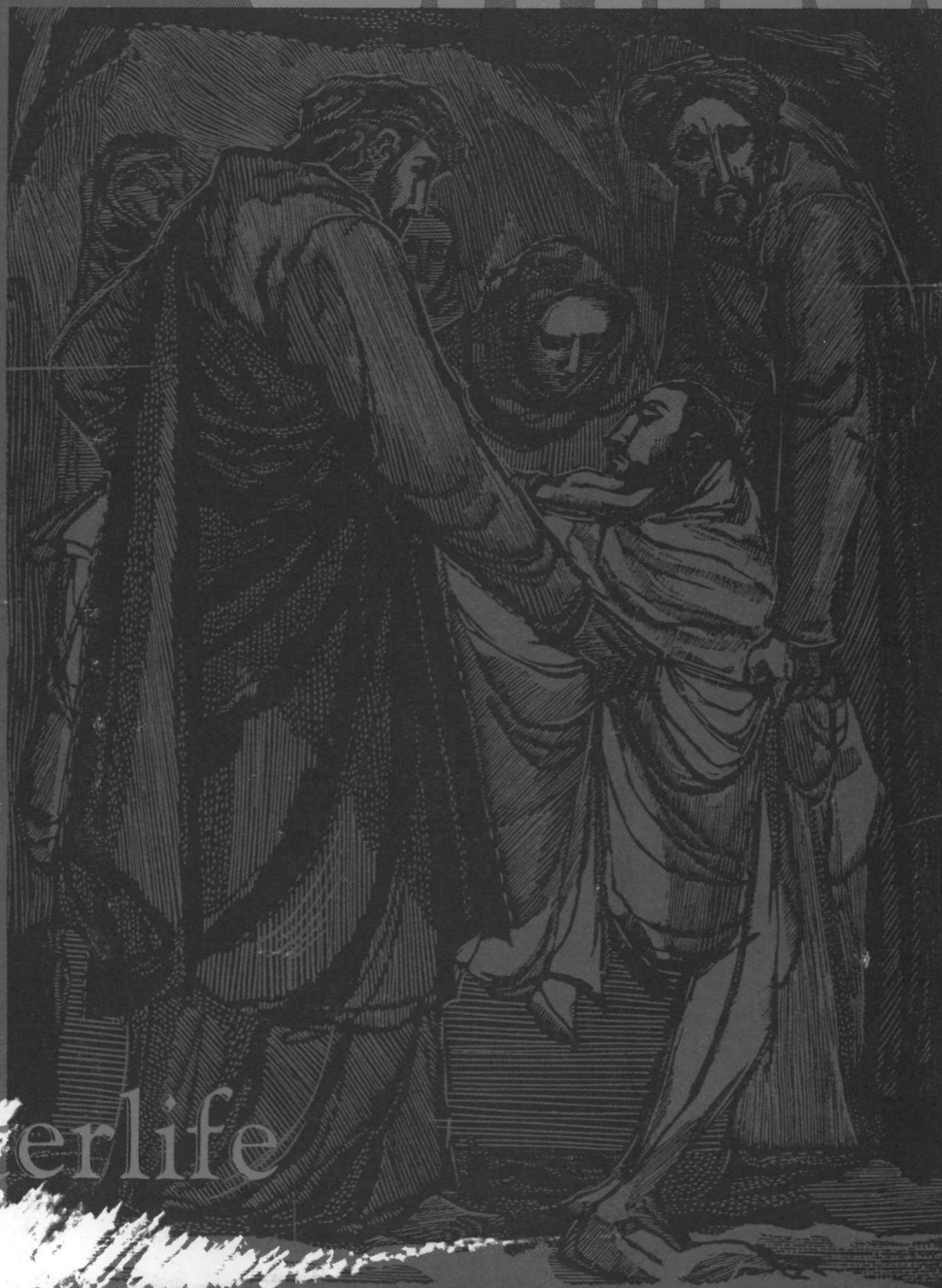


VOLUME • 73 NUMBER • 11 NOVEMBER 1990

THE WITNESS



Afterlife

— Charles Meyer

Letters

Remembering a friend

The Rev. Canon Paul Saunders, whose picture was included in our article "Environmental racism and the struggle for justice" (September WITNESS), passed away recently from an illness with which he had been struggling for several months. We would like your readers to know that we at the SouthWest Organizing Project in Albuquerque, along with many others around the country, have lost a great friend.

In the time we knew Paul, he accomplished much in helping to make the issue of eco-justice a priority for church institutions at many levels. Paul was instrumental in forming the Task Force on Eco-Justice of the New Mexico Conference of Churches in 1989. He provided much-needed guidance to local preparation for the Inter-Denominational Hearings on Toxics in Minority Communities, conducted by SWOP and the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Working Group in the fall of last year. Paul was clearly moved, as all of us were, by the testimony at the hearings.

Perhaps most importantly for us at SWOP, Paul considered himself not only a good friend, but in his words "a member" of our organization. We miss Paul, but find our continuing efforts greatly strengthened by his contributions, and by his example.

Louis Head, Michael Guerrero
SouthWest Organizing Project
Albuquerque, N.M.

(THE WITNESS joins SWOP in mourning Paul Saunders' death, and in celebrating his life. — Ed.)

Only 'green' counts

I had to look up the article by Manning Marable on "The myth of equality" because Robert Jordan's Letter to the Editor attacking it (July/August) was so vitriolic I thought I had missed the article's pronouncements.

If Jordan had attacked the requirement of a break from the tactics and ideas of the desegregation period of the 1960s I could have understood his objections. Anyone working for equality then knew we could not become part of the system. Martin Luther King, Jr. was teaching transformation. That is why he was killed.

The American system cannot claim equality in economics. A slave relegated to the auction block wrote off hundreds of lives to come, and minorities now consigned to holding cells will keep disrupting lives in our communities. Deterioration of decent conditions for life is the decline of freedom. We will not end this awful problem if we do not face what inequity does to people.

Marable is right, some blacks are moving up, but they are not racially equal, they are monetarily equal. When you run in the crowd who worships money, green is the only color that matters. That message is everywhere. The poor ghetto kid knows this, but the nasty approach to his life will remain, because to keep monetarily ahead the minority needs to use punitive methods to keep a majority from starting up that ladder.

We are building a society of inequality, and race will be an argument as long as the power elite can get us to argue among ourselves. And while we do that, we continue to accept their solutions. The promise of equality must be maintained so that it sounds as though leaders are following what is written. They are not, and as long as minds are twisted and resist creative solutions we will have to stand whatever the system dishes out.

Gray Anderson
Bloomington, Ind.

Activist sets example

I would be very distressed if I didn't have the opportunity to read articles about people like Mary Brent Wehrli (July/August issue). She probably repre-

sents many people who have lived somewhat sheltered lives until they've been confronted with the reality of how the have-nots are forced to live.

Affluence was not part of my early years growing up nor of my early years of marriage. Frugal, more like, but with a secure feeling of family bonds and good friends in abundance. But I did get radicalized when I worked with the Head Start program in the late '60s and early '70s. I was appalled at the poverty I found in my own hometown. My life has been dedicated to one cause of concern after another ever since. And, like Wehrli, one begins to realize how domestic and foreign policies here in the U.S. and throughout the world tramples most attempts to do something about the atrocities victims experience.

Sara-lu M. Morrison
Washington, Iowa

Anti-choice hurts women

Please send a copy of the feminist study guide, *My Story's On: Ordinary Women/Extraordinary Lives*, as advertised on the September back cover. I don't want to cut up any issue of THE WITNESS. You are my strength for common sense in the Episcopal Church.

The patriarchy is worried that an egalitarian system would give it less power over women and minorities and is fighting with money and our legal system to erode the progress we've made since *Roe v. Wade* in 1973.

Episcopalians are expected to think for themselves but there is a conservative group called "Episcopalians United" trying to get us back under patriarchy, and one called "NOEL" (National Organization of Episcopalians for Life), who are determined to get women into submissive roles.

The Roman Catholic hierarchy and fundamentalist leaders have backed anti-choice candidates, which is why we're hurting the young women and poor.

Having abortion as a political football right now will only hurt more women.

Barbara Palmer
Utica, Mich.

Keep plugging away

I am so glad you printed Margaret E. Ferry's letter (September) taking on the class nature of the "Liberation philosophy for retirement" article. In fact, I'd like her letter to be a regular feature each month.

The entire September issue is good. I broke apart reading Susan Pierce's report ("Fighting the poison of despair") on the Great Louisiana Toxic March through Cancer Alley. We Americans bitch about the possibility of chemical weapons being used by Saddam Hussein in the Middle East while we use chemical "weapons" here at home or export them to Third World countries as pesticides, herbicides and, who knows, maybe donated medicines that are banned for U.S. use but can be distributed by pharmaceutical companies abroad.

And who am I to talk? Here I sit in my Snug Sack, conserving energy, using recycled paper and envelopes (congrats to THE WITNESS for going to recycled paper) bought and paid for with oil income, the greatest polluter of all. I try to cancel out the oil income's part in pollution by ecologically-sound consumerism, but I think pollution is winning with plastics, gasoline engine emissions, etc. Well, I'll keep plugging away.

Abbie Jane Wells
Juneau, Alaska

Cuba issue to council

Your March issue on Cuba has been invaluable to me during a visit to Detroit by Clinton Adlum of the Cuba Interest Section in Washington, D.C. The Justice for Cuba Coalition, of which I am a member, arranged his visit during which, among other events, he was welcomed by the Hon. Maryann Mahaffey, presi-

dent of the Detroit City Council.

The City Council presented him with a resolution promising to use its influence to petition the U.S. government to remove travel restrictions between our countries; to remove the trade embargo, and the hostile military stance toward Cuba. The Detroit City Council hopes to visit Cuba some time next year.

Therefore, I would like to present each member of the council with a copy of the Cuba issue. Check enclosed. Yours for a peaceful world.

Cheaber H. Farmer
Detroit, Mich.

Preachy and passive

I get the impression that, like the secular "mass" media, the religious media has a limit to what it is willing to print. For all the griping THE WITNESS does about our government it still doesn't call for the constitutional changes that might make meaningful reform possible. In consequence, the magazine comes across as a passive bystander merely observing atrocities, and kibbitzing about them with others in the audience. If one were impolite one might accuse you of a sophisticated form of gallows humor.

Your September editorial ends with a call for "the American people" to "put limits" on the Bush Administration. Why does THE WITNESS preach at some nebulous "American people"? Aren't you people? Aren't you Americans?

The article on "Environmental racism and the struggle for justice" seems absurdly naive to be surprised that hazardous wastes should be another way we

"dump" on minorities. I was amused that someone has come up with a way to fancify feminism ("Ecofeminist vision must spur action") in order to avoid having to deal with the logical end-question of how much political power women should have. And the article "Make environment ministry a priority" ended with a list of busywork for the religious media that sounded an awful lot like Dr. Strangelove's "First we have to dig bomb shelters . . ." as the bombs were going off.

It is as if THE WITNESS would pee in its pants if it had to finish the logic of its purported fight against racism and sexism. The truth is that our government is white and male supremacist. When THE WITNESS refuses to testify to that fact, then it continues to bind us all to that white masculinist insanity simply by remaining aloof.

John Kavanaugh
Detroit, Mich.

(We have always appreciated reader Kavanaugh's provocative letters, and this is no exception. As an advocacy journal, we try to take the side of the oppressed. Through our individual efforts to work at social and political change, we are quite aware that our government (and indeed, the church) is white and male supremacist. We have experienced that first hand. But forgive us if we don't share the view that a constitutional convention or constitutional change is the answer to all our problems.)

As the Letters to the Editor on this page show, WITNESS readers across the country find the magazine useful in different ways.

We work at "conscientization" in our pages — which might be defined as education oriented toward action. The particular action is up to the reader, who will give according to his or her talents, addressing urgent needs in his or her community. The enterprise "is exploration into God," and with God be the increase. — Ed.)

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Editorial

Beyond the politics of fear

*This month's editorial is by WITNESS Contributing Editor Manning Marable,
Professor of Political Science at the University of Colorado.*

There is an unsettled feeling across this land, a sense of alienation and fear. No politician or national leader has really tapped this potential unrest. Nevertheless, the politics of fear lurk just beyond the political horizon.

For two generations, the American people were told that sacrifices were essential to defeat Communism, to dismantle the tyranny of the Iron Curtain. We were assured that once the forces of the "Evil Empire" were crushed, our productive energies would be turned to more constructive enterprises. There would be a "peace dividend" from the economic conversion of conventional and nuclear weapons production to the building of hospitals, schools, houses and transportation facilities. After years of confrontations, the Soviets have withdrawn from Afghanistan, are packing up to depart from Eastern Europe, and have adopted the Shatalin economic program to build a market-oriented economy.

