

## Christmas Reflections for First World Christians

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Elizabeth Amoah • Henry Atkins  
Dorothee Sölle • Jack Woodard

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# THE WITNESS

# Letters

## 'In exquisite taste'

You've done it again! The September issue of *THE WITNESS* on AIDS is the finest treatment of the subject I have yet seen.

We, here in New York, are becoming more and more affected by the crisis. We need to touch each other across the land and know that there are brothers and sisters who are sharing the sadness and seeking to bring love and justice to the situation.

Your issue was in exquisite taste; some of the articles so well written as to bring tears to the eyes, and yet there wasn't an ounce of sentimentality involved.

**The Rt. Rev. Paul Moore**  
Bishop of New York

## AIDS resource for NCC

Congratulations on an especially excellent September issue. Thank you for focusing on the AIDS crisis in a way that provokes a Christian response rather than the homophobic hysteria that is so common today.

As you probably know, the primary outreach of the Metropolitan Community Churches is to the gay and lesbian communities. As part of that we are doing an AIDS resourcing presentation to the National Council of Churches later this year. We would like to use your entire September issue in our information packet as part of that presentation.

**The Rev. Nancy Wilson, Clerk**  
MCC Board of Elders

## Gays can be healed

I feel that the church has begun to redefine sin in so many instances, and it frightens me. It seems that what God has called sin and rebellion is now being called good, and in fact being encouraged. The church is clearly adopting humanistic and new age ideas and attaching Jesus' name to them, and it sounds to me like another gospel.

When my husband was in seminary

we knew many gays, and I had the very sad experience as seminary nurse, to see one of these unhappy persons destroy himself. There are now ministries within our church which have 100% healing of homosexual persons. But then that requires the recognition of the practice as a sin (as the Scriptures have said it is), repentance and reconciliation, plus counselling. And it does take a little time. God is so loving and compassionate toward all his wilful and disobedient children (into which category we all fit one way or the other), but thankfully He has provided us a way out. The correct solution may not always be the easiest, and it most assuredly would require the crucifying of the flesh of which Paul spoke. I strongly feel that doing it God's way and not man's way will be the most rewarding in the long run.

**Carolyn A. Raham**  
Warren, Mich.

## Biblical anchor lost

Recently a copy of the September issue of *THE WITNESS* was passed on to me — the first I had read in perhaps 25 years, and I was astounded. If this issue is characteristic, it seems to me that *THE WITNESS* has lost its biblical and creedal anchor and has become a witness not to the Spirit of God but to the Spirit of the Times. First, the assertion in the back page blurb for "A Priest Indeed" that "women made the Episcopal Church whole" is repugnant and heretical in the implication that God created the church incomplete and left it that way until women in 1974 corrected His error.

Second, John Fortunato, in his outrageous lament on AIDS, would have us believe that "evidence that homosexuality is a natural biological variation" is actual, conclusive, and relevant; that homosexuality must therefore be attributed to God's creation; and that homosexuals per se must consequently be catered to in and by the church. His failure to consider the possibility of de-

monic perversion of the natural order is both interesting and indicative of the quality of his divinity studies; but his failure to call for repentance and for amendment of life according to Biblical standards make his lament hollow, blind, and self-righteous.

Third, lesbian seminarian Gilson confuses a homosexual's being a Child of God with approbation of homosexuality. Her seminary seems not to have taught her the classical Anglican position that a person is made a Child of God in Holy Baptism and, contrary to her claim that "the church is wrong to refuse to ordain gay men and lesbian women," the only entitlement attached to being a Child of God is the potentiality of being an inheritor of the Kingdom of God.

**Edgar Alan Nutt**  
Woodville, N.H.

## Fortunato replies

To the Editor: You asked for a brief response to the Nutt and Raham letters, especially in reference to their notions of homosexuality as a demonic perversion and the curability of homosexuality. My answer may be shorter than you expected.

I tend not to read hateful letters any more (even the passive-aggressive ones that come discreetly wrapped in a benevolent Christian smile). I've found that it isn't good for my soul to ingest other people's bad karma. Which is to say, I didn't read the Nutt and Raham letters.

But insofar as they do include notions like homosexuality as a demonic perversion and the curability of homosexuality, I can respond even without having read them. And my response is this: I no longer stoop to debate even the possibility that my gay brothers and sisters and I might be either sinful or sick simply by virtue of our *being* gay.

I believe this uncompromising tack deftly dumps the negative karma back in the laps of its originators, where it rightfully belongs. I wish them well in the

healing of their homophobia. I keep them in my prayers.

If any would consider this a cop-out, I ask only this: Is there a conscious woman among us who would any longer debate her God-given equality.

**John E. Fortunato**  
Chicago, Ill.

## Gilson responds

Perhaps Egar Alan Nutt has overlooked the theological difficulties posed by his separation of the Spirit of God and the Spirit of the Times. His statement that THE WITNESS has favored the Spirit of the Times over the Spirit of God is dangerously suggestive that the Spirit of God does not keep up with the times. If so, we have an out-of-date God stuck way back there in history.

It was with that same Spirit of God that in 1974 the ordination of 11 women spurred the church further along in its journey toward wholeness. Yes, Mr. Nutt, the church was not created whole by God. Jesus spoke about the *building* of the church (*Matt. 16*) not the *completion* of the church. And the church was left in human hands, admittedly with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but nevertheless subject to the same oppressive power dynamics as other human institutions. The church is not whole as long as women are denied vocations to the priesthood on the sole basis of gender.

And so it is with lesbians and gay men whose vocations to ordained ministry are denied on the sole basis of whom we love. The 1979 General Convention statement by some bishops states that lesbians and gay men are Children of God, yet denies ordination to "practicing homosexuals." There are several points to be made here. You assert that we are made Children of God in holy Baptism. I join my voice with 19th century Anglican theologian Frederick Denison Maurice to say that Baptism does

not make us Children of God, but rather proclaims what is already so. I am a woman, a lesbian, and a Child of God. Behind your charge that I have confused my Child of God-ness with approbation of my lesbianism is your assumption that homosexuality is a sin. To that I would reply that as a Child of God and a moral agent in the world, I see the overriding ethic of the Christian tradition to be the ethic of love. It is not the gender of the person with whom we are intimate that is the issue. Rather, the issue is the commitment and quality of our relationships and the extent to which they empower us to come into our inheritance as Children of God. For the bishops to declare that lesbians and gay men are Children of God but, at the same time, deny the vocations to ordained ministry of lesbians and gay men once again denies the wholeness of the church as well as our status as Children of God.

**Anne Gilson**  
Cambridge, Mass.

## Typhoid Mary and AIDS

The two articulate and compelling articles on AIDS provide a needed reminder that those who have contracted AIDS deserve our love and compassion. I was moved and humbled and share their rage at the heartlessness of many in relation to the victims of AIDS.

On the other hand, neither of the articles included the equally needed rage at those who by their negligence infect others with AIDS. Nor is there any recognition that society is faced with the most deadly plague in history with a 100% fatality. Just as society was outraged by the "Typhoid Marys" of the past, so must society and the church in the vanguard of leadership, protect itself from those who have the AIDS virus, and know it, yet allow themselves to transmit AIDS to others.

**Robert T. Jordan**  
Alexandria, Va.

## Ciannella responds

Robert T. Jordan's concern is valid. A distinction however, must be made between conscious and calculated negligence and that which issues from "normal" human fallibility. I would seriously question the inferred intent in the spread of AIDS. His question leads into the tangled web of the problem of evil.

Since we live in community, human beings are always subject to the acts of others, whether for good or bad. At any time anyone can be both a victim or a victimizer and in both instances the human plea is "Help!" God's answer to this is the cross set in the center of our humanity and our human acts. In this instance of AIDS, the response to the cross is more research, more information and education, more caution and responsible action.

**The Rev. Domenic K. Ciannella**  
Hicksville, N.Y.

## Gay issue hits prison

I am one of the Silo Pruning Hooks who tried to disarm a nuclear missile silo near Kansas City last Nov. 12, blessed with a 10-year prison sentence for my efforts of love, justice and peace.

Here in Sandstone Federal Prison the issue of AIDS and homosexuality is a dominant topic of conversation among many. Some inmates flush the toilets only with their shod feet and cover the toilet seats with tissue before they will sit.

I am in prison because I am concerned with the oppression of the global corporate state and the virulent illness of nuclearism which could quickly destroy us all. Others are here because they have been involved with the human appetites and sicknesses related to drugs. All are here because they have been judged to be a danger to society.

Scattered among us are those who are obviously and not so obviously homosexual, who form a significant contingent of convicted felons of various crimes.

*Continued on page 23*



## Truth and the Apocalypse

*"And upon the earth, distress of  
nations in perplexity . . ."*

**T**he church has never quite known what to do with those "other" Advent biblical texts read in weekly preparation for the birth of the Messiah. As the power of symbolism and allegory have become more appreciated in recent decades, we have come to understand that the coming of Christ among us constitutes divine judgment (both now and eventually) as well as love incarnate and filled with promise.

But many of us still strain after the meaning of the apocalyptic passages of Advent: "Signs in sun and moon and stars"; men and women "fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken" . . . it is a hard and mysterious text which *Luke 21:25-28* provides.

