

VOLUME • 69

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DECEMBER 1986

# THE WITNESS

WISHES YOU A

## Blessed Christmas

The great thing about Mary  
• Sue Hiatt

'Belonging' • Malcolm Boyd

The cosmic nature  
of Christmas • John Hamel

# Letters

## Cause set back

Herewith is a running commentary on the September WITNESS, which carries significant correspondence between your Editorial Board and the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church:

To speak of the reality as "sexual preference" is to bespeak a lack of sensitivity. Dictionary definitions of "preference" are "the act of preferring," "the power or opportunity of choosing," etc. Suggesting that one chooses one's sexual orientation re-enlivens the myth that a non-gay or gay person can change at will. Further, it suggests that gay Christians are wilfully sinful in not "preferring" what most Christians consider to be the normative orientation. By including such a phrase in its open letter, THE WITNESS is setting back the very cause it presumes to assist.

The open letter suggests that the Episcopal Church is peculiarly qualified to provide leadership to Christianity in its moral confusion about the ordination of practicing gay persons. My study and writing about the official statements re the church and gay persons promulgated by 36 denominations supports that suggestion. But, for the most part, Episcopal publishing organs do not meet their responsibilities in helping our denomination assume the vanguard. Your own monthly prints personal horror stories, violent letters, and sympathy-evoking devotional pieces, rather than dealing with the substantive theological, sociological, educational, ecclesiological, and moral questions involved. If ever Episcopalianism becomes a spirit-filled prophet here, it will do so only on the basis of sound rational, prayerful, biblical, and historically aware study — not on the planks of yellow journalism, or of power politics at public assemblies. The latter two may move a denomination to different practices; only the former will give a denomination leadership in shaping the destiny of Christ's church as a whole.

It is amazing that the board presumes to call Bishop Browning to lead the way in correcting this pastoral scandal. In the few months he has been in office, he has already been doing this. Where have you folks been?

The prayer provided by the Gay Christian Movement of England reminds one how much more the church values unity as compared to justice. Many mainline denominations — including our own — demand that secular principalities and powers guarantee all civil rights to lesbian and gay persons, while themselves denying some ecclesial rights to those same people. A curious instance where the church expects government to be more "Christian" than the church. Furthermore, most of those same sectarian bodies solicited and received from a subgroup, studies and reports which recommended an openly gracious and "Christian" behavior towards same-gender lovers, but then — by votes — rejected much of that counsel in the name of maintaining denominational unity (that is, in fear of losing large parish, individual, and other organizational donors from their rolls). All hail the power of money, and peace-at-any-price!

One wonders how many of the persons involved in writing the pieces in the September issue are self-declared gay Christians. One wonders when non-gay publications will start giving power to such self-declared advocates to speak for themselves on the substantive issues and to set the course of the conversations, rather than patriarchally assume that only they (the non-gay imperialists) know how, when, where and what to say on the issue.

**The Rev. Ray Mesler, Jr.**  
Jersey City, N.J.

## Commissions can lead

Bishop Browning has clearly analyzed and stated the current "common wisdom"

of the churchly society on the subject of homosexuality. I concur that there remains a diversity of professional opinion as to the biological basis of sexual orientation, but those of us who are in the field of medical education are painfully aware that decades, perhaps a generation, may be needed for the fruits of medical research to trickle down even to the astute practitioners and opinion shapers.

The three pastoral principles enunciated by Bishop Browning, if prayerfully studied and faithfully followed, can lead only to the resolution of this current problem within the church in a manner consistent with the inclusiveness, reconciliation and love taught by Christ. The Diocesan Commissions should be expected and permitted to become leaders in this pastoral mission, with the guidance not of words, but of the *Word* and Bishop Browning's pastoral compassion.

**David J. Lochman, M.D.**  
Chicago, Ill.

## Ghettos healthier?

Thanks to THE WITNESS and the Presiding Bishop for initiating dialogue on the subject of lesbians and gays in the church. The words of the Presiding Bishop, "No ghetto is spiritually healthy," call forth my thinking on this matter.

The fact is, the ghetto may be far healthier than the society which creates its necessity. This is as true of a sexual ghetto as it was of the slave ghettos in 19th and 20th century America. The problem is that the health which is in a ghetto remains unknown until many years later. Then historians and artists, seeing with clearer vision, bring forth the truth.

Those of us who are lesbian and gay see in Jesus the One who shows the Way. In the church, we often see the Pharisee.

The critical issue, from my perspective, is whether or not the church is willing to recognize the price it has paid by separating itself from those it brands

as sinners. That which unites all people always creates evolution, grace, peace and possibility. That which separates yields death, violence, war and hatred.

When the church truly listens to the gay and lesbian community, without prejudgment, it will discover a ghetto filled with grace and power. While the larger society reacts to AIDS with fear, ignorance, loathing and perverse joy in this supposed judgment of God, the lesbian and gay community has called forth heroic testaments to the power of the Living God. I see a level of caring for one another which I have found in only one other community, the Black community. I see people dying with great pain, but fully at peace with themselves and gifting themselves in many ways to others. I see members of a community, embattled from without, showing a level of care for one another exactly like the community of Acts, where all things were held in common, and shared. And, I see healing — people getting well in non-conventional ways.

If the church, then, seeks the authority of Christ, let it with the outcasts seek Jesus, where there is no condemnation and no guilt.

**The Rev. Richard Kerr**  
San Francisco, Cal.

## Trapped in sin

I think too many people with homosexual problems have come to church for love and forgiveness, only to receive hate and rejection. So they turn to others looking for help and are told, "Oh, it's normal; it's fine . . . you're O.K., there's no problem . . . Go explore it; God loves you, He made you that way!"

God does love them, but He hates their sin. This is why the church must carefully weigh its approach to someone trapped in sin. A segment of the church is doing a disservice to the body, not only by trying to accommodate itself with the gay community, but in not addressing the

sin of sodomy.

We must scrap the buzz words, "sexual orientation," "alternative lifestyle," "enlightened relationships" and the like. Sodomy is not a civil rights issue, and it's not a case of oppression: it's a perversion. In addition, homosexuality is a choice, not only to engage in such activity, but also a choice to reveal it. Obviously there cannot be supposed discrimination against a homosexual unless that person has chosen to make his/her behavior known.

When the church stops ignoring the voluminous biblical admonitions against this practice and confronts it, we will be aimed in the right direction.

**Donald L. Adams**  
Rio Rancho, N.M.

## Passing thoughts

I'm gladly sending my renewal to THE WITNESS. Wouldn't want to be without it, after all these years. Two passing comments: 1) Mary Lou Suhor's several special contributions to the July/August issue are greatly appreciated by this isolated reader ("Guerra, Cueto home from prison" and "Conversation with Ben Bagdikian"). 2) Did anyone try to help Zal Sherwood understand the difference between "coming out" and "going public?" The former can be helpful; the latter crippling.

**The Rev. Robert Griswold**  
Lakeview, Ore.

## Why 'come out'?

Many people question why it is that we gay and lesbian people ever feel that it is necessary to tell anyone our affectional preference. That question came up at the National Church conference on AIDS in San Francisco. I found myself answering that the homophobia most of us experience is based on misperception, myth, and ignorance . . . that it is difficult

to maintain homophobic beliefs after one knows gay and lesbian people. It is somewhat like the concept of women clergy. Many were opposed to our ordination until they actually knew a woman who was called to be a priest. When the idea was no longer abstract, there was greater acceptance. I believe this is possible with lesbian and gay people also.

Obliteration of homophobia is an essential goal for the church. Homophobia creates a serious break in the Body of Christ. Rather than stress the different sexual expression of a gay or lesbian lifestyle as compared to heterosexual persons, we must stress the concepts of commitment in relationship, faithfulness to one's partner, and unselfish love. These are expectations of the "straight" community and can surely be addressed in the lesbian and gay community. Emphasis on the sanctity of marriage not only alienates gay and lesbian persons, but all of those persons who have chosen to remain single, are divorced, or widowed.

I have been faithful to the promises made when I was ordained a priest in this church. I am diligent in reading and studying scripture and have, in fact, just completed a devotional manuscript for publication. I was a faithful pastor . . . My resignation was pushed, not because I had been unfaithful, but because I am a lesbian, and the homophobia surrounding lesbian and gay persons.