But now the American people are being told that their economic sacrifices must continue. Massive Pentagon expenditures and budget deficits are necessary to maintain a strong "defense" against Noriega, the Ayatollahs, Saddam Hussein, or whoever else becomes the next "international villain." The U.S. government has enough money to send thousands of young Americans to fight and die protecting oil corporation inter-

ests abroad, virtually without public debate, yet never has enough to house the homeless or feed the hungry here. We have the funds to finance Stealth bombers to protect the Saudi sheiks, but never enough to save an entire generation of inner-city young people from unemployment, crime and drugs. Where are our priorities?

In the glitzy '80s, we were assured by the gurus of Reaganomics that wealth would trickle down to working-class and poor people. Some conservative economists even predicted that the business cycle of expansion-recession was a relic of the past. Keeping government out of the affairs of corporations and cutting taxes for the wealthy was the recipe for prosperity.


Now we stand at the edge of a recession, precisely due to the greed and irresponsibility of the Reagan-Bush administrations. This summer, the U.S. Labor Department revealed that employment has fallen in 33 states during the past year. Construction spending and retail sales slumped, and household income increases have fallen behind the growing rate of inflation. Meanwhile the wealthiest 10% of all Americans are paying \$93 billion less today than they would have under 1978 tax laws, according to the research group Citizens for Tax Justice.

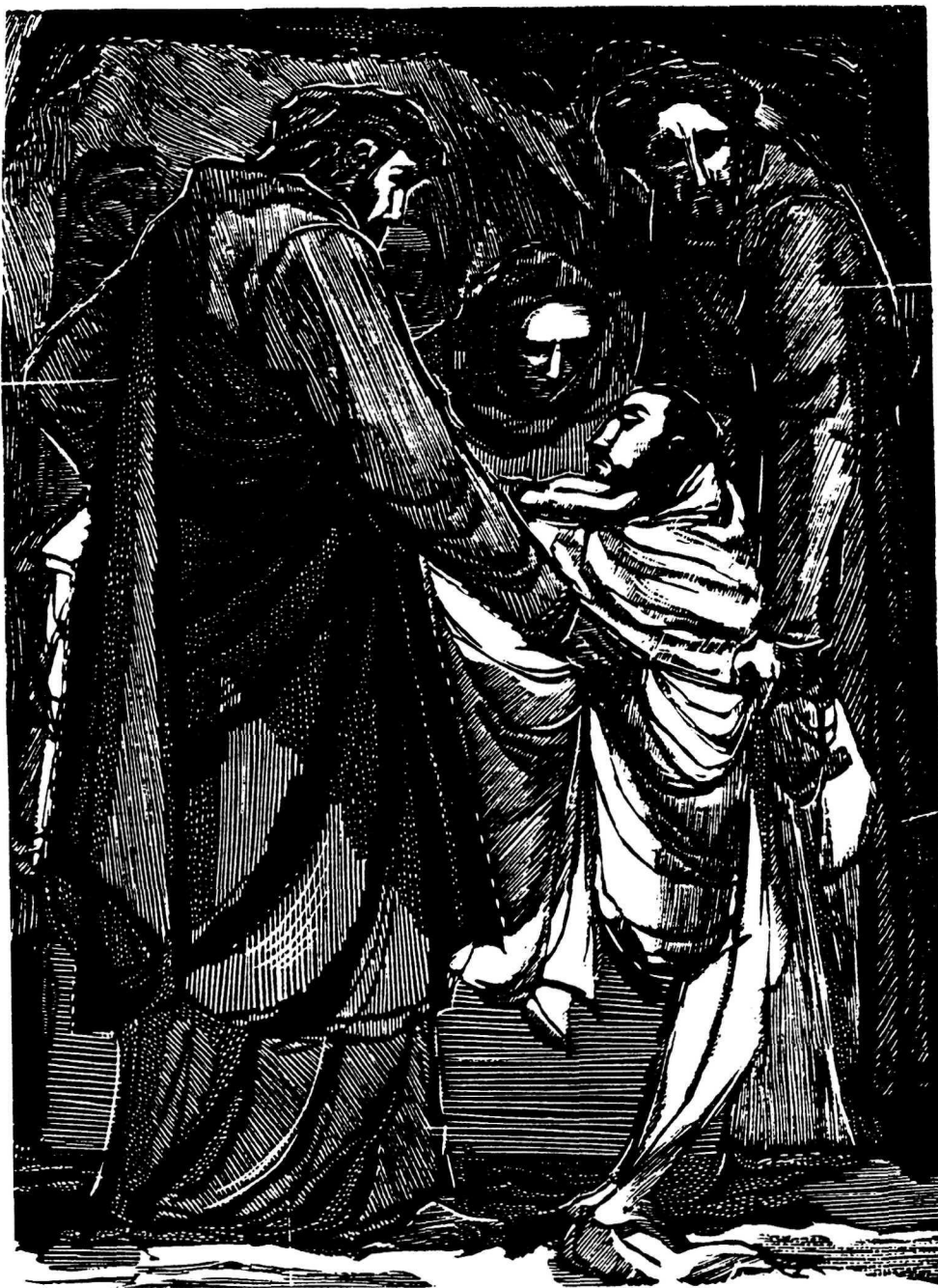
In politics, growing numbers of Americans are becoming cynical about the viability of both parties. According

to a recent study, more than one-third of all families with annual incomes under \$30,000 agree with the statements, "Washington officials lose touch with the people pretty quickly," and "Hard work offers little guarantee of success." Not surprisingly, the greatest alienation was among African-Americans.

The great danger is that our sense of community and social responsibility is being destroyed by the politics of fear and narrow self-interest. If we simply leave the system to the politicians, corporate lobbyists and arms merchants, we abandon any hope for constructive change. If our model of acceptable public behavior is Donald Trump, we will inevitably become ethically and politically bankrupt. When politics becomes an expression of a single class or group's advancement over and above the well-being of the vast majority, in the long run all will suffer.

The power of the civil rights movement came from its expressed commitment to the democratic rights of all Americans, regardless of race, class and gender. The fear among blacks generated by racial segregation was overcome by our collective struggle to improve conditions.

Today, we will banish the specter of fear and alienation from the political process only when we find within ourselves the courage to reorder national priorities for the common good. 



Afterlife

by Charles Meyer

After a loved one dies, disturbing questions frequently linger to haunt the survivors. These questions are practical, logical and theological in nature, having to do with the afterlife. Issues that used to be topics of idle speculation now are of central importance. Survivors — sitting across the table from an empty chair, walking down the hall past a child's vacant bedroom, waking up in a now huge bed, sitting alone in a theater, driving home in an empty car to an empty house — find their minds wandering, and wondering.

Often people are embarrassed by the provocative ambiguities which remain with them. It is as though they think they should have learned the answers already — in church, or in the common culture, perhaps — and are ashamed that they obviously weren't listening the day these important matters were discussed. Sometimes survivors feel intimidated, fearful that if they asked the questions in their heads, God would surely punish them for their unbelief or theological stupidity. So they wonder in agonizing silence, forever unsettled by the nagging nonsequiturs called forth by trying to align their experience of loss with the scriptures they read and the sermons they hear.

In fact, the church is equally unsettled by the issues of afterlife. If it were not, there would be many more sermons and discussions about what happens after someone dies.

The purpose here is to ask the questions out in the open — so that survivors will not feel stupid or alone in their thoughts — and to offer some reasoned possibilities to replace uncertainty with comfort, if not with clarity.

As those who have lost loved ones have wandered into my office over the

The Rev. Charles Meyer is assistant vice president of patient services at St. David's Medical Center in Austin, Tex.

past 11 years, their afterlife questions seem to fall into five categories: purpose, place, safety, knowledge, and future.

• **Purpose.** Why did God make or let this happen? Was God trying to get my attention? Am I to blame for this death? Is God punishing me for something I did (or the person did) years ago? Did God know that something awful would happen to her in the future and therefore spare that agony by “taking” her now? Is this part of God’s plan for him? For me? What is the meaning of this loss? What am I supposed to learn from it?

Most of these questions assume that God is in charge of everything and personally pulls strings that cause events (births, deaths, accidents, windfalls) which directly affect our personal lives for specific reasons, usually related to a “plan.” If that is true, then God is not only capricious but also vindictive: the Divine Parent constantly chastising and recording mistakes for future retributive paybacks.

What makes more theological sense is that “Life is unfair” and “God is powerless.” People are not rewarded for “good” behavior with protection from illness, accident, misfortune, and death. In fact, that is not God’s promise (as Jeremiah and others were slow to learn). Because there are things far worse than death from which we need protection, God promises instead to “be with us” through these events, in the midst of what we experience as the unfairness of life, and as we “walk through the valley of the shadow of death.” God’s power is found in *presence*, not in prevention, in God’s choosing to be powerless and to trust us with freedom rather than devising a scheme of marionette-like manipulation.

The *reason* for the death is to be found in the incident: physical or emotional ill-

ness, accident, carelessness. The disease took over, the mechanism malfunctioned, her attention was elsewhere, he was being mugged, she hated herself. Seldom is the reason related to or the fault of the survivor. When it is, the church offers confession, forgiveness, absolution, reconciliation.

The *meaning* of the loss is found in our reaction to it. The death itself has no purpose, but it may have great impact on and meaning for the lives of others, reminding us of the fragile nature of our existence, the futility of hatred or violence, the indomitability of the human spirit, and the eternal nature of healing love.

• **Place.** Where *is* she? Did my loved one go to a “place”? Do dead persons exist in a suspended state? Do they look like the spirit beings portrayed in such movies as *Cocoon* or *Close Encounters* or *The Abyss*? What does the essence of the person consist of? When exactly does it leave the body? Does a part of it stay here? What do people do in whatever place they are? Do they continue to grow, to mature as time passes? Is there any such thing as time in that place? Do babies who die grow up and become adults? What about fetuses?

Attempts to answer these questions have taken different forms at various historical times. While I will present my own views, it is important first to state some generalities.

First, beware of any one claiming to have the absolute truth about any of this. There are no right answers, only reasoned speculation based on belief, creed, or scripture of one brand or another. Second, take nothing literally. The importance of speculation about afterlife is its metaphorical impact, and the effect that speculation has on how we live our lives now. Third, remember that, whatever the concept we may have of that “place,” it

is probably not anywhere near the reality we will face when we get there. Having said that, let me venture forth, basing my images on hundreds of conversations with dying persons and the questions their families ask after their deaths.

It doesn’t take a genius in physics to conclude that the soul (or spirit) of the loved one is “someplace.” Assuming that it is some kind of essence, it has to *be* someplace. But the nature of that place (not to mention the nature of the essence) is, at least to me, specifically unknown.

It does seem that the place must either be in God’s presence or outside God’s presence, either in light or darkness — what others may describe as Heaven or Hell. If in God’s presence, then the essence/spirit must exist in perpetual light, surrounded by what has already been described in the best metaphorical manner possible in various religious scriptures from the Bible to the Baghavad Gita, as music, joy, contentment, peace, angelic safety and worship of God. They may know God more fully than we do now — not because they are closer (no one can get closer to God, we are all equidistant), but because the plane of their understanding and experience may be unhindered by the distractions of this life.

If it is outside of God’s presence, the essence/spirit must be in eternal darkness; not hellfire and brimstone, but eternal numbness with no interaction, much like being deaf and mute, unable to touch or know anyone or anything, wandering in infinite darkness without impediment or obstacle, never able to know or find the light.

It seems to me that where the person goes is always a choice. We choose light or darkness with each business, personal, professional or familial decision we make every day. Even at our death, I imagine that we are yet again offered an

alternative. Perhaps even in the eternal darkness the voice of God calls to us, maybe the only sound able to penetrate it. Perhaps even then we still may choose to ignore the sound, continuing to prefer the all-enveloping anonymity of nothingness.

People who have lost a child often ask if their child will “grow up” in heaven. A man whose wife, 16 weeks pregnant, died in a car wreck, wanted to know what happened to the fetus and to his wife. I expressed my belief that the fetus, having not been born, and not yet a person or an entity, went nowhere. It would not grow and develop. Just as the rest of the body tissues died, so did the fetal tissue. Other people may believe that the fetus is “ensouled” from conception, in which case the soul would go into the place of light as described above.

But what of his wife? Would her spirit continue to age so that, assuming they were reunited at his death, they would be the same age?

These questions grow out of our need to make logical sense of things beyond our logic, to measure death in terms of life. While, of course, there are no known answers, it does seem to me that our spirit is eternal and ageless. While our bodies age and grow, our spirits, when they meet, are the same “age” whether the body stopped at three days or 90 years.

But it also makes sense that spirits continue to grow in their knowledge of God. If God is infinite wisdom, and our souls are with God, then it seems that the journey of the soul is one toward greater knowledge, feeling, and understanding of God, which, by definition, takes an eternity.

Other people will suggest that the spirit immediately obtains infinite knowledge upon its release from the body. But this is to discount and even

denigrate bodily existence, to continue the Greek mind/body distinction, and pronounce the life of the spirit superior. In fact, the spirit and the body are one when alive and interacting with others here. Perhaps the body is even a necessity in the body/soul journey, experiencing and learning things about God that cannot be learned in any other way (no matter how long that body journey lasts). When the body dies, the soul/essence/spirit continues the journey; and it continues in eternal light/heaven/in God’s presence, unless it has chosen eternal darkness.

