The Witness

Economies of sin

Volume 78 • Number 3 • March 1995

Political Prisoners

I CONSIDER IT REMARKABLE that a magazine that serves many of the "mainstream people" in our church and nation would devote an entire issue to concerns related to U.S. political prisoners. I appreciated the articles highlighting individuals who are willing to suffer through long imprisonment for the sake of the truth.

When I say that there are signs of hope in the midst of seeming hopelessness in our society, *The Witness* that raises hard questions with its readers is one of the signs of hope in the church and in our nation.

Seiichi Michael Yasutake
Interfaith Prisoners of Conscience
Evanston, IL

Family Values

THE WITNESS IS ALWAYS an inspiration and a challenge — but never more so than the incredible "Family Values" issue.

As director of Ministry with Single Adults and as a therapist, I work with men, women and children who are in their own lives redefining "family" and who understand what "family values" really ARE. I would like to order additional copies of this issue to have available through my ministry and practice, and also to use in my consulting work across the country. As always, the scope of your articles broadens the understanding, even as it cuts to the very heart of the issues.

Kay Collier-Sloane
SOLO FLIGHT
Lexington, KY

MS. PAYDEN IN HER REVIEW of Dr. Spock's recent book in the December 1994 issue makes reference to the decadent nature of her middle-class environment, presumably because of some lack of values, pointing out that she as well as her teenage daughters know of youth in that community who are on antidepressants. May I use the occasion to point out that DEPRESSION is an illness and is the leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 15 and 25, and is the leading cause of disablement in the population at large! The prognosis for its positive control, thanks to modern medicine, is probably as high as 95 percent. It is, like cancer and many other illnesses, genetic in nature and therefore hits those who are rich and poor alike with little discrimination; you will find it in the worst slums and in the best suburban areas. Because its symptoms have so many negative behavioral characteristics (all of which are antithetical to all relgious virtues — there is no religion I know of that condones laziness), it is attacked with a passion as the worst of sins.

Without a doubt, depression, like any other illness, is exacerbated by the environment and circumstances of one's life, but these are certainly not the cause.

What is decadent about our society is not those of our young who are ill, but the appalling lack of health care insurance provisions and services, both private and public, to deal with the crises.

I doubt if I will read Dr. Spock's book, for as Ms. Payden points out, all of us are responsible for all people, all the time, everywhere. Values and value systems (whatever they are?) only get in the way.

David Jones
Highland, MD

I ENJOYED THE DECEMBER 1994 ISSUE on "Family Values," but gender issues persist and there is no use in being gender-shy. It pops up where you'd least expect it.

For example, in the article, "Making love manifest," about Jennifer Walters and Alexandra Sciaky and their adopted child Ben, about 17 or 18 of the quotations definitional of the relationship and its meanig *vis-à-vis* the community, the church and the state — nearly all the quoted copy in the article — came from Jennifer. Only three or four quotes, mainly on satisfaction with the relationship and the pleasure of sending thank you notes following the baby shower, come from Alexandra.

Judging from the gender role-playing shown in the article, I'll bet that Jennifer Walters and Alexandra Sciaky are more traditional than the men who are bringing a presentment against their bishop in Michigan because of them!

Lloyd Moyer
Sophia Press
Montpelier, VT

Message from Cuba

DURING MORE THAN 35 YEARS we have carried out a pastoral work of companionship with the Cuban people. Never before has the embargo been so cruel: Torricelli's amendment and the new prohibitions imposed by the Clinton administration last August increase the suffering and the pain of the Cuban people, particularly for old people, children and the weak.

U.S. citizens should pray and struggle to put an end to this tragic situation. Meanwhile, without medicines, almost without transportation, lacking many essential things, but with lots of love, we remain at the side of the people. We are deeply grateful to all those who voted against the blockade at the General Convention in Indianapolis.

Juan Ramon de la Paz Cerezo
Episcopal Peace Fellowship,
Holy Trinity Cathedral Chapter
Habana, Cuba

[Ed. note: Juan Ramon says there is a desperate need for medicines in Cuba, especially for asthmatic sprays. Readers who

Correction

In the Family Values issue (Dec. 1994), Rosemary Radford Ruether's father was wrongly identified. The cutline should have read Robert Armstrong Radford.

can help provide these medications should be in touch with Pastors for Peace, 331 17th Ave. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55414.]

Talking about AIDS

I HAVE NEVER BEEN a no-holds-barred activist, but when it comes to AIDS, I find I am becoming just that. Is it enough to recognize AIDS on the second Sunday in October as the Presiding Bishop has asked, or the first Saturday in November (the date of the Diocese of New York's AIDS service) or World AIDS Day in December?

I say no, a thousand times no. How many more people in my and your life have to die before we pull in the reins and take a clear, hard look at what we are doing on a personal level to fight this pandemic?

We must openly, intelligently, incessantly talk about AIDS with the people who do not know and care about AIDS because they say AIDS does not affect them directly. Every single day, we must use the word AIDS in a sentence to someone new.

When we begin to accept a person's death from AIDS as just another fact of life, we throw in the towel. All we've got to do — and do it every day — is tell the world how we feel about AIDS, unedited. Our dignity and our very lives may depend on it.

Robert Davis
New York, NY

Witness praise

I LOVE *THE WITNESS* and find every issue thought provoking and quotable. Please reinstate my subscription and send me the issue that I just missed. I can't risk being so uninformed.

Barbara L. Garcia
Valhalla, NY

THANK YOU FOR THE ADVENT calendar. It's beautiful. I want you to know, it's the first Advent calendar I've ever had and I like it so much I'm never going to do without one again.

I'm enclosing my check for a subscription. It isn't really a renewal because last year's subscription was a highly appreciated gift and I'm now addicted, so it's a necessity. It's great and I thank you for making it so.

Ruth Garland
Brookline, MA

WHAT A DELIGHT TO RENEW my subscription to a publication which so helps me to "belong to the Truth" (John 18: 37)! I'm renewing as a "sustainer" and wish I could do more to adequately reflect how sustained I am by your publication. It never fails to provoke thought, inspiration, discomfort, tears, joy or all of the above. With you all — writers, editors, board, artists — for company it is good to belong to Christ.

And as for Julie Wortman's Advent calendar ... my daughters and I feel "highly favored" by it.

Holly Antolini
Stonington, ME

YOU AND *THE WITNESS* FAMILY continue to amaze me with the continuing high quality that you have brought to this journal. It's absolutely "first rate."

John Burt
Marquette, MI

HEARTY CONGRATULATIONS AND thanks for a splendid, stimulating, challenging publication — always eagerly anticipated and passed on to many other enthusiastic readers, including seminary staff, bishops and young "radicals"!

Maureen Clegg
Rosalie, Australia

I HAVE SUBSCRIBED TO *THE WITNESS* for the past two years and have renewed for 1995. I, like many others, look forward to receiving your thoughts, ideas, experiences, and accounts of your individual struggles to make sense of something; as well as, your analysis and solution to a circumstance, or activity, by government, etc.

I was delighted to receive your Advent letter which had the "personal touch" and was written in the way a person writes to members of a family or friends.

Your ministry is valued by those of us who deeply care about others, no matter who they are and where they live.

Sandy Neubauer
Norfolk, VA

Classifieds

Kirkridge retreat

A midweek workshop at Kirkridge Retreat Center entitled "Futuring Our Ministries in the Congregation" will be led by Alban Institute founder Loren Mead April 18-20, 1995. Mead's widely acclaimed book, *The Once and Future Church,* yields practical insights for developing healthier congregational life and healthier roles for pastors and leaders. In dialogue and telling our own parish and leadership stories, we will honor the heritage of the past while freeing ourselves to shape our ministries in new and uncharted ways. Cost: $275 ($150 registration deposit). Write or call Kirkridge, Bangor, Penn., 18013. (610) 588-1793.

Urban interns

Episcopal Urban Intern Program: Work in social service ministry, live in Christian community in Los Angeles, share in spiritual formation. For adults 21-30. Apply now for the 1995-1996 year. Contact: The Rev. Gary Commins, 260 N. Locust St., Inglewood, Calif., 90301. (310) 674-7744.

Environment conference

Bishop Steve Charleston will give the keynote address at a conference on living out environmental spirituality in parishes and homes. Sponsored by the Diocese of Minnesota, the conference will take place July 21-22 at St. John's University, Collegeville, Minn. Cost is $95 before April 1, $105 after. For details contact Eugene Wahl, 11684 Eldorado St., Coon Rapids, Minn., (612) 323-4913.

Classifieds

Witness classifieds cost 75 cents a word or $30 an inch, whichever is less. Payments must accompany submissions. Deadline is the 15th of the month, two months prior to publication. For instance, items received January 15 will run in March.

When ads mark anniversaries of deaths, ordinations, or acts of conscience, photos — even at half column-width — can be included.

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Office: 1249 Washington Blvd., Suite 3115, Detroit, Mich., 48226-1822. Telephone: (313) 962-2650. Fax number: (313) 962-1012.

Cover: Separation of Light and Darkness and *Fall of the Rebel Angels* by Master Bertram, Grabow Altarpiece, detail of wing, 1379. Kuntshalle, Hamburg.
Backcover: Calvary: "There was darkness over the whole land, until the ninth hour" by Dierdre Luzwick, an artist in Cambridge, Wis. This work is part of a series called "Christ Kin" for which Luzwick is seeking a publisher.

Weighing sin and judgment: who will redeem the times?

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

The church calendar and the national political climate fuse to bring us the Lenten images of sin and the cry of the right that it can redeem the nation or at least mete out punishment.

This issue is dedicated to the topic of sin. It includes the voices of several who believe, like Douglas John Hall (p. 8), that the right wing's use of religious imperatives is actually in the service of the rich. It also includes the views of folks at Episcopalians United and of a conservative charismatic priest who left the Episcopal Church in pursuit of a church that he believes will uphold Biblical morality.

On the whole, the writers with the *Witness* perspective insist that hurling judgments at others is dangerous and usurps the authority of God. Likewise, these writers suggest that self-affirmation and concentration on the love of God will produce better disciples than will self-recrimination and holy crusades.

Short, clear moral imperatives and a life quiz that will put us over the top into heaven are not available to us, these writers say.

Verna Dozier goes so far as to say that in following Christ we *always* stand on shifting ground (p. 10). William Stringfellow, who is in agreement, says that our task as followers of Jesus is to exercise sanity and conscience in the face of the myriad forms of death — this means our responses will vary with historic context; there are no tried and true right answers (p. 6).

Widener Coll., National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Woman weighing pearls **by Jan Vermeer**

> *We have to untangle the call of orthodoxy from the cries of those who through fear and self-righteousness hope to corral our consciences.*

Many writers propose that the very act of exercising judgment against others is the essence of sin. It lends itself to scapegoating and to suppressing the parts of yourself that may be complicit with the very sin being condemned.

But conservatives in this issue object, asking is there no criteria by which to assess the morality of our lives other than our own feelings? Are the Biblical admonitions of no consequence, to be laid aside as cultural and out-dated baggage?

Readers can discern which perspectives are most true for them, but there is a helpful caution in Ken Leech's article which notes that in Nazi Germany, church liberals cooperated with Hitler (p. 24). It was the evangelicals and conservatives who drafted the Barmen Declaration which in its simple way asserted the lordship of Christ in the face of the Third Reich. (And, innocuous as that assertion may seem, all the signers of the declaration were eventually exiled, imprisoned or executed.) Leech suggests that, unlike liberals, radicals and conservatives both cling to an orthodoxy that can witness to the powers.

Somehow we have to untangle the call of orthodoxy and committed faith, the kind that can prompt us to make sacrifices and to sign a Barmen Declaration, from the cries of those who through fear and self-righteousness hope to corral our consciences and proscribe, ultimately, even God's freedom. We offer this issue toward that end.

In the long run, of course, we are all like the woman in Jan Vermeer's painting, we weigh the material of our lives with the Last Judgment as backdrop. TW

editor's note

Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann is editor/publisher of *The Witness*.

The Church and the demonic

by William Stringfellow

The inherited churches in this society have not been bastions of resistance to demonic power, as embodied in churchly and ecclesiastical forms, in the state, or in other American principalities.

Indeed, the churchly denominations and sects have notoriously been among the most benighted institutions in America, remarkably undiscerning so far as the reality of the demonic in history is concerned. And, in the apparent hierarchy of principalities, the American churches have more often than not been among the most menial, manipulated, and degraded vassals of the power of death.

It is no great surprise, then, that so many churches on the contemporary scene are not communities in which the Bible has been esteemed or in which the biblical life-style has been much practiced or in which the Jerusalem vocation is deeply comprehended and loved. Still, if when looking at the churches the marks of Jerusalem are not readily beheld, that does not imply the departure of the Holy Spirit from America or the indifference of God to the militancy of death in the nation or the absence of the biblical witness amid the American babel and chaos. It means only that human beings must be open to the marks of Jerusalem where they appear — if only, as it were, momentarily — wherever that may be; that one is called to be truly discerning of the Holy Spirit and of all spirits and to be courageous in naming the same. It means further that a Christian freely affirms the biblical life and acknowledges *that* as the church however, wherever, or whenever that happens and regardless of whether the event of the church occurs in distance from traditional churchly existence.

Among the conventional ecclesiastical principalities, there are, mercifully, occasional congregations and paracongregations, and there are laity and clergy and some few ecclesiastics, that stand — together with more *ad hoc* communities and happenings and people — within the continuity of the biblical witness. Taken together, I believe, these constitute an emergent confessing movement in the United States: spontaneous, episodic, radically ecumenical, irregular in polity, zealous in living, extemporaneous in action, new and renewed, conscientious, meek, poor. It is to these phenomena, far more profound and much more widespread than is commonly recognized, that a person must look to sight the exemplary church of Jesus Christ acting as harbinger of the holy nation. It is in this confessing movement that the Jerusalem parable is verified, now, in America, right in the midst of the ruin of Babylon's churches and miscellaneous death shrines. TW

William Stringfellow, a lawyer, social advocate and theologian, died 10 years ago, in March 1984. These articles, originally published in An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land *and* Suspect Tenderness, *are currently available in* A Keeper of the Word: Selected Writings of William Stringfellow, *ed. by Bill Wylie-Kellermann, Eerdmans, 1994.*

Understanding conscience

The exercise of conscience is not the same thing as the arrival at consensus. In specific circumstances within a particular segment of the body of Christians, there may be a coincidence of conscience and consensus, but there may also be conscientious fitness not attended by consensus or there may even be many simultaneous voices of conscience, some of which seem inconsistent with each other. ...

Pietists, among them some partisans of natural law, will complain that this comprehension of functioning conscience within the Christian witness makes evaluation of any particular action, which is said to be conscientious, difficult. That we readily concede; it is, in fact, impossible, and we gladly recall that the prerogative of judgment of conscience is vested in God, not in human beings, not in laws, not in the state, not in the ethics of culture, not in the church, and certainly not in the churches, sects and denominations. What transpires, in decisions and actions of conscience, on the part of a Christian or of some community of Christians or of many Christians positioned diversely, is a living encounter between the Holy Spirit and those deciding and acting in relation to human needs in society. If either those who act or those who stand apart from the action presume judgment of what is said and done, they negate the visibility of that encounter. The practice of conscience, thus, is an extraordinarily audacious undertaking, disdaining all mundane or conventional prudential calculations and confessing the exclusivity of God's judgment and trusting God's judgment as grace. Conscience requires knowing and respecting one's self as no less, but no more, than human. The exercise of conscience represents — as 1 Peter remarks — living as a free human being. — *W.S.*

On reading nadeshda mandelstam

by Dorothee Sölle

The poet
suspected and shadowed for a long time
has friends

One of them hangs up three times
when the marked man calls

Another sends his wife
to ask how things are
he's out of town himself

A third turns informer
he needs a better apartment

When the car came to pick him up
three close neighbors
happened to be sleeping

Denial betrayal abandonment and sleep
the old story of friendship
remember that christ died
for friends like these

— from *Revolutionary Patience*, Orbis Books

In complete control

by Rumi

In complete control, pretending control,
with dignified authority, we are charlatans.
Or maybe just a goat's hair brush in a painter's hand.
We have no idea what we are.

We donate a cloak

by Rumi

We donate a cloak to the man who does the washing.
We feel proud of our generosity.
We stare at the infinite, suffering ocean.
We fall in.

— Rumi was a 12th century Persian mystic

The Witness' *new poetry editor,* ***Ana Hernandez****, is a musician and singer, raised in New York, who performs with the Miserable Offenders. (They market a wonderful tape of Advent music called,* Keepin' the Baby Awake.*) She also staffs the bookstore at the Episcopal Church Center. Asked about political and artistic commitments, Hernandez responded, "Yes. I have them."*

The political consequences of misconceiving sin

by Douglas John Hall

The vocabulary of Christian faith suffers from misunderstanding at every turn, but no one term is as badly understood in both society and church as the little word, "sin." Nor is this misconception an innocent or merely "religious" affair. Lives are ruined by it. Sometimes it destroys whole communities.

It is quite possible, in fact, that the false appropriation of what the Judeo-Christian tradition means by sin on the part of powerful sectors in North American society today constitutes one of the most subtle causes of our socio-political malaise. Cultures, as the term connotes, spring from cults, and the foundational cult of this society, whatever its present status, is Christianity. The residue of Christian dogmas, including their typical perversions, lingers long after the sincerity has gone out of religious observance. In their decline religions, like secular ideologies, regularly accentuate their most reductive beliefs and practices; for the correctives that were present in their heyday, stemming especially from the activity of critical, theologically informed minorities in their midst, are pushed aside by the true-believing simplifiers, who savour the power of their slogans and resent any interpretations that may muddy the waters of their "fundamentals."