Homophobia causes us to lead a closeted lifestyle. Our parishioners share the joy of family life, the birth of a child, a blossoming love, the pain of separation or divorce, and we can share nothing of our lives. I hardly advocate sharing intimate details of a relationship, and don't expect that from heterosexual people either. My hope and prayer for the church is that we can and will recognize that there is no one specific lifestyle which is better than another. Heterosexual peo-

*Continued on page 20*

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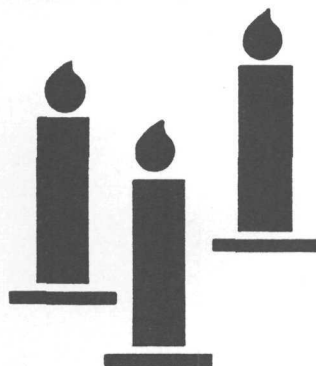
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# Editorial

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## Bob Cratchit: Father of a disabled child

*Guest editorial this month is by Cyndi Jones, editor of Mainstream, a national journal by and about handicapped people. The work below appeared previously in Mainstream, which she publishes monthly from 2973 Beech St., San Diego.*

**T**iny Tim—Charles Dickens' perception of how every well-behaved disabled child should be.

So often when we think of disabled individuals or children we are reflecting on the image of Dickens' Tiny Tim. The usual focal point of Dickens' story is the miserly Scrooge, however, let's reflect for a moment on the Cratchits and their role as parents of a handicapped child. Bob Cratchit would carry Tiny Tim around on his shoulders. The family included Tiny Tim in its daily activities and made sure his needs were met.

Why didn't Bob Cratchit ever talk about curb cuts or accessible public transportation? Probably because like most small children, Tiny Tim was easy to carry and Cratchit really didn't expect Tiny Tim to survive his childhood, much less live an independent life.

Expectations have changed since the

late 1800 s, and most radically in the past 10 years. Parents of handicapped children are seeing great strides in the medical professions that enable their children not only to survive, but to thrive. The 1975 Education of All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) has produced its share of handicapped children who expect to take their rightful place in the mainstream of society.

But these great expectations will be for nothing unless the parents of today's handicapped infants and toddlers put their muscle behind the fight for their children's future in our society.

It is sometimes difficult to see 18-20 years into the future like Scrooge had the opportunity to do, but if Bob Cratchit had, he would have realized that Tiny Tim was going to grow up to be a disabled adult; one that he could no longer carry on his shoulders or lift into the carriage. Tim probably survived Bob Cratchit and as such, not only

needed independent living skills, but also an openness of society. Tim might have worked in a sweatshop or perhaps a freak show, but with proper training and an open and educated society, Tim could have been properly placed in an accounting firm, following in his father's footsteps. But none of this mattered, because Cratchit had no view of his disabled child's future.

If we want our children to be able to use public transportation when they grow up, we had better start advocating their right to do so now. By the time they are old enough, the transportation system might be able to accommodate their needs.

It takes a long time for most systems to change. If we work hard today and are a bit lucky, by the time today's infants are adults, society will be ready to accept and welcome them as full participating members. ■

**Members of American Disabled for Accessible Public Transportation (ADAPT) blocked buses in Detroit in October to protest the lack of public transportation for handicapped people and to hassle the convention of the American Public Transportation Association, which played a key role in rescinding federal regulations designed to increase the number of buses equipped with wheelchair lifts. Some 20 protesters were arrested, including Jane Jackson, of the Episcopal Urban Caucus Board. (The Detroit News photo/ © Lynn Owens)**



# The great thing about Mary

by Suzanne Hiatt

A friend sent me an ad recently for a poster she thought I might want to use as a teaching tool. At the center of the poster is an abstract version of a madonna and child. Surrounding this medallion is the legend, *The great thing about Mary is that her son turned out so well! Alleluia!* My friend thought I might want to use the poster in a quiz; i.e. "What's wrong with the theology here expressed?" But then again, she supposed my students were too sophisticated to take it seriously.

However, the fact that the poster undoubtedly sells well (and not cheaply either — \$14.50 mounted in a clear plastic box) makes one wonder if it doesn't reflect the common Christian wisdom. There is clear and specific Dominical teaching to the contrary in the New Testament:

*While he was speaking thus, a woman in the crowd called out "Happy the womb that carried you and the breasts that suckled you!" He rejoined, "No, happy are those who hear the word of God and keep it."*

(Luke 11:27-28)

Yet many Christians still believe that women are to be judged on the accomplishments of the men they are close to and presumably influence. Popular Mariology may well be summed up in that poster despite the efforts of modern theologians like Hans Küng to honor Mary as the first among believers.

Reflections on the role of Mary in particular and women in general in the

Christian church come naturally at Christmastime. They come to me especially at the close of this year as I look back at some poignant milestones involving Anglican women in 1986. In April an event was held at Canterbury Cathedral honoring the work of Anglican women worldwide. A stirring service recognizing the various ministries of women throughout the Communion was followed by another service that a number of women felt it necessary to boycott as the host church, the Church of England, refused to allow any women priests from other provinces to exercise their sacramental ministry.

In May a woman was very nearly elected Suffragan Bishop of Washington, but again the sensibilities of the Church of England were invoked and the convention was persuaded to "wait" until after the next Lambeth Conference (a worldwide conference of Anglican bishops held every 10 years in England)

scheduled for 1988, so as not to promote "disunity" in the Anglican Communion. In July, the Church of England reaffirmed its ban on allowing women ordained in other Anglican provinces to celebrate Eucharist in English churches and declined to vote on ordaining English women priests until further study could be done. (The first such study was done in 1919 and the synod approved such ordination "in principle" over 10 years ago.)

In August came the death of Dr. Cynthia Wedel, the last of a number of great Episcopal women who pioneered in Episcopal, Anglican and ecumenical leadership roles in the 1960s and '70s. In September the U.S. House of Bishops urged caution in consecrating women bishops here, strongly suggesting we wait until after Lambeth 1988 to take such a step.

All these events leave me feeling sad about the prospects for women keeping

## End of an era?



Wedel



Kellerman



Rodenmayer



Murray

**The Rev. Suzanne R. Hiatt** is professor of pastoral theology at Episcopal Divinity School.

the word of God in the Christian church today, certainly in my small corner of that church. We will miss Dr. Wedel, along with Marion Kellerman, Pauli Murray and Betsy Rodenmayer, all recently deceased, not only for the leadership they exercised and for the mentors they were for many of us, but because they don't seem to have women successors among the church's leaders. Were they the first in so many areas only to be the last as well?

Perhaps women's leadership is more diffuse now, many women doing the jobs that only a few were allowed to do a generation ago. Woman's voice is no longer univocal (indeed it never was) and no one person or small group can represent "the women" anymore. If so, well and good, but I wonder. In the Episcopal church women have been priests for almost 13 years, deacons for 16 and the backbone of most parishes for over 200 years. Where are the women rectors of "cardinal parishes," the ordained women on the national church staff? Where are the women, lay and ordained, who chair diocesan standing committees, provincial bodies, standing committees of the General Convention House of Deputies? Where are the Episcopal women in leadership roles in the Anglican Consultative Council and in national and international ecumenical organizations? I know there are a few, but not nearly enough.

And perhaps symbolically most important and telling, where are the women in the House of Bishops? It is embarrassing to be part of a church where one house of its bi-cameral legislature excludes women entirely. It is even more embarrassing to hear members of that house describe it as "the most exclusive men's club in America" and mean it, or to hear them chat about which members attended which men's college and belonged to what fraternity. I suppose that goes on in the U.S. Senate in spite of the presence of a few women, but it is no way

to run a country or a church.

It is amusing in a bittersweet way to watch the House of Bishops debate the matter of women bishops. They acknowledge that the canons of the Episcopal Church clearly allow for women bishops as they do women deacons and priests, so we don't hear many arguments about why women can't be bishops. We do hear arguments about timing and disunity and pain and suffering on the part of male bishops who have stuck it out despite women priests but who could not tolerate women bishops. These are arguments we have heard before — when laywomen threatened to invade the lay order of the House of Deputies in the 1950s and '60s and when women clergy threatened the clergy order of the same house in the 1970s. A different ox is being gored, but the cries of its owners are similar to cries we've heard before.

