activism is not a handy pejorative for pietists to toss in the direction of demonstrators. Rather, to be an activist is to *do* as well as *be*. If someone says, "I'm not an activist," it is good theology of discipleship to ask, "Why not?". But indisputably, there are ministries, callings, which inherently demand more doing than being, and it is these with which this article is primarily concerned.

Typically, those few members of each seminary class who feel a strong personal calling to an activist ministry go into their first assignments full of

drive and optimism. All too often, 10 years or less later, they are tamed cynics either out of the ordained ministry or quietly playing custodial roles somewhere, making no discernible waves.

For some, the principal cause may have been faulty vocation in the first place, or for others, it may have been the triumph of seminary conditioning. But more commonly, it is a case of not staying spiritually fit.

Knowing "who I am" is a basic of spiritual health for an activist.

I am not Christ. I am me. The people I serve are not mine, but Christ's. The ministry in which I share is not mine, but Christ's. Thus I am fully human, able to make mistakes, quite able to act out of pride or anger or lust or greed instead of the pure motives I like to claim as mine. It is quite normal — not disgraceful — for me to be wrong.

Christ on the Job

Christ is on the job day and night. Thus I am able to be absent from the parish and neighborhood and city I serve and not thought to be irresponsible. I can give equal priority to time with my family and time to rest and play without disaster befalling anyone or anything. I am dispensable; useful, perhaps even important, but definitely dispensable. I can even get excited about

a satisfying life beyond retirement. My present role is not me, but simply what I do presently. I should and do take it very seriously, but it is not me.

It is appropriate that isolation begins with "I." Solitude and isolation must not be confused. Solitude is intentional. I need solitude frequently. Isolation is inadvertent and usually unnecessary. The first pangs of loneliness and isolation can be the trigger for depression. But it is spiritually possible to use them as signals that it is time to be in community with colleagues. In isolation "I" becomes magnified and distorted. Truth exchanged among colleagues keeps me down to size and my self-image clearly focused. Life in community is not a distant ideal to be envied as the experience of others. It is a realistic possibility for everyone who genuinely seeks it, though for an activist it is more likely to take shape across denominational lines.

A healthy activist ministry is driven by the biblical vision of what God wills in this world that is still being created. That vision is one of shalom — a state of peace which exists because justice prevails and thus there is nothing to fight about. The condition of shalom is the Kingdom of God realized as the purposive end of creation. And it is to

The Rev. Jack Woodard is rector of St. Stephen and the Incarnation Church, Washington, D.C.

be realized here, on this planet Earth, not by and by in the sky.

Jesus' words, "My Kingdom (or realm) is not of this world," mean, "My realm is not rooted in what you are familiar with as the values and habits of the present society. Instead, *my* realm is of God." They do not mean, "My realm is somewhere other than here." Though its fulfillment is to be in the *kairos* (God's moment) and not the *chronos*, (our time) the Promise is about the reality we see and touch and experience. As former Presiding Bishop John Hines once said, "There is no Gospel in 'if only'."

Some people involved in peace and social justice movements are not driven by that vision, do not believe in its possibility. Some take action, make witness, out of desperation, anger, sheer determination. But when spiritually healthy activists get involved in the peace and/or social justice movements, they are pursuing that biblical vision of shalom. They honestly believe it is going to happen. The movement is understood to be anything but futile because it is in tune with God's Promise which is actually going to be fulfilled here in God's world in God's own time.

Like Elizabeth and Mary in the early chapters of Luke, the whole creation waits on tiptoe in pregnant expectancy for the keeping of the Promise — which is on the verge (in *kairos* terms) of being kept.

Spiritually Fit Tension

When such a vision of the practical, realistic prospect of the condition of shalom comes to the forefront of our worldview, our whole relationship with what-is becomes tensive. What-is begins constantly to be held up beside what-is-to-be. A discontent with what-is emerges. A new realization is born: the injustice, the oppression, the cruelty, the greed, the callousness, the exploitation, the militarism in what-is *do not*

have to be. And the activist's relationship with present patterns of behavior, cultural mores, political and economic policies, institutional forms and practices, is never again entirely at peace. A critical faculty, missing in most seminary graduates, comes into automatic operation. The cross becomes a daily experience of tension with what-is, a tension which can only be borne by a cultivated dependency upon God's grace.

This perspective results in living in tension with the institutional church. And this simply means living by a set of values which are not customary in the institution. Radical social change activist Saul Alinski once said to an auditorium of Roman Catholic seminarians, "The way to take seriously the commitments to the poor I have been talking about is first to give up any idea of ever becoming a bishop."

The same principle applies to "career development" or advancement up some conceptual ladder of ecclesiastical rewards to something like a cardinal rectorship. For example, in the early 1970s all that finally kept a priest from receiving the call to become the powerful rector of one of the wealthiest parishes in the Anglican communion was an outspoken critique of the Vietnam War he had written for *The Episcopalian*.

Then, *effectiveness* gets argued about in movement circles perhaps more than any single word. To some, it is like a four-letter word, not worth considering. That attitude usually results from the absence of a vision of shalom as being possible in the real world. To others, an opposite view prevails; namely, that nothing should be done or risked which does not bid fair to be *effective*. That attitude is a sure-fire guarantee against ever taking action on anything. The prophetic calling is to bear the relevant Word intelligently to the world's intersections and there to lift it up at

whatever the cost. Little reflection on Isaiah or Jeremiah or Amos or Jonah is required to realize that the effectiveness of that bearing and lifting up is God's responsibility, not the prophet's.

The Role of Discipline

An activist who is not spiritually fit is living without discipline. Spiritual health comes from continual prayer — from constant communion with God. "Continual" and "constant" are sharply distinct from "occasional," the correct word to describe the relationship of many Christians with the creating, redeeming, active One. "Continual" and "constant" are not possible without discipline.

Just as a sedentary life causes a former athlete to go to flab, so an absence of regular centering, regular listening prayer, regular meditative reading of the Bible, regular reflective writing, regular accountability to a group of Christian colleagues, and regular sessions with a spiritual friend, produces the dry hollowness seen all too frequently in activists. "Regular" may mean several times a day or just once daily, but there must be regularity and that is just impossible without discipline. **Discipline simply means committing ourselves to do something even when we do not want to do it.**

Within whatever pattern of discipline an activist establishes for her or himself, there needs to be at work a faith-concept of an activist God. God is not a pet rock, truly. The activist's God acts — still creating, always loving, calling, bearing our pain, judging, forgiving, purposefully moving in the guts of human affairs.

In these cruel times, no word is more urgently needed in the activist's often lonely heart than the Word that God is up to something now, that God is taking action omnipotently. On that Good News, an activist can keep going — and without desperation. ■

Noisy Contemplation

by William Callahan



Did Jesus pray intermittently, when he had peace and quiet or a chance to get apart, or did he pray steadily throughout his busy ministry?

The question is important because Jesus is our model for Christian living. We need not, unless specially called, lay expectations on our own praying that Jesus did not meet. Let's look more directly at his active ministry for further evidence of his prayer.

Prayer apart was integral to Jesus' ministry. But such moments seem insufficient to explain his actions, including many of his richest encounters with human beings. Jesus often established strong bonds with people when time for building relationships was not present. For example:

- How do we explain Jesus' encounter with the woman reputed a sinner at the house of Simon the Pharisee (Lk. 7)?