Perhaps the text might yield at least some of its secrets if we were to view the ominous trend of current events through its prism. In public discourse about them, truth has become progressively a casualty.

Is this development grave enough to warrant a comparison with the undoing of the cosmos?

It is at least to say that the abandonment of the pursuit of truth will eventually produce cosmic consequences, a way of putting it that the ancient Greeks well understood. So did St. John: After all, the Word made flesh was "full of grace and truth," and Jesus is, in John's Gospel, the Way,

the Truth, and the Life. So truth has the aura of the sacred. When it is persistently desecrated or ignored, the fabric of the universe begins to unravel and the powers of heaven are going to shake.

In our country, that may be happening now. First, there is a growing and ominous tendency in our TV news, our newspapers, and in Congressional debate to present only one point of view about a critical event. It is a point of view supporting the rightness of America, critical of any position that deviates from that standard. Mexican poet Octavio Paz summed it up well: "If they could, Americans would lock themselves up inside their country and turn their backs on the whole world, except to trade with it and visit it."

Second, there is an increasing willingness by government, breathtaking in its boldness, to engage in the Big Lie and the Big Distortion. Exulted one prominent newsmagazine after the forcedown of the Egyptian airliner carrying the alleged hijackers of the Achille Lauro — "Getting Even: As Reagan draws the line against Mideast terrorism, Americans celebrate a moment of unblemished success." No major Congressional or media voice was raised to present the view that our country was wrong to coerce the airliner of a sovereign nation to land at a U.S. air base in Sicily. Might was assumed to make right.

Likewise, it was allowable, according to Reagan, that Israeli warplanes would bomb the Palestine

Liberation Organization headquarters in Tunisia. But it was *not* that the World Court was about to find the United States guilty of mining the harbor of Nicaragua. So we announced we would not recognize its jurisdiction.

Also deeply disturbing up to now has been the approach of U.S. politicians of all stripes to the Geneva peace summit. We have been treated to a superbowl of propaganda warfare. The object is to push the wily and cunning Soviets back to their diplomatic goal-line and win the cheers of the world of public opinion. Lost in this Madison Avenue approach to diplomacy is the human rationale for a summit meeting — the recognition that together we have to live on the planet as one people, with some degree of mutual trust inevitably emerging.

In domestic affairs, the chief law enforcement officer in the nation, Edwin Meese, denounces the courts repeatedly, calling upon the presumed purity of the original framers of the Constitution as his authority for attacks on civil rights, abortion, and now the Bill of Rights itself, which he would like to apply to federal cases only.

So truth is hawked as a ware in the marketplace and the fabric of the universe is strained taut.

The times demand the proclamation of the truth to ourselves and to a nation behaving before the world and its own people like an ostrich. Together we will need to remember that the Gospel's truth must be proclaimed not occasionally, as from a closet, but again and again, from the rooftops. ■



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# The birth of a landless peasant

by Jack Woodard

**H**er name was Nona and she was 45 and very poor. She was one of about 30 — gringos and peasants — sitting in a circle in a crude community center in a Managua slum. It was two years ago and we were talking about base communities. When I asked how Christians got involved in overthrowing Somoza, Nona spoke up, "I'd like to answer that one." She told how the neighborhood mothers had watched year after year as the dictator's soldiers beat down their sons and daughters and dragged them away leaving a trail of their blood in the dust.

Finally one day it became too much simply to watch. She sent word to other mothers: Come to the community center and bring your Bibles. They searched for godly counsel about what to do. And suddenly, she said, it was as though they were seeing Mary at the foot of the Cross *for the first time*. Not as a passive, submissive model of a woman saying sweetly, "Be it done unto me according to Thy will." But as an incredibly courageous person standing by her Son in a dangerous place as He gave His life for His people.

So, she told us, the mothers closed their bibles and went to the underground Sandinistas and said, "We must be part of the revolution." And they were, some at the cost of their lives.

The years of the puppet king, Herod the Great, under the Roman occupation in Israel were like that. There were small religious communities taking the sacred writings very seriously, expecting Yahweh soon to keep the promise of a Liberator. They were communities of almost breathless expectation.

One of these was on the Dead Sea at a

miserably hot, barren place called Qumran. Its monks were probably slaughtered by the Romans on a general's order merely because the site and its buildings might have military value in a revolution. Fortunately for Christians and Jews today, the monks somehow managed to hide their library in nearby caves before they were wiped out. The hundreds of sacred scrolls which have been discovered in that area since the early 1950s have provided a bonanza of knowledge about the times and the Scriptures.

Other communities were more oriented to the revolutionary process. There had been major uprisings earlier and others would come a little later. The silent, beautiful ruins on the Masada mountaintop, a few miles south of Qumran, bear eloquent witness to the price of revolution against the Romans. There, they began their siege by building a miles-long surrounding wall so not even a child or a goat could escape to survive defiance of Roman authority.

In King Herod's time, hope of liberation — by God or humans or both — was abroad in the people of the land. The oppressors had no intention of letting it happen. In such a time, in a scruffy village north of Jerusalem, lived a peasant family who had a marriageable young daughter called Mary.

As was the custom, the family had made an arrangement for her marriage to a son of another family — a young man called Joseph. The wedding was near at hand.

Then Mary gave Joseph a stunning piece of news: She was pregnant and not by him. That was more than enough to bring down the wrath of the whole community on a betrothed woman in those days.

Knowing what our own reactions would be, we can guess Mary might have

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

given Joseph an explanation something like this:

*Right here in Nazareth, one night in our little house, I became aware that Yahweh was speaking to me. At first, I couldn't believe it. But then I was sure that God was asking me to be the mother of the Chosen One. My incredulity turned into fear. I tried to ask questions. Why me? I objected. Pick on some other woman. What will it cost me? Maybe my life? Then I tried to negotiate. Why not wait until Joseph and I are married; that won't be long. Why now?*

*But the answer kept coming back: You. Now. Yes or No. I knew I was free to say no. But how do you say no to Yahweh when you are sure you are being summoned to live out your purpose in life? Then I realized I was also free to say yes. So I took the deepest breath of my life and finally said "I am willing."*

*And immediately I knew God was pleased. I became calm and sure. I knew it would be all right. I was certain God's promise to send a deliverer to the poor people — like you and me — was about to be kept. I was filled with joy — except for one thing.*

*Joseph, I want you to go through this pregnancy with me. Be my partner in the important parenting to be done. Love me and love the baby. Share this joy with me. Trust me and trust Yahweh.*

Mary reminds us of Nona: a gutsy, faithful, loving person who had had enough of oppression and was willing to take a huge step toward liberation. Joseph must have been like that too, because he also said yes when he was free to say no.

And as if they did not already face enough problems, word came that they would have to walk many miles south past Jerusalem to Bethlehem, to be counted for the census. So they made the journey together, with Joseph helping Mary stay on the donkey through the narrow valleys where bandits lurked, past military checkpoints, and finally into the ancient village.

There they faced another problem. Mary's body was signalling that she was on the verge of labor. Bethlehem was not their home and it was jammed full of people there to be counted. They had no secure place to go, no friends, no midwife. They must have been fighting panic as they began checking out the crude inns. There could not have been many of them — perhaps only four or five small smelly places already crammed with travelers for the night.

Most innkeepers simply shrugged their shoulders and shut the door to the chill evening desert air. But one could have

been kinder than the others. He pointed out that inside his inn, the travelers were sleeping side by side on the floor in one big room. There was no decent, private place for a woman to have a baby. Mary and Joseph must have agreed.

But he went on to say that there was a cave out back of the inn. Someone a long time earlier had smoothed the natural entrance into an incline not too steep for cattle and camels, goats and sheep. Inside were a few animals and a lot of clean hay stacked in shocks after the wheat harvest. At least it was private and out of the wind. He might have encouraged them to prepare a place to have the baby in the hay which must have still smelled clean and sunny. He could have told them the cave stable was theirs for the night if they wanted it. And they could use his well. And maybe he even gave them some supper leftovers from the big pot at the fireplace. And an oil lamp to take in there with them.

So they nestled into the hay, ate the



Church of the Holy Nativity, Bethlehem



food, drank the cool clear well water and felt much more able to face the birth. By now the pains were closer and it probably wasn't long until the baby's head appeared and Joseph was able to help the infant emerge as Mary pushed. We can see Joseph holding the little boy upside down by his ankles and swatting him firmly. We can hear furious crying bounce off the stone cave walls. We can watch as Joseph lays the baby beside Mary and she enfolds him in her arms.

The Creator of the Cosmos has become a landless peasant.

The whole thing is shocking.

A few miles away in Jerusalem stood the biggest church in the land — the Second Temple. Why not in there in the Holy of Holies? Faithful people were praying there all the time, performing liturgies, offering sacrifices, trying to obey the sacred writings. Why not there? Why in the hay of a stable behind a village inn? From the very beginning, nothing was neat or logical or expected. It was all terribly vulnerable, so awesomely defenseless. It must have looked exactly like the birth of any other peasant baby in a poverty/oppression situation anywhere.