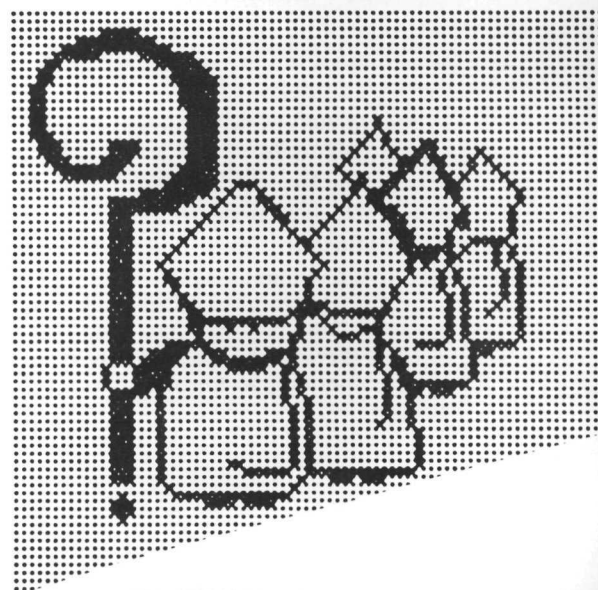
It is ironic that the bishops have given the question so much time, since they are the only group in the Episcopal Church who do not normally vote for bishops. Bishops are elected in our polity by clergy (deacons and presbyters) and lay people. True, diocesan bishops do call for the election of suffragans and coadjutors, but they do not have a vote as to who will be selected by the diocesan convention. The House of Bishops may, by majority vote, refuse to consent to the election of a particular person (and have done so in the past, most often on grounds of churchmanship or alleged heresy), but this power is negative and after the fact. It is a collective veto also granted to diocesan standing committees. Members of the House of Bishops have twice indicated they would not veto a bishop-elect *because* she was a woman, but they have also asked the dioceses not to put them to the test before Lambeth 1988.

Meanwhile, God is undoubtedly calling women to be bishops. Fine candidates have emerged in a number of Episcopal elections over the last few years and, were it not for the plea to wait until after

Lambeth 1988, I suspect we would already have at least one woman bishop and that several more would be elected in the next two years. But the siren cry of "wait" — most insistently keening from England but not absent among American bishops — is heard by the electors. They are decent folk and do not want to cause any pain or suffering they can avoid. (Women's pain and suffering is apparently part of our natural condition and therefore not to be considered.)

So I feel sad about women's leadership prospects as I think about Mary this Christmas. Hearing the will of God and keeping it is complicated by the church's preference for women who bear and nurture sons who turn out well.

Yet sometimes in these dark December days I wonder what would happen if we did hear the word of God and kept it. Suppose women who are called to be bishops heard the call not only from God but from their fellow Christians as well. Suppose Anglicans in New Zealand and Canada and Hong Kong and Brazil and Kenya and the United States and Uganda and all the Anglican provinces that have women priests (and even perhaps some that don't) elected and ordained a number of women bishops in the next two years and presented Lambeth 1988 with the fact rather than the theory. That would certainly change the debate just as the fact of women priests changed the debate on that issue here in the United



States and made it real.

In my fantasy these women bishops would be elected and ordained within the structures of their own provincial churches. They would be regular suffragan (even — dare we hope — diocesan) bishops, canonically chosen and certified. Failing that, for the weight of caution is very strong in regular channels, some of them might have been chosen as special bishops to women in their respective churches.

In the American church we have a special suffragan bishop for the Armed Forces, whose duty is to minister to men and women in the military wherever they may be stationed. Military chaplains are responsible to their own diocesan bishops (where they are canonically resident), but they do have someone to turn to for

pastoral care and advice who is especially charged with ministry to the military.

Perhaps we could use that model to create several suffragan bishops for women, whose responsibilities would be to provide pastoral care and advice to the women of the church. We know that such “extra-territorial” bishops can function in our system. We also know that women would welcome the pastoral care and advice of other women as we develop new roles and leadership styles in a very changed world. There would need to be not one but several such bishops. One thing we have learned over the years is that no woman should be asked to take on such a burden by herself.

Suppose Lambeth 1988 had to deal with real women bishops from all over

the world. No longer could the idea of women bishops be considered “a hare-brained American scheme,” but must be taken seriously as a vocation whose time has come. The rhetoric about pain and disunity would be minimized as it was with priesthood after the fact. To paraphrase Shakespeare, “Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love — or for clergywomen.”

Best of all, for my fantasy to come to pass women ourselves would have had to take leadership in the church and to have insisted that our voice be heard. We would have truly learned the great thing about Mary — not that her son turned out well or badly, but that she heard the word of God and kept it. Alleluia! ■

## Speak truth to power, my love

Speak truth to power, my love  
and watch their sleek smiles disappear.  
The gatekeeper's face hardens from the impact.  
And those who should feel only shame,  
are filled with righteous puffery.

Meanwhile, the loyal oppositionists,  
academic acolytes, pop scribes,  
the Bear-baiting labor dealers,  
all sniff the wind and test the *Times*,  
trimming their sails, ready about!

With earnest asides,  
they counsel self-censorship,  
urging you to a smaller voice  
to gain a bigger audience,  
as they twist themselves in a tighter circle,  
twisting for their credibility.

They know how to show courage  
against easy targets.  
Waiting for an approving glance,  
they demand faultless standards  
from besieged infant revolutions.  
A critical distance they keep  
when victims fight back and win.  
They do mainstream imitations  
Responsible Critics from Pragmatics, Inc.,  
and flash their anti-Menace credentials  
as they seek entry through the reception gate.

But you, my love, standing outside  
under the chill glare of mean eyes,  
you just speak truth to power  
and feel your power grow.  
Your life itself an eloquent testimony  
of fightback and fightforward  
against their gossamer and stone.

Moving quietly in a raucous history,  
the trickle becomes a tide  
until one day the soldiers  
look the other way or melt into the crowd,  
drawn by the padding of a million footsteps.

M'Lords squawk urgent commands  
to stop the insolent dance.  
M'Lords sit in their bayonet temples,  
calling upon the Furies of private interest,  
hurling down their incantations.

And you,  
you stand there like a thousand legions  
and speak truth,  
remembering how the tides  
can break down walls.

— Michael Parenti



# A Luta Continua — the struggle continues by Barbara C. Harris



## 'Tis the season

**T**he pre-Christmas mail always brings a few refreshing accounts of activities which illustrate that some people really do care about their neighbors and others whom they may not know, but with whom they are moved to share and to tangibly express concern. A recent Diocesan Press Service news packet contained one such item.

Seventeen local Episcopal parishes in the Diocese of Washington, D.C. have funded a residence in a neighborhood north of Georgetown for five people with AIDS. The first such undertaking by churches in that area, it is the outgrowth of a discussion between Christ Church, Georgetown and the Whitman-Walker Clinic, the area's largest provider of services to persons with AIDS. Members of the parish were looking for a way to assist those suffering with the disease. When the clinic described the backlog of people needing housing, the parish found a way to help. A committee of parishes in the diocese — now the Episcopal Caring Response Committee — was formed, the house was opened in early September of this year and by the end of October over \$26,000 had been raised with \$9,000 more pledged.

The home is administered by the Whitman-Walker Clinic, which also runs five similar facilities. The others are funded through a combination of public appropriations and private, largely secular, contributions. As the epidemic continues to grow, the clinic plans to open more.

Such facilities are necessary for persons with AIDS who are well enough to

care for themselves physically, but are too ill to support themselves financially. They cook their own meals and perform the usual household chores. Those who can work contribute a portion of their income toward the cost of operating the facility.

That's good news as Christmas approaches and our thoughts turn to the coming of the Savior who had no place to lay his head. It also should sharpen our awareness of the absolute necessity for some massive new efforts to attack homelessness, hunger and similar problems in our communities.

Sociology professor Robert Bellah's compendium of interviews with middle Americans — *Habits of the Heart* — is well titled. Its analysis of individualism and commitment in American life is most revealing of the dominant national psyche and uncovers much of the underlying lack of a sense of community among so many. One of the conclusions Bellah and his research associates draw is that the church could be a vital force in the recovery of communal values in our society. While no minorities were included in the research that produced "Habits," that particular conclusion is something the Black church has known for a long time. Historically, it has been the ethic and the ethos of many Black congregations.

It was out of basic needs and a sense of community that many Black-owned and operated burial societies (which later evolved into insurance companies), banks, savings and loan associations, credit unions, hospitals and other institutions

were spawned by Black churches. For many Blacks, these efforts found their genesis in African societies where the welfare of widows and orphans was the concern and the responsibility of the entire community.

The cooperative effort of the Washington churches with Whitman-Walker and similar undertakings are to be cautiously commended. What is needed are large scale partnerships between the church and other institutions of the community — public and private — that address the spiritual and temporal needs of the whole person. Old divisions between church and society must continue to fade because no institution of the community, no matter how well intended, can go it alone these days.

