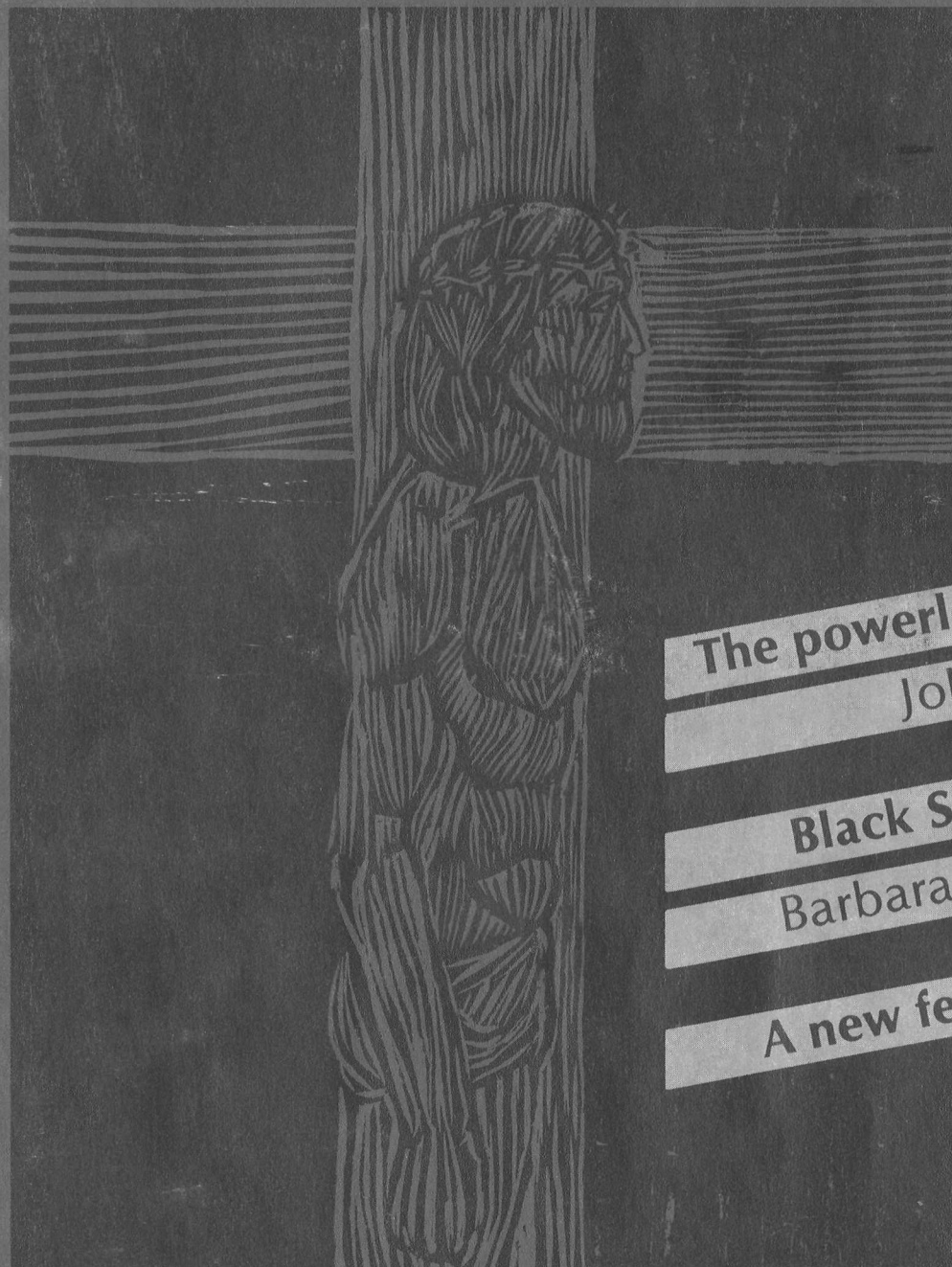


VOLUME • 69 NUMBER • 3 MARCH 1986

# THE WITNESS



**The powerlessness of Christ**  
John Shelby Spong

**Black Sash vs. apartheid**  
Barbara M'Cready Sykes

**A new feminist anthology**

# Letters

## Untie priest, diocese?

I appreciated your January editorial on Zal Sherwood and Anne Gilson, (who lost their church posts because they revealed that they were gay/lesbian). I particularly found significant the suggestion about bishops "opening their dioceses." I'd like to develop that a little.

I am, ironically, one of those gay men who can be described as "straight acting and appearing" (although I find that phrase extremely offensive). People don't know I'm gay until I tell them. Yet I have been "branded" in my diocese, the Diocese of Dallas, because in response to God's call as I felt it, I founded the Dallas chapter of Integrity five years ago.

God has called me, I believe, to the ordained ministry. Yet in my diocese, I cannot answer that call. I am now a student at Episcopal Divinity School. I have no official candidacy status with a diocese. I have only minimal financial aid, as it is simply not available without official status.

Our current ordination process might work well in usual cases, but it does *not* work for people like Anne Gilson and me. I cannot enter the ordination process in another diocese without "establishing residency," which not only drags out my situation in terms of time, money, and stress; it still carries no guarantees. I might move to another city, "establish residency," and not be accepted. Yet I *am* established in a parish; I *do* have the support of a rector — in Dallas, where the process cannot move beyond the parish level.

I question the wisdom of having ordination so tied to a diocese. I feel the Roman Catholic Church has a much better approach to this matter, as they tend to ordain priests for the church, not for a local unit of the church. Only in the last few months has Dallas ordained women; yet before the ordination of Gwen Buhrens, there were at least two women priests in the diocese. They were

not allowed to function officially by the bishop, but they were there, as priests; in their parishes, their work places, and at cocktail parties they could be among people as Episcopal priests who happened to be women. That, I would say, was a strong witness, and no small contributor to the changing of attitudes enough to finally allow the ordination of women in Dallas.

Since enrolling in seminary, I have found I am perceived, in the eyes of the world if not those of the church, as having at least a sort of semi-official status in the church. With that status, I have found my simply being among the gay community — in Dallas or in Boston — *is* a witness. I can attend a gay community meeting or a dinner party, and simply the fact that I can say yes, I am openly gay; yes, I am a seminary student; and no, I don't feel any conflict between the two is more Christian presence than many in the gay community (who have understandably turned their backs on the church) have ever experienced.

That, of course, is the value of having openly-gay priests. Both gay people and straight people need the experience of meeting and getting to know more openly-gay priests. If every gay person who wants to be ordained has to become a resident of one of the "open" dioceses, people in places like Dallas are never going to meet an openly-gay priest.

I'm not asking a bishop to guarantee me a job. I'll find a way to make a living, whether it's teaching or counseling, or whatever. I'm asking a bishop to ordain me, not for a particular diocese, but as a priest in the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church.

**Robert Williams**  
Cambridge, Mass.

## Supports editorial

I am a new subscriber to THE WITNESS — a Lutheran sister — and read with great interest your January edito-

rial. I am supportive of the position you took and am most concerned about the two people who lost their positions due to the public nature of their stand. Continued blessings on your efforts to call the church back to justice and healing for her members.

**Mary Moisson Chandler**  
McMinnville, Ore.

## Calls for sex education

It has not been my custom, during the 35 years I was in the active ordained ministry of the Episcopal Church nor in the two years I have been the retired Bishop of Central New York, to write letters to editors of church magazines, but the disturbing editorial in the January WITNESS has moved me to write this. "In the matter of Sherwood and Gilson" caused me too to be deeply saddened because I know and have admired one of those persons for some years as a committed Christian, a very sensitive person and an articulate witness of the Faith.

Their bishops, both of whom I know and respect, have every right to make the decisions they did. Having agonized over many episcopal decisions myself for 20 years, I feel deeply for them too.

The root cause lies within the church itself. A few years ago the Episcopal Church authorized a study of a document it produced on human sexuality. It was good and helpful to those who used it. It was, however, only a beginning and unfortunately it was not used extensively. Such a study has to be an ongoing educational process. Only in that way and done with an openness to the moving of the Spirit can we move out of the attitudes of an institutional church which has never been able to deal with sex.

Pastoral concern is certainly needed for Sherwood and Gilson. In that instance I am sorry I am retired. However there is also sorely needed an educational process within the church on the issue of human sexuality which can give greater

hope and opportunities for service to future servants of the People of God.

**The Rt. Rev. Ned Cole**  
Syracuse, N.Y.

## Gay percentage inflated

I recently read a copy of your issue on AIDS, which I found most interesting. I would like to point out, however, that using the Center for Disease Control's percentages (which record gay IV-drug abusers simply as "gay") seriously overstates the "gay" and understates the "IV drug abusing" percentage of victims. The point is that the church should review and update its programs aimed at substance abusers in the very near future. There is some indication that (besides dirty needles with the virus) *all* drug abuse harms the immune system.

**Albert L. Peruzzo**  
Chicago, Ill.

## Life after AIDS

It was with mixed feelings, as a person diagnosed with AIDS-Related Complex (ARC) that I read your September issue. The problem was not only with the word "plague" in your cover title (AIDS is an epidemic, not a plague). The real problem was more in the area of paternalism in not having any of the articles written by persons diagnosed with AIDS or ARC. Some of us are somewhat tired of the hierarchical paternalism which always has "the well" — whether gay or non-gay is irrelevant — chosen as spokespersons for us.

I will not own the medically and media-induced belief in the "inevitable death" from AIDS/ARC. Such a belief pattern only contributes to the "life-threatening" aspects of the disease, and what we should be about is learning to own life in its fullness, even as Jesus said, "I am come to bring Life . . ."

Is there a lesson for living in this AIDS crisis or only a farewell? As a person diagnosed with ARC, I must die a little and be reborn a little and live a little each

moment. It is ridiculous to dwell on sickness and death like some Thomas Mann character. I will need all of my strength — and possibly more — along the way.

My eyes overflow. I know how to die (all of us do; it's the one thing at which no one's ever failed). But do I know how to live? It is in the control and the letting go; the ability to find that special moment and the going with the flow of Becoming and Being that I find my wholeness and strength through the universal and indwelling Christ of God.