What we are seeing in North American Christianity today is just such a triumph of religious simplism. As the old once-mainline denominations are relegated to the social periphery, and as theological scholarship retreats from active engagement with the community of belief, the sort of Christianity that was regularly regarded as "the lunatic fringe" as late as the 1950s becomes increasingly *normative* Christianity. The role of the "hot" media, especially television, in this process is of course vital. These media evoke — in our context, demand! — simple, straightforward stuff: one-liners, slogans, hype. Who would be fool enough to try to communicate the thought of Thomas Aquinas or Karl Barth on television? You can hardly manage it in a seminary classroom today!

Under these circumstances, sin has plummeted to its crassest forms of misconception ever. It has become, in fact, little more than a stained-glass version of the directory of "bad things" that the political Right abhors, most of them, predictably enough, having to do with sexual deviations from the rhetorical norm, lack of respect for conventional authorities, and crimes involving property.

By accentuating the private side of sin; by singling out precisely the vices that offend the rich, born-again Christianity performs exactly the same service that Establishment Christianity has been providing in the West since Constantine.

Whether the biblical concept of sin has ever been profoundly grasped by most Christians is a good question. Anyone who moves from the gospels and epistles of the newer Testament into the Christian writings of the 2nd and 3rd centuries C.E. will realize that the process of sin's reduction has begun. Already sin (singular) has become sins (plural) — the nasty little thoughts, words and deeds that punctuate every life. You can list them. You can distinguish them from their opposites, the virtues. If you are conscientious (or afraid of the consequences!), you try to make your good outweigh your evil, so that (with Jesus' and the saints' help, of course) you will be "saved."

By the Middle Ages, a whole ecclesiastical technology for handling sins was in place. It was not *all* bad. People need help with their problems. But lest we grow romantic about the confessional, let us also remember that the penitential system was enormously important to those in power, both ecclesiasts and princes (often enough the same people). If the biblical concept of sin has seldom been probed, the reasons are not all theological! Opposition to the Reformers from Wycliffe on came *mainly* from those whose status and powerbase would be greatly altered were the "new" ideas about sin and grace held by the protesting elements actually implemented.

Usually the Reformation is presented as introducing radical notions of salvation (it is "by grace alone, through faith") and authority (*sola scriptura*). But it would be just as instructive, in a way, to say that the Reformers entertained a radical understanding of sin — radical in the genuine sense of the term, because it goes to

John Hall is Professor of Christian Theology, Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University, Montreal, Canada.

the roots (*radix*) of biblical faith.

Thus for them sin meant disobedience, rebellion, refusal, turning-away. In short, they saw it as a relational term. It refers to the abrogation of relationship. The modern equivalents, as Tillich and others taught us, would be alienation or estrangement. The foundational relationship of human life— our relation with God — is broken; and this brokenness shows up in all our other relations (read Genesis 3 again!).

Whether we should even speak of "sins" (plural) is questionable; but if we do, we should understand that they are *consequences* of what is wrong, not its causes. If my relationship with my friend is deeply flawed, most of what I do, say or think in relation to her will reflect the fact. The remedy for such a condition is not labouring to alter the surface patterns of my behaviour *vis-á-vis* my former friend but seeking (no doubt painful) reconciliation with her. Analogously, the Bible's answer to the broken relationship called sin, said the Reformers, is not "works of the law" but "faith" — that is, trust: a new relationship with God, initiated by God. That is why Sören Kierkegaard (still one of the best analysts of sin) declared that the opposite of sin is not virtue but love. In fact, what are usually thought to be virtues may be as much consequences of sin as are obvious vices — which is why Jesus had more trouble with the reputedly virtuous than with acknowledged "sinners."

While classical Protestantism at its best grasped this relational basis of the doctrine of sin, post-Reformation Protestantism soon slid back into reductionist versions of what is wrong with us. Moreover, the individualism fostered by pietistic and liberal expressions of Protestantism has greatly aggravated the tendency to identify sin with negative qualities (sins) — specifically, negative *personal* failings.

***St. Michael* by Martin Schongauer, c. 1480.**

It could be argued that the reduction of sin to personal "sins" is a *natural* sort of heresy, especially for those who adhere to the *New* Testament, with its particular interest in the inner life of the individual person. But the newer Testament is not one-sidedly personalistic, and if it is understood (as it ought to be!) as an extension of the Hebrew scriptures, then its development of the personal dimension will have to be kept in tension with the corporate dimension. For the prophetic tradition of Israel, sin applies to the whole people and to the species and not only to individuals; more importantly, the two dimensions are inseparable. "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips," cries Isaiah in his awareness of the just God (6:5).

The corporate nature of sin has only rarely been explored imaginatively in Christian history. Augustine in his late work, *The City of God*, came closest to such an exploration in the ancient church, and no one in the modern church approaches Reinhold Niebuhr's consistent attempt to counter American religious personalism and sentimentalism with a provocative social analysis of sin. There is a crying need in our context today for a continuation of Niebuhr's work. He was particularly conscious of the *liberal* reduction of the doctrine of sin. A contemporary critique would have to be more conscious of the so-called "conservative" reduction of the doctrine.

For it is a reduction, no matter how "biblical" its language or how fiery its denunciations. In the end, it is thoroughly in the service of the political Right, as the recent Congressional elections again document so concretely. By accentuating the private side of sin; by identifying what is wrong with the world in ways that call for no radical transformation of social structures and no *metanoia* on the part of the dominant classes and factions; by singling out precisely the vices that offend the rich, born-again Christianity in the United States (and to a lesser extent Canada) performs exactly the same service that Establishment Christianity has been providing in the West since Constantine invited the church to become chaplain to Empire.

A harartiology (doctrine of sin) that was truly— and not just rhetorically — biblical would turn *our* world upside down, just as the first disciples were accused of doing to theirs. TW

Joining Christ on shifting ground: an interview with Verna Dozier

by Julie A. Wortman

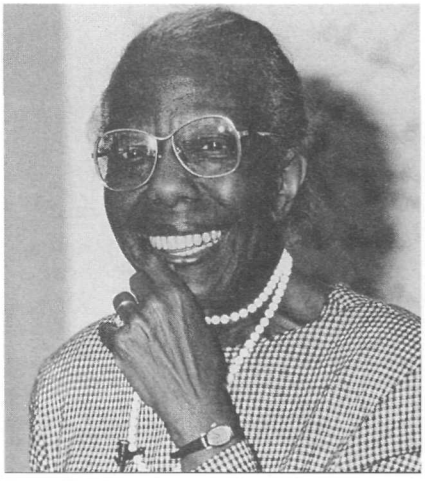
Verna Dozier is a lay theologian, biblical scholar and Christian educator. Her books include The Dream of God *and* The Authority of the Laity.

Julie Wortman: What's your quick definition of sin?

Verna Dozier: Violation of the first and second commandments as Jesus enunciated them: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy mind and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Racism is a very flagrant violation of the first commandment. And we see it in the results of racism — in poverty, in homelessness. Poverty and homelessness are also violations of loving thy neighbor as thyself. I see it at the present time in the Republican Congress and in the meanspiritedness that prevails in this country. All of that's a violation of the first and second commandments.

I think that the basic thrust of the Bible has very little to do with private and personal morality. The Bible is directed to a *people* and to the issue of a *people's* morality. We play up individual morality — I think that if you love your neighbor and love God you *will* have a personal morality — but I don't think that is the thrust of the biblical story. One of the problems we have with the biblical story is that we go at it by bits and pieces and we don't get the whole sweep. So we concentrate on certain items, but I think they have to be played against the whole story. In one way *that* is a definition of sin because that's what we do — we cut God down to our size, so that's not loving the Lord God.



Verna Dozier David Zadig, Episcopal Times

J.W.: Is the church a force of resistance in the face of sin?

V.D.: No, not the institutional church. I make a distinction between the visible institutional church and the people of God, a number that no one can number. I think that there are within the institutional church those people who have a vision of what God was about in creation and what God is continuing to be about, but you can't identify the people of God by any denominational label or by any parish — even the congregations who try so hard to be different.

J.W.: What resources do the people of God have in the face of sin?

V.D.: Repentance. They can repent and live in the new creation of the Resurrection. Every single day can be a day of repenting and living anew — living as if yesterday had not given us any light because yesterday is darkness today. That's a very scary way to live — I certainly don't do it. I cling to the little truths that I find and I get disturbed when those truths are challenged. My vision is greater than my actions. And I think that is true for all of us. But I think that the awareness of that is one sign of God touching our lives, that we don't make our understanding God.

J.W.: Concretely, what do you do each day to try to live in the newness of the Resurrection?

V.D.: Well, one of the things I try to do is to know that I haven't done it. I try to be aware always of my shortcomings and my failures and my being just like the people with whom I have trouble. That's an uncomfortable way to live, but there are no answers. I suppose that's why one of the church's sayings, that "Christ is the answer" is so disturbing to me — what does that mean? In saying Christ is the answer, we're defending where we stand, making that stand God.

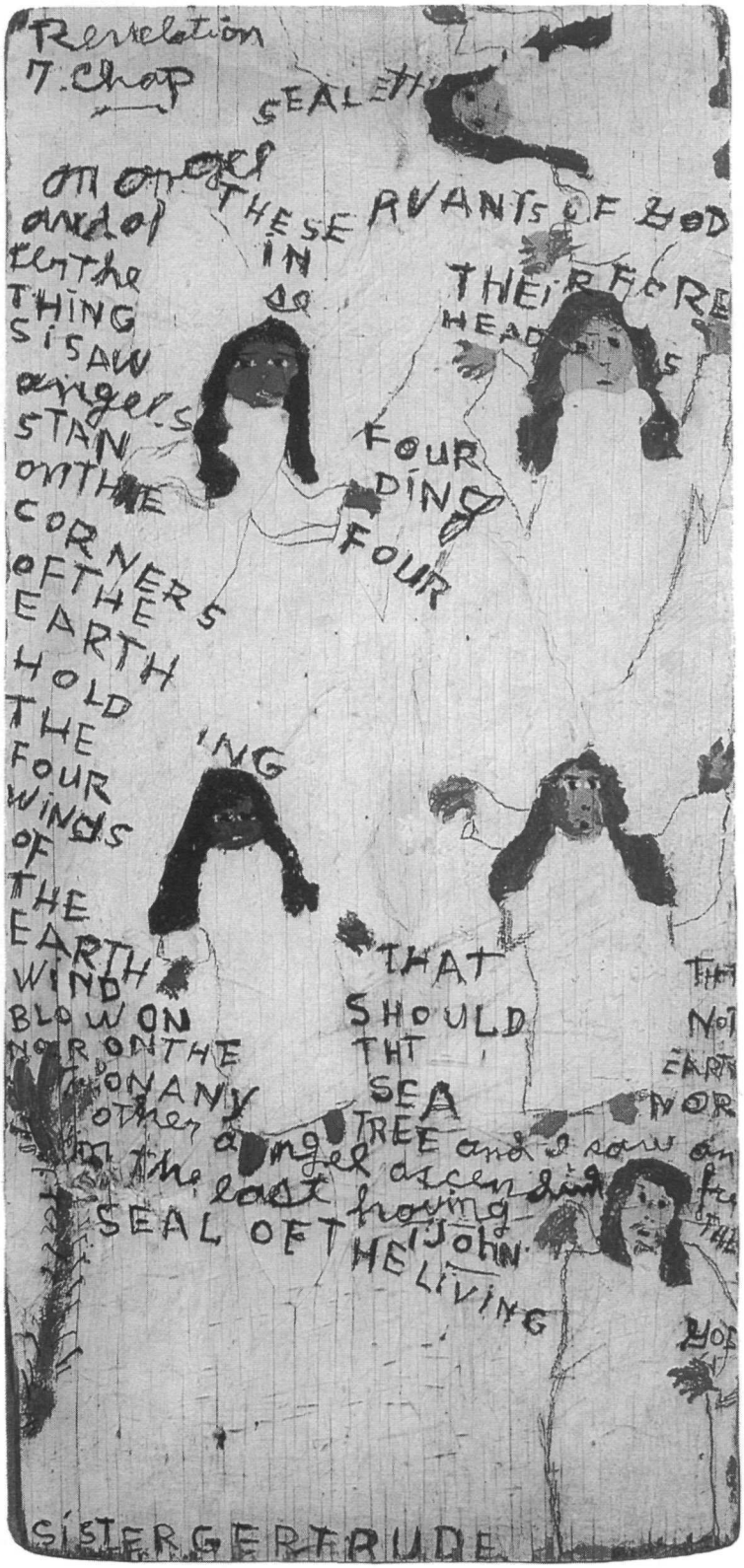
J.W.: What about some touchstones to live by?

V.D.: For me, the whole biblical story is the touchstone. But the difficulty is that in doing daily Bible reading you're only picking up a little piece of it and so you have to know that even the piece that you pick up that means so much to you that day is only a part of the story. And so it's always living in the incomplete and the unfinished.

Everything is unfinished. You have to be able to live perpetually without answers and that's the trouble — we want some certitude. (I call that faithlessness.*) Faith is risking that God is for you.*

J.W.: That seems very hard.

V.D.: It *is* hard. And it is perfectly pos-



***Revelation 7 Chap.*, by Sister Gertrude Morgan, a street preacher in New Orleans in the 1940s.**
Courtesy of the Jaffe Collection

sible to become comfortable with *that*, that everything is incomplete and unfinished. There's no place where a human being can stand. Standing somewhere implies a permanence, a finite position. And I don't think there is any finite position. When I was a little child we used to sing a hymn, "On Christ the solid rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand." I found that very meaningful, but the thing about it is, what does it mean? *Where* is Christ the solid rock? Because I think the minute you stand on it, it shifts. You have to be able to live perpetually without answers and that's the trouble — we want some certitude. (I call that *faithlessness*.) Faith is risking that God is for you — Abraham went out from everything he had known.

J.W.: Without certitude, isn't it hard to act?

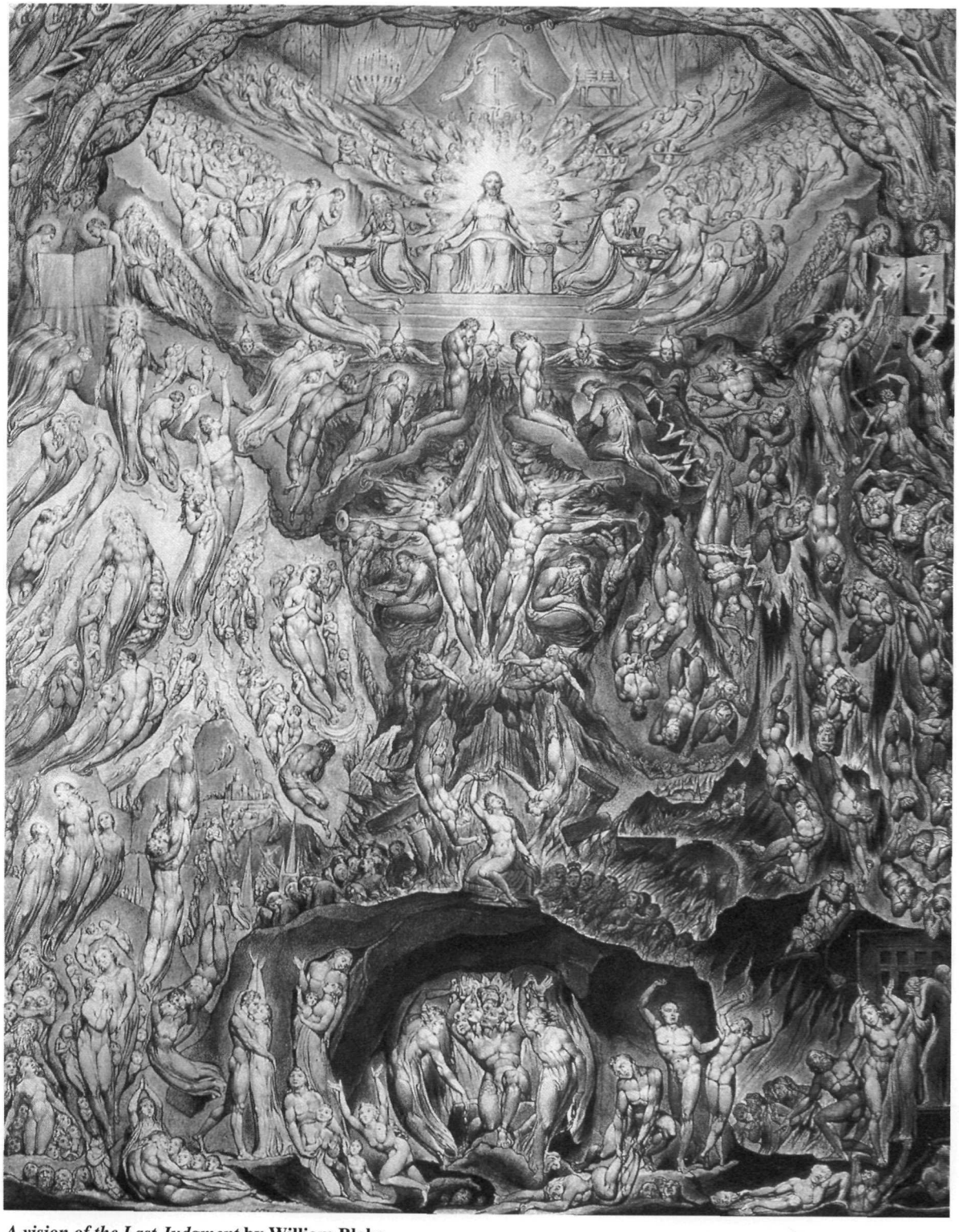
V.D.: That's because we've determined that our act is holy! We've usurped the place of God. We will never give up the original sin, which is playing God. We assume that we know better, that we know who is right and who is wrong, who is good and who is bad. And we believe God will see it exactly the way we do.

J.W.: What is the church's sin?