But the essential ingredients were in Bethlehem: One loving God wanting to do for human creatures what we have been unable to do for ourselves. One courageous young woman. One trusting young man. One baby Liberator on some clean hay in a cave. Some common sheep herders somehow knowing freedom was in that cave — bringing all they had: eggs, a lamb, a couple of chickens, and their joyful, wondering faces.

How can that little boy possibly make it all the way to an age sufficient to start the movement? To put the new creation alongside the old order and thus put the lie to coercion, weapons, manipulation, privilege, exploitation, acquisition? To teach a new way to contact Yahweh after He, the movement's founder is executed by the old order?

It is frightening to dwell on how fragile that little family group was and what enormous stakes each man and woman had on whether they survived long enough for the purpose to be carried out. But survive they did. In that successful vulnerability lies the core point of the event for us. It means the way to survive is to be vulnerable. It means the only security lies in risk. From it comes the glad Word that we too will make it through, in spite of our weakness. Because of that paradoxical Word, even today in that Bethlehem village, special bells ring out once each year on the supposed anniversary of what happened in that dim warm cave-stable behind the scruffy little inn with a kind keeper.

If you go there today and descend the stone steps in the Church of the Holy Nativity, you can stand in the very cave where the Liberator's birth took place. The underground revolutionary movement which that Bethlehem baby started when he was ready knew where the birthplace was and kept the memory alive for three centuries until it became possible to build a church there. Now everything is marble and candles and hanging brass lamps. But it is the place.

You can get on a jet and go there. And you can come close to the historical Jesus the Deliverer. An awesome "It really happened" will probably hit you when you kneel in that cave. But you do not have to seek a liberating faith at the other end of a plane ride to Tel Aviv and down some stone steps. You can find a faith like Nona's or Mary's or Joseph's in Managua or Brooklyn or Johannesburg or anywhere. To find that kind of faith, you kneel wherever you live your life and like blind Bartemaeus, you say, "Lord Jesus Christ, Chosen One of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner. Let me see." And truly mean it. And you kneel and say it again. And again. And again — for the rest of your life. And you will become free and perhaps even troublesome to the old order. ■

## Back Issues Available:

● **AIDS: The plague that lays waste at noon**, plus articles on the rights of gays and lesbians in church and society. Authors include John Fortunato, Zalmon Sherwood, Anne Gilson, Domenic Ciannella, Madeline Ligamare. September 1985.

● **Capital Punishment:** Articles by Mary Miller, Joe M. Doss, Marie Deans, Thomas Shepherd examining how the death penalty is symptomatic of a violent society; what it means when a prison chaplain loses a friend to the electric chair; the morality of capital punishment; a survivor's view of murder; and a model church ministry to prisoners. April 1985.

● **Bishop Tutu Speaks Out:** Includes quotations from various speeches of the noted Nobel prizewinner, showing his courageous stands against apartheid, his deep biblical faith and his keen wit; background on South Africa; and letter from U.S. church leaders to Congresspersons refuting claims that U.S. companies in South Africa are a force for change. Also lists resources for those working against apartheid. December 1984.

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# Short Takes

## The runaway boys

Once there were two brothers who ran away from their mother, one East, the other West. They grew to be giants and they returned home possessed of an overpowering strength of muscle and voicebox. Slapping breast and thigh they bragged to her, "See how I prance."

"See how I stand on my head."

"No wonder," she replied, "your father was highly spirited."

The two vied for their mother's favor, but she maintained a strict impartiality. "Dear children," she said, "do you remember that when you were in your cradles I used to sing to you,

"Where do you come from, baby dear?  
Out of the nowhere into the here."

They felt humiliated. Their blood boiled. But their mother refused to concede that either was superior in prowess to the other. Their fury had to channel itself in another direction, and so they turned against each other. They became consumed by their mutual antagonisms, and ended by totally ignoring the existence of their mother, she who was the essence of twoness.

Their crushed pride called on them for a showdown. And then . . .

There is no record of what happened.

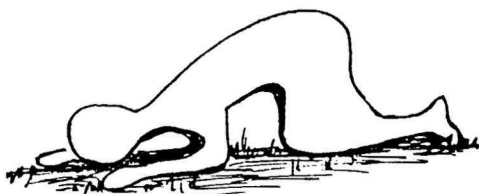
**Mariquita Platov**  
Tannersville, N.Y.

## Blood, water on our hands

Were Russians today being forcibly returned to the Soviet Union, or Poles to Poland, Congress and the American people wouldn't stand for it. Why then do they sit idly by while innocent Salvadorans are returned to a country whose death squads long ago would have killed a Lech Walesa? Why do they tolerate a forcible repatriation of Guatemalans to a government widely viewed as the most brutal in the Western Hemisphere . . .

Because it has knowingly deported innocent people to torture and death, the Reagan Administration has blood on its hands, but only because Congress and the American people have water on theirs — water like Pilate's.

**William Sloan Coffin**  
Letter, *N.Y. Times* 1/17/85



"To live we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness and others to want," says Wendell Berry in *The Gift of Good Land*.

**Quoted in Breakthrough**  
Global Education Associates

## Throwing away Jesus

A Russian refugee, professionally a restorer of ikons, came to the United States and found shelter and assistance with a small Franciscan community in Las Vegas, Nev. Since there were no ikons to restore, the sisters finally got her a job clearing tables at the restaurant of a gambling casino. Some days later she returned in tears. "I cannot continue this work," she said. "They make me throw away the body of Jesus." "What do you mean?" the sisters asked her. "The bread, the body of Jesus. If the bread on the table is uneaten, they make you throw it away. No one else can have it. It is throwing away the body of Jesus!" The sisters assured her that she should not continue with the job — and they thanked her for helping them see the Lord's presence in all bread, not only in the bread consecrated at Mass.

I find this a haunting story. It is a reminder of how our eyes are usually blind, our ears normally deaf. We live every moment in God's presence, yet so often we fail to be even faintly aware of this presence. We imprison God in little boxes, little patches. We tend to limit our awareness of God to our own Christian territory, but even within that expanse, keep God on a short leash.

**Jim Forest, Editor**  
*IFOR Report*

## Cause of terrorism

Terrorism is not caused by the inherent wickedness of Palestinians. Rather, terrorism continues because Israel puts more energy into discrediting the PLO than it does into resolving the crisis that has been created by the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The PLO has been down before — following its defeat in Lebanon, for instance. But in some form or other, the hopes of the Palestinian people will emerge again, not in terms dictated by Israel or the United States, but in their own demands for justice and freedom.

Israelis understand this inevitability much better than do Americans because they live in daily fear of a bomb on a bus or the death of a jogger running along a city street . . .

Only if we can rise above our nationalistic pleasure in winning this one (the rerouting of four Palestinian hijackers by U.S. planes) will we be able to gain the proper perspective that lets us see that while short-term justice is important, long-term justice is the key to peace in the Middle East.

**James M. Wall**  
*Christian Century*, 10/30/85

## Palestinian plight

There are over 4 million Palestinians today. Approximately 1.3 million live under military occupation on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, territories seized by Israel during the 1967 war. The Gaza Strip is a densely populated and extremely poor area with a population of 500,000 Palestinians, of whom 75% are refugees.

Nearly 50% of the Palestinians are under 15 years of age. A second generation of Palestinians has been born without a homeland or government of its own. The grandchildren of the first refugees of 1948 are now parents themselves and they are still refugees.

**American Near East Refugee Aid**  
Washington, D.C.

## Quote of note

"I have spent a lot of time searching through the Bible for loopholes."

**W. C. Fields**

# Toward a critical spirituality

In recent years I have been questioned more and more about my spiritual stance. In public and private conversations, people have asked me, Where do you get your strength? Why do you still have hope after all the defeats? What sustains you?

Frankly, I did not enjoy the questions. I looked closely at those who asked. Was it sheer curiosity on their part? Did they expect me to tell them about my childhood, my mother, or my family situation? Sometimes I detected a kind of envy as though people were asking, "Why am I not as strong as you?" I also often got the impression that those who asked me were not involved in social struggles, but rather bystanders who wondered about us peaceniks and other fools.

I had learned earlier from my Third World brothers and sisters that the Gospel is struggle — "*Evangelio es lucha*." The Gospel is not, primarily, given to comfort, to lighten the burden, to make one feel good. It is that, too, but first it is for fighting the good fight.

Therefore, when asked about my spiritual strength, sometimes I was annoyed and said, "This is a question from First World people. You ask it because you assume the First World is the whole world. You don't understand that God so loved the Third World that God has already started to free those who live in it."

It took me a long time to learn that the underlying query was not about the state of my psychological well-being. It was a religious question. People asked me about *God* when they wanted to know on which power I relied. When I understood the depth of the question I was even more handicapped. What sense would it make to assure them that "My help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth?" Would this not be considered mere pious talk, stones instead of bread for my hungry questioners? I was facing one of the major difficulties in the use of religious language.

