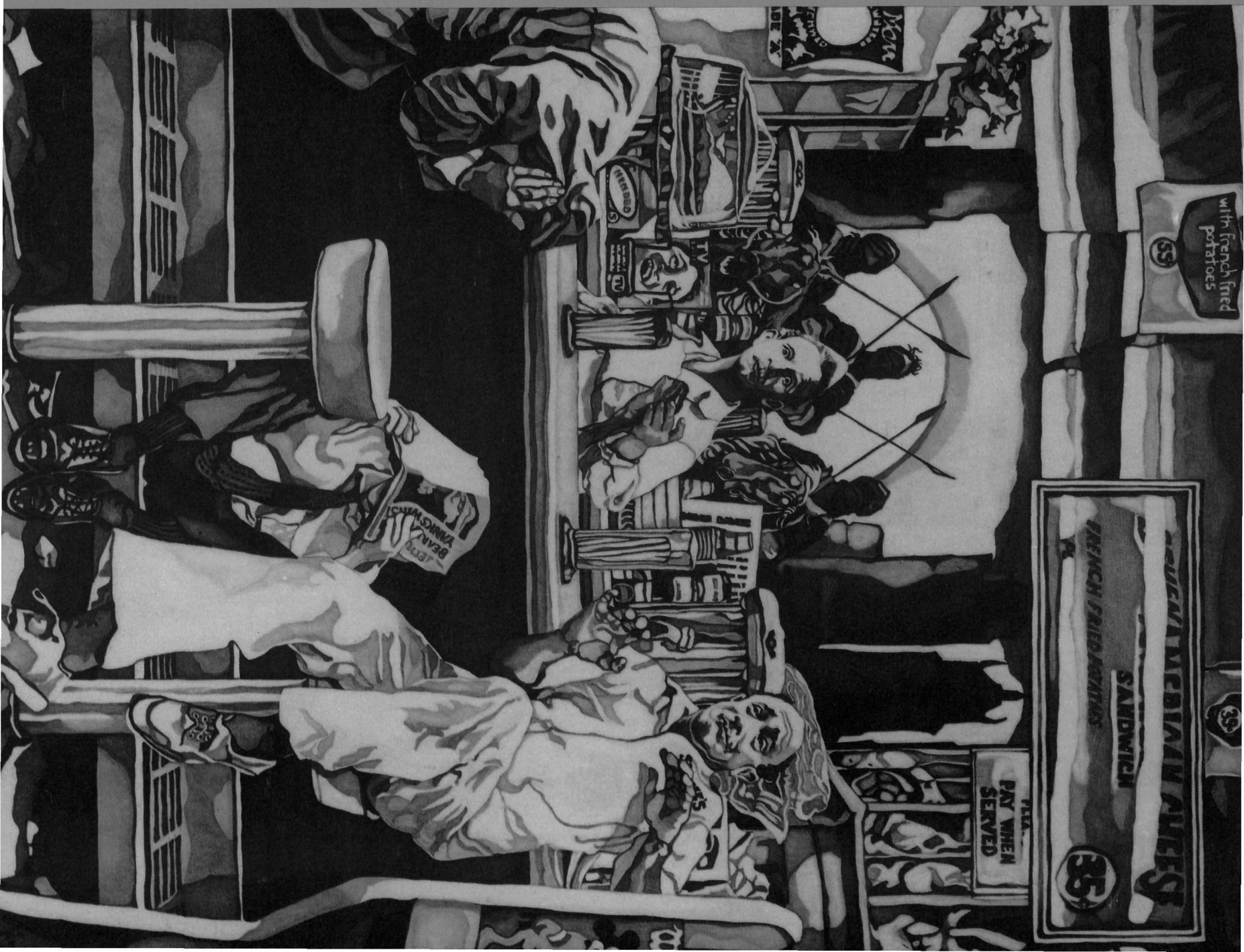
The Christian Right: What is there to fear?

The Witness

Volume 79 • Number 10 • October 1996



Family reunions

LOVED YOUR ISSUE ON FAMILIES. Nancy and I leave Monday — with my parents, sister and aunt — to visit the tiny village of "Sehested" in northern Germany, near the Danish border. It will be our first visit. We didn't even know it existed until a few years ago, when my Dad started doing serious family research. The only other time Dad was in Europe was to participate in the initial wave of the D-Day invasion.

Ken Sehested
Baptist Peace Fellowship
Lake Junaluska, N.C.

WHAT GOOD TIMING! Your issue on Family Reunions arrived at a time when I was preparing to attend three reunions this summer. I read with so much interest all of the articles and could relate and relate and relate.

It was wonderful to read the definition of family in so many different ways.

Having been a subscriber for at least 15 years, I have retained every copy because they all carry such good messages and information. How anyone in the Episcopal Church cannot appreciate your kind of coverage is beyond me. I find it so refreshing!

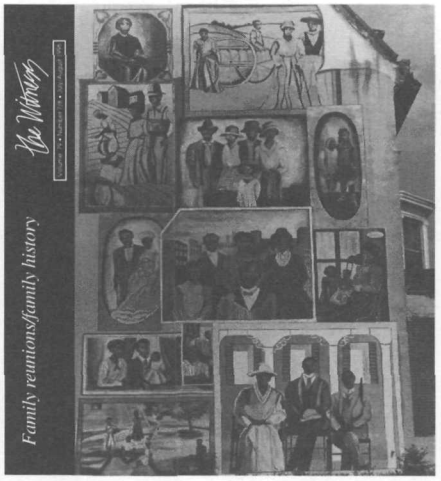
Inez L. Harris
Yankton, S.D.

THE WITNESS has consistently done a fine job, but Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann's account of tracing her roots was surpassing.

Bill Rankin
Episcopal Divinity School
Cambridge, MA

Hospitals

I APPRECIATED YOUR THOUGHT-provoking articles in the June issue about health care. I was pleased to read about Grace Cottage near my home. (The man in the back row of the back cover photo is Archer Mayor, a



local novelist who writes mystery thrillers set in this part of the state.)

John C. Morris
Wilmington, VT

Fundraising

I DO NOT VERY OFTEN SERIOUSLY wish that I were rich, but this is one time that I do. I would give you a million dollars if I could — and probably ruin the magazine.

Not to worry— that is not an imminent danger you need be concerned about.

Thank you again and again for this splendid magazine.

Sara Duren
Atlanta, GA

On the conservative side

I HAVE SUBSCRIBED to *The Witness* for 10 or 15 years and where the publication has ventured into areas involving God, Gospel, Man, and Divine-Human relations, I have enthusiastically disagreed ... especially during the Barbara Harris years.

I am amazed, however, that at least on the Conservative side, there are apparently so few who would welcome a magazine so opposed to their convictions. This is no way to get an intelligent handle on controversy.

R.E. Thrumston
San Diego, CA

Witness praise

I ALWAYS READ *The Witness* in one or two sittings, then savor it for weeks, dipping back in and reading the best parts over.

Lynda Foster
Adelynrood, MA

THE WITNESS IS WONDERFUL as always. I'm still enjoying the issue on silence. My young cousin wrote the enclosed. To think a nine year old has such ideas and hope!

Margaret Howard
Middletown, N.Y.

What if nobody cared about the color
differences between each other,
It could happen.
What if everybody loved each other, and
there was peace, not war.
It could happen.
What if women did the same job as men,
and could get paid the same,
It could happen.
What if there were no drugs in the world,
It could happen.
What if there were no gangs in the world,
It could happen.
What if everyone had a home,
It could happen.
What if there were no starving people,
It could happen.
If we could all just put our heads together
and work as one.
If we could stop the hatred and war — and
think more toward peace and love,
what a better place the world would be.
The sick wouldn't be afraid.
The hungry would have food.
The homeless would have shelter.
Color differences would be as beautiful as a
rainbow.
If we would all work together
IT COULD REALLY HAPPEN.