“These questions grow out of our need to make logical sense of things beyond our logic, to measure death in terms of life.”

Two final questions regarding place have to do with activity and well-being. Survivors frequently ask, What does he do there? Is she safe? Is he okay?

• **Safety.** I assume that, whether in light or darkness, the spirit/essence is under God’s purview and therefore “safe.” There is no such thing as eternal torment, sadness, or grief; those things are reserved for this earthly plane. Once death has occurred the spirit has a different perspective on that previous plane of life, limited now only by the infinity of God. Metaphorical images for that perspective are found in such words as peace, joy, rest, happiness, tranquility, and do not so much indicate inactivity as lack of worry or stress or interruption or

demand.

Activity as well can only be described in metaphor. Many people imagine heaven as sort of a parallel universe, where activities go on much the same as they do here. But it seems to me that a spirit would spend eternity *being* rather than *doing*. Perhaps *being* in the presence of God, regardless of whether we are here now or in eternal light or darkness, is the ultimate activity we can know. So the answer to what souls *do* is that they *be*.

• **Knowledge.** Can my loved one contact me? Does he know what I’m doing now? Does she know what I’m thinking and feeling? Does he watch after the children and me? Can they intervene or protect us?

Questions abound regarding the connections between “here” and “there.” While we do continue our lives here in the midst of a “cloud of witnesses,” there can be no real contact with that arena of existence. To do so would indelibly affect the course of the person’s life here, much as a “miraculous intervention” from God would do, and would seem to violate the freedom of choice with which both we and the universe are created.

Many people want continued interaction to finish unfinished business, work out emotional and personal issues with the dead loved one, or continue to converse through the healing period of bereavement. In all of these instances it is important to assume that the dead person now has a different perspective, a more inclusive understanding of the relationship, and that they wish for us benevolence and the equanimity, forgiveness, peace and healing they now know, even in the midst of their knowing our grief for them. Indeed, if there is any grieving, it is in their desire that we could experience as they do now.

And it does seem that the spirit would know what we are doing and how we are feeling in a similar sense that God knows those things, but not in the intensely personal, and perhaps judgmental sense that we know and interact now. It is knowing in the sense of understanding, accepting without comment or response, and having such a broad view of existence that no response is required or even desirable.

The same is true for intervention and protection. We see and judge the events of our lives in categories of good/bad, right/wrong, fortunate/unfortunate, deserved/undeserved. We try to ward off "bad" things through many means: worry, vigilance, alertness, health habits, and prayer. Another means of warding off untoward happenings is through the hope that our loved ones can intervene and protect us from what we view from our perspective as "bad" events. But with the perspective of eternity, neither intervention nor protection are necessary, even if they were possible.

• **Future.** Will I see him again? Is he now with the rest of the family? Will all the generations of our family be together? Will I see her if she took her own life? What about resurrection? What about reincarnation?

Again, we deal in terms with which we are familiar. But rather than seeing the persons again, perhaps we are "with" them; perhaps we "know" them, "experience" them in a manner that is even clearer than seeing. I doubt that we will recognize the person by face or clothing or voice, but it does seem clear that, because each spirit/essence is unique, we will know the person in totality, even as we will be known and experienced by others.

Relationships, however, are for the plane of existence on which we now live. They are a way of defining who we

are, designating territoriality, and setting societal limits to behavior. Once again, from the perspective of eternity, these relationships have no usefulness. Where we are all one in relationship to God, previous familial and societal designations are meaningless. Recognition of specific spirit/essences will be known, but not with the designation of relationships.

The manner of one's death is irrelevant. One can argue that we all participate in our own demise. If you have ever drunk alcohol, used drugs of any kind (including caffeine), smoked a cigarette, driven or ridden in a vehicle powered by an internal combustion or jet engine, eaten processed foods, or avoided exercise, then you have hastened your death. Active suicide is different only in its immediacy, and cannot warrant eternal condemnation in darkness any more than smoking or refusing to wear helmets, seat belts or condoms.

Thus it seems that persons who die by suicide, or by active or passive euthanasia, or by refusing medical treatment for fatal illnesses, or by accident will be there for us and with us.

Reincarnation does not make sense in this system, but that is because I live in a culture that generally does not believe in karmic laws. I would suggest that the spirit's journey as one with the body is necessary toward understanding God, but that the length of time or amount of accomplishment is irrelevant. One need not return to another body to accomplish tasks necessary to complete the earthly understanding of God. Perhaps one second of birth is equal to a lifetime from the perspective of eternity, as one molecule of water is equal to the experience of the whole ocean. If this is the case, then reincarnation is unnecessary.

Resurrection is usually described as occurring at the end time when a final judgment occurs and the living and the

dead are reunited eternally in peace. There seems to be some discrepancy about whether the dead are somewhere in graves (or cremation urns) and then are resurrected or are in heaven with God (but not quite with God). Resurrection is the final passage to being with God.

This event is usually based in the belief of a plan or purpose that must be accomplished before it occurs. Some believe it will be when we finally destroy our planet and life dies out, or when the sun burns itself out and all life comes to an end here.

Perhaps a better image than resurrection is one of reuniting, where the embodied become spirit/essence and now have the same eternal understanding and being as those who have "gone before." It is a hope of eternal peace, of which we may have glimpses even now.

This discussion of the afterlife, while it focuses on speculation regarding what happens after we die, is actually about the certainty of how we live here and now. The questions we raise about our loved ones, and the answers to those questions are valuable and make sense only as we relate them to day-to-day living. For the truth is we will not know what happens after we die until we die, and no amount of speculation can prepare us for that experience. What matters is what we do in the meantime, together, now. It is only in this context that our wandering through the metaphors of afterlife makes sense, for now is — eternally — the only time we have. **rw**

Resources

Charles Meyer, *Surviving Death*, Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, Conn. \$7.95 (The new edition to be printed next year will include this WITNESS article as a chapter.)

Leslie Weatherhead, *The Will of God*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, Tenn., 1944.

Garbage dump therapy

by Jeff Dietrich

It looks like a war zone, with sleeping bags and bed rolls strewn in disarray, and supine bodies asleep where they have fallen dead to the world. The acrid smoke of the campfires stings the eyes and the odors of garbage and human offal assault the nostrils like a Nazi *blitzkrieg*.

The sun has been up in the rest of Los Angeles for at least two hours. But here on Crocker Street, the two-story concrete wall of the Pacific American Fish Company turns its unblinking stare upon the cocaine and crack addicts of this skid row encampment, blocking the warmth of the sun and shuttering the area into a permanent twilight zone.

There is a bizarre, foreign-looking quality to these 200-or-so feet of sidewalk crammed to overflowing with filthy humanity, like a cattle car rushing to the slaughterhouse. Surely, these must be the streets of some Third World site, where people stoically live out their existence in public places, a full half-world away from the broad avenues and boulevards of American enterprise and opportunity.

It is easy to rekindle the feelings of revulsion and righteousness of the 19th century British imperialist encountering for the first time the opium dens and squalid humanity clinging precariously to the fringes of the Empire.

Not unlike these British officers, who did their best to maintain a façade of civilization in such wilderness outposts, the officers of the Los Angeles Police Department have opted to fight a holding pattern, rather than push for victory

in their battle against drugs. There are regularly scheduled harassments and arrest actions in which a score or so of the inhabitants might be forced to kneel with hands behind their heads while officers swagger about, making a show of force and civilization. They knock over campfires and throw possessions into the street, search suspects and occasionally make an arrest or two. But for the most part there is an unstated recognition that this is a battle of appearance only. On most days, you can drive by any time of the day or night and see the unmistakable glow of "crack pipes," the frenzied exchange of cash, and a gross of spent butane lighters which give testimony to the persistence of deviance.

Like a Good Humor truck driving into Dante's Inferno, the old Catholic Worker van rolls into these badlands a couple of mornings a week to serve coffee and fresh-baked raisin bread to the early risers. Of the various nomadic activities that we are experimenting with while our new soup kitchen is being built, this is the most challenging and the least favorite. The people are aggressive and rude and we have to keep our "street smarts" on constant alert, ready to pack up at the first sign of trouble. Last week, when a drug deal went sour, knives, screwdrivers, and lead pipes wrapped in electrical tape appeared (quick as secret handshakes at a Shriners convention.) It was over in a flash — they had the "culprit" up-ended and screaming, shaking him until the requisite amount of cash fell out from the inner sanctum of his pockets. Here on Crocker Street, we feel as though we have stepped into a morass of problems so deep and grave that they make our gifts of bread and coffee seem about as helpful and effective as a Pop-

sicle in hell.

The ancient Hebrew name for hell is Gehenna. It meant, literally, garbage dump. It was a heap of decaying matter rotting in the sunlight at the outskirts of town. No civilized person ever went there even during the day except to quickly dump his refuse and perhaps pause to urinate. In the dark of night, however, it was a different matter. It became the grocery store and gathering place of the most disgusting "low-life" of Hebrew culture: the lepers. The lepers were literally the outcasts of this community.

Of course, the Hebrews were not nearly so advanced in their understanding of the human condition as contemporary folk and thus did not realize that leprosy is a physical disease. Rather, they believed it was a condition precipitated by the sinfulness of the individual. Thus, in Hebrew culture, victims of the physical disease of leprosy were heartlessly ejected to the margins of the community for their "sinfulness."

Today, we are under the impression that such superstitious behavior would never be tolerated in our more progressive society. But the city of Los Angeles is extremely adept at administering garbage dump therapy to the homeless addicts of skid row.

The city's drug therapy program is staffed by 15 unlicensed "drug counselors" on loan from the Street Maintenance Department. They are supervised by two senior "drug and substance abuse counselors" from the police department, who offer free "group therapy" at the County Jail. Their therapeutic equipment consists of two five-ton yellow dump trucks, a T-228 Caterpillar skip loader, a pick-up truck and a squad car. Together

Jeff Dietrich is a 20-year member of the Los Angeles Catholic Worker.

they operate as a kind of rapid deployment force. Twice a week, they rush about from one skid row encampment to the other, cleaning up the city's drug problem with the speed and efficiency of Patton's tank corps rushing to the Rhine in 1945.

If this seems to you like a ludicrous and inappropriate way of dealing with the city's problem, you are correct. You are equally correct in assuming that there are more serious responses taking place. But you are wrong if you think that their level of success or compassion or humanity is a great deal higher than the garbage dump approach.

Both the liberal social service programs and the Christian fundamentalist missions that earn their keep — some rather nicely, by the way — by salvaging the shipwrecked lives caught on the shoals of skid row share the same Calvinist theology that undergirds our larger social system. This theology places the burden of economic and spiritual sinfulness directly upon the shoulders of the individual. Repent and be saved, repent and be employed — it is the same message. As long as we can convince ourselves that the situation is the result of the individual person's sinfulness, or pride, or laziness, then the larger community is comfortably absolved of any responsibility.

The drug addicts of Crocker Street are in the same situation as the lepers of first century Palestine. They have been cast out of the community for a sin they did not commit.

The poor are the ones most affected by the rapid changes in technology, culture, and the economy. It is among the poor that we are able to observe the seamy underside of our most precious cultural idols: technological and economic progress. Futurologists Alvin Toffler and John Naisbitt describe with glowing effusiveness our future of constant technological change as a series of waves, and our

critical survival skills as the ability to surf that so-called wave of the future.

But in places like Crocker Street the wave has already crashed, leaving the poor bereft not only of jobs but of dignity, family, community and a sense of purpose. Of course the poor take drugs. Their situation is hopeless. Drugs are not the problem. They are merely the symptom of a despair and lifelessness at the center of our culture. We are deluding ourselves if we think that it is possible to teach the poor how to surf when they have never learned to swim.

Over the last two-and-a-half decades, under the pressure of revolutionary changes in the fields of transportation, communication, and information processing, we have rapidly shifted from a national economy to a world economy. In this situation, the "surfers," who engage in what Harvard economist Robert Reich calls "symbolic-analytic work" — lawyers, bankers, executives, consultants, scientists, writers, editors, etc. — have increased their share of the GNP to 40%, while representing only 20% of the job force.

The "swimmers," on the other hand — those engaged in "routine production work" — have had their share of the GNP reduced from 30% to only 20%. Manufacturing-type jobs once represented a full 50% of the American work

force. Today, they represent only 25%.

The people on Crocker Street know intuitively that this "wave of the future" will not reverse itself. It will only gather momentum, and the "surfers" will ride faster and faster while the "swimmers" will surely drown in a sea of despair and drugs. They also realize that neither the liberal social worker nor the conservative fundamentalist preacher, nor for that matter a Democratic presidential candidate, will offer them the true salvation that Jesus Christ demanded for the lepers of his time; that is, full participation in the economic and social, as well as spiritual, life of the community.

The faith of our nation presently lies not in Jesus Christ, the God of life, but rather in the worship of the gods of power: technological progress and unrestrained economic growth. This worship progressively relegates to the dung heap the large masses of simple folk who will never be ordained into the higher levels of a structure demanded by the arcane priesthood. As Hazel Motes, the demented preacher in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*, said, "No man who drives a good American car ever needs to be justified by Jesus Christ." Our faith in power is justified by its manifest effectiveness. Our faith in Christ is justified only by the simple spirit of life that flows through us.