**Mikhael Francis-Maria Itkin**  
Syro-Chaldean Communion  
San Francisco, Cal.

## Larnin' a lesson

I enclose a check for a copy of the September 1985 issue, which I trust is still available. I have received the December issue, with reader reactions to the September issue, my copy of which I gave away and don't know how to go about getting back.

It should just "larn" me not to give away issues until after receipt of the reactions, far too often from persons who themselves need a great deal more larnin'.

**Fred R. Methered**  
Honolulu, Hawaii

## Wayward WITNESS

I am grateful for your magazine, since it provides an effective inoculation against stupidity, self-justification, and heresy. Just a smidgen of your publication builds up great reservoirs of anti-bodies against its pernicious teaching. In that, you perform a service.

Discussing THE WITNESS with a bishop friend, I tried to fathom the depth of your waywardness by suggesting that perhaps you do not know the Biblical revelation. He replied with piercing accuracy, "Oh, they know it well enough. They just don't like it."

**The Rev. Bruce W. Coggin**  
Cleburne, Tex.

## Agrees with Guinan

I want you to know how much I enjoyed James Guinan's "The Church in a Frozen Revolution" (January WITNESS). I am now retired, but spent 13 years in the south Caribbean, mostly in the Province of the West Indies — specifically in Guayana, Trinidad, Tobago, Curacao and Venezuela.

All that he says about Carriacou is true of the places I have mentioned except possibly Venezuela. In Curacao, the Anglican Church is largely made up of immigrant West Indians who came there a generation or less ago to work in the Shell Oil refinery, and so they are a microcosm of all the West Indies. I have never been to Grenada, although it is almost visible from Tobago on a clear day. There are many Grenadians in Trinidad and Tobago.

I agree heartily with Guinan's evaluation of the Anglican Church in that Province as I knew it. I was in Trinidad the longest, and I believe that diocese is less infected with a pseudo-Romanism than is the case with the Windward Islands and especially Antigua. Codrington was an ostrich with its head in the sand and unaware of the yeastly life going on. Ornate liturgy would cure everything! Is there any hope?

**The Rev. Howard R. Kunkle**  
Ft. Scott, Kans.

## Picking up the banner

Many thanks for the December issue of THE WITNESS. Brad Taylor's reflection, "Who Will Carry the Banner?" is appreciated.

WITNESS readers may wish to know, more specifically, why the demonstration sponsored by the Brandywine Peace Community at General Electric took place. GE, the fourth largest war contractor in the United States, consumes about \$13 million each day from the public treasury in war contracting. GE's Space Division, headquartered in Valley

*Continued on page 17*



## Lent and the 'right stuff'

**L**ent is a fitting time to think about heroes and sacrifices, particularly as memories of the Challenger disaster linger on. This month also brings Central America Week (March 16-24), a time to commemorate those who heroically worked, suffered and died in the endless struggle for peace with justice in Central America.

What is heroism? Is it one dramatic gesture, the sacrificing of oneself for a cause, the pursuit of a dream? Or can heroism be more unassuming: daily, unromantic work carried on in the context of grave danger?

On January 28, when the deadly fireball of flame and vapor streaking across the Florida sky filled TV screens, the nation watched and wept for the Challenger astronauts who died so tragically. From the President on down, Americans mourned. Our hearts were in the capsule-tomb with Smith, Scobee, McNair, Onizuka, Jarvis, Resnik and McAuliffe.

In stark contrast — less than six years ago when roses bloomed in a Salvadoran December — four American women were raped and murdered. And the U.S. government turned its back. Shocked Americans were outraged by the pictures of their brutalized bodies being dragged by ropes out of a shallow grave. Had that event received any measure of the Challenger publicity, it could have been a catalyst for real grassroots action to end corruption and U.S. intervention in El Salvador.

The government, however, did not praise the heroic sacrifice of Ita Ford,

Maura Clarke, Dorothy Kazel and Jean Donovan, nor even mourn them as innocent victims. The work of the three nuns and lay missionary as advocates for the poor was a threat to those in power, their deaths an embarrassing reminder that the United States was supporting a corrupt regime. Politicians and militarists must define their heroes with great care, and ideologies can transform heroes into villains.

Thus, in coverup, Jeane Kirkpatrick, President Reagan's choice of Ambassador to the United Nations, was quoted 14 days after the death of the women: "I don't think the government (of El Salvador) was responsible. The nuns were not just nuns. The nuns were also political activists."

And Secretary of Defense Alexander Haig: "Some of the investigations would lead one to believe that perhaps the vehicle the nuns were riding in may have tried to run a roadblock . . . and there may have been an exchange of fire." (Evoking *Harper's* wry comment, "On Capitol Hill fascinated spectators called it, 'The Day the Nuns Attacked the Soldiers.'")

The tragedy of the Challenger was so poignant because it was the deferring of a dream — space exploration. For the first time a civilian-teacher, Christa McAuliffe, was to widen that horizon for all of us, her pupils. The tragedy of the murders in El Salvador was obscured by a violent political cross-fire of propaganda and confusion where "subversives" preached the Gospel and "friends of democracy" terrorized the people.

Other contrasts haunt us. The Chal-

lenger crew faced risk, but were also buoyed by the confidence born of previous successful missions. Ford, Clarke, Kazel and Donovan confronted danger every day. They buried the mutilated bodies of friends and neighbors. Their deaths Dec. 2, 1980 were among the hundreds in Central America that day. They could easily have left El Salvador. They never did.

The Challenger crew left on their final mission with the support of cheering crowds. When the four women set out on their last journey, there was no one to bid them farewell but their murderers.

Heroes are potent figures in life, sometimes more so in death. We must take care that we do not let politicians and propagandists, solely, define our heroes for us.

Today, we proudly inscribe the names of the seven astronauts in our archives of national heroes. And during Lent and Central America week, we prayerfully celebrate the lives of the four women in El Salvador who were carrying on the work of a hero who lived long ago, a certain "subversive" Nazarene named Jesus.



Ford, Kazel, Donovan, Clarke



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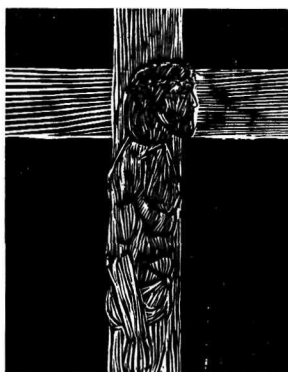
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Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus (woodcut, Tracy Councill)

# The powerlessness of Jesus Christ

by John Shelby Spong

**H**oly Week confronts us with a powerless Christ. The portrait is that of the victim, not the victor. Jesus is arrested. No one contests that arrest. When the story was written down some two or more generations later, the absence of resistance was embarrassing, and so it was softened. One account suggested that the arrest was at Jesus' command. Another said that at least Peter tried to resist and he was rebuked by the master. These are kinder sentiments, but hardly historic. This was the powerless Christ, the victim Christ; betrayed, arrested, condemned. He had no way of escape. He endured the indignities of a prisoner. His privacy was invaded, his personal belongings were confiscated. He was separated from his friends, interrogated in accusatory terms, beaten, mocked, tortured, crucified, killed. Holy Week ends with the picture of his broken body limp and lifeless, hanging from a cross. A powerless person.

The church has trouble with that portrait. We are quick to clothe that dead body with regal robes or to turn that crown of thorns into the crown of kingly power. We endure Good Friday only to get to Easter. A powerless Christ is not an appealing image, particularly for a church that historically has always been a seeker of power.

The powerlessness of Good Friday is not an aberration in the story of Jesus. It is rather, a vivid final expression of that which his life was always about. When he confronted the jealous ambitions of the disciples he placed a child into their

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**The Rt. Rev. John Shelby Spong** is Bishop of the Diocese of Newark.

midst — a powerless child — and said, “Unless you become as little children you cannot enter the Kingdom of God.” On other occasions he said, “He who would be great among you must be servant. The last shall be first.” The fourth Gospel shows us a Jesus who washed the disciples’ feet, performing a menial task of the servant. In his teaching Jesus chose the powerless Samaritan over the powerful priest and Levite to be his hero. He chose the pathetic Lazarus, eating the crumbs that fell from the master’s table, rather than the rich man Dives who dined sumptuously. Jesus responded to the woman of the street — a powerless person — rather than to Simon the Pharisee, in whose home he was a guest. The message of this Jesus in his words and in his deeds was the message of humble servitude, the message of powerlessness.

That message finds its ultimate expression in the powerlessness of the crucified one. It is not a comfortable note of the Gospel but it is an essential note. We hurry past it to enjoy the triumphalism of Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost, all of which draw us magnetically. The defeat of the cross repels us. We know how to relate to victory; we seek to avoid defeat. We respond to power far more easily than to powerlessness. The church needs to resist the temptation to rush beyond the cross and to linger in the story of the passion until the call to become servants of a powerless Christ is felt.

In so much of our history, the Christian church has been a power-seeking institution. The church’s ordained ministry has been the beneficiary of that power. We have basked in the status of our institution. In past eras, the church has ruled the world. We have as an institution made kings and removed them, started wars and ended them, identified enemies and executed them. We have brokered power in exchange for life and sometimes in exchange for integrity. It is a strange history for an institution that claims to follow the powerless one. Time

after time we have adopted the symbols and images of power. We took the Eucharist and made the one who served the Eucharistic meal a person of power. Serving the people of God at the table — the traditional role of the servant — has become the very source of the power of the priesthood. “Which is greater” our Lord said, “the one who dines or the one who serves?”

But we have reversed the power equation in the Eucharist. In every way possible we say as an institution that the one who serves is greater. That one is called the rector or ruler. That one is called father. The power role in the patriarchal society is the title applied to the priest. We have identified the priesthood as the higher calling. We have attached reverend to the priest’s name. The priest is the revered one. The priest who becomes a bishop is the right revered, or the most revered one. The Bishop of Rome who claims to head the universal church is referred to by the not immodest title, His Holiness. We identify our priestly status by a little cross beside our names. No one can miss our claims to holiness, our identity with power and favor.