The word God, for example, is on each dollar bill. A Trident submarine was named Corpus Christi, the body of Christ. Take any other religious concept, such as Father, Almighty,

Love, Truth, Faith — all these concepts in a pluralistic culture are equivocal by nature. How could we ever hope to communicate what we mean by those words? It does not help my sisters and brothers to tell them that my strength comes from God. I must communicate that indirectly, through images or narratives, so that the sense of truth, love and justice is apparent. Indirect communication invites the partner to find out for himself or herself where the strength comes from. It renounces the authoritarian proclamation in which I, "the knower" pour "truth" into empty vessels. Christ used this method when he said to Pilate: "Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice" (*John 19:38*). This was an invitation to Pilate not just to hear differently, but to *be* different. It was an invitation to die to the system of Roman oppression for which he stood.

Authentic spirituality happens indirectly, in a non-authoritarian way. God lures us into this "being of the truth." Indirect communication needs a critical mind, which is capable of discerning the spirits. Not all God talk, not every gesture of spirituality, not all spiritual life is good.

Do we have criteria to discriminate between different forms of spirituality? I think the Bible offers the criterion of a God who is the God of the poor. God's "option for the poor" is the liberating criterion that frees us from equivocalness in contemporary religious life.

I would like to identify some new forms of contemporary religious life under the title of *narcissist* spirituality.

I recall a sermon preached by a well-dressed, elegant woman in a cathedral in New York City. Talking about creation, she spoke about her cruise to South America, crossing the equator, the open sky, and the marvelous beauty of the southern hemisphere. She was praising the splendor of creation, and the words she used to conclude her description were "It's all ours. It has all been given to us." I was shocked.

Hers was an upper-class sermon without any consciousness of class reality, neither that of others nor that of her own. She displayed no awareness of those who live in the countries into which she ventured. She gave no thought to the people in Chile, but spoke in elaborate language about Chile's impressive terrain from the perspective of a tourist. What I heard her say was that it was all ours to exploit and dominate; "it's all ours," and whoever opposes us has to be silenced,

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## by Dorothee Sölle

tortured, and killed; "it's all ours," because the whole world has been created for the enjoyment of upper-class tourists.

To love God's good earth is to know about the hunger and exploitation of those who share the earth with us. Affirmations of beauty lack truth if they exclude the vast majority of our brothers and sisters. They are false praises, mere abstractions that are isolated from reality.

I would like to give another example of a subjectivist spirituality. Earlier this year there was in West Germany a public event on behalf of the hungry in the Sahel zone. This "Africa Day" was an appeal to spend money for those who suffered under the drought. The West Germans gave more than 100 million marks. On television one could see politicians and experts talking about the needs of the poor. There was an enormous wave of compassion going through those who normally are not aware of the needs of their far-away fellow human beings.

But compassion may take two different directions. One stays free from analysis, separated from rationality and cut off from wholeness. The other is emotion that integrates itself into thought and action and changes the whole self. The first form veers toward sentimentality and soon fades away; the second leads to self-critical analysis of reality. It moves us to ask *why* Africans are in need. Is it a problem of climate or overpopulation or lack of technology? Has it to do with trade conditions, with the role of the leading financial institutions in the First World and its politics toward the poor countries? People who want to remain in the purely emotional stage often fear the economic and political analysis. Their compassion limits itself to obvious misery, to the swollen bellies of Black children. But this form of spirituality is like the seeds in Jesus' parable that fell on rocky ground.

An object-free spirituality is a quasi-religious feeling in which the spiritual object, the Thou, becomes invisible and inaudible. The God of the poor remains absent. The need for self-realization gets the highest priority. There is nothing wrong with the wish to find one's place in the world and to strive for one's identity. Yet, "auto-realization" is a self-contradictory goal which can never be completed without a broader vision of the world in which we live. When we give ourselves to the greater vision of the Kingdom of God, the realization of our potentials and powers will flow out of our

involvement with the struggle. "Seek ye first God's kingdom and its righteousness and all things will be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

We live in danger of succumbing to a highly individualistic spirituality that grows out of a general culture of narcissism and is not capable of transcending it.

**TODAY  
THERE IS NEITHER  
THE GLORIFYING OF GOD  
NOR PEACE  
ON EARTH**



**AS LONG AS A HUNGER  
IS NOT YET STILLED  
AND AS LONG AS WE HAVE  
NOT UPROOTED  
VIOLENCE  
FROM OUR CIVILIZATION  
CHRIST IS NOT  
YET BORN  
GANDHI**

Over and against a spirituality of narcissism in the First World, we find signs of hope in a developing spirituality of solidarity with the poor. After some 20 years of Liberation Theology, Christians in the First World have begun to listen

*Continued on page 22*

# Public sanctuary: A sign of hope

by Henry Atkins



I spent the last weeks of December 1981, living in a Salvadoran Refugee Camp in La Virtud, Honduras. Over 3,000 refugees were living in the camp during my time there. They had all come out of a situation of violent oppression. The refugees had known rape, the murder of family members, imprisonment and torture. Many had had first-hand experiences with Salvadoran “death squads.”

One of the reasons I was living in La Virtud was to serve as a form of protection for the refugees who were still plagued by members of the “death squads” who would cross over the border into Honduras to capture or kill them. Our assumption was that members of the “death squads” would not kill the refugees in the presence of North American clergy.

Several times while I was living at La Virtud, both Salvadoran soldiers and members of the “death squads” came into the camp. One of those times was Christmas Eve. On this occasion, several of us were able to get the soldiers to leave the camp. After the soldiers left,

the other two clergy in the camp and I spent four or five hours talking with the Salvadorans about the entry of the soldiers into the camp. Many had come to believe that Honduras was not a place of refuge.

On Christmas Day, most of the refugees gathered to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The three of us who had planned the liturgy had scheduled a time for reflection after the reading of the Gospel. I shall never forget this experience. Around 30 people spoke. They told of having no place to give birth to their children as they were hiding in El Salvador and how many had to hide in caves where their children were born. They then spoke of the experience of Mary and Joseph and how they also had had no place but a cave for the birth of Jesus.

The refugees also spoke of how they were forced to leave El Salvador for the safety of their children, just as Joseph, Mary and Jesus had become refugees by fleeing into Egypt in order to escape the “death squads” of King Herod. The Salvadorans said that if anyone understood their situation, it was Mary, Joseph and Jesus, and that Christmas was a sign of great hope for them, a hope for new life.

These stories remain vivid to me as a backdrop for more recent developments

in the United States as it deals with Salvadoran refugees. By way of example:

During the Advent and Christmas season of 1984, Jesus Cruz, a paid informer of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, spent part of his time writing letters to Salvadoran refugees in sanctuary in the United States who had entered this country through Arizona. The addresses he had for them were care/of the churches that had become public sanctuaries. Cruz told the refugees that he had been given toys to send their children for Christmas and he needed their *specific* addresses so he could send them the presents.

The refugees who responded did not receive toys. Instead they received arrest warrants bearing addresses that they had sent to Cruz. By the end of January 1985, North Americans working in the Sanctuary Movement who had been associated with the refugees on Cruz’s list had also been arrested.

The Public Sanctuary Movement which started in this country in 1981 when churches in the Southwest began opening their doors to refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala now includes nearly 300 churches and temples. The churches in this movement have been moved to become public sanctuaries be-

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## St. Michael's family faces deportation

**R**amon Flores, a Salvadoran in sanctuary at St. Michael's Chapel, Rutgers University, is awaiting a deportation hearing after being arrested while attempting to pick up his 7-year-old daughter from a child care program across from the chapel.

Two Immigration and Naturalization Service agents, John Nixon and Lee Morgan, arrested Flores as soon as he stepped off church property.

After the arrest, Nixon asked Flores if he remembered him, and Flores recognized him as the person who had driven him from Phoenix to Albuquerque during his sanctuary run. Apparently both Nixon and Morgan had infiltrated the movement as "underground" drivers, said the Rev. Henry Atkins, chaplain of St. Michael's.

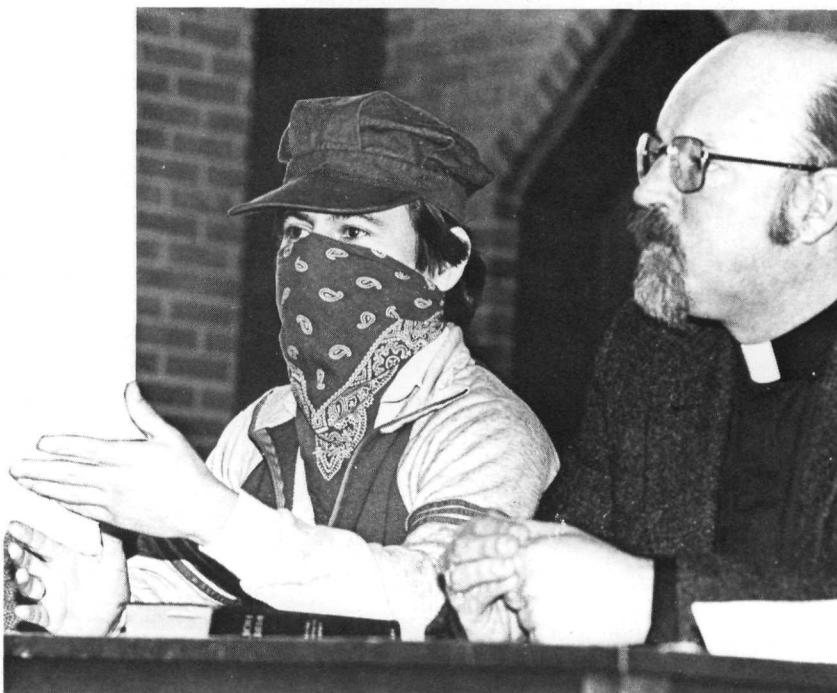
Following the arrest, Flores and his wife, Victoria, and brother, Roberto, were all subpoenaed to testify as witnesses against the church workers on trial in Tucson. Victo-

ria and Roberto Flores are also now awaiting deportation hearings, along with Ramon. Meanwhile, all are in sanctuary at St. Michael's.