Thus, in good conscience, we can offer the "lepers" of Crocker Street neither the "cheap grace" of mission salvation nor the tawdry hope of phony job training programs. While we know that what we do have to offer is manifestly meager, it comes without restrictions. We do not demand repentance or job readiness or clean streets. Along with the modest gifts of bread and coffee, we offer a few brief moments of an authentic human contact that neither judges nor condemns, but recognizes the improbable connectedness of our common human brokenness. TW



Church silence on gay-bashing deadly

by Jan Nunley

In the gay and lesbian press, it's being called "the second epidemic." The first, of course, is AIDS. A wave of anti-gay and lesbian violence has broken over the United States in recent months, causing law enforcement officials and lesbian/gay leaders to turn at least some of their attention from the fight against disease to fighting in the streets.

Look at the statistics:

- In New York City, anti-gay bias crimes rose 122% in the first five months of 1990 compared to the same period in 1989.

- Gays and lesbians in Massachusetts suffered nearly three times as many crimes of violence in the first five months of 1990 as in 1989.

- In Philadelphia, gay men are 12 times more likely to be victimized by violent crime. Lesbians run nine times the average woman's risk of assault.

- Nationwide, a survey reports 7,031 incidents of violence against lesbians and gays ranging from harassment to homicide occurred in 1989.

- A 1987 report by the U.S. Department of Justice notes that "homosexuals are probably the most frequent victims" of hate violence in America.

Now look at the faces behind the figures:

— Early in the morning of May 6, a group of almost 40 gay men were waiting to enter an after-hours party in Boston's South End following a dance sponsored by the Grass Roots Gay Rights Fund. Suddenly a group of black and Latino men, some carrying broken

bottles, approached, yelling anti-gay epithets and threatening gunfire. Over a dozen gay men were injured. One witness reported, "It was like a 'wilding.'"

— Three Idaho white supremacists associated with the group Aryan Nations were arrested on federal bombing and conspiracy charges May 12 in an alleged plot to bomb a gay disco in Seattle.

— On June 16, 2,000 lesbians and gays walked through New York's Greenwich Village behind a banner reading "Queers Take Back the Night" to protest violence against gays. Along the way, marchers were assaulted with taunts, bottles, fists and knives from on-lookers. Some protestors fought back, chasing hecklers into a building. A lesbian going home long after the march was attacked by a man with a stick.

Those are just three stories. There are many, many more, in the files of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Anti-Violence Project and those of anti-violence groups around the country.

As with most such crimes of violence against women and minorities — including rape, incest and racially-motivated assaults — there are questions as to whether the statistics reflect an actual rise in the incidence of the crime, an increase in reporting, or some combination of the two. Joyce Collier, of Boston's Fenway Community Health Center, feels that, after years of trying, they finally have a "baseline" from which to say that gay-bashing is definitely on the upswing.

"For a long time, hate crimes against lesbians and gays weren't reported because the police were the only ones to whom you could report them," she says. "But with some form of anti-violence project in virtually every major city and most states, there are now enough pro-

grams to say definitively that there is an increase."

Kevin Berrill of the NGLTF says the number of anti-lesbian and gay violent crimes is "sharply under-represented" in official statistics. Berrill compares it to the situation with rape or domestic violence 20 years ago.

What's prompting the increase?

There is no one reason, say those who've studied bigotry and violence against lesbians and gays. Researchers, law enforcement officials and civil rights activists have taken worried note of an increase in the general level of bigotry and violence against minorities in the last decade and they're not sure why it's happening. Reports of hate crimes in general in the last two years were up 41% in Los Angeles, 33% in Boston, 28% in Pennsylvania.

Blame for some of the increase is being laid by many civil rights workers at the door of the Reagan Administration, as civil rights laws and policies were systematically weakened during Reagan's years in the Oval Office. Joan Weiss of the National Institute Against Prejudice and Violence has been quoted in the *Boston Globe* as saying that Reagan and his appointees undermined civil rights and "legitimized anti-minority sentiments." It is interesting to note that 19% of the gay-bashing reported to NGLTF occurred on college and university campuses — largely among people who spent their formative teenage years under Reagan's presidency.

Only 15% of the attacks reported in the NGLTF were classified as AIDS-related. A study cited by Kevin Berrill theorizes that "AIDS is less a cause of anti-gay sentiment than it is a new focus and justification for expressions of

Jan Nunley, a free-lance writer and broadcaster, is a student at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass.

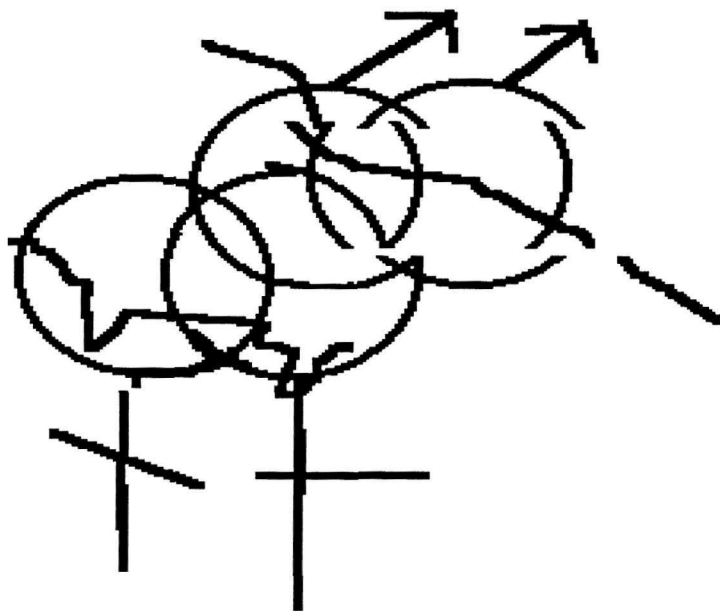
preexisting anti-gay prejudice." Berrill and others think that, while the movement for lesbian and gay civil rights increased the visibility of lesbian and gay people somewhat, it took the AIDS epidemic — and its potential for spreading among heterosexuals — to put lesbians and gays in daily headlines.

For a long time, gay-bashers haven't been strongly given the idea that what they're doing is illegal.

"Homosexuality is a tough issue with cops," says Detective Sergeant Bill Johnston of Boston's Community Disorders Unit. "Boston's police academy requires eight hours of training in civil rights law; four hours of that is spent on gay and lesbian issues alone. I really think the department is trying to break down the barriers between gays and the police. Still, the worst bigots in the world often hide behind a badge — you have the right to enforce your prejudices with arrest. It's not a popular cause with some of the officers; they've been known to call gay-bashing 'Mickey Mouse crimes,' and sometimes at a crime scene I've heard officers say, 'He's only a fag.' A victim of crime is a victim of crime — period."

In Niagara County, N.Y., a district attorney interviewed on radio expressed opposition to protecting victims of anti-gay crimes, calling them "queers" and "sick people." Dallas District Judge Jack Hampton told a newspaper reporter in December 1988 that he had refused a life sentence for a killer because the victims were "queers" and "I put prostitutes and gays at about the same level . . . I'd be hard put to give somebody life for killing a prostitute." (Hampton was later censured by the Texas State Commission on Judicial Conduct.)

Not all judges share those attitudes. Following the passage of a Massachusetts law extending civil rights protection to lesbians and gays, a Suffolk County judge ordered an injunction against four young men accused in the May beatings in Boston's South End. They're prohibited from assaulting anyone based on sexual orientation and from approaching the May 6 beating victims. A Maine judge ordered convicted gay-bashers to help set up a display of the Names Project quilt as part of a program of unpaid public service to the lesbian/



gay community included in their sentence.

The passage of the National Hate Crimes Statistics Act last April is seen as a milestone in the fight against anti-lesbian/gay violence. The Act had been delayed for several years while Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC) pressed to include an amendment stating that "the homosexual movement threatens the strength and survival of the American family as the basic unit of society."

Helms' amendment was finally defeated, but similar prejudices have

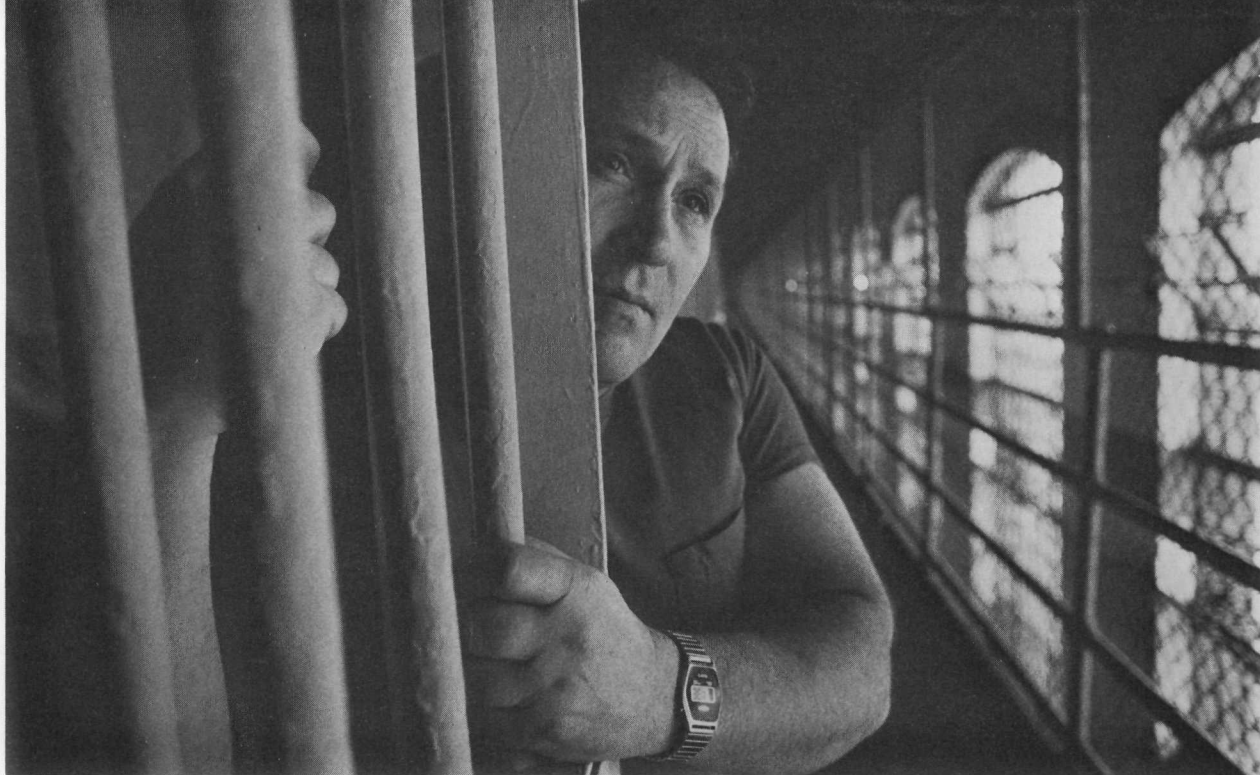
stalled hate crime bills in Georgia, Illinois, New York and New Jersey, and sexual orientation was written out of hate crimes bills in Texas and Washington. (In Texas, legislators also had their names removed from a bill commemorating the deaths of people with AIDS for fear it would be interpreted as an endorsement of homosexuality.) Nine states have hate crimes laws that do include sexual orientation; eight states have bills under consideration.

The violence has prompted lesbian and gay groups in many cities to offer courses in self-defense, to demand better police protection, and in some cases to threaten action against gay-bashers. Queer Nation, which got its start as an affinity group of the New York AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), now has chapters in other major cities, and is focusing on anti-gay violence in its protest, called "zaps." The anger is palpable, from the T-shirts bearing an upraised fist and the slogan "Queers Bash Back" to the chanting of "We're here, we're queer, don't mess with us."

Religion and the church have not generally weighed in on the side of promoting tolerance. From the days of singer Anita Bryant's campaign invoking God's wrath against gays rights in Dade County, Fla. in the mid-70s, public fulminations against homosexuality have usually involved some appeal to "Christian morality."

A 1978 book by Dr. Tim LaHaye, a popular author found on many Christian bookstore shelves, concludes with a series of predictions that a "rise" in homosexuality will accompany the "last days"

Continued on page 21



Mario Diblasio: It is possible to be happy in prison.

Seminary sparks life in Sing Sing

by Norman S. Green

This is not a story of men stabbed through the heart with sharpened teaspoon handles, suicides, prison riots, or men machine-gunned trying to escape. They shot those kinds of movies here at Sing Sing, but they never shot this one: Convicted murderers and drug dealers graduate from theological seminary in prison and talk about their lives and how they've changed.

I approach Sing Sing from the river side. Some cells have fabulous views: Sailboats slicing the Hudson, green cliff-faces across the water, ball fields wrapped in razor wire. The battlement guns along the huge walls aim inside. Using the chaplain's name gets me in.