— Lindsey Steinwand, age 9

Renewal letter

I AM MOVED TO THANK YOU for the best renewal letter I have ever seen. It's good to be treated intelligently and truthfully. Keep up the enlightened work of *The Witness*. Not only do I read each issue carefully but also my friends and companions and I have many

good conversations inspired by something they or I have read there.

Betty Sawyer
Alfred, ME

YOUR LETTER IS WORTHY of comment and praise for its common sense and clarity. Thank you. I have written other worthwhile but persistent causes and begged them to send me one renewal notice a year. If they don't, I'll drop them from my list. It is a waste of money, paper, etc. as you said so well.

Ann McElroy
Cupertino, CA

Classifieds

Vocations

Contemplating religious life? Members of the Brotherhood and the Companion Sisterhood of Saint Gregory are Episcopalians, clergy and lay, married and single. To explore a contemporary Rule of Life, contact: The Director of Vocations, Brotherhood of St. Gregory, Saint Bartholomew's Church, 82 Prospect Street, White Plains, NY 10606-3499.

Recovery ministries

Recovery Ministries publishes a newsletter and recovery literature, sponsors diocesan commissions, and holds an annual gathering and celebration of recovery. Memberships are needed to support this work ($25 individual, $100 parish). Send contributions to Recovery Ministries of the Episcopal Church, P.O. Box 6594, Helena, MT 59604.

Vestment exchange

Donate unneeded vestments and other liturgical articles for use in mission churches. Contact Eileen Elias Freeman, 908-232-5240 or 800-862-1350; fax 908-233-1339; e-mail EileenEF@aol.com.

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.

Christmas gift offers!

The Witness, a gift subscription — Why not send *The Witness* — a simple gift — to someone you love? To show our appreciation, we'll send a back issue of your choice to either of you. Just send $25 for each gift to *The Witness.*

One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism: A Conversation with Adversaries — The *Witness* video documenting our visit to Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry, a seminary noted for its focus on Scripture, conservatism and mission work. This six-segment video shows both constituencies working to understand one another. Panelists are Chester Talton, suffragan of L.A., Mary Hays, Scripture professor at Trinity, Virginia Mollenkott, English professor at Paterson College, and Bill Frey, retired bishop and dean of Trinity. Workshops are led by Verna Dozier, Butch Naters Gamarra, Mary Meader, Quentin Kolb and Andrew McThenia. The video costs $40.

My Story's On: Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives, 212 pages — This amazing collection of women's stories, edited by Paula Ross, includes stories and poems from women with children, women in jail, women in crisis and women finding their freedom. Copies are available for $6.

Catalogues of M.O.R. Stamps can be purchased for $2 sent to Julie A. Wortman at *The Witness.*

Any of these gifts can be mailed directly to the recipient with a card or shipped to you. Please send a check made out to *The Witness* with your address and phone number, include the address and phone number of the recipients if you want the gift shipped to them by us. *The Witness*, 1249 Washington Blvd., Suite 3115, Detroit, MI 48226-1822.

Back issues, possible gifts in themselves, are available for $3 each. Currently available:

Africa, come spirit come, 6/95
Alternative ways of doing church, 9/94
Ancestors, 11/93
"Be ye perfect", 3/93
Birthing in the face of a dragon 12/91
Body wisdom, 5/95
Christians and animal rights, 10/93
Dialogue, 4/94
Disabilities, 6/94
Family history, 7/96
Godly sex, 5/93
Hiroshima and nonviolence, 7/95
Holy matrimony, 12/95
Hospitals, 6/96
In need of a labor movement 9/96
In the church's intere$t, 3/96
Is it ever okay to lie? 4/96
American faces of Islam, 5/96
The New Party, 11/95
Resurrecting land, 4/95
Silence, 1/96
Staying in my denomination, 10/94
The Christian Right 10/96
The hope of bioregionalism, 10/95
Women's spirituality, 7/94

The Witness

Volume 79 • Number 10 • October 1996

Cover: Ubiquitous Apocalypse *by Dierdre Luzwick, Cambridge, Wis.*

Back Cover: Family values *by Ron English of N.Y.C.*

The Witness offers a fresh and sometimes irreverent view of our world, illuminated by faith, Scripture and experience. Since 1917, *The Witness* has been advocating for those denied systemic power as well as celebrating those people who have found ways to "live humanly in the midst of death." We push boundaries, err on the side of inclusion and enjoy bringing our views into tension with orthodox Christianity. *The Witness'* roots are Episcopalian, but our readership is ecumenical. For simplicity, we place news specific to Episcopalians in our Vital Signs section. *The Witness* is committed to brevity for the sake of readers who find little time to read, but can enjoy an idea, a poem or a piece of art.

Manuscripts: We welcome multiple submissions. Given our small staff, writers and artists receive a response only when we are able to publish. Poetry can be sent directly to Leslie Williams, 2504 Gulf Ave., Midland, Tex., 79705.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: $25 per year, $3.00 per copy. Foreign subscriptions add $5 per year. CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Third Class mail **does not** forward. Call or send your new mailing address to *The Witness*.

Office: 1249 Washington Blvd., Suite 3115, Detroit, Mich., 48226-1822. Telephone: (313) 962-2650. Fax number: (313) 962-1012. E-mail: The_Witness@ecunet.org.

Facing down our fears

by Julie A. Wortman

Evangelical Christians didn't begin getting politically active until 20 years ago, when significant numbers started registering to vote. In 1980 they helped put Ronald Reagan into the White House. Today the "Christian" or "Religious" Right's ability to get Republican candidates elected to state and local office has made them key players in setting that party's political agenda. In fact, the "family values" terms of the religious cultural war that Pat Buchanan declared on this country in 1992 have been a touchstone of public debate ever since.

Frankly, I can't fault the Christian Right's rapid rise to political power. It has shown the will and the discipline to effectively play the game that passes for democratic process in this country.

But it makes me nervous. As Sara Diamond points out in her piece on the Christian Right's dominionist theology (p.8), the Christian theocracy this powerful political constituency is aiming to "reconstruct" would likely condemn me to death or imprisonment, if not for my anti-capitalist, pro-choice, eco-feminist views, certainly for my "practicing" homosexuality. Even my straight Christian friends who stand on the "pro-life" side of the abortion issue would not be immune to such a government's censure — for their commitment to nonviolence, their activist opposition to the death penalty and nuclear weaponry, for their practice of Zen meditation.

Knowing how best to respond requires spending time considering what those who would dismiss my being and beliefs as blasphemy think — and why.

Contributions by Virginia Mollenkott, Michael Lerner and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen have helped free me from the usual stereotypes. I'm left feeling a lot of sympathy, in fact, for the perspective that inclines many Christians to the Right. I too, want to live a life of meaning grounded in God's reality. I, too, live in expectation of the Second Coming and the promised judgment on the social/political order. I, too, believe that Satan is at large and must be resisted.

This is precisely what frightens me.

The motivation to engage the fallen powers and principalities in my case and in theirs is the same, and I recognize its power. But I feel revulsion at the uses to which the Religious Right has put the Gospel. I agree with New Testament scholar Reta Finger (p. 30): I cannot comprehend a reading of Scripture that does not lead to a deep critique of this country's economic/political system, a system in which, according to Holly Skar writing in *Z Magazine*, "the top 1 percent of families have an astonishing 42 percent of American wealth" and "average CEO compensation comes to more than $72,000 a week."

And I do not recognize, let alone embrace, a Gospel of glorified atonement or "righteous" violence and social domination.

I want so much to stand in complete opposition to the Religious Right's agenda, in fact, that I find myself shying away from speaking out of an explicitly Christian frame of reference. But this is the only frame of reference that gives me sufficient clarity about what I see happening in the world to empower my resistance.

