

VOLUME • 72 NUMBER • 6 JUNE 1989

THE WITNESS

Procreative Freedom

Faye Wattleton

Elizabeth Maxwell

Beverly Wildung Harrison

Kathie Hancock Ragsdale

Pat Wilson-Kastner

Faith Evans

Letters

Shed tears of joy

I have been enjoying THE WITNESS for several years, ever since an Episcopalian friend first introduced me to it. As a United Church of Christ clergywoman, I have found much within these pages to give me strength.

Today has really brought that home to me. I spent an hour with a woman who is beginning to look for a church home. She has (for several years) been separated from the church to which she had belonged — ever since she decided to become a “whole” person, not satisfied with teachings of inferiority and subordination. The pain of her departure, and the despair with which she has been looking for a church that affirms her entire person, encouraging her to be whatever she can be, were palpable. I recognized and shared her pain, and it stayed with me long after she left.

Then I began reading the April WITNESS — *Barbara Harris: Bishop* — and found myself in tears. From the chronology on page 2 through the ad on the back page for “My Story’s On,” I shed tears of joy at proof that God will not be denied!

As I face the problems of being a woman in a patriarchal society, working in and through a patriarchal institution that would wish to be otherwise, I shall hold tight to this issue. I think I shall have the picture on page 25 framed, with the words, “Could God die, I would die.” For surely the loving God we serve holds the power we need to celebrate such moments of justice. Thanks be to God!

The Rev. Karen L. Clark
Denver, Col.

Get clay feet moving

I’m 51, with a Baptist, and now a Friends, background. When the April issue arrived I made a pot of tea and read nonstop, tears streaming down my face. The problems of patriarchy run deeper

than I imagined.

Thanks, Carter Heyward, for reminding us that we *all* have a load to carry. Thanks, Li Tim-Oi, for reminding us that our backs have already been straightened. Thanks, WITNESS, for keeping this in a very human perspective. A sister with clay feet has been called to a higher order. May we look at our clay feet and get them moving.

Beverly England Williams
Mountaintop, Pa.

Has ecumenical appeal

I looked forward to the April WITNESS with all the accounts of Barbara Harris’ election and its meaning, not only for the Anglican communion but for the rest of us, as well.

I was not disappointed! It is a wonderful issue, and I’ve already shared it with many friends. I’d like to send a copy to two of my good friends who are United Methodist (women) bishops, and am enclosing a check for two issues which I will send them with a note.

As a professional ecumenist, I thought Rosemary Ruether’s article was prophetic and that Pamela Darling named the issues for all clergywomen, no matter what communion. Keep up the good work. I look forward to every issue.

Jeanne Audrey Powers
New York, N.Y.

Offers two corrections

Thanks for the wonderful coverage of Barbara Harris’ consecration, and especially for the photos. I have put the picture of Barbara and Li Tim-Oi at Canterbury Cathedral alongside the color shot of Barbara in those magnificent vestments in a new women-in-ministry “wall of fame” outside my office.

A couple of minor corrections: The very helpful chronology inside the front cover indicates that it was over 20 years

between the 1862 ordering of the first deaconess in England and the first one here. But according to Emily Hewitt and Sue Hiatt’s chronology in *Women Priests, Yes or No?*, the Bishop of Alabama ordered a deaconess in 1865, and the Bishop of New York did the same in 1867.

General Convention began “studying” deaconesses in 1871, and then defeated a deaconess canon five times before finally approving it in 1889. Deaconess training schools established in New York, San Francisco and Philadelphia in the next triennium provided the first formal theological education for women in the Episcopal Church, who were not admitted to any regular seminary program until the Episcopal Theological Seminary opened the Bachelor of Divinity degree to women in 1958. It was a quarter century from the ordering of the first deaconess until the authorization of deaconesses in this church, and another century until the ordination of a woman to the episcopate. Not exactly precipitous action!

Second, Paul Washington was certainly a key participant in the Philadelphia ordinations — held in his church — but the preacher that day was Dr. Charles V. Willie, then vice-president of the House of Deputies (who resigned in protest after the emergency House of Bishops meeting at O’Hare Airport declared that the Philadelphia ordinations hadn’t happened).

Pamela W. Darling
New York, N.Y.

No looking back

Enclosed is a check for \$28. Please send one extra issue of the *Barbara Harris: Bishop* special issue and consider the remainder a donation to your work and ministry.

I feel as though we women (and men who support the advance of women) in

the church have leapt a giant chasm with nothing but even ground ahead — even though there are bound to be rocks to stumble over, pits to fall into and brambles in which we may become entangled. At least the path is well-defined for all of us. No looking back.

May God truly bless the life and ministry of Bishop Harris. Those who will be touched by her pastorate will surely know a new joy and blessing.

**Judith Yeakel
Langley, Wash.**

Can't stomach magazine

Barbara Harris made waves all right and I am one of the ones who didn't like the wet slap in the face.

You may be proud of her election but I think it was a travesty against all qualified priests in the church.

I am looking forward to the "more inclusive church." I feel sure the Episcopal membership will rise in joy and the increased giving will swell the hearts of all social activists.

Full speed ahead with consecrations of more theologically unqualified activists and damn the consequences.

I can make it without THE WITNESS; I have a weak stomach.

**The Rev. Richard G. Anderson
Boise, Idaho**

WITNESS at its best

Your issue on Barbara Harris is magnificent: uplifting, comprehensive, thought-provoking — THE WITNESS at its best! Thank you for this gem with its many facets.

**Powell Woodward
Cambridge, Mass.**

What next?

After I read my *first* issue of THE WITNESS, I realized that I had made a mistake. The only reason I didn't cancel

then was out of curiosity as to what you could *possibly* come up with next, and you did.

We're evidently on totally different wave-lengths and marching to different drummers. I seriously doubt your assertions that you all are being guided by the Holy Spirit, and certainly not by the same spirit and truth as I perceive it.

**The Rev. Willys E. Neustrom
Salina, Kan.**

Mail brought Spring

Spring arrived in Michigan when the mail carrier delivered the refreshing April issue of THE WITNESS. Congratulations to you and your staff for bringing us the best reflections on the significance of Barbara Harris' episcopate.

**The Rev. Zal Sherwood
Jackson, Mich.**

Not one quotation

Please stop sending your magazine to me — I find it very repulsive.

I did not find one scriptural quotation to support anything you said. Although you spoke of God, you never said which God. And *I Corinthians* 8:5-6 tells us to watch out because we have only one God and *Psalms* 83:18 tells who He is.

**Terry Elms Cockrum
Chloride, Ariz.**

Kudos from editor

Your Barbara Harris issue is a thrilling tribute to the first woman bishop in the world, as your *Boston Globe* picture of her is captioned. What a boost for womankind all over the globe, especially Black women, who have been subdued too long.

When *The Churchman's Human Quest* celebrated its 185th anniversary in April at a luncheon in St. Petersburg, I found it a special satisfaction and joy to quote

from some of your women writers. Although the Episcopal Church has, at times through the decades, given its women recognition for buttressing the church with their talent, charm and literal support by way of bazaars, canvassing, etc., it has been slow to think in terms of equality.

The founding ecclesiastics of THE WITNESS and *The Churchman* are likely to be most uncomfortable in their crypts to see these Episcopal journals run by women editors. For over 20 years I have grown into the confidence that editing a venerable magazine, begun in 1804 by the grandson of the first Episcopal bishop in the United States, engenders. With Bishop Barbara's pinnacle recognition, those of us women who serve the church, carry our heads a bit higher, knowing we deserve acknowledgement, too. Bishop Barbara's graceful and gracious acceptance of her new role is an inspiration to us all.

It was a special pleasure to quote the Rev. Carter Heyward's comment on church mediation "through the presence of male genitalia" which she termed "kinky theology." Delightful amplification. THE WITNESS is to be congratulated in generating this special issue.

**Edna Ruth Johnson, Editor
The Churchman's Human Quest
St. Petersburg, Fla.**

Seeks smoking gun

I seem to hear a number of your writers saying that much of the opposition to Bishop Barbara Harris is because of her race. Is there hard evidence on this point? Or are your writers indulging in a mere "conclusory allegation" that anyone in the church who is theologically conservative must also be a racist?

Do you know of any hard evidence that, e.g., several bishops or several standing committees refused to approve

Continued on page 23

THE WITNESS

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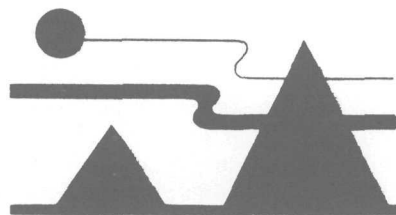
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THE WITNESS



This issue would not have been possible without the consultation of Katherine Hancock Ragsdale and Diane Pollard.

Ragsdale, who coordinated the issue with Assistant Editor Sue Pierce, is a pastor at St. Matthews, Jersey City, N.J., and was a lobbyist for abortion rights and other legislative issues at the 1988 Episcopal Church General Convention.

Pollard, a Convention deputy from the Diocese of New York, became pro-choice while a volunteer at New York's Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital in the 1960s, when she saw women abandoned at the hospital's door, injured or dying from botched illegal abortions.

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Editorial

Reproductive freedom: a battle we cannot afford to lose

by Katherine Hancock Ragsdale

It feels odd to be working on an abortion issue in 1989. It appeared that this matter had been settled in 1973. We trusted that in the case of *Roe v. Wade* the Supreme Court had once-and-for-all decided what our minds, our hearts, and our souls had long known — that every woman has the right and responsibility to control her own bodily health and reproductive functions. We rejoiced that the Court had virtually guaranteed the right of every woman to a safe and legal abortion. We believed that never again would we attend the funeral of a friend, sister, or daughter who had died as the result of a botched back-alley abortion.

The faith community continued to harbor differences of opinion as to when life begins and when abortion is an appropriate choice. Still, most of our churches and synagogues insisted that abortion was a moral/ethical issue and as such must be decided by conscience, not by legislation. They pointed out that a coerced decision carries no moral weight and so affirmed a woman's right to choose.