V.D.: The church's sin is worshipping Jesus instead of following him. We have elaborate liturgies and elaborate costumes. Or we have elaborate liturgies that don't *look* as though they're elaborate but they are just as elaborate — Quaker silence and retreats and so on, those are also liturgies. And we're using our liturgies to say, "We're all right, we're all right."

But we also have the Gospel possibility — "Behold, I make all things new!" And I think that's done daily. I love the story of the children of Israel in the wilderness — "And the *manna* on the morrow stank." I love that story — because the minute we settle on anything, that's it. But on the morrow it stinks, it's not any good. All things are new every morning. TW

Sin: a survey of opinions



A vision of the Last Judgment by William Blake

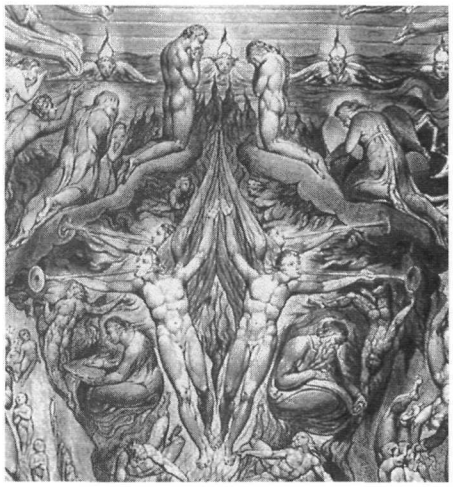
'Sinning is being'

by Mary E. Hunt

I do not use the term sin very often. But as a full-fledged human being, I have always liked the good Protestant phrase "sin and sin boldly" since we all do. Between that notion and Mary Daly's insight that "sinning is being," I derive my sense of sin as a negative part of the human condition which can and must be changed.

I understand sin as behaviors and structures that hurt other beings and the earth. What distinguishes sin from organic evil (like a plague or a flood) is that it can be controlled by human effort in ways that an earthquake cannot. The earth shakes and the consequences are dreadful but no one is accountable.

When sins are committed, people and structures can be cited as responsible and expected to cease and desist when the error of their ways is pointed out to them. Would that it were so easy — for me to stop my sins at least — but at least the theory provides hope.



Like the Supreme Court justice who said that he knew pornography when he saw it, sin is relatively easy to spot, relatively hard to describe.

In the current political climate I see lots of sins. Murdering women as they seek reproductive health services is surely sin. But so, too, is legislating the prohibition of payments to welfare recipients who have been on the rolls for more than a year or two when jobs are few and far between. Sin is sex without a condom if one is at risk of transmitting disease; sin is declaring that lesbian/gay people are "morally disordered."

In short, there is plenty to go around, which is why religious communities seek meaning and value for the common good and for the eradication of sin.

I am as suspicious of the rush to forgiveness as the rush to judgment. I think we can learn to live with the unforgiven and a resolution not to allow it to be repeated (nunca mas) *more easily.*

The knee-jerk call to "forgive and forget" has led to endless cases, especially of women who were sexually abused, where forgiveness has preceded the repentance on the part of the sinner. Some psychological professionals have repeated this mistake, assuring their clients that it is better to forgive and be freed of the burden than to harbor ill feelings against those who have wronged one. But whose burden is it?

I am more persuaded of the approach of Catholic sacramental theology, namely, that the ball of change starts rolling when the one who has caused the problem recognizes the wrong and asks for forgiveness. Then the aggrieved person can offer forgiveness and the one who has been forgiven can complete the process by making amends and resolving not to repeat the behavior.

Of course, it does not always, or even usually, work so neatly, but I am as suspicious of the rush to forgiveness as the rush to judgment. I think we can learn to live with the unforgiven and a resolution not to allow it to be repeated (*nunca mas*) more easily than we can or should learn to live with forgiving what finally demands our condemnation.

The churches' sins, like those of most hierarchical institutions, are embedded in their structures as much as in the behavior of their officials and/or members. My hope is that as the Christian churches move toward a "discipleship of equals," structures which reflect love, justice and equality, and styles of life and work which are inclusive, some of the structural sins of patriarchy will fall away.

Then we will see in clearer relief how the Christian message might be lived fully. TW

Editor's note: We sent out a survey on sin to a diverse group of people asking the following questions: What's your quick definition of sin? Do you know it when you see it (i.e., *when* have you seen it)? What are the church's resources in dealing with sin? What are Christians called to do in the face of sin? What is the church's sin?

The views on sin that follow come from the responses we received.

Mary Hunt is co-director of the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual, based in Silver Spring, Md.

Wounds and structures of privilege

by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott

I understand personal sin to be an error, a wrong relationship, a failure to "hit the target" of loving God with all our hearts and our neighbor as ourselves. Such errors arise out of profound inner wounds that cause us to be fearful and defensive. I understand structural sin to be the systems that privilege certain people and disempower others: racism, sexism, classism, ableism, ageism, heterosexism, you name it. These structures arise from a consensus of erroneous thinking on the part of millions of individuals.

I have seen sin, certainly, "up close and personal": in my own or others' depressions, rages, or hatreds stemming from childhood physical or sexual abuse or neglect. (Because people cannot entirely help where they are in their journey toward wholeness, I think the term "damage" is a more accurate description for personal sin.)

I have seen sin structurally, too, in the dismissive contempt of people who think nothing I say could have any validity because I am a woman or because I am a lesbian, or because I am over 60 and/or overweight.

I will never forget the day a group of us gay and lesbian Christians held a meeting with a church group who were determined to keep homosexuals out of first-class citizenship in the church by denying ordination, banning rituals to recognize our unions, and so forth. The white male well-known well-heeled leader of that oppressive movement arrived sporting an enormous button saying, "Don't hassle!" It was as if a group of wealthy capitalists were meeting with some Latin American peasants whom their policies had impoverished, and had enjoined the peasants to passivity by wearing "Don't hassle!" buttons.

Christians are called to seek healing and wholeness through psychotherapy, self-help groups, readings, conferences, prayer, meditation and the like. Whatever enables us to love ourselves more fully enables us to love God and our neighbor more fully, and thus to avoid sin.

Our task both individually and collectively is to educate ourselves about structural sin and how best to transform it into structures that honor God's Presence in everyone. I often think about Aristide's revolutionary motto, "Every person is a person." Any behavior that denies that fact, any corporate or social policy that denies that fact, is sinful and in need of redemption.

Inasmuch as the church has involved itself in sexist, classist, racist, heterosexist, or other oppressive structures, the church is a sinful organization. Furthermore, to the degree that the church uses the concept of sin to foster guilt and shame and thus to gain power over weak psyches, that also is sin.

Guilt and shame are usually wasteful and often brutalizing self-hating states of mind; and to some, *mea culpa*! becomes enjoyable in a masochistic way, like psychic masturbation. Hence it is important to define sin as error rather than as a deep dire irrevocable unforgivable event. (I am not talking about legal repercussions, which must run their proper course.)

What do we do when we make an error in arithmetic? We erase it and continue our calculations: that's why there are erasers on the end of pencils. What should we do when we find ourselves involved in wrong relationships, either personally or structurally? Forget the *mea culpas*: acknowledge the error before God and the wronged person or people, correct the error, and get on with making amends. TW

Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, an English professor at William Paterson College, N.J., is author of *Sensuous Spirituality: Out From Fundamentalism.*

Love and forgiveness

by Jack Iker

Sin is a selfish willfulness that places our own desires at the center of our lives and seeks our own will instead of God's. It is "missing the mark" as revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

I don't always know sin when I see it, for sin often masquerades as something good. I have seen it in unloving and selfish manipulation of others.

The church's resources in dealing with sin are grace, the power of the Holy Spirit, the sacraments, a supportive community where the love of Jesus is experienced and shared.

In the face of sin, Christians are called to repent and seek God's help, forgiveness, and strength to lead a new and better life.

The church's sin is a failure to love and to forgive as Jesus does, and to fragment the unity of His Body. TW

Jack Iker is bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth and a member of the Episcopal Synod of America, a group that opposes women's ordination to the priesthood.

Sin and self-fulfillment

by Todd H. Wetzel

Something's not quite right with our enlightened world.

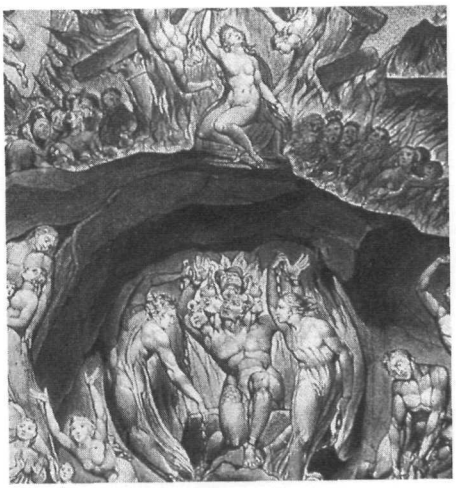
How did the Holocaust happen in one of the most sophisticated nations on earth? Why Bosnia, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Ireland and the host of other national and international crises? We don't lack technology, intelligence or compassion. Why do people starve in a world of abundant food?

People work heroically to make life better, but so often, life's tragedies grow worse. Why are prejudice and hatred, child abuse and neglect, so prevalent? Why are acts of violence on the increase? Why, with all of our technology, do so many lack jobs and homes?

Our century is not unique. Men and women, cities and nations, tear at each other constantly. What about me? I want to be good at the many roles I play in the drama of life. Truth is, I try but often fail miserably. In solving one problem, I create others. Sadly, what is true in the macrocosm of life "out there" is equally true in the microcosm of my own life.

Paul said it well: "For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I meant to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it" (Romans 7:18-20).

Sin is the root cause of the world's constant dilemmas. And sin is at the heart



of my life as well. We're caught in a tragic drama: the good that we would, we do not; the evil we would not, we do.

John writes, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). If sin is endemic to life, then we cannot "fix" it. Paul goes further in Romans 7 and states: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

I would prefer to save myself. But I cannot. St. Augustine said that the human heart denies God, turns in upon itself, tries to better itself, wants to fulfill its own desires and ends up debasing itself. Down the path of self-fulfillment lie dismal failure and despair.

I am a sinner. Acknowledging my sins drives me to Christ Jesus. There I find healing for the brokenness of my life. My relationship with Christ has, in turn, led me to love and search the Scriptures which reveal God's holy standards to my unruly heart and mind. Obedience, though still a struggle, brings peace and blessing. God takes our lives, which otherwise are tragic dramas, and redeems them. TW

Todd Wetzel is executive director of Episcopalians United (EU), whose mission is to "influence the structures of the Episcopal Church so they may reflect the lordship of Jesus Christ more faithfully. EU holds Holy Scripture as the primary source for doctrine, discipline and worship."

Corporate sin

by Daniel Berrigan

The ecology of the world is ruined, consequent upon moral evil. This is the view of Revelation, in consonance with Genesis itself.

No one is saved in isolation, no part of the universe is destroyed apart from any other; evil in the moral order results in the destruction of the universe.

It is simply unimagineable that one stand alone in the universe, without roots, tentacles, moral vibrations outward; and similarly, no one gets reborn alone.

Sin, properly and biblically understood, cannot be regarded or judged solely on a one-to-one basis. One-to-one is all-to-all. The sins of corporations are corporate sins, a revealing tautology.

Moral evil, property-idolotry, threaten the world's well-being. The Bomb is by no means a chancy event. It was brought to pass by us — but prior to that horror, it exploded within us. TW

Daniel Berrigan is a Jesuit priest who works with cancer and AIDS patients when he's not in jail for resisting U.S. militarism. This is excerpted from *The Nightmare of God,* Fortkamp Press, 1993.

'Woe to those who call evil good'

by Doug LeBlanc

Sin is the biblical word for our actions and choices that separate us from God's love and purpose for our lives. The Penitential Order in The Book of Common Prayer reminds us, week after week, that we have sinned "in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone."

I'm often slow to recognize sin, but sin soon reveals its destructive presence, wreaking havoc in my life, in the lives of those I love and in the lives of those I'm learning to love.

Sin reveals itself in the nagging feeling that something is amiss, that I'm not living in the way God has designed me to live.

Sin rears its head when I gossip, when I presume to judge another person's motivations, when I laugh at someone's expense, when I respond in anger or fear rather than in love. Sin is a constant companion, a cheap thrill, an act of conscious rebellion against my Creator.

Throughout history, God has used prophets, saints and the church to reveal sin for what it is, to call people to repentance, and to offer absolution. The church's greatest tools for confronting sin are Scripture, bold proclamation of the Gospel, the rite of reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist.

God calls us, as Christians, to repent of our sins and to amend our lives. God calls us to tell ourselves and our neighbors the truth about sin — first to acknowledge that sin estranges us from God, then to proclaim God's grace in delivering us from sin through the death and resurrection of Christ the Lord.

Like Christ, the church has experienced every temptation known in a fallen world. Unlike Christ, the church has succumbed to each of those sins, because the church is a society of people needing redemption.

Many traditionalists, myself included, understand sin first as an individual struggle, then perhaps in corporate terms. Many of my progressive friends understand sin primarily as a corporate dilemma.

I trust that we all recognize the sin in believing that sin is someone else's problem rather than our own. I also hope we all remember that, whether sin is individual or corporate, God is eager to forgive it.

The church sin that saddens me most is any effort to redefine sin as self-actualization, as enlightenment, as something only fundamentalists talk about, or perhaps even as the revised will of an evolving God.

Scripture warns us of this danger: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter" (Isaiah 5:20).

No one party or faction in today's church holds a monopoly on such self-deception. We're all fairly adept at kidding ourselves. Our first step toward redemption is to admit our culpability. TW

Doug LeBlanc edits *United Voice*, the newspaper of Episcopalians United.

The church's greatest sin

by Edmond L. Browning

I believe it was the first Ash Wednesday after I became Presiding Bishop that I was in Buffalo, N.Y. I celebrated the Eucharist, there was the imposition of ashes, and then a question-and-answer period. Having been the Presiding Bishop for a few months, I had begun to have some idea of the kinds of questions I was asked in such settings! Often they had to do with some of the controversial issues before our church, frequently sexuality. However this question, coming from a young man, stopped me. He said, "What do you think is the greatest sin the church has to face?"

I didn't think or try to make an intellectual response to this question; there could have been so many. I didn't think, but in the next moments my heart framed the answer. Images came to me. Images of dusty streets in the black townships of South Africa. And I thought, does anybody care? Images of the Gaza and the West Bank. Does anybody care? Images of a hospital ward for AIDS patients. Does anybody care? Images of the homeless who sleep on the sidewalks. Images of Indian reservations — symbols of promises betrayed. And I asked myself again: *Does anybody care?* These other realities are just as real as this room where I am sitting in warmth and comfort and safety, drinking coffee. Does anybody care?

All of this probably took place in 15 seconds, but it seemed like minutes later that I answered the question. I said to the young man, "Apathy."

Edmond L. Browning is the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church.

The greatest sin the church has to face is apathy. Though it is psychically uncomfortable to live in a state of outrage, we must not lose our outrage that God's children are suffering all around us. We must keep this reality before us and commit ourselves to transforming the images. This is what we are called to do. Yet, so very often, we just don't care. We slip into the mode of "if its good for me, it must be good." This is the antithesis of the message of the Gospel.

Sin, we know, is separation from God. When we are not in loving communion with God we quickly fall into sin. Our God is not an uncaring God, and when we become uncaring we are far from God and prey to sin.

Our first resource in dealing with sin is spiritual, as we develop our spiritual consciousness, our awareness of the presence of God and of God's hand moving through the world. Something good is trying to happen in the universe, I do believe. Our unity with this force is imperative to our battle against sin: sin outside and our own besetting sins.

God's spirit was given to the church. With the power of the spirit, we can vanquish sin. But we need, first, to care — and second, to tap the deep strength and power God has given us to make a difference in the broken world. TW

Gender-defined sin

by Gretchen Pickeral

A working definition sin involves not having God at the center of one's life, life-style and orientation but rather having the self at the center of one's existence.

This definition fits the masculine model of development and socialization well. For survival in familial, social and economic systems the male must be separate, independent and able to thrust the self into a world which has high expectations of his autonomy, strength and self-sustaining capabilities.

To be called into community of faith and a salvific life of grace in God, by God, this independent, "self"-oriented individual is called to look outward, to notice others and make allowances for their existence - widow, orphans, oppressed and hungry.

But an individual socialized with a more feminine frame of reference may find the message confusing and mixed.

When an individual is immersed in the notion of intuiting and meeting others' needs, sin might appear to be absent. If a systemic state of sin consists of living with self at center, then where does the sin occur here? But if this individual has no sense of self, then God is not at the center here, either.

This is a mirror image of the classic notion of sin as self at center — others at center. Furthermore it is more subtle and seductive because it can be made to look like the person is very giving and faithful, when in fact the person is not even a whole person.

If someone who is fully focused on the other — on nurturing, caring for, protecting and enabling the other — tries to find salvation in the notion of letting go of self and keeping God at the center, they will find only chaos, confusion and pain. Their spiritual journey may involve continuous cyclical questions and behavior along the lines of "Don't I already have God at the center? I am giving of my energy and my time constantly serving others. How can I do more?"

This state of being has serious dangers: A person in this state may remain in an unsafe environment for years and model to the next generations that it is acceptable to do so. This perpetuates self-centeredness in the abusing gender (unto the fourth generation...) and lack of self-ness in the abused gender of the household.

For those in the masculine orientation salvation requires a shift of focus away from self to allow divine presence to see others, identify needs and utilize the gifts of the self.

For those in a more feminine frame of reference, movement toward God requires a shift of focus to the self. Examination and discernment of gifts must occur so that the needs of others might only be fulfilled as a result of the divine presence.

The task of the church is to remind people that God belongs at the center of self and that you have to have a self to allow God in. TW

Gretchen Pickeral is the assistant rector at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Florissant, Mo.