Jesus was invited to a dinner to be observed and even judged. While they were eating, a woman came in, washed Jesus' feet with her tears, dried them with her hair and anointed them with ointment. Simon scorned Jesus in his own heart as not much of a prophet to allow such a disreputable woman to

touch him. Jesus defended the woman and celebrated her love as more hospitable than that of Simon.

How could Jesus risk his reputation after such a brief, public encounter with the woman? Could it be that Jesus, as many of us treat him, was really "God in a man's suit," able to use his godly wisdom in order to confound his critics?

If Jesus was simply God in a human disguise, we are protected against having to act as he did.

Archbishop Oscar Romero, martyred in El Salvador, employed as his liaison with labor unions, a fiery priest whom he was warned not to trust.

The priest did great service but was eventually killed in the midst of popular forces fighting against government troops. Even Romero's closest advisers urged the bishop to distance himself from the priest's funeral.

Romero asked them, "Do you think his mother will be there?"

"Of course," they answered.

"Then," said Romero, "I think his bishop should be there, too." He presided at the funeral.

- When Jesus, from the midst of a crowd, saw the despised tax collector Zacchaeus in a tree, he invited himself to stay with him. The people around Jesus complained bitterly. But Zacchaeus was deeply touched and seems to have been radically changed.

How could Jesus respond this way? Perhaps Jesus drew upon the mysterious

beatific vision? Perhaps when Jesus got up that morning he reviewed the divine scroll of history and planned the encounters of the day ahead?

Any of these solutions would defend us from having to live and act the way Jesus acted. He was God and we are not!

- When Jesus looked on the crowd with compassion (Mt. 14:14) and longed to gather the people of Jerusalem "as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings" (Mt. 23:37-8), what did he see? What vision of love made him ready to condemn the leaders of Israel for their failure to serve the people?

- When Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4), he was breaking multiple social taboos. She was a woman and a Samaritan, i.e., a heretic. He talked to her, alone, in the most public of places, at the well. She was a public sinner, five times married and living with a man not her husband. Yet Jesus' meeting with this woman engaged her in the liveliest dialogue of the New Testament.

She went back into the town. By the sheer contagion of her enthusiasm, like a moviegoer infecting others with a desire to see a favorite picture, she drew the people forth to listen to Jesus until they believed on their own.

How could Jesus encounter this woman so swiftly and bond so deeply?

- When Jesus was moving in a crowd one day (Lk. 8:40-48), he suddenly

William R. Callahan, S.J., is a co-director of the Quixote Center in Mt. Rainier, Md. A former physicist, he was part of the founding team of the Center of Concern in Washington, D.C. and organized Priests for Equality in 1975.

asked "Who touched me?" He said, "I felt that power had gone out from me." A woman came forward and witnessed her cure from lengthy bleeding.

What empathy was there in Jesus that enabled him to sense her cure?

- When parents were bringing their children to Jesus, the disciples, perhaps acting like adults who feel that children ruin a religious environment, tried to prevent their coming (Mk. 10:13-16). Jesus rebuked them, called the children to him, and proclaimed them a model for all believers.

What did he see that differed so deeply from the disciples?

- When ten lepers, standing afar, called out, other people saw the ravages of the dread disease. Yet Jesus saw people waiting to be healed. He made them well (Lk. 17:11-19).

How did Jesus see through their brokenness?

- When Jesus was dying, what dynamic enabled him to reach across the distance to the adjoining cross and bond with the penitent thief: "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk. 23:43)?

In these examples and in many others, Jesus established bonds of love more swiftly than the ordinary dynamics of human relationships make possible. The examples suggest that Jesus approached life in a contemplative way.

Jesus seems to have used his physical senses, his compassion and empathy to contemplate life and the people whom he met. He looked at people, touched them, felt their presence, and empathized with their plight with a love that brought deep insight and bonding. This contemplative posture, as the Trappist, Thomas Merton, said, "achieves insight beyond analysis."

Jesus' preaching and parables suggest that he contemplated the earth. Yeast, wheat, figs, fruit trees, oil, salt, light, weather, wine and grapevines are images for faith.

He saw people with a love that cut through past social judgments. He "tuned in" to their present condition and needs. Jesus contemplated people with a love which revealed their hearts to him. He shared his own heart in return.

I believe that this contemplative approach to life was the dynamic which nourished Jesus, the basic way he prayed throughout his days. Sometimes he prayed apart to gain perspective and to rest. But most of his praying was done in the midst of his ministry.

Jesus prayed constantly and simply by contemplating life as he lived it. Jesus practiced noisy contemplation.

Such a dynamic would mean that most of Jesus' praying took place by contemplating the people and events of his life at the time he experienced them.

These experiences of contemplative bonding were deeply nourishing. Far from draining him, the encounters were nourishing and brought him insight into people's hearts and built bonds of love which lasted for lifetimes.

Deep prayer, if it is not to be the exclusive domain of a privileged few who are backed by the resources of "religious multinationals," must be so simple that it can be attempted by any person of good will who attempts to follow Jesus.

The more complex the demands of deep prayer, the more specialized and professional the required support staff, and the more costly the needed environment of silence and separation, the fewer the people who can consider the journey. Affluent prayer, like affluent pilgrimages, is available only to affluent people.

Simplicity of life is a Christian call that applies not only to our consumption of the earth's material goods, but also to the resources we devote to nurturing our life of prayer.

Deep prayer for people who want to follow Jesus must be as available as

Jesus was to those willing to walk with him. In fact, his promise of the Spirit affirmed that he would be far more available to people of faith than when he trudged the dusty roads of Israel.

Such prayer should be able to begin with children and be achievable by people of all educational levels, classes and nations.

Deep prayer must be simple, yet as deep, as the "Lord's Prayer" which Jesus wove out of their experiences.

Deep prayer must be as portable as the human being who journeys after Jesus. No "Airstream camper" spirituality, it must be simple enough to be smuggled into prison cells, comfort people who grieve alone, and pass between people who have nothing but love to share.

Not for a moment does this emphasis upon simplicity deny the place of professional spiritual directors, of silence, of profound and cultivated skills, of intercultural experiences of prayer, of leisure, learning, serenity, or tranquility.

But what this does challenge is the tendency to make such resources seem so essential that ordinary people are kept from the dream of praying deeply when all they have to bring to their following of Jesus are the ordinary, poor, uneducated, tense, anxious, insecure surroundings in which most people exist.

Jesus comes today to the simple and marginal people of the earth, just as he did in Palestine. Modern spirituality must come to grips with that fact. ■

*This article is excerpted with permission from **Noisy Contemplation**, a 24-page tabloid study guide by William Callahan, S.J. linking spirituality and social consciousness. Single copies are available for \$1.50, prepaid, from the Quixote Center, P.O. Box 5206, Hyattsville, MD 20782. Copyright by the Quixote Center.*

The Bible and the Religious Left

An Interview
with Rosemary Radford Ruether
by Tony Clarke-Sayer



Rosemary Radford Ruether, Feminist Theologian
Professor of Applied Theology
Garrett Evangelical Seminary, Evanston, Ill.

How did you first read the Bible?