Norman Green is a free-lance writer living in New York City.

How does a seminary program change a prisoner's life?

"God or Jesus or Allah has *already* said to them, 'Listen, you son of a bitch, shape up or else.' " This is what the Rev. George (Bill) Webber says. He put the program together at New York Theological Seminary, where he is Professor of Urban Theology and Director of the Master of Professional Services Program at the prison.

"They've *already* changed," Webber says. "They've learned to survive and gotten their undergraduate degrees."

New York Theological Seminary, at its own expense, gives the men 10 months of seminary training in a bare office below the prison chapel: Old Testament and New Testament theology, ethics, church history, homiletics (preaching), and a full year of pastoral

counseling which they agree to immediately put into practice. All these men become inmate counselors. Over the eight years that the program has been in existence, 90 prisoners have been graduated, Webber said. Twenty are now outside the walls.

The Book of Exodus is popular here. "Prisoners tend to think of the street as the Promised Land, when in fact release is more like moving from Egypt into the wilderness," Webber says. "How will they survive the wilderness?"

Webber shares some more biblical wisdom he and his students enjoy in Sing Sing: the letter from Jeremiah to the prisoners of Babylon.

"See, the prison is Babylon. The letter says, 'Seek the shalom of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in seeking its peace you will find your own peace.'

"That passage ignites terrific debate," Webber says. "They go, 'You mean I'm supposed to pray for the guards around here?'"

The program creates harmony, because, says Webber, "In the seminary group the men study together, they help each other, they become brothers to each other in a way they're unfamiliar with, especially in prison. Maybe they learn some trust, though everything in prison mitigates against it.

"They are committed to seek opportunities to be helpful. To be involved in making the prison a better place. To seek the peace of the city where they are prisoners," he adds.

I am thoroughly searched by uniformed guards. My bag is taken. My shoes are examined. My pockets are emptied. The pages of my date book are individually leafed through. My belt and eyeglasses are scrutinized. I walk through a metal detector. Then the first of half-a-dozen barred gates, opened by a guard using a huge ring of keys, loudly closes behind me and locks me into Sing Sing.

Chaplain Edward Hunt is my escort to the seminarians. He strides through the bleak tunnel leading us into the bowels of Sing Sing, banging his cane, speaking fiercely and limping with military pride.

"What about the good going on behind these walls? You'd be crazy not to see the bad. But what about the good?" he asks.

Prison is tough for a chaplain. In the war between the prisoners and the system, he serves both sides. The system trusts Hunt, or I wouldn't be in the prison today. As prisoners dressed in green fatigues pass by, running errands with clipboards, doing prison jobs, they greet him, "Hey, Rev!" and shake his hand, say "What's up?" and ask favors. Each one seems to want a little contact with him.

"How do you do it?" I ask Hunt.

"I love the work," he says. "These men need me and I love serving them. *Nobody* wants to help these men. *Nobody* wants to work in here. I've been on the job 19 years."

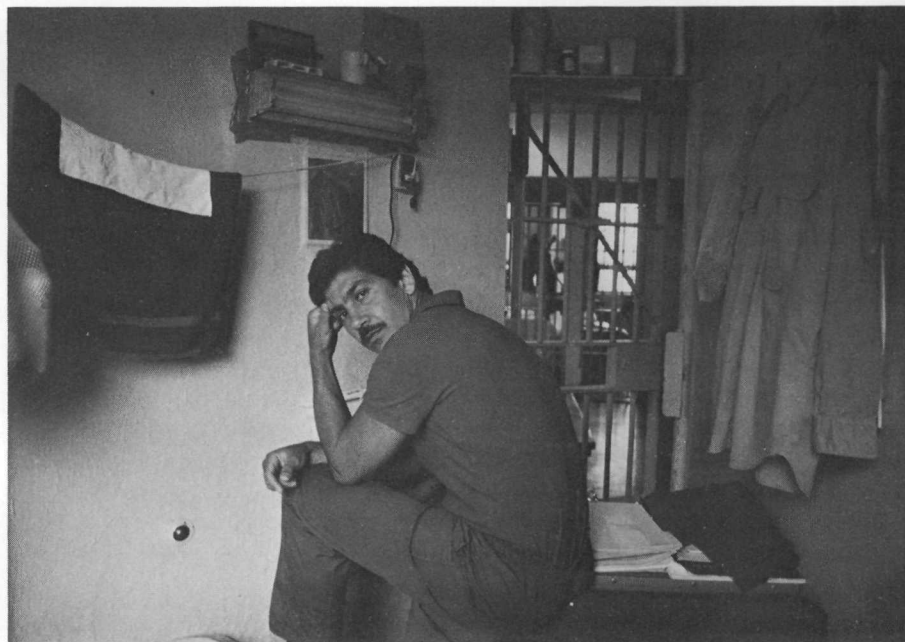
The first prisoner I meet is the Imam Mika'il Abdullah Mohammed, a.k.a. Michael DeVeaux, #79-A-2747. (The first

two digits of the prisoners' number tell you the year they entered the system.) *Imam* indicates that he has been chosen by the Muslim community here as their leader. I meet him in a bare room off the Protestant chapel. There is a barred window and the sound of men yelling and playing outside.

The Imam's body is startlingly muscular, his torso triangular, his waist impossibly tiny; there is no fat (he fasts one day a week to kill desire). He works out with weights an hour a day. Bearded, young, beautifully handsome with full lips, his deep eyes grab you, pierce you and insist that they have absolutely nothing to hide. He was born 32 years ago in Harlem's parallel universe of blackness and coolness and hustler heroes. A child math whiz and prep school veteran, he is now doing 25 to life for a cold-blooded execution. Incarcerated for the last 10 years for a crime he says they never proved, he has nothing to hide, he says.

He explains how he has changed. "One of things that makes a person grow is because he wants to. To be able to survive when I am released, I had to change in here. I couldn't stay the same.

© Shorna Valeska



Ralph Puig: I have been trained to be both a gladiator and a monk.

"I turned my thoughts away from the dope game, crack, assaulting people, illegal ventures," he says. "The New York Theological Seminary helped crystallize my thinking."

A turning point came for the Imam in the Box. "I was in solitary for 15 months, locked in 23 hours a day. You don't see anybody. You *better* come to grips with yourself," he laughs. "Mostly what I did was think and pray and read and write poetry."

"You begin to make decisions. You begin to make choices. What is responsible behavior? What has value? You have to sacrifice superficial things, and artificial things — it's hard because you want to enjoy life. But you want something better."

"Are you going to say that everybody else is wrong? Or are you going to realize that you are part of your situation?"

The Imam, like other seminary graduates, serves the population as a counselor. His Muslim friends are his flock. He introduces me to two roomfuls of inmates, one of men who were Rastafarians, one of Muslims in a makeshift mosque with Arabic script on the wall. He calls me "Brother."

The Imam concludes, "I'm not a finished product. I'm learning humility. I'm learning how to communicate. I have to humble myself to you. That's the only way I can serve you. That's a kind of, I guess you can say, enlightenment."

Mario Diblasio, prisoner #86-A-9635, tells his story expansively, throwing his hands, clutching his chest, crying and shrugging. He is 43 years old. As chaplain's clerk he goes to an office in the afternoon. We meet there, in deadly heat uncooled by an ineffectual fan. Outside in the chapel, men in their greens were sitting in pews discussing the Bible, the light from the Hudson filtering in colors through the stained glass windows.

"I came to this country in my teens," says Diblasio. "When I learned English, I went back to school and became a doc-

tor. I was one of the best — not my words — in Brooklyn."

He explains that his journey towards prison began after "adverse life events — the death of my daughter, then a divorce. I started to do drugs. First, prescription drugs. Then, when they threatened to take away my license, I switched to cocaine."

ECPC involved with texts

Seminarians at Sing Sing used as two of their texts, *Must We Choose Sides?* and *Which Side Are We On?*, Volumes I and II of Christian Commitment for the '80s, until the books were finally out of print, according to the Rev. Bill Webber, program director. The books were published by the Interreligious Task Force for Social Action, assisted by a grant and a loan from the Episcopal Church Publishing Company, publisher of THE WITNESS. The books were made available to the seminary program free of charge.

The prisoners were most impressed with the texts, which explored myths about the capitalist system and how anyone can achieve the "American dream" if he or she only works hard enough, Webber said.

"They knew the system didn't work for the poor and those who suffer discrimination, but they were surprised that other folks had caught on, and even published books about it," he added.

"In mid-1984 I started freebasing cocaine in ever-increasing quantities, \$4,000-\$5,000 worth a week. In October 1984 I lost my job at the hospital. I could no longer work."

"In April 1985, I sold my house to continue to buy cocaine. I deposited about \$30,000 in cash in the bank, and withdrew \$2,000-\$3,000 every two to three days. In June, I was in jail for sale of cocaine. In November, I was free on bail," he says.

"I realized I had to change. I got down

on my knees in the bathroom. I crossed myself. I said, 'Somebody help me. If there is anyone out there, please help me.' And I stopped doing cocaine. I don't know how. I was freed."

He went to trial in October 1986. As he relates this, he grows quiet and then starts to cry. He adds, "I lost the trial. And I am in here doing 21 years to life."

As we talk, prisoners come into the office, apparently needing to speak to Diblasio. He lets them stay.

"I thought it was the end but it was not," he continues. "All my licenses were taken away, but here comes an opportunity to get a Master of Professional Services. So I lose an M.D. but I gain an M.P.S. I enjoyed it immensely. It made the time pass like this," he says as he snaps his fingers.

"Now I have the training to help others with their problems, to make them understand that the reason they are here is not because the system is imperfect, oppressive, against the poor and on the side of the rich — which it is," he says.

"No, the reason we are here is because we have pursued a value system which is distorted, wrong, twisted. All I cared for was cocaine. I abandoned my family to go after cocaine. I became a scumbag."

"The new Mario is a Master of Professional Services. The new Mario has learned compassion," he notes.

"It is possible to be happy in here," he says, "where nobody thinks it is possible to be happy."

Dr. Charles Friedgood, #77-A-0455, sits in a chapel pew with me. He is 73 years old and called "Doc." The guys like him because he is a first-rate doctor and helps his fellow inmates. He looks a little like a mad professor: white hair, thick glasses, kindly mouth.

Doc's case was internationally famous 15 years ago. Newspapers reported that Doc was captured on the runway at Kennedy Airport with three-quarters of a million dollars worth of his wife's bonds and jewelry in his pockets. His mistress/

nurse was waiting for him in Denmark.

Doc had signed his wife's death certificate listing the cause of death as a stroke, and his children had grown suspicious about the bonds. They dug up the body, and found a little wound inside her elbow where Doc had administered the lethal shot of Demerol.

"I practiced medicine for 30 years in Brooklyn," says Doc. "I was convicted of second degree murder and given 25 years to life. Here in prison, I became an observant Orthodox Jew. I am the only Jew to go to the seminary in Sing Sing."

Asked what prison is like, he replies, "Prison is like concentration camp. In here I keep very busy in order to survive. I keep working, teaching, tutoring, talking with inmates about their problems at home. I coordinate Jewish religious services for the rabbi, I hold High Holiday services, Passover Seders, and I supervise the kosher meals."

Being in prison, he says, "you begin to realize that the material world isn't what's important in life. You begin to realize there is more to life than working and trying to make as much money as you can."

"Out there I missed all the things that I now realize are important in life. The Ten Commandments — love thy neighbor. Do good. That is the basis of our religion," he says.

I ask him, if he could address the Dr. Charles Friedgood of 20 or 30 years ago, what would he say?

"Start looking at your life. See how foolish you are. Practice your religion. Work with youth to prevent them from living a life of crime. Be more involved with your community," he answers.

"I'm not greedy like I was in those days," he says. "I have time to talk to people, to help them if they are in need. I had no time for family in those days. I threw my life away."

Asked about his wife, he says, "I would have avoided the problem that led to my crime by changing my lifestyle. I

'Going down to reach the stars'

The Rev. Minka Shura Sprague, who describes herself as "the petticoat-in-collar" at Sing Sing, sees her teaching role there as part of the ministry described by Isaiah: "God has sent me to preach good news to the poor, heal the broken-hearted, and proclaim release to the captives . . ."

A member of the faculty of New York Theological Seminary, she has taught, at various times, ethics, systematics, and New Testament in the seminary's prison program over the past four years. She thinks of it as a privilege.

"Many of us are able to fulfill the biblical mandate to feed the hungry or clothe the naked, but relatively few are invited to 'free the prisoner.' That is what our Sing Sing classes are about," she said.

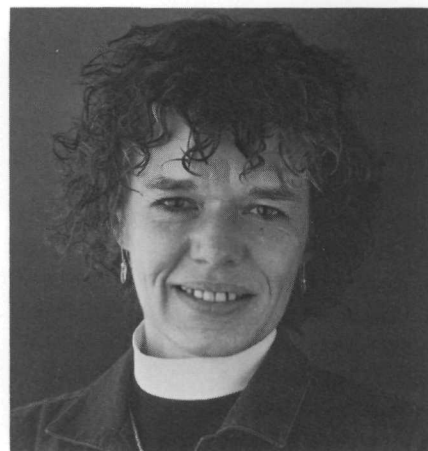
The petite Episcopal priest is often asked if she ever experienced fear in her classes, encountering murderers, drug abusers, and others considered a threat to society.