The courts also acknowledged that the time life begins is a theological/metaphysical question and abortion a moral/ethical decision. As such, they were not matters for legislation. We offered *Te Deums*. Many skirmishes remained to be fought (against bogus

clinics, fundamentalist moralists, and clinic bombers) but the battle was won. We redirected much of our energy to fighting for other social and economic justice issues. We hoped to create a world where abortion was less frequently a woman's only viable alternative.

But today all our hard-won freedom is in jeopardy. As this issue goes to press we await a Supreme Court decision in the case of *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*. The Bush Administration has asked that the Court use this case to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and return to each state the right to decide if, and under what conditions, a woman may choose to terminate her pregnancy.

On April 9, 1989 an estimated 600,000 women and men converged on Washington, D.C. to protest this threat to reproductive freedom. THE WITNESS was one of the many sponsors of this "March for Women's Equality, Women's Lives" organized by the National Organization for Women. The religious community fielded approximately 100,000 of the marchers. They marched for freedom of choice, freedom of conscience — for religious freedom. They knew that this is a battle we cannot afford to lose. The stakes — the integrity of our consciences and the lives of our daughters — are too high.

"In a resounding reversal of a long-standing position, the Episcopal Church has dropped its opposition to legislation restricting abortion in the United States."

NOEL News, 9-10/88.

This statement by the National Organization of Episcopalians for Life (NOEL) evidences the misinterpretation that is possible when our churches sacrifice clarity and integrity in an effort to avoid conflict and appease proponents of irreconcilable positions. (To see what the Church really said, turn to p. 20).

Ambiguous pronouncements by mainline churches have fueled the administrative, legislative, and judicial efforts to restrict women's access to safe, legal abortions. At this crucial time the church needs clear resolutions such as the following, which General Convention failed to adopt:

"Resolved, the House of _____ concurring: That this 69th General Convention of the Episcopal Church express its unequivocal opposition to any legislative, executive, or judicial action on the part of local, state, or national governments which would abridge the right of a woman to reach an informed decision about the termination of pregnancy and which would limit the access of a woman to safe means of acting on her decision." (submitted by Deputy Diane Pollard, Diocese of New York.)

Planned Parenthood head calls on



Faye Wattleton, national president of Planned Parenthood, has championed a woman's right to reproductive choice since her days as a young nurse at New York City's Harlem Hospital in the 1960s. Her beliefs were shaped by caring for women who were seriously ill, and sometimes died, from illegal abortions; counseling teenage mothers; and working with abused and abandoned children. She was a public health administrator for the city of Dayton, Ohio, before joining Planned Parenthood as a board member. She was appointed president in 1978, and turned what had been a low-profile service organization into an aggressive advocate of women's reproductive rights.

For the past 11 years, Wattleton has led Planned Parenthood in battling the anti-family planning policies of the Reagan — and now the Bush — administration, and the hostile tactics of the anti-abortion shock troops of Operation Rescue. Her commitment to the struggle, she said in a recent interview, is founded not only in her nursing experience, but in her upbringing. Her mother, a minister in the Church of God, and her father taught her, she said, "that it was my obligation to help those with less than I had."

Wattleton was recently interviewed by the Rev. Elizabeth Maxwell for *THE WITNESS*. Maxwell, associate rector of Church of the Holy Apostles in New York City, is an officer of the New Jersey Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights.

These must be difficult times for the pro-choice movement, with abortion rights and family planning rights so much under attack. What sustains you in the work that you do as president of Planned Parenthood?

I don't see the period we're going through now as any different than the period we went through in the past 16 years. The attacks on reproductive rights are not new. It's the accumulation of those attacks, and their ugliness, that have provoked the kind of emotional response that we are witnessing right now among Americans. So I'm not sure that I need to be sustained now any more than

I've needed it throughout the many years of my work in this organization.

I believe very deeply in what I work for; I believe that reproductive rights are central to the ability to shape one's own destiny. Many of the problems of our society can be prevented if people have the means and the knowledge to practice family planning effectively, so that their child-bearing decisions do not compromise but rather enhance their lives and their children's lives.

My nursing background has given me a view of the world that is pretty plain and undressed up. You see people at their most vulnerable. That gives you a

perception of the challenges and the problems that people confront. So often a crisis among people and their families comes about because of the burdens of too many children too soon, not wanted, not cared for. If we love our children, we want to have them to come into a nurturing environment that welcomes them.

What is the religious right up to, and what is its impact, in these years after Reagan?

They were more visible in the early to mid-'80s than they are now. Their program was never accepted by the majority of the American people. The pinnacle of their impact really occurred with the

churches to support choice

election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. Were it not for the right wing, including the religious right, it would have been impossible to organize a sufficient base to elect him.

Their influence was always greater than their numbers, but even in that context their influence today is not as great as it was in the early '80s. Certainly they had less impact on subsequent elections.

Why do you think a politician like President Bush goes out of his way to affirm the goals of the anti-choice movement?

I think that Bush, to a lesser degree, it would appear, than Reagan, believes that he has to court the anti-choice constituency. Unfortunately, he doesn't realize that his larger base is among the people who marched in Washington two weeks ago, the broad base of the American people who are generally pretty middle of the road.

I suspect we may see Bush being less aggressive on these issues than was the Reagan administration. Though Bush's behavior the day after his inauguration would not seem to bear me out on that point — he addressed anti-abortion advocates by remote loudspeaker — although he did not meet with them. The day after Reagan was inaugurated, he received a delegation of anti-abortion advocates. If Bush were as rigid as Reagan, he would never have appointed someone like Dr. Louis Sullivan to his cabinet as head of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Going back to the religious right, what about Operation Rescue? Has it continued at the same level since the Democratic Convention last summer, and what has its impact been?

It certainly continues, and has expanded. During the Democratic Convention it was largely confined to Atlanta, where the television cameras were. It has now

spread to other cities.

Once again, it's fascinating to me that all of this is being read as something new. There's nothing new about Operation Rescue except the label. We've withstood picketing, harassment, vandalism, violence ever since this issue started. The media has given it a different flavor, because, now, instead of XYZ bomber blowing up a particular abortion clinic, it's Operation Rescue. I think that's useful, because it captures the attention of the American people, and serves to create a backlash against them. That's one reason we saw so many people marching in the streets on April 9 in Washington D.C. People are appalled by their tactics. We have reached the point of outrage. Americans are saying they're tired of the attacks on women, and they want them stopped.

What do you think will happen with Webster vs. Reproductive Health Services, the Supreme Court decision that is expected this summer?

I don't think much is going to happen. I don't believe that *Roe v. Wade* will be reversed. There's no evidence that this court is interested in doing that. There is some reason to believe that they may give states more control over abortions. Of course, any restriction on abortion is very troubling, because it means that the people who do not have the means to negotiate the restrictions will be the ones hurt. But I don't believe (and I know that this is not a point of view that many my colleagues share, and I may be perceived in the next few months as a dinosaur who wasn't tuned into reality) that when the Supreme Court decision comes down, abortions will be illegal in this country again.

One of the things I find disturbing is the use of religious language and symbols to advance an anti-woman point of view. What do you think pro-choice

people in the religious community should be doing to counteract this?

I think pro-choice religious folk need to acknowledge and examine the anti-choice elements in their own denominations. Religious denominations need to take strong, clear, unambiguous stands on this issue, because women look to their religious institutions for guidance in making these decisions.

The co-opting of religious language and symbols by anti-abortion activists is not an unusual tactic on their part. They also use themes like racism, or abuse of women. They push the buttons of what are known to be sensitive, personal issues, in which there are areas of disagreement. The clash of religious dogmas, the struggle for religious liberty, and the separation of church and state have all been difficult issues for Americans, especially politicians. Anti-abortion activists know that, and they use it.

They're very quick to appropriate the language of the civil rights movement.

Absolutely. Racial issues are very sensitive in the consciousness of Americans. I go out to give a speech in some small town, and I'm met by picketers saying that abortion is Black genocide. Abortion protesters use that language to trigger the emotions, but what they trigger is resentment. The response is the reverse of what they seek.

There's also the perception that the pro-choice movement is a White women's movement. Your presence as head of Planned Parenthood suggests that that's not entirely true, but why does it seem that women of color are not involved in this issue?

I think that that perception should be seen as the great dichotomy between the haves and the have-nots in this country. Who are middle-class women in this country? They are disproportionately White. Who are poor women? Dispro-

portionately women of color.

Poor people don't usually go to Washington to march in the streets. Major political movements are usually led and driven by the sentiments of the middle class.

Yet poor women, who are, as you say, disproportionately minority, will be the ones most affected by any erosion of abortion rights.

Absolutely. That's one of the reasons I feel so strongly about the work I do. The people who are hurt the most are Black teenagers who get pregnant. The women who will die first are Black poor women. I won't die if abortion becomes illegal again. I will have the means to get an abortion if I need and want one; my child likewise. But it is my African-American sisters, who are more likely than Whites to be poor, who will suffer.

Those of us who are affluent must step up to the challenge to defend these rights, because we defend them for all. I'm not surprised that Blacks are not more visible in the pro-choice movement. It is more a reflection of the classism in our society than it is any inherent difference in racial views about abortion. It has been well documented that Blacks are as pro-choice as Whites.

The United States' rates of both teen pregnancy and abortion are substantially higher than those in most other developed countries. One reason seems to be that in many countries in Europe, for example, public health policy includes making contraceptive services available in schools and other easily accessible places. My question is about the problems Americans seem to have with making such services more widely available, despite their proven effectiveness in preventing unwanted pregnancy. What do you think causes our resistance?

Well, the resistance is our great phobia about sex and sexuality. We have not overcome that phobia, and that phobia certainly extends to our children, in that

we are uncomfortable discussing sexuality and sexual development with them. We are particularly uncomfortable with looking at some of the more difficult sexuality issues: birth control, abortion and homosexuality.

Our attitude about sexuality and our lack of openness about it seems to be rather unique in the developed world. Sex abounds, but we somehow feel that we must restrict our own sexual acceptance as a way of offsetting the profuse and ubiquitous display of sexuality in the commercial marketplace. What that gets us is kids who are not educated. Because we engage in a great conspiracy of silence, kids take chances with their sexuality and very often end up pregnant or with sexually transmitted diseases, and with lives that are severely damaged.