Sins of commission and omission

by Kim Byham

With considerable disdain, the secular press once quoted Jimmy Carter as saying, "I am the worst sinner I know." Those outside the church apparently assumed that this represented some sort of puritanical hatred of self or a pervasive sense of guilt that is endemic to Christians. But I agree with the former president because, in my view, sin is that which separates us from God.

God never stops loving us, of course, but we can inoculate ourselves from experiencing that love. I know how often I separate myself from God because I feel the void I create.

It's comparatively easy to tell if a person is closely connected with God ("Spirit filled") because the fruits of that closeness are obvious. On the other hand, except for the rare "self-proclaimed and practicing" atheist and those with whom we are most intimate, we don't have a sense of how close to, or separated from, God other people are.

In the parable of the two sons — the one who said, "No," but did what was requested and the other who said, "Yes," but failed to do the work — we see two sides of sin. The speech of the first son, a sin of commission, led to a brief rupture with the father, but the subsequent action led to reconciliation. The other son was a hypocrite, avoiding a sin of commission in his speech, but by his omission separating himself from his parent.

The church's primary goal is to overcome sin by providing greater access to God. It more often, however, assumes the role of the second son, committing sins of omission.

As a gay man, I am always struck by the utter hypocrisy of "hate the sin, love the sinner." This simply never happens. To be sure, there are sincere Christians who think homosexual practices are "sinful," but most of these people cannot consciously "hate" the "sin" because it is as foreign to them as the sin of eating pork for an Orthodox Jew. Those who truly "hate" lesgay sex also hate lesgay people, or use a distorted definition of "love" to express the same emotion. For me, nothing is as clearly sinful as hating my neighbor.

Christ warned me and my fellow lawyers, and other hypocrites who compose the church, not to overlook the "weightier demands of the law — justice, mercy and good faith." The church constantly sins by paying only lip service to issues of justice and mercy. I feel blessed as a gay person to experience one of the few areas in which the church still sins by commission in its teachings. This awareness of the church's sinful nature in one area has made me more conscious of its slightly more subtle sins in other justice and mercy issues.

Together in the church we share God's grace; in sharing we also infect each other with sin. I pray for the day when the church itself will not be a stumbling block for so many in becoming one with God. TW

Kim Byham is publisher of *The Voice of Integrity*, the magazine of the Episcopal Church's gay and lesbian justice organization.

'Static in the atmosphere'

by C. Christopher Epting

My quick definition of sin is anything which damages or severs a relationship — impairs communion — with God or another human being. It's sort of like "static in the atmosphere" in our relationship with God. Biblically, it is falling short of the mark, and that mark for me is the fullness of our humanity as seen in Jesus.

Sin can be seen virtually everywhere since we live in a fallen world. It seems to arise from our selfishness, and I sense its presence most when there's an absence of love and compassion in the room!

The church's resources in dealing with sin are manifold, but I would emphasize three: the Bible which deals with the reality of sin and redemption from cover to cover; prayer which keeps us centered in God and so growing in love, and the sacraments — all seven of them! According to the baptismal covenant, Christians are first of all to resist the evil which leads to sin. But then, in a wonderfully pragmatic phrase, the Prayer Book says that "whenever we fall into sin" (not *if* we fall into it!) we are to repent and return to the Lord.

As far as the Church's sin, I would have to say that it is our fragmentation into the various denominations. This historical tragedy prevents us from sharing all our gifts from the one Spirit in the one Body. In other words, it keeps us from being a *whole* body of Christ in the world today, doing the things Jesus did — preaching, teaching, loving, healing, forgiving, suffering, dying and rising again. All to the glory of God! TW

C. Christopher Epting is bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Iowa.

Dissing Jocelyn Elders

The firing of Jocelyn Elders [former Surgeon General] is no bone thrown to the Right so that the President can get back to business. The dissing of Black people — and the over-lapping AIDS-affected, gay and women's communities Elders stood for — *is* the business at hand. From the crime bill, to welfare reform, to the do-nothing policy on AIDS, to the gays in the military debacle, to the cynical manipulation of Haitian President Aristide and the Haitian refugees, Clinton's legacy has been the entrenchemnt of increasing racism and homophobia.

— Stephanie Poggi
RESIST staff,
Somerville, MA

Rainbow Coalition

The ultra-conservative Republican Party takeover of Congress has spawned fightback efforts by progressive leaders and organizations around the country. Most prominent was the January gathering in Washington, D.C. of over 300 people hosted by the National Rainbow Coalition and its president, Jesse Jackson.

Largely ignored by the nation's media, the conference brought together an impressive breadth of people's organizations under the theme "Defending the Family: Strategies for Economic Justice and Hope." Sponsoring the conference were 11 national trade unions including the National Education Association (the country's largest), the United Autoworkers, and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers. Also sponsoring were the NAACP, the National Urban League, several national student organizations, community organizations, the National Organization for Women, prominent organizations of Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Asian Pacific and Native Americans, civil liberties groups, environmentalists, gays and lesbians, and national farmer groups.

The three-day meeting hammered out a programmatic "Working Document," soon to be released as a critique of the Republican Party's "Contract with America." Intended as a guide in the building of an "independent progressive movement," the document will offer pro-people legislative and policy alternatives around which to mobilize grass-roots support.

Among the bills proposed will be the "Job Creation and Wage Enhancement Act," the "Family Reinforcement Act," the "Senior Citizens Equity Act," and the "Taking Back Our Streets Act."

At an opening press conference, Jackson declared, "We have analyzed the Republican contract. At its core, it is a statement to Americans that — in the new global economy — they are on their own. Radical conservatives say government can do little but give more tax breaks to the corporations and the wealthiest Americans. This is not acceptable and will be resisted."

Will Jackson or another member of the Rainbow Coalition enter the 1996 presidential campaign, and if so, will it be as a Democrat or independent?

While the answer is yet to be decided, base building is already underway with the announcement that Rainbow orgaizations are being established in all 50 states to investigate requirements of ballot status. They will also seek to build voter registration drives targeting key congressional districts, and mobilize grass-roots pressure on members of Congress to resist the right-wing legislative agenda.

More concretes will be discussed at the upcoming regular annual meeting of the Rainbow Coalition May 25-28 in Atlanta.

The conference also endorsed another effort to challenge the Republican Party agenda — a national "Rally for Women's Lives" April 9 in Washington, D.C. for an end to anti-abortion violence and other violence against women.

In announcing the rally, National Organization for Women president Patricia Ireland said, "We must fight for the White House and the Justice Department to launch a full-scale investigation into the anti-abortion massacre in Brookline and the nationwide network that is inciting and organizing these terrorist tactics."

The demonstration will also demand that Congress protect nutrition programs for pregnant women, infants and children, food stamps, Aid to Dependent Children, school lunch and childhood immunization programs — all of which are on the chopping block under the House Republicans' Contract on America, said Ireland.

— Pat Fry,
a freelance reporter
in New York City

Sacred sites at risk

Legislation has been introduced (HR 563) to alter the National Historic Preservation Act to exclude "any unimproved or unmodified natural landscape feature which does not contain artifacts or other physical evidence of human activity that have unique significance in history or prehistory."

HONOR (Honor Our Neighbors Original Rights) asks that letters be sent to elected representatives protesting the proposed change, because, if passed, many sacred Indian sites currently protected may be retroactively denied. More information is available from: HONOR, 2647 N. Stowell Ave., Milwaukee, WI, 53211.

Peacemaker teams

Anyone interested in joining Christian peacemaker teams headed for the Middle East (in April) or Haiti (in June) can call 312-455-1199.

Short takes

Countering judgment and hate with nonviolent love

by Herman Page

"I want you to know that we're going to your big meeting in Indianapolis and watch all your bishops copulate with Bishop Tutu," Fred Phelps of Topeka's Westboro Baptist Church screamed at me and at others witnessing outside St. David's Episcopal Church last July.

While I was upset at the slander of one of the great bishops of the Anglican Communion, I was delighted that Phelps and his anti-homosexual pickets would be at the Episcopal Church's 1994 General Convention. "Now," I thought, "the rest of the Church will find out what we've been putting up with here in Topeka."

Phelps founded the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kan., in 1956, as a "primitive" Baptist congregation. Over the years he and his family have comprised most of the membership. He has a large family, and several of his children are attorneys in the law firm of "Phelps, Chartered." Phelps himself was disbarred from the practice of law in 1979.

In 1992, the Westboro Baptist Church began its picketing against homosexuality at the city's Gage Park, which had some history of gay activity. His signs appeared stating such messages as "God hates fags," "Fags are worthy of death," and "Fags = anal sex = death." Included on other signs were negative comments about various public officials.

During the winter of 1992, an *ad hoc* group of citizens decided to try to counter the Phelps demonstrations, organizing several gatherings called "Sunday in the Park without Fred" as positive times for people to come together, play games, have picnics and witness to God's love for all. At least twice participants included members of St. David's, wearing shirts bearing the name of the parish softball team, "St. David's Deacons."

Later, an ecumenical group of clergy ran an ad in Topeka's daily newspaper distancing themselves from the Phelps' use of Scripture to condemn homosexual persons and others. Robert Layne, St. David's rector, and I missed signing the ad, so we decided to run a separate one for St. David's. About 100 parishioners signed it. Coming from laypeople rather than clergy, who are often thought to be "paid" to say such things, the ad was a strong witness.

In response, in March of 1992, members of the Westboro Baptist Church began to picket St. David's on Sunday mornings, harassing people coming to church with their "God hates fags" signs and with verbal abuse. Most of us thought that since Phelps and his followers seemed to thrive on publicity, we would try ignoring him, hoping they would go away. But they did not! A year later, they were still coming on Sunday mornings to picket St. David's.

It was sickening, week after week, to see the signs and hear the insults. I hated to hear the Episcopal Church blasphemed. I was angry at the cries of "Rectum Bob" directed at our rector and of "You drink rectal blood" in reference to the Blessed Sacrament. A parishioner of Asian descent was called "slant eyes" and an Hispanic church member was called "Greaser fag." At one elderly woman suffering from cancer, they yelled, "Why don't you just hurry up and die, you old whore!" To another person with a small oxygen tank, one picketer said, "I hope you drop dead on the church steps, you dyke."

In February 1993, Layne preached that we could no longer ignore picketing which denied the love of God for all persons. So a number of St. David's parishioners agreed to begin witnessing to God's love.

Bob Proctor, a parishioner and local psychologist, and two other parishioners agreed to head up the program. Layne insisted that we take "non-violent protest" training. Guidelines were prepared and we made signs that read "God loves all," "Jesus loves you," and "Love one another." The first public witnessing occurred at an ecumenical Palm Sunday procession.

Here are some of the procedures we used:

- Non-violent witnessing — we would not respond by word or deed to anything the Phelps people said.
- All people witnessing, whether from St. David's or from outside, would sign the guidelines *each* time and accept the direction of a team leader.
- Any individual bothered or stressed by the picketers was to come into the church, rather than chance an inappropriate response to the picketers.
- We required a minimum of ten persons before going out to witness and witnessers were to stay together.
- Sessions were to begin and end with prayer; other persons, if available, would keep a prayer vigil in the chapel.

The witnessing outside St. David's continued for over a year, in freezing weather and in scorching heat. Some Sundays the Phelps family came as early as 7 a.m. (St. David's has an 8 a.m. service); other times they arrived just before the 10 a.m. service. Some days they stayed all morning and occasionally

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they didn't come at all, although we would continue our witness even in their absence.

It seemed to me that we really were, as it says in Ephesians, struggling not just against "flesh and blood" but against powers of evil. The sneers on the picketers' faces, their language and their gestures seemed so opposite to what the ministry of Jesus was about.

St. David's attempted to get a city ordinance to prohibit picketing before, during and after church activities within a certain distance of our property, but failed. Twice the city commission voted an ordinance by a 5-4 margin, but the mayor, who feared the cost of a long court fight with Westboro Baptist, vetoed the measure each time. "Right-to-life" advocates also opposed the ordinance for fear of limits in their picketing of health clinics. The only relief for St. David's came when a temporary restraining order was granted by Judge Michael Barbara, on the grounds that the picket signs and verbal harassment were not a suitable environment for children coming to church. The injunction went into effect July 21, 1994, and with that, at the judge's request, we temporarily suspended our public witnessing.

At times, during those 15 months of public witnessing, we were scared. We wondered if someone might attempt a drive-by shooting. Also, on more than one occasion several young men in the Westboro group tried to provoke us to violence.

It was tempting to respond in kind. That's why we always prayed before we went out, hopefully not in the spirit that we were "good" and they were "evil," but to help us not return evil for evil and to pray for the Westboro group.

The hardest part for me was to move from the protest into celebrating the Eucharist. What a shifting of emotional gears! It was equally hard for many worshipers to run the gauntlet of hate and insult outside and then enter into meaningful worship time inside.

St. David's parishioners witness to God's love in the face of hateful protests at their Topeka, Kan., church.

When we came in after each session of witnessing, we would usually form a circle, have silent prayer, maybe debrief. We tried to share our own hateful emotions. We were often in need of absolution and cleansing, but we tried to commit what we had tried to do in a loving way to God's grace.

We learned a great deal from the experience. I personally had to rethink my whole approach about homosexuality. And many of us had to think and pray long and hard about the meaning of the baptismal covenant, to "respect the dignity of every human being." We could see how hate groups tend to pick on the most vulnerable constituencies in a community.

We were heartened by letters of support from other Episcopal parishes. One parish in southern California sent banners and a video of greeting in which they assured us of their prayers. The women's group of a rural Methodist parish in central Kansas sent a bouquet of flowers. We had frequent visitors from out of town.

Locally, many people drove by St. David's during our program of witnessing, saw our signs and gave us honks, waves, and cheers. Layne frequently asked other churches who approved of what we were doing to send delegations to help us. Over 80 individuals did respond, including Bishop Smalley, some other clergy and several laypeople from other congregations who were very regular in coming.

In the spring of 1993 I studied at St. George's in Jerusalem and while there spent an afternoon at the Holocaust Museum. It was amazing to reflect on the rise of the Nazi movement: its small beginnings, its violence and its "equal-opportunity hatred" of Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, labor leaders, the mentally ill and so on; and note the similarities with the Westboro group. The question arises in looking back at Nazi Germany: "Where were the churches?"

People understand where St. David's stands: we're trying, though imperfectly, to live out the Baptismal Covenant to "work for justice and peace and respect the dignity of every human being." TW

Our sin and God's mercy:

an interview with Madeleine L'Engle

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

Madeleine L'Engle, author of more than 50 books for children as well as adults, is an Episcopalian living in New York City and Goshen, Conn.

Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann: There tends to be a left/right dichotomy regarding sin — the right focusses on personal sin while the left focusses on social sin. Do you have thoughts on this?

Madeleine L'Engle: There is a happy medium. People on the right say it's all sin and evil. The left says there is no such thing as evil. ...

Sin is separation from God. I blundered and struggled for years before I understood that Jesus was without sin, because Jesus was never separate from the source. He did things that were considered wrong, and that the right wing would say are wrong, but he was always in union with God.

J. W.-K.: Have you been in the presence of sin?

M.L'E: Walking from my apartment to the cathedral, I walk past drug dealers — I think that's evil.

On the other hand, I was at a church meeting when someone spewed forth judgmental hate. He said, "It says in the Bible ..." I responded, "I'm feeling judgmental towards you and that puts me in the presence of evil. In atonement, I'll bring a leg of lamb and the priest can put blood on his ears and toes — it says so in the Bible."

We find what we look for. If we look for evil, we will find it. If we look for Satan, Satan will oblige. As Christians, we should be looking for Christ, and for love.

Madeleine L'Engle James Solherm, ENS

J.W.-K.: What should Christians do in relationship to evil?

M. L'E.: Satan kept tempting Jesus to forego his humanity. I like the old translation that says we need to "resist steadfast in the faith."

On public radio I heard an interview with the most popular pop singer in Rwanda — he kept talking about the need for reconciliation. The interviewer said, "Have you lost anyone in this?" He answered, "Oh yes, my mother, my father, my little brothers." And they said, "You can talk about reconciliation?" Meanwhile, I thought, I'm in the presence of a saint.

I think there are powers of evil in the universe. One of the worst things the media has done is persuade us that normal is nice. Normal isn't nice. It's life with all its ups and downs — from a head cold to the loss of a child.

I went to the dentist and I had novocaine and gas. I was in and out of consciousness — I suddenly realized that to be conscious is to be able to feel pain. God came as Jesus to feel pain. In this culture we try to avoid pain at all costs — we have pills for every pain possible.

For lepers the biggest problem is the loss of pain — they have no warning system for breaks and disfigurement. Perhaps it's our soul's warning system too. Perhaps it's a good thing we're feeling pain in the church — if we deny it, it will become like a leprous sore. But if we say, "Yes there is pain between the left and right," maybe we'll work toward the kind of reconciliation that the man in Rwanda was talking about — with a total understanding that he had lost his entire family.

J. W.-K.: What are the resources that the church can bring to situations of evil? Do we in the church call on these resources often enough?

M. L'E.: I think the church has got to stop being polarized between the left and the right, the permissivists and the fundalits (fundamentalists/literalists). There are things that are wrong, behaviors that are wrong and have real and dreadful consequences. Self-indulgence is not the most important thing in the world. What has happened to our promises? In my marriage I was attracted to other men, and my husband to other women. We don't need to act out all that we feel!

J.W.-K.: Does the church have specific resources? Like sacraments?

M.L'E.: Sacraments are essential. When I receive the bread and the wine I am being given the original matter that the Word cried out. We are all made of the same stuff as the stars. Eucharistic bread is a sustainer, and it's cautionary — you've just eaten *this* and you can do *that*?

J.W.-K.: In the presence of something as destructive as nuclear weapons, does the church have a responsibility?

M. L'E.: If the church truly does its job

and we truly believe that the Word lives among us, we cannot see these evils without doing something about them.