I don't believe I am alone in this. As Dorothee Sölle reminds us (p. 24), left-of-center Christians were coopted by this very contradiction as fascism swept Europe before World War II. I fear this moment in history is much the same. Real deprivations, real economic inequities, real immoralities and, for good or ill, real losses of privilege abound. And stadiums are full of earnest people willing to be led by those who can offer an authoritative antidote.

The powers are not overlooking the opportunity.

I'm grateful for Christian leaders who are publicly disputing the Christian Right's claim of religious mandate. Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning's testimony in favor of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act amendment to the Defense of Marriage Act last month is a case in point. "To disrespect the dignity of any human being through discrimination," Browning said, "is to disrespect our Creator."

But the rest of us also have a powerful resistance to offer. Some serious Bible study in the mode of base community would go a long way to countering the narrow, misappropriated "biblical" tyranny that would insinuate itself into this society if it could. It is time to face down the fear of insufficient distinction between our Gospel and theirs, our theology and theirs, our Christian history and theirs and immerse ourselves more deeply in all three.

Digging deeply might also help us find something else we badly need — a clearer sense of the society the Bible *does* call us to create. TW

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

Marching ever Rightward

by Katie Sherrod

In 1994, the Texas Republican Party woke up to find itself taken over by the Religious Right. School boards and county governments across the state were discovering the same thing.

By 1996, Texas ranked fourth in attempts to pull "unChristian" books from libraries and public school classrooms, according to People for the American Way, and Republican Party officials found themselves in the astonishing position of having to negotiate with the Religious Right to get Republican Senators Phil Gramm and Kay Bailey Hutchison accepted as delegates to the party's National Convention.

This intermingling of religion and politics is not new in Texas, the Buckle in the Bible Belt. For decades, Southern Baptists dictated what the Texas Legislature would do on issues such as liquor-by-the-drink and Sunday closing laws. As the state became more urban, the Baptists' political power waned. But it never completely died out. As urban ills such as drugs and gangs soared, people's fears also soared. The state's conservative religious political history provided fertile ground for these seeds of fear.

What *is* new is that Episcopalians — who historically looked down their noses at religious conservatives — have begun to flirt with the Religious Right.

Our diocese's brief history made it ripe for seduction. In 1982, the Diocese of Fort Worth was formed out of the western half of the Diocese of Dallas. Dallas Bishop Donald Davies became the new diocese's first bishop. Given Davies' conservatism, his commitment to an exclusively male priesthood, and the number of like-minded male priests already clustered in the western half of the Dallas diocese, Fort Worth was ripe for plucking. Ignatius' statement that "Wherever the Bishop appears, there let the people be ..." was to become the mantra of Davies and his successors, Clarence Pope and Jack Iker. They embraced the idea of an Imperial Episcopacy as a bastion of orthodoxy protecting an uninformed laity from an apostate National Church.

As Jack Iker and his supporters struggle to maintain a diocese untainted by female priests, inclusive and expansive language, and by "practicing homosexual" priests, the "muscular Christianity" of the Religious Right draws them like a siren song. "Onward Christian Soldiers" seems to be their favorite hymn, and The Church Militant the image they most cherish. The unabashed androcentrism of the fundamentalists, the clear-cut "biblically ordained" roles for men and women, the patriarchal hierarchy — all this already is embraced by the leadership of this diocese.

Bishop Iker and several priests trekked off to Atlanta along with 40,000 other pastors to a Promise Keepers rally where they shared grape juice and wafers with evangelical and fundamentalist ministers from across the country. Plans are being made for a large Episcopal presence from Fort Worth at the upcoming PK rally in Dallas.

Promise Keepers, and other manifestations of the Religious Right, reassure them that men are in charge because that's the way God Himself wants it. And while PK at least acknowledges that racism is a sin, sexism isn't even on their radar scope. In their universe, what we see as sexism, Promise Keepers see as The Natural Order Ordained by God. And heterosexism is a virtue.

This is comforting to our diocesan leaders, who claim to feel unwelcome and shunned at General Convention, House of Bishops meetings, etc. Wearing the mantle of martyrdom to the cause of orthodoxy is great for recruiting purposes, but it must be nice to take it off every now and then and just hang out with like-minded guys, cheering for Jesus in a football stadium. However, there *are* limits. No one is suggesting the Episcopal faithful give up drinking alcohol.

When the laity see the few who do speak up in protest being demonized, labeled "unChristian troublemakers," "bad priests," and apostates, the incentive to be quiet is high. Acquiescence by silence is easier since overt attacks on the ordination of women has given way to hysteria over homosexuality, always an issue ripe for fear-mongering.

So, while the leadership marches ever rightward, the isolation increases. Talk of "taking the diocese out of the Episcopal Church" continues. Our bishop will not recognize female priests or bishops and has announced that we are "out of communion" with dioceses that ordain "practicing homosexuals."

What other dioceses now take for granted — the ministry of female priests or bishops and inclusive liturgies — is viewed as evil, or at best, risky. Congregationalism is on the rise, people are drifting away, and respect for local and national leadership decreases.

But none of that matters. Our diocesan leaders are lost in admiration — the Religious Right has pulled off in the Republican Party exactly what they hope to pull off in the National Church, or at least in General Convention. Like the Republican Party platform, there is no room for tolerance here. TW

Katie Sherrod is a producer/commentator for PBS and NPR outlets for north Texas, and is vice-president of the Episcopal Women's Caucus.

The law of the Lord is perfect

The law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure and gives
wisdom to the innocent.

The statutes of the Lord are just and rejoice the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is clear and gives
light to the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is clean and endures for ever;
the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous
altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold, more than much
fine gold,
sweeter far than honey, than honey in the comb.

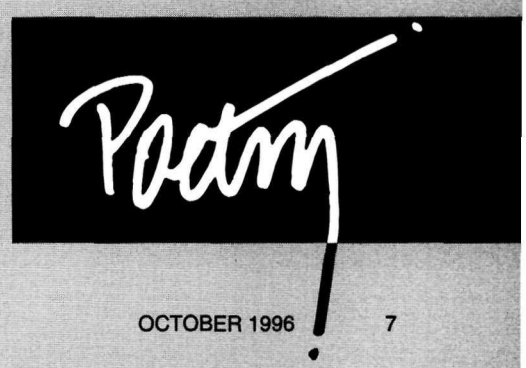
By them also is your servant enlightened,
and in keeping them there is great reward.

Who can tell how often he offends?
cleanse me from my secret faults.

Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins;
let them not get dominion over me;
then shall I be whole and sound,
and innocent of a great offense.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart
be acceptable in your sight,
O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

— Psalm 19: 7-14



Aiming to take dominion

by Sara Diamond

The political situation today is that the Republican Party cannot win elections without the Christian Right in many parts of the country, raising the question of just how much power the movement hopes to amass. Ralph Reed of the Christian Coalition says his organization wants nothing more than a representative voice in government, "a place at the table," as he puts it. Other movement leaders are more sweeping in their calls to make ours a Christian nation, a Kingdom of God on earth.

As we assess the Christian Right's future prospects, the movement's political theology is one big piece of the puzzle. Included in the movement are people with diverse viewpoints on the degree and means through which Christians ought to "take dominion" over every aspect of society. The motto of the secular Heritage Foundation, taken from the title of an influential conservative book of the 1940s, is "ideas have consequences." Yet in the past few years, with the growth in public awareness of the Christian Right, the movement's variant forms of dominion theology have attracted only scant attention.

Most of the attention has come from a new crop of researchers working on the Christian Right. Most of these people are political liberals who seek to shore up the prevailing "two-party" system by portraying their opponents — in this case, those of the Right — as aberrations on the U.S. political landscape. Liberals' writing about the Christian Right's take-over plans has generally taken the form of conspiracy theory. Instead of analyzing the subtle ways in which political ideas take hold within movements and why, the liberal conspiracy theorists use a guilt-by-association technique.