But Sprague began teaching at Sing Sing after her best friend had been killed — run over by a garbage truck — on Third Avenue in Manhattan.

"That changed my whole life," she said. "I came to believe, when it's the end, it's the end. I'm no more in danger in prison than on Third Avenue. Actually, it's the most highly motivational learning experience I encounter."

Her ministry has another aspect, she admits. "The other side of fear is the thrill of doing it, like riding a roller coaster. I was raised by a professional athlete, and there is that part of me that still responds to 'blow the whistle and I'll do it.'"

Besides, it's not her most difficult task, she laughed, recalling her assignment to 7-to-12th grade students in church camp this summer in the Diocese of New York. "As I saw 100 kids walk up the hill with their hormones in



The Rev. Minka Shura Sprague

hand, I wondered, I'm supposed to teach this group?" Sprague also serves as deacon at St. John the Divine Cathedral.

What has she learned from her prison classes?

"The power of freedom and love. I see the New Testament at work in Sing Sing. I see love made and freedom known. I also learn about poverty, and bleakness. The most wonderful Christmas dinner I ever had was in the prison classroom. I watched the seminarian-inmates chop onions with a knife borrowed from a guard, under the guard's supervision; and I saw them serve tuna fish out of cans, and offer diet sodas. It was glorious."

Sprague likens the prisoner's experience of discovery and awakening to that of those outside the walls who have tried to live the prayer of St. Francis: "Where there is hatred, let me sow love; injury, pardon; let me seek not so much to be consoled as to console . . . for it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

"When our students learn this, and decide 'I'll take responsibility' — the universe breaks in behind the prison walls. Then they know that by going down, you reach the stars," she said.

— Mary Lou Suhor

would have spent more time with her, I would have been more appreciative of having a good wife."

His parting words to me were: Stay out of prison. Get married."

Graduation night. It is very hot in Sing Sing. We have entered through a huge armored rolling door controlled by a guard in a tower. Dozens of seminary guests are here, professors, trustees, patrons, benefactors, clergy, family and friends of the graduates. We are being painstakingly searched. There are 200 of us and it takes hours.

We are bussed through the prison grounds, past handball and basketball courts where men under bright white stadium lights play in the heat, stripped to the waist. We drive by the blocks of cells. The prisoners try to look into our bus, staring at the women.

Seminary graduation ceremonies proceed at one end of the old gymnasium, enormous, oblong and domed, built as a gift to the prison by Warner Brothers. A handful of guards stands at each of several exits. The prisoner graduates cheerfully march down the aisle in their mortar boards, past the rows of families and friends, swinging their arms in graduation robes worn over prison greens, waving and smiling at the spectators.

A prisoner in for murder gives the opening prayer: "Dear God, we ask that you be present here tonight like a divine wind. Oh, God, we ask that you help us heal each other and love each other. Oh, God we ask that you open our minds and let us help each other . . ."

A hymn is being sung in a rivetingly clear and high soprano. There is an air here, for a little while, of reverence for powers greater than ourselves and powers within us. The silence in which the hymn is sung is cracked by the static squawk of the P.A. system calling on guards and prisoners to do something unintelligible.

During the speeches, songs, prayers and homilies, I sit in the bleachers and

talk to past graduates. Ralph Puig, #82-A-2819, sits next to me.

"My crime is drug sales," says Puig. "I'm serving 15 years to life under the Rockefeller Drug Laws, which made substantial sales of narcotics an A-1 felony, same as murder.

"The New York Theological Seminary experience has totally empowered me to teach and to do certain things. I am a Roman Catholic. I teach two classes — Bible study and catechism. I am an altar person and lector at Mass on Sunday. I try to orient the men to find a fulfilling life in the community outside.

"I realize that the drug thing was bad. All those years I was involved in the fast life — greed, violence and fast money.

"Now my faith commitment calls on me to give back. I would love to teach in troubled school districts and do counseling in the area of narcotics," he says.

"How did you accomplish such a change in your character in this environment?" I ask.

"I have been trained to be both a gladiator and a monk," he says. "There are rapes and drugs and harassments here. I am a survivor in a hostile environment, surrounded by cement and cold steel, and also a monk cloistered away who has many hours for contemplation."

He adds that this experience has strengthened his resolve to change: "I'll never come back to prison. And most of the guys here will."

And what is the toughest thing about prison?

"Loneliness. Being separated from those you love. Feeling left out. Seeing lovers and friends get married, have children and drift away."

The seminary program helps combat this loneliness, says Puig. "There is a spiritual love among the men of this program. And the men in the population see this and go get their high school and bachelor degrees. The men of the seminary are like lighthouses in the vast emptiness."

Morris Howard, #75-A-2675, starts off nervously, smoking a precious cigarette.

"I was caught up in the drug craze," he says. "I got busted selling weight and they painted me like somebody bigger than I was. I got 25 years to life for cocaine. I've been in the system for 15 and a half years, in Sing Sing for six.

"I came into my incarceration without a high school diploma. Street-wise — an education I didn't need. I was qualified to make \$5,000 to \$10,000 a week."

He eventually decided to complete his education. "My first semester, I was like anyone else from the street. You cheat. But I found myself lost when everyone else was discussing school topics. I made up my mind I was going to know what the hell they were saying.

"And that's what I did. I made the Dean's List. I got hooked on my ability. For the first time in my life, I saw that I could accomplish something with my mind. I ended up being valedictorian."

He entered the seminary program, which "taught me about discipline and how to study," he says. "By staying up until 2 or 3 in the morning writing papers, I got an *inner*, you know, a *deeper* sense of pride and accomplishment. It helped me grow into manhood."

Asked what gives him the strength to go on, he answers "Life. Life. Life."

The guards have announced that graduation is over. Families are smiling for final snapshots as flashes go off. The guards kill the lights to make their point. The graduates and other prisoners here tonight will be searched with humiliating thoroughness before returning to their cells. It is dark out. The blackness is consuming. We visitors will be bussed from the gym to the guard post where we will be processed out of here. They will make sure we are not prisoners dressed in visitors' clothes. Then we will be released through the huge armored door to the other side of the wall, into a quiet country night near the Hudson River, and to freedom. TW

Short Takes

Fast for gay/lesbian rights

In a letter to the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Dr. Louie Crew, founder of Integrity, advised that he will no longer receive communion "until the Episcopal Church makes all sacraments available to lesbian and gay persons." Crew said that fewer than one-tenth of all Episcopal Church congregations have listened to the issues facing gays and lesbians, and that he looked forward to the time when the governing body of the church, the General Convention, no longer stages exclusion. He invited heterosexual Christians to join his fast.

"Experiencing the denial of sacrament, heterosexuals will sample the hunger and spiritual malnutrition which the church now systematically imposes on all lesbian and gay people," Crew said.

The Second Stone 9-10/90

Quote of note

Probably every generation sees itself as charged with remaking the world. Mine, however, knows that it will not remake the world. Its task is even greater: to keep the world from destroying itself.

Albert Camus

Next General Convention host?

When Arizona's senate impeached its scary governor two years ago on charges of misappropriation of funds and obstruction of justice, it picked a fitting date to do so: the 20th anniversary of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. After all, while in power, Evan Mecham had rescinded the order to create a Martin Luther King, Jr., state holiday, defended the word "pickaninny," and asked to see a list of gays on the state payroll. But because his impeachers failed to pass a "Dracula clause" prohibiting his return to politics, Mecham has returned from the politically dead and is stalking his old office. Mecham had 11,158 Arizona lawyers to choose from when he went looking for his 1990 campaign attorney. He chose Donald MacPherson, lawyer for James Earl Ray, convicted assassin of King.

David Beers

Mother Jones 9-10/90



Harvesting the legacy

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the deaths of Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel, Maura Clarke, and Jean Donovan, four U.S. church women killed in El Salvador. In commemoration, the Religious Task Force for Central America is sponsoring "Harvesting the Legacy," a theological reflection weekend Nov. 30 to Dec. 2 in Chevy Chase, Md. Weekend leaders will include Ray and Patricia Donovan, the parents of Jean Donovan, and Melinda Roper, former president of the Maryknoll Sisters, who was on site when the bodies were discovered. Also on the program is Jon Sobrino, S.J., colleague of the six Jesuits killed in El Salvador last year. For information contact: Religious Task Force on Central America, 1747 Connecticut Ave NW, Washington, DC 20009. Tel. (202) 387-7652.

That which gives life meaning

I hope you come to find that which gives life a deep meaning for you. Something worth living for — maybe even worth dying for — something that energizes you, enthuses you, enables you to keep moving ahead.

I can't tell you what it might be — that's for you to find, to choose, to love. I can just encourage you to start looking and support you in the search.

Written by Ita Ford to her niece shortly before Ford's death

A woman's work . . .

Sweeping historical changes in Eastern Europe find most women still sweeping the floor.

Mary E. Hunt

Churches join civil rights defense

The National Council of Churches and the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice recently filed a friend of the court brief with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, asking that the court set aside \$92,000 worth of fines levied against three civil rights lawyers — Louis Pitts, director of Christic Institute South, a public interest legal assistance group; noted human rights attorney William Kunstler, and Barry Nakell, a University of North Carolina law professor.

The fines involve a suit the lawyers filed in 1989 charging state and local officials in Robeson County, N.C., with conducting a campaign of "harassment and intimidation" designed to deprive African American and Native American citizens of their constitutional rights. The lawyers later dropped the suit because, they stated, it had become moot.

U.S. District Judge Malcolm Howard of Fayetteville, N.C., then fined the lawyers under Rule 11, a controversial federal court procedure. Designed to prohibit "frivolous" lawsuits, this rule has been criticized by those who say it is being used disproportionately against lawyers who file suits seeking to protect the civil rights of minorities.

NCC News 10/4/90

People in hell — where do they tell people to go?

Red Skelton

Young victims of Lebanese war

The death of a parent or other family members has been the source of symptoms of grief, depression, guilt and self-doubt among children in Lebanon. Interviewers have found considerable pessimism among their subjects, with some children talking about the inescapability of death and injury at a young age. Data from various surveys show that 15 to 20% of children in the country had lost at least one member of their family.

Dr. Amal Shamma

Our Hope for Lebanon newsletter 9/90

A motley collection of saints

by Sue Hiatt

“Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers in their generations.” So begins the author of Ecclesiasticus in his poem of praise for those who have gone before who deserve remembrance: those who ruled in their kingdoms, were renowned for their power, leaders of the people, composers of musical tunes, those who set forth verses — rich men furnished with resources.

Those are the people the author considers praiseworthy — though he does add that there are some who have perished as though they had not lived, have become as though they had not been born, but they too will be remembered by their posterity.

This passage strikes me as a *cri de coeur* against death — an ancient whistling as we pass the cemetery. We all die and our bodies are buried, but, we cry against all reason, surely we will not be forgotten. Surely the riches and the fame and the talent and the creativity can’t just be gone as if they never were. Let us now praise famous men, not just because it gives us joy to do so, but because they need our praises to continue to exist. If we don’t remember, death does indeed have the final word.

This impulse to remember and rejoice in those who have died is very deep in all of us. All Saints Day is the occasion when catholic Christians remember our dead — other religious groups do it in other ways and on other occasions but we all do it. We, being human, remember our dead as we would have liked them to be.

The Rev. Suzanne R. Hiatt is Professor of Pastoral Theology at the Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, Mass.

Years ago I preached at a chapel that had in the sacristy an old sepia print entitled “the communion of saints.” It showed the sanctuary of a church with a priest distributing communion to a group of people kneeling at the rail. Over their heads, in a chancel very high and ornate were the communion of saints. Almost all the figures were male — young men in dress military uniforms of the First World War. The only female figure I recall was a nurse. All the figures were young and perfectly dressed — no doubt as the artist remembered them from life.

The picture struck me as poignant — for it was so much the communion of saints in our own image. We are so prone to think of the communion of saints as people we admire and miss.

But comforting and encouraging as such images may be, the communion of saints of which we are a part is much more diverse — a crowd we might not always feel so at home with.

Jesus gives us a glimpse of some other saints in the beatitudes. Not the “famous men” that Ecclesiasticus bids us remember, but the meek, the poor, the bereaved, the merciful, the peacemakers, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who are persecuted. This considerably more motley collection of people are those Jesus calls “blessed.”

And then, in Matthew’s version where Jesus pronounces these people “blessed” apart from the crowd, in the presence of his disciples and as part of his teaching, he does a very strange and compelling thing. He suddenly changes the formula of his speech from “blessed are they” to “blessed are you” and addresses the disciples directly: “Blessed are you who are reviled and persecuted on my account,

for so were the prophets persecuted who went before you.”