Corporately the church, which is dominated by the ordained, states the desires of the ordained in the way we relate to that priest we choose to be our bishop. We clothe our bishops with crowns and royal capes. We house them in homes called palaces. We seat them on chairs called thrones. We place the royal ring on their fingers and the royal sceptre, called a crozier, in their hands. Not coincidentally, we call them prelates or princes of the church. Is it any wonder that the Christian church reflecting these claims to status refuses to gaze for very long at the powerless Jesus of Good Friday or to listen with much attentiveness to his constant message of powerlessness? This Jesus of the passion narrative is heard calling his disciples to emulate his teaching, to walk the way of the cross, to embrace the vocation of

powerlessness, to accept the role of the servant. That is not a popular message for us save in our rhetoric, so we confine that message to the prison of our words.

We place that concept into an isolated holy place where lip service to it becomes our only duty. We talk about the servant church or the priesthood as the servant class. It sounds good to our ears but we are careful never to act it out and none of our symbols affirm that image. We prefer to dwell in the illusion of our ecclesiastical power.

The church in our day, however, is rapidly losing its temporal power. We no longer govern nations or make kings. We have been forced to retreat from the center of life to our present position on life’s periphery. Members of the priesthood continue to pretend that we have status but our morale crisis betrays that pretention. Our profession is badly divided, deeply competitive, under tax pressure from local municipalities, and victimized by bureaucratic rulings in the Internal Revenue Service. We are looked upon by large segments of our society as benign, ineffective do-gooders; as irrelevant, non-productive members of the social order. We suffer a crisis of confidence. We lack symbols of affirmation. We are not well paid. We have never been well paid, but once we were well valued. Now that has been taken from us.

We attempt to justify ourselves in countless ways. Some undervalued priests become workaholics in a vain attempt to win respect and gain value. Others focus on tangential skills of the priesthood, becoming pastoral counselors, consultants, community workers, in the frantic effort to regain power. In our powerless state we cling even more desperately to our ancient symbols of power. Sometimes we shrink our orbit which once embraced the whole world and all time, into the narrow confines of our small churches and for the space of only the Sunday hour of worship. There, we pretend that the



world has not moved past the 13th century and that the priest is still the power person in the community. It is a rather pathetic game, a rather desperate attempt to claim that which we no longer are.

The church today is not a powerful institution. The clergy — the bishops, priests, and deacons — are not powerful people in our society. Even when we band together and speak with a corporate voice as the Roman Catholic Bishops in America have done on peace and the economy, the political forces do not listen. The MX missile program passed the Senate despite the almost universal protest of the religious leadership of this nation. The safety net underneath the poor in this country has been all but removed despite the religious voices which are heard crying in the wilderness. Religious opposition to the death penalty has not prevented it from being reinstated in state after state. The Christian church's historic institutional quest for power has run its course and we have become increasingly powerless — not yet scorned and ridiculed, but powerless. Some of us feel hopeless, despairing, depressed, and fearful as to what the future holds for our institution and for our profession.

The time has come to look anew at our Christ! Was power ever his goal? Should it ever have been the goal for His church? Was earthly status and prestige ever meant to be the marks of the church's ministry? Has not the day come when we must rethink the meaning of servanthood as the church's vocation — a vocation not in rhetoric, but in fact? Should we not begin to lay down our claims to power, our titles, our pretensions, and in a radical way learn how to follow the powerless Christ, how to walk the powerless way of the cross in the 20th century? Can our real contribution to the world ever be measured by the power standards of success? Is it not time we stopped competing in that arena? No one can identify the leaven when the bread has been

baked. No one can isolate the salt when the banquet is fully seasoned.

Our Lord Jesus Christ did not accomplish his work by winning. He did not meet power with power. His was the life of the victim. He was the powerless person who drained the evil of life out of the hearts of men and women and restored them to wholeness. He was the servant who, for their sakes, gave his life to them without defense or justification. His task was to bear witness to the love of God, not to win the battles, not to impress the world, not to lord it over other people. He was a powerless Christ.

This church of ours is being driven in our day to emulate this powerless Christ. Many, especially among the ordained, see it as defeat, as the end of the Christian era. I believe that it presents us with the opportunity to be faithful and true to our vocations in a way that has not been possible at least since the time of Constantine.

Holy Week draws us to the altar. We come as a servant priesthood serving in an increasingly powerless church. But the Lord of that church reminds us by the events of this week that He is the powerless Christ — the Christ of Holy Week, the Christ of Good Friday, the victim and not the victor. Our call in our day is to learn to be a powerless priesthood, to rejoice in it rather than to bemoan it, to see it as an opportunity and not as a defeat. We need to work out what that means for our lives, for our justification, for our future. In this period of transition we need to call each other to that priestly vocation of powerlessness which has been ours since the dawn of the Christian era but which we, blinded by our symbols of power and authority, have so often failed to see.

This generation of ordained people is privileged, but only because we cannot avoid facing that which we were always meant to be — a powerless priesthood, dedicated to serving our world in the name of our powerless Christ. ■

## Episcopal woman bishop, Roman women priests?

**T**he Rt. Rev. John S. Spong, Bishop of Newark, who wrote the lead article in this issue, has proposed that a woman be elected Suffragan Bishop to his diocese.

While not formally calling for the election, he raised the possibility recently in his column in the diocesan paper, *The Voice*. Assuming a positive response, it would be reasonable to anticipate a formal call in the near future.

About the same time that Spong wrote his column, the National Coalition of American Nuns (NCAN) called upon retired Catholic bishops to consider defying Rome by ordaining women.

The 1,800 member organization said, "We extend our invitation to retired Catholic bishops because we recognize that they have nothing to lose; neither promotion to positions of higher jurisdiction nor to a red hat."

Among the 370 Roman Catholic bishops in the United States, some 80 are retired.

"The courageous example of our Episcopalian sisters who were ordained more than 10 years ago gives us hope," NCAN said.

In another development in the Diocese of Newark, its annual convention passed a resolution urging the Church Pension Fund "to divest with all deliberate speed from companies doing business in South Africa," and establish a voluntary escrow account to be used if and when CPF trustees fail to comply. The resolution's timetable specified that the CPF at its April meeting begin to implement divestment from the 12 companies cited by the National Council of Churches, and by the following meeting implement divestment from all companies not complying with the Sullivan Principles. ■

# Short Takes

## Reinventing democracy

Today we have the opportunity to reinvent democracy, and once more make the state serve the well-being of the citizens. We cannot hope to remove the nuclear threat, or even to reduce it drastically, without reconceiving citizenship and revitalizing democracy . . . A final cautionary note: these long-term goals are associated with transforming the state by rejecting the logic of military power as the essence of security. Such an undertaking need not displace more immediate efforts to moderate the dangers that this logic produces. It can be useful to work against MX, Star Wars or Trident II, or on behalf of some forms of arms control. But these activities must not foster the grand illusion that we can get rid of the nuclear threat without liberating the state from militarism.

— Richard Falk

*Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 8/85*

## Berrigan, AIDS victims

The Rev. Daniel Berrigan, noted Jesuit peace activist (Catonsville and Plowshares) and author, is currently working with AIDS patients at St. Vincent's Hospice in Greenwich Village.

"I work with young males for whom a hole has opened in the universe through which they have fallen. It's going to get much worse. I was helped in my decision by the image of my grandfather who died at age 45 of what was then called 'immigrants disease' — tuberculosis. By this label, he was stigmatized in life and death.

"Every age wants a scapegoat. Currently the same aura and fear is growing around AIDS victims. We might bear in mind the image of St. Francis kissing the leper, or Rose Hawthorne — Nathaniel's daughter — and her group of nuns caring for the poor dying of cancer at a time when cancer among the poor was rewarded by shipping them off to an island used as a kind of latter-day leprosarium."

— Jennifer Marrs

*The Hartford Advocate*

On the day the God-man underwent the death penalty, he abolished it.

Victor Hugo

## Let us pray

**Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we dreamed too little, when we arrived safely because we sailed too close to the shore.**

**Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; when having fallen in love with life; we have ceased to dream of eternity; and in our efforts to build the new earth, we have allowed our vision of the new heaven to dim.**

**Stir us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas, where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes, and to push us into the future in strength, courage, hope and love as we are fed, as we share and as we go forth from this place to serve you. All this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.**

— adapted from a prayer by David Hardman

Quoted by Canon Charles Minifie  
*Cathedral Age* Fall '85

## Proof it!

Some recent published evidence that a single letter can make a big difference:

*The Wall Street Journal*, referring to the decline in the number of persons affiliated with certain large U.S. Protestant denominations, observed that "membership in the old mainline churches is swindling" . . .

*Newslog* of the Associated Church Press passed along word of a position vacancy in the London-based World Association for Christian Communication. Among the qualifications: "The person should be a committee Christian . . ."

*Context* heard of a college summer school advertisement with a photograph of a teacher who had written on the blackboard: "Judo-Christian teaching". To which a correspondent retorted, "Give us a few black belts and we'll take on the lions!"

"Notebook," *One World*

## FDR's tragic flaw

The conclusion of Hugh Gallagher's exceptional biography, *FDR's Splendid Deception*, notes that FDR's greatness has never been genuinely appreciated by the American people. Plans for a monument commensurate with tributes to Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln have long been accepted, but construction has never been initiated.

The basic flaw in FDR's historical image is the absence of a sense of identity as a disabled man. He failed to realize that he was part of a minority group engaged in a continuous struggle for equal rights. Ironically, Roosevelt's oppression also has seemed to prevent Americans from recognizing him as an authentic national hero.

Gallagher's volume, which resonates with the disability experience, ought to be read by all disabled men and women who are grappling with their own identities. Perhaps an essential foundation for this process is an awareness that the appearance of disability can be a source of dignity and pride. This consciousness might eventually enable artists to erect a statue of Roosevelt using the wheelchair in which he refused to be photographed.