Conspiracy theorizing about the Christian Right's "secret" agenda also involves highlighting the hate-mongering and bizarre ideas of a handful of Christian Right players while neglecting the broad popularity of dominion theology.

A mandate to take charge

The Dominionist idea is that Christians alone are biblically mandated to occupy all secular institutions until Christ returns — and there is no consensus on when that might be. Dominionist thinking precludes coalitions between believers and unbelievers, which is why many Christian rightists will have a hard time compromising with some of the very same Republicans they help to elect.

The Dominionist idea is that Christians alone are biblically mandated to occupy all secular institutions until Christ returns.

The idea of taking dominion over secular society gained widespread currency with the 1981 publication of evangelical philosopher Francis Schaeffer's book, *A Christian Manifesto*. The book sold 290,000 copies in its first year and it remains one of the movement's most frequently cited texts. In the 1960s and 1970s, Schaeffer and his wife Edith ran a retreat center in Switzerland, where young American "Jesus freaks" came to study the Bible and learn how to apply Schaeffer's dominion theology to the political scene back home.

In *A Christian Manifesto*, Schaeffer's argument is simple. The United States began as a nation rooted in biblical principles. But as society became more pluralistic,with each new wave of immigrants, proponents of the new philosophy of secular humanism gradually came to dominate debate on policy issues. Since humanists place human progress, not God, at the center of their considerations, they pushed American culture in all manner of ungodly directions, the most visible results of which included legalized abortion and the secularization of the public schools. At the end of *A Christian Manifesto*, Schaeffer calls for Christians to use civil disobedience to restore biblical morality, which explains Schaeffer's popularity with groups like Operation Rescue.

A Christian theocracy of Old Testament law

Reconstructionism is the most intellectually grounded, though esoteric, brand of dominion theology. Its leading proponent has been Rousas John Rushdoony, an obscure figure within the Christian Right. Rushdoony founded the Chalcedon Foundation in California in the mid-1960s. One of the Foundation's early associates was Gary North who eventually married Rushdoony's daughter. North had been active within secular libertarian and anti-Communist organizations, particularly those with an anti-statist bent.

Rushdoony and North had a falling out

Sara Diamond is the author of *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right* (South End Press, 1989); *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (The Guilford Press, 1995); and *Facing the Wrath: Confronting the Right in Dangerous Times* (Common Courage Press, 1996). She teaches sociology at California State University at Hayward. A longer version of this article appears in *Facing the Wrath*. Photographer **Jim West** lives in Detroit.

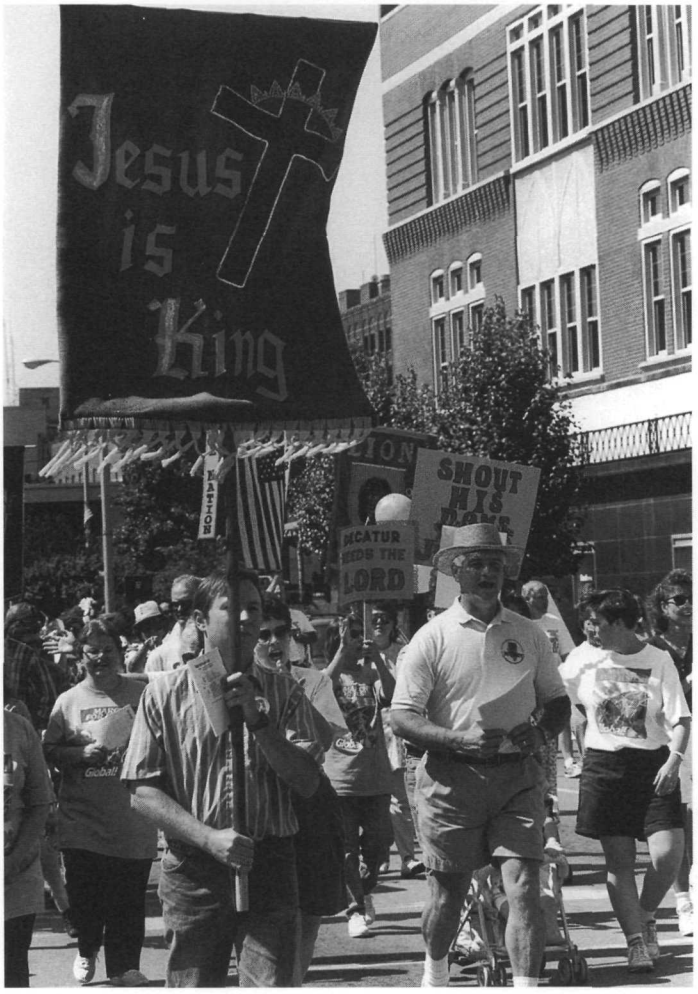
and ceased collaboration years ago, North starting his own think tank, the Institute for Christian Economics in Tyler, Texas. Rushdoony, North and about a half dozen other reconstructionist writers have published countless books and journals advocating post-millenialism (the kingdom of God must be established on earth now because Christ will return only after Christians have been in charge for 1,000 years) and "theonomy" or the application of God's law to all spheres of everyday life.

It was Rushdoony's seminal 1973 tome *The Institutes of Biblical Law* that articulated Reconstructionists' vision of a theocracy in which Old Testament Law would be reinstated in modern society. Old Testament law classified a wide range of sins as punishable by death; these included not only murder and rape but also adultery, incest, homosexuality, witchcraft, incorrigible delinquency by youth and even blasphemy. In the Reconstructionists' vision of a millennial or "kingdom" society, there would be only local governments; there would be no central administrative state to collect property taxes, nor to provide education or other welfare services.

Aside from Rushdoony and North, Reconstructionism boasts only a few other prolific writers, none of whom are major figures within the Christian Right. They are quoted more often in liberal reports than in the Christian Right's own literature.

The unabashed advocacy of a Christian theocracy has insured a limited following for the most explicit of the Reconstructionists. Perhaps even more than the punitive legal code they propose, it is the Reconstructionists' religion of Calvinism that makes them unlikely to appeal to most evangelicals.

Calvinism arose in Europe centuries ago in part as a reaction to Roman Catholicism's heavy emphasis on priestly authority and on salvation through acts of penance. One of the classic works of sociology, Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, links the rise of Calvinism to the needs of budding capitalists to judge their own economic success as a sign of their preordained salvation. Calvinists justified their accumulation of wealth, even at the expense of others, on the grounds that they were somehow destined to prosper. It is no surprise that such notions still find resonance within the Christian Right.



March for Jesus in Decatur, Ill. Jim West/Impact Visuals

Conflict with evangelicals

The hitch comes in the Calvinists' unyielding predestinarianism, the cornerstone of Reconstructionism and something at odds with the world view of evangelical Christians. The problem is that evangelicals (a category including Pentecostal charismatics and fundamentalist Baptists) believe that God's will works in conjunction with free human will. Evangelicals believe strongly that humans freely choose sin or salvation and that those already converted have the duty to go out and offer the choice they have made to others. Calvinism, in contrast, undercuts the whole motivation for missionary work and it is the missionary zeal to redeem sinners that motivates much of the Christian Right's political activism.

Calvinism is an essentially reckless doctrine. If God has decided what's going to happen, then the Dominionists do not have to take responsibility for their actions. (They can kill abortion doctors "knowing" it is the right thing to do.) Evangelicals, even those on the Right, still believe they as individuals are capable of error.