J.W.-K.: Do you have reservations about doing it as the church?

M.L'E.: We read about how the church confronted similar evils in the Acts of the Apostles. Can we do less? I'm only reluctant to do it in the name of the church because when you get involved in a cause you can lose track of human compassion.

J. W.-K.: I understand that you are writing a book about mercy. What's your understanding of mercy?

M. L'E.: In the 100s, William Langland wrote, "All the wickedness in the world which man might say or do is no more to the mercy of God than a live coal dropped in the sea." I'm calling the book *A Live Coal in the Sea.*

After I'd given a college lecture, a young man said, "Your books seem to indicate that God is forgiving." I replied, "What an extraordinary statement." He amended, "What I mean is that your books do seem to imply that ultimately God is going to forgive everyone." I responded, "I don't think God is going to fail with Creation. I don't worship a failing God. Do you want God to fail?" He said, "But there has to be absolute justice." I asked, "If you should die tonight, is that what you want? Absolute justice? Don't you feel the need of any mercy at all?" For some reason that had not occurred to him. I finally suggested that he read the Bible from beginning to end, and that he would find that mercy by far outweighs anger.

J. W.-K.: Do you see this in the natural world as well?

M. L'E.: Quantum mechanics and particle physics have certainly altered my faith in God. Everything is related to and affects everything else. The universe is more marvelous than we can have dreamed. Shouldn't our image of God and God's mercy have grown with that understanding? TW

A wind under the door

Madeleine L'Engle enthusiasts will recognize this passage from A Wind Under the Door *in which Meg seeks to save her brother's life by throwing herself into the echthroi, the demonic void, that is threatening his life.*

The pain.
It came again, as she had known it would.
Agony. Red anguish pounding against her eyeballs ...
....
Cold beyond snow and ice and falling mercury.
Cold beyond the absolute zero of outerspace.
Cold and pain.
She struggled.
You are X to me, Echthroi. I fill you.
....
She cried out, "I hold you! I love you, I Name you. I Name you, Echthroi. You are not nothing. You are."
....
I Name you, Echthroi. I name you Meg.
I Name you Calvin.
I Name you Mr. Jenkins.
I Name you Proginoskes.
I fill you with Naming.
Be!
Be, butterfly and behemoth,
be galaxy and grasshopper,
star and sparrow,
you matter,
you are,
be!
Be, caterpillar and comet,
be porcupine and planet,
sea sand and solar system,
sing with us,
dance with us,
rejoice with us,
for the glory of creation,
sea gulls and seraphim,
angle worms and angel host,
chrysanthemum and cherubim
(O cherubim)
Be!
Sing for the glory
of the living and the loving
the flaming of creation
sing with us
dance with us
be with us
Be!
....
Echthroi! you are Named! My arms surround you. You are no longer nothing. You are. You are filled. You are me.

— A Wind Under The Door,
Dell Yearling, 1973.

Fighting social evil: Radicals and conservatives share roots

by Kenneth Leech

An anti-racist spirituality must be both radical and traditional. It calls for rootedness in a living tradition.

It is strange that today the word "radical" is opposed to "fundamentalist," since both *radix* (root) and *fundamenta* (foundations) are almost identical words. Both refer to the need for grounding, for rootedness, for secure foundations. Such a quest for roots is basic to all forms of racism and fascism: such roots are sought in the myths of blood and soil, of fatherland, of genetic purity. They can only be combatted by a faith whose roots are deeper and more universal, which transcend those of tribalism.

It is even stranger to find "radicalism" opposed to tradition."

Today, when I hear the word "traditionalist" I suspect that it refers to someone who is effectively ignorant of the tradition in its richness and complexity, but who clings to the conventions of several decades ago. The whole point of a living tradition is that it roots people within a history. Of course, traditions must be subjected to continual scrutiny and interrogation. But as Alasdair MacIntyre has shown in *After Virtue*, to be outside of all traditions is to be rootless, to exist in a state of intellectual and moral destitution, speaking the languages of everywhere and nowhere.

I believe we need to question the assumption that movements of social and political protest go hand-in-hand with theological relativism and "liberalism." Often radical protest and witness is rooted in a deeply traditional theology which calls the unjust order into question. Thus John Davies, Bishop of Shrewsbury, writes of his experiences in South Africa:

"The most powerful weapon in Catholicism's armory of imagery in the struggle against injustice is the doctrine of the Body of Christ. ... There has been nothing radical or intellectually daring about this: the South African situation has required Catholicism to be thoroughly conservative and oppose the novel nonsense of upstart racism with a traditional orthodoxy which insists that there must be a visible fellowship of believers and that Christian love must be acted out in visible terms."

This empahsis on the visible body brings me to my second characteristic of an anti-racist spirituality. Such a spirituality will be both materialistic and transcendent. Materialist both because it will be rooted in specific, concrete, material struggles and demands and because its theological sources are those of incarnation, resurrection and Eucharist.

Some approaches to racism see it primarily as a personally disfiguring disease, a type of psychological illness, of individual pathology. Yet racism is, of its very nature, embodied in structures. It was to emphasize this structural dimension that the word racism was introduced into popular English usage and entered dictionaries at the end of the 1960s.

The only spirituality which can be of use in combatting racism is one which takes seriously the principalities and powers, the truth that spiritual evil is concretized and embodied in earthly material forms.

Often radical protest and witness is rooted in a deeply traditional theology which calls the unjust order into question. The experience of Christians both in Nazi Germany and in South Africa show that, resistance to racism is bound up theologically with the assertion that Jesus is Lord.

Yet, as the experience of Christians both in Nazi Germany and in South Africa shows, resistance to racism is bound up theologically with the claims of transcendence and with the assertion that Jesus is Lord, and the refusal to acknowledge lesser gods.

There is a true "otherworldliness" which issues not in withdrawal from this world, but in the struggle for its transformation by the powers of the world to come. The insistence that all Christian life is *en Christo*, that we are all citizens of a new creation, is absolutely basic. As

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Kenneth Leech is an English priest who has spent his life in anti-racist ministry in the East End of London. This article is excerpted from Leech's keynote address, "Developing a Spirituality for Anti-Racist Action," delivered to the 1994 Episcopal Urban Caucus Assembly in Charlotte, N.C. The address forms a chapter in the EUC's publication, *"To Heal the Sin-Sick Soul": A Spirituality for the Struggle Against Racism*, which can be purchased for $12.50 from the EUC by writing them at 138 Tremont Street, Boston, Mass. 02111.

long as we are conformed to this world, we will accept both its premises and its conclusions.

I believe, thirdly, that an anti-racist spirituality must be prepared to live with darkness and perplexity. This is as central to the meaning of the Cross as it is to the life of faith itself. We often talk as if the struggle against racism is primarily educational and that, if only we expressed ourselves in better language, people would understand. But the problem may not be that people don't understand, but that they do.

To be involved in the struggle against the demons of racism is to be brought into the very heart of the mystery of evil, to enter the darkness of the paschal mystery, to share something of that desolation and that upheaval.

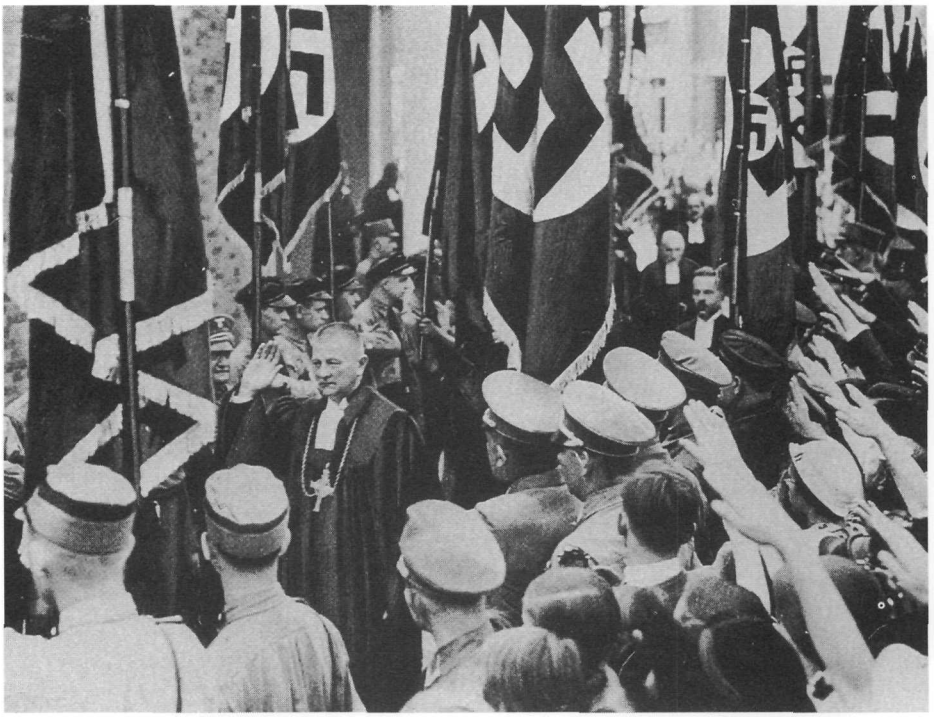
The encounter with racism, therefore, is a spiritual crisis of the most profound proportions. It is nothing less than a corporate dark night of the church and it is only out of this crisis that any of us can emerge whole.

Yet, such a spirituality is rooted in a vision of a better order, a vision of God's kingdom.

Earlier Christian social thinkers often confused the kingdom of God with the liberal doctrine of progress and missed the elements of crisis and apocalypse. But they did get it right that the kingdom of God involves this world. A spirituality to combat racism is a kingdom spirituality, a spirituality of a new order of things.

So the struggle against racism must be located within the wider spiritual and theological framework of the good news of the kingdom, involving the collapse of Babylon and the coming of the New Jerusalem.

And this involves vision and envisioning, dreaming and prefiguring, living the dream and holding fast the vision. TW



At a gathering similar to this one in Gustav Adolf Church, Berlin in 1934, the dean of Madgeburg Cathedral explained from the pulpit: "In short, [the flag] has come to be the symbol of German hope. Whoever reviles this symbol of ours is reviling our Germany. The swastika flags around the altar radiate hope — hope that the day is at last about to dawn."

Statements of faith

The Barmen declaration, which took issue with Nazi claims to power, was drafted by Karl Barth and approved by the Confessional Synod at Barmen on May 31, 1934. It reads in part:

"Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

"We reject false doctrine, as though the Church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation."

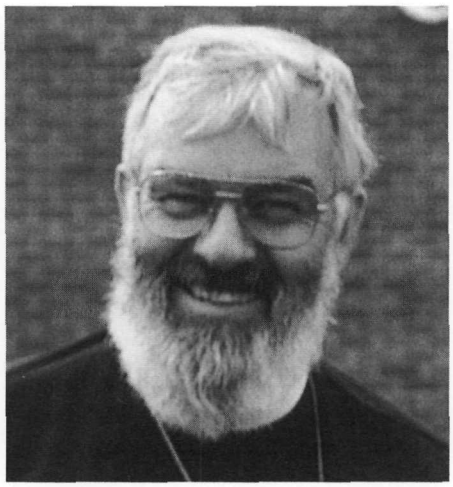
Similarly, the South African Kairos Document, authored by more than 50 black pastors ministering in the townships near Johannesburg in 1986, condemned apartheid as "heresy" and called the god of the South African state "the devil disguised as almighty god — the antichrist."

Both constituencies would probably agree with the words spoken in 1978 by Archbishop Oscar Romero (who was martyred in March, 1980 for taking the side of the poor in the struggles in El Salvador): "This is the mission entrusted to the church, a hard mission: to uproot sins from history, to uproot sins from the political order, to uproot sins from the economy, to uproot sins wherever they are. What a hard task!"

Leaving the Episcopal Church: an interview with Ken Bieber

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

[Ed. note: Ken Bieber, an Episcopal priest for nine years, left the church last fall feeling that many of the bishops and priests of the Episcopal Church do not take the creeds or the Gospel mandates seriously. Bieber, whose politics are conservative, served on many committees and on the Executive Council in the Diocese of Michigan. He was a deputy from Michigan to the 1994 General Convention in Indianapolis, resigning immediately upon his return. He is now establishing a congregation in the Charismatic Episcopal Church.]



Ken Bieber Herb Gunn

Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann: What drew you to the Episcopal Church?

Ken Bieber: My wife! We got married in her church because she was quite a committed Christian. I went to Vietnam right away and really didn't think much of religion until coming back.

A number of circumstances — a lot of it outside the church — led me to a deeper relationship with Christ. I began to get active. Then I began to look more and more at what it meant to worship. As I began to understand the liturgy and the prayer book, it just amazed me how neat and how clear the teaching of the church was. But the more I knew about what the church said even back then, there was a disappointment of not seeing it practiced.

J.W-K.: What are some examples of that?

K.B.: Well, like the creeds. I have this intuitive feeling that everybody who says the Nicene Creed, knows what it means: There is God and Christ and the Holy Spirit; Jesus was crucified, died, was buried and rose again.

Yet I ran into so many clergy who didn't believe that, or who said, "Well, it may be all right for us to believe it, but other people don't have to."

Bishop [John Shelby] Spong [of Newark] is an easy target, because in his writings he has simply said, "I don't believe anything that the creed says." And the church does not do anything about that.

Do you recall when Bishop [Richard] Grein [of New York] celebrated a eucharist that invoked the names of pagan deities? How could a bishop either do that or allow that when he was present? And again, there was not much of an outcry about it.

No matter how much we love the Scriptures, if we're wrong, we're still wrong. I don't think there are two sets of truth.

I think we *can* reach wrong conclusions and no matter how much we love the Scriptures, if we're wrong, we're still wrong. I don't think there are two sets of truth.

J.W-K.: And your feeling is that in the nine years that you were ordained in the church, increasingly the majority of the church was coming to the wrong conclusions?

K.B.: Either coming to or allowing the wrong conclusions. I don't think there's any difficulty understanding what the Scriptures mean when they talk about sexual behavior. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to say that some people have reached the wrong conclusion. The fact that people behave in a sexually promiscuous way doesn't change what Scripture says about that.

J.W-K.: It *may* take a rocket scientist, because people of good will and faith disagree. I agree with you on the issue of promiscuity, but I support committed same-sex relationships. And I do take Scripture seriously.

K.B.: I can see that in your writings. I would just say, from my point of view, you're wrong on that.

One of my favorite passages, is when Jesus was talking with the Sadducees and finally said, "Is this not why you're wrong? You neither know the Scriptures, nor the power of God." In the case of sexual behavior or same-sex unions you can know the Scriptures, but not accept that God can and will change your orientation and allow healing to come.

J.W-K.: Tell me about what happened when you and Diane realized you were serious about leaving the Episcopal Church.

K.B.: The question was never of finding *nirvana*, the question was of finding sanity and truth, clear doctrine that was practiced by those in charge.

We are both evangelical and charis-

matic and have worshipped with Pentecostals and non-denominational charismatic churches. We liked what was there, but they really were, in our estimation, incomplete. They focussed on the Holy Spirit to the exclusion of liturgy, to the exclusion of church history. And they're too independent. There's no authority.

Rome didn't seem right either. I didn't see the papacy as being the place of *all* authority and in general there appears to be more emphasis on supporting the structure of the institution than on the welfare of the people. Instead of a personal relationship with Jesus, there is a works righteousness which implies if you go to church, attend mass, that's all you need.

The Orthodox Church had a lot of appeal. What was amazing was that in all their imperfections, the people that we met — lay and clergy — had no doubt about what the Gospel was and what the Truth was. They didn't live it necessarily, but the teaching was very clear. The bishops didn't say, "I believe in Jesus Christ, the only son of God," and then teach that Christ is only *one* way to salvation.

But then we learned about the Charismatic Episcopal Church. The CEC is not a break-away church. They began as Pentecostals. In their quest for more than what they were experiencing in their charismatic circles, they came to see Anglicanism as western orthodoxy and basically adopted almost everything about Anglicanism.

J.W-K.: Do they use the prayer book?

K.B.: They do and they allow the 1928 prayer book. People can also use Eastern and Roman rites.

J.W-K.: What about inclusive language rites?

K.B.: Probably not.

J.W-K.: By choice or by decree?

K.B.: Well, if it's radical inclusive language that changes what the Scriptures say, it wouldn't be allowed.

J.W-K.: When you mentioned the variety of liturgies that are accepted, it sounded really flexible and then I started to wonder what the limits are.

K.B.: I don't know the limits yet, because I'm not one who's going to be pushing in that direction.

***Last Judgment* by Petrus Christus, 1452.**

J.W-K.: Is there the same kind of hierarchy?

K.B.: There are bishops, but all bishops are parish priests. So all dioceses will be small. It takes a minimum of five parishes to form a diocese and the maximum number in a diocese will be between 24 and 30 parishes. There are about 100 parishes in the United States.

In its liturgy and in its canons, CEC specifically stresses the role of the Holy Spirit in liturgy. It's not mandated *how*, but all churches have to be open to the charismatic gifts — however they may be manifested.

J.W-K.: You're thinking mostly of speaking in tongues?

K.B.: Speaking in tongues, singing in the Spirit, words of prophecy, prayers of healing at the altar rail and seeing people being healed.

A lot of Episcopal churches have been trying to rediscover the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. These folks, coming from their background, were trying to discover liturgy, because they had the charismatic part down.

The whole structure of the CEC is designed towards the parish, because that's where lives are changed. It's not designed upward towards the dioceses where bigger things might happen.

J.W-K.: When people come forward with views that some people consider heretical, what happens then? You don't have General Convention — or maybe you do?

K.B.: Well, there is a convention, but there's not a House of Deputies. There is no voting on the truth in that sense.

J.W-K.: Though their bishops probably vote on exactly that.