— Harlan Hahn

*Mainstream* 7/85

## War

Held to be a crime when committed by individuals, homicide is called a virtue when committed by the state.

St. Cyprian (200 A.D.)  
quoted in EPF Newsletter

## Nicaraguan difference

I've traveled in Third World countries before. I've seen poor people, living in shacks, dressed in rumpled, used-up clothing, their shoulders bent, their faces tired, simply from trying to live. Though the poverty was evident, something in Nicaragua was very different. There was something about the people — an unmistakable dignity. "Nicaragua libre, viva, Nicaragua." They say the word "libre" as if it were gold, or the name of their only child.

Sharon D'Amico  
St. Ann's, Sayville, N.Y.  
in *Peace Offerings*



Paul Alberts

**Sheena Duncan**  
**Black Sash president**

Not a karate match

# Black Sash fights apartheid

by Barbara M'Cready Sykes

**N**ot long ago a senior official in South Africa's government was asked what he thought of the women in Black Sash.

"I hate them," he said, "we all do."  
"Why?"

Angrily, "Because they are the conscience of this nation!"

He was not referring to a group of female karate experts nor to an acronym for some Society Against Something or other — Black Sash is sometimes called simply Sash — although stalwart women and a hatred of injustice are Black Sash's leading characteristics. Black Sash is an organization of some 2,000 women, most of them White, who hardly let a day go by without protesting against apartheid — and doing what they can to fight it.

Thirty years ago the organization came into being when the National Party in South Africa, intent on establishing complete White supremacy, decided to deprive the Coloured (mixed-race) people of the right to vote although the franchise had been guaranteed to them in the constitution of 1910. The Afrikaans-speaking Nationalists could only achieve this deprivation by packing the Senate and the Appellate Court and they proceeded to do so, much to the consternation of the English-speaking Whites who feared that

the Afrikaaners might even go so far some day to discriminate against *them*. (For example, decree that English would no longer be one of the two official languages, also promised in the constitution.) The stock market dropped, lawyers and businessmen and army officers issued protests, some families talked about leaving the country, but the matter was generally accepted as a fait accompli.

Except by six women of British descent who, having tea together in Johannesburg one afternoon, decided they should do something about it. They knew very little about politics but they knew that the constitution was being flouted. They went to their telephones and each woman called six women of her acquaintance and they each called six more and within a few weeks 100,000 people had signed their petitions of protest. Soon groups of women started appearing in public and official places wearing black sashes diagonally from their shoulders to their waists and carrying posters saying "Honour the Constitution" in both English and Afrikaans.

They stood in silence and imperturbably ignored the laughter and abuse that greeted them, and tried to ignore the occasional egg and tomato that were thrown — even long hatpins were flourished alarmingly near. (Women have never been taken very seriously in South Africa.) They held all-night vigils in town and village squares, they organized lectures, they rode in a thousand-mile mo-

torcade to Capetown to take up their accusing stand at the opening of the newly-packed parliament. The newspapers made much of them, partly scornfully, partly admiringly, but the government paid no attention to them, other than to refuse to accept their petitions, to evict them from the galleries and to confiscate their sashes. Their protests were to no avail and the Coloureds were deprived of the vote.

Truth to tell, in the beginning most of the women had actually been more upset about the insult to the constitution than about the Coloured vote. They knew very little about the plight of the Coloured and Black peoples. But in the process of protesting they learned a great deal and their eyes and minds were soon opened. They resolved not to disband the organization (although much of their membership had melted away) and within a very few years came out squarely against apartheid.

Most of the members were English-speaking; for them this stand meant a sharp break with most of their community; and for the few Afrikaaner women it meant practically social ostracism. Believing it would be banned by the government or harried by the police if it became a multiracial group and since there were no Coloured or Black women voters, Black Sash thought it would be more effective if it were wholly White; today it is a closely-knit sisterhood with some Coloured and Black members

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**Barbara M'Cready Sykes** is a free-lance journalist living in Harwichport, Mass., who has a long-time interest in Black Sash and social justice in South Africa.



(people of color now have their own vigorous organizations fighting apartheid) and an increasing number of dedicated Afrikaaner women.

What does Black Sash do? First, it protests publicly and incessantly against the legislation that makes apartheid legal: against the pass laws which dictate where and how Blacks can live and work; against the forced removals of entire Black communities to undeveloped areas and their former homesites being given over to White purposes; against the assigning of Blacks to so-called homelands (comprising 14% of South Africa and often barren regions with which the Blacks have had no connection whatever) and then depriving them of their South African citizenship; against indefinite detention in prison without trial; against, according to its constitution, "any law or action that diminishes the right and freedom of the individual." Legislation is constantly being passed by the government to implement new apartheid regulations (only a very few minor ones have been rescinded) and members carefully study both the laws and their effects and tirelessly publicize their findings. They join in meetings and protests with other anti-apartheid groups and still stand on occasion, black-sashed and silent, in public places — protesting, for example, the lifting of Bishop Tutu's passport or the continuation of national conscription. Since the government has banned outdoor gatherings (a gathering is defined as more than one person coming together) each woman must now stand out of sight of the next woman. Members regularly visit Black townships, removal areas, hostels for migrant workers and the extremely inadequate schools and write reports on conditions in them which are published in their own magazine, *Sash*. Since radio and television are totally controlled by the government and there is a very subtle kind of censorship of the press, if it were not for "*Sash*" many of the cruelties and hu-

miliations of apartheid would never be known.

For almost 30 years Black Sash has run its seven Advice Offices, scattered throughout the country and open to anyone who comes in. Here members sit down in one-to-one consultation to help the Black people cope with and to surmount the difficulties and the degradations that the pass laws daily impose upon them. Blacks over 16 years must carry at all times pass or "reference" books containing their fingerprints, their ethnic origin, their tax payments, their work records, any detail the police find interesting. If the bearer cannot instantly produce a pass book up-to-date and in perfect order he or she can be immediately arrested. Blacks cannot leave their homeland to visit another area for more than 72 hours without laboriously ob-

taining permits from both the place they are leaving and the place they want to visit. People come for advice about getting their names on housing lists, about improper race classifications, about proving rights to live or work in urban areas, about permits to have a lodger or be a lodger, about searching for missing children.

A widow and her children are about to be dispossessed because it was the father of the family only who held a residential permit; a youth must get his first pass book and wants help about changing the job category he has arbitrarily been put into; an older man comes in despair because he has been discovered working illegally (as thousands do, at the only jobs they can find) and now he is to be dumped in a homeland where he has never been and where probably there will be



Members of Black Sash lined the railings of the Houses of Parliament, Cape Town, in a continuous vigil in 1956.

Mirabel Rogers

no job for him at all. The mass of repressive regulations has been directly or indirectly the cause of breaking up an enormous number of families, of jobs and opportunities lost, of skills and energies wasted. Yet these pass laws are one of the cornerstones of apartheid and so complex that most lawyers shun them.

The Black Sash Advice Offices provide clarification and paralegal aid and find lawyers when necessary. Rural workshops on these matters are set up by Black Sash, often working with the South African Council of Churches, and although it is not a member of the United Democratic Front, a much admired league of hundreds of anti-apartheid groups headed by the Rev. Allan Boesak, it has observer status with it.

What are the goals of Black Sash, beyond an end to apartheid? Black Sash is pledged to non-violence and it believes that the political conflict can and should be ended by means of a national convention. It calls for a universal franchise; once that principle is accepted, constitutional ways of protecting individual rights and security can be agreed upon. At its conference this Spring its president Sheena Duncan said: "We in the Black Sash have always been concerned with the victims, the excluded, the poor, the dispossessed. Our task is to find the non-violent ways in which power can be transferred to the powerless — not in any desire for the defeat or subjugation of the presently powerful, but in the true longing for a society in which equal distribution of powers will lead to peace and justice preserved in that creative tension which exists between conflicting interests of equal strength."

Addressing two forthright questions to the government and the business community, Mrs. Duncan asked: "Are you prepared to risk everything to be a partner in that creative tension? Or will you wait to be destroyed because you have never been able to show that you mean what you say?" ■

## A profile of Leah Tutu

**Q**uestion: "What does it feel like to be under constant surveillance by security forces?"

Answer: "It feels very safe."

She says this with a comfortable chuckle, then continues, more seriously, "... at least you know the identity of the assassin."

Leah Tutu was talking about one aspect of her daily life in South Africa. On a brief visit to European agencies which support the South African Council of Churches, she spoke to people in the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva who had gathered to meet the woman who is as involved as her husband, Desmond, the Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg, in the struggle to bring about change at home. And she says change is happening every day. "Things move so fast in my country. I've just left there, but what I tell you today may already be out of date.

"We are going to be free — I can see it coming — and let's hope it's a reality before a lot of blood is shed. Because there are still unchanged aspects of our daily life: tear gas in Black areas, army vehicles roaming freely, picking up people at will, children taken from schoolyards and on their way to school — many simply kept in police detention.

"Our government says there are changes in the pass laws, but that is not true. The offices where Blacks without passes are processed are as crowded as ever."

Leah Tutu is director of a domestic

workers' employment project, creating jobs and fairer conditions for these often abused laborers. She is at the nucleus of a group of Soweto residents who want the government to pull the army out of Black townships, under threat of a total boycott of businesses run and owned by Whites.

"Those whom I know and for whom I can speak want the boycott," she says, "and I'm told that many others want it as well. Because we want change.

"White South Africans have not suffered. So they say it's Blacks who would be most affected by a boycott. But we are suffering already, and we don't hold all the Krugerrands which buy the luxuries for Whites. We don't have so much to lose."

Leah Tutu is especially concerned about what happens to children who grow up under a state of siege in Black townships. "One of the hardest things to be in South Africa today is a parent," she says. "If your children are late, you have to worry whether they are in jail or being tear-gassed or stoned."

The Tutus have reared four children. Only the youngest is still a student. Their mother feels that young people in South Africa have come a long way in expressing their anger over the racist government and unjust social system under which they live.

She was aware of segregation when she was growing up in the 1930s and 40s, she says, recalling the time when she suddenly recognized that there were two categories of people in her country.