Unlike the European countries that you've described, we haven't learned that you cannot stamp out sexual development and sexual response. What we've seen in those countries is a greater emphasis on preventing the negative outcomes of sexual associations, rather than trying to focus on preventing the sexual association. They have had a heck of a lot more success than we have in reducing the tremendous social costs that come about because of our more restricted and, indeed, repressive attitude about sexuality.

How much do you think our religious history and climate have to do with that?

I think that the Calvinist values regarding sexual issues are still very strong in our society. Churches have been reluctant to step up to the needs of the community with respect to sexuality. Established religions' ambivalence about dealing openly and honestly with sexual development, sexual intimacy and the response to our sexual needs is a great deficiency in our society. I think that our religious institutions can play a major role in shaping the moral values of responsibility for ourselves and those we

care for. We learn those values out of the framework of our home and our religious beliefs. If our churches don't broach the subject of sexuality in that context, a whole aspect of our lives just goes wanting.

It's bizarre. Religious institutions can be a very important force in calling for a different environment for our children to grow up in with respect to their sexual development. However, for the most part, they have not assumed that role.

As we finish, is there anything else that readers of THE WITNESS should know about Planned Parenthood's current work or position?

To summarize, we see the current struggle as one more battle along the way. After *Webster*, we will have to continue to work for more sex education, better contraception, and better access to services for all, especially for low-income people. These rights have been under attack from the day Margaret Sanger, who started the birth control movement, set out to make sure that children were born wanted and loved. They'll still be with us after the Supreme Court decision. The challenge is for Americans to see that their concern about women's rights should not stop with the Supreme Court.

If women are truly to have the right to shape their destiny, it can only come through education, and the availability of the technology to carry out their decisions.

Speaking of technology, do you think that RU 486 — the "abortion pill" currently available in France — will be marketed in this country any time soon?

I'm optimistic that eventually it will be developed and marketed, although it may take a while. At that point, the decision to have an abortion will truly be a private and personal one for a woman. No one else will be able to dictate her actions.

WV

Women of color address abortion

by Sabrae Yulonne Jenkins and Chung C. Seto

This country's "founding fathers" utilized sexism and racism to affirm the notion that the rights of women and Blacks, in particular, were not important enough to be included in the Constitution. These two groups, along with Hispanics, Native Americans and Asians, have had to fight against numerous oppressive attitudes and devices. As with most issues, people of color — forced to contend with discrimination — have had to organize separately from our White counterparts.

The unwillingness to recognize that all God's people are created equal and that tremendous value exists in the cultural diversity of all races continues to divide us on numerous social concerns. In matters of reproduction, some religious

groups have attempted to coerce the personal freedom of our citizens through the power of public policy and thus have attempted to dictate one religious perspective. This constitutes a serious threat to the basic principles upon which our country was founded as well as a threat to the Constitution's First Amendment, which guarantees freedom of religion.

In 1983 the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR) sponsored a meeting of women of color in Washington, D.C. to discuss reproductive health care issues. We found that women of color view abortion as one aspect of a full range of comprehensive reproductive health services. Yet the fact remains that public policies on issues of health, particularly reproductive health, affect women of color disproportionately. A general lack of sensitivity and consideration for the specific needs of women of color has helped to reinforce our omission from the pro-choice ranks.

National pro-choice organizations have not been willing to incorporate the full spectrum of reproductive health care issues into their agendas. For instance, issues such as infant mortality, sterilization abuse, and Caesarean section abuse have severely affected women of color but have not been addressed by national groups. Likewise, women of color interested in working on this issue have felt the sting of racism and have experienced an unwillingness to work on an equal basis.

The Women of Color Partnership Program was established by the board members of RCAR as a special project in direct response to these realizations. We envision our work to include the building of partnership networks between all

women of color around a comprehensive range of reproductive health care issues by incorporating our individual faith perspectives and social organizations.

Although the general health of women of color is substantially worse than that of White women, the following reproductive health statistics are even more startling:

- The infant mortality rate is 18.3% among Blacks compared to 9.3% among Whites.
- 35% of Puerto Rican women have been sterilized — the highest rate in the world.
- 80% of the women who are forced to have Caesarean sections are women of color.
- An estimated 30 to 42% of Native



Sabrae Yulonne Jenkins is the Director of the Women of Color Partnership Program of the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR).



Chung C. Seto is RCAR's Director of Communications.

American women of childbearing age have been sterilized.

For Asian/Pacific, Black, Latina and Native American women, the lack of access to adequate reproductive health care can literally become a matter of life and death. Before abortion was legalized in 1973 by the landmark Supreme Court decision on *Roe v. Wade*, 49% of the pregnancy-related deaths in New York were due to illegal abortions. Of these deaths, 50% were Black women, and 44% were Puerto Rican. Prior to legalization, 93% of therapeutic abortions in private hospitals were performed on White women.

The economics of this country dictate that the “haves” may choose to purchase whatever health services they may need or want, whether legal or illegal. The “have-nots” are offered very few choices in their lives and in many instances must rely on the federal government, which has slashed funding for family planning and public health.

An excellent example of government control of women’s right to choose is the Hyde Amendment. It restricts the use of Medicaid funds for abortion services and has a direct impact on the lives of 22 million impoverished Americans, 5 out of 10 of whom are women of color. Many of the women affected by this restriction are also those most susceptible to the health risks, nutritional deficiencies and limited access to health care that contribute to the incidence of unintended or problem pregnancies. All Native Americans, Peace Corps volunteers, military personnel, prison inmates, and federal employees are directly affected by the Hyde Amendment. Interestingly enough, the federal government does pay for sterilization.

On Jan. 9, 1989, the United States Supreme Court announced that it will hear and decide *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, a case of critical importance to women of color throughout this country. In this case, the state of Mis-

souri is asking the Court to rule in favor of a state’s power to ban abortions. The Attorney General of the Reagan Administration submitted a brief to the Supreme Court urging it to use *Webster* to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, which upholds a woman’s right to choose safe and legal abortion.

If the Supreme Court uses this case to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and returns the power to declare abortion illegal to the individual states, countless low-income women may be forced to carry unwanted pregnancies to term, even if that pregnancy is the result of rape or incest. As the majority of women seeking services from public hospitals are women of color, a decision in favor of the Missouri law would severely limit their access not only to abortion services, but also information, counseling and funding for all related reproductive health care problems. The consequences for women of color would be serious. They often cannot afford private medical care and suffer disproportionately from a variety of serious health conditions which may be exacerbated by pregnancy, such as:

- Hypertension, which is 82% higher among women of color than White women — more than one in four Blacks suffer or will suffer from it. Chronic hypertension is associated with up to 30% of maternal deaths and up to 22% of perinatal deaths, and has been linked to strokes during pregnancy.
- Diabetes — the annual mortality rate is 31 per 100,000 among Puerto Rican women compared to 14.5 among White women.
- Sick cell anemia — 1 in 165 Black people are born with the sickle cell trait. Pregnant women with sickle cell anemia are more prone to miscarriages, aggravated circulatory problems and depression.
- AIDS — 75% of all female AIDS cases are women of color and 80%

of their children are affected.

Under severe restrictions such as the Missouri law, a pregnant patient who tests positive for the AIDS virus, for example, may not be counselled about the life-threatening risks of deciding to continue her pregnancy. Nor could pregnant women with severe diabetes, hypertension or sickle cell anemia be advised of the risks. Even women experiencing ectopic pregnancies — a condition that could result in the death of the mother if an abortion is not performed — cannot be told that there is a serious health risk requiring immediate action.

In response to the health threats to women of color that the *Webster* case presents, RCAR’s Women of Color Partnership Program was instrumental in submitting a “Women of Color Amicus Brief” to the Supreme Court. The brief was signed by 116 organizations — the largest number of organizational endorsements of the 31 briefs submitted — and over 258 individuals.

This case is just one of the initiatives that the Women of Color Partnership Program has undertaken to respond to the continued attacks against the reproductive freedom and health of women of color. On a continuing basis, the Program holds regional forums around the country to educate women and move them to effect change in their communities. These forums create an opportunity to discuss cultural similarities and differences and their affect on reproductive health care issues. The Program also publishes a newsletter, *Common Ground-Different Planes*, and Fact Handbooks on health issues for Black and Puerto Rican women. Handbooks are currently being researched for Chicana, Native American and Asian/Pacific women.

Reproductive freedom touches the lives of countless women of color whose views have gone unheard. Therefore, the Women of Color Partnership Program will continue to serve as the foundation of a united, multi-cultural coalition. **WW**

Men's privileges vs. women's rights

by Faith Evans

When I agreed to write this article, I enthusiastically accepted because I actually believed I could write a piece on "men's rights." But in sitting down and trying to put it together, I realized that it isn't a very easy subject to write about. Even though I am a Black man born out of an African culture and living in a racist society dominated by a White male culture, my rights as a man are privileged.

I was born in New York City in 1940 to a mother who, throughout her lifetime, birthed 17 children and was psychologically, physically or economically incapable of caring for any of them. My mother was one of 13 children born to sharecroppers in rural South Carolina. At the ripe old age of 15, my mother was "farmed out" to a 35-year-old stump preacher owning a plot of land and a two-room shack. Being a Black female in the rural South in the 1930s meant that my mother had no rights. All she had was responsibilities, like bearing children, raising them, doing all of the household chores, taking care of the farm animals, raising the food for the table and finding ways to make life bearable for the man of the house, who accepted all this as his right. My mother "escaped" that life by attaching herself to another male and running away to New York City where the male, accepting his right, got her pregnant with her 10th and 11th children — my twin sister and I — and then promptly deserted her. The nine other children were left in South Carolina. My sister and I wound up in a foundling home in New York City a month after we were born. My mother returned to South Carolina where, through a succession of attachments to other males, she eventually had six more children.