The more day-care centers and soup kitchens churches open on their own, with only token hand-outs from the public and private sector, the less the whole society is called into account for the causes of hunger, joblessness and the plight of working mothers. The more churches open their sanctuaries as shelters for the homeless, the less will be done about adequate and affordable housing for the poor.

As necessary as these stop-gap measures may be, until we undertake some realistic efforts that cooperatively involve the church with other major institutions of the society, we are engaging in an exercise about as effective in the long run as rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. ■

# 'My name is Ed. I'm a racist.'

by Ed Kinane

I recently went with a friend to a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. Before each person spoke he or she said, "My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I'm an alcoholic." AA knows that recovery requires acknowledging one's illness; denial makes recovery impossible. What follows isn't about drinking but about a more widespread disease. Before I say more, I want to introduce myself: "My name is Ed. I'm a racist."

No, I'm not flaunting my bigotry, nor being cleverly rhetorical, nor tormenting myself with guilt. I'm acknowledging that I've been deeply conditioned by a society permeated with racism and that recovery is the task of a lifetime.

AA teaches that alcohol is cunning; so too is racism. Just as it is hard to admit alcoholism, so too is it hard to admit racism — thanks to our stereotyped notion of what racism is. Conveniently, our stereotype involves alien behavior in which we would never engage. We know we're not racist because we would never condone burning a cross on someone's lawn; we may even wince at ethnic slurs or take offense when someone says "nigger."

We view racism as "elsewhere," coarse, bullying, and face-to-face: Bull Connor and lynching in the bad old rural South. But after World War II, as blacks by the millions were dispossessed of their land and sought sanctuary in Detroit, Boston or New York, racism got hip and turned inside out. In the urban liberal

North, racism, still the mainstay of class privilege, became refined, avoiding and systemic. Spawning the suburb and ghetto, it cloaked white dominance with white separatism.

Anti-racism has also become stereotyped. Again, conveniently, the focus is on the alien or far away. We know we're anti-racist because we angrily condemn Apartheid; we may even do some organizing against U.S. investment in South Africa. But if our concept of racism/anti-racism is limited to such obvious examples, it is unlikely that we're challenging the racism within us. Nor do we grasp racism's breadth and subtlety or perceive the social and economic forces which foster the de facto apartheid that crosscuts every facet of our society.

Propping up this lower case apartheid is what can be called tunnel vision. It is infinitely more destructive than the malice of the Ku Klux Klan. Tunnel vision is a cultural egoism which assumes — often unconsciously — that only white history

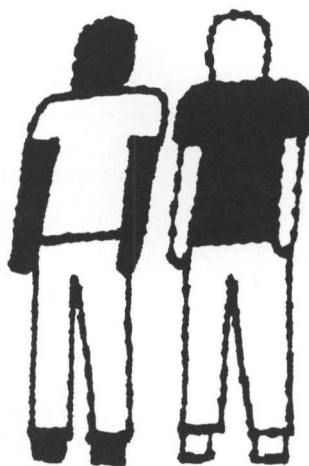
or suffering or interests or discovery are worthy of notice. Most of us grew up in white neighborhoods going to white schools where we internalized the white version of life. Our openness to people of color was "whited out" at an early age.

In my first 14 years of school I had only three black classmates; I've never had a black teacher. I was 19 before I had my first conversation with a black person. My first years of college were spent with the Jesuits in a lovely ivy enclave set off by walls and security police from the teeming inner city at its gate.

I quit school to work construction. The job paid well — thanks to the building boom of the '60s which, in the name of urban renewal, forced the relocation of thousands of blacks off the precious real estate between downtown and the university. Few of these blacks could break into the construction trades; there was not a single black in our union local. My fellow workers were determined to keep it that way. No wonder that when I was in South Africa recently it seemed so much like home.

Even in the '80s as a so-called "grass-roots" activist I've had little contact with the local black or Indian or Latino community. It seems much of our activist subculture, so vain in its political correctness, simply reflects society at large.

Sometimes our tunnel vision leads us to be duped by the foreign policy double standard which regards only political violence aimed at whites as terrorism. In recent decades whites have not been the target of U.S., Israeli or South African air raids, so we don't call those atrocities terrorism. Similarly, although we call



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Qaddafi a terrorist, we don't call members of Congress terrorists when they vote tens of millions for military regimes and mercenaries. In the moral calculus of white America the tens of thousands of slain Nicaraguans and Salvadorans simply don't exist. Even we who actively oppose U.S. policy in Central America often forget the racism at its heart.

The tunnel vision that denies or de- means did not originate with racism. It began, historically and personally, before we were exposed to ethnic diversity. As children, while being molded for roles defined by gender, we acquired the tunnel vision of a culture based on male supremacy. Sexist behavior provides the on- going rehearsal that hones our racist performance. Sexism is the parent or prototype of racism. It grinds the lens

which makes our racist outlook second nature.

When we were young we had no con- trol over our indoctrination and so were not to blame for our tunnel vision. But now we are responsible for the kinds of callousness and exclusivity we choose to honor. Many of us eagerly, or unwit- tingly, float along the mainstream that invalidates the lives of the disempow- ered. Their gifts and their rights, their needs and their pain are systematically negated, rendered invisible.

What can we do to shed our self- contrived blinders? What can we do to burst the bubble of our self-contrived segregation? We can raise our children — and educate ourselves — as non-sexist and non-racist as possible. This is no easy task. It requires that we become as

children and unlearn much that our cul- ture keeps teaching us. It requires rolling back the snug, the smug, chosen ignor- ance that comes from having imbibed the white version of life.

As involved citizens we can encourage our peace and justice groups not only to take on the Apartheid over there, but also to confront apartheid here. We can seek to discern why so many of our enter- prises — whether they be the neighbor- hoods we live in or the causes we lobby for — are lily white. We can work with the poor and people of color locally on issues of importance to them. If we take that mighty step our eyes will at last be- gin to see the huge majority of our species who are not white, who are not affluent, and who do not blackmail the globe with nuclear terror. ■

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Robert F. McGovern

## The cosmic

**T**he Christmas event is a cosmic one. Its significance has to do with God's coming to humankind, and with a change in the world for all time that results from this coming. From this point of view, the events of Jesus' birth change our understanding of things from the time before time to the end of things and the eternity beyond time. For this Jesus, who in the traditions becomes the Christ or the one sent from God, stands one and the same with God at the beginning and at the end. He is symbolized in the tradition as the Alpha and Omega — the beginning and end of all meaning.

For us, it may be easier and better to start with the beginning as it has been given to us. Was there ever a story so beautifully told? Was there ever such an inspiration rolling through the centuries commanding our gifted ones to great works of unutterable beauty in song, story, spire, color and light? We see paintings of animals adoring the baby in the manger; paintings of Mary, holding the child, of a beauty that brings awe at the power and imagination of the mind's eye; and of angels, golden and glorious, ascending to a realm where our hearts virtually leap to follow. We see our own children at local church or school auditoriums looking like angels we know they

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# nature of Christmas

by John J. Hamel

are not and singing like we never knew they could.

So much for what has been made of the story — we would almost be believers because of that alone. But what in the story shows us a reality not layered over with our own shimmering sentimentality? What are the facts, shorn of the wonders of the stars, kings, angels, and adoring shepherds?

What we are really given are two people — one not so young — who are poor and powerless and about to have a baby. They have been ordered by imperial decree to return to their native city for a census and eventual taxation. You can be fairly certain that most of the people the Gospels call Herodians and other officials and the wealthy had rulings from their lawyers and tax collectors that allowed them to avoid a long journey to their native villages. Those who couldn't find a tax loophole certainly commanded enough respect in the community to have the innkeeper find them a room; many would not have been turned away under any circumstances.

The innkeeper, often portrayed as hardhearted, undoubtedly took one look at Mary and quickly decided — with one eye to an image of bad publicity — that maybe the stable could be brought into use after all: "Well, my friend, there really is nothing I can do for you here, but I see your plight and there is just the possibility that this place out back here . . ." The man was not unkind. He wasn't thinking that animals look cute in paintings and on cards; he knew for a fact that they were at least warm. And shepherds know something about birth; they might have a lively

interest in the events in the local stable that night.

They were also, like all poor people, subject to the wanton brutality of the organizing ability of Imperial Rome. Rome's local representative, Herod, was obviously feeling some kind of political vulnerability. He had his soldiers move through a village where he thought a threat might develop and kill all the male children under a certain age. Why not? Can you think of a better way to keep an unwanted or possibly rebellious group of people under control? What are kings for? Didn't Rome bring order and control wherever she went? Joseph and Mary may have been political refugees for some time from this wanton brutality, because Matthew says they did not return from Egypt until after Herod was dead.