K.B.: They use what's called a consensus form of government and they are dedicated to being a house of prayer. They spend most of their meeting time in prayer and study. It's like in the Book of Acts where James said, "It seemed good to us and to the Holy Spirit to make this decision."

J.W-K.: To me it sounds similar to the Episcopal set-up except that lay people and clergy won't have the voice.

K.B.: It's more orthodox in that sense. It's not that they won't have lay input, but the bishops are the ones who are called to

guard and defend the faith and you don't do that by voting on it. It's less political.

J.W-K.: I'll want to talk to you in 10 years.

K.B.: Well, maybe. The governance is a model where the rector is the leader and his job is to lead people in worship and train them for ministry.

J.W-K.: Did you have any regrets when you went through the formal process of alerting the Episcopal diocese that you were changing denominations?

K.B.: Sure. I had a lot of regrets. In my heart I wish it was something I didn't have to do. I'm leaving something that has everything on paper that I think is important. Yet many people see certain issues as being more important. I wish people were as vehement for the Gospel as they are for abortion or gay rights.

J.W-K.: Somebody in whom I see that kind of enthusiasm and who's unabashed in his testimony to God's love is Louie Crew. His whole work is dedicated to gay rights and yet it would be hard to demonstrate that he's not alive with the Gospel. It doesn't seem to me that it's always terribly clear where faithful people are going to come down politically.

K.B.: We're all sinners. I don't have any trouble with my being a sinner, but I don't say because this is me and God made me this way, I have the right to continue doing this.

J.W-K.: Louie would say that he does not consider homosexuality to be sin which is different than saying I believe that I can sin and not stand before judgment.

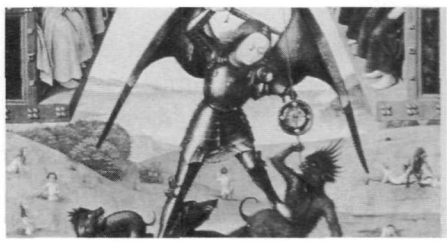
K.B.: The main problem for me is that sets up each individual to be the final arbiter of God's word and the church is not that way. The church is a community and it's a community led by the Spirit that maintains the standards.

One of the things about the Episcopal Church is that you're allowed to think, but we don't make doctrinal statements as individuals. That's what we have councils for.

I don't thunder from the pulpit. But I think we err when we put the truth out, but then modify it with today's slant.

J.W-K.: But in any good Bible study you move from what you've read in the text to your life and back and forth.

K.B.: What I like about the creed is that it's like a boundary. There's room to talk,



but there's also a point that says if you go beyond this then you're really outside the church.

J.W-K.: The creed *is* really clear, *and* there are lots of issues that aren't addressed in it — like gay rights.

One of the things that I really admire about your decision to change denominations is that you didn't get held hostage by the Church Pension Fund. What was your thinking with Diane about that?

K.B.: I do have a guaranteed small pension now for my years of service. We talked about it — the new church won't have those things. From our own life, we know that God is faithful. The Church Pension Fund is something we'll miss, but the word "hostage" is accurate. There are people who don't leave even though in their hearts they want to, because they feel they can't afford to.

I have no qualms about condemning the actions or teachings of people who violate their vows or play word gymnastics with the truth.

I didn't feel that it was appropriate to run to another diocese as some clergy have done. They just kind of isolate their parishes from all the political stuff as best they can and say, "We won't let that affect us," but then they are drawing into a shell which isn't good.

J.W-K.: Sometimes it's hard looking at the left and the right within the Episcopal Church to know if the gap is similar to the one in the culture at large. When you look at what's described as the religious, political right in the U.S. — does it reflect your views?

K.B.: Well, I think the religious right is a term which paints with a broad brush. I don't agree with everything that is attributed to the religious right.

J.W-K.: It's clear, from what you've said earlier, where you stand on the issue of gay and lesbian orientation and on abortion rights. What about the U.S. military, since that's a large focus of the Christian political right.

K.B.: I don't have any problem with a strong defense. I'm one who attributes the fall of Communism, in a large part, to President Reagan's determination to spend the Soviet Union into the ground and to quit playing footsies with them.

It was refreshing for me to hear him call them "an evil empire." We're not perfect either, but people weren't fleeing to the Soviet Union for salvation. They were coming to America.

One of the reasons that I don't mind having a strong, defined military is that our country has never had a problem of changing civilian governments. We've never had a military uprising with the generals deciding the president's off the wall and they're going to take over.

J.W-K.: There's more to say on that. There certainly have been, especially in the late 1960s and 1970s, assassinations within this country that were government initiated. It's not unusual — most coun-

tries have that kind of experience. But since there are no end to the political things we could take on, I should probably let it go — I look forward to completing the circle after Judgment Day and having clarity about so many things.

K.B.: Don't you know that those who are in Christ have already passed from death into life? And don't go through the Judgment?

J.W-K: No, I think we do. My image of it has always been that there will be a time when we're called to look straight into the eyes of Christ. In that moment, things that we were pretending to ourselves were not sin, will be crystal clear to us. Things that we didn't know were sin will become clear to us as well. We'll have a choice in that moment — either to acknowledge it and repent or to reject Jesus. At least, that's the way I envision it. So, even though I'm alive in Christ and confident in the resurrection, there will still be that moment of accountability.

K.B.: If one is in Christ, one is *past* the judgment. The judgment is for the lost.

J.W-K: I really believe that you and I are both in Christ, and somehow there will need to be a sorting through of the things about which we disagree. That's not judgment in your mind?

K.B.: I don't think those things will determine that I'm right and you're wrong or you're right and I'm wrong, and therefore we go through the two different doors.

J.W-K.: You and I disagree about some crucial issues. Are we both saved?

K.B.: Yes we disagree, but as St. Paul said in Romans 10, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

On the other hand, Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." In that context he was speaking about false prophets and that we would know them by their fruit. So salvation is both simple and complex, requiring more than lip service.

I believe God's grace and love are far greater than most of us can imagine or accept. Yet, they don't wink at unrepentant sin. Although we can judge the actions and teachings of others (we have a standard by which to judge), we cannot judge one's salvation — that belongs to God. I believe we can be wrong, but still saved.

Paul wrote about that in first Corinthians: "If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire." The fact is that we all sin and we all err in our judgments. The difficulty comes when individuals, even with all good intentions, redefine sin according to science and feelings without having the church come to that place.

J.W-K.: Am I condemned in your eyes?

K.B.: No you are not. I hope never to be so arrogant as to act as that kind of judge. No one is condemned in my eyes, not even those whose actions and statements I find so appalling.

I have no qualms about condemning the actions or teachings of people who violate their vows or play word gymnastics with the truth. As a pastor and teacher, I have a responsibility to defend, or as it is written, "contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." But eternal judgment is in God's hands — thank God for that!

J.W-K.: How will things come clear?

K.B.: I think they will come clear when we see the Lord on that day.

St. Paul said it best: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we shall see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known." TW

Surrogacy and redemption

by Delores S. Williams

Black women are intelligent people living in a technological world where nuclear bombs, defilement of the earth, racism, sexism, dope and economic injustices attest to the presence and power of evil in the world.

Perhaps not many people today can believe that evil and sin were overcome by Jesus' death on the cross; that is, that Jesus took human sin upon himself and therefore saved humankind.

Rather, it seems more intelligent and more scriptural to understand that redemption had to do with God, through Jesus, giving humankind new vision to see the resources for positive, abundant relational life. Redemption had to do with God, through the *ministerial* vision, giving humankind the ethical thought and practice upon which to build positive, productive quality of life. Hence, the kingdom of God theme in the *ministerial* vision of Jesus does not point to death; it is not something one has to die to reach. Rather, the kingdom of God is a metaphor of hope God gives those attempting to right the relations between self and self, between self and others, between self and God as prescribed in the sermon on the mount, in the golden rule and in the commandment to show love above all else.

The image of Jesus on the cross is the image of human sin in its most desecrated form. This execution destroyed the body, but not before it mocked and defiled the Jewish man Jesus by publicly exposing his nakedness and private parts, by mocking the *ministerial* vision as they labeled him king of the Jews, by placing a crown of thorns upon his head mocking his dignity and the integrity of his divine mission. The cross thus becomes an image of defilement, a gross manifestation of collective human sin. Jesus, then, does not conquer sin through death on the cross. Rather, Jesus conquers the sin of temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11) by resistance — by resisting the temptation to value the material over the spiritual ("Man shall not live by bread alone"); by resisting death (not attempting suicide that tests God: "if you are the son of God, throw yourself down"); by resisting the greedy urge of monopolistic ownership ("He showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, all these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me"). Jesus therefore conquered sin in life, not in death. In the wilderness he refused to allow evil forces to defile the balanced relation between the material and the spiritual, between life and death, between power and the exertion of it.

Helen David Brancato

What this allows the womanist theologian to show black women is that God did not intend the surrogacy roles they have been forced to perform. God did not intend the defilement of their bodies as white men put them in the place of white women to provide sexual pleasure for white men during the slavocracy. This was rape. Rape is defilement, and defilement means wanton desecration. Worse, deeper and more wounding than alienation, the sin of defilement is the one of which today's technological world is most guilty. Nature (the land, the seas, the animals in the sea) are every day defiled by humans. Cultures and peoples (Native Americans, Africans, Jews) have been defiled and destroyed by the onslaught of Western, Christian, patriarchal imperialism in some of its ugliest forms. The oceans are defiled by oil spills, and industrial waste destroys marine life. The rain forest is being defiled. The cross is a reminder of how humans have tried throughout history to destroy visions of righting relationships that involve transformation of tradition and transformation of social relations and arrangements sanctioned by the *status quo*. TW

Delores S. Williams is an associate professor of Theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. This article is excerpted from *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, Orbis, 1993, which will be released in paperback in July.

How sin works: the views of Ted Peters

by Marianne Arbogast

Whenever we draw a line between good and evil and place ourselves on the good side, "bells should ring and lights should flash," says Ted Peters, a theologian at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, Cal., and the author of a new book on sin.

"That's the *structure* of sin; that's not the way you overcome sin."

Describing the way sin works — a task he feels is being neglected by the church — is Peters' concern in *Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society* (Eerdmanns, 1994).

Drawing on Augustine, neo-orthodox theologians, and an array of other classic and contemporary writers, Peters examines ancient doctrine in a contemporary context.

Though pastoral care has been enhanced by input from psychology and other disciplines, "the image is really western pragmatism," he said in a recent interview with *The Witness*. "You've got problems, we'll help solve them. We get close to a person's soul with that kind of thing, but the real question is, what is a person's relationship with God?"

New Age spiritualities, which Peters credits with filling the gap, tend to see only the good in human nature.

"I'm sympathetic with their motive for doing that — they believe with St. Augustine that the good has a power that the evil doesn't. But there's a lack of realism, a naiveté — in fact, there's an actual denial."

Original sin

"I want to deal with what's just observable about life," Peters says of his exploration of the meaning of original sin. "We enter into streams of action and activity into which bad precedents have already been set, we participate in them, and we contribute to the violence that they do. I love coffee, and I think of poor Juan Valdez's family in Columbia not having enough bread on the table. Well, the injustice of the coffee economy was established before I was born, but I can't help, when I drink coffee, contributing to that.

"A critic will say, 'I believe that babies are born free, and that as they grow up, they make these free choices, and they eventually choose patterns of selfishness.' The problem with that criticism is it doesn't account for this experience that we have of being drawn ineluctably into these pre-existing structures of evil."

He notes two understandings of freedom in Christian tradition which he sees as "only partially compatible.

"The first is the quasi-pelagian understanding, that we are free egos and we stand in a neutral position, and we've got good on the left hand and evil on the right — so freedom is the condition for the possibility of doing evil. It's that understanding of freedom which the Christian tradition has bequeathed to the western world.

"But there is another understanding of freedom that's really quite different, and that's freedom understood as liberation. You begin with the experience of bondage, and then when God's grace acts in your life, you experience liberation."

Steps to Radical Evil

Peters identifies "seven steps down the path to radical evil": 1) anxiety, 2) unfaith, 3) pride (from individual narcissism to patriarchy and homophobia), 4) concupiscence ("an unquenchable fire of wanting and wanting and wanting," symbolized by sexual lust but, extending to the creation and maintenance of an unjust international economic order), 5) self-justification and scapegoating, 6) cruelty (growing out of "the lie that is tied so closely to virtually every aspect of sin — namely, that we can gain our own immortality by stealing life from others"); and 7) blasphemy, or radical evil.

Self-justification

He writes compellingly against self-justification and scapegoating, which he considers "the most subtle and dangerous dimension of sin" (p. 162).

The entire mechanism [of self-justification] is shattered when it becomes clear that God has identified with the scapegoat rather than the righteous ones who slaughter with the best interests of the existing social order at heart.

Here, truth "flies in the face of the way we think things should work," Peters explains. "If we are to be moral people, we should try to make ourselves good and to stamp out evil, right?"

Wrong, he contends. For as soon as we identify ourselves with the good, we identify others with evil, opening the floodgates of exclusion, prejudice, and

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violence done in God's name.

"The entire mechanism is shattered when it becomes clear that God has identified with the scapegoat rather than the righteous ones who slaughter with the best interests of the existing social order at heart. ... One way to look at this is to suggest that when God draws the line between good and evil, God places the incarnate divine self on the evil side."

This insight, he believes, should lead Christians to avoid all forms of ideology, and to humility in their most cherished moral crusades.

Culture wars and activism

"It is the combination of morality and ultimacy that marks the danger" in the contemporary American "culture wars," he writes.

"What accounts for the tenacity and ferocity on both sides of each of these cultural battles [over abortion, gay rights, etc.] is the identification of those involved with an ultimate moral order, identification with what adherents to each ideology presume to be ultimate justice or goodness or righteousness. ... My point here is not to pick sides in the culture wars. Nor do I wish to propound a limp ideology of inclusivity that takes the passion out of moral activism. Rather, I simply want to suggest that in order to understand sin, we must be able to see it right in the very heart of our most moral endeavors."

If we really think about ourselves in terms of how it is that I justify myself, how it is that I do violence against others in the very process of trying to make myself look good, that's getting ready for repentance and forgiveness.

The model he would propose for activists is "the Dietrich Bonhoeffer paradigm. When Bonhoeffer participated in the plot to kill Hitler, the moral question arose, 'Does the evil that you would have prevented, had you been successful in killing Hitler, justify the means of having committed murder?' Bonhoeffer's response was no, committing murder is an evil pure and simple, it was sin. So the question of moral action is one in which the sinner sins boldly, to use Luther's words."

Peters believes that, in resisting oppression, "we don't have any alternative in which there isn't violence of some kind. I do think on a relative scale that economic violence is much better than military violence; but when you take away a company's profits, through a labor union strike or whatever, you just have to call it what it is.

"I think of ethics and social action as being eminently practical, that if I choose violence B I think it's better for society than violence A. It's not that the track I'm pushing is absolutely good, it's God's will, it's going to bring in an everlasting utopia; but rather that, on balance, this is better than the alternative. The pursuit of justice has to continue, but the pursuit of self-reflection, understanding myself as a sinner who's trying to take action, will mitigate a lot of the violence that could be done."

Theological pitfalls

Peters is sharply critical of liberation theology for conveying the impression that siding with the oppressed puts one in the camp of the righteous.

"I genuinely believe that the liberation theologians were right — there are structures of injustice that are built into society, and the church was wrong for never having paid attention to that. But the victimized group is subject to the same dynamics as the oppressive group."

Back issues

The following back issues of *The Witness* are available. Study guides are available upon request when ordering multiple copies of a single issue.

Alternative ways of doing church 8-9/94
"Be ye perfect": From perfectionism to prophecy 3/93
Birthing in the face of a dragon 12/91
Caesar and the widows and orphans 4/93
Christians and animal rights 10/93
The communion of saints 11/93
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Likewise, he raises challenging questions for Christian feminists: Are there forms of feminism that function as self-justifying ideology? At what point might goddess worship signify "a return to old-fashioned idolatry?" (p. 112).

But many who take such questions seriously will dispute his interpretation of Virginia Ramey Mollenkott's affirmation that "because God is womanlike — women are Godlike" (p. 113) as idolatrous. (In a generally favorable 1994 book review in *Christian Century*, Walter Wink faults "the absence of a thoroughgoing critique of biblical patriarchy" in Peters' thought.)

Radical evil

Though Peters traces a logical progression in his seven steps, he is primarily concerned with showing the underlying connectedness of all sin. Sin is of a piece, and even if our sins stop short of blasphemy, or "radical evil," it is an outgrowth of the same weed.

Peters defines blasphemy as "the misuse of divine symbols so as to prevent the communication of God's grace."

Its covert form, or "the form of the lie," can be recognized when "the symbols associated with God become so identified with oppression that their original intent is subverted." The appeal to Scripture to justify apartheid is a case in point.

Overt blasphemy is evil in the name of evil, symbolized by Satan.

Peters — who explains in the introduction to his book that his initial impetus to write it came, in part, from his exposure to accounts of Satanic ritual abuse — devotes considerable space to an examination of the phenomenon of Satanism, examining the perspectives of Satanists, anti-Satanists and anti-anti-Satanists.

Because sin, by its nature, leads us to see evil outside us rather than within us, Peters says we need to be vigilant against the temptation to "trivialize radical evil by identifying it with every point of view with which we disagree," and thereby failing "to recognize the real Satan when he appears"(p. 248).

As a principle of discernment, Peters suggests that "Satan is present when we hear the call to shed innocent blood."

Meeting of Pilgrim and Envy, c. 1390 — Biblioteque Royale, Brussels

Genetic sin?

Peters, a participant in the government-funded study of theological and ethical issues raised by the controversial Human Genome Initiative, devotes the final chapter of his book to this topic.

Noting that the balance of scientific opinion is shifting toward heavier weighting of biological influences on human behavior — even "aggression and altruism, vice and virtue" (p. 294) — Peters ponders the spiritual implications of this perspective.