My sister was adopted at an early age by a West Indian couple and I, between the ages of one month and nine years, resided in a succession of seven foster homes, each of them more abusive than

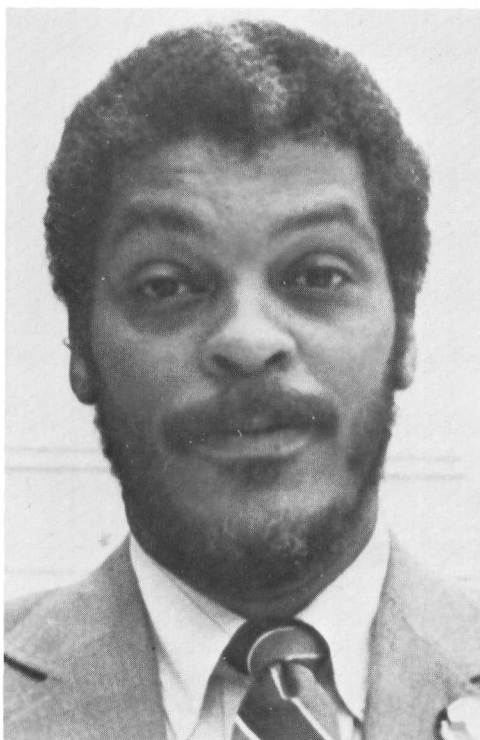
the last. At the age of nine, having decided I would not be abused again, I stuck a knife into the chest of my foster father and pushed my 300-pound stepmother down a department store escalator, praying to Jesus Christ — I was being raised as a Catholic — she would be dead when she hit the bottom. Neither she nor my foster father died, but I was taken out of foster homes for two years and placed in an institution. When I was 11, I was placed with a relative. Two months after that, I ran away and grew up living in the streets of New York.

Growing up in the streets of Brooklyn, I slept in hallways at night after the bars closed and ran with the gangs, learning first-hand what it meant to be a man. As a man, you had to constantly prove your power with a knife or a fist. Women (girls) were protected by you just like your turf. No one interfered with your right to do anything you wanted with your woman. Getting and keeping control over your woman was what was important, whether one used violence or what passed as a "game" — convincing them of your undying love. The lords of the neighborhood were those who had the greatest number of women looking after them. Sharing your woman with your buddies in the gang showed how really "cool" you were — a man wouldn't let a woman "open his nose," i.e. fall in love.

I could go on and on discussing the lessons on how one became a man in that environment, but I don't find the lessons taught in the supposedly privileged parts of our own society any different. It's been passed down through the ages, whether you are in a shelter or on Park Avenue. The rituals and the result are the same — as a man, you control your turf, and to most men, women are "turf."

I say all of this because I want to make the point that as a 48-year-old Black male, who grew up under not-so-privileged conditions, I am still a product of thousands of years of history that has guaranteed me, even under the worst of

Continued on page 23



Faith Evans, national president of the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR), is on the staff of the United Church of Christ Office for Church in Society.

A conversation with Beverly Harrison:

The politics of reproduction

*Dr. Beverly Wildung Harrison is perhaps the most renowned authority on abortion ethics in pro-choice circles. Her books include the landmark **Our Right to Choose: Toward a New Ethic of Abortion**, about which one commentator said, "Even the footnotes were interesting." Harrison, currently Carolyn Williams Baeird Professor of Christian Ethics at Union Theological Seminary, has been on the faculty at Union since the mid-'60s, and is widely in demand as a lecturer. She interrupted a rigorous writing/speaking/teaching schedule to have a conversation with WITNESS editor Mary Lou Suhor. Excerpts follow.*

A Roman Catholic pro-choice event this month bills you as speaking on the topic, "Ethical methodologies and their practical applications." How do you break that down, in lay terms, with respect to the abortion issue?

I speak from the standpoint of a feminist liberation theological ethic. From that methodology, one does not begin abstractly with a discrete deed called "an abortion decision" or a moral dilemma called "abortion." One begins with a concrete analysis of the lives of women and their circumstances within which the question about abortion arises.

Today the dilemma about abortion evolves around a woman's extremely limited ability to determine how her reproductive capacity will be integrated within all the expectations and demands of her life.

If you read the literature in Christian ethics on abortion, it is completely abstracted and treated as an isolated case, as though everyone facing this decision is up against the same wall. Commentaries don't even pause to notice that for the woman, the moral question is, what will I do with my reproductive power within my total life plan and commitment?

Many women choose abortion reluctantly, even in desperation, recognizing that they cannot maintain conditions for

their own and a dependent child's survival given the constraints governing their lives. Women bear not only the biological risks but also the cultural, social and economic consequences of pregnancy and childbearing. Few moral philosophers or moral theologians have paid attention to the "politics of reproduction" in human history.

Methodologically, I begin with concrete dilemmas, then look at the moral traditions. The second point of liberation theology is that one does not assume that all inherited theological morality is good. One has to presume it's a mixture of the social control of the powerful and the effort to identify genuine norms and values in the culture and one has to do a critical reading, invoking a "hermeneutics of suspicion."

This is where people like Roman Catholic hierarchy and fundamentalist Christians and even to a large extent, non-fundamentalist Christian males, basically read the Christian tradition as a lofty, monolithic moral concern for innocent human life. And it's not that. It hasn't been that.

I have argued in my book that there are no moral reasons articulated against abortion in early Christian tradition. The Church Fathers assumed that abortion is probably a symptom of adultery. No other reasons are offered until probably

the 15th century. Abortion was always condemned when sexual behavior rigidified, especially during the period when clerical celibacy was imposed.

Until the late 19th century, there was no effort to impose a uniform definition of what constitutes an abortion in ecclesiastical teaching. Many applied the term abortion only to termination of prenatal life in more advanced stages of pregnancy. And no Protestant clergy or theologian gave early support for proposed 19th century laws banning abortion in the United States. I have traced the texts that anti-abortion moral theologians use and what they've said about them and most of the time they've just repeated a prohibition, a taboo against abortion without reasoning about it.

You have expressed concern that current developments have "fetalized" the abortion debate. In what way?

What's so astonishing about the present debate is that it is overwhelmingly about the innocent, helpless fetus. And why is the fetus *innocent*? Because it hasn't yet been born of woman, and fallen into sin. So on one side you have all the imagery of the innocent fetus and no consideration or discussion, on the other side, of the impact of this pregnancy on the woman's life. The woman is invisible, without standing as a full person, with-

out moral autonomy. The first principle of biomedical ethics in every other field is, you cannot override the autonomy of the patient in prescribing treatment and care. Yet, appeals women make to their right to bodily self-control and self-direction are treated at best as morally irrelevant or ethically confused, and at worst as selfish, whimsical or positive evidence of the immorality of women who choose to have or to defend legal abortions.

So we end up with a society that sanctions *coercive pregnancy*. If you use that term people look at you like you're mad. But prohibiting abortion or constricting it means that coercive pregnancy is the social policy of the nation. If you got pregnant and didn't want to, that's tough. You have no option. You must now carry this pregnancy to term, whatever the circumstances.

What are some other consequences of fetalizing the issue?

One was the popular visualization of fetal life, as picked up by the media. The so-called pro-lifers pre-empted the high ground here — so-called, because I know no one on the pro-choice side who is not pro-life. With today's technology, the capacity to visualize fetal development is subject to incredible misuse. "The Silent Scream," a film shown by anti-abortionists, is an example. To show a tiny zygote magnified many times under a powerful lens, it would appear to have the morphology of a baby because shape takes place first. But that is very

different from claiming that this is a human being, analagous to ourselves, with rights. The question is not when biological life begins, but when does fetal life become a person, a full member of the class of human beings? Anti-abortionists urge us to respect fetal rights from the time of conception or genetic implantation, and tempt us to imagine that personal rights inhere in natural biological processes. But early fetal life lacks even the minimal requirements for participation in the sphere of human rights. In courtrooms there has to be a "stand-in" for the fetus to claim "its" rights. And that person will be the husband, doctor, or lawyer — usually powerful men whose judgment will be honored over the pregnant woman's.

Also, the recent explosion in medical knowledge and medical technology has led doctors to *perceive* fetuses as separate from the mother, even viewing fetuses as patients. Doctors face issues of treatment during pregnancy which ostensibly involve contrary interests between the gestating fetus and the pregnant mother. Take the case of a professional woman, for example who is having her first child in her mid 40s, who is told that because of her age she should spend two days a week hooked up to a fetal monitoring machine for optimal safety. What is her moral obligation? Any woman undergoing high-risk pregnancy will be under incredible restraints to have no other interests in her life except optimal caution in relation to high risk pregnancy.

Politically, don't men take it for granted that they can exercise their own power in society over life and death issues — conduct wars, build nuclear missiles, engage in toxic experiments which endanger fetal life?

Absolutely. While there is no perception of women having any right to make even very concrete decisions about their own lives, men will not even look at the ef-

fects, including the social effects of their own disastrous decisions on the process of reproduction and on the well-being of children.

Everything in this argument makes clear there's no capacity to imagine the possibility of women having the power to make decisions as being in any way analogous to the power that men *insist* upon.

How do you see the role of motherhood as related to pro-choice?

A feminist agenda needs to recognize a supreme irony in this society: At the very time the United States is attempting to re-impose compulsory pregnancy as the social policy of the nation, it is at the same time doing things that consistently erode the conditions for the positive choice of motherhood. It is sheer insanity for anyone who has the tiniest imagination about the condition of women's lives. The extent to which motherhood is being assaulted is extremely wicked — a social evil of unspeakable magnitude, as far as I'm concerned.

The role of biological and social motherhood — they are not the same — is undervalued in this country. Motherhood is truly the whipping boy of so much psychological theory. If people have problems they blame it on their mothers — it's a favorite game. No one stops or pauses to look at the tremendous social contempt for pregnancy and child-bearing, and yet at the same time we can feel so self-righteous that we're now going to perceive human life as existing from conception onward. But the fact is we can't see the conditions that often dissuade women from choosing child-bearing — poverty, isolation, lack of access to social power and lack of social support. So we have a society that profoundly evades the conditions for positive choice. We have cut back funding for prenatal health care; our infant mortality rate is skyrocketing. It was down in the '60s; the war on poverty had a lot

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to do with that. This kind of social turmoil has come up every time there has been any effort or intervention around the issue of positive state support for women, for unborn children, for the conditions of women's health care. It's a social contradiction that screams to be noticed.