Jesus is calling his disciples, as always, to follow him. Not to be good, or obey the law, get rich, or be famous — but to follow him. And he promises not remembrance, but persecution. From now on saints will not be people of accomplishment or even of character, but people of faith and commitment.

And that is a very diverse group indeed. When we consider such historical saints as Paul or Peter or Simon Stylites, we realize they might not be people we’d like or even to be able to communicate with in any way. The mark of a saint is one who gives up everything for Christ, whose faith is the distinguishing mark of her or his life. These are people who have lived and died and people who are yet to be born, for the communion of saints stretches into the future as well as the past.

We are part of this cloud of witnesses. We share with them a faith that can overcome all obstacles and a commitment to say “yes” to Jesus, who asks us to follow and do God’s will in the world.

The world in which we find ourselves is fearsome — the ground shakes, the wind blows, winter appears to have triumphed over summer and the earth is cold and grey. But we are called to be saints, to face the demons we fear and to preach the good news to all the earth. The world hovers between endings and beginnings; our society and our church seem similarly between eras.

So let us whistle our way past the graveyard and take courage from the strange and glorious communion of saints which, for reasons beyond imagining, God has called us to be a part. **THW**

Bashing . . . Continued from page 13

and the suggestion that “the anti-Christ may be a homosexual.”

In March 1981, Moral Majority leader Dean Wycoff told an interviewer on a Santa Clara, Calif. TV broadcast that “Homosexuality should be coupled with murder . . . it would be the government that sits on this land that would be executing homosexuals. We are interested in re-establishing biblical morality here.” Shortly after that, a member of a local fundamentalist church attempted to run down members of Community United Against Violence, a project staffed largely by lesbians and gay men.

The Rev. Louis Sheldon of the California-based Traditional Values Coalition has been quoted as saying that “if two adults can’t resist their erotic sexual appetites enough to know that one of them is going to end up killing the other with anal intercourse, then actually they ought to pay the penalty of death . . . I believe homosexuals have a longing for death because they eat feces in which there is, of course, no nourishment.” Sheldon claims support from 6,500 churches in California, and ties to Republican congressmen William Danne-meyer and Robert Dornan.

“The churches — particularly the Roman Catholic church and fundamentalist groups — have joined with legislators in taking a very anti-gay stand,” says Joyce Collier. “That sends messages to people that it’s okay to hate gay people.”

Kevin Berrill concurs. “The church has failed miserably to meet the challenges of AIDS and anti-gay violence,” he says. “The silence has been resounding, and here I have to quote Elie Wiesel, who said that silence in the face of injustice is not benign. The silence of the church in the face of this violence is killing us. I’ve heard the argument that ‘we hate the sin [of homosexuality] but love the sinner.’ All I can say is that their ‘love’ could freeze beer. What people

pick up on is the condemnation — they’re not getting the message from the clergy that anti-gay violence is immoral.”

“The Episcopal Church passed a resolution declaring its abhorrence of anti-gay violence at the 1988 General Convention in Detroit — at our insistence,” says Kim Byham, past national president of Integrity, the group for lesbian and gay Episcopalians. “But as for the actual position of the church on gay-bashing? In a nutshell: firmly with its head in the ground.”

“Consider that New York’s new bishop (Richard Grein) had no problem issuing a statement deploring racism after the Bensonhurst incident — in the Diocese of Long Island. But when a gay man was stabbed to death on Staten Island, in the Diocese of New York, I heard the bishop say he was advised not to get mixed up in that mess. Later he acknowledged it was a mistake, but that it was too late to do anything about it. And he’s one of the better bishops. The only Episcopal bishop who’s given even lip service, in terms of raising hate crimes against lesbians and gays as a moral issue, is William Swing of California.”

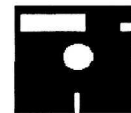
Part of the problem, says Byham, is that “Episcopalians tend to assume that gay-bashing is done by ‘people who are not our class, dear’ — they have gun racks in the back windows of their pickup trucks — that kind of thing.”

One church that isn’t making that assumption is St. Stephen’s in Boston’s South End, near the site of the May 6 assaults, in State Representative Byron Rushing’s district.

“When that happened,” says Rushing, “Butch (the Rev. Floyd Naters-Gamarra) was one of those who met to talk about how to deal with it. We don’t have a lot of churches in the South End that perceive themselves as neighborhood churches, but St. Stephen’s does. We decided to get the communities together —

lesbian and gay, Hispanic, African-American — and get them to *know* one another, to trust one another. So we organized a softball game! And a week before the game, two gay men were stabbed in the South End. We went ahead with the game, and it was good — there was something in place, something for the community to connect with and unify around. That had to come before the anti-violence work.”

Rushing says the church’s lack of response to hate crimes against lesbians and gays comes from an inconsistent theology. “It’s especially true in churches whose theology says lesbians and gays are sinners, because the reality is in this society we punish sinners, and yet we’re not supposed to punish *these* sinners, at least not that way. The church must get in the middle of constructive work in the community against hate crimes; the theology will clean up in the process of getting to know the people who are being victimized as *people*.” **rw**



To potential WITNESS authors

THE WITNESS will now accept manuscripts on computer disks, either 3 1/2" or 5 1/4" floppies. The word processing program must be DOS compatible. Acceptable programs are WORDSTAR 3.3 and above, WORDPERFECT, MICROSOFT WORD, MICROSOFT WINDOWS WRITE, XYWRITE III, MULTIMATE and DCA files prepared with IBM DISPLAYWRITE 3, SAMNA WORD, VOLKSWRITER 3, and WORDSTAR 3000. **Do not send original disks.** We cannot be responsible for damage in transit. Send a copy and a hard copy print-out.

A call to confront homophobia



In December of last year, Diocese of Newark Bishop John S. Spong became the focus of national publicity when he ordained the Rev. Robert Williams, an openly gay man living in a committed relationship.

Williams later spoke at a January public symposium in Detroit on human sexuality, making remarks about celibacy and monogamy that many considered scandalous. At the time, he was executive director of The Oasis, Newark's gay and lesbian ministry. During the storm of controversy that followed, Spong asked Williams to resign. Many conservatives in the church called for Spong's resignation as well.

In February, Presiding Bishop Edmond L. Browning and the group of bishops constituting his Council of Advice, issued a statement affirming the church's position that it is "inappropriate" to ordain practicing gay and lesbian persons and disassociating themselves from Williams' ordination. At the recent September House of Bishops meeting, after intense emotional debate, the bishops voted by a slim margin to adopt the statement as their own. In reaction to the vote, Spong made a stinging response, calling upon his colleagues to confront the homophobia within their ranks. Excerpts from the Episcopal News Service transcript of Spong's remarks follow:

I speak to you today primarily to share with you information and concerns of which I do not believe you are all aware. I shall endeavor not to speak defensively, for the cause I have tried to represent does not, in my opinion, need defense. Indeed it presents us with an incredible opportunity to bear witness to Christ by standing at the side of members of this (gay and lesbian) population who are marginalized by prejudice, abused by their rejection in both church and society and frequently condemned by those of us who say we represent the love of God.

I speak to you as one who, 11 years ago in this House, was too much the victim of my own homophobia to allow me to sign the 1979 statement of dissent from the majority recommendation of the General Convention. I salute the courage of Ed Browning, Jim Montgomery, John Krumm, Paul Moore and Bob Anderson, among many others, who

gave that statement of dissent its form and its life.

My comments focus on what our fears in regard to homosexual persons are doing to the structures of our church. My warning is that if this House acts inappropriately — as in my opinion, it has just done — it will become quite easy for this House to act inappropriately on many other issues. There is not a member of this House who is not a minority person on some issue. I want to make brief comments on four areas.

First, pastoral sensitivity.

I want to heed the warning of Bob Johnson that we not use the word homophobia loosely. Homophobia, to me, is present when irrationality distorts our response.

It is present in our pejorative phrases. "Practicing homosexual" to the gay population has the same connotation as "nigger" has to the black community. And we use that phrase over and over

again. Think how strange it would sound if we referred to "practicing heterosexuals," and you get some sense of their discomfort. We talk about homosexual lifestyles in a pejorative way, as if the only lifestyle known is that of the bath houses of San Francisco or the promiscuous behavior that we read about in the press. There are homosexual lifestyles that are beautiful, that are holy, and that need to be recognized by this church. So I urge us to be careful of our language, and to learn that prejudice is quite unconscious in many of us.

I view with alarm the contrast in the way I was treated by the members of this House, when compared to the treatment that has been accorded to members of the Episcopal Synod of America.

To accommodate those who have stated and acted out their refusal to obey the canons we passed in 1976, opening the ordination process to every member of this church, this House responded to

those who could not bear that in their consciences, by passing a conscience clause — then, later, an Episcopal Visitors Resolution — and committing vast amounts of the time of this House to listening to their pain and their distress.

I wonder if this House can embrace the fact that other bishops besides those in the Synod of America have a conscience that cannot and will not be compromised? The way the church treats its gay and lesbian members so deeply violates my conscience that it strains my life by tearing it between my loyalty to Jesus Christ, who made a habit of embracing the outcast, and my loyalty to this church which I dearly love. But it is nonetheless a church that has historically rejected blacks, women, and gays, in succession.

It is not the Bishop of Newark who is violated by this process. It is the gay and lesbian members of this church for whom I am an ever-so-inadequate spokesperson. I do not believe conflict over issues of great significance should be dealt with in this manner. And I do resent it.

I will skip over my comments on the 1979 resolution because the points have already been made. But I do recommend that a more objective part of our church might read them — perhaps the press. And the way you spell recommend is R-E-C-O-M-M-E-N-D. Recommend. It is used both in the resolution and the minority statement that says, “taking notice of the recommendatory and not proscriptive nature of this resolution . . .”

Among the 21 signatories were Ed Browning, the man elected Presiding Bishop, and John Walker, the runner-up for that office and later the vice-president of this House. That would hardly indicate to me the marginalization of the point of view expressed in the minority statement.

In the light of these facts, can you feel my sense of wonder when this recommendation was interpreted by so many

of you to have the force of canon law? This church refused in 1979 to write its prejudice against homosexual persons into the priesthood into canon law. We refused in 1982; we refused in 1985, we refused in 1988. Indeed, in 1988, we came within one vote of amending the canons to guarantee they would be applied without discrimination, including

“Integrity, the national organization of gay and lesbian Episcopalians, has given me the names of 50 priests who have been ordained since 1979 (and) are willing to state publicly that the ordaining bishop knew they were homosexual and not celibate. We have had in the past, and we have now, members of this House of Bishops who are homosexual persons.”

to homosexual persons.

Also in 1988, this church in a resolution affirmed “chastity and fidelity in personal relationships.” I support that with all my heart. My action in the Diocese of Newark was to affirm that resolution.

I also hope that they will look at the fact that an attempt was made to amend that resolution in the House of Deputies to change the words “personal relationships” to “holy matrimony.” That resolution was defeated.

I think that the day will come when every member of this House will regret any attempt we might make to give canonical weight to General Convention resolutions, even to those resolutions that specifically state that they are recommendatory.

The position of this church on birth control, expressed in General Convention, on abortion, on many other issues is debated. If a bishop disagrees with our moderate pro-choice position on abortion and works to achieve a constitutional amendment to ban abortion, is that bishop subject to presentment, censure, disassociation? Our church has opened the Eucharist to baptized children. Some bishops disapprove and do not allow this in their dioceses. Are they candidates for presentment or censure or disassociation? Is it surprising that objective observers see homophobia as rampant in the responses of many?

The Episcopal Synod members say the canons opening the ordination process to women are permissive, not binding. But many of the bishops of the Synod have argued that the 1979 resolution on human sexuality, which was recommendatory and not proscriptive, was, in fact, binding. Permissive canons and binding recommendations — my sister and brothers, only great fear and prejudice would enable one to talk this way without being amused.

The Synod members argue that no bishop is required to ordain anyone. I agree with that. But the canons do require that the process be open to all. The Synod members respond that women can go to another diocese to be ordained. To that, I respond, “That is correct,” but in that very process the equal application of the canons of the national church to every member of this part of Christ’s body is, in fact, denied.

Was my ordination last December the first ordination of a practicing — to use your words — homosexual person? Of course not. Integrity, the national organi-

zation of gay and lesbian Episcopalians, has given me the names of 50 priests who have been ordained since 1979, who are, I am told, willing to state publicly that when they were ordained the ordaining bishop knew that they were homosexual and that they were not celibate. We have had in the past, and we have now, members of this House who are homosexual persons.

We have had homosexual seminary professors. Many of the bishops of this church studied theology under a brilliant professor at one of our major seminaries who is known and loved across this church, who was and is gay and non-celibate. He is not the only one. We have had deans of our seminaries who were non-celibate homosexuals. We have seminary students at many of our seminaries who are openly gay and lesbian, living in committed relationships, and they are getting ordained every year.

A study in the Church of England reported recently in *The Church Times* revealed that the conservative estimate is that one in seven Church of England priests is homosexual. Only a very small percentage are celibate, according to this study.