Does it support Augustine's view of original sin as hereditary disease?

If propensity to sin is in our genes, is the grace to transcend it also genetically given?

What if someone were shown to be genetically predisposed to crime — would they be considered innocent — or would their genes make them guilty?

Apart from rejecting a determinist perspective that leaves no room for grace, Peters does not answer these questions, but holds them up as markers of a dawning theological frontier.

But while he reports that the genetic issues have generated the strongest interest among readers, his own assessment of the significance of his work stresses the dynamics of self-justification.

"If we really think about ourselves in terms of how it is that I justify myself, how it is that I do violence against others in the very process of trying to make myself look good, that's getting ready for repentance and forgiveness and renewal and that whole dynamic that we've thought, in the church, has been so precious over the centuries — but we've lost a way of understanding it." TW

Offering a clear focus to a church in disarray: the EUC at 15

by Julie A. Wortman

One of the most successful coalitions that has ever been forged in the Episcopal Church, the Episcopal Urban Caucus (EUC), will meet this month in New Orleans to continue incubating ideas and strategies for making the church's urban ministries with the poor more effective. It's a process in which the group has been engaged ever since its founding 15 years ago in Indianapolis.

"We started with 500 people — the cathedral in Indianapolis was filled," says Mike Kendall, who co-chaired the first assembly with John Walker, the bishop of Washington and chair of the Urban Bishops' Coalition. "Since then we've maintained a dedicated core membership of between 150 and 200."

Like Walker and Kendall (who is New York's archdeacon and a past chair of the national church's Standing Commission on the Church in Metropolitan Areas), many in that core group have been influential in the councils of the church.

"We're not a powerful organization, no one would say that, but there have been major accomplishments by the members, like Jubilee Ministries [anti-poverty initiative passed in 1982] and the Michigan plan [for economic justice passed in 1988]," says Emmett Jarrett, EUC's current president. "Some of our members helped draft those pieces of legislation." In 1991 Caucus members were also successful in persuading the General Convention to make fighting racism in the church a priority until the year 2000.

The harder task, Jarrett says, has been holding the church's feet to the fire around implementation. "With all the recent budget cuts, Jubilee is now just an empty shell. The church also made a unanimous decision to support a major economic justice program and then there's been nothing. We were going to have the church *invest* its money in economic justice — we were going to have a national church mutual fund!"

An EUC-backed effort at last year's budget-slashing General Convention resulted in a "challenge budget" that would channel funds to Jubilee Ministries and to economic/racial justice programs if dioceses exceed the asking from the national church in 1995. But that's an eventuality that few expect, despite widespread enthusiasm for the idea among convention participants.

"We survived [the budget process]," EUC coordinator Ed Rodman told members in this year's pre-assembly mailing. "But with, I believe, a greatly diminished national church program and a weak process for raising additional funds needed to truly support the so-called challenge budget."

EUC board member Richard Bowden believes that EUC-supported programs would get better financial backing if more bishops were active in the group. "The Caucus came into being because of an initiative of the urban bishops," Bowden says. "But social concerns are no longer foremost on their minds. There are more pots on the stove now."

The EUC's agenda for the past 15 years, in fact, has deviated very little from that set by a series of public hearings that those 50 or so bishops held in 1978 and 1979. In *To Hear and To Heed*, the report produced afterward, Joseph Pelham, then the dean at the Rochester Center for Theological Studies, wrote that in listening to those who testified at the hearings, certain conclusions were inescapable.

"We must decide that we will be *for the poor*," Pelham said, noting that it would be a struggle "which has no forseeable end."

In words prophetic of the EUC's current focus on the church's racist institutional life, Pelham also asserted, "We must decide to recognize that without consistency between the church's own life and the ends and purposes of its mission, that mission will be fraudulent and impotent. Racism and sexism in the church itself are contradictions."

According to Kendall, EUC's single-minded focus on the urban poor and the "isms" which are used to keep them poor, in fact, is now one of its best contributions to a church some believe to be in disarray.

"The Episcopal Church is struggling with its future and identity," Kendall says. "The Caucus keeps a very clear focus on ministry in urban areas and with the poor — it isn't really caught up in the disarray. As far as we're concerned, the church can restructure any way it wants, but it *must* deal with our cities. Keeping the basic mission of eradicating poverty alive is so important."

Sandy Elledge of the Appalachian People's Service Organization (APSO) believes that with the Republican ascendancy in Congress, the EUC may now be in a position to strengthen its clout.

"Some people are almost *opposed* to ministry with the poor in these times of blaming the victim," Elledge says. "And there seems to be a backlash against anything liberal. The Caucus can be a place where people opposed to this trend can organize." New blood, Elledge believes, will also be an asset to the group.

"What's powerful about the caucus is that it's a place where black people and white people work together," says the EUC's Jarrett. "It's a place where people connect — just to know folks who care about the same thing really helps."

Vital Signs

Julie A. Wortman is managing editor of *The Witness*.

Mandating anti-racism

by Herb Gunn

Less than 100 days into the life of a new, smaller Diocese of Michigan organized into regional councils of congregations, the diocese's bishop, Stewart Wood, with the endorsement of the diocese's Executive Council, has mandated that each new council will assume as part of its organizational mandate "a prime directive of becoming anti-racist in decisionmaking and in every other aspect of its corporate life."

The diocese's canon to the ordinary, Bonnie Anderson, stresses that Wood's anti-racism mandate is not a request for a new program. "What the bishop is asking is that everybody approach their ministry through a wider lens," Anderson said.

Anti-racism has been a central theme in Wood's episcopate since he became diocesan in 1990. A volunteer anti-racism training network formed by the Bishop's Anti-Racism Committee has been offering congregations and diocesan groups anti-racism training since 1992.

The new anti-racism mandate has its roots in the campaign to divide the old diocese which stalled in 1992 when black clergy charged that division was racially motivated — virtually no persons or congregations of color were to be included in the proposed new northern diocese (now the Diocese of Eastern Michigan). The 1993 diocesan convention withheld approval for division until delegates committed both new dioceses to eradicating racism from their institutional lives.

The two new dioceses officially came into existence on Jan. 1, 1995, and Wood's mandate was announced a few weeks later. The Bishop's Anti-Racism Committee will be providing the new deans and presidents of the new regional councils with anti-racism training during a day-long organizational workshop on March 11. Facilitated by staff from Boston's Women's Theological Center, the training is aimed at ensuring that the new councils will begin organizing along anti-racist lines so that decision-making, access to and allocation of resources, standards of behavior and definitions of problems will not perpetuate a situation of white racial supremacy.

"The training will give the councils some tools in dealing with the questions they need to ask themselves when they are trying to adhere to the bishop's mandate," explained Rebecca Morris, chair of the anti-racism committee. "It gives a mechanism to confirm the bishop's position that he would like to see us be a church for all races."

Wood told the diocese's Executive Council last January that it seemed necessary to issue the mandate because congregations and diocesan groups have not been seeking anti-racism training on their own. Only eight congregations, two youth groups and a handful of staffs have invited the diocese's anti-racism training network to lead anti-racism trainings in the past two years.

"We are anxious to move beyond waiting for congregations to invite us to come do the training," Wood said.

Herb Gunn is editor of *The Record*, the Diocese of Michigan's newspaper.

Scots now have women priests

One in seven Episcopal Church priests in Scotland are now women, following a spate of ordinations in December and Janaury that marked the ending of that Anglican province's male-only priesthood. The Scottish church eliminated the final barrier to women priests last June.

ATR focuses on urban ministry

Urban ministry was the focus of the Fall 1994 issue of the *Anglican Theological Review (ATR)*. Authors included a number of Episcopal Urban Caucus activists: G.P. Mellick Belshaw, recently retired Bishop of New Jersey and a former president of the EUC, Edward Rodman, canon missioner in the Diocese of Massachusetts and the EUC's staff consultant, and Maria Marta Aris-Paul, former executive director of the Instituto Pastoral Hispano. Norman Faramelli, a board member of the Episcopal City Mission in Massachusetts, Gibson Winter, whose groundbreaking book, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches*, posed an early challenge to the church not to abandon the cities, and English urban activist Kenneth Leech (writing with Alan Green and Hillary Russell), also provided essays.

Topics ranged from Winter's examination of violence and poverty and Rodman's survey of urban ministry in the black Episcopal Church to Faramelli's analysis of the future role of local congregations, Leech's reflections on England's urban church and Aris-Paul's question, "Can the Episcopal Church respond to the hispanic community?"

Belshaw, editor of this issue of the *ATR*, writes about "The Religion of the Incarnation," which he argues is "the theological ground for the church's presence with and ministry among the poor, whose poverty is a global phenomenon and whose proportions challenge the mission of the church as never before."

Single copies of this issue cost $6, subscriptions to the quarterly *ATR* cost $23 per year or $43 for two years. Contact *ATR's* Jacqueline Winter at 600 Haven Street, Evanston, Ill., 60201; (708) 864-6024.

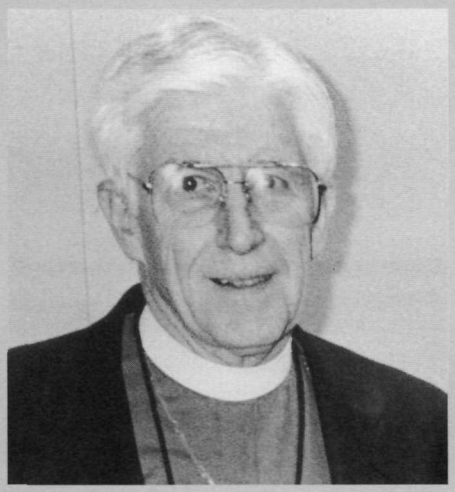
Massachusetts candid about bishop's suicide

Since the death of David E. Johnson, Bishop of Massachusetts, who died of a self-inflicted gun shot wound last January 14, the diocese has made an extensive effort to assist members of the diocese in working through Johnson's suicide.

A day-long gathering for 500 persons, including diocesan clergy, lay leadership and staff, was held at the beginning of February. In addition, response teams are reacting to the needs of congregations and individuals.

Perhaps most remarkable has been the diocese's commitment to candor during this process. Noting that honesty will contribute to "the critical process of healing," a diocesan press statement immediately acknowledged both the suicide and the fact that Johnson had been involved in extramarital relationships. The initial release, which was approved by Johnson's family, even indicated that "at least some of these relationships appear to have been of the character of sexual exploitation." The release also stated that Johnson had made at least one previous attempt at suicide.

"We realize that many would prefer that these hard truths remain undisclosed out of respect for Bishop Johnson's family and the many good things he accomplished," the release said. "But our



David E. Johnson

years of struggling in the church with the issue of clergy sexual exploitation and many other issues that cause such pain and division have shown us again and again that such healing can only take place when we begin to face such truths together."

Richard Shimpfky, Bishop of the Diocese of El Camino Real, says he regrets that Johnson's death will interfere with the ability of Tom Shaw, Johnson's successor, to pursue his own vision for the diocese. But he immediately added that Shaw's first-ballot election as bishop in March 1993 is evidence of the Holy Spirit's work, "since he's clearly the right man in the right place at the right time." Shaw, 49, is a member of the Society of St. John the Evangelist and was for a time the community's superior.

Shimpfky added that he's heard many people react with anger to Johnson's suicide because "bishops are supposed to be a sign of hope."

Speaking to this, Bill Rankin, dean of the Episcopal Divinity School, observed, "Though to us he was the bishop, to himself he was nothing but a man. And there is no protection against the risks such a fact entails — not being outwardly a success, nor being in a power position, nor being idealized by others, nor even believing (as I do) that suicide is wrong. In the end, all of us are thrown upon the mercy of God. But we believe this mercy is infinitely larger than what's wrong, and what's disillusioning and death itself."

Church treasurer embezzling?

The surprise resignation of the national church's top financial officer, Ellen Cooke, has been followed by news that the church's funds may have been embezzled.

Rumors circulating now, which cannot be confirmed pending the results of an independent audit now under way, suggest that as many as one million dollars may be in question.

The presiding bishop's February 15 press release states that one month after Cooke's departure in early January, members of the Treasurer's office informed him that they had discovered irregularities that appear "to indicate misuse of Church funds by Mrs. Cooke."

The presiding bishop has engaged legal counsel and is awaiting the results of the independent audit.

Cooke was treasurer of the Episcopal Church and the General Convention for nine years.

Exploitation series begins in April

The church has turned a corner in its understanding and handling of clergy sexual exploitation cases — behaviors that used to be swept under the rug as unfortunate, but minor, unpleasantnesses in church life are now being recognized as damaging breaches of ecclesiastical discipline requiring aggressive, upfront adjudication. This shift in institutional attitude has likely been responsible for encouraging victims to come forward in unprecedented numbers (some diocesan officials say they have been inundated with complaints). But the increased caseload has not yet generated a consensus about causes, prevention or treatment.

In April, *The Witness* will begin touching into some of the complexities and foundational questions with which the church is dealing as it addresses clergy sexual exploitation. Nancy Hopkins, who works with congregations affected by clergy misconduct, will lead off our series with a piece about reclaiming the parish as sacred space after the removal of a clergy perpetrator. Future articles will examine presumptions about who has power and the potential to abuse it, the tension which arises as the Episcopal Church attempts to respond to cases as both a legal entity and as a Christian community, healing for victims and offenders and ethical issues that emerge when cases involve gay and lesbian persons and others.

Celebrating William Stringfellow on the 10th anniversary of his death

by Timothy F. Sedgwick

A Keeper of the Word: Selected Writings by William Stringfellow. Edited by Bill Wylie-Kellermann. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994. Pp. 434. $24.95 (pb).

Radical Christian and Exemplary Lawyer. A Festschrift Honoring William Stringfellow. Edited by Andrew W. McThenia, Jr. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995. Pp. 161. $14.99 (pb).

Born of disciples' gratitude and devotion for a master and friend, these two books celebrate the life of William Stringfellow on the tenth anniversary of his death. But more than narrowly honoring the person, they witness to his Christian faith and charism.

Stringfellow lived as a neighbor, whether in East Harlem or Block Island off the coast of Rhode Island. Always he welcomed those about him. Both the table and the circus were central to his life: He loved to cook and feast with friends, and he loved the circus — even spending one summer traveling as "theologian in residence."

He served as lawyer and theologian — not as an academic but as one who stood under and gave voice to the Word of God.

A Keeper of the Word reads less like an edited selection of writings than an autobiographical account of Stringfellow's life and the world in which he lived. Stringfellow wrote in order to create a space in which the Word of God might be heard. His life situation was the occasion for reading the Bible, while the Bible was the source of the Word of God necessary in order to read the world.

For Stringfellow the correlate to Scripture as the Word of God is the world as principalities and powers. The principalities and powers are matters of collective human action that are sustained in time by institutions — educational, cultural, artistic, political, scientific, domestic, etc. These powers are good. They bear meanings and values. They are, however, fallen and as such turn in upon themselves and seek to save their own lives at the expense of those they are to serve. They "claim autonomy from God and dominion over human beings and the rest of creation, thus disrupting and usurping the godly vocation or blaspheming, while repudiating their own vocation" (p. 207).

Falleness is a matter of an ethic of survival and death, only seen in light of freedom and life — life given and sustained by hearing the Word of God in our midst. "The resurrection," says Stringfellow, "means the accessibility, for human beings, on behalf of all of life, of the power of the Word of God, which the whole of Creation enjoys in being made, overcoming the power of death here and now" (p. 113).

What is so powerful is that the exploration of life and death as political and as personal are inextricably intertwined. Stringfellow moves easily from polemics against the church and nation to moving meditations on prayer, friendships, or the Christian seasons. This is vintage Stringfellow, not as an actor in the American drama, however much he was that, but as theologian, as one who in giving voice to his experience gives space for God to be heard as a sovereign power, terribly other. Stringfellow is not a disciple of Karl Barth but gives voice to the same reality of God, of judgment and of grace.

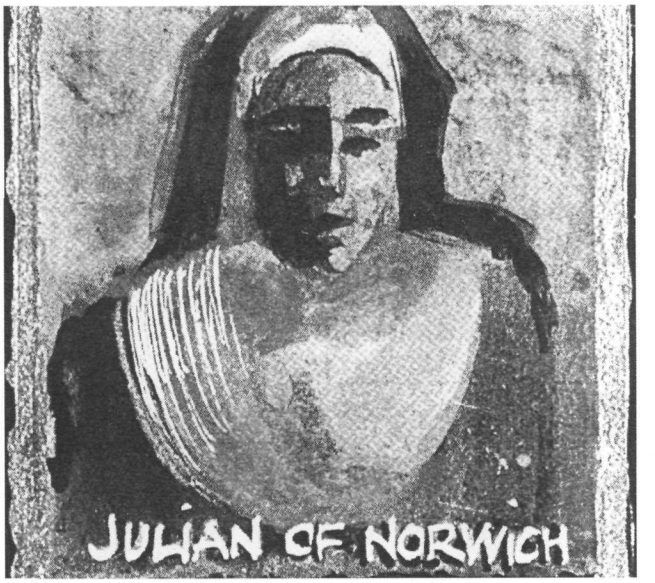
Wylie-Kellermann has masterfully woven together Stringfellow's confession of life and faith from the 15 books and more than 130 articles that Stringfellow wrote. This may restore Stringfellow's voice as one of the most significant American theological voices in the second half of this century.

Andrew McThenia's *Festschrift* is also an important contribution to this restoration. Like most collections that celebrate the life of a person, *Radical Christian and Exemplary Lawyer* includes a range of sometimes overlapping essays, some highly personal, others assessments of his thought. Powers and principalities, creation as apocalyptic, Stringfellow as political activist, Christian, biblical theologian, writer, friend, and advocate — these are some of the perspectives developed by a range of authors including Walter Wink, Stanley Hauerwas, Mary Lou Suhor, Jim Wallis, Liz McAlister, Daniel Berrigan, and Thomas Shaffer.