Can you give some historical examples?

Every demand women have made over two centuries, from suffrage to full social equality — and remember, the ERA is not yet law — has met with derision. It took a generation-long struggle to make contraception legal and widely accessible. The birth control movement encountered opposition from its inception in the late 19th century, and Margaret Sanger was branded a common criminal.

The Sheppard-Towner Act, a progressive bill that supported maternal and infant health care for nearly a decade, was repealed in the right-wing politics of 1929, which branded it socialized medicine. While Sheppard-Towner was in effect, infant mortality dropped 11%.

What is the undergirding theology of Operation Rescue?

I haven't read a lot of its literature, but I've heard the leader, Randall Terry, speak. That is pure patriarchal fundamentalism, which I believe is a new thing under the sun. Theological conservatism isn't, but this brand of fundamentalism, heretofore apolitical, has been embraced by wealthy, powerful men and the well-financed New Right. This encapsulated do-what-the-Bible-says mentality comes from strident, purportedly straight White male voices telling us we'll go to hell if we don't obey what they say because that's what God thinks and what the Bible teaches. I see it as an actual response to the rising of women. Any biblicism which makes sex roles in their most patriarchal form and the nuclear family an issue of faith is pure ide-

ology aimed at constraining women.

But it doesn't work. The sex scandals of TV evangelists show that their basic attitudes toward women are not all that different from their secular counterparts. And women who buy this line end up divorced, single parents, with babies they can't feed, just like other women.

Is abortion a given for our society for the near future, even if *Roe vs. Wade* is turned around?

Abortion is a social inevitability. If one knows anything about the growing pauperization of women and children, the fact is that increasingly women have to believe that if they get pregnant, there's a strong possibility that they and they alone will raise the child. Nearly half the children in this society are being raised by single parents, and that's rising. In most cases the single parent is the woman, who is the sole provider.

How does sterilization abuse work in this dynamic?

Sterilization abuse and genocide are the other side of the coin in the abortion issue for poor and racially marginalized women. In my studies I found that sterilization abuse, and by this I mean all methods that block the option of reproduction for women — took three forms. The first was the overt use of state power to insist on medical-surgical sterilization for poor women, generally poor Black women and usually through the welfare system. The welfare system, particularly in the Deep South, frequently made sterilization a requirement for continuation of welfare. In at least 17 counties suits were brought to stop the practice. I'm sure, however, if I would call the Black Women's Health Coalition in Atlanta they'd tell me there are still places where it goes on.

Another form of abuse very acute in Hispanic, and particularly Puerto Rican communities was reported by Dr. Helen Rodriguez. She found that over one third

of all Puerto Rican women of child bearing age on the Island were sterilized, and it's still the birth control method of choice among many Puerto Rican women. Historically, the Roman Catholic Church prohibited availability of contraceptive devices, and Protestant hospitals offered sterilization as a method of birth control. Puerto Rican women debate deeply about this, because it is seen as genocide by many Puerto Rican men, especially on the liberation front. But it is more complicated, because sterilization didn't require the knowledge or cooperation of their husbands. What some see as genocidal, some Puerto Rican women see as a necessary evil. Without the availability of other contraception, removing the sterilization option pushes the woman back onto the willing collaboration of her sexual partner. That is problematic for some women. So for many, the decision was certainly a force-field choice.

Another thing we found was that many poor women and racial minority women received health care from large urban hospitals. Sometimes tubal ligations and hysterectomies were performed insensitively. And the American Medical Association once conceded that in certain teaching hospitals, large numbers of hysterectomies were recommended only to train young surgeons how to do them.

If *Roe vs. Wade* were overturned, or abortion issues remanded to the states, how would anti-abortion laws be enforced? Wouldn't that take the setting up of a whole new cumbersome apparatus?

If the locus of the political battle shifts to the states, some states will continue to grant abortions. Some 14 or 15 now provide public funding for abortions. In every one of those the battle has been a bloody one. But we'd have to assume that in many states abortion would be effectively outlawed. Provisions such as abortions are OK only if you're raped

have no meaning to women. What this does is submit a woman who has already been violated to having to prove she didn't "ask for it," that she's not a bad person to want an abortion. Women won't tolerate it.

We'll go back to the illegal abortion industry. It will be very expensive and dangerous in that optimal conditions won't prevail. But there will be less danger now because prior to the '60s the surgical procedure of suction wasn't available. What will happen is abortions will take place later in pregnancies, when social policy should be to encourage early abortions. Now well over 90% are performed during the first trimester of pregnancy, but that won't happen. Also, RU-486 and other such drugs will become available on the black market.

We can be sure that new laws will be partially enforced for a while to placate anti-abortion groups, but basically the state apparatus won't be there, and abortion will be tolerated, like prostitution. Abortion laws will be used coercively, when it suits those in power, and therefore will be another part of the underenforced control apparatus of the state, only to be used against unpopular and marginalized groups. It will do more harm to the effort in society to have respect for law where we need law.

What do you perceive as the practices and policies that ought to characterize a moral society in this discussion?

First, we'd have to move to the point where the well-being of *all* born children in this society was recognized as a genuine theological and moral concern; and concern for and care of children would be a priority. Supportive conditions for women who wished to be mothers, or people who wished to be parents, would have to include policies which respected and honored that.

But neither would society penalize people who opted for other things. The fact is that population growth in the

world is severely taxing the capacities of societies. We are not in a historical situation where people have to be urged to bear children.

What people don't see is that since our society offers practically no support to the decision to bear and raise children — that is, since this is not a priority for society itself — the result is that women on the whole make decisions about childbearing in a largely negative environment in which the choice to bear children is practically a heroic decision.

It's either heroic or naive. I worry about the traditional ideology that says women are uniquely fulfilled by childbearing. It creates needs in young women to be mothers without giving them any honest reading about what the conditions for motherhood are in this society.

I believe in the best of all worlds we would have the conditions for greater procreative choice, including safe and reliable means of contraception, which would preclude the necessity for frequent abortions. Men and women would share not only the responsibility for procreative choice, including contraception, but also the overall well-being of children, and there would be no sexual violence or sexual abuse. In such a utopian world, it might make sense to adhere to an ethic which affirmed that abortions should be resorted to only to save a mother's life. In our world, such an ethic is cruelty masked as morality.

In the seminary, what are the chief problems you face in making your students aware of social justice issues around pro-choice concerns?

It is no more acute for us than a few years ago. Perhaps the present generation is more amnesiac than previous generations. But I view that as intentional. Partly it is the way liberal institutions have identified with the powers that be. Readings of U.S. history and political history that are really attentive to the so-

cial struggles and the resistance to change in this society, and that view these debates in any serious perspective in terms of political and economic analysis are rare. So critical reading is limited among students, and therefore, their capacity to make connections. You have to do consciousness-raising with middle strata Americans that is not unlike the consciousness-raising that has to be done with the peasants in Brazil. And in some cases at least the peasants in Brazil and racial-ethnic people who are genuinely poor don't have to be told that the system is far from just. But middle strata people have been taught to perceive the pain in their lives as their private problem. You've got to help people to detect that their so-called private pains are in fact public issues.

Many students still operate in the liberal framework that perceives that solutions to problems can be tackled by individuals. That the individual woman, for instance, trying and working harder to be a little better than a man will somehow see the barriers fall. But of course that's not the kind of world we're living in. All patterns of injustice to women are worsening in the world. The progress that can be made through tokenism is quickly coming to an end in our society because the restructuring of capitalism is leading to cutbacks everywhere and experimentation is not continuing.

There is a lot of rhetorical embrace of gender justice expectations within what is implicitly liberal social theory. But we need a feminist analysis that realizes that all oppression is structured. Gender oppression is one of several powerful historical structures and all of these enforce each other.

Resource

For a comprehensive treatment of issues in this article, see *Our Right to Choose: Toward a New Ethic of Abortion*, by Beverly Wildung Harrison. Beacon Press, 1983. \$18.95

Short Takes

Life ends at birth?

Teenage pregnancy isn't a new problem. Though making abortions available to young people has somewhat lowered the birth rate, a great many babies are still being born to teenagers, most of them unmarried girls under the age of 18. The personal and social costs to these new parents are staggering. And we have only begun to feel the cost to society. On economic grounds alone, it is hard to see how we will be able to care for and educate these children in generations to come. Many of the most rabid right-to-lifers don't address this question. They seem to believe life begins at conception and ends at birth. The teen and baby are on their own after the birth.

Rep. Pat Schroeder
in *Champion of the Great American Family* (Random House)

No comment

Had there been in 1921 the overwhelming number of abortions that there were in 1987, he believes he would probably not be here . . .

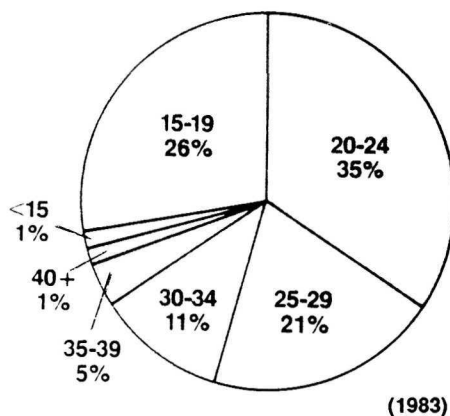
The Rev. William Guthrie, speaking of the Very Rev. David B. Collins
The NOEL News, 9-10/88

Integrity to note 15th year

Integrity, an organization of Gay and Lesbian Episcopalians and Friends, will celebrate its 15th anniversary during its national convention June 30-July 3 at Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, according to Kim Byham, president.

Participants will include the Rt. Rev. John S. Spong, Bishop of Newark, and the Rev. Malcolm Boyd, who will be celebrant and homilist, respectively, for the anniversary Eucharist July 1; and the Rev. Norman Pittenger, noted theologian, banquet speaker. Others on the program include Louie Crew, founder of Integrity, and the Revs. John McNeill, Ellen Barrett, Richard Kerr, Janie Spahr, and Connie Hartquist, many of whom will conduct workshops scheduled for the event.