'Only the righteous shall rule'

Evangelicals do find appealing, however, the views of David Barton of WallBuilders, Inc. From Aledo, Tex., Barton has successfully mass marketed a version of dominion theology that has made his lectures, books and tapes among the hot-

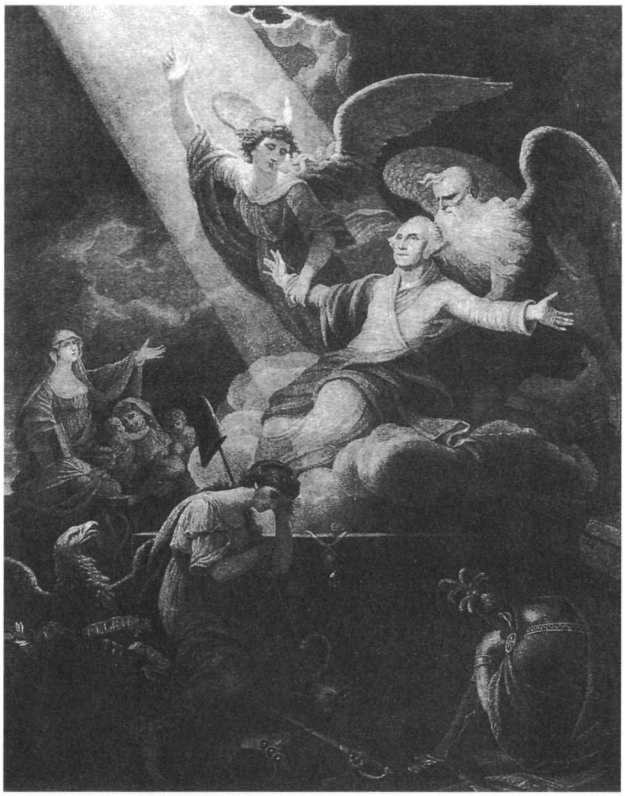
test properties in the born-again business. Barton's pitch is that, with the possible exception of Benjamin Franklin, the Founding Fathers were all Evangelicals who intended to make this a Christian nation.

Crowds of home schoolers and the Christian Coalition go wild with applause for Barton's performances. With an overhead projector, he flashes slides of the Founding Fathers and reels off selected quotes from them saying things like "only the righteous shall rule." For the years following the Supreme Court's 1962 and 1963 decisions against public school prayer, his charts and graphs show statistical declines in SAT scores and rising rates of teenage promiscuity, drug abuse and other bad behavior. Apparently no one has ever explained to Barton that a sequence of unrelated events does not add up to a cause and effect relationship.

Barton's bottom line is that only "the righteous" should occupy public office. This is music to the ears of Christian Right audiences. To grasp Barton's brand of dominion theology, unlike with reconstructionism, one does not need a seminary degree. Barton's pseudo history fills a need most Americans have to know more about our country's past. His direct linkage of the deified Founding Fathers with contemporary social problems cuts through the evangelicals' theological sectarianism and unites them in a feasible project. They may not be able to take dominion over the whole earth or even agree about when Jesus will return, but they sure can go home and back a godly candidate for city council, or run themselves. Barton tells his audiences that they personally have an important role to play in history and that is what makes his dominion theology popular.

What do conservatives want?

Barton's message flies in the face of the Christian Coalition's public claims about wanting only its fair share of political power. In his new book, *Politically Incorrect*, Coalition director Ralph Reed writes: "What do religious conservatives really want? They want a place at the table in the conversation we call democracy. Their commitment to pluralism includes a place for faith among the many other competing interests in society." Yet the Coalition's own national convention in 1994 opened with a plenary speech by D. James Kennedy who echoed the Reconstructionist line when he said that "true Christian citizenship" includes a cultural mandate to "take dominion over all things as vice-regents of God."



***Sacred to the Memory of Washington* by John J. Barralet, c. 1800** Historical Society of Philadelphia

Barton's pitch is that the Founding Fathers were all evangelicals who intended to make this a Christian nation.

Who is telling the truth about the Christian Right's bid for power, Ralph Reed or the popular Dominionists who speak at Christian Coalition gatherings? Liberal critics of the Christian Right would have us believe that Reed and Pat Robertson are just plain lying when they say they want to work hand-in-hand, like good pluralists, with non-Christians in government. To bolster the "stealth" thesis, liberals have to resort to conspiracy theory: Barton and Kennedy spoke at the conference, so Reed must secretly agree with them.

A better explanation is that the Christian Right, like other mass movements, is a bundle of internal contradictions which work themselves out in the course of real political activism. Ideas have consequences, but ideas also have causes, rooted in interests and desires. The Christian Right is in a state of tension and flux over its own mission — part movement to resist and roll back even moderate change, part reactionary wing of prevailing Republicanism. The Christian Right wants to take dominion and collaborate with the existing political-economic system at the same time. Liberal critics, who also endorse the ruling system, can recognize only the Christian Right's takeover dimension. Radicals can see that the dominion project is dangerous because it is, in part, business as usual. TW

Hebron's wheat harvest

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), an initiative among Mennonite and Brethren congregations and Friends meetings, are being sent into Hebron where the expansion of Jewish settlements threatens Palestinian lives.

Dianne Roe and Anne Montgomery accompanied Mosallam Ali Shreateh, his brothers, and their families from Yatta to his wheat fields next to the Israeli settlement of Susia last May. The settlers had previously seized a section of this land to plant trees, had poisoned another section, grazed sheep on the growing wheat, and threatened Palestinians attempting to work in their own fields.

They report: "When we reached the field adjacent to the trees, a group of settlers approached, filmed us, and were soon followed by two soldiers who, after a lengthy argument, informed the brothers that the plot of land now belonged to the settlement. When the family began harvesting the wheat next to it, two other soldiers arrived and shouted at the Palestinians, threatening to shoot us all if we did not leave in five minutes. We moved to a field farther from the settlement. Shortly the same two soldiers reappeared and repeated their five-minute warning which was ignored. For the next two hours, men, women and children gathered as much wheat as possible to save it from the burning sun."

—Christian Peacemaker Teams

P. O. Box 6508 Chicago, IL 60680; 312-455-1199; e-mail: cpt@igc.apc.org.

Mordechai Vanunu

Demonstrations throughout the world marked the tenth anniversary of Mordechai Vanunu's incarceration in Israel on September 30. Vanunu, a former Israeli nuclear technician, released information about Israel's secret nuclear weapons program to the *London Sunday Times* in 1986 and is now serving an 18-year sentence in solitary confinement in a cell measuring six by nine feet.

— U.S. Campaign to Free M. Vanunu
Madison, Wis.

AFL-CIO President John Sweeney (in suspenders) was arrested with 19 others just before Labor Day outside the offices of the Detroit Newspapers. The group protested the continuing strike that has idled 2,000 union newspaper workers for 14 months. Four presidents of the six striking unions also were arrested. Rudy Simons

World Court examines nukes

Alyn Ware, executive director of the Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy, presented the legal counsel of the U.S. Department of Defense with sunflowers following the July ruling of the International Court of Justice that the threat or use of nuclear weapons is generally illegal and that states have an obligation to negotiate the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Ware referred to the action by U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry who planted sunflowers on a former Ukrainian missile site on June 4, the day Ukraine officially gave up nuclear weapons.

Legal challenges to nuclear weapons are critical because despite massive international protests France has resumed nuclear testing in the South Pacific. In addition, France, China, the U.S., the U.K. and Russia continue to threaten to use their nuclear arsenals which could encourage other countries to develop nuclear weapons. (Contributions can be sent to Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy, 666 Broadway, Rm 625, N.Y., N.Y. 10012.)

— Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy, N.Y., N.Y.

Security issues

Sabotaged or not, TWA Flight 800 raises security issues because it evokes painful memories of Pan Am 103, Oklahoma City and the recent terrorist bombing of Saudi Arabia.

Security specialists say more sophisticated technologies are ready for airport use, but they fear a public outcry against their intrusiveness.

New screening technologies include imaging methods that can see through clothing — and produce an image of the body underneath — by exposing a passenger to low-level radiation. Alternative chemical trace-detection techniques involve person-to-person contact or direct contact between trace-chemical sensors and passengers.