Ruether: I never had a fundamentalist or literalist relationship to the Bible. I learned the Bible through the medium of historical criticism. Obviously I'd heard passages read in church, but I think it's quite different when you grow up in a church that reads the Bible in a fundamentalist or literalist way and then later on you learn historical criticism. That's a great shock and turmoil, which I didn't experience because I read the Bible seriously in the context of college and graduate courses.

How did you view the Bible prior to that? Was it just an emblem of the authority of the church?

Ruether: The Catholic Church didn't evoke the Bible as a symbol of authority.

The Rev. Tony Clarke-Sayer of Asheville, N.C., is a United Methodist minister and freelance writer.

The Bible was a subversive tool of dissenters all through the Middle Ages. Then of course it surfaced during the Reformation, which carried it away into another series of churches and then proceeded to cover up for those churches the fact that the Bible was subversive. But the Catholics never forgot that the Bible was subversive, and so they didn't want people to read it. As a result, when modern Catholics read the Bible for the first time from the standpoint of liberation theology, they rediscover it as a subversive instrument.

But not so much from the standpoint of historical criticism?

Ruether: No. Historical criticism can be a way of making the Bible inaccessible. You raise up such a superstructure of scholarship that ordinary people feel they really can't use the Bible because they lack all these critical skills. There are two

ways of making the Bible into a tool of the status quo. One is the fundamentalist way of picking out a certain series of things in the Bible, excluding all the prophetic material, and then using it in a very literalistic way to support patriarchy or creationism or whatever. The other way is the historical-critical method, which is the academic establishment's way of making the Bible something that ordinary people are not equipped to read accurately.

But you have colleagues who teach these critical skills to budding young ministers.

Ruether: Yes, to make them into clerics. I think it's not accidental that the most neglected degree around here is the Masters of Theological Studies, which is a lay degree. Nobody here seems to have any idea that that could be a creative degree. I think it could be a very important pursuit where all kinds of people —

without any intention of becoming clergy — could do serious theological study. They could study theology without adding all these courses that make you clergy, and they could specialize in things like peace studies or feminism.

You're proposing that the seminary should not be a place primarily for the training of clergy?

Ruether: I think that would be much healthier. It would break down at least partially the clericalization of learning, the use of learning as a way of setting up class divisions in the church.

Would you recommend that persons considering seminary do studies elsewhere before entering seminary?

Ruether: The seminary is a better instrument for doing what I want to do than the only other available institution that teaches religion, which is the department of religion. Departments of religion programmatically cut off any connection between what they teach and a kind of faith-stance or action. In seminaries you aren't just doing academic searches but trying to apply what you learn to helping people in the world. You have to raise questions of value and meaning. That's a deeper dimension than just the academic study of religion.

What I do think, though, is that seminaries have to start connecting people with social issues right away. Something that interests me very much, and that we're working on as an interseminary project, is to connect a number of women pastors who are in small, dying inner city churches. What the churches — Methodist, Congregational, and various others — are doing with the glut of women ministers that they have on their hands is placing them into these extremely difficult situations in the city: dying churches.

Sociologically, those churches are situated in important places, from the standpoint of understanding the real

crises of cities and the relationship of races and so on. What we want to do is to network women in those situations. They have access to many more resources that way. Instead of just surviving day-to-day, they have a little space for analysis with other women ministers across the city. And then we want to have a program that places women seminarians with these women pastors for a six-week course, where they would do both Biblical and theological reflection and social analysis. An added dimension would be to get those pastors to identify a core-group of laity who could participate in seminars where we would come and ask about the neighborhood. Nobody is better equipped to talk about that than the people who live there. Also a great deal of the organizing in those areas is done by women, so you could link up with community organizations. We see this project as potentially very creative, giving support to these women pastors and at the same time turning their inner city assignments into a resource rather than a debility.

I want to return to the thought that the historical-critical method functions as an ideology and renders the Bible inaccessible. I think that for many liberal Protestants, if you go say, to a liberal Methodist or Presbyterian church, you'll find a division between the people who want to read the Bible for the sake of reading the Bible and those who are interested in other issues. There will be five or six adult Sunday school classes, and one of those classes, composed primarily of relatively elderly and conservative people, will be "the Bible study class." Everyone else will be studying world hunger or marriage enrichment or whatever. All these other classes quote the Bible, but it's all one-liners, all pretty shallow.

Ruether: There is an alternative way of using the Bible which is neither fundamentalist nor based on clerical credentials, and that is the kind of Bible study

that has developed in predominantly Catholic basic Christian communities. What you have here are Catholic Christian cultures which traditionally didn't use the Bible, which essentially built the religious faith of the people around sacramental life, with clerical authority rooted in the clergy's "private property" position over the sacraments. The Bible is discovered and read by people in these cultures very much as it was read in the Middle Ages and by left-wing Protestants in the 16th and 17th centuries: as a subversive document, an anti-clerical document.

In Latin America, *comunidades de base* are very much working-class groups. You also find this in Italian basic Christian communities, which use the Bible in a similar way. There you have working-class and more educated groups. But they all feel perfectly competent to get a small number of people together and simply sit down, study a passage, and then reflect on it. The method is that you reflect on it together in the context of your social experience.

With this liberation theology method it seems possible to avoid both the fundamentalist and clericalistic traps. I saw this in the Diocese of Cuernavaca, where the bishop, who happens to be a socialist, has promoted basic Christian communities throughout the parishes, and they really now form the militant core of the parishes. We went to one basic Christian community — lower-middle-class Mexicans in a poor section of town — and the Gospel text for that Sunday was the parable of the many soils.

The parable of the sower, in Mark?

Ruether: Yes, the sower sows the seed and it falls on rocky soil, good soil, and so on. All in the group were laypeople. Nobody had gone to seminary or had a big structure of expertise. They read the parable and discussed, "What does this

Continued on page 17

William Temple —



The Rt. Rev. William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury during World War II, has been called the most influential British Christian social thinker in this century.

Too often our desire to set the church on new paths leads to a suspicion of the church's past as a chronology of compromise and unfulfilled hopes. Such dismissal is dangerous: it makes it all the more likely that our own enthusiasm will be short-lived; failing to learn the lessons of history, we will make mistakes that have been made before and our own hopes will be frustrated. William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury during World War II, represents a long and distinguished tradition in Christian thinking. It is important that we know that tradition, and recognize that we are in its line.

The great changes in 20th century church life and thought are highlighted by a brief chronology of Temple's life. He came from a privileged background — his father himself was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1897 to 1902. He was educated at Rugby and Oxford. At Rugby he made a friend who would have a great influence on his thinking, the socialist historian, R.H. Tawney, author of *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, *Equality* and *The Acquisitive Society*.

Temple was ordained in 1909, by which time he was a committed socialist. He had been involved in adult education and was the first President of the Workers' Educational Association from

1908 to 1924. He joined the Labour Party in 1918, and, though he resigned when he became Bishop of Manchester in 1921, he did not hide his socialist convictions.

In 1918 and 1919 he worked energetically for the Life and Liberty Movement, set up as a ginger group pressing for legislative independence for the Anglican Church. Previously, the church had had to have all legislation concerning its internal affairs enacted in Parliament. The pressure paid off in 1919 with the passing of the Enabling Act, after which the Church Assembly was set up.