## Birth story universal

The simple birth story is for all peoples and all can relate to it. Mother, child, father, shepherds, animals, clear starry night, and a lowly place. There are no crowds of slaves, retainers, captains of cohorts, senators, and nobles awaiting the news of a new Caesar from the messenger of the current political god. This is not a birth where groups of mounted knights might wait in the castle courtyard under great flickering flares while serfs surround the moat and all wait to hear of a new lord and master.

We do not have to be familiar with captains of industry — where the family and controlling shareholders would be anxiously waiting to hear of a successor registered at Exeter and Harvard and at

the best New York clubs at the moment of birth — to understand this story. Christianity lays claims to universal truths and here we have some evidence. The book containing this story has been translated into every conceivable living language and a few dead ones, and everywhere the book has been carried people have responded.

The world's people can say, "This much I understand, this child and his life relates to me, what happens here and afterward can matter to me." We often think the stable is some sort of staging meant to hide the fact that a most royal personage has come among us. The real events, we seem to feel, are signified by those things that happen in the sky. Actually, it is the other way around. For a child of truly lowly birth will eventually change the world for all time to come and will confront us all with questions about our life that cannot be avoided and that bring light or darkness to us all — life or death.

We can approach the final phase of Jesus' life journey by asking, as many have before, what he thought of himself. In what sense was Jesus conscious of his mission and aware of his stature as God's Son? If he knew something of this, as he seems to in the stories, at what point did the knowledge come? Did Jesus learn about himself from his baptism by John and from John's view of Jesus? Maybe it was at the temptation and his transfiguration where the Apostles saw Jesus in white robes. Maybe. Maybe.

These are virtually unanswered questions and yet if left unanswered, it seems impossible, or has seemed impossible to

those who care at all, to make sense of the mystery left by Jesus' death at Golgotha. Once again, it won't do. We must find another way. There must be another vision, a way of thinking that can resolve these things in our time.

Go back, look again. What is there to be found?

Did Jesus believe he was the Messiah — the one sent from God? There can be little doubt that he had a strong sense of his relationship to God and was sent to the people much as the prophets were. There is also little doubt that he had ideas of a different kingdom that was not of this world and that these ideas were related to the end of the world and the establishment of a new kingdom by God. In various forms, these ideas were abroad in Israel in Jesus' time and were held by many individuals and groups. These "messianic" ideas were not always taken quite literally even in the first century, but were often meant lyrically, symbolically, and metaphorically. Even in the Gospels, this is the case in many instances where Jesus expresses such ideas.

But nonetheless, there is the interpretation of the Christian church and its historical expressions, awkward for our times, to be sure, but at the heart of Christian experience over the centuries. Jesus is celebrated as Messiah, the one sent specially from God, beautifully and lovingly, faithfully and universally throughout our world, in ways held dear by millions. Badly used at times though it may have been, the message built from the story of this man has comforted and strengthened people far more than we can ever begin to express. Has this journey, in 1986, brought some new light for us?

### **What Jesus refused to be**

The most striking part of the story of Jesus' last days is not so much in what many claimed he was, but in what he

refused to be. He rejects every claim made for him, much in the same way he rebuked the demons and told people he healed to tell no one but to go to the Temple and give thanks to God. Peter said, at one point, that some people thought Jesus was the Christ and Jesus tells him to be quiet and talks about having to die. The disciples dispute among themselves about who will be the greatest in the coming kingdom and Jesus gets quite angry with them. A man approaches with the greeting "good teacher" and is told none is good but God alone. We see him, most clearly towards the end, turning aside every claim by silence or by turning it back upon the speaker. The religious leaders ask if he claims to be the Son of God, the one that is to come, and he replies that that is what they themselves say; then he adds an apocalyptic saying about the end of time. Clearly, the ideas he had were not related to his lifetime nor, seemingly, to what he was being accused of. Pilate asks if he is a king and Jesus in effect says those are your words not mine. Then, amidst the claims and counterclaims, false charges, false witness, and lies, Jesus falls totally silent and goes to his death.

Many theologians and preachers have led us to think of these events as a sort of necessary deception on God's part. Jesus had to die because that was what God wanted from Jesus, who was a special kind of being on a kind of special mission. We find out about this after three days and Jesus' resurrection when everything will be all right again and we will see how God was acting through the life and death of Jesus in a transaction between God's world up there and our world as we know it down here. This may be conceived in sophisticated terms or claimed to be symbolic in some way, but all in all, it amounts to the same thing. It is a view that comes from the mindset of the time that the New Testament was written and is reinforced by the church fathers and the building of the creeds, most especially

by the powerful figure of Anselm.

The whole "action" of God is regarded as a sort of trick, is often expressed that way in the literature. But, as Einstein has said in another connection, "God does not play tricks." The world view of the traditional formulation contained the kernel of Christian truth for well over a thousand years — albeit uneasily, as we see from inquisitions, religious wars, crusades, and many lesser evils. But since the time of Copernicus and Galileo, certainly since Bohr, Einstein, and Hubble, modern physics and astronomy, atomic furnaces, and space probes, this world view has gradually weakened and finally turned itself into the tool of the mindset that seeks for a certainty in life that cannot be found. Faith becomes a special type of knowledge and belief is presented to us as accepting something we know is not true.

But we have our precedent from the stories of Jesus' birth, where we put aside the events in the sky and looked for the realities that kindled the initial expressions of faith. If we look at the whole story in that way, we find a man who led a life of total faithfulness to the essential God of his people, the God of forgiveness and love. Far from being some hidden power, we find him rejecting every power and authority that others claimed for themselves or attempted, one way or another, to thrust upon him. Jesus was broken and went to his death because of what everyone else thought he was, feared he might be or hoped that he would be. He would have none of it, he had even put aside the powers that his love had given him to heal, lest they lead people astray and substitute magic for faith. It is *not* that Jesus is some special power and came with the authority to represent God on earth but is hidden for a time; it *is* that he shows forth the traditional God of love and forgiveness in a new and compelling way by taking on himself no authority whatsoever and by accepting no power at all.

The life and death of Jesus are an event in time that change more than our intellectual understanding — our “illumination,” so to speak — because they change the very substance of life in a fundamental way. We are dealing here with a view of the Christian truth that is well beyond the sweet reasonableness of “modern” Christian thought that always comes down to making Jesus and his life some sort of example.

Leaving aside the older notions of original sin which belong to the two-story, supernatural version of Christian events, our problems with faith, love, and life have recently been more often described in psychological terms. One popular, widespread, and even profound version of this arises out of the idea of “separation,” our separation from God and our separation from our fellow humans. There are well-trained and brilliant clergy who can use categories like “separation,” “alienation,” and “loneliness” with very telling and true effect. The categories of

“power” and “authority” may bring a new set of descriptive thoughts that are somewhat stronger because they spin out of the basic events of Jesus’ life and death. They may even provide a better grounding for the psychological truths. For is it not our condition, the condition of all human beings, that we cannot abandon the need for authority and the desire to wield power over others? Do we not totally resist letting go; do we not find it impossible to abandon what we feel is best, especially for those we love? Is this not our “pride,” which needs to be overcome and is the source of our separation? Has not Jesus brought to us an understanding of God’s love that breaks through to us and gives us the courage to turn from this way of life, to let go, to love, to care, and to be as we were meant to be?

So we are able, in a new way, to express the true paradox of our faith. God is revealed in Jesus in a startling way. The most powerful idea we can have —

that of God — and what we must conceive of as the final authority for our life, is revealed in a life that rejects all power and all authorities. God is pure spirit, God is perfect love, there is none above God. To believe in God is to believe that love and caring, justice and peace are the very foundations of human life.

No authority that humans may find — not science, not philosophy, not living history or any other truth or thought can stand above that faith. No power we take unto ourselves to exercise — that of the state, of economic organizations, of institutions (even church and university) or any other source — can occupy our first loyalty or be allowed to corrupt our relations with our fellows so as to leave them at our mercy or shrink the scope of their lives for our benefit. These are crucial guiding principles and they lead us to be very circumspect in the powers, laws, institutions, restrictions, governances that we would inflict on others for their own good. ■

## To a God without papers

**Undocumented God:**  
you cross borders without inspection,  
you know you smuggle goods  
that would make customs officers  
very perplexed.

**Undocumented God:**  
you manage without a Green Card,  
without proof of belonging  
to this empire.

**You are an uncredentialed God,  
a God-not-figured-out:**

not by the FBI  
not by the CIA  
not by the INS  
not by the IRS  
not by the SSS

(Computers say when asked:  
“This God does not compute”)

There are no fingerprints,  
no driver’s license number,  
no credit cards,  
no trace.