— Aviation Week & Space Technology, 7/22/1996

Short takes

A time to bear witness

by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott

Fundamentalism as a world view only really began as a movement in the 1920s. The term was coined in 1921 by Curtis Lee Laws, a Baptist, to identify someone who stood for what Laws called "the historic doctrines of the Christian faith" — as opposed to modern religious liberalism.

The conservative Inter-Varsity publication, the *New Dictionary of Theology*, defines a fundamentalist in several ways: 1) an evangelical Protestant (that's not accurate as far as I'm concerned); 2) an anti-modernist, meaning somebody who subscribes to the traditional, supernaturalistic beliefs of biblical Christianity; and 3) someone militant in this anti-modernism and militant in anti-secularism. So most recently what has been under fire from fundamentalists like Pat Robertson has been the Supreme Court's ban on prayer in public schools, any tendency to liberalize laws or attitudes towards homosexuality and any tendencies toward equal partnership between women and men in church and society. This latter part is especially focussed on taking away women's reproductive freedom.

Historically — that is, since the 1920s — fundamentalism has been the term to refer to those who hold the "five fundamentals" of the supposedly historic Christian faith: the miracles of Jesus taken literally; the virgin birth of Jesus taken literally; the substitutionary atonement of Jesus (which was not important to the church until Anselm developed the idea in the early 12th century); the bodily resurrection of Jesus; and the word-for-word inspiration of the Bible.

The fundamentals

Even before fundamentalism had the name, two California oil millionaires, Lyman and Calvin Stewart, had begun to spread the movement by funding 12 booklets called *The Fundamentals*. Between 1910 and 1915 they mailed these to more than three million pastors and other Protestant Christian leaders. The booklets denied Darwinian evolution, attacked the higher criticism of the Bible and affirmed the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. They also affirmed the five fundamentals. The rest of the booklets took issue with Roman Catholicism, socialism, atheism, Mormonism — and, above all, they took issue with naturalism. So, for instance, anybody who would explain Jesus' walking on water by suggesting that maybe there was a sandbar would be accused of gross unbelief.

But as somebody who came out of the fundamentalist camp, I want to say that the literalism is exceedingly selective. I'll just give one illustration: the Hebrew prophet, Joel, who said that God's spirit speaks and says "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh and your sons and your daughters will prophesy and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids, in those days will I pour out my spirit" (Joel 2:28). Fundamentalists accept the Book of Joel as part of the verbally inspired scriptures, but they don't take Joel's words literally; in fact they *do not* believe that God's spirit could be poured out on all flesh. Because if God's spirit could be poured out on all people, it would include Mormons! It would include feminist theologians! It would include Muslims, Jews and atheists.

Surprising statistics

The fundamentalist movement is so decentralized that it's very hard to pin down. For instance, many journalists or critics of fundamentalism assume that the term is synonymous with the Religious Right and you will very frequently hear it used that way. Some see the Religious Right as a reincarnation of Jerry Falwell's now defunct Moral Majority. Some see the Religious Right as a continuance of the conservative political campaigns of Pat Robertson and Patrick Buchanan, and others see it as a kind of broadbased, socially conservative, inter-religious, inter-racial coalition.

The Religious Right scores points with the American people by playing on their ignorance of Scripture. That's a vacuum into which they can pour all the interpretations that are the most patriarchal.

I think the truth lies somewhere in the middle of these definitions. A Gallup poll taken at the end of 1994 for the Princeton Religious Center came up with some very interesting statistics, such as that only 18 percent, at that time, of American people identified themselves as members of the Religious Right. I would think that the shift to the Right in this country would make it slightly larger now. Seventy-four percent were able at that time categorically to deny that they are members of the Religious Right. And then there were about 8 percent that weren't sure whether they were in the Religious Right or not.

Virginia Ramey Mollenkott is a contributing editor of *The Witness*. She teaches English and Women's Studies at New Jersey's William Paterson College. She grew up in American fundamentalism and has taught at several fundamentalist colleges.

Of those who identify most strongly with the Religious Right, 21 percent are women, 23 percent are college graduates, 26 percent are Southern people, 30 percent are African Americans, *16 percent are Democrats* and 24 percent are Republicans. Only one person in three who claims to have been "born again," also considers himself or herself a member of the Religious Right. I should remind you that during the last presidential election all the Republican and Democratic presidential and vice-presidential candidates identified as "born again," which right away should warn us not to make too easy an equation between born againism and the Religious Right.

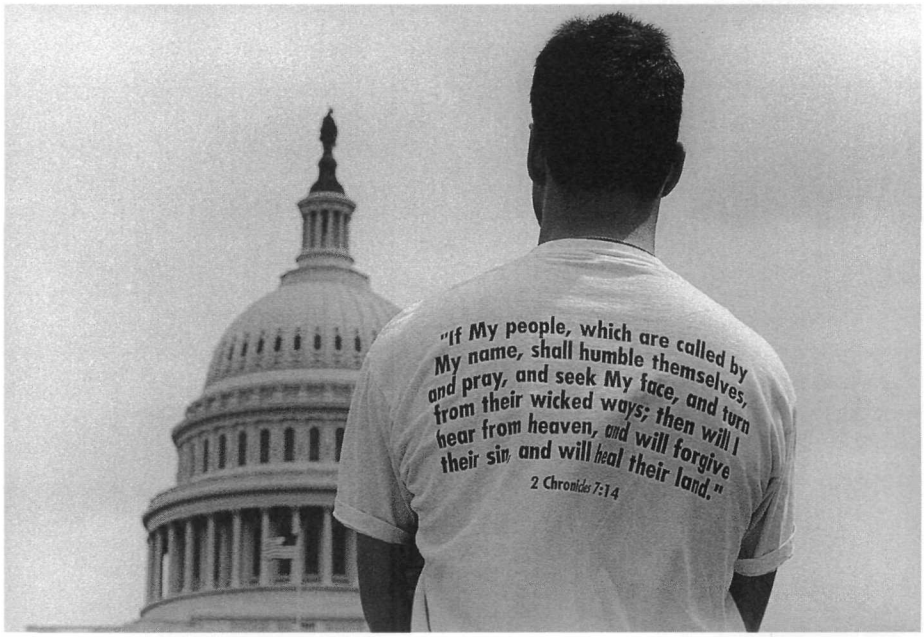
It's not correct loosely to identify the Religious Right with fundamentalism. Is it accurate to relate it with Republicanism? Clearly not, although it's important to note that the Religious Right currently is very influential in the Republican Party and certainly several organizations are actively trying to take over the GOP. Fifteen percent of the people who identify with the Religious Right call themselves ideologically "liberal." Another 14 percent call themselves "moderate."

Right-wing organizations

Despite these complexities, there can be no doubt that a lot of fundamentalists are deeply involved in the organizations of the Right. And I would like to note now some of the organizations and talk a little bit about their agendas.

Accuracy in Academia and *Accuracy in the Media* are two watchdog groups. They fight what is called "liberal bias." According to these groups, we college professors are terrible — we are, they say, trying to rob all young people of their faith.

Then there are the "big three." First, *The Christian Coalition,* founded by Pat Robertson and now led by Ralph Reed. It is developing greater political sophistication as it attempts to infiltrate school boards all over the country. It claims to be non-partisan, but the IRS is now seeking to take away its tax-exempt status because of its political maneuvering. The goal of the Christian Coalition is to put 10 trained workers in each of the nation's 175,000 precincts. As of 1995, they had almost two million members and more than 100,000 precinct leaders in place.



Washington for Jesus rally, April, 1996. Jerome Friar/Impact Visuals

Another of the big three is *Concerned Women for America,* which is the nation's largest conservative Christian women's organization. It supports male headship in the home and in the church. The group's focus is, of course, on anti-feminism. They promote themselves as the conservative alternative to the National Organization for Women. The male corollary is *Promise Keepers,* which is sweeping the country.