Percentage of abortions by age



- More than 60% of women who have abortions are younger than 25. The highest rates occur among older teenagers and young adults (60 per thousand women ages 18-19; 51 per thousand women ages 20-24).

- Each year in the United States, women end approximately one out of four pregnancies, for a total of nearly 1.6 million abortions (1985). Both the number of abortions and the rate (per thousand women) have remained relatively constant throughout the 1980s.

- The lowest rates occur among women younger than 15 (9 per thousand) and women after their mid-thirties (10 per thousand, ages 35-39; 3 per thousand, ages 40 and older).

- In the United States, nearly 70% of the women who obtain abortions are white. White women tend to use abortion to postpone the beginning of childbearing; nonwhite women tend to use abortion to space their children or to end their childbearing.

- Most women (90%) obtain abortions in the first trimester of pregnancy (12 weeks or less since the last menstrual period). Fewer than 1% of abortions occur after 20 weeks, and almost all of these are at 21-23 weeks.

National Abortion Federation, 2/88

Silencing the oppressor

The client I was protecting seemed to handle the pleas of "pro-lifers" to "save her baby from these murderers" very well — she realized that these people just didn't understand or care about her. But when a white man screamed at her that the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. would "turn over in his grave for what she was doing," and that she was contributing to the genocide of African-Americans, she broke. She stopped, stared in his eyes with tears in hers, and coolly said, "You're a white boy, and you don't give a damn thing about me, who I am or what I do. And you know even less about Martin Luther King or being Black. What you have to say to me means nothin', not a damn thing." He was silenced and she walked on.

Dazon Dixon
Common Ground-Different Planes, 12/88

Alejandrina Torres update

Alejandrina Torres, Puerto Rican activist, is currently serving a prison sentence for allegedly aiding the FALN, the Puerto Rican liberation movement. Her experience in the Lexington Federal Prison High Security Control Unit for political prisoners — which used sensory deprivation, isolation and sexual humiliation to control the inmates — was the focus of a February 1988 WITNESS story. Due to pressure by religious and secular groups, the Unit was closed and Alejandrina was transferred to San Diego Metropolitan Correctional Center.

Her husband, the Rev. Jose Torres, a UCC minister in Chicago, said that though conditions are somewhat improved, Alejandrina is allowed only a half hour of exercise a day, and is not getting decent medical attention for an arm injury caused by a guard's assault in another prison, and a serious bladder condition. Interested readers should write to the warden, urging more exercise time and adequate medical care for Alejandrina. The address is: Warden Al Kanahale, MCC, 808 Union St., San Diego, CA 92101.

Legislative and pastoral implications:

The Episcopal Church and abortion

by Katherine Hancock Ragsdale

Every three years as General Convention rolls around, the Episcopal Church's position on reproductive freedom goes up for grabs. Detroit's 1988 Convention saw pro-choice activists working to pass a resolution offered by New York deputy Diane Pollard. It strongly and clearly affirmed the church's opposition to any legislation which would restrict a woman's access to abortion services and to the information she needs to make an informed and responsible choice.

Anti-choice activists lobbied for resolutions which declared all abortion a tragedy. These resolutions encouraged women to consult their pastors before electing an abortion, to consider all other options, and to avail themselves of the rites of reconciliation of a penitent if they did choose an abortion. These resolutions gave only glancing acknowledgement to women's legal right to abortion — never did they clearly support that right.

Compromise legislation which included watered-down versions of both anti- and pro-choice resolutions finally passed. They probably left no one happy. Happy or not, those with a commitment on either side of this issue are thus left to deal with both legislative and pastoral implications of General Convention's actions.

Some who agree that abortion is a moral/ethical decision on which people

of good faith disagree and, as such, is an issue to be decided within individual conscience and/or communities of faith rather than by legislation, have argued that the church need not and should not concern itself with the legislative implications of its position on abortion. They contend that the church's job is only to speak pastorally and ethically. Such a position reveals both a misunderstanding about the theory of our democratic system and a naivete about the reality of legislative process.

Democratic theory calls us to add our voices to the public debate on this issue, as does hard political reality. Women's right to safe and legal abortions is in jeopardy. It is under attack in the legislatures, in the courts, and in the executive branches of our state and federal governments. These attacks are fueled not only by the vitriol of the religious right and the Roman Catholic hierarchies, but also by the perception that the liberal and mainstream churches are backing away from their historic insistence that abortion is a moral/ethical decision not to be coerced by restrictive legislation.

In politics, as in much of life, perception becomes reality. Therefore, it would be irresponsible not to note what is happening legislatively as well as pastorally, and to determine if our actions and pronouncements serve to promote justice or oppression.

By the time this issue goes to press the U.S. Supreme Court will have heard oral testimony in the case of *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, more commonly known as *Webster*. The case involves a Missouri statute which declares

that life begins at conception, restricts access to abortion in public health facilities, and seeks to prohibit the use of public funds for abortion counselling.

Webster seemed at first to be just one more attempt by a state to limit the constitutional rights guaranteed in *Roe v. Wade* (the 1973 Supreme Court decision which effectively legalized abortion). However, as the case went to the Supreme Court, President George Bush and Attorney General Richard Thornburgh used this opportunity to speak out against *Roe v. Wade*.

Prior to hearing the oral arguments in the *Webster* case, the Supreme Court received 31 amicus briefs signed by more than 300 organizations arguing that the court should uphold the lower court decisions, rule the statute unconstitutional, and leave *Roe v. Wade* intact. Signers include 896 law professors (15% of all U.S. law professors), 57 bioethicists from 20 states, 167 distinguished scientists and physicians including 11 Nobel Laureates and five National Medal of Science recipients, 77 women's organizations, members of Congress, Nurses' Associations, State Attorneys General, the American Psychological Association, 22 international women's health and population organizations, and 2887 women who have had abortions.

One brief prepared specifically for the religious community was signed by The Episcopal Women's Caucus, the Episcopal Diocese of New York, the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts—Women in Crisis Committee, the Women in Mission and Ministry unit of the Episcopal Church USA, and eight Episcopal bish-

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ops. The bishops' statement of interest reads as follows:

As bishops of the Episcopal Church we have several concerns about the Missouri statute. We know that scientists, ethicists, theologians, and other faithful persons differ about the time life begins, and we worry when states attempt to answer existential questions by statute. Similarly, we recognize that the decision to have or not to have an abortion is a profound and personal decision to be made by the moral agent involved (that is to say, by the pregnant woman). We must object to any statute which would deny an individual the information necessary to make an informed decision about her reproductive health or the ability to act upon that decision.

Others signing this brief include the American Friends Service Committee, several offices of the United Church of Christ, The General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, several Jewish organizations, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, and many more.

It is clear that if the Supreme Court upholds the Missouri statute, pro-choice activists will have their hands full with state-to-state battles to insure women the right to reproductive choice and safe, legal abortions. What might not be so evident is that the *Webster* case, and the Bush Administration's interest in it, is not a new thing but is merely the next logical step in an erosion of women's right to choose. That erosion has been in progress for several years. A look at the losses of 1988 alone should provide ample evidence of the crisis at hand.

Efforts to restore Medicaid funding for abortions in the cases of rape and incest were unsuccessful in 1988. Opposition from within the House of Representatives and the White House contributed to that failure. Choice advocates hope to



At the April 9 march in Washington, D.C., Hispanic women proclaim, "Our bodies, our rights."

raise the issue again in 1989.

Also, Congress passed an anti-abortion rider in 1988 which bans the use of locally raised tax revenues for abortion services in the District of Columbia. Similarly, other funding bans were used to restrict access to abortion. One such ban bars abortions for federal prisoners. Another prohibits U.S. military personnel stationed overseas from using U.S. facilities (base hospitals, clinics, and doctors) or transportation (military transport back to the United States for access to safe non-government hospitals and doctors) for abortion services, even if they wish to pay for them themselves.

Restricting a woman's right to an abortion or to information about abortions does not even depend on a majority vote in each house of Congress. Significant restrictions can (and do) occur within the regulatory process (a function of the executive branch).

One regulation, ruled unconstitutional by a federal judge but still in effect pending the outcome of the Administration's appeal, is known as the "Mexico City" population policy. This international family planning policy bars U.S. funding to non-governmental popu-

lation agencies which use *non-U.S. funds* for abortion services in countries where abortion is legal.

One of the most heinous of the Administration's regulatory attacks on reproductive freedom involves Title X. Enacted by Congress in 1970, Title X provides federal funds for programs that offer comprehensive reproductive health care, which includes physical exams, birth control counselling, pregnancy testing, screening and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases and minor gynecological problems, and other types of counselling and referral. Congress intended Title X programs to give priority to low-income women, who most often have no access to health care services or to information about where to obtain reproductive health care. Since its enactment, Title X has improved the health care of millions of low-income women.

Title X provides that none of the funds appropriated for its programs shall be used "where abortion is a method of family planning." Since its enactment, agencies have interpreted this to mean that Title X funds cannot be used to provide abortions but that counselling and referral for all available reproductive op-

tions (including abortion) may be provided. Indeed, medical ethics and legal malpractice standards regulating health care providers *require* that such comprehensive information be provided.

When a woman decided that an abortion was the most appropriate choice for her the Title X funded agency either referred her elsewhere to obtain abortion services or, in some cases, performed the abortion within the agency but using non-Title X funds.

Reagan Administration regulations would reverse this 17-year-old interpretation of Title X. If implemented, these regulations would require the complete physical and financial separation of federally-funded family planning activities from any abortion-related activities. Thus clinics, family planning centers, health services centers, etc., which receive Title X funding for any of their programs cannot provide any abortion-related services or counselling even if they do so within other non-federally funded aspects of their program.

Under other regulations, federal funds would not be available to any family planning program which *even mentions* that abortion is legal. They would prohibit all non-perjorative speech about abortion by Title X grantees, even when the doctor has determined that a woman's life is threatened by continuation of the pregnancy. Furthermore, personnel of federally funded programs may not even refer such a woman to a non-federally funded agency where she could receive complete information about her options and her own medical needs.