**Because you are undocumented!**

You said “No, thank you” to the melting pot.  
You graciously declined  
an advisory job  
with the government.  
You would not sit  
with the board of directors  
of a business concern

(even when they all thought  
that their fabulous prosperity  
meant you were on their side  
and had finally accepted  
to sign the proper forms.)

**But you are God,  
definitely without papers,**

**God**  
foreign  
marvelously free,  
a wandering God  
who crosses borders  
as some of us do  
looking for work.

**Undocumented God:**  
if you are ever detained  
by the Border Patrol  
know that you have the right  
to remain silent  
know that you have the right  
to remain free.

— Aurora Camacho de Schmidt  
*Poem available in Spanish*



# On Bishop Tutu, gays, Christmas and belonging together

by Malcolm Boyd

**“I**f we could but recognize our common humanity, that we do belong together, that our destinies are bound up with one another’s, that we can be free only together, that we can be human only together . . .”

These are Desmond M. Tutu’s words at his installation as Archbishop of Cape Town. He was speaking, of course, in the context of the possibilities of “a glorious South Africa . . . where all live harmoniously as members of one family, the human family, God’s family.”

His words also speak sensitively and prophetically in the context of where, and how, gay people fit into the church. “If we could but recognize our common humanity . . .” We cannot do this when some of us are likened to lepers, or notorious sinners, by virtue of our sexual orientation. This, despite the fact we have been baptized, confirmed, and sometimes ordained.

I remember when Black people were not welcome in most White Episcopal churches. Apartheid was practiced with the rigidity of a sledgehammer. I also recall a western U.S. town with *two* Roman Catholic parishes — one offering the Mass for Anglos, the other offering the Mass for Latinos. The latter largely comprised farm workers not acceptable to middle-class Christians with different cultural mores.

“That we do belong together . . .” Gay men and lesbians have been told from time immemorial that they were welcome in the church only if masked, if “telling a lie for Christ.” Needless to say, this has not been congruent with enabling either mental health or spiritual well-being. If one’s mask momentarily happened to fall on the floor, there was hell to pay. Hell, defined vividly afterwards by those required to live through it. This cruelty was enacted beneath the shadow of

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**Malcolm Boyd**

cool angels’ wings, in the name of the Good Shepherd.

“That our destinies are bound up with one another’s . . .” Shortly after my “coming out” in 1976, I was invited to attend the funeral of a priest whom I had long known and respected. A large number of clergy were present. As we vested in the parish hall, another priest asked to be introduced to me. I reached out, took his extended hand, smiled. I had no way of knowing that in a moment his calculated smile would turn into a mask-like hate stare. Suddenly he withdrew his hand — fiercely, with animal strength — leaving mine hanging in empty air. He simply stood there to a count of five, staring angrily, before he turned his back and strode away. He created an incident of extraordinary embarrassment for me. The crowded parish hall fell silent, but no one came forward to offer comfort or comradeship. The priest-as-judge had made his point, his “witness.”

“If we could but recognize our common humanity, that we



do belong together, that our destinies are bound up with one another's . . ." Desmond Tutu's words ring especially true for those of us, heterosexual or gay, who are yoked together by Christ in his church. It is a church with such a high proportion of gay people in its ranks, clerical and lay, that sometimes — as I've noted in *Gay Priest: An Inner Journey* — I've felt that I stumbled as Malcolm in Wonderland along an ecclesiastical landscape.

The church has an enormous task to try to translate Christ's gospel of love to a puzzled, frustrated, angry world. How can the church be made more relevant, appealing, approachable to the contemporary people who inhabit that world? Surely not by practicing apartheid in any form, slamming doors in peoples' faces, remaining uncaring instead of loving, denouncing in the place of healing, or expressing professional spiritual elitism as over against others' alleged spiritual inferiority.

*How relate to another human being?* If one is honest, this is never an easy question. I remember when I was a chaplain at Wayne State University and lived in the inner-city of Detroit. A block away, a figure framed in a window looked small. Yet the same figure loomed large in my consciousness and became unforgettable for me. It somehow incarnated the meaning of that question: How relate to another human being?

*Look up at that window where the old guy is sitting.*

*See, he's half-hidden by the curtain that's moving a little in the breeze. That tenement — it's a poor place to have to live, isn't it, Jesus?*

*He is seated alone by a kitchen table and looking blankly out the window. He lives with his sister, who is away working all day. There is nothing for him to do. He doesn't have any money; all he has is time.*

*Who is he in my life, Jesus? What has he got to do with me? He's your brother, and you love him. What does this say to me, Christ? I don't know what sense I am supposed to make out of this. I mean, how can I possibly be responsible in any honest, meaningful way for that guy?*

*He just moved a short bit away from the window. Maybe he moved because he felt my eyes on him from the sidewalk down here. I didn't mean to embarrass him. I just wanted to let him know somebody understands he's alive and he's your brother, so he's not alone or lost. Does he know it, Jesus?*

*Are You Running with Me, Jesus?*

Do we ever know completely, or for long stretches of time, that we're *really* secure? Can we help one another along the way, maybe with a symbolic reminder of God's love expressed in human terms? Can we help to raise one another's self-

esteem a notch in a world that likes to batter it; become a concrete expression of compassion in the midst of terror, fear and hate? The man in the window is an archetypal figure for me now. I've seen him — or her — in many a window since I lived in Detroit. The figure haunts me for it bespeaks love, and the absence of love.

"That we can be free only together, that we can be human only together . . ." What is the larger context in which gay people live and work in the church? What do gay Christians mean in, and to, the church? The theology of liberation extends to gay people. Baptism guarantees that there are no second-class members of the church. Membership signifies freedom to be oneself, created in the image of God; freedom to grow in the nurturing love of Christ. But how may this be put into practice now for gay people in the church?

First, by granting permission for the closeted to "come out" if they wish, into full acceptance and love.

Second, by opening up the ordination process for lesbians and gay men, without further hypocrisy or calumny.

Third, by blessing relationships of gay people. In this age of AIDS, when having multiple sex partners is seen as a primary cause of the disease, it is an outrage against the Holy Spirit when the church withholds a blessing from those who choose faithfulness to a life partner. Gay relationships have long suffered because of the absence of support. It is time to redress that wrong.

Fourth, by relaxing in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Practice what Reinhold Niebuhr called "Christian nonchalance." Let go of old fears and hatreds. Shed stereotypes, see people. Try to relate. Smile. Laugh. Touch: it's only flesh and blood.

The church has an opportunity, virtually unparalleled in our time, for genuine evangelism and pastoral outreach.

*Burnt-out people*

*play with fire again*

*light candles in darkness*

*a moral minority emerges*

*integrates diversity*

*feminine, masculine*

*heterosexual, gay, lesbian*

*Black, White*

*Latino, Anglo*

*European, Asian, African*

*new breed*

*sophisticated beyond belief*

*innocent as lambs*

*tough survivors, tender lovers*

*God isn't Lionel Barrymore anymore*

*glimmer of deity*

*along lines of*

*Dorothy Day, Barbara Jordan  
Eleanor Roosevelt, Georgia O'Keeffe*

*Endless procession  
chanting, robed  
women and men  
(there's even a place for me)  
a tiny seashell  
on floor of mighty sea  
a small streak of color  
in blazing sunset*

*Half Laughing/Half Crying*

A new generation of gay people, comprising a sizable proportion of the urban population, presently is indifferent to the church that has clearly expressed indifference and hostility toward it. A multitude of gay people will not feel an affinity for the church *without* an unequivocally warm invitation. Does the church wish to bar its doors to this burgeoning community of caring, creative, productive people who need spiritual nourishment — and have so much to offer?

An influx of gay people into the church may, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, change the church itself. The church may reach a more honest and healthy view of human sexuality as created by God. It may even find new paths toward servanthood and “foot-washing,” in place of outmoded monarchical patriarchy and the stinging blasphemy of self-righteousness that stands in the way of Christ’s inclusiveness.

I’d like to see Bishop Tutu’s beautiful words printed on a Christmas card: “If we could but recognize our common humanity, that we do belong together, that our destinies are bound up with one another’s, that we can be free only together, that we can be human only together . . .”

At Christmas, we realize with special clarity that Christ has entered into our common humanity as one of us. So, we belong together in Christ. Christ’s gift to us of freedom and full humanity cannot ever be “mine,” it is inescapably “ours,” as we contemplate the manger scene and later stand at the foot of the cross.