The other member of the big three is *Focus on the Family,* led by James Dobson out of Denver. It seeks to defend traditional "family values," but it doesn't seem to know or care that there are at least 40 different forms of family described or implied in the Bible, including equal partnership marriages, commuter marriages, single-parent families, communes and so forth.

From anti-ERA to gay executions

The Eagle Forum, led by Phyllis Schlafly, almost single-handedly defeated the Equal Rights Amendment and is still around. *Exodus International* is an organization that claims to have converted thousands of gay men and lesbians to heterosexuality. *Family Life Ministries,* led by Tim LaHaye, seeks to save America from secular humanism. LaHaye, of course, was formerly a Moral Majority leader. *The National Right to Life Committee* opposes abortion and women's reproductive freedom. *Rockford Institute* in Illinois opposes the erosion of traditional values resulting from an increasingly pluralistic society, so it sees multiculturalism as the enemy. *The Traditional Values Coalition* is active in anti-homosexual legislation and opposes even school-based counselling programs for gay and lesbian teenagers. *Scriptures for America* is really out there on the right. It's a racist, anti-semitic group. It espouses Christian

identity theology, which claims that Anglo-Saxons are the Bible's true chosen people and Jews are interlopers! They also believe gay people should be executed.

Increased political savvy

Two years ago, Ralph Reed, head of the Christian Coalition, released what he calls a "contract with the American family." Among other things, this contract called for a tax credit of $500 for each child and the right of homemakers to contribute up to $2,000 annually toward a tax-sheltered annuity. These are initiatives intended to help the middle-class American family, initiatives I liked. But what's especially interesting to me is that the contract does not frontally attack homosexuals, even though that group has raised a lot of its money by anti-homosexual rhetoric. It also takes a fairly centrist position about abortion and moves away from suggesting compulsory prayer in the public schools.

These modifications from the usual fundamentalist positions indicate a growing political awareness that the American people will tolerate only so much forcing of views onto other people. Don Browning, who is a professor at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, was so impressed by this document that he argued in *The Christian Century* that mainline churchpeople ought to discuss it seriously and think about throwing their votes toward it as a way of keeping America from moving even farther to the Right. This is the way liberals are getting co-opted.

Ironically, it is the militia movement that has pushed many Americans back a little bit more toward the Left, especially since the Oklahoma bombing. I watched with fascination one night as David Koresh went on and on about his understanding of the Bible — the most amazing composite of biblical literalism and his own mad read on himself. It was astonishing! And of course the Weavers of Ruby Ridge also hold a view of biblical inerrancy. The militia movement sees itself as the last line of defense against a government that is hellbent on taking away all traces of opposition to its own policies. There's a great deal of racism and anti-semitism involved: They argue that the "Zionist Occupation government" is taking over America and that argument seems to be gaining ground among many people. It seems meager right now, with about 10,000 members, but it has to be closely monitored because it is so full of violent enmity.

If you've got any energy, run for the school board. But also be there for the debates and when you hear the deceptive rhetoric, expose it.

Beware of the innocuous

So where do we go from here?

Several lines of action are essential for people such as ourselves. If we want to preserve America's civil liberties and historic church-state division, we'd better keep ourselves well-informed. Furthermore, we better learn to read very carefully, because Religious Right literature is getting more and more sophisticated and often sounds exceedingly innocuous.

Here's an example: Lou Sheldon of the Traditional Values Coalition has been pushing a religious equality amendment to the Constitution. The first section reads: "Neither the United States, nor any state, shall abridge the freedom of any person or group, including students in public schools, to engage in prayer or other religious expression in circumstances in which expression of a non-religious character would be permitted, nor deny benefits or otherwise discriminate against any person or group on account of the religious character of their speech, ideas, motivation or identity."

This sounds like the good old American freedom of religion. But in point of fact there are a couple of very glaring problems in it. For one thing, it's redundant. We already have the establishment clause in the first amendment, which protects the rights of minorities and dissidents by placing certain matters like religion outside the reach of transient majorities.

But secondly, to guarantee freedom to engage in prayer or other religious expression wherever expressions of a non-religious character would be permitted would allow teachers to proselytize students in their classrooms. It would allow students to disrupt class sessions with their religious convictions. It would allow judges to proselytize in their courtrooms. The other hidden political agenda is that the clause forbidding denial of benefits is in there to force taxpayers to pay for vouchers for attendance at religious schools.

Run for school board

We have to be aware that the current primary strategy of the Religious Right is, as I said earlier, to infiltrate school boards, because these positions influence education and therefore eventually could provide a *cadré* of political candidates in the future who have been governed by this particular perspective.

Well, what's the best way to try to transform that strategy? If you've got any energy, run for the school board yourself. But also be there for the debates and when you hear the deceptive rhetoric, expose it. Many Americans are voting for these candidates without having the vaguest idea that they are Religious Right candidates.

We must remember that the bulk of

Religious Right activists are committed to the use of conventional politics. We can be grateful for that. They are not committed to the use of bombs and guns to get what they want. The best obstacle to that is our own political activity.

We also need to oppose the racism and anti-semitism that is sometimes expressed by the Religious Right, not by everybody, but by enough people to make us nervous. I think of Tim LaHaye's comment that by rejecting Jesus, Jews brought God's curse on themselves and on Palestine, and Pat Robertson's heavy reliance on well-known anti-semitic literature.

Some of us have lived through the holocaust and we have seen what happened there and it was very largely traceable to Christian theology. So we can't sit still and let this happen again, be quiescent or apathetic about it. Pat Robertson complained, for instance, that "cosmopolitan, liberal, secular Jews are involved in the ongoing attempt to undermine the public strength of Christianity." And he has made similar charges against Islamic leaders.

A liberating hermeneutic

Above all I think we have to work in our local congregations and secular communities to teach people a liberating and inclusive way of interpreting the Bible. The Religious Right scores points with the American people by playing on their ignorance of Scripture. That's a vacuum into which they can pour all the interpretations that are the most patriarchal. I think it is vital that we don't lose the battle for the American mind by sheer default because we are too lazy to learn how to read Scripture in a more liberating way. When we're sufficiently outspoken about the radical insights of Scripture, we can help move society in a more healthy direction.

Why have the churches not taught a liberating interpretation of Scripture? I have a feeling that many of the mainline churches are so embarrassed about what happened in the 19th century with slavery, when some leaders defended slavery from a scriptural base, that they don't want to talk Bible study anymore. But if we aren't willing to study a liberating hermeneutic, by default we leave other people to tell the American people what the Bible says. So we could teach through discussions, public forums, neighborly conversations, letters to the editors of newspapers and magazines, and lots of other ways.

If you can say — "This is what I believe, this is my experience" — that should not be offensive to anybody, because it is not the same as talking for somebody else; it is simply bearing witness by standing in your own truth. TW

Creating a Better Future **by Nivia Gonzalez** Courtesy Galleria Ortiz

We have to work in our local congregations and communities to teach a liberating way of interpreting the Bible. It is vital that we don't lose the battle for the American mind because we are too lazy to learn how to read Scripture. We must be outspoken about its radical insights.

The Institute for First Amendment Studies profiles important Christian Right organizations in its 1993 publication, *The Top Ten: A Freedom Writer Fact Sheet.* The Institute also runs The Freedom Writer Network, a non-profit educational and research organization that publishes *The Freedom Writer*, a newsletter devoted to "defending the separation of church and state." Annual membership costs $25. Contact the Institute at PO Box 589, Great Barrington, MA, 01230.

The need for a politics of meaning

Michael Lerner

[Last May* The Witness *was co-sponsor of a conference on the life and legacy of theologian/lawyer William Stringfellow held at Washington and Lee University. In a presentation on the "politics of meaning," Michael Lerner spoke about why people drift to the Right.]

From 1976 to 1986 I worked in California as a psychotherapist and set up the Institute for Labor and Mental Health. These were years when many middle-income, working people were moving to the Right and a lot of my work in that period became focused on trying to understand why. The therapists that I worked with came from liberal, progressive or anti-war backgrounds and as we listened to the stories we heard something emerging that we had not expected.