Less than 3% of Salvadorans who apply for political asylum are granted it; many are deported and never heard from again, Atkins said.

At a news conference following Ramon Flores' arrest, Atkins spoke of the Sanctuary Movement and its witness to faith. "The people of this country will continue to give sanctuary until the Government sees that neither its policy nor its intimidation and infiltration of this movement will stifle our work for justice and peace."

Asked what he now considers the future, Flores said, "I've tried not to think about it. But if I'm deported, I don't know if I'll make it past the airport in San Salvador. At least I'm still here now. If I had remained in my country there is no doubt in my mind that I would have been one of those who 'disappeared'."



Salvadoran refugee Ramon Flores and the Rev. Henry Atkins

A resolution supporting the sanctuary ministry and the Flores family was passed at the Episcopal Church General Convention in Anaheim recently. It read:

*Resolved*, that this 68th General Convention of the Episcopal Church be on record as supporting the ministry to the Ramon Flores family of St. Michael's Episcopal Chapel at Rutgers University; and be it further resolved that this convention:

- declares itself in opposition to the deportation of the Flores family;

- urges the United States Government to grant political asylum to Salvadorans and Guatemalans who have fled to the United States because of the violence in their countries; and be it further

*Resolved*, that the secretary of this convention send a copy of this resolution to the President of the United States, the Secretary of State of the United States, and Senators Bill Bradley and Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey.



cause of their own sense of ministry and mission, stemming from their understanding that God wills the church to care for the stranger and alien in her midst, to treat this stranger as we would treat our brother or sister (*Lev. 19:33*).

The sense of mission grows out of a theology that realizes that God is present in the poor and the oppressed in their struggle for justice. This theology makes an option for the poor so that the poor might live. "The theology of sanctuary has not been written in academia, it has been written by 'coyotes for the people' who have sat huddled in a dark church holding refugee children in their arms, waiting for the border guards to pass," authors Michael McConnell and Renny Golden said of the Sanctuary Movement.

This movement, which includes thousands of people across the land, is now under attack by modern-day Herods. As this is written, 12 North American sanctuary workers are on trial in Tucson, facing the possibility of both prison sentences and fines. The U.S. Government has spent thousands of dollars to bring these church workers — including priests, nuns, Protestant ministers, and a Quaker rancher — to trial. Informers such as Jesus Cruz have gone into Bible Study groups, prayer groups and celebrations of liturgies to gather data to use against churches in the Sanctuary Movement.

The U.S. Government has subpoenaed the Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees who were on the Jesus Cruz list to use as witnesses against the North Americans. This has placed the refugees in a most difficult situation. If the Central Americans decide not to testify, they must find another country to take them in, which is hard, or go to jail and face certain deportation, which most believe would mean prison, torture or death for them.

Regardless of the outcome of the trial in Tucson, several matters are now clear: 1) The Sanctuary Movement is doing its work well; not perfectly, but well. Other-

wise, the most powerful government in the world, the United States government, would not be moving against it. The most feared part of the Sanctuary Movement seems to be that the sanctuary churches provide a place where the refugees can tell their stories, name their reality. What they say is vastly different from what the U.S. Government wants the people to believe about Central America.

2) It is clear that, building on its Santa Fe document (1980) which stated that the church identified with Liberation Theology must be moved against, the present Administration is moving against the prophetic church in this society. Any church that is not aligned with this Administration is a church it cannot trust. It must be spied upon and its members imprisoned.

3) It is now clear that the Sanctuary Movement, partly because of the second element, is helping a large part of the "liberal church" in this society become part of the prophetic church as sanctuary churches stand with the poor and oppressed from Central America.

During this Christmas season, the events surrounding the Sanctuary Movement present us with two theological options. One is the theology of the present Administration, the theology of Jesus Cruz. A theology of deception and death. A theology that wills death for the poor of Central America. The second theology is that of the refugees in La Virtud who know that Mary, Joseph and Jesus are with them in their struggle and suffering and that God will one day bring them out of Egypt and let them return to build the new El Salvador and Guatemala where they can live in peace with justice.

This second theology, a theology of life, is now being worked out in the midst of the historical realities of the United States and Central America. It is not an easy theological task that this second option presents, and it will challenge us with a long struggle, but it also offers

hope, the hope of peace and good will for all the people of the earth.

## Resources

*Sanctuary: The New Underground Railroad*, by Renny Golden and Michael McConnell. This book portrays the human face of sanctuary through storytelling, while analyzing the political and economic forces trying to stop the movement. Also compares the goals and ideals of the abolitionists who ran the first underground railroad and their modern counterparts. Paperback \$7.95. Orbis Books.

*Sanctuary: A resource guide for understanding and participating in the Central American Refugees' struggle*, edited by Gary MacEoin. Contributors include Elie Wiesel, Jim Wallis, William Wipfler, Elsa Tamez, Richard Shaull, Rabbi Marshall Meyer, Yvonne Dilling. 224 pages. Paperback, \$7.95. Harper and Rowe. ■

## Crusader

How many windmills have  
you met

Don Quixote?

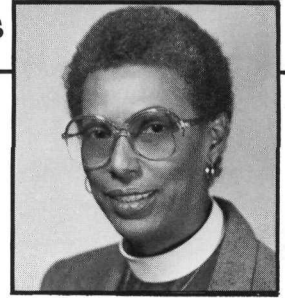
Merciless giants  
who beset the innocent.  
How many times were you  
the windmill?

The terrifying screech  
from reluctant bones,  
filling the air  
With the voice of resistance  
spoken to the wind of change.

The wind which whirled you  
upside down.  
Your insides groaning,  
gasping, complaining,  
I've never, won't ever,  
let me be . . . let me be.

Arms like blades,  
seeking to cover  
the windows of your soul,  
Through which  
the Light of the world  
poured in . . .  
Exposing the cobwebs  
on your dusty spirit.

— Ronald E. Lanting



## Echoes of Anaheim

The “Welcome Episcopal Church” greetings on the hotel marquees have changed at least a dozen times; the placards designating *House of Bishops* and *Deputies Only* have been replaced by other turf indicators; the rubber chicken banquet menus mercifully have faded from digestive memory and the density of dust on copies of the Blue Book very likely has approached that on some family Bibles. By now the high discourse contained in the Bishops’ Pastoral Letter has been read, marked, learned, and, by some, forgotten, and most of the formal reporting on General Convention has been done. But three months down the road, echoes from Anaheim continue to waft on the air.

Certainly one of the great surprises of the Convention was the swift and easy passage of the resolution calling for divestment by the church and its agencies of securities held in companies doing business with South Africa. The weakness of that legislation was its failure to place a “time certain” by which compliance with its intent should take place. Without such a proviso, the natural tendency for the church, many feel, is to move with the rapidity of a glacier or, at best, with about the same “deliberate speed” exhibited by many states in desegregating their school systems in the wake of the 1954 Supreme Court decision. Some have yet to move significantly. As any journalist can attest, there is nothing like the press of a deadline to inspire the completion of an assignment, no matter how complex.

A few dioceses already have moved to implement the South Africa resolution,

thereby generating no small controversy and strife at the local level. There are fears of losing capital gains and resentment that individual parishes might, in some way, be “forced to comply” with autocratic and insensitive national or diocesan standards in this regard. Amid that kind of furor one hears another echo — the biblical reminder that “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

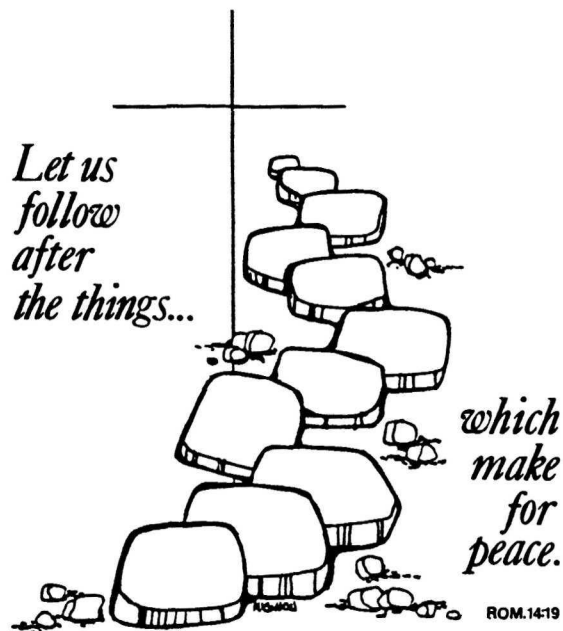
It remains to be seen what action, if any, will be taken by the largely autonomous Church Pension Fund to divest itself of ties to apartheid through its investment portfolio. That body’s compliance with the spirit and letter of the resolution will be difficult to monitor. At least one group in the church, however, has indicated its readiness to mount a campaign reminiscent of 1960’s “selective patronage” efforts to force some movement by the Pension Fund if it fails to act with dispatch.