*Oh Jesus . . . it is so cold and lonely to be separated,  
isolated, fearful, unloving . . . warm us . . . vivify us  
. . . touch us . . . hold us . . . make us see we are one in  
you, all parts and partners in the morality play called  
life . . .*

It’s Christmas again, Jesus. We’re going to celebrate your birthday another time around. But are we aware you’re *real*, Jesus? If not, maybe this is why we seem to be despising humanness in our world right now. Help us to understand what it means to be truly human and real, with you and the others with whom we share life. Happy birthday, Jesus. And, thanks for being here. ■

## Beware the mothers

once i railed against god  
for giving me children  
when i wanted to fight dragons.  
now i know  
my children are the eyes  
through which i see dragons  
more clearly.

i say to you, men:  
beware the mothers  
the ones who cherish the future  
because they have given birth to it.

ours is a tenderness  
born in the late-night caress  
of a slumbering child.  
ours is a fierceness  
born of watching our children cry  
where there is nothing we can do.

i say to you, men:  
we will not abandon the children  
the future  
to the myopic ones  
who would turn playgrounds  
to battlegrounds  
and swimming holes  
to fox holes.

you will not steal the future  
from my children.  
you will not destroy  
their birthright.  
i will not hand it to you  
it does not belong to you.  
i have birthed the future  
my children.  
and you must learn to cherish it  
as i do them.

— patricia broughton

## When elephants fight, grass suffers

It is important to remember that when we raise the question of peace, we do not only speak about the arms race at the top, but we also look at the grass, which suffers when elephants fight. I am one who belongs to the grassroots.

And what is the elephant fight all about? This question has to be carefully answered. What role do we play in relation to the grass which suffers?

In this search, I need you, my Christian sisters, to assist me in finding my role, so that it becomes our struggle together. We need desperately a circle of friends at all levels from the stem of the grass up to the elephants, in order to develop a global understanding of the problems and are not too narrow in our approach.

**Sithembiso Nyoni/Zimbabwe  
World Encounter, Fall '86**

# Short Takes

## Whose poor? Who's poor?

One of the truest, deepest themes of Sacred Scripture is the special love and care God has for the little people. But who believes it? The world surely has a multiplicity of poor. Some 800 million people live in absolute poverty where hunger, homelessness and sickness are chronic.

It is becoming clear to me that God's expressions of care for the downtrodden are not intended for them at all; that all the words of hope and restoration Scripture addresses to the abandoned are directed elsewhere. (Keep in mind most of the poor can't read.) The real shock is that God's words about the poor are aimed at those of us who are not poor. We are not only the ones who can read; we are the ones who can make the promises of God come true. The Word of God is aimed at converting us, not the poor.

**Bishop Michael Kenny**  
*The Inside Passage* 9/5/86

## In pursuit of Shalom

Torah was to the people of God in the Old Testament what the Risen Christ and the Spirit were to the people of God in the New Testament, a source of illumination and guidance. A society based on Torah (as a church based on *pneuma* — Spirit) could lay the foundation for Shalom. Shalom, the realization of Torah in human society, was the greatest good because it was everyone's good. It was nothing less than the vision of a social order in which no one lived at the expense of another.

Implicit in the Torah's concern for economic justice was the awareness that violence most often was perpetuated for the purpose of preserving the interests of an elite who lived quite willingly at the expense of others' misery. Maldistribution of wealth and concentration of luxury in the midst of poverty and oppression could never lead to Shalom. Social inequities sowed the seeds of reactionary movements whose harvest of violence was but a response to the violent and daily oppression of the many by the few.

**Prof. William R. Herzog, II**  
*Witness for Peace Newsletter*

*Invoice*

*Cover design + separations*  
*200.*

*The Witness*

*many thanks,*

*Corita Kent*

## In loving memory

Among deaths of noted religious figures in 1986 was Corita Kent, artist and former nun, who died of cancer Sept. 19 in Boston. Her work is found in 40 major museums throughout the world, and in 1985 she designed the famous postage stamp bearing the word, *Love*. She also created the largest object ever granted a copyright, the 150-foot rainbow on the gas storage tanks along Boston's Southeast expressway.

Corita used a "sliding scale" to charge her clients, as illustrated on the invoice above, in her own hand. She designed the cover of the February, 1981 *WITNESS* for \$200. Now a collector's item, it bore an arrangement of crocuses to illustrate that issue's theme of hope.

## Making of an Episcopalian

"As long as Catholics marry Baptists, we'll have lots of Episcopalians."

**The Rev. R. Roy Baines, Jr.**  
Quoted in *Inside the American Religion Scene/RNS*

## Homosexual conundrum

How fiercely ironic that a gay Christian can have clandestine sex several times in one Sunday after church with far less risk than the person takes if he introduces as spouse at the parish coffee hour a gay lover of many years.

The gay press floods with discourse about "responsible sex," especially in the wake of the grim specter of AIDS. Meanwhile, the church would defrock those of us in holy orders unless we lie.

**Louie Crew**  
*Christianity and Crisis*, 3/17/86

## Mini-meditation

The word "religion" draws out all sorts of associated responses: God, sacrifice, church hypocrisy, cross, boredom, joy, opiate, repression, oppression, status quo, institution, wealth, goodness, evil, farce, truth, deception, salvation, heaven, hell, or whatever.

Here is the Bible's definition: "Pure religion is this: to visit the orphans and the widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

Pretty simple stuff, really.

In that definition, there is no mention of institution, of clergy, of ecclesiastical structures, of church property or of cathedrals. There is no indication of church treasuries, tax-free donations, building funds or charity funds. Nothing about pews, or an organ, not even a steeple.

No stained glass, no preachers. No deacons, no professionals, confessionals, processions, or recessions. Not even choirs or parking lots!

Now, other passages in the Bible may address some of these things. But when biblical religion is reduced to the bottom line, it is this — a personal responsibility to love genuinely.

Religious behavior springs from two fonts: 1) sensitivity to human need and personal involvement in meeting those needs, and 2) basing one's moral behavior in an ethic of love.

Here is the essence of biblical religion: loving so that lives change.

**Jon Paden**  
*Juneau Empire*, 7/25/86

## Take care of your pump

Every day the human heart pumps 2,000 gallons of blood through 70,000 miles of blood vessels.

**American Red Cross**

## Words, words, words . . .

*The New York Times* notes that the Lord's Prayer contains 56 words, the 23rd Psalm 118, the Gettysburg Address 226, and the Ten Commandments 297, while the U.S. Department of Agriculture directive on pricing cabbage weighs in at 15,629.

**Utne Reader**



ple, single and married people, gay and lesbian people, divorced and widowed people, are all members of the Body of Christ and must learn to respect one another, live together, work to heal wounds resulting from prejudice, lack of knowledge and misperception.

**The Rev. Claudia L. Windal**  
Minneapolis, Minn.

## A matter of scandal

The "Open Letter to the Presiding Bishop" from THE WITNESS Editorial Board is an urgent appeal for moral leadership to eliminate the scandalous mistreatment of lesbians and gay men seeking ordination and those already ordained.

The Presiding Bishop's response is a disappointment. Nothing he says is wrong exactly, but lesbians and gay men respond, "So what?" His vision of the church as "a community where love and grace abound" is not wrong, but is it a concrete response to *scandal*?

Gay men are legion among Episcopal clergy — in every diocese and even in the national church offices in New York. Lesbian clergy are less numerous because of another scandal: the long-time refusal to ordain women. The scandal, therefore, is not the existence of gay and lesbian priests, but rather the immoral demands the church places on those who seek, and receive, ordination.

The scandal is that the church condemns those who tell the truth. The scandal is that the church consigns countless men and women to secret, double lives, balanced precariously between their desire to serve the people of God and their desire for fulfilled, happy lives which are sustained by the love of another person of the same gender. And it is not only clergy but men and women in the pews who are so condemned.

The appropriate moral response to duplicity is to begin telling the truth. The truth is often hard, but without it admonitions about love are empty. The Presiding Bishop is wrong: The canons do not give ample guidance to the ordination process when, in North Carolina a gay

priest is fired, in Pennsylvania a lesbian is removed from the ordination process, but in Michigan and New York gay men and lesbians are being supported, ordained and placed.

I am glad that this Presiding Bishop responds to letters which press important issues and that he seems to care about the marginalized among us. Now, he should take the next step: moving from abstract pastoral nostrums to an active involvement in concrete situations where the lives of flesh and blood lesbians and gay men are at stake.