"I was 12, and about to be communicated into the Anglican Church. I needed to buy a little hat. They wouldn't let me try it on. The White girls were

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**Monique McClellan** is a radio producer in the World Council of Church's News and Information Office. Her profile of Leah Tutu appeared originally in *One World*, Vol. 111.

## by Monique McClellan

allowed to try theirs on.”

There were many more painful incidents to come, but she says it took her until the 1960s, when she was already married and a mother herself, to realize that she was not going to take things the way she had in the past, sitting down. And she brought up her children in that spirit.

Now she says it would worry her if her children were the way she was at the same age. “Of course, I worry about them in a different way: I might lose them because of their commitment. But my feeling can’t dominate my thinking.”

She sees part of her work as being available to support others with her presence in police stations or courts. News of arrests or police harassment travels fast on the township grapevines.

“Some time ago reports came in about arrests of children. When a group of women got to the police station, more vehicles arrived, full of children who had been taken from school.

“The mothers formed a human chain to stop the cars from driving into the compound, but they reversed and entered through another gate. Confronted by a chain of policemen with dogs, the women were completely helpless.

“The next morning we all went to the court where the children would appear. Some had been released the night before. But all the mothers came. The police had chosen a large room, because there were many children.

“Each name would be called out and they appeared one by one. After several names, there appeared a boy who looked no older than six. There were gasps, one of them from my son, who had not been

detained but came along to support.

“My son has a very loud voice — obviously,” she says with a smile, “and a policeman jumped up, grabbed him and took him out by his jacket. I jumped up and followed, and a young man appeared, who told me he was an attorney. I immediately instructed him to act for my son.

“The police quickly separated us, not permitting contact. But the attorney shouted after him: ‘Don’t say anything, Trevor! Don’t answer any questions!’

“The police kept him for 14 days, without charge. Then they released him to the family. And, thank God, they had not assaulted him.”

Leah Tutu is convinced that the many random arrests are also a source of income for the government. “They arrest so many people for no reason, and then they ask for bail. Especially where children are concerned, there is nobody who

wouldn’t scrape their last coins together to bail them out. With every arrest, we are afraid of the deaths that occur during detention.”

She pauses, then adds with a smile, “Just the interest on the bail money should be enough to run the country.”

For someone living under the pressure she does, Leah looks surprisingly composed and calm. A person who travelled with her said, “She can hold her own. She’s an individual. She stands next to Desmond, not in his shadow.”

But Leah herself puts it more modestly. “I’m just like any other mother in my concern for my children,” she says, “just like any wife in my concern for my husband. There is nothing unique about me at all.”

She says she wanted a normal family life, “like all women,” and that hers has actually turned out to be that. “If Desmond hadn’t from the very beginning



Leah Tutu

Terry Foss/AFSC



talked with me about his ideas, and what he had to do to fight racism, and acted on it, only *then* our life wouldn't have been normal.

"We discussed what he would do beforehand. Sometimes I worry about his safety, or about detention, but that never means that I would have preferred him quiet."

Living as a Black woman in South Africa today the way she does, nurturing life under the threat of death, makes her quite special — certainly in the eyes of those who live outside that volatile situation. She does not see different roles for men and women in the struggle for an end to racial oppression, and she is prepared to be in the forefront of resistance to the apartheid regime.

"The police don't treat women any differently from men. Women stand the same banning orders. I think that when the women who are arrested at present are sentenced, the courts will not exercise leniency. If anything, they may be harder."

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### Present tense suffering

"Once suggestions are made about how governments can help destroy apartheid, we hear the same sweet talk, 'But Blacks will be the first to suffer,'" Leah Tutu told the American Friends annual public gathering in Philadelphia recently.

"What makes you worry about future suffering if my present suffering is nothing to you?" she asked. Then she admonished, "Be honest. Just say, 'sanctions and disinvestment will hurt our profits and balance of payments, as well, of course, as hurting Blacks in South Africa.' It is OK for Blacks to suffer as long as they suffer alone, that's what we seem to be reading.

"The western philosophy of democracy, equality and freedom for all is being tested. The western countries are asked to put their actions where their mouths are. Are they going to do it?"

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## Random thoughts from

*Helen Woodson, mother of 11 children, joined a Plowshares action to jackhammer a Minuteman II missile silo in Kansas in November, 1984. Sentenced to 18 years, she noted her first anniversary at Alderson Women's Prison recently with the following meditation, and adds a P.S. about the commutation of her sentence to 1996.*

As a result of atomic testing, women in the Marshall Islands are having "jellyfish" babies, blobs of tissue with no skeletal structure. In their ignorance, they think it's their fault. Meanwhile Americans continue to pay taxes and allow the missiles in their cornfields. In their sophistication, they know it's not their fault . . . A friend from DC Jail is here doing 18 years for attempted murder. "And you," she said, "are doing 18 years for attempted non-murder. The country's crazy!" She has never read Merton but would probably enjoy his reflection on mental health in a world in which Adolph Eichman is legally sane.

We laughed so much in the court holding cells that one marshal slammed the door in anger. I guess when missile death expresses the national mentality, joy is indeed an outrage . . . A child from Nebraska wrote that she was uncertain about our action until her teacher explained the difference between God's law and human law. She said her original hesitation may have had something to do with the fact that her father is police chief . . . My Kansas cellmate remembered being committed into the custody of the Attorney General and asked about that position. Upon my explanation, she said she didn't mind prison, but she ab-

solutely deplored being so closely associated with professional criminals . . . Someone wrote that he hopes my time passes quickly, but I pray the opposite. This is most of the rest of my life, and I'd kinda like to live it . . .

We sat up timing a sister's labor pains. She would return 3 days later without her child, but for those precious hours, we were just women together celebrating the miracle of life. Perhaps the continual cycle of taking in and letting go teaches women to live fully in the present moment . . . Those who think I should seek sentence reduction and accept parole ask if I do not wish to "save" myself. Even assuming that salvation emanates from the court, the question arises — save myself for what? Under the terms of law, I could renounce my act, refrain from further civil disobedience, pay for repairs to the missile silo, subject my personal life to official sanction and be "free." Somehow, prison seems the better deal, and I have a feeling God will take better care of my immortal soul than the 8th District of Missouri . . .

One of my students in the prison school said, "I can do real good. I could even get to be white." Here "whiteness" is a function of power. Niggers populate

# the first year in prison

by Helen Woodson

prisons and whitey runs 'em, and this applies even when the prisoner is Caucasian and the warden Black. It might be that the major problem in America today is avoiding criminality. The street criminal makes a living off the misery of others, and the judge, prosecutor and jailer make a living off the misery of others. For some reason, one avenue is legal and guarantees a good pension; the other isn't and doesn't. No one has yet explained to my satisfaction why that is . . .

While adults reel with confusion, my children seem unperturbed. At the county fair, they saw people paying to smash a junk auto with sledgehammers and ran over to engage in their own "Pow-shares," beating the unfortunate car and shouting, "Kick the Bomb!" At our visit, they entered happy and left happy, and when I said, "I love you," Jeremy replied, "I know." . . . I have lost my driver's license which could pose future testing problems because I never mastered parallel parking. I wrote the Department of Motor Vehicles that next time I take a truck into a missile silo, it will be illegal . . . The prosecutor says my continued refusal to comply with legal processes is "extremism." I guess in a country where MX is "peacekeeper" and 20,000,000 casualties from a "limited" nuclear exchange is "acceptable collateral damage," telling the truth and sticking to it *is* a bit extreme . . .

One can find in prison the despair and degradation of tormented people. I find much more the mutual support and re-

silient spirit of human beings who refuse to be crushed. When my illiterate cottage-mate started school, the sisters greeted her with cheers. On the street, she had hidden her "shame" for 20 years; here where there's nothing left to lose, she can be what she is and dream of something more . . . People say we're political prisoners and should be adopted by Amnesty International. I have a friend who nonviolently burglarized a hotel and got 75 years. She suffers a variety of problems relating to poverty and has almost no hope of anything more. Seeing as how decisions about who gets the goodies and who doesn't are political, the response of the oppressed is likewise political as is the punishment inflicted upon them. I wish someone would adopt my friend . . .

We are commended for our courage, strength and love. Christ said when people do all he has commanded, they are but ordinary servants. He also said, "My yoke is easy and my burden light." Now either Christ is a merciless tyrant with no concern for human frailty, either he is the biggest con artist of the millenium or he is right, and Christian duty is well within the grasp of ordinary people. I suspect the latter. After all, if Christianity were accessible only to a select few, why did Jesus go to such pains to recommend it to the weak and sinful? Besides, I feel very ordinary . . .

We must give thought to communicating the joy of resistance. We are acting not from despair but from a love and proper enjoyment of life. Do we leave

that behind at the silo gates? Gandhi spoke of entering prison as a spouse enters the marriage chamber, yet our focus is more often on suffering and sacrifice. If I were to nominate a spokesperson for the joy of resistance, it would be another of the Nebraska kids who wrote, "I believe in what you did and I'm happy for what you did. You are lucky that you were picked for the job. By the way, have a good time!"

Thank you, my friend. I will!  
P.S. The new release date is May 15, 1996. I would like lobster and two and a half Black Russians. I get lost looking for the bathroom after three, so dignity will be maintained. ■

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## Good Friday

And some truth begins to dawn . . .

that the ground we stand on is firm  
firm enough to hold a cross.

that the cross is firm  
firm enough to hold a life.

that life is firm  
firm enough to hold the depths  
of pain and love.

that love is firm  
firm enough to reach out to us  
in our alienation, in our sin, in  
our fear, in our wonder.

We stand today on solid ground  
for God shares our ground  
and risks pain and death to say  
to each of us and all of us  
that we are loved, accepted, cared for,  
forgiven, companioned.

The ground is firm . . .

It is we who tremble.