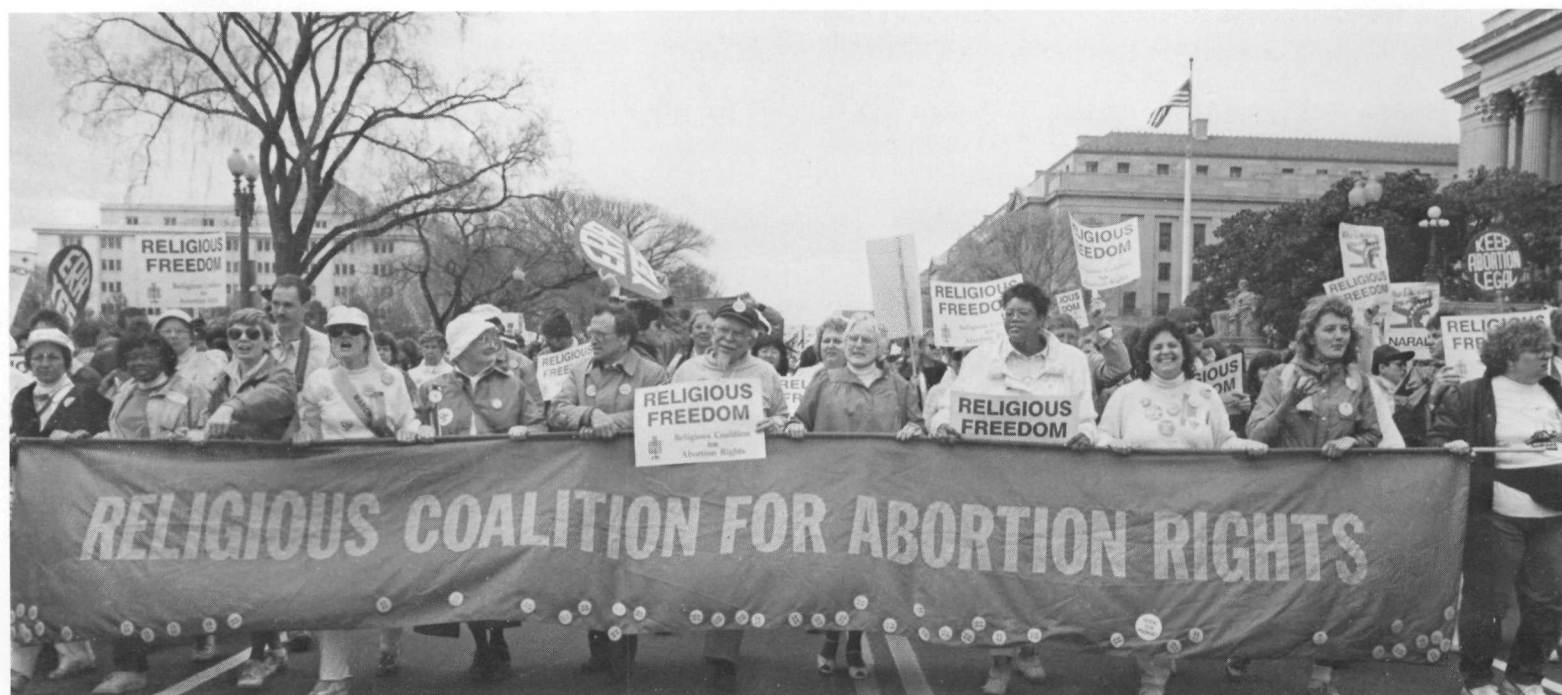
Clearly, the church has a stake in these legislative and regulatory limitations of choice as a justice issue. While the Supreme Court ruling upholding women's right to choose still stands, this right is being systematically denied to poor women.

The one clear message in the midst of all this is that people of good faith are not in agreement on the abortion issue, and there is no moral consensus that

abortion is wrong. Thus we must be sure that when our voice as a church surfaces in the public debate we are clear in our opposition to legislative coercion in the arena of moral decision.

The 1988 General Convention Resolution concerning abortion dealt most extensively with what were termed the "pastoral dimensions" of the issue. Priests reported being approached for counselling by women who had elected to have abortions and now, years later, were regretting those decisions. Citing a need for the church to state clearly its moral opposition to abortion in principle, many of the more moderate voices in the debate agreed to support language which stated that while abortion may sometimes be necessary it is always a tragedy; and which encouraged women to consider all other options, to consult with their pastors before choosing to abort, and to seek the sacrament of reconciliation when an abortion did take place.

Even if one were willing to concede



An estimated 100,000 people of faith joined RCAR to march for "Women's Equality, Women's Lives."

that abortion is always an unfortunate necessity at best, the language of the 1988 resolution is counterproductive.

An October, 1987 study conducted in a Southern state on behalf of the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights questioned church-going women about their beliefs concerning abortion. Most of these women indicated that if they were faced with deciding whether or not to abort they would not go to their pastor for counsel. They said that they would read their Bible and they would pray for guidance — but they would not talk to their pastor.

If, indeed, we want women to make moral choices which they don't later come to regret, and if we believe that the church is equipped to help people make responsible moral choices, then it is incumbent upon us to put aside our judgmental rhetoric. The call of the church is not to make people's moral decisions for them or to provide a formula into which they plug their data to get the "right" answer. The call of the church is to create a context within which circumstances, options, and competing values may be weighed and the responsible moral agent involved can decide what course of action is most in keeping with God's love and God's call to work creatively in this world.

Those whose goal is to reduce the overall number of abortions would better serve their cause by working to create a world where abortion is less often the best of the available alternatives. Instead of denying women the right to choose they might support adequate sex education within our schools, enhance the availability of contraception, and educate themselves and others to recognize and intervene in situations of domestic abuse and incest.

They might also invest some of their considerable political energy in curbing the routine devaluation of and violence against women which so easily escalates to rape (instead of arguing as one federal

legislator did — with a straight face — that it is almost impossible for a woman to become pregnant as a result of rape because her fear causes her body to produce some chemical which destroys the sperm!).

Perhaps those who wish there were fewer abortions might work for social policy which better protects the careers of parents who take maternity leave; which allows for more flexibility in work schedules of parents; which pro-

vides safe, adequate, subsidized day care to all citizens; which provides adequate public assistance to support the children of women who can't find adequate employment. When these changes take place we will, perhaps see fewer abortions in this country. Until then the question answered by restrictive legislation is not how many abortions will there be but how many women will live through them, and, of those that do, how many will be debilitated by guilt. **TW**

Statement on Childbirth and Abortion of the 69th General Convention of the Episcopal Church, July 1988

All human life is sacred. Hence, it is sacred from inception until death. The Church takes seriously its obligation to help form the conscience of its members concerning this sacredness. Human life, therefore, should be initiated only advisedly and in full accord with this understanding of the power to conceive and give birth which is bestowed by God.

It is the responsibility of our congregations to assist their members in becoming informed concerning the spiritual, physiological and psychological aspects of sex and sexuality.

The Book of Common Prayer affirms that "the birth of a child is a joyous and solemn occasion in the life of a family. It is also an occasion for rejoicing in the Christian community" (p. 440). As Christians we also affirm responsible family planning.

We regard all abortion as having a tragic dimension, calling for the concern and compassion of all the Christian community.

While we acknowledge that in this country it is the legal right of every woman to have a medically safe abortion, as Christians we believe strongly that if this right is exercised, it should be used only in extreme situations. We emphatically oppose abortion as a means of birth control, family planning, sex selection or any reason of mere convenience.

In those cases where an abortion is being considered, members of this Church are urged to seek the dictates of their conscience in prayer, to seek the advice and counsel of members of the Christian community, and, where appropriate, the sacramental life of this Church.

Whenever members of this Church are consulted with regard to a problem pregnancy, they are to explore, with grave seriousness, with the person or persons seeking advice and counsel, as alternatives to abortion, other positive courses of action, including, but not limited to, the following possibilities: the parents raising the child; another family member raising the child; making the child available for adoption.

It is the responsibility of members of this Church, especially the clergy, to become aware of local agencies and resources which will assist those faced with problem pregnancies.

We believe that legislation concerning abortions will not address the root of the problem. We therefore express our deep conviction that any proposed legislation on the part of national or state governments regarding abortions must take special care to see that individual conscience is respected and that the responsibility of individuals to reach informed decisions in this matter is acknowledged and honored.

Woman vs. womb:

Whose 'life' counts?

by Patricia Wilson-Kastner

In the current debate around the legality and morality of abortion, the self-designated "pro-life" proponents would like us to believe that choosing to reject abortion and preserve fetal life is a clear, obvious and simple decision to all except the morally callous or the severely misled. These anti-abortion forces include Roman Catholics loyal to papal teachings about sexual morality and various Protestant fundamentalists who fear the demise of the nuclear family if women are allowed any freedom of choice about reproduction.

The fundamentalist argument is fervent, but often couched in rhetoric about "traditional" family life, and it is easy to show its historical and biblical flaws. A more rigorous intellectual and theological substance for debate is rooted in the Roman Catholic community, with its long tradition of natural law theology.

It is important to appreciate some of the fundamental dangers of natural law theology, which in disguised ways appears in much popular argument about abortion and choice. The particular piece of this theology I think we need to clearly dissent with is its very notion of life — by this I mean more than just the question of when life begins. The way opponents of choice use the term "life" is, at best, inadequate for honest and constructive moral discussion and decision-making.

At first, the term "pro-life" sounds appealingly simple: After conception, always give the benefit of doubt to the

new life and let it develop, if physically possible, into a new human. Theologically the assumption is that all life is sacred, to be protected to the best of our abilities. This sounds uncomplicated, honest and direct. It isn't.

This type of thinking uses the word "life" as though it always meant the same thing. But the meaning cannot be so neatly isolated. To use the term "life" to designate the biological existence of a fertilized human ovum is not the same as describing the active life of a three-year-old pouring cat food into the fish tank, or searching for the vital signs of a severely injured victim of an auto accident. We use the word "life" as an abstraction from many particulars, with related but different meanings. The religious opponents of abortion have substantially confused the question by assuming that life is always the same reality with identical moral significance.