In 1924 he chaired the first major interdenominational conference to discuss social issues, the Conference on Christian Politics, Economics, and Citizenship (COPEC).

In 1926, he was the subject of political controversy when he and other bishops attempted to mediate in the dispute between miners and pit-owners.

Leading Ecumenical Figure

He became Archbishop of York in 1928, by which time he was already a leading figure in the ecumenical movement. He attended the first world conference of the Faith and Order Commission in 1925, and became its chairman four years later. The second world conference was held in 1937, the same year that the Life and Work Commission met in Oxford to discuss Church, Community and State; here again Temple was a major contributor. These two commissions agreed in principle to unite; the fruit of that agreement was the plan to set up the World Council of Churches, with

Neil McIlwraith is secretary to the National Student Christian Congress and the Student Christian Movement's director of resources. He is also carrying out research on theology and society for the University of St. Andrews. A longer version of this article appeared earlier in the SCM publication, *Movement*, No. 48.

A Voice for Today?

by Neil McIlwraith

Temple as its provisional chairman. He would undoubtedly have been its first president had he lived until its official foundation in 1948 but he did see the inauguration in 1943 of the British Council of Churches, with himself as president.

During the Second World War, Temple was in the center of discussions about the social changes that would be needed when Germany had been defeated. Central to his thinking was the sanctity of the person. The 1930s had shown the limitations of the ideology of individualism: applied dogmatically, it sacrificed so many of the individuals it pretended to value. In 1938 Temple chaired the committee of the Pilgrim Trust which published the famous report, "Men Without Work," documenting the great personal suffering caused by the recession and mass unemployment. In 1941, he called together a conference at Malvern to "*consider from the Anglican point of view what are the fundamental facts which are directly relevant to the ordering of the new society, and how Christian thought can be shaped to play a leading part in the reconstruction.*" The Conference concluded that the maintenance and concentration of private industrial ownership could be a stumbling-block to the living of Christian lives.

In the same year he published *Citizen and Churchman*, in which he was the first to use the phrase, the "welfare state." Shortly thereafter, he wrote his most famous work, *Christianity and Social Order*, in which he defended the Church's right to intervene in society, outlined the principles with which Christians should approach their social

and political responsibilities and suggested a radical program in housing, education, social security, worker participation in industry, and shorter working hours. Much of his program was incorporated in the "Beveridge Report," and Temple's book stands with that report as one of the foundation stones of the welfare state. It was published in 1942, the year that Temple became Archbishop of Canterbury, which he remained until his death two and a half years later.

Changing Structures

Many of the questions with which Temple wrestled are the same for any effective Christian witness today. An investigation of his life and thought yields many lessons for us.

Some need to be learned more thoroughly by conservative Christians, some more by radicals. I shall try to give examples of both.

Whether social transformation is achieved through the changing of individuals or the changing of structures is a question asked as often today as it was in Temple's time. In his youth he fell in with the predominant answer of the time. Great political problems seemed to demand and could only be saved by a great spiritual renaissance, directed at the individual as a responsible agent.

"If it can be done, the housing problem, the temperance question, the differences between employer and employed, will solve themselves and the British Empire will become an instrument of real justice."

He later came to realize that an increase in the number of Christian politicians and citizens, Christian em-

ployers and workers, however good in itself, need not change their social relationships. He underestimated the strength of the systems of which they were a part. Spiritual and political events could not be separated so easily.

Social conditions, bad housing, alcoholism and alienating work were **real impediments to the spiritual uplift** Temple sought; degrading conditions themselves limited the moral freedom and thus responsibility, of the individual. People's spiritual horizons are defined by such material conditions, so the problems therefore had to be tackled by both political and spiritual means. Temple's dialectical understanding of the dynamics of social change is a lesson that has been forgotten by many modern churchpeople. Ronald Preston writes:

"It is an indication of how far there has been a regression since Temple that the Archbishop's call to the nation in 1975 was based on two questions: 1) What kind of society do we want? and 2) What kind of people are needed to create such a society? It omitted a third question, what kind of structures are needed to produce the kind of people we need? It is inconceivable that Temple would have made such an omission."

Role of Duties, Rights

Another error among conservatives is the assumption that an emphasis on a citizen's duties is more moral and "Christian" than an emphasis on rights. Temple himself wrote in *Christianity and the State*:

"The temper of a movement that rests on rights will be aggres-

sive, violent, contentious; and the temper of a movement that rests on duties will be persuasive, public-spirited, harmonious."

Temple later came to realize that preaching the priority of duties over rights could have dangerous consequences. In a dispute between weak and strong the call to both to recognize the priority of duty was ineffectual, idealistic, unjust and a failure of the Christian duty to look to the needs of the poor. An emphasis on duty, equally applied to two sides can only be permissible in a situation of existing equality between them. Otherwise Christian mediation could easily fall back into tacit endorsement of prevailing forms of domination. Temple came to realize that a trade union leader must assuredly be made aware of his duty but his main duty is to fight for the rights of the workers. Rights must be clarified in a conflict because they define duty as seen by those with whom one is in discord. Expressed biblically, in order to love our neighbors we must know what it means to them to be loved; otherwise we will deny love by imposing our own scheme upon them.

Among radical Christians there have been many who have been content to work with too easy an identification of God's ultimate purpose for humanity in his Kingdom with the human project of socialism. Temple himself was so enchanted with the explosion of the Labour Party in his early work that he identified socialism completely with Christianity: *"The alternative stands before us, socialism or heresy."*

He saw socialism as the economic structure of the Kingdom of God, and the task of the church as *"making England into a province of the Kingdom of God."*

Temple later came to see that such a grandiose vision was a product of an imperialist Christendom doctrine. The ecumenical movement in which Temple

played such a large part grew under the shadow of rising Fascism and Nazism. These ideologies identified their political fulfilment with God's purpose for history in the same way as Temple had identified socialism. The certainty of moral rectitude and ultimate historical vindication for a doctrine tends to justify any conceivable means, however diabolical in itself, that might bring the promised end nearer. By the time of the Second World War Temple had ceased to identify the Kingdom with an earthly project. He now saw it only *"as the standard of judgment whereby we are all included under sin."*

Turning Saints to Demons

Temple's experience should also serve as an effective antidote to the lack of realism in much contemporary Christian radicalism. With the rise of totalitarianism and the wastefulness of war, Temple came to realize that any doctrine which emphasizes the human potential for good must also recognize the depths of human sinfulness. Treating imperfect historically conditioned persons as saints could turn them into demons.

As they began to believe that their best efforts were unambiguously good, they became the proud center of their own universe. Temple believed that we must be made aware that even the best courses of action in any circumstances may still be inadequate. But his sober and realistic assessment of the human condition never became an excuse for weakening his commitment to social justice:

"We are involved in an entanglement due to the sin of mankind, in which the best thing we can do is still a bad thing. Nonetheless it is right to do it, because it is the best possible. And so we have got to do it, and be penitent while we do it."