— Kenneth Ian MacDonald

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**S**teven Guerra, a member of the Board of Directors of the Episcopal Church Publishing Company, is completing a three year jail sentence in La Tuna, New Mex. for refusing, as an act of conscience to testify before a Federal Grand Jury investigating the FALN. He is shown above with his wife Nancy during their Christmas visit. Guerra sent the accompanying open letter to **THE WITNESS** recently. Though never charged with a crime, he and four other Hispanics have been labeled "FALN terrorists" by the FBI, a designation which has cost them an early parole. Others in prison are Maria Cueto, Julio and Andres Rosado, and Ricardo Romero. **THE WITNESS** will carry a story about their release in a future issue.

# Letter from prison

by Steven Guerra

**B**efore long I will be getting out. As you might imagine, I am starting to look long and hard at the calendar, for this is "my year" as they say in prison. By the time you receive this I should be about 40 days short of freedom (mid-April). Hopefully time will move forward quickly. I realize how foolish that may sound to you but in here, time has different characteristics. Sometimes it's fast, others slow. I now want it to be fast forward.

Still, upon reflection, I can say that although at times it did not seem so, we were really only here for a "minute." And for the last year or so I know I've felt better for it, for I have now gone through the ordeal and know like all else, jail, too, can be conquered.

It's funny, for they thought by jailing us they could isolate us and thus weaken our resolve; but what came to pass is exactly the opposite. We are certainly not isolated, and to be sure I, for one, am infinitely stronger in my conviction that the Grand Jury investigation was both illegal as well as immoral, and as far as Puerto Rico is concerned, the U.S. presence in our homeland is both repugnant and criminal.

Enclosed is a photo of Nancy and me, taken at a recent visit. As you might imagine, she is excited about my release as well. I am trying desperately to lose

the 15 pounds I put on while in the hole at Petersburg.

I've written a few new poems. I have about 25 in all, and a journal in Puerto Rico will be publishing some fragments of them just about when I get out. I guess now is a good time to share some with you. I cannot believe that it has been two years, for it seems so very much has changed, both personally and politically.

Well, here goes the Guerra method of mental agony — my poetry! This is called:

## Fragments of my exile

I

Having left behind the hell  
of the mystics,  
I stumbled into the hell  
of the alchemists.  
There I changed, from bad to good  
and back again  
Like magic.  
I met those who  
lacked both hearts and faces  
I learned to lie loudly  
and hold truth hostage  
Until I was unable to distinguish  
the faces of those  
who crumbled secretly with fear  
from those who  
could not be taught to kneel.  
And  
now I know that  
to lead is not a small thing  
But,  
there are things greater.



## II

In westtown there is a wall  
on which is written  
the story of my life.

*Duende loves Marianna forever  
Latin kings Rule.*

*Libertad para los Cinco Nacionalistas  
Six children died here*

† June 22, 1979 †

It is a wall which forgets nothing  
On it I played out  
a theatre of emotion  
Viva las FALN!

*Puerto Rico Libre — Cuesta lo que cuesta  
Duende loves Eva*

*Libertad para los Presos Politicos y P.D.G.*

It is a wall on which I plotted rebellion  
where I gave away my secrets  
to whoever was bored enough  
to stop and read,

where I translated profound words  
into common speech

In westtown there is a wall  
with a space on it  
for the final word  
is yet unwritten.

## III

A long time ago  
I, together with many  
of my fellow conspirators  
in Guatemala, Chile, Robbens Island,  
the Philippines and Palestine  
resolved never to change.

Our resolution, faith  
determination and hope  
was not born of anything special,  
Just the fact that we knew  
the day we stopped burning  
with love of freedom  
our people would begin  
to die of cold.

Well, you can see I feel a lot of conflicting emotions. I'm glad I went through this, though, for I am infinitely stronger and clearer about myself and my relationships to others.

OK, here's another poem, then I'll

close. I wrote this after some long conversations with my fellow Grand Jury resister Ricardo Romero while at Lewisburg.

**What is liberation?**

Someone I once loved asked me.

Answering quickly,

for I was younger and knew more then,  
I said it is the cry of the oppressed  
for bread and justice.

And now looking back

I can see it is so much more.

It is being gentle enough to love,  
having the courage to resist,  
the will to win

when everything around you is still dark  
and so cold.

Liberation, my friend,

I said, shouting into the night  
is a river that flows from  
Babylon to freedom.

It is a dialogue between  
their past and our future

It is the festival of life  
that burns like a fire  
in my bones.

And though I am today covered  
by the blanket of time

I know it to be carina  
the power of the poor in history  
struggle  
and  
transformation.

That's it for now. My love to everyone  
at THE WITNESS and all our friends  
everywhere. I send you my hopes for

**Justice and peace,  
Viva Puerto Rico libre.  
Steven Guerra**



## Letters . . . Continued from page 3

Forge, Pa., is producing DSCS III and other satellite systems for the command and control of U.S. nuclear war plans, as well as components for MX and Trident II first strike nuclear missiles, and is developing Star Wars related weapons.

We would welcome any and all who would want to pick up the banner to which Brad Taylor referred, and participate in our two day walk of conscience and nonviolent resistance to GE at Valley Forge, Holy Thursday and Good Friday, March 27, 28. For information call (215) 544-1818.

**Bob Smith  
Brandywine Peace Community**

## Issue goes to meeting

The November article by my neighbor, the Rev. James Lewis of Ann Arbor, entitled "How Honduras is Getting Fixed" carries so much truth that I wonder how every U.S. taxpayer can be alerted to the situation. Perhaps this article could be printed as a pamphlet and distributed by the thousands? Likewise, the article by Bishop Sturdie Downs, "A Christian from Nicaragua": "If you knew (you taxpayers) about the interventions by the United States and how your country created a National Guard which kept our people down, and how the multinationals exploited us, you would be out in the streets protesting." And Jim Levinson's testimony on Nicaragua should be given before the Congress and entered into the *Congressional Record*, that more Americans could read the truth.

Time does not permit me to comment on other articles in the November issue except to say that I am going to take my copy to the meeting of MICA (Michigan Interchurch Committee on Central American Human Rights).

I was also greatly impressed with your December issue. I share your concern that it would be disastrous to lose sight of the North-South contradiction. It certainly is "the fundamental problem which polarizes humanity."

**Sister Agnes Prendergast  
Adrian, Mich.**

# Looking backward, living forward

by Nathan E. Williams

A fascinating feature of a 1957 Plymouth station wagon my father once bought was a third seat which faced backwards. My brother and sisters and I used to compete for that seat. One time while traveling with a favorite uncle, we began to tease him from our outpost near the rear bumper. Uncle Rupert acknowledged us in his goodnatured way and said, "Turn around and pay attention to where you've been."

My uncle's remark is still good advice. It is possible to look backward to see, not just where we have been, but where we are going.

The prophet Zechariah once offered a humane and wholesome vision of the future to his people. A look backward toward Zechariah and those who followed him might afford us a glimpse of our own destiny.

*These are the words of the LORD of Hosts: Once again shall old men and old women sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each leaning on a stick because of their great age; and the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls, playing in the streets. These are the words of the LORD of Hosts: Even if it may seem impossible to the survivors of this nation on that day, will it also seem impossible to me?*

**Zechariah 8:4-7**

*I lifted my eyes and there I saw a man carrying a measuring-line. I asked him where he was going, and he said, 'To measure Jerusalem and see what should be its breadth and length.' Then, as the angel who talked with me was going away, another angel came out to meet him and said to him, Run to the young man there and tell him that Jerusalem shall be a city*

*without walls, so numerous shall be the men and cattle within it. I will be a wall of fire round her, says the LORD, and a glory in the midst of her.*

**Zechariah 2:1-5**

What an extraordinary vision this is! Old and young alike share city streets in safety, with mutual appreciation and respect. The city in which they live lies open to the world. The presence of God dwells in the midst of the city, and the security of God stands between the people and any potential adversaries.

Some 60 or 70 years after Zechariah a man called Nehemiah came to Jerusalem. Unlike Zechariah, he had no word from God. Nehemiah was a civil servant turned politician who had learned, while serving the king of Persia, that the city of his ancestors was without walls. The news depressed him terribly. A devout man, he prayed for the opportunity to help his people. The king of Persia was reluctant to part with Nehemiah's service, but he finally appointed him governor of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah arrived and quickly confirmed his worst expectations. He rallied the people saying, "We're defenseless. Someone might come and attack us. We must rebuild the walls." The people felt the need for security, and construction began. No sooner was work underway than neighbors to the north began to worry and accuse Jerusalem of hostile intentions. These neighbors threatened a pre-emptive strike to keep the walls from being built. Nehemiah accused them of escalating tensions, and responded.

He cut his work force by half to create a militia. The remaining half had its efficiency drastically reduced by the requirement that they wear weapons and battle dress to work. People were in-

creasingly fearful. Workers did not dare to leave the city to return home after work. They slept in the city with a guard standing watch. And, they slept in their clothes in order to be instantly responsive to an alarm.

The civilian population was economically oppressed to support the militia and build the walls. Adults mortgaged their homes, fields, and vineyards to buy food and pay taxes. Parents sold children into slavery for the same reasons. The elderly were reduced to begging. But, Jerusalem had walls, and the people, forgetful of Zechariah's vision of an open city and deceived into thinking they now had security, celebrated the walls with Nehemiah.

The society that lived within the walls was dismal. Most cities of the time allowed their gates to stand open during the day. In Nehemiah's Jerusalem the gates were shut and barred. Jerusalemites, in the time prior to Nehemiah, had married Ashdodites. Nehemiah ordered the persecution of all who had married non-Jews. He presided when people of mixed marriage were beaten and the hair was ripped from their heads. After torture he extracted signed pledges from people that they would not marry non-Jews or permit their children to marry them. Finally, he banished many dissenters from Jerusalem. The City of Peace had become a totalitarian nightmare. Children and the elderly avoided the streets.

Nehemiah, the politician of national security, came to the end of his life with a clear conscience praying, "Remember this to my credit, O God."

Uncle Rupert spoke more than he knew. We ought to look backward to see where we are going and not just where we have been. ■

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**The Rev. Nathan E. Williams, M. Div.,** is minister of the First Baptist Church of Pittsburgh.