On the darker side of Anaheim (no pun intended) was the shabby treatment of some minority women by convention’s “third house,” the Triennial Meeting of the women of the Episcopal Church. A flood of widely circulated letters to Triennial officers, their responses, statements and resolutions have landed in postal boxes across the country over recent weeks. They center on the exclusion of ethnic desk representatives to the Women’s Task Force from the Triennial Eucharist and from participation in the deliberations of that body — after an invitation to “seat and voice.” Strange behavior on the part of a group that came into being largely because its constitu-

ency was denied the opportunity to participate in the “high counsels” of the church.

A reorganization and restructure of Triennial, through the adoption of new bylaws, is a step toward avoiding a repeat of the humiliation experienced by those relegated to space behind yellow barrier curtains that clearly marked who was “in” and who was “out” of a gathering that had as its theme *One Body — One Spirit*.

Addressing a recent gathering of Black Anglicans from around the globe, the Rev. Edward Rodman, canon missionary for the Diocese of Massachusetts, recalled a phrase that the whole church might well claim as its watchword. In the early days of the Union of Black Episcopalians, celebrations of the Eucharist frequently were held in the context of a liberation/agape meal and often began with the salutation: “Let there be peace among us and let us not be instruments of our own oppression.” “If every service began with that salutation,” he said, “and people worked through the implications of its meaning in their personal lives, for the religious community in which they found themselves and for the broader community they were called to serve, our liturgies might take on a more profound reality and force the kind of self criticism and renewal that would make us not only the ‘light of the world’ and the ‘salt of the earth,’ but a more genuine manifestation of Christ at work in the world.” Amen. ■



# Who will carry the banner?

by Brad Taylor

**Journal:** Peace vigil, General Electric Plant, Valley Forge, Pa.  
**Sponsor,** Brandywine Peace Community, to protest GE's involvement in nuclear technology in its many and varied plants.

*Questions I'll have to think about:*

*Why is the plant so big?*

*Who are the managers?*

*Who are the workers?*

*What do they do inside? Do they know? Do they want to know? How many do and how many don't? Who cares anyway?*

*The American flag out front — what does it stand for?*

*What does it mean — to me — to them?*

*Why is it such a beautiful day — sunshine, breezes?*

*What happens to the sun and breezes when nukes explode?*

**I** cross Goddard Boulevard to join the group of about 50 people standing on the island separating the lanes of traffic across from GE entrance, and watch the traffic fly by. I ask myself "What am I doing here?" When I know the power structure, the movers and shakers are saying we're "kooks, crazies, faggots, space cadets, airheads, commies, bums." I had spent most of my life believing I was in the mainstream — one of them. Now I feel such a desperate need to stand apart — from them.

And yet we are all God's children. Who is God anyway?

And why do the most learned among us fight so desperately to

"prove" this God

or that God

or his God

or her God

If God did create it all, where is God NOW?

*Then I thought — I'll go over that yellow rope.* After all, that's why I'm here — to witness.

So I joined the group at the far end, furthest from the microphone. A man standing beside me turned and said, "Will you hold the banner?" And I said to him "No." I thought to myself, "If I'd wanted to bring a banner, I would have. Doesn't he know that — doesn't he know that I've spent the last month thinking about what my banner would say? And the best I'd been able to come up with was "Let's have *another* tea party." I thought, that's pretty damn good but

It's too slick.

It's inciting.

It's irreverent.

Anyway — I'm not a carrier of banners. I don't even wear a wedding band. And I asked myself about symbols — wedding bands, flags, anthems, banners, drum beats.

What did my "No" mean — to me, to the man who had asked me to hold the banner. I knew perfectly well I'd have been willing to help if his arm was tired

but wasn't sure enough of myself to hold his banner unless I first knew

What does it say?

How long does he want me to hold it?

Where will he ask me to go with it?

Will I be willing?

Will I embarrass myself by asking him to take it back?

Will I embarrass him by not carrying it over the hill?

HOW INSECURE, UNSURE!

OH, CHICKEN! CHICKEN!

CHICKEN!

And after the man had been nailed to the cross

and had died,

and the darkness had descended over the hill,

and the crowd had left

and the latter were asked by the authorities

Did *you* know him? Did *you* carry his banner?

What's the big deal anyway. It's only an office building, or as the sign says "Space Center." How can you be so sure in your mind and in your heart that everything happening under that gigantic roof should be *stopped now, forbidden.*

The beautiful girl played guitar and sang; the words and music were quiet and beautiful.

Across the boulevard were the police, the cameras, the company, security forces, the *yellow rope.*

For an hour they watched us, their cameras recorded each of us, they chatted. Behind the police and the guards were the police cars, the police vans, the bus.

Those among us who looked at the police and the guards and the vans knew that soon our consciences would challenge us to break the law and cross the yellow rope

and be arrested

and questioned

and fingerprinted

and charged

and be read our rights

and be held

and to either plead guilty or be found guilty.

We're thinking and wondering and singing and praying. A mother with three small children — one in arms, two others old enough to hear, to listen, to look, to wonder — stood behind me. Was I wrong not to bring mine? Is she wrong to have brought hers? Does it matter? What will their having been here mean to them when they are older?

And the flag flutters in the breeze and the

DIRECTOR

CHIEF

LEADER

CO-ORDINATOR

BOSS

SUPERVISOR

CAPTAIN

of the FORCES across the boulevard protecting our

FREE ENTERPRISE

PRIVATE PROPERTY

THE LAW

OUR CONSTITUTION

OUR WESTERN CIVILIZATION

stood and watched and went back and forth, sometimes chatted, sometimes joked, sometimes issued orders, but always on the alert lest our force now of three score people, a microphone, a guitar, a half-dozen banners *charge* against his marshalled forces.

In the distance, a mile to the west, stood the high ground, the huts, the chapel, and the monuments commemorating the men who camped at Valley Forge in the winter of our birth as a nation. An army summoned by leaders whose passion was to revolt, to overthrow, to be free of a "foreign" yoke. I looked up on the hill in front of the Space Center and saw the flag patterned after the one made for them by a woman named Betsy in 1776. I thought of how that flag is being taken all over the earth by military forces



in the name of freedom. In far off places like Korea, Viet Nam, the Eastern Mediterranean, Central America (who were Americans long before we were), and I wondered about why that is being done, and if I don't understand why, how is it possible for the people of those places to understand why?

What is worse, I knew that now my government sends its agents surreptitiously, under cover, un-uniformed across the earth to defend against what — I'm not sure they know. I know I don't. Three years before, after months of trying, I had met with my representative, a ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, whom I knew to be a good man. After I had said, "Larry, we have enough weapons, we do not need more," he responded, by way of consolation, "Brad, don't worry. We in Congress know what the military is doing. But it's all so sensitive that we cannot share the knowledge with our citizens. *But don't worry.*"

I thought of Ike's final words to his people: "Beware of the military industrial establishment." And of Ben Franklin's remarks to a question from the crowd gathered outside Independence Hall in 1787: "Mr. Franklin, what have you given us?" And his reply, "A republic — if you can keep it." And the Jeffersonian teachings that an enlightened, educated citizenry would be vital to the maintenance of democracy. And of Lincoln ridiculed by "the leaders" of his era for his earthyness, humility and nobleness, leading our nation in cutting out and destroying a cancer which had been a part of its birth.

Then, as noontime came near, they began to cross the boulevard, one by one, then twos, then others into the hands of the law in order that they might be faithful to a law they deemed higher. Irony of all ironies — breaking the law to uphold the law. To face their accusers who would say to them "Why must you break our law? Do you not realize that our com-

munity could no longer function if we allowed our people to select which law they would obey and which law they would not?"

I stood and wondered about Jesus before Pilate; Luther before the Pope; Henry, shouting at the Virginia House of Burgesses "And I know not what course others will take but as for me, give me liberty or give me death."

I wondered about all the prophets who in their day were questioned, and ridiculed, and shunned and excluded.

And, being a lawyer, I thought of the laws that down through the ages have been laid down by men and against other men in the name of righteousness, binding them to serfdom and slavery and ignorance and death.

As they continued quietly across the boulevard, I looked again at the aged lady in the wheelchair beside me who had smiled when I had taken her hand during the prayers; at the mother and her children; the man beside me still holding the banner; the girl with her guitar; the ministers; the young — the old; the FORCES OF RIGHT marshalled against us across the boulevard; the flag; the Space Center; its workers, some now watching from afar — managers, lawyers, accountants, public relations people, lobbyists. I thought of the payments known and unknown GE makes to those

in power for the privilege of preparing the next series of *weapons of death*.