As we embark on our own search for

the authentic voice of Christian prophecy it is as well to learn from the life of William Temple, lest we identify prophecy with an idealism which has little to offer to those who struggle for social justice. George Bell, who was Bishop of Chichester and a close friend of Temple, considered him above all as a prophet. But Temple was also a priest — for all his radical criticism, very much a man of his time and of his church. John Atherton, a director of the William Temple Foundation, writes of the necessity of balancing prophecy and priesthood:

"If we are concerned . . . with moving towards an adequate theology in Britain, our agenda will surely not just be for prophets, but also for priests. As Reinhold Niebuhr noted so perceptively when writing of the opening years of his pastorate in Detroit, the trouble with prophets is that they can always move on: the priest has to stay."

William Temple was one who prophesied and stayed. So we must learn to combine the virtues of prophecy and priesthood. It is all too easy to denounce, and then stand back, pure and happy in our isolation. If we want our prophetic voice to be taken seriously, we must show our willingness to undertake thorough analysis and partake in the detailed debates over policies. Unless we do, a radical Christian perspective will remain as irrelevant to today's political questions as the conservative theology it opposes. ■

CREDITS

Cover, Beth Seka; graphic p. 4, Margaret Longdon; graphic p. 6, Robert F. McGovern; p. 10, Bishop Temple, courtesy *Movement* magazine.



The Rt. Rev. John Hines

John Hines on Today's Church

by David E. Sumner

The Rt. Rev. John E. Hines, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church between 1965 and 1973, guided the church through some of its most turbulent and controversial years. He was identified mainly with the General Convention Special Program, which administered grants to civil rights and minority groups seeking empowerment and social change.

At 34, Bishop Hines was elected Bishop Coadjutor of Texas, to become one of the youngest bishops in Episcopal Church history. A native of South Carolina, he graduated from the University of the South and Virginia Theological Seminary. He is now retired and lives in Highlands, N.C., with his wife, Helen.

In a recent interview, he offered some comments and reflections on the 1982 General Convention, the Episcopal Church today, and its role in the future:

On General Convention: "The General Convention showed that the church is pretty well frustrated in its pursuit of mission, still. There is a quiescence, perhaps a hoping that a quiescent attitude will help the giant problems go away. I think that was about the mark of the General Convention to me."

Jubilee Ministry: "The forces that strove to help extend or recreate a socially active ministry of the national church did a heroic job, but they were too little and too late. Even though having been guided by some astute minds of people, they didn't get started soon enough. They didn't understand

sufficiently the financial structuring the General Convention goes through, and therefore, they came up with their proposition too late to get it budgeted adequately."

Lutheran-Episcopal Relations: "Probably the most significant action. The resolutions were ones of hope. They didn't attach the main difficulty and problem in ecumenism, which has to do with the validity of orders. But they did accept mutual recognition of sacraments which will enable Lutherans and Episcopalians to live together and work together as Christians. I see it as very beneficial, very helpful."

The Nominating Committee for the Presiding Bishop: "The most critical thing, in my view, was the creation of the Nominating Committee for the Presiding Bishop. I think the leadership in the office of Presiding Bishop depends how accurately this Nominating Committee reads the needs of the church for strong, effective, imaginative, and courageous leadership in the years ahead. I doubt if the church is well enough to pick the kind of person who will give it the kind of leadership the next decade is going to require. The church is still afraid, still scared, too unsettled for controversy, still sees itself in the reconciling role."

The House of Bishops: "There's not much leadership in the House of Bishops now. The ablest and best minds are those that are about to retire, with a few startling and good exceptions. As a result of the fact that they are about to retire, they are themselves coasting and don't want to join the issues on the floor."

David E. Sumner is Director of Communications for the Diocese of Southern Ohio.

hold-the-line approach. There's been an attempt to reconcile the differences in the church. I really haven't seen a church worth very much which is totally a reconciling church. In the conflict and tension between reconciliation and the pursuit of justice, justice always loses. Reconcilers do not want to pay the price for justice."

Liturgical Renewal: "The Episcopal Church has moved towards a Eucharistically-centered worship. But it's had both good and bad aspects. One of the good aspects is that the church is beginning to understand worship much more seminally than it did in the past century. It's gone beyond worrying whether the priest is wearing the right vestments, etc. I think the church has benefitted by a Eucharistically-centered worship.

"It's also, unfortunately, made our church a more

exclusive church. The Eucharist is still a mystery and will always be a mystery. The liturgical aspects of having the Eucharist as the main service presents a barrier to those who are not acquainted with the Episcopal Church, but might like to explore it."

Other Changes: "I think generally the church is more socially sensitive and sensitized than it was 20 years ago. I think gains were made in the 60s and 70s that never will be totally lost. I also think the church has retreated badly from engagement in world issues and human issues of life. I think we're in a trough now, and have been for 8 or 10 years. The church (all churches) has diminished in its influence. It really isn't regarded as very effective, except on some occasions with certain visible leaders, such as the Pope. So I'm not very high on the church right now as an institution." ■

The Unknown Clothier

by Abbie Jane Wells

(Abbie Jane Wells, a WITNESS subscriber in Juneau, Alaska, has a continuing preoccupation with the down-to-earth aspects of the heavenly events recounted in the Bible.)

What did the Christ wear on the first Easter morning? Well, it wasn't "the same old thing," that's for sure. His grave clothes neatly folded in the tomb, his robe gambled for by soldiers at the foot of the cross — what on earth was he to put on for Easter?

At first glance, Mary mistook him for a gardener. Could it be that was because he was dressed like a gardener? Is it possible that a gardener shared his clothes with Jesus — the very first instance of "I was naked and you clothed me" in post-Resurrection history?

Did Jesus come bursting out of the tomb in grave clothes just as a gardener went by, and scare the poor chap half to death? Causing

the gardener perhaps to say, "Man, you can't go running around like that, you'll scare people. Here, let me give you some of my duds so you'll look alive instead of like a corpse."

Or had Jesus stripped the grave clothes off and folded them neatly before he burst forth, causing the passing gardener to say, "Man, you'll catch your death of cold and besides, women come this way often. Here, let me give you some of my clothes."

It's said that Mary was the first one who saw him that Easter morning. But maybe not; it might have been the one who gave him the clothes who saw him first.

So someone unknown clothed

him, and he looked like a gardener to Mary.

I wonder what effect this had on the one who gave Jesus clothes to wear on that first Easter. Did he (or she, maybe?) know who he or she was giving clothes to? Did that person always share clothes with anyone who needed them or was this the first time?

Well anyway, Jesus was decently clad in someone's clothes when Mary came and Jesus didn't scare her by wearing grave clothes. The one to whom we never give a thought, or thanks, the unknown clothier who provided Jesus with something to wear on the first Easter, deserves some recognition, so here it is, belatedly, and with my thanks. ■

A Journey Is a Person in Itself

by Malcolm Boyd

I went looking for signs of vitality and hope in American religious life. It was a zigzag geographical and psychological adventure that introduced me to vastly different people, moods, experiments, feelings, reactions and approaches to problems.

The muscular Black rector of a Roman Catholic parish in Harlem took hold of my shoulder and guided me to the window of his church office.

"Look outside that window across the street," he said. "There is trafficking in drugs right there. The church has to be a sign of hope for our people. We do this with our school system. A second emphasis is the liturgy."

An energetic woman minister in California told me about her work with young adults.

"We're thinking of opening a laundromat and developing it as a new village well. Most young adults spend time in a laundromat. This would also produce income to help support our ministry."

A middle-aged nun, a handsome woman and a leader in her community, spoke to me in Houston about the future of religious orders like her own.