## Life, liberty and the pursuit of duplicity

**A**s kids growing up we learned a lot about duplicity from adults, especially church folk who had a way of demanding public penance from “sinners” who got caught. We secretly mocked grown-ups for an ethical stance and posture that boiled down to “Don’t do as I do, do as I say.”

The lessons of duplicity are still around for the learning by the current generation. They can see the “morality” of their elders played out on a grand scale, this time by a government that loudly touts the sanctity of human rights — supposedly a pre-condition for its economic aid — while it selectively subsidizes the suppression of human liberties at home as well as abroad. The President’s recent fast-paced State of the Union message is a case in point. Like most of his Hollywood-hype-oriented pronouncements, it was long on rhetoric and short on substance in this area.

“To those imprisoned in regimes held captive, to those beaten for daring to fight for freedom and democracy, for their right to worship, to speak, to live and prosper in the family of free nations,” said Reagan, “you are not alone, ‘freedom fighters.’ America will support with moral and material assistance your right not just to fight and die for freedom, but to fight and win freedom — in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia and Nicaragua.” This, he continued, “is a great moral challenge for the entire free world.”

Absent from the President’s list were not only such freedom fighting strongholds as South Africa and El Salvador, but the barrios and Native American reservations of this country where government suppression of the struggle for human liberties is as blatant as in any totalitarian regime.

The Episcopal Church Publishing Company and THE WITNESS for some time have focused on political repression at home, with particular attention on several Hispanics who have resisted testifying before federal Grand Juries investigating the activities of the Puerto Rican Independence movement. Five of these prisoners of conscience, who include former national Episcopal Church Center staffer, Maria Cueto, and ECPC board member, Steven Guerra, are approaching the end of three-year sentences in federal correctional institutions. Guerra, the only first time “offender” in the group, is slated for release next month. Given past Justice Department maneuvers, there is every reason to believe that the five could be subpoenaed again and, refusing to testify, be subjected to the same harassment, prosecution and persecution as the government seeks to extract its desired 15-year “pound of flesh” in three-year increments.

Similar is the plight of Native American political prisoners such as Leonard Peltier, who has spent 10 years in the federal penitentiary at Leavenworth.

Peltier, though obscure to many Americans, has become a powerful symbol of U.S. persecution of Native Americans fighting for religious freedom and against the continuing expropriation of their lands by major corporations in league with tribal governments backed by the Bureau for Indian Affairs.

Peltier was on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, near Wounded Knee, helping to maintain a small spiritual community of traditional Indians resisting attempts by their tribal chairman to sell sacred lands. Two federal agents who drove directly into the living compound of the community were killed in an ensuing gun fight, along with an Indian male. The latter’s death was never investigated. Court records of Peltier’s arrest, extradition and trial, however, are replete with examples of blatant government misconduct.

His current appeal before the Eighth Circuit Court in St. Louis is supported by eight Episcopal bishops, along with Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Rev. Jesse Jackson and other international religious figures and organizations. The church, the ethical conscience of the nation, must continue to speak and act forcefully when human liberties are at stake.

So long as the Peltiers, Guerras, Cuetos, Rosados, Romero, et al are targets of repression, America’s ability to speak effectively to other governments is seriously diminished. ■



## New feminist anthology out

**M**y Story's On: *Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives* — a unique feminist anthology made possible by a grant from the Episcopal Church Publishing Company — has made its debut after a three year search for materials from women who have often been excluded from mainstream feminism.

"My Story's On grew out of a belief that most women are not corporate vice-presidents or employed in non-traditional jobs," said Paula Ross, editor of the new publication. "We are not all members of that elite feminist club that requires you to be a young, white, urban, able-bodied, heterosexual, middle-class, childless, professional woman in order to be admitted. Women can't afford this false face of feminism. Not only does it exclude too many by holding up a mirror that reflects a single image, it also cuts off feminism itself from a source of tremendous power — the strength lodged in

diversity," she said. Ross, a Black editor who resides in Berkeley, grew up in Detroit.

Authors who appear in the anthology are women from different races, cultures, classes — who write in the laundromat, in prison, in kitchens, in ghettos, in mental hospitals, on lunch hours.

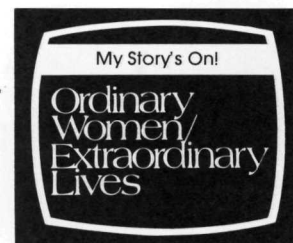
The concept for *My Story's On* developed after some 15 women from varied backgrounds met in New York in 1981. Most had attended one of seven regional meetings across the country, sponsored by ECPC, to discuss the feasibility of such a project. The women met for two days, developing a common vision and a solicitation plan which ultimately resulted in the submission of 300 manuscripts.

A working group of six from the original 15 met periodically thereafter to review submissions. In addition to Ross, who made the final selections, they included the

Rev. Patricia Merchant, a mother and assistant rector at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Atlanta; Pandoura Carpenter, a Black cab driver from Oakland, Cal.; Joan Howarth, an attorney and former member of the ECPC Board; Inez Yslas, a Chicana activist from Denver; and Mary Lou Suhor, WITNESS editor. In selecting manuscripts, a major concern was to maintain a high percentage of work by women of color. Publisher of the book is Women and Children Too, a non-profit corporation based in Oakland.

"The New Right and the Moral Majority have produced dozens of books, selling their image of what it means to be a 'real woman,'" Ross said, "but we think that feminism belongs to any woman who claims it."

Below is a sample from the book — a story by one such woman — who took on a U.S. bank, single-handedly.



## A Bank of America story

by Andrea Canaan

**I**t was January 3, 1983. I had received no income since November 15, 1982. After almost two years of working for a gay agency, I quit my job because of intolerable hostility, harassment, blatant racism, and, finally, because my physical and emotional health were being adversely affected. My unemployment benefits were being held up because of an error in reporting my social security number. Although I had

applied for welfare on the first of December, as soon as I knew that I could not make it on my last check for an extended period, I did not receive a check until December 29, after the banks had closed. I had been disqualified to receive food stamps because I had "voluntarily" quit my last job. The rent was overdue, there was little food in the house, and I had been very frightened until the check arrived. Now I could pay for the bare essentials until my unemployment came through.

I went to the Bank of America because I had closed my personal checking account, due to lack of money and to the new policy of my bank to charge \$15 to service any account

**Andrea R. Canaan** is a Black, Southern, lesbian, feminist who currently resides in New Orleans. A longer version of the above appears in *My Story's On: Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives*. (See ad back cover.)

with an average daily balance lower than \$200. I reasoned that, under the circumstances, I needed to go directly to the bank that the check was drawn on to have any hope of getting it cashed. This was the only reason that I happened to be in the Bank of America on one of the most crowded days in the month. When I arrived at the bank the line was 35 deep. There were 12 tellers serving and I quickly calculated how long it would take me to be served. After I cussed myself for not bringing a book, as is my custom, to ward off my fear of crowded places and the dreaded loss of identity and hysteria that often surfaces in them, I busied my mind with the tasks of the day and reviewed the past week's events.

To speed up my departure from this teeming space, I had ready my ID, the unendorsed check, and the services I needed. I also rehearsed soothing tones and the appropriate customer stance. It was finally my turn. The teller at the 12th window said, "Next," and I moved toward her.

I proffered my documents, said "Hello," in my holiday voice, and waited for all to move in concert at my unsuspected direction.

After inspecting my documents by turning them this way and that and looking into my face several times, the teller said, "I'm sorry, but I cannot cash this check unless you have other identification," with a small, questioning, slightly embarrassed teller lilt and an I-don't-make-the-policies lift of her eyebrows and shrug of her shoulders.

I said in a reasonable and dignified tone, "I don't have any other form of ID. Perhaps you can check with your supervisor."

The teller moved away and came back with a serious look. "I am sorry, but I cannot help you."

One decibel above normal, I said, "This check is drawn on this bank. I have two valid forms of ID. I have every intention of having this check cashed today!" in precise and pushing tones.

The teller left the window, walking quickly as if something were chasing her, and returned with a woman I assumed was her direct supervisor. This woman walked up to the window and said, "I am sorry, Miss, but the policy of this bank is that you must have at least two forms of ID. A driver's license and state ID only qualify as one. If you wish to cash this check, may I suggest the county offices on Oak Street. I am sure they can help you there," as if she thought the matter surely settled and closed to further discussion.

The county office the second teller referred to is 15 miles away. It is not a bank. The likelihood of my getting a check cashed was the same as my Black, good-looking face getting me a reservation in a nuclear bomb shelter on Doomsday. So I said, one decibel louder, to the second teller, "I have one dime. My rent is due today. I have no idea if the county office can help me, but I *know* this one can! If you cannot authorize

check cashing, then get someone who can!"

The second teller left with an exasperated look and a roll of her eyes. The other tellers and customers nearby were obviously uncomfortable. During my last speech it became crystal clear to me that if I were going to get my check cashed it would be against all odds. My throat and chest started to fill with dread and a curious infusing energy. I was determined, a little desperate, and shaking inside. I thought about my mother and called up her voice to guide me. I felt a stubborn gear shifting into place. I was in communion with her will, determination, and her fighting off this same sense of shame, guilt, and humiliation while she raised four children alone during the '40s and '50s.

The second teller returned with a tall, thin white man who was looking too important to be bothered with petty customer disturbances. When they arrived before me, the third teller said to the second teller, "What seems to be the problem here?"

The second teller said to the third teller, "This woman does not have adequate ID and refuses to take our suggestion to go to the county office for help." Both spoke in injured party tones and seemed frozen in Saturday Night Live relief.

The third teller turned to me with an accusing and disbelieving stare to say, "Miss, you don't have *any* credit cards?"

At decibel three, I responded, "Mister, when you are unemployed and forced to accept welfare, they do not allow you to keep credit cards! Does the Bank of America allow its card holders to legally retain their credit cards when they can no longer pay their bills?"