We joined in more songs, prayers for peace, blessings upon those whose witness was not over but who would be brought before the law and convicted of . . . Of what? Some will say *criminal trespass*. Others will say *They're all crooks and that's all we need to know — lock 'em up*. Perhaps most will say *I don't really understand it, but it's interesting to watch the film clips on the TV news*. Many will say *Who cares?*

And then — a motorist passed on the north bound lane and seeing us and our banners, yelled at us in profanity; but, as though God had been watching it all and had held out a cue card, on the south bound lane there instantly appeared a young man, head and arms out the window, holding a feather and smiling at us as though he understood and loved us.

"We" were no longer. Our beginning had occurred at 11 a.m., our ending at noon. Some had crossed the line; others had stood in support. Those who had crossed the line were now in the bus on their way to be booked. Those who had stood in support had either gone their own separate ways or gotten on a van to be taken to the police station to support those under arrest.

And now I was alone on the silent battlefield. I found a tree to shade me. I stayed looking, thinking, remembering, wondering. I noticed some debris on the site where we had met. I cleaned it up.

All were gone now — we and they.

I wondered about what we all would say that afternoon, that evening — about what had happened; why it happened — to our fellow workers, our superiors, our husbands and wives, our children and their children.

Who had been the Good Guys? Who were the Bad Guys? And why? ■



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# On being near the fire

by Elizabeth Amoah

*"And there was a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was not better but rather grew worse. She had heard the reports about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, 'If I touch even his garments, I shall be made well'. And immediately the hemorrhage ceased; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease."*

—Mark 5:25-29

Naturally the weak, pale woman in this story was poor and frustrated. Added to her physical misery were the requirements of the Israelite ceremonial laws about impurities, as stipulated in Leviticus 15:19.

The plight of this woman would have been even worse had she lived in my country. Among the Akan of Ghana, women used to be considered abnormal during their menstrual period.

The custom was that, during the days of her period, a woman not only had to observe numerous restrictions — she was not allowed to cross the threshold of any man's house, nor was she allowed to perform the regular duties of a wife like

cooking the meals — but she even had to leave her own home and live alone in the *bra dan*, the "house for menstruation" at the outskirts of the village.

Hence, one of the euphemisms which the Akan used to describe a woman in her menstrual period was that "she has gone to the outskirts of town" (*'w'ako mfikyire'*).

The blood of such women was considered potent enough to neutralize or desecrate other powers. Parallel ideas are found in many other cultures.

Because of her disease, the unnamed woman with a hemorrhage whom Mark portrays suffered from financial problems. She also faced social, cultural and religious difficulties. She had to move carefully, in order not to make someone else unclean by coming into contact with him or her.

The unnamed woman in this account has been living with that kind of frustrating isolation for 12 years. She has lost any hope of being healed — until Jesus comes.

On the basis of the rules and regulations set forth in Leviticus 15, the woman is very much aware that she ought not to go out and mingle with the crowd following Jesus.

Yet — whether out of superstition or out of a more genuine sort of trust and faith in Jesus — she is stubbornly convinced that if only she can touch even Jesus' garment all her years of frustration will be over.

Like any other person who has been hemmed in for years by traditions and

customs, she debates with herself. Should she try to touch Jesus and perhaps be healed? Or ought she to abide by the religious rules and live with her disease and frustration?

Whatever any of us might suppose to be the appropriate decision in similar circumstances, there is a proverb in Akan that is very much to the point: "It is the person who is very near the fire who feels how hot the fire is." (*nya oben gya no na onyim ma ogya no hyehye fa.*)

This woman has been very near the fire. She knows what she had been going through for twelve long years. She knows how desperately she needs to be cured.

And so she decides to break the rules. She touches Jesus. That challenging and daring action results not only in her immediate healing but also in words of commendation from Jesus: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease" (Mark 5:34).

In one sense, the story of the encounter between the unnamed woman with a hemorrhage and Jesus is a woman's story. The presence of Jesus, it tells us, enables us to challenge and question all sorts of customs and traditions that enslave us and make our lives frustrated.

But the experience of this woman and the lessons this story teaches us represent a challenge to all Christians. They apply to all kinds of situations of human life.

True salvation always challenges existing laws and regulations. It also requires awareness and effort on the part of the person who seeks it. ■

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Elizabeth Amoah teaches in the department for the study of religion at the University of Ghana in Legon, Ghana. This article is reprinted from *One World*, April 1985.

Gay priest forced to resign

# WITNESS author loses N.C. parish

by Mary Lou Suhor

*"If we dare to live openly gay lives, we are more often than not excluded, despised, slandered, robbed of human rights . . ."*

**T**hose words proved prophetic for the Rev. Zalmon O. Sherwood, the 28-year-old priest who wrote candidly about his sexual orientation in the September issue of *THE WITNESS*. He was forced to resign less than a month later from Emmanuel Episcopal Church, Southern Pines, N.C., and is currently seeking employment.

Sherwood said that he was faced with the choice of staying and refusing to do any advocacy work for gay rights, or quitting. "I think they were asking me to be dishonest, and I was tired of being dishonest," Sherwood said.

His decision was reported to be "wrenching" to parishioners who attended the Sept. 29 service when their pastor, the Rev. Sam Walker, announced that Sherwood had declared himself a homosexual and resigned.

Sherwood had been at Emmanuel for almost a year and a half and "had all the right stuff," as the *Raleigh News and Observer* put it in a front page story. "An accomplished musician, he related well as a deacon and later as assistant minister . . . at Emmanuel Episcopal Church. Soft spoken and genteel, he mixed comfortably with the flock. He won the parish tennis tournament and played a good game of golf."

It was the *N&O* article which stirred the community by quoting from *THE WITNESS* and revealing Sherwood's homosexuality.



The Rev. Zal Sherwood

The North Carolina diocesan paper, *The Communicant*, reported that "shock and high perturbation rippled through the 800 member church where Sherwood was curate and music director." It continued:

"A native of Geneva, Ohio and graduate of the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Sherwood won general approval for his ministry, particularly for his music program and work with young people and single persons. Walker, who declared that Sherwood had breached trust with the parish and urged Sherwood to resign, could still state in an open letter to the parish that Sherwood had 'contributed greatly to the church's overall ministry.'"

When Zal Sherwood's resignation was announced, "tears flowed and parishioners softly wept," said Donald C. Cressman, chair of the parish music committee. "It was a wrenching experience that won't go away." A letter sent to church members, signed by the rector, Senior Warden John Evans and Junior Warden Asbury Coward III, stated: "It is with regret that we must accept his decision to make a public statement of his alignment with the homosexual community and his corresponding decision to resign from this staff in order to pursue a direction of ministry to that community."

But Sherwood told *THE WITNESS* that he did not resign to minister only to gay persons. "As a priest, I minister to all persons," he emphasized.

The young curate's *WITNESS* story reinforced his view of the universality of his vocation: "My own experience of marginalization empowers me to reach out to others at the edges of society — battered women, abused children, prisoners, poor and hungry persons, the elderly, persons of color and different faiths. I shall always live at the margins, at times closer, at other times farther from the centers of social, religious and political life. As a gay priest, I do not attempt to disguise my homosexuality behind the disembodied prestige of the clerical collar."

Sherwood's article had come, unsolicited, to *THE WITNESS* and was viewed by this editor as an integral contribution to the September issue which focused on AIDS and the rights of gays and lesbians. However, aware of the risk and vulnerability which the article posed, *THE*

WITNESS contacted Sherwood in a lengthy phone call for a "reality check" concerning his future. He reiterated his confidence in his people, his pastor, and his bishop, the Rt. Rev. Robert W. Estill.

In a subsequent letter to THE WITNESS he wrote, "I appreciate your concern about the future of my priesthood if this article were to appear in THE WITNESS. My ministry is strong and vital at Emmanuel, and most of my parishioners would be impressed that I was able to publish such an article. I'm confident and at peace whenever I do advocacy work for gay men and lesbians."

Ironically, Sherwood's demanding schedule as a parish priest left little time for such ministry. "I was very busy and wasn't able to do that much. I counseled gay people in the parish and community and I am a member of the Triangle Chapter of Integrity, a Durham-based organization that ministers to gay persons," he said.

The Triangle Chapter offered strong support for Sherwood when he was under fire in the diocese. Members sent a letter to Bishop Estill asking him to clarify six points, including how he could say, "I would never knowingly ordain a person who is a practicing homosexual" and also be an advocate of gay rights.

Members urged Estill to reinstate Sherwood, or failing that, to find another position for him such as "a diocesan staff position, preferably as a missionary to the gay and lesbian community."

Estill subsequently met with Integrity, and although he did not change his position, invited the group to name several members to serve as liaison with his office and the community. In a note of affirmation, the Triangle Chapter unanimously elected Sherwood as its chaplain recently.

Shortly after the September issue carrying Sherwood's article had rolled off the press, a resolution stating that sexual orientation was not a barrier to the selection process for ordination was narrowly turned back at the 1985 General Con-

vention of the Episcopal Church in Anaheim. The resolution was defeated by lay deputies in a vote by orders.

Prior to that, a 1979 resolution had stated, "It is not appropriate for this church to ordain a practicing homosexual . . ." Twenty-one bishops at that time signed a statement repudiating the resolution, including Presiding Bishop-elect Edmond L. Browning.