I honor celibacy. There must always be a place in the church for those, like Mother Teresa or Francis of Assisi, who feel that their call to priesthood or to service makes any other commitment impossible. But celibacy is a vocation — a vocation to which very few are called. It takes a special grace. It is not the practice of the masses. For us to assume that we can make the distinction between orientation and practice and hide behind the myth that our gay and lesbian clergy are only homosexually oriented and not sexually active is naive.

I think that both the church and individual bishops should be in the position to say that predatory, promiscuous or casual sex is wrong. But the only way that this can be done with integrity in the gay community is for this church also to

be able to say that responsible, faithful, monogamous relationships can be holy, can be life-giving, and can be recognized. To offer celibacy as the only alternative to immorality is a strange stance. And in my opinion, it is not a stance that does anything except encourage covert promiscuous activity.

In one city of my Diocese of Newark, 30% of the population is estimated to be gay and lesbian — 30%! I want us to have life-giving words of the Lord to speak to this community. “Thou shalt not” cannot be that word.

Let me say a word about collegiality, which I also honor.

The charge of violating the collegiality of this House is a disturbing charge. It has, to my knowledge, never been leveled against the members of the Episcopal Synod, or against those who hold a pro-life position on abortion, or against those who refused to boycott Texas oil interests. But it has been leveled against me. I think that is a sign of fear, even of homophobia.

Collegiality means acting with sensitivity. It means notifying those who should be aware of your actions of what you’re doing; indeed, giving them a chance to suggest a different course.

The Presiding Bishop and John Howe, Bishop of Central Florida, knew about the forthcoming Williams ordination in July (1989). The House of Bishops met in Philadelphia in September. Either were free to bring the issue up, if it was of such terrible import. But neither did. I felt I had acted appropriately when I notified the Presiding Bishop six months prior to this action. (Later) I decided that courtesy required that I notify every one of you as to what was happening in the Diocese of Newark and the canonical procedures through which we had gone.

At that time, the *New York Times* had already informed me that they were not even going to cover the story of this ordination. However, when bishops around the country, most especially the bishops

of the Episcopal Synod, having received my courtesy notification, called a press conference to condemn the Diocese of Newark and its bishop, that action guaranteed the media circus that surrounded the ordination. My first knowledge of Clarence Pope’s condemnation came from the BBC. They called to ask me to comment on Bishop Pope’s press conference. At that moment I did not know of his press conference.

I have supported, at great cost to my conscience, both the conscience clause and the Episcopal Visitors resolution. I did it as an act of collegiality. The Episcopal Synod has responded by calling for my resignation. They will not get it.

I have been honest. I have been bothered by the lack of honesty among some of my critics.

Integrity members tell me that three of the ten signatories on the Presiding Bishop’s letter of disassociation have themselves knowingly ordained non-celibate homosexual persons. I know this to be a fact about only one of those bishops, for I know the candidate that was ordained. I hope you feel with me the sense of hypocrisy that the bishop’s signature created for me.

This past June, I deferred to the request of the Presiding Bishop and postponed an ordination of a gay male who had the unanimous support of the Commission on Ministry, the Standing Committee and the vestry of the church that called him to be their associate. That was an act of collegiality. But I now know that four non-celibate homosexual persons were ordained by other bishops in that same period of time.

I cannot tell you the pain my diocese has experienced because of that postponement. The gay and lesbian community, with which we were building trust, and the top decision makers of our diocese who had stood with me in this wonderful year — all felt betrayed by my postponing action.

In 1988 at every national church gath-

ering in the United States, the issue of homosexuality was debated. Twenty-five years ago it was on no one's agenda. There was consensus 25 years ago, generally unchallenged, that homosexuality was a matter of choice, that it was self-evidently wrong and that it reflected moral depravity. That consensus was not debated, for no one challenged that position. But that point of view has been challenged significantly by authoritative sources.

- In 1988, the Southern Baptist Convention, hardly a liberal organization, debated homosexuality for the first time. Now, they wound up condemning it as sin. But the fact is that they debated it and that indicates that the consensus has broken down — even in the Southern Baptist tradition.

- In 1988, the United Methodist Church, meeting in a national assembly in St. Louis, condemned homosexual acts, and then immediately appointed a task force to study the issue.

- In 1988, both the Presbyterian and the Lutherans put out serious study documents that put to shame anything our Health and Human Affairs Committee has produced — and I speak as a member of (that) committee. Those two studies brought together the best scientific data available that challenge the attitudes of the past.

- In 1988, our church affirmed "chastity and fidelity in personal relationships," a big step forward, and called for conversations of mutuality with gay and lesbian Christians.

- In 1988, the United Church of Canada removed any restriction from the ordination of responsible gay and lesbian pastors.

- In 1988, the Anglican bishops of the Church of England authorized a special committee, called the Osborne Committee, to make a report to them. It is an enormous step forward.

- And in 1990, Reform Judaism admitted gay rabbis to their ministry.

My brothers and sister, this issue is not an off-the-wall subject. It is on the agenda of every religious body in the world. It will not be addressed by shooting the messenger.

Neither I, nor any member of the Diocese of Newark have a sense of having acted inappropriately. We have been shocked. We have been amazed at the response of hatred and condemnation that has marked some parts of the church — some of it literally encouraged by the bishops. And we resent being the victims of hypocrisy.

If the standards of this church are to apply to all equally, then I will abide by those standards. If recommendations of General Convention are to be mandatory and binding on all, then let them be mandatory and binding.

Please do note in this regard that in a very recent letter to the Presiding Bishop from the Episcopalians United, which came just before we gathered, calling once again for the action on the part of this House against me for violating the 1979 resolution, they inform him at the end of that letter: "Please do not infer from our commitment to dialogue in fellowship that we could or would comply with every decision made by General Convention." That is the hypocrisy.

I would not take anything for the experience I have had in this past year. It has been the most exhilarating, growing, eventful year of my life. And the primary reason for that is that I have experienced first-hand the prejudice and the negativity and the pain and the fear that is the daily bread of gay and lesbian people.

Their ability to forge relationships of durability, commitment and faithfulness — living under that kind of hostile, negative rejection and prejudice — is in my opinion, almost a miracle. I salute my fellow gay and lesbians as fellow Christians whose capacity for love I admire far beyond what I see in the ordinary parlance of our church. TW

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Encyclopedia of the American Left in debut

*The article below is reprinted with permission from the editors of the prodigious **Encyclopedia of the American Left**, just out from Garland Publishers, New York (\$95) and described as the "first comprehensive reference work on the history of the Left" in the United States.*

*Among Episcopalians mentioned in the volume, in addition to Anne and Carl Braden, herewith, are Vida Scudder (in an entry contributed by Mary Lou Suhor, editor of **THE WITNESS**); the Rev. William Howard Melish, one of the founders of the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship; and the Rev. William B. Spofford, former editor of **THE WITNESS**.*

*Dr. Manning Marable, of the University of Colorado, who is a contributing editor to **THE WITNESS**, served on the publication's Advisory Board. The volume was edited by Mari Jo and Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas. In addition to personalities, the book covers pre-Marxist socialism, Christian socialism, pacifism, various forms of anarchism, Black Power, the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, the Trotskyists, etc. Radical movements not always considered part of the traditional Left such as Gay rights, Native American rights, and ecology are also in its 976 pages. For toll-free orders: 1-800-627-6273.*

Anne and Carl Braden:

Anti-racists in a hostile Southland

Anne and Carl Braden, two prominent journalists, joined forces in Louisville, Ky., where they met as education and labor editors, respectively, for the *Louisville Times*. Anne Gamrell McCarty, the daughter of a relatively privileged family, was raised in Mississippi and Alabama. As the result of her upbringing and the Episcopal Church, her education at Stratford and Randolph-Macon colleges, contact with a young black woman in New York, and her experiences as a reporter in Alabama, she came to abhor the ugly effects of the South's segregation system on whites and its humiliating impact on blacks.

She returned to Louisville, her birthplace, at age 23. There she met 33-year-old Carl Braden, who had already been married and divorced, had organized unions, and worked his way up through a variety of newspapers in Harlan County, Knoxville, and Cincinnati. Carl came from Portland, a poor white section of Louisville. His father, a railroad shop

worker and factory hand, imbued him with the socialist teachings of Eugene Debs, while his Catholic mother taught him the social gospel. Carl attended Catholic schools and seminary, but abandoned plans to join the priesthood and instead went to work in 1931 as a newspaper reporter. He and Anne married in 1948, and the couple became public relations directors for Left-led Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) unions and worked in the Progressive Party campaign. During the rest of their lives, the Bradens remained at the center of battles to transform the South, and were repeatedly attacked as subversives for their work supporting black freedom.

Mississippi authorities jailed Anne in 1951 for leading a delegation of Southern white women to the governor's office to protest the scheduled execution of Willie McGee, a black man charged with raping a white woman. Following the Supreme Court's *Brown* school desegregation decision in 1954, Kentucky

state prosecutors arrested the Bradens and charged them with plotting to incite insurrection when they bought a home in a white neighborhood and sold it to a black family.

Local newspapers blacklisted them from employment, prosecutors confiscated their books as "evidence," and racists bombed the home they had purchased for Andrew Wade. Held on \$40,000 bail, Carl served eight months of a 15-year prison sentence before a higher court overturned his conviction. Anne popularized the case in a book about segregation titled *The Wall Between* (1958).

Unable to secure employment as journalists, the Bradens became field organizers and writers for the integrationist Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF), which James Eastland's Senate Internal Security Subcommittee and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) had called a Communist front. In 1958 HUAC called the Bradens

to Atlanta to testify about the integration movement in the South. In the hearing, Carl stated, "My beliefs and my associations are none of the business of this committee," and refused to testify based on his right to freedom of speech and association contained in the First Amendment. He and anti-HUAC organizer Frank Wilkinson nearly succeeded in winning their First Amendment test case against HUAC but lost it in a celebrated 5-4 decision before the Supreme Court in 1961.

As in the Louisville case, authorities put off questioning or prosecuting Anne. She meanwhile wrote and circulated 200,000 copies of a pamphlet — *HUAC: Bulwark of Segregation* — and traveled across the country in a clemency campaign. The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other black leaders held a dinner honoring Braden and Wilkinson before they entered prison to begin serving eight months of a year's prison sentence for contempt of Congress.

From that time forward, the Bradens continually upheld the position that protection of the First Amendment guarantee for freedom of belief and association, like the struggle for black rights, was integral to all other struggles. They helped launch the National Committee to Abolish HUAC, and throughout the 1960s organized support for most of the major civil rights campaigns.

State and federal authorities continually attacked the Bradens and attempted to isolate them from the civil rights movement (Alabama even enjoined Carl from working in the state) and from Southern whites. However, the Bradens used every attack against them and the movement as a platform to raise issues. More than others on the Left, they perfected the use of media and the written word to fight back against repression. In 1967, during a period of increased radicalization in the Southern movement, the Bradens became executive directors of SCEF. In the same year, Kentucky au-

thorities again arrested them on sedition, this time for setting up a community organizing project among poor whites in Appalachia. The courts ultimately overturned the law as unconstitutional.

In 1972 the Bradens retired as SCEF directors, Carl setting up a training institute for activists and Anne returning to full-time editing of SCEF's paper, the *Southern Patriot*. By this time factional and ideological splits of the New Left had torn SCEF apart. Carl resigned to protest what he considered Red-baiting within the organization, and Anne left shortly thereafter when the SCEF board voted down a proposal to renew the organization's formal commitment to interracialism.

Carl directed the Training Institute for Propaganda and Organizing, initiated the fight to free North Carolina's Wilmington Ten, and became one of the leaders of the National Alliance Against Racism and Political Repression. He died suddenly of a heart attack in 1975 at age 60, embittered with much of the New Left but never backing down from his participation in the movement. Anne, along with others who had been in SCEF, formed a new group, the Southern Organizing Committee for Economic and Social Justice (SOC). She continued to build interracial coalitions, to work against racist violence, and to support the Rev. Jesse Jackson and other black leaders.

For many on the Left, the Bradens became the symbol of radical challenge to the segregation system from within the

white South. Although the FBI and other authorities warned black civil rights leaders not to work with them, the Bradens developed close working relations with black activists throughout the region, and supported the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Black Power movement when many liberals turned away. They were widely respected for their unwavering commitment to the struggle against racism, and despite the inquisitions and arrests directed against them, the Bradens never rejected Marxist politics.

As principal victims of anti-communism in the South, the Bradens never affirmed or denied whether they ever held membership in any Left party. At the same time, they steadfastly worked with and supported Communists and others on the Left, and stated their own socialist beliefs when they thought them relevant to the struggle at hand.

However, their main focus remained on the struggle for racial justice as the key to changing the South and the nation. As Anne Braden explained her commitment in the *Louisville Defender* in 1978, "Our future and that of our children rides with the fate of the black struggle for progress, and [we must] join in that struggle as if our very lives depend on it. For, in truth, they do."

(Contributed to *Encyclopedia of the American Left* by Michael Honey, former SCEF worker and author of "Labor and Civil Rights in the South: The Industrial Union Movement and Black Workers in Memphis.")

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