But life is not just a biological quality of certain matter; all life exists in a human context of relationships. The biological definition, as used by natural law theorists, ignores the human context of life and isolates it into a simple quality of matter. In that case, a just-fertilized egg, a 10-year-old girl, and an 80-year-old man are all "alive," and that becomes the essential element for ethical decision-making.

Under this assumption, some very odd and unexamined priorities are set up. Women are defined solely as bearers of new life without any concern for their lives. In effect, the fetus is more valued than the woman, because all aspects of her reality — other than the functioning of her womb — are eliminated from the decision-making process. Frequently, as

those arguing against choice perceive themselves as defending millions of helpless fetuses, the level of rhetoric rises and the tone of the debate becomes hostile towards women, but remains approving and protective towards the womb and fetus.

One of the most important contributions pro-choice advocates can make is to remind people that the relationship of the woman to the fetus in her body, and to the people and circumstances around her, are all part of life, and need to be taken into account when deciding about pregnancy. A woman may bear a fetus in her womb, but she is not *a womb*.

We are not accustomed to thinking about complex biological, social, emotional and moral interrelationships. We find it easier to reduce the argument to abstract categories — a woman's rights, baby-killers, the absolute right to life. However, the messy reality of human life call us back into a world in which a woman's life includes pregnancy, family life, health, economic stability, emotional maturity, support of others, faith, and a host of other factors. These are only some of the elements which shape whatever life the fetus might have, and are mediated through the mother.

In considering the life of the fetus, scientific evidence has shown that up until the 24th to 26th week of pregnancy, the fetus is totally dependent on the mother for survival. Its life, even in the limited biological sense, is not life in the same sense the mother's is. Fetal and maternal life are interdependent, but certainly not identical, nor can decisions about them be made using identical, simple, abstract rules. Abortion concerns human beings, not abstractions.

The Rev. Patricia Wilson-Kastner, Ph.D., is rector of the Church of the Resurrection, Norwich, Conn. Her 1984 WITNESS article on abortion, co-authored with the Rev. Beatrice Blair, has been widely reprinted.

Sometimes, because of the pain and complications of human life, abortion may be a tragic but morally necessary decision. Sometimes limited resources make it appear wise to choose things such as the mother's physical health, or family stability, over the potential life of the fetus. These decisions are always complicated, and all of us need to re-

member and respect this complexity. The choice is never so simple as "woman vs. womb."

Much of the vicious and destructive fighting in the conflict over legal abortion could be ameliorated, if not eliminated, if all sides were able to acknowledge the complexity of human existence. Abortion and reproduction fit as but two

elements among many in a diverse, interconnected reality. If pro- and anti-choice supporters could admit that inevitably each of us will make different judgements about this intricate web of life, we might begin to talk with each other honestly, humbly, and empathetically about the moral dimensions of reproductive choice. **TW**

'I'd make the same decision again'

"I'm afraid I'm going to die."

She appeared one day on the doorstep of the suburban church where I serve as rector. A high school senior and a Roman Catholic, she told me, "I came here because I saw a woman's name on the sign outside." The story tumbled out as we went into my office. She had had an abortion six and a half months before, and as what would have been the due date of the pregnancy approached, she was haunted by nightmares, guilt, and the fantasy that she would be destroyed by a vengeful, punitive God, "because it was alive, and I killed it."

She told me about the circumstances surrounding her pregnancy. She was an excellent student, planning for college and a career. She had had sex with her boyfriend several times; they cared for each other but, she said, were far too young to marry. Although fully aware of the physiology of reproduction, they had never used birth control. "I didn't think this could happen to me," she said. Her parents? "They're very strict. I could never tell them; my father would kill me." She had arranged for the abortion herself, gone to the clinic with her boyfriend, had the procedure done, and returned home. She hadn't told anyone, until now.

Did she really believe in an ogre God? I asked. We talked about the process by which she had made her decision, about the options she had considered and rejected. I suggested that biological life may differ from personhood. "Sometimes we grieve for our lost possibilities," I said, "even if we have made the right decision."

She told me about the values — and the fears too — that had guided her choice. "And you know," she said, "I'd do it again. I'd make the same decision. I know I couldn't give a baby up for adoption, and I know I couldn't raise it myself. Do you think I'm wrong to be so selfish?"

"I think we have not just a right, but a responsibility to care for ourselves, as well as others," I said. "I think

you're a courageous young woman, and I think you made a good decision."

We talked awhile longer, about a loving God who gives the awesome power and responsibility of choice, about the murkiness of decision-making, about grief, regret and loss, about future choices to be made in regard to sexuality, about her plans and hopes and dreams. I thanked her for trusting me with her story, and invited her to come back again if she wanted to talk more. I did not know her last name or how to reach her, so any future contact would be up to her.

"I think I'll be all right," she said.

As frequently happens in pastoral ministry, there are things I wish were different in this story. The young man and woman were foolish not to use contraception; they might have been wiser not to have had intercourse at all. My heart aches for this teenager, bearing the decision, the abortion, and the resulting feelings alone. I wish she had had a supportive, loving family, or had been able to perceive their love. Most of all, I wish her early religious training had been different; I wish she had learned care and respect for herself, her sexuality and her powers of choice, rather than guilt and fear of a God who seemed to lack compassion for human circumstances. One thing I am glad about, though, is that the choice was hers to make, that safe and legal abortion was an option.

In my opinion, the task of the church in such situations is not to make moral pronouncements, but to support human beings who must make deeply personal choices in a world full of ambiguities. We must affirm that women are responsible for the shaping of their own lives, including child-bearing. In the long term, we need Christian education that forms people who can trust their own ability to make difficult decisions, before God, caring both for themselves and others.

— The Rev. Elizabeth Maxwell

Evans . . . *Continued from page 11*

societal conditions, a privileged male role. That privilege assures me, even in 1989, the right to dominate and control the lives of women through the institutions of my world, be it the church, the gang that hangs on my corner, the family head, or the relationship I choose to be in. Every institution in our society is influenced by this ethos.

At some point in my life, and it's hard to pinpoint exactly when, realizing how terrible that situation was, I decided that I would spend the remaining years of my life siding with women, victims of that inbred privilege.

Throughout the civil rights movement of the late '50s and early '60s I spent most of my time working with women's groups, challenging the question of men's rights in both the Black and the White communities. I left the Catholic church in the 1960s because I concluded it used religion to acculturate both males and females to the dominant rights of males in society.

The struggle today around women having control of their ability to reproduce is, I am convinced, key to breaking this

concept of male privilege. It is a fight that cannot be lost by women. Two-thirds of the world's female population is controlled as a result of this male right. (When I use the term "male right," I mean an assumed privilege that is established under religious or secular law.) As more women begin to decide for themselves when they will or will not get pregnant, will have or not have a child, this issue of men's rights will get very, very confusing.

For us men who have concluded that women's reproductive freedom is the most crucial of issues to work on, I hope we all understand that once this issue is resolved, the real work will begin to dismantle some of those rights we automatically claim as men the day we are born. What's coming down the line ain't easy, but it's very possible that sharing some of those rights society gives us could make a difference in the struggle to win equal rights for all people. I think the results of my 22 years in this struggle have taught me that I really would rather have a world where I can choose what I want to be, than to be burdened with what the world wants me to be.

TW

Letters . . . *continued from page 3*

Barbara Harris for consecration *because she is Black?* Would they have refused to approve a Black male under the same circumstances? Let's see the "smoking gun" — or let's see no more insinuations of overt racism in the matter.

The Rev. Lowell J. Satre, Jr.
St. Paul, Minn.

Sharing feelings

I've been thinking and thinking how I might try to express to all of you how very moved I was and am with your recent WITNESS honoring Barbara Harris as a newly elected bishop. The tone of all the plaudits seems to come from people who strive to work with and honor one who has been and continues to be among us as a champion of human rights, responsibilities and the never-ending quest to hold us to a love of God infinite.

Without your nurturing ways my life would be so diminished. Thank you again for being and giving meaning to my life.

Sara L. Morrison
Washington, Iowa

Christians, get real

Thanks to THE WITNESS for the issue on Barbara Harris. She's radical-liberal; a civil and human rights activist. I've always considered Jesus to be rad-lib; certainly He bucked the establishment and if we believe The Book He was an activist for human rights.

When one prowls through the catacombs outside Rome, as I have done more than once, one is not reminded of or impressed with the splendor of Canterbury, Constantinople, or Rome. The pervasive thought is of the early fugitives who gathered in those damp, dark caves to break bread, declare their faith and lend support to each other in the all-too-frequent prospect of murder by the government.

I think the people who turned thumbs down on Harris (and that includes this diocese) are hypocritical. What ever happened to Jesus? It seems the institutional church lost Him somewhere along the way. To those people who opposed the election of the first woman bishop I would say, get real, grow up, try being Christian instead of ecclesiastical businessmen.

Boston has done itself and us proud in

calling Bishop Harris. But then, Boston also gave us a Tea Party; maybe we shouldn't be surprised.

Cal South
San Diego, Cal.

Barbara Harris: Bishop

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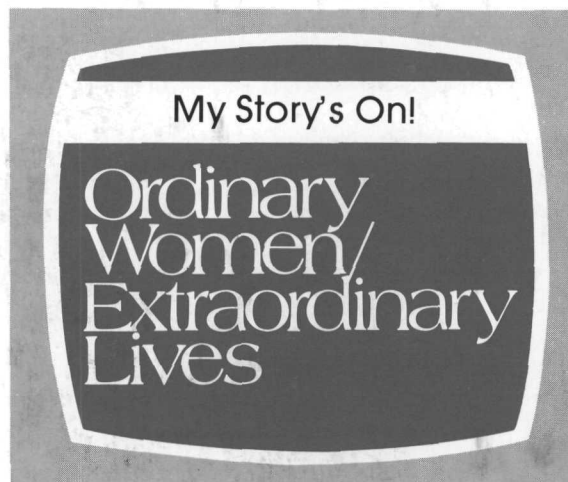
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