"I hope we may be women whose priorities and goals are based on belief in, and concern for, the social scripture.

To live the Word. Isaiah. Amos. Jesus. We have the financial freedom to be true leaders and witnesses. We are not yet really sensitive to, and aware of, our freedom to be prophets. We will not starve if we stand up to powerful institutions and multinational corporations, and speak the Gospel to them. But we are too often afraid to be embarrassed."

The rough-hewn modern counterpart of an ancient prophet, the director of a center for runaway youths in Portland, spoke about social change.

"Because of media trappings that triggered recollections we've finished the '50s, '60s, and '70s. That's bringing everybody to the point of living right now. Regardless of class or sex, the individual today is being forced to confront change."

I examined social implications of the teachings of Jesus Christ as interpreted by minorities.

The Latino director of a Mexican-American community center in Texas spoke critically of his experience with White leadership.

"They wanted to keep me at a 'Chicano-boy' level," he said. "Generally we Hispanics have to submerge our ego down a hole in confrontations with Anglo power. I decided to take a stand — advocating, enabling and facilitating. I have a responsibility to let the church's resources be used creatively and constructively in these communities. I am basically a minister of the Gospel. I must witness to what the Lord has done. Love must break through as a gift of God. My concept of ministry is holistic.

If we develop a church we should know what else is in need in that community."

In Harlem, a Black Protestant minister talked about his own struggle.

"Blacks have been ripped off, abused, kept quiet by the wrong use of religious authority. Jesus made his most important political speech about releasing the captives, preaching good news to the poor. How do you do this without making changes?"

I saw new forms of religious expression emerging to meet the needs of spiritual hunger. In a suburb of Chicago I found an experimental church that occupied space in an office building across from a large shopping center. People came from five counties to be members of the congregation. Membership was based on an annual renewal of covenant.

Outside San Francisco I visited a church on a hillside and talked to its minister.

"Ten years ago this building was a public relations social club on a hill — cold, lifeless, angular," he said. "For the first two years I tried to keep it alive and going. But we had to let the church die in order to be reborn. This process had to do with my personal growth, too, in order to move toward my own aliveness."

We sat in silence for a few moments. Then he continued:

"Healing is a recent experience. Twelve of us took a commitment to be a healing community for six months. There was a healing yesterday of a child

The Rev. Malcolm Boyd is Writer-Priest-in-Residence at St. Augustine-by-the-Sea Episcopal Church in Santa Monica, Cal. He is a social critic and author of 20 books including *Are You Running With Me, Jesus?*, *Take Off the Masks and Look Back in Joy*.

with a brain tumor operation. We'll visit the child again and again, involving different members of the group. We've not been afraid to risk, to let the Spirit nudge us into new levels of being. God works in our lives around the edges rather than hitting us over the head. We move toward the aliveness that nuances provide."

In Chicago I discovered evangelical faith coupled with a strong commitment to social action in a church.

"You have to teach people from the Bible," the minister explained. "Four hundred passages talk about responsibility to the poor, many speak of justice. I look upon piety and social concern as two oars of a rowboat. Both are essential. The guys without piety burned out. The merely piety guys left because their methods didn't work.

The most extraordinary church I found was in the Pacific Northwest. Its hallways and offices were literally filled with fresh produce and stacks of discarded clothing for the hungry and needy. The church was packed with service organizations including a learning center, a school for high school dropouts, a police-community relations committee, a Balkan dance group, a Catholic Worker kitchen, a community underground newspaper, a basement coffeehouse, a theater group, and a center for gay men and lesbians.

"We try to get systems changed," the director of the church's emergency service, a registered nurse, told me.

Looking at the complex mosaic of religious experience that I saw in various parts of America, I found some connecting links. For example, a Protestant church in Northern California had similarities to the *havurah* that I found in a Los Angeles synagogue whose families met together in homes, rediscovered their Jewishness, celebrated the home festivals, and developed a sense of family.

In the synagogue, half of the families

belonged to *havuroth*. The church that resembled it in this aspect was divided into six extended families. These cross-generational groups spent much time together outside of church but, on Sundays, developed and utilized themes in worship, brought food and greeted strangers.

Another connecting link I found in Harlem. A Black minister told me: "An interesting model for Black children is the Hebrew School, where Jewish traditions are learned. We need a counterpart for Black kids to get Black history and culture."

During my journey I found new components of the American religious scene outside Will Herberg's classic, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*. These included Islamic influences, new age consciousness, cults and neo-traditionalism. Many young adults who are single, feminist women, gay men and lesbians, and people engaged in developing alternative lifestyles, wish to be a part of organized religion with the rights of first-class citizenship in the churches.

I discovered a pervasive anti-intellectual mood among a large number of people who increasingly trust only their gut feelings and reactions. This augurs the reliving of history, when its truths are unrecognized or unknown. Also I found evidences of a biblically and theologically illiterate generation in contemporary America. This may well be the greatest challenge within Judeo-Christian structures.

During my journey I perceived the need for a network of linkages — in the sense of providing information and a supportive community — for many disconnected persons and small groups. Although these are linked in spirit and intention, their dislike and fear of bureaucracy often keeps them isolated from one another.

The most fearful moment of my pilgrimage came in a meeting with a Jewish Young Leadership Group in

suburban New Jersey.

"I am haunted by the question of what might happen if there were a Hitler kind of leader in America," a young woman said. "Another Holocaust. Whom could I trust among my Christian friends? To whom could I entrust my children's lives, the life and future of my family? Sometimes I wonder if there is anyone. Or, if the person I think I could trust would in reality betray me."

The group commented on the appalling ignorance of Christians concerning Jewish life, attitudes and beliefs. A Christian friend had asked one member of the group if Jews still engaged in blood sacrifices.

The most daring experience I encountered during the journey was in a situation where four West Coast churches had just recently become one. Worshipping together for the first time, the combined ministers represented a strong diversity — female, male, Black, White, Asian, young and old.

"We had a full church for the first time since 1960 for any of our congregations," a minister said, "There's no way any of these churches could keep enough people and generate energy to exist alone. We had to work through denominational differences, church leadership dilemmas, and questions of ownership and economics.

"We're creating the structure of a new church. Nobody knows what it's going to be. You have to let the old dream die if you're going to have a new creation."

My journey in search of creativity and hope reminded me frequently of John Steinbeck's personal odyssey in *Travels with Charley*, his encounters with different people and moments of fresh discovery. "A journey is a person in itself; no two are alike," he wrote. I felt the same way as my enlightening trip played itself out. And, (again from Steinbeck) "We find after years of struggle that we do not take a trip; a trip takes us." ■

Ruether . . . Continued from page 9

mean in terms of our experience?" And what they came up with is, "Well, that's very much like when we try to talk about questions of poverty and wealth in the churches, and when we try to talk about the peace issue in the churches, or when we tried to talk about what was happening in Cuba in the churches, and the reception we got. Some people were very open, some people were closed." Their language was much simpler than this, but what they decided was that socio-economic status proved, in effect, to be the equivalent of fertile soil or rocky soil and so on. If people had privilege and wealth, then they didn't want to hear the message. If they were really experiencing oppression, then they were receptive. Their socio-economic status created a consciousness that made them open or closed to the message. I thought, "This is brilliant exegesis," and of course they were drawing it right out of their experience. They were recounting stories about how they had tried to speak in this or that parish.