**Robert H. Gorsline**  
New York, N.Y.

## Fails to persuade

Reading Bishop Browning's recent letter in the September WITNESS, I do not disagree with the logic he brings to bear, either on the issue of the 1979 Convention resolution on the ordination of homosexuals or the acknowledgement of the historic controversies surrounding homosexuality. It simply fails to persuade.

The references to canonical rights of bishops in this light is reminiscent of the state's rights arguments by Southerners. They might have been perfectly correct and legitimate, but this did not alter the fact that they were used to oppress, and oppression is the more urgent issue. Nor is the Presiding Bishop's argument that little is really understood of "the homosexual" really profound; to further the same analogy, "the nigger" was a mystery in the antebellum South. The treatment of Blacks made any knowledge impossible.

We ask Bishop Browning to go past the details of canon, the contradictions of Pauline scriptures, and the scores of controversial individual cases to the heart of

the matter and proclaim God's fundamental acceptance of and love for all.

Everyone has so long been wrapped up in individual issues that the central has escaped us; we are like the fundamentalists who have argued so long about the age of creation that they have forgotten the central message: *God creates*. If we can get back to that without any of the baggage we normally carry, we can get quickly to the implied statement that our ability to love each other is God's greatest gift to us; just as returning to *God creates* lets us see that the way in which God created us in God's image is by giving us the power to create for ourselves.

Nowhere is the interrelation of these gifts more obvious than in the monogamous marriage described as "the Christian norm"; the dedication of two persons to each other and their mutual dedication to build a life together is both an ideal of love and of creation.

This may in fact be at the root of much anti-homosexual feeling. Homosexuality has often been associated with sex without love, with pointless promiscuity and anonymity. Small wonder then, that there has been distrust of homosexuals. However, the hatefulness of Sodom is not the homosexuality, but the wantonness, the lack of love, and this applies to everyone. After all, the whole city was destroyed, not just the homosexuals.

If the church is worried about the fitness of homosexuals for the priesthood because of their sexual activities, let her simply impose the same strictures as for heterosexual priests: that sex should be in the context of marriage.

There could be no better time to take this position. Not only does the newest wave of homophobia create a deep need for some demonstration to society that homosexuals and heterosexuals share the same fundamental desires and dignities, but AIDS has also shown many homosexuals, albeit starkly, their depth of feeling for their lovers and the need to create stable units despite pressures from outside.

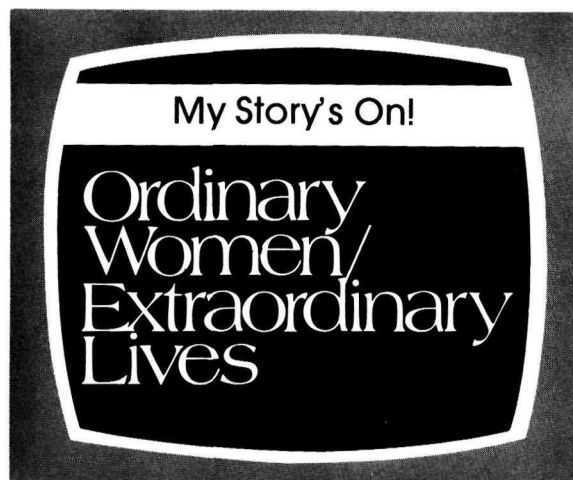
I pray that Bishop Browning may see the way in which ordination of gay and

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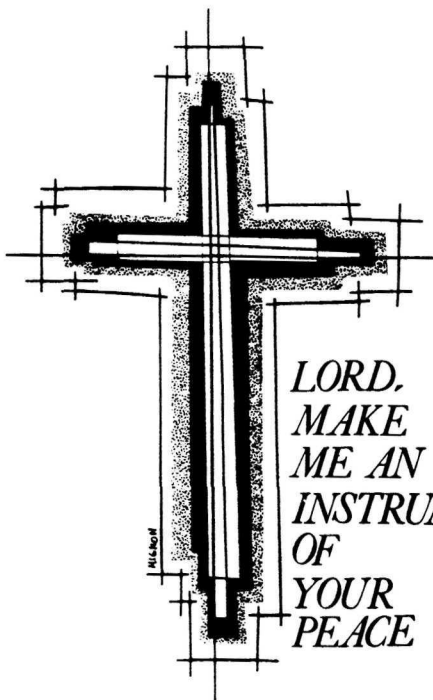
lesbian priests is a fundamental part of the affirmation of the rights of all to God's gifts. When we limit the priesthood we say: thus far and no farther are you accepted in the eyes of God. And whomever we say this to, we limit us all; whether black, white, man, woman, gay, or straight, because we limit the possibility of God's love. This issue may be closer to home for gay or lesbian Episcopalians, but it is at the heart of all our faiths.

**Edward T. L. Hardie**  
**Hong Kong**

### Presiding Bishop requests letters

**All Letters to the Editor relating to the exchange of correspondence between THE WITNESS and Presiding Bishop Edmond L. Browning on the subject of gay and lesbian rights in the church have been forwarded to him at his request. We are anticipating a response for the January WITNESS.**

**At the House of Bishops meeting in September, Bishop Browning cited THE WITNESS open letter and his response as an example of dialogue around "explosive issues" which need to be explored. "Of all the issues we face, I think this will neither disappear, nor should it," he told the bishops in his opening address. "I am deeply aware of the possibilities of real tension and polarization, which enhances my conviction for this dialogue. I have no idea where this may lead, but I'm willing to take the risk for those who have too long been considered as outcasts of society."**



# Litany of contemporary

*The Rev. F. Sanford Cutler, recently retired rector of Redeemer parish, Morristown, N.J., compiled the following list of "Episcopal saints" as an invocation opening a meeting of The Consultation Nov. 1 in Detroit. He began with a reading from Jose Cardenas Pallares' A Poor Man Called Jesus and asked those present to respond to the Litany by saying "Presente," a Hispanic commitment to remember the dead by pledging to emulate their lives. The Consultation is a coalition of Episcopal organizations working on justice and peace issues. THE WITNESS joins Sandy Cutler in noting that the list is by no means exhaustive, and invites readers during Advent to add their own contemporary saints.*

**Shelton Hale Bishop**, Harlem rector, who showed us that you can move a Presiding Bishop, to move in turn a General Convention out of a segregated city

Response: *Presente.*

**Carol Davis**, who 25 years ago quietly demonstrated what a woman could do in full-time parish ministry in Corning — and even at the Episcopal Church Center

*Presente.*

**Bill Gray**, who proved that a diocesan newspaper did not have to be dull, irrelevant and trivial

*Presente.*

**Charles Lawrence**, who somehow managed to serve the church prophetically at all levels — parochial, diocesan, and national — and the world in the church's name

*Presente.*

**William Appleton Lawrence**, for so many years the only consistent voice for peace in the House of Bishops, who gave us an Episcopal model of a pastoral prophet

*Presente.*

**William Howard Melish**, who no doubt is reading the November issue of THE WITNESS with delight, only regretting that he can't add his comments, for he led the fight for East-West understanding in his time

*Presente.*

**Pauli Murray**, lawyer, poet, activist, priest — but perhaps more important, a true communicator capable of inspiring others to do battle for justice in church and society

*Presente.*

# Episcopal saints

by Sandy Cutler

**Chuck Packard**, who in a short life and very short ordained ministry, challenged and energized young radicals and tired cynics in the Diocese of Newark to take on the Church Pension Fund

*Presente.*

**Jeannette Piccard**, who in a long and full life, lifted our vision up to the stratosphere, and broke not only the gender but the age barrier

*Presente.*

**Betsy and Bob Rodenmayer**, who together, showed the church a vision of marriage and team ministry that broke the traditional stereotypes

*Presente.*

**Vida Scudder**, who constantly reminded us that justice and peace are linked, and that both are deeply rooted in our peculiar Anglican tradition

*Presente.*

**Bill Stringfellow** — Defender of the faith, but more important, defender and protector of the faithful

*Presente.*

We sum up our petition in the words Jesus taught us:

Our Father and Mother in heaven

Holy is your name

May your reign come

your will be done

on earth as in heaven

Give us our bread for today

And forgive us our sins

As we forgive those who sin against us

Do not put us to the test but deliver us

from the power of evil

For yours is the realm, the power

and the glory

Forever. *Amen.*

Dismissal (said by all): God, send us anywhere you would have us go, only go with us. Place any burden upon us, only stand beside us. Use the ties that bind us together, to bind us closer to you. And may your peace, O creator, redeemer and sustainer, be always with us. *Amen.*

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