There was a ripple of low laughter and angry supporting grunts around me as the third teller rolled his eyes upward to the Great Versateller in the sky, stepped slightly backward, and pursed his lips in distaste at the force of my third decibel. Staring into the vista of the sit-down side of the bank, seeming to look for someone, he spoke as if to himself. "Where is . . . (inaudible)?" As if by magic, a uniformed and armed guard appeared. I immediately assumed that there were others so alerted. The other customers shifted and moved restlessly as a mass and grumbled as if they too were threatened by this obvious show of force, before settling into a watchful hush.

I responded to this threat by going to decibel five. "SURE, PUT A WOMAN IN JAIL BECAUSE SHE IS UNEMPLOYED, FORCED TO ACCEPT WELFARE, AND YOU REFUSE TO HONOR A CHECK DRAWN ON YOUR BANK THAT MAKES MORE MONEY *HOLD-ING* THAN DISBURSING. HER PRESENCE EMBARRASSES AND FRIGHTENS YOU! THIS WILL NOT BE THE LAST TIME YOU WILL HAVE TO

CONTEND WITH PEOPLE WHO DO NOT MEASURE UP TO YOUR ELITIST STANDARDS NOR WILL ALL OF US BE BLACK, THIRD WORLD, OR WOMEN. LOOK INTO MY FACE AND SEE *YOUR* FACES AFTER THE POLITICS OF DESPAIR YOU PUT INTO OFFICE CATCH UP TO YOU. EITHER PUT ME IN JAIL *NOW* OR FIND SOMEONE IN THIS BANK WHO WILL AUTHORIZE THIS CHECK TO BE CASHED! AND DO NOT BE MISLED BY THE FALSE SENSE OF YOUR POWER VERSUS MINE, I *WILL* BE SERVED HERE TODAY! NOT TOMORROW! NOT ON OAK STREET! BUT HERE!

As I was ending this oration, a small, older white man walked up to the slightly shaking and pale third teller and began to speak in almost inaudible tones. When I had finished, all was silent and still except for the fourth teller's whispers. It was as if time had caught her breath and all was frozen except the fourth teller's lips. My heart was pounding and I was perilously close to tears. The tears caught me off guard, for rarely do I cry. As a matter of fact, I often feel that my inability to cry is a weakness. But the idea of crying in front of those white folks struck terror in my passages — my finely tuned racial and woman memory of centuries-old rule of the few over the many, of the rainbow people being robbed and killed by colorless people who coveted our rich hues, our culture, our knowing.

Through the myriad voices of my people, their urgings, prayers, and support, the fourth teller was saying something to me.

"Uuh, Miss Grahnjay," as he looked up from my documents with an accomplished smile.

"Granger," I responded at decibel four. "It means farmer."

"Well, Miss Granger, we *may* be able to help you if you will just step aside. You are holding up the line."

I moved back to decibel five. "I AM A CUSTOMER HERE DOING LEGAL BANK BUSINESS AND I HAVE EVERY INTENTION OF OCCUPYING THIS SPACE UNTIL MY BUSINESS IS CONCLUDED."

The fourth teller took both volume and response in stride and continued to look at me as if he could deal with me without serious incident. He said, "Miss Granger, do you have any documents other than these? A welfare card? Food Stamp card? Letters with your name and current address on them?"

I responded at decibel three, "Are you the president? Will you approve this check?"

He brightened a little at the reduction of volume as if to say, finally, progress is being made. He said, "No, I am not the president, but I may be able to help you."

At the sound of the withholding *may*, I went back to

decibel five. "WELL, MISTER, THEY DID NOT GIVE ME A WELFARE CARD, IF THEY EVER DO. I AM NOT ELIGIBLE FOR FOOD STAMPS EVEN THOUGH I HAVE NO MONEY AND LITTLE FOOD. THE ONLY ID I HAVE OTHER THAN WHAT IS IN YOUR HANDS IS MY LIBRARY CARD, MY CO-OP CARD, AND MY SIGNATURES THEREON. IF I HAD THOUGHT THAT COUNTY DOCUMENTS SAYING I HAVE NO MONEY WERE ADEQUATE IDENTIFICATION, I WOULD HAVE HAD THEM WITH ME TODAY. SINCE LETTERS AND WELFARE CARDS WILL DO, I AM SURE THAT THESE ALSO WILL VERIFY MY EXISTENCE TO YOUR SATISFACTION!"

The fourth teller silently reached out his hand for the papers I had ready. He then said, "I won't be long," and moved off to the back of the stand-up side of the bank. He signalled to someone outside my field of vision, and a few moments later an older white woman approached to receive his instructions. She returned with his glasses. He picked up a phone.

My being was concentrated on the fourth teller. My every pore was beaming pressure onto him — pressure to do my will this day. I stood at rigid attention, never allowing my eyes to leave his face, and willing myself to stem my imminently leaking eyes.

Time stopped again. I checked all my senses to be sure that I was still alive and human. I went over my actions in the bank so far that day with my mother as a guide in my head. "You are acting wisely," she counseled. "You have not attacked anyone personally. You have held your composure as you have stated your case forcefully. You have not done any more than make these people want to get you out of here as quickly as possible and with as little further loss of face as possible. Be patient and watchful a little longer. They will go through the motions of further verifying your existence and then cash your check. I love you and I am with you. Remember that there is no degradation in being poor and no humility in allowing any system to render you powerless and without voice." At that point I remembered a line of precious poetry:

*So it is better to speak  
remembering*

*we were never meant to survive*

(from "A Litany for Survival" in

*The Black Unicorn* by Audre Lorde).

Suddenly a dark-skinned white man stood next to me. In my watch and communion with my mother and sister, I had not noted his movement or his approach. He said to me,

uncomfortably close, "I would have shouted just as loud and I thank you."

I nodded my head slightly, moving only my eyes to see him. I did not want any change in my body posture to signal to the fourth teller relaxation on my part. The effort of taking in the presence of the man and his words threatened to break my watch, my composure, my too-tightly-wound and protected spirit. While I was surprised that anyone would actually speak directly to me in this situation, I remained suspicious and wary.

After the passage of my supporter, I tried desperately to hold on to my mother's counsel. In all, it had been 25 minutes since I first approached the 12th teller's window and another 20 minutes waiting in line before that. I calculated that 72 people had been served since I first got into line and 36 people had been served since I had walked to the 12th teller's window. I declined to estimate the number of people who would be served before I left the bank.

As I finished my calculations, the fourth teller made a sign in the air in my direction. It said, "I am making progress on the state of your existence." The solicitous nodding of his head and the smile on his face said, "Don't look so stern. Relax."

I stiffened my stance in response.

Time stopped. I thought to myself, He *must* be talking to someone else. Is he signalling his boss behind me or calling more guards to haul my ass out of here?

Finally the fourth teller returned. He said, breathlessly, as if he had been doing hard manual labor, "What is your counselor's name at the welfare department?"

I answered at decibel three, "T. Hillary."

I wondered what he thought my welfare worker could do and was prepared for him to use her as a ploy to get me to move from my stance. I had already made a decision that under no circumstances was I moving until they took me away or I had cashed my check.

He went back to the phone and returned to stand before me and say triumphantly, "I have finally come up with a test to establish your identity — What is your daughter's first name?"

I was stunned. I hesitated, a little confused, as if drugged or suddenly awakened from a dream. I thought to myself a little hysterically, Is this the game show Password or something?

I was not prepared to call my daughter's name. I was also not prepared to lower my voice in the compromise of allowing only him to hear it. So in the same decibel as before, I precisely spelled out the six letters of her name. The fourth teller returned to the phone and then finally came back to me. He handed my documents to me and with them his card. He attempted to speak to me but I cut him off, after reclaiming

parts of myself, to say, "Thank you, I will use this card the next time I come to the Bank of America to cash my welfare check — with the *same* credentials that I have today."

He attempted to speak to me no further and signalled to the teller in the 12th window to cash my check.

As I was finally accomplishing my original task, I began to plot my departure so that those people would not see me cry. My face felt like granite, my body as if it belonged to a long-dead corpse. As I left the bank, I could hear myself repeating through the deadness and granite, a line from a Marge Piercy poem:

*She is not strong as a stone  
but as a wolf suckling her young  
(from "For Strong Women" in  
The Moon is Always Female.)*

The tears began to glide down my face as I willed myself to the car I had borrowed. When I finally got in, I cried out the rage and defiance that desperation had borne. I moved mechanically to start the car, to complete the still necessary tasks with the haunting feeling of the loss of something I could not define, as well as with the gain of something equally hard to put into concrete conscious thought.

A few days later, as I sat reading and half listening to music, the song playing caught my full attention as it called up the feelings of loss and gain I felt upon leaving the Bank of America on January 3. I suddenly knew. The gain was the sweet music of my mothers' voices comforting, guiding and supporting me. The loss was the bitter knowing that in my coming to *know* I had oppressed, suppressed, and ignored them, as if I were hearing- or sight-impaired, without the grace of sense expansion, and thus created a translucent and muting screen between myself and treasures of comfort, wisdom, and strength . . .

The image shows the front cover of a book. At the top, in a white banner, is the text "My Story's On!". Below this, the title "Ordinary Women/Extraordinary Lives" is written in a large, stylized font. The background of the cover is dark with some abstract white patterns.

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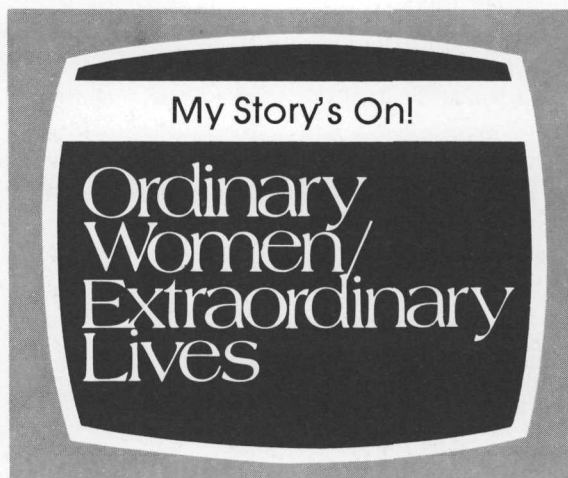
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