It certainly speaks well for the method, but the parable itself seems to indicate that the method is only feasible for people who are in fertile soil. What are we to do about the affluent White liberals or the fundamentalists? They don't want to hear that message, and if they used that method, if they reflected on their social experience, they would come up with different results.

Ruether: Of course the Latin Americans are explicit on that. They talk about "the hermeneutical privilege of the poor." The prophetic texts themselves are written from the point of view of the oppressed, and therefore the oppressed can connect up the Biblical text with their social experience. They're coming out of the same perspective of looking at the structures of wealth from the underside. But if you're not looking at the structures of wealth from the underside, it is a much harder struggle to connect with the

Biblical message.

I've experienced that coming from a Black seminary to a predominantly White context. At Howard University in Washington we had a program for storefront pastors and ministers, about half of whom were women. These were people who didn't have the education to qualify for seminary, who for the most part didn't have college educations. But they had a lot of street experience and they knew the Bible. They had no trouble at all connecting the Biblical symbols with social issues. I remember doing an interpretation of the beast in the Book of Revelation as a symbol of international political and economic power. I looked at the economic structures that are described there in terms of international trade and at the structures of military power, and then I connected this with military power and multinationals. Those people didn't have any trouble at all seeing a direct analogy between those things. Trying to do that in an affluent White church would make people hopping mad.

Or they would want to talk about the Soviet Union. Yes, the beast represents corporate and military power, but not ours.

Ruether: I've just done a course on basic Christian communities with Ed Grace, who is the primary networker for basic Christian communities in Italy. There you have middle-class communities, like St.-Paul's-Outside-the-Walls, which are primarily scholars, academics, journalists, ex-priests. They're definitely middle-class, but they're all people who in one way or another have been marginalized by both the church and the society because they've made political commitments. So, even though they are not "the oppressed," this also gives them a kind of handle on reading the Bible in this way.

You have taken a step in Biblical interpretation that liberal theologians by and

large have not taken. You have looked at the Bible essentially as the record of a power struggle and thus are not startled by contradictions in it.

Ruether: I don't know how much liberation theologians have articulated this explicitly, but there is a normative principle of prophetic critique which includes critiquing the oppressive social and economic power of the rich vindicating the poor and the oppressed, critiquing the dominant religious ideology, which is used to sanctify the power of the wealthy, and opening up an alternative vision. But this normative prophetic principle is something that has to be constantly reappropriated in new situations. Any particular way of stating it could be deformed, including ways of doing it within the Bible itself. You could, for example, identify God and Christ with servanthood in order to critique kingship. You could raise up the notion that we are God's servants and are at the same time liberated from oppressive power. But then that same language can be deformed into a sanctification of slavery. Because Christ was a slave, you should docilely accept being a slave. Which is exactly what happens by the time you get to 1 Peter and elsewhere in the New Testament: servant language is deformed into slave language. In order to read the Bible, you bring that same critical principle to bear and you recognize that same power struggle going on in the Bible.

Are you concerned about the fate of the liberal church?

Ruether: What worries me about the left-wing exodus is that the American left in general, and Catholics in particular, tend to be very purist and anti-political. They want to do something utopian. Consequently, their activity fails to have historical impact because they don't know how to reconnect with at least some parts of the existing institution and transform the openness there into vehicles for their option, thereby greatly magnifying

that option. I'm very anxious that the feminist left, and the left in general, begin thinking more politically about the creative dialectic between the renewal movement and the historical institution.

Right now many people are forming basic Christian communities in the United States like the ones in Latin America and Italy. Feminists in the Catholic context are increasingly thinking that the only way to go is feminist base communities. They are undecided whether they are simply disinterested in the institutional church and are just pursuing a feminist agenda, or whether they also have a mission to the institutional church. Feminist base communities are an important development because there one can freely make liturgical changes that cannot be done in almost any of the institutional churches because of the enormous resistance to language change. But I put feminist communities in the framework of being an exodus within and for the sake of the church. Many feminists are over the arrogant notion that their community is the true light. They recognize that there just might be some parishes here and there that are doing things comparable and compatible to feminist concerns.

This is really a serious break, though. In all the mainline denominations we see defections of individuals and sometimes whole congregations splitting away because the church is too liberal, too concerned about social issues. Then there is this other exodus: Christian base communities, feminist communities, and so on. How badly are all these departures going to weaken the liberal church?

Ruether: In the case of the Roman Catholic Church, and I suspect it's true of a number of mainline Protestant denominations, the institutional structure is a lot more durable than you might think. There is no question in my mind that these living fossils called the institutional church will roll right along and

socialize the next generation, because they have the structure. And the only way in which the renewal movements are going to make a difference historically is to get hold of parts of the institution around the edges and translate them into vehicles for their option.

What I hope would develop would be a creative dialectic between the people who stay in the churches — and I don't doubt that the majority are going to stay — and the small groups of people who create feminist basic Christian communities. What those small groups do will be important if they can create models which other people can then appropriate. ■

Again Gethsemane

Here, if we'll pull through or no,
I can't say. Though I do say
we walked to the garden with Christ;
He only asking that we watch a while,
and I trying terribly not to sleep.
I really did. But with the body dim
from drink and dream it's not easy.
He shook us twice up. I kept falling
back to dreams — beasts, bloody and wild.
I knew He knelt near the rocks, crowned
with moonlight.
It was just a night like any other,
wasn't it? He often went off, praying alone.
We didn't know.
After the bright palms, the children
singing, I didn't want this silence
of despair.

There, torches and drawn arms
fell from the night.
The shadows parted. I slipped in too easily,
swearing "I don't know Him,"
(even to that third cry).
Yes, I ran off — to the fields beyond town
weeping, out of my head somewhere,
shaken and alone. And now back, lost
with the others within this room dark
as the garden, without moonlight even,
these walls unshrinking as rock, I, Peter,
who couldn't rise, can find no rest.
I face this cup. It can't pass, ever.
It is waiting, being full once more,
where on knees, so terribly awake as He's
sleeping, we sweat forth our own blood
of hope.

— Robert Kotansky

Letters . . . Continued from page 2

The Future Shape of Ministry (Seabury)! Page 261: "Emotionally the idea of women as priests is repulsive to many of us ('Mother cannot say Mass this week, she's about to have a baby.'). but intellectually it is very difficult to defend the relationship between sexual differentiation and prohibition to the priesthood."

Susan M. Mass
Minneapolis, Minn.

Neither Parent in Pulpit

Why I let myself be drawn into this kind of retort is a mystery to me, but the urge seems irresistible! Re: the "Baby at the Pulpit" letter in the January issue — interesting idea. After all, the birth of a baby was front and center at the most important event in history. However, that is not what hit me about this.

My mind trips to the fact that no *male* priest, whose baby is about to be born, should be standing in that pulpit either. The writer of the letter touches a chord in my parently heart. A baby is never "her" baby. It is always "their" baby, and when that baby is born neither parent should be standing in the pulpit!

Mildred P. Boesser
Wasilla, Alaska

Overeaters Anonymous

I want to thank you for publishing Judith Moore's "Bulimia: Catharsis or Curse" in January. I am a compulsive overeater who had considered vomiting, but was a coward so I just gained weight or starved.