The personal stories and comments may be most revealing and interesting. In the final essay McThenia himself, for example, comments on Stringfellow as lawyer. For Stringfellow "a lawyer's work of justice is a form of prayer and praise. We do our acts of justice as a way of praising God, knowing that it is not God who is made whole by these acts of praise but we ourselves." TW

Timothy F. Sedgwick is Professor of Christian Ethics at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, Evanston, Ill.

book review



'All manner of thing shall be well'

by Marianne Arbogast

"In his lovers he regards sin as a sorrow and a suffering, and because of his love, not as blameworthy."

One of the most familiar assertions about sin by a Christian writer is, more often than not, quoted only in part.

"Sin is necessary," Julian of Norwich heard Jesus say to her in a vision, "but all shall be well. All shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."

The medieval mystic who called God our mother and spoke wonderingly of God's courtesy and tenderness, saw this graciousness clearly against the backdrop of human sin.

The little that is known of Julian's life comes mainly through her *Revelations of Divine Love,* an account of visions she experienced during a life-threatening illness at the age of 30.

She was born in 1342, and lived till at least 1416 (the date of a will of which she is a beneficiary).

Julian lived during the era of the bubonic plague in England. The first outbreak, which struck when she was six, killed over half of the population of Norwich. It erupted a second time when she was 18, and again when she was 27. More likely than not, Julian lost family members (a husband? children?) and friends to this "Black Death." In any case, as Robert Llewelyn writes, "the cries of the dying, the loneliness and suffering and grief of little children, the smell of decaying flesh in the streets, the burials in mass graves, the horror of rats and vermin would all have been familiar to her" (*All Shall Be Well*, Paulist Press, 1982).

At what point she embraced the contemplative life is not known, but she spent at least her latter years as an anchoress attached to St. Julian's church in Norwich (the probable origin of the name by which she is known).

Anchoresses of Julian's time lived in small homes — often with gardens — usually adjoining a church. Servants brought food and handled other necessary contact with the outside world.

One window of the anchoress' cell opened onto the church, enabling her to participate in the liturgy and partake of communion. At another window, open to the street, visitors seeking counsel or spiritual companionship were welcomed.

Julian struggled continuously to reconcile the suffering of the world with the unbounded love of God, in light of the visions she had received.

Sin, to Julian, is "known by the pain it causes": the passion of Christ and "all the suffering and pain of his creation, both spiritual and physical."

Christ, in her vision, affirms that sin is the cause of this pain, but repeats his pledge that "all will be well."

Julian chafes against this assurance.

"We see deeds done that are so evil, and injuries inflicted that are so great, that it seems to us quite impossible that any good can come of them."

Moreover, the church teaches that "many creatures will be damned. ... This being so, I thought it quite impossible that everything should turn out well, as our Lord was now showing me. But I had no answer to this revelation save this: 'What is impossible to you is not impossible to me. I shall honour my word in every respect, and I will make everything turn out for the best.'"

Christ's promise was spoken "most tenderly," she writes, "with never a hint of blame either to me or to any of those to

Witnesses, the quick and the dead

Marianne Arbogast is assistant editor of *The Witness*. Artist **Helen David Brancato**, of Philadelphia, painted this image in a series titled, "It was the women who stayed," which is available in poster form.

be saved. It would be most improper of me therefore to blame or criticize God for my sin, since he does not blame me for it."

But Julian goes further still, asserting that God will *reward* us for our sins!

"For the soul that comes to heaven is precious to God, and the place is so holy that the goodness of God will never allow the soul who gets there to have sinned without that sin being compensated. ...

"In his lovers he regards sin as a sorrow and a suffering, and because of his love, not as blameworthy. The reward we will receive will be no small one, but one rather that is great, glorious, and honourable. ...

"Our courteous Lord does not want his servants to despair even if they fall frequently and grievously."

As if struck with the sudden concern that this might make sin look attractive, Julian denies this emphatically.

"If, because of all this spiritual comfort we have been talking of, one were foolish enough to say, 'If this is true, it is a good thing to sin because the reward will be greater,' or to hold sin to be less sinful, then beware! Should such a thought come it would be untrue, and would stem from the enemy of the very love that tells of all this comfort. ... I am quite clear about this: the more a soul sees this in the courtesy and love of our Lord God, the more [s]he hates to sin."

Julian warns against paying too much attention to the sins of others.

"To consider the sins of other people will produce a thick film over the eyes of our soul," she writes.

Equally dangerous is excessive worry over our own sinfulness.

Christ wants us "to hang on to him, and hold tight always, in whatever circumstances; for whether we are filthy or clean is all the same to his love."

But "our enemy and our own blind folly" accuse us: "'See,' they say. 'You are a wretched creature, a sinner, and a liar to boot. You do not keep God's commandments.' ... It looks to me as though sin begins here ... This makes us dread appearing before our courteous Lord."

Julian counsels boundless confidence in God's love, since "mercy and pity dwell thus with humankind until at last we come to heaven." TW

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New contributing editor

Virginia Ramey Mollenkott has agreed to become a contributing editor to *The Witness.*

Mollenkott, who teaches at William Paterson College in New Jersey, is the author of *Sensuous Spirituality: Out From Fundamentalism* and 10 other books.

She brings to *The Witness* a respect for and knowledge of scripture that stems from her childhood in a fundamentalist environment. She also contributes the perspective of a self-affirming woman who has struggled through the proscriptions, finding her own freedom and fidelity in God's love.

We will be announcing two other new contributing editors soon.

We give thanks for the long-term work of Barbara Harris, Carter Heyward and Manning Marable. Likewise, the support that Dorothee Sölle and Walter Wink have offered over the last three years has been invaluable. Both have assured us that their relationship to the magazine will be ongoing.

April issue:

Reclaiming land

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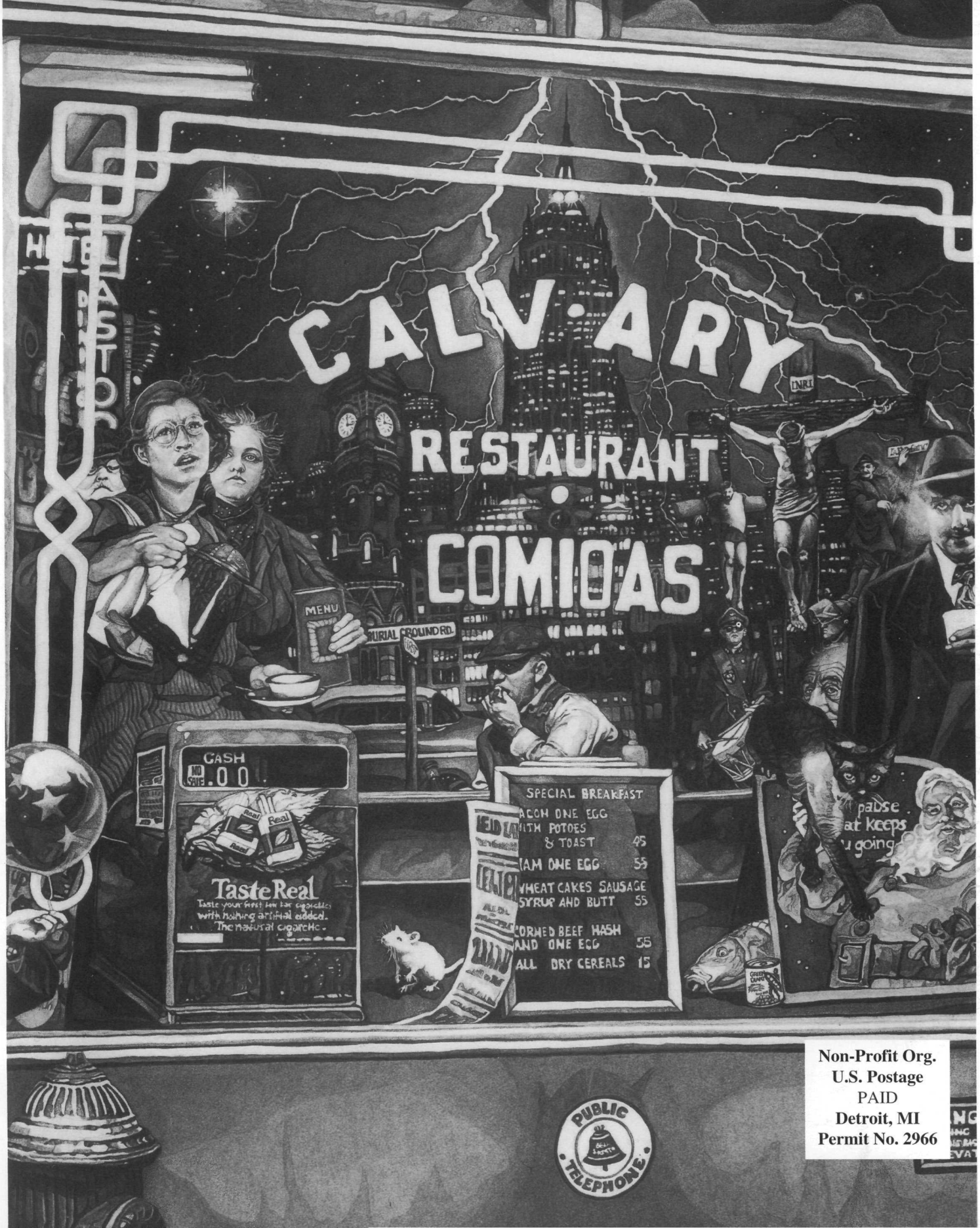

Looking for *the passion* in everyday life?

Marek Czarnecki

Dear Clergy of ECUSA,

We often hear of people dismissing *The Witness* as didactic, passé, predictable. These criticisms usually come from people who haven't examined a copy in years. Our staff seems to have the enormous task of standing on rooftops yelling, "The magazine is not exactly what it was 10 years ago. Thanks be to God!" There's little point in putting 1990s wine in the wineskins of the late 1970s. It surprises us that so many imagine that we would.

The Witness is a Left-wing voice in the church. You may be able to anticipate our stands on the many issues facing the church today. However, we avoid the "ism" words when possible; we move into critical issues through personal stories and through theology; we periodically publish the views of those who disagree with us; we can entertain criticism; and, we enjoy the quirky and the unpredictable.

In the last three years:

* We have taken *The Witness* to Trinity School for Ministry to test our views in a challenging, yet hospitable, environment.

* We have published articles by Jack Iker, Todd Wetzel, and Doug LeBlanc.

* We have been self-critical, examining the Left and where it is now. We have put away some sacred cows, allowing the pages of *The Witness* to reflect the concerns within our readership about abortion. We even found a way, during a conversation of board members, to respect everyone's views in a way that resulted in a policy statement that affirms abortion but gives the editor freedom to voice her reservations and the chair room to dissent from the majority opinion.

* During 1995, our Vital Signs section, which is devoted to news of the Episcopal Church, has examined the changes in church policy concerning clergy sexual abuse. The voices of Nancy Hopkins, Sally Johnson, Gene Robinson, Sue Hiatt and Mary Meader are among those included. Some voices suggest that new guidelines for clergy are intrusive and chilling, while others see them as an overdue accountability. The role of the Church Insurance Company and the implications of presumptions of power and powerlessness are all explored. In 1996, Vital Signs will not cover a theme, but will include reports and editorials on issues in the church, marking the flat lines and the new life.

The Left and the Right both understand that our society is in crisis. We may even agree on some of the causes. The proposed solutions are where we are likely to divide. Meanwhile, the tensions within the church are excruciating. And both halves of the church are having a hard time communicating the vitality of our faith to the world which is utterly captive to the commercial powers.

The Witness is feisty and opinionated. It is one ofvery few Left-wing Christian magazines published by women.

We walk an edge, we have a sense of humor, we draw on art and poetry, we respect the humanity of our adversaries, we love the church. We are worth your time and the cost of a subscription.

Art, poetry, letters, reflection and analysis combine to make *The Witness* lively and provocative. Won't you send $25 to subscribe and consider sending a gift subscription (for the same price) to someone you know (perhaps one of your own children or an adult child of a parishioner) who may be on the verge of leaving the church.

Send $25 to *The Witness*, 1249 Washington Blvd., Suite 3115, Detroit, MI 48226. Study guide packets, including eight copies of the magazine and study guide questions, are available for $25.

If you already subscribe to The Witness, *please pass this issue on to a friend.*

"The Witness *faces issues with profound honesty. More than unpredictable, the magazine is daring in its search for answers, in its search for the truth of God."*

— Pio Celestino, Harlingen, TX

"I am a former Episcopalian, now a Quaker — and your magazine is the remaining social justice journal we choose to get. You are doing spectacular work."

— Barbara Potter, West Buxton, ME

"The Witness *is unique: a popular Anglican journal with strong social and political convictions, well-produced, open to debate, and accessible to a wide range of people. I am delighted to be able to promote it in England where there is nothing of its calibre."*

— Kenneth Leech, London, England

"I haven't felt this good about a magazine in a long time!"

— Sue Ann O'Niell, Momence, IL

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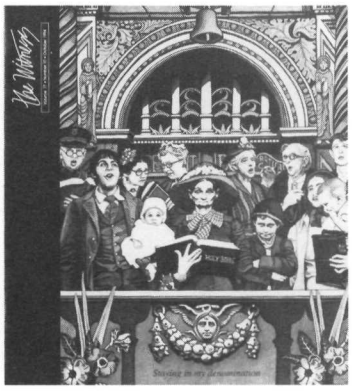
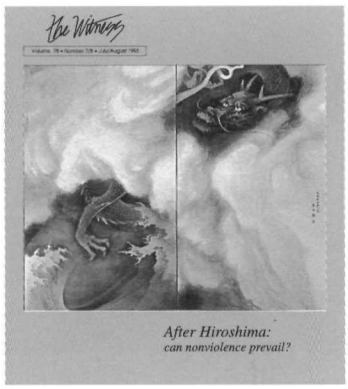
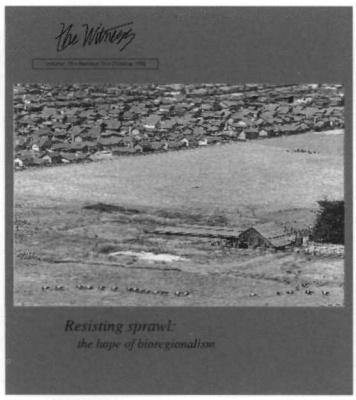
Douglas John Hall suggests that rigid rules of virtue are themselves sinful. Other writers include Ken Leech, Virginia Mollenkott, Doug LeBlanc, Edmond Browning, Todd Wetzel, Kim Byham and Herman Page.



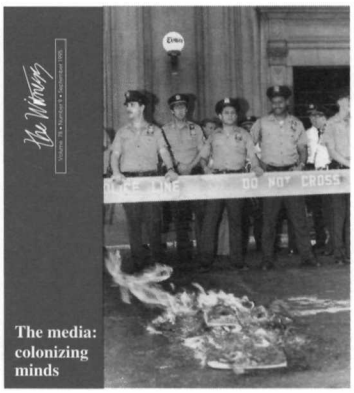
Progressives in the Episcopal, Orthodox, Baptist and Roman Catholic churches explain how they are able to remain within their denominations. Writers include, William Stringfellow, Demtra Jacquet, Ken Sehested and Edwina Gately.



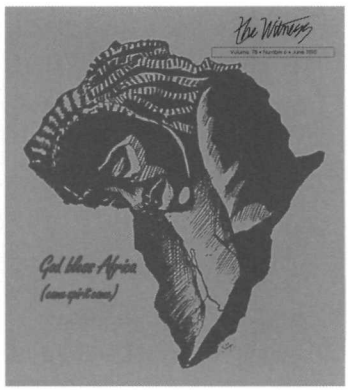
Writers describe the horror of the war in the Pacific and explore the ways that nonviolence can work toward social change. Writers include Dorothy Day, William Lanouette and Barbara Deming.



As suburban sprawl engulfs what's left of the natural settings we depend on to maintain our humanity, writers examine what the churches can do to help if they will think regionally. Writers: Gary Snyder, Franklin Vilas, Isaac Muringih, Julia Wells and Jim Berry.



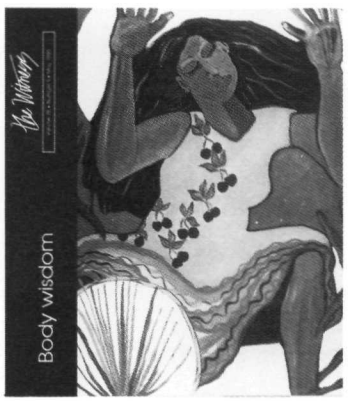
Assaulted by stories of violence and news articles that refuse to seriously examine the economics that shape our lives, readers are often unable to discern what could be done to improve society. Writers: Edward Herman, Camille Colatosti and William Stringfellow.



The songs, rituals and hopes of African indigenous Christian churches rise up in these pages. Included are the views of Brigalia Bam, Khotso Makhulu, Titus Presler and eight African priests in the U.S.

Rosemary Radford Ruether sets the stage by asking, Can women stay in the church? She proposes that women must fight for the soul of the church. Post-Christian women in this issue say it is too late.

The Witness presents its conviction that vigorous and opinionated exchange is good for the church, far better than murmured discontent. Writers: Steve Charleston, Walter Bruegemann, Virginia Mollenkott.



Many people of faith are attempting to draw a consciousness of their bodies into their experience and their prayer, rejecting a left-brain, analytical approach to life. Writers: Ched Myers, Michael Meade and Sy Safransky.

Every issue of *The Witness* includes art, poetry, reviews and profiles as well as articles on the theme. We are committed to including voices and artwork from many cultures. Created in 1917, *The Witness* is owned by the Episcopal Church Publishing Company. It is an independent journal that does not receive national church monies.