In a telephone interview with THE WITNESS, Bishop Estill said he had voted in favor of the 1985 resolution in the House of Bishops, where it had read that sexual orientation was not "a barrier to employment." Asked if Sherwood's story might have had a different ending had the resolution passed the House of Deputies as amended, Estill said, "I can't speculate about that."

But Estill confirmed that Sherwood was "a first rate young man" who had "done a splendid job" at Emmanuel, and indicated that he was anxious to keep in touch with him in a pastoral way. "The basic issue with Zal was that he did not tell us the truth about himself during the process and there was a breakdown of trust," he said.

In Sherwood's view, the church forces gay and lesbian priests to go underground. Sherwood says that both his rector and

his bishop, however, were aware of his homosexuality prior to his ordination to the priesthood. In fact, Sherwood said, Bishop Estill and the Standing Committee of the Diocese withheld canonical residence from him primarily because of the homosexual issue. Sherwood is canonically resident in the Diocese of Ohio.

In THE WITNESS, Sherwood had written that he had "come to accept and love this particular person who I am and the spiritual journey which is my own. In coming out, my life and ministry become a public witness of homosexual Christian maturity and a gift to the next generation."

After his resignation had been announced, Sherwood met with members of that generation — his senior high youth group — to say goodbye.

At the end of his statement he asked two favors, that the youth pray for him, "because I'm feeling afraid about what the future holds for me." He said that in return he would take a list of their names and pray daily for each. "The second thing," he said, "is that you continue meeting as a group and that you love each other when you are together or apart . . . and take care of each other. Love Mr. Walker, love this parish, and most important, love God, the source of all love." ■

## I

**If everyone  
bashed missiles  
and if everyone  
got 25 years  
for bashing missiles,  
we'd all live long enough  
to serve our time.  
The moral being:  
find a hammer  
and support  
your local constabulary.**

## II

**Our prison missalette  
is sponsored fore and aft  
by morticians.  
To squash the word —  
or the prisoners —  
between death's covers  
is indeed  
a prodigious undertaking.**

— Helen Woodson

*(Helen Woodson is serving a prison sentence for bashing a Silo N5 missile.)*



### **Spirituality . . . Continued from page 11**

to and learn from the poor, and share their lot through prayer, struggling and suffering. I am aware of the difference between the suffering of the poor and our suffering in the rich world. We may lose our job in the struggle, where they may lose their lives; however, I believe that God calls all of us to work for justice and peace differently in various historical situations.

Meditation, prayer and sharing of our theological-political concerns are signs of a new culture of resistance that starts with resisting the functionalism of our everyday lives where studies, career and family claim priority. Under these claims we stay spiritually dead. "A people without vision perishes," the Bible says (*Proverbs 28:18*). Most of us are spiritual illiterates who have no language for the deep human wish to be one with all that lives which we call "religion." Instead of sustaining the need for a different heaven and earth, we reduce ourselves and become more and more similar to that which we already are. We think the way we always thought, only more firmly and more rigidly. Life becomes the undisturbed repetition of itself, a permanent returning to patterns; it becomes more and more narrow as if it were our own coffin. Authentic spirituality is the break from this repetition.

I would like to recall an image of communitarian spirituality, and describe the traditional Jewish celebration of the Sabbath in the Eastern European shtetl. The Sabbath is an interruption of life's repetitiveness. The shtetl was a world of unbelievable poverty, filth, coldness, hunger and misery. But on Friday night the Queen Shabbat entered the little town and interrupted the usual. A white tablecloth was spread on the table even in the smallest and dirtiest cottage. The candles of Sabbath were lit. Women put on their jewelry. The celebration of the Sabbath kept the people alive in their Jewishness and humaneness. The poor behaved as if they were rich. The burdened and worried people stood up and stretched; they stopped caring anxiously about what they would eat and wear tomorrow. The hardworking peddler or craftsman and his even harder-working wife interrupted their daily toil. The people rested. The day was dedicated to the remembrance of creation and the remembrance of liberation out of Egypt. The people commemorated who they were: sons and daughters of the Highest as the psalmist says, "little less than God, crowned with glory and honor."

Where is our Sabbath? Where do we interrupt ourselves and break the circle and stop the self-repetition? Spirituality is breaking away from our wickedness, our egocentricity, our being immersed in work and family concerns. Spirituality means that I begin to become the keeper of my sister and brother. I stop functioning, I perceive the distracted. I listen to the cries of the tortured. It is my "coming out" of that personal apartheid which keeps other people away from me. Spiritual

discipline means to interrupt oneself.

That leads to the second break we need — away from our own despair. I interrupt my own routine sense of self-pity and powerlessness. I remember the saints: Oscar Romero, Ita Ford, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King and so many others. I remind myself of what is more than I. I listen to the voices of the tradition. Perhaps I read the Bible, perhaps I pray, perhaps I write a letter.

Spirituality means that we interrupt our wickedness and our despair — our being cogs in the machine of oppression, and our powerlessness. In naming the objective side of sin I fight the subjective side of it — my despair — as well. This spiritual self-interruption needs a form, it needs words and gestures, rules and rituals. It is here where religious institutions have something to offer. They provide us with the language to articulate our hopes and fears. They tell us how people before us have interrupted the circle of egocentricity and despair. It might be saying too much that they teach us to pray, but they remind us at least of other people who prayed and cried and laughed and sang hallelujah.

Recently I went to a solidarity meeting for Third World people in Switzerland. A young teacher listened to my rather pessimistic analysis of the situation and then asked why I had come to Zürich that night. Since there was not any hope whatsoever, he told me, he did not know why I was standing there.

When I reflected on my own hope and where it comes from, I told him about a book I had just finished, Winnie Mandela's autobiography. Winnie is the wife of Nelson Mandela, the acknowledged leader of Black people in South Africa who has been imprisoned for more than 16 years. I related one detail of repression that especially shocked me. The children of political prisoners are allowed to visit their parents only if they are under two or over 16 years old. In other words, the children of Nelson Mandela have not been allowed to see their father from their second to their 16th year. I wondered how sick a person or a group of lawyers and politicians must be to invent such a law. But then I recalled that Winnie Mandela's book had given me something more than the knowledge of repression. There was not one paragraph in that book without hope and steadfastness of mind. If people who fight more than 30 years for human dignity do not give up on hope, do not doubt the final victory of justice in South Africa — what legitimate reason could we have to give up on hope? If they go on under torture and murder — how could we possibly become resigned? If they believe in God — what right have we to deny God's power in history? If they cry even though silenced and fight even though tortured and live even though murdered — how could we betray the Spirit? The poor are our teachers. ■

### Letters . . . Continued from page 4

There are Fluffy and Stephie and Didi of notorious fame here, but also Wilbert Lawyer and Mike Magic (not their real names) who are not so well known.

Lawyer and Magic speak openly to me and realize I have no hang-ups with their sexual preference. They know and accept their own homosexuality and they live their lives as best they can.

Up to now there has been no case of AIDS in Sandstone prison, but the undercurrent of dread can be felt among us.

I hope your special issue will alleviate some of the homophobia which prevails among so many of us. Questions which continually keep coming to my mind are: How would Jesus relate to these issues? What would He have to say to us?

Your September issue has been inspired by the Holy Spirit and is indicative of the mind and teachings of Jesus Christ. Thank you and keep up your good work. I appreciate your publication.

**The Rev. Paul Kabat  
Sandstone, Minn.**

### Texas vs. gay rights

I applaud the courage of the Rev. Zalmon Sherwood and Anne Gilson in choosing life! Homophobia is indeed present in our culture. Here in Houston there was such an outpouring of hate last Jan. 19 in the defeat of the gay civil rights ordinance that I still shudder when I think of it. In August the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the Texas sodomy law (outlawing homosexual activity and making the private life of gays illegal). As I write, Houston is in the midst of a vicious mayoral race where the fear of AIDS is being used as a political tool to defeat the mayor and city council persons who support gay civil rights.

I know of people's fear and ignorance of AIDS. I live in an area with a large gay population. Some people at work have suggested that I not be allowed to share the coffee room because of where I live and the chance of my coming into contact with a gay person and spreading AIDS at work.

**Jerry A. Boyd  
Houston, Tex.**

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## THE HUMAN ENTERPRISE: A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON WORK

by Richard W. Gillett, Contributing Editor, *THE WITNESS*

"This book is remarkable for its synthesis of theological, humanist, and technical-economic material — even more for the accessibility and wit of its prose. Essential reading for those concerned about the struggle by working people, their churches and their local governments to build a new economic life for themselves in the wake of the de-industrialization of America."

Bennett Harrison, MIT, Co-author:  
*The De-Industrialization of America*

"Human work is a key, probably the essential key to the whole social question," stated Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical *On Human Work*, issued in 1981. In the industrialized countries, most prominently the United States, this observation comes at the precise moment when a profound transformation in the substance and shape of the workplace is occurring. Characterized most often as a shift from traditional blue collar industry to a service and information-oriented work force, the shift also has other characteristics which qualify it a genuine revolution in the workplace.

Richard W. Gillett's book addresses critical questions, such as the role of transnational corporations in the reshaping of the workplace, the role of technology, the militarization of the economy, the alienation of work and racism and sexism in the workplace. The frame of his reference for his inquiry is the basic significance of work in the Christian tradition.

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