The joy in my life is that I've found a solution! I'll be celebrating my 27th birthday in January plus two years of abstinence (freedom from compulsive overeating, binging, dieting, and the food crazies)! Two years ago my life began to change when I went to my first Overeaters Anonymous (OA) meeting.

OA is a fellowship of men and women who have common eating disorders. We believe we share a three-fold illness: physical, emotional, and spiritual. Our program is based on the 12-Steps of

Recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Our program is an anonymous self-help program. If readers of THE WITNESS would like further information, they may write to Overeaters Anonymous, World Service Office, 2190 190th Street, Torrance, CA 90504; Telephone (213) 320-7941.

**Name Withheld
Upon Request**

Forced to Renew

Your January issue *forced* me to decide that I must renew my subscription. As a student doing internship I had decided that I am too busy to read all that I would like to; the January issue would have been my last. Every article made me decide to change my mind. Thank you for the student rates, too.

**Jan Marvar
Royal Oak, Mich.**

Despair to Excitement

Again, my personal and enthusiastic thanks for continuing to give us perspective in difficult perplexing areas.

Each issue has something (often *much*), that turns despair to excitement. It's that small but intense light that burns when new understanding points to what we perceive as Christian action.

**Virginia S. Meloney
Claremont, N.H.**

90% Provocative

This "new senior" had originally decided, as a matter of establishing new priorities not to renew, but I can't resist!

Occasionally I get furious with the "junk" I find in the magazine, but 90% of the time this "moderate liberal" finds the articles both informative and provocative. I know we need to get "provoked" sometimes — perhaps even stimulated to action — if we are to keep the democratic process, not to mention our faith, working. Thank you for prodding.

**Margaret E. Johnson
Watsonville, Cal.**

Continued from back cover

cution had argued that the jury "should be permitted to reach its verdict uninfluenced by concern arising from the FALN's proven record of violence." The FALN is an alleged terrorist group advocating Puerto Rican independence and suspected of setting off a number of bombs, the most recent on New Year's Eve, which seriously injured three police officers.

Judge Sifton in his instructions to the jurors made clear that this was not an FALN trial and that the defendants were not charged with violent acts, but the defense lawyers claimed that an anonymous jury prejudices the case, cloaking it with an aura of mystery and implying that the five on trial are somehow connected to the FALN.

Many supporters of the five expressed surprise that the trial was still in progress. They pointed out that this could have been an open and shut case — the five had freely admitted that they

had refused to testify before the Grand Jury. The question has now turned to *why* they did not testify, with the defense presenting character witnesses to get at their motivations.

The issue, therefore, is not whether the defendants have disobeyed the law, which they have admitted. The question has become, how can justice be done?

Testimony of character witnesses centered around the confidentiality of the ministry, the nature of lay ministry, the chilling effect of a community worker testifying before a Grand Jury, and the job performance of the defendants.

In January, THE WITNESS reported that a counter suit had been brought against the U.S. Government by the five, including a motion to quash and pointing to a prejudicial press release issued by the FBI labeling them the "unincarcerated leadership of the FALN." (See interview with Maria Cueto, January issue.) But Judge Sifton denied the motion.

Deadlines prohibit further details, but outcome of the trial and other developments will appear in the April issue. ■

Inertia

The Primal Passion was so great
It burst upon the bones of Nothingness
It pulverized, exploded them to being.

But still the Nothing drags. It tugs
and pulls against the hem of Being.
Inertia of matter, it is called.
The quantum pulse, the constant
push of being
Must fight each instant against
oblivion.

And what are sin and evil but that drag?
They scream and claw
against the larval Spirit
So that the Nothingness
may rest once more, and sleep.

So Christ upon the Cross and
in the Bread
Is still the Primal Passion fighting on
To overcome reluctance of the World
to being born.

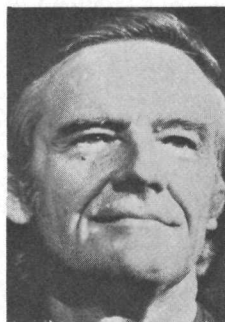
— Odell Prather

Editorial . . . Continued from page 3

of small alternative media such as LP and the Ecumenical Press Service to fill the information gap. Other sources of information are socially concerned missionaries overseas and culturally aware church people who travel abroad.

The more affluent church publications are sending their own reporters to cover stories, especially in Central America. It's an expensive venture, but one eminently worthwhile, in the interest of finding out whether "that's the way it (really) is."

(M. L. S. and the editors)



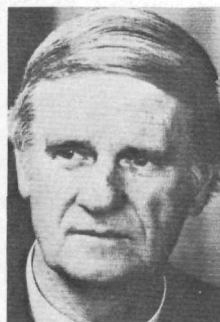
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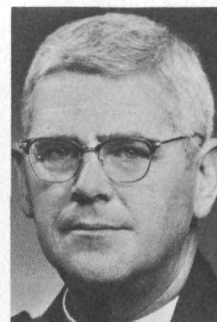
HOPKINS



DeWITT



McGEHEE



BLANCHARD

Character Witnesses Stir Trial

by Mary Lou Suhor

As THE WITNESS went to press, four bishops and three laypersons had testified as character witnesses for the defense in the trial of five Hispanics charged with criminal contempt for refusing to testify before a Federal Grand Jury in Brooklyn. Two of the defendants, Maria Cueto and Steven Guerra, have close ties to the Episcopal Church.

The testimony Feb. 9 marked one of the highlights of the trial, as the case moved into its second week. Among those taking the stand were:

- The Rt. Rev. Roger Blanchard, former Bishop of Southern Ohio, currently attached to the Diocese of Massachusetts; and the Rt. Rev. Paul Moore, Jr., Bishop of New York, who testified on behalf of Maria Cueto. Bishop Blanchard was deputy to the Presiding Bishop when Ms. Cueto was

employed as executive director of the Episcopal Church's National Commission for Hispanic Affairs;

- The Rt. Rev. H. Coleman McGehee, Jr., Bishop of Michigan and Chair of the Board of the Episcopal Church Publishing Company; the Rt. Rev. Robert L. DeWitt, Senior Contributing Editor of THE WITNESS; and Ms. Mattie Hopkins, Chicago educator and ECPC Board member, who appeared on behalf of Steven Guerra, who is also a member of the ECPC Board;

- Dom Velazquez and Yolanda Sanchez, professional social workers serving in East Harlem, who spoke on behalf of their co-worker, defendant Andres Rosado.

- Other defendants are Julio Rosado, who is serving as his own attorney, and Ricardo Romero, of Alamosa, Col.

Asked about the heavy church presence in the courtroom, which included a number of clergy — men and women — and a broad spectrum of lay people, Bishop McGehee said, "We are here to express our pastoral concern, of course. Many of us have worked closely with some of the defendants and have anguished as they served previous jail terms on a similar charge. But beyond that, we want to be one with them in upholding the social justice issues around which they have rallied — Grand Jury abuse and the rights of Hispanics, especially the right to support Puerto Rican independence."

Another highlight of the week was the decision by Judge Charles P. Sifton to try the case before an anonymous jury; that is, a jury identified only by numbers, not names and addresses. The prose-

Continued on page 19