The first thing we heard was that people were moving to the Right in large part because they were in deep pain in their lives. We expected some pain in peoples' lives, in part because we knew about the lack of power and control that people have in the work world. But what we discovered was that the pain was also connected to the fact that people felt their lives lacked any kind of framework of meaning and purpose — the pain and oppression that they experienced in the world of work was very much connected to their inability to serve the common good, to do something that would be of value.

Learning 'realism'

From what we had learned in the liberal world and in academia we expected to think of middle-income Americans as though their bottom line was money; if people were moving to the Right it was only because they were racist, or sexist, or homophobic. But what we learned was that these people wanted a framework of meaning and purpose for their lives and that that framework was systematically denied. They said they were learning, in the world of work, that their desire for some higher ethical and spiritual context for their lives was unrealistic and that to be realistic one had to focus on the bottom line.

So they had both parts of themselves, a part that wanted to go for their own highest vision and a part that was saying, "I have to live in the real world and what I really need to do is to learn the skills of the market. And the skills of the market, as they saw it — I think correctly — were that the way you advanced yourself was to learn how to manipulate and control other people. The bottom line of the market is money and power. The common sense of the market is looking out for number one.

We learned that people drifting to the Right wanted a framework of meaning for their lives and that that framework was systematically denied.

An ethic of self-interest

So people find themselves surrounded by an ethos of selfishness and materialism. People find themselves surrounded by a rip-off consciousness that permeates the society from the very top — where some small sector of corporate leaders think it is perfectly appropriate to rip off the resources of the planet without regard to the future survivability of the planet — all the way down the class ladder, affecting everyone in the society.

This ethos of selfishness is manifested not just in crime, but also in human relationships, because more and more every relationship becomes infected by market consciousness so that even in loving relationships people ask, how much you can satisfy my needs? When that becomes the sum and substance of relationship, when people are no longer able to see other people as fundamentally deserving of love and caring by virtue of who they are as embodiments of the spirit of God, then you get a society in which human relationships are, by and large, assessments of self interest.

As a psychotherapist, and now as a rabbi, I have had people come to me when they were breaking up a relationship and present the trump line: "I met somebody who can satisfy more of my needs." There is nothing more to be said, as far as most people are concerned, once that has been said. But if that is what it is all about, nobody can feel deeply secure in their relationships.

The crisis is real

Now the Right comes forward and articulates this and says there is a crisis in ethics, there is a crisis in crime, there is a crisis in family. And the Right is entirely correct. There are such crises. But then, tragically, the Right goes on to blame these crises on the alleged selfishness of the traditionally demeaned others of the society — African Americans, gays and lesbians, feminists, Jews, immigrants, the "other" — aided and abetted, allegedly, by big government liberals who are using big government to take from the rest of us

Michael Lerner became involved with the progressive social change movements of the 1960s, having been a student at the Jewish Theological Seminary of Abraham Joshua Heschel. Artist **Lucinda Luvaas** lives in San Marcas, Calif.

and give to these special interests.

Liberals deeply misunderstand the reality of all this, if they only hear the Right's analysis and think that people are responding simply to the analysis. Because there are two parts of this reality, there is first the calling of the issue, and secondly the Right's analysis of it. Hate radio, for example, is popular, in part, because it says to people, *you* are not getting the respect, the caring, the recognition, the love that you deserve. And the reason you are not getting it is because the liberals are taking it from you and giving it to these others.

Liberals make a deep mistake here if they don't understand the part of this message that's true. Most people are *not* getting the love, the recognition, the caring that they deserve in this society. They hunger for it and they hunger for a framework where something is going to be valued, intrinsically, not just for what it can produce in the way of personal consequences. They hunger for some higher ethical and spiritual framework and the Right, at least, is articulating that there is a problem.

Meanwhile, of course, the Right is in this incredible contradictory position, because while it talks about the crisis in ethics and selfishness, it is the primary champion of the ethos of selfishness and materialism in the world of work. It is the force that says that the best way to serve everybody's interest is to go for maximizing individual interest: Take care of yourself, do not try to impose responsibility on corporations.

Now how does the Right get away with this? Well, the way they get away with this contradiction is because the liberals aren't even in the relevant ballpark.

Facing into people's pain

Liberals and progressives, in my view, do not have a clue as to what is going on in American society today, and that is why they are in deep political trouble. They do not have any understanding of the pain that the vast majority of Americans are in.

On the contrary, liberals have a framework of understanding that deals with economic entitlements and political rights. For a large part of the 20th century these *were* the central issues for the vast majority of Americans, but today, for the vast majority of Americans, the central crisis is the *meaning crisis* and that crisis is not being addressed by liberals.

Tikkun magazine came out of the work we did at the Institute for Labor and Mental Health. We attempt to address the crisis of meaning not by blaming, but by looking at its roots in the economic and political structures of the society and by calling for a different kind of politics which would require a transformation of social institutions.

In short, a politics of meaning is a call for a change in the bottom line in American society, from an ethos of selfishness and materialism to an ethos of caring and idealism.

Parallels with feminism

The paradigm shift that I am talking about is of monumental proportions, as was the monumental transformation that was proposed by women 30 years ago in the emergence of the second wave of feminism. At that time, people began to talk about a struggle against patriarchy. People asked, "Can you please name us a society in the history of the human race which hasn't been patriarchal, in which women have had equal power in the world of work or equal power in the bedroom or in the kitchen? Please show us such a society. ..." And women couldn't. But luckily for us a lot of women did not buy the argument from realism and instead bought the argument from the standpoint of their need to live in a different kind of society even though such a society seemed unrealistic. I don't mean to suggest that patriarchy has been defeated, but I do mean to suggest that over the course of the past 30 years dramatic transformations have happened.

Similarly, I want to argue that it is now on the political agenda of this country to

Hellgate **Lucinda Luvaas**

have a politics of meaning, a politics that recognizes that every human being is created in the image of God and works from there.

Covenant with American Families

At *Tikkun,* we've put together two documents. One is a Covenant with American Families — a progressive alternative to the Right's Contract with American Families. We say that the Right, although it addressed the correct issue — there *is* a crisis in families — offers solutions that have nothing to do with preserving families.

For example, one of the major tenets of the Right's contract is the elimination of the Department of Education, but I can tell you from my own experience as a therapist and a rabbi, I've never yet had a couple that came to me and said the problem in their relationship was the Department of Education. It is rather the ethos of selfishness and materialism that is central. So in our Covenant with American Families we challenge the way the ethos of selfishness and materialism works in this society and try to show you how you could build a progressive, pro-families movement around that notion of challenging selfishness and materialism in all aspects of American life.

A second concrete political program that we've developed is called the Social Responsibility Initiative. The individuals who are signing this commit to taking individual responsibility in our own lives to lead a life with greater moral integrity and greater sensitivity to the consequences of our actions on other people. But a second point of the Social Responsibility Initiative calls upon corporations to assume certain levels of responsibility for the consequences of *their* actions, in terms of their personnel policies, their downsizing of work forces, their advertising and their products.

Shifting the focus

There is a difference in focus here from the focus that I have heard from some of the people in the Christian religious world. I hear in the Christian world, among the people with whom I identify most, a preferential option for the poor. But what we are saying in the politics of meaning movement is: We support that and see that as flowing from biblical principles, but the way to be preferentially for the poor, at this historical moment, is to build a cross-class alliance between middle-income people and the poor. It is not really substantively being for the poor to spend your time preaching about how terrible conditions are for the poor. Instead we need to speak to the pain of middle-income people and be able to understand that pain and link that pain with the issues facing poor people.

When we talk about a politics of meaning we are saying that the deprivation of people's ethical and spiritual needs is as fundamental as the deprivation of economic and political rights.

In other words, we need a shift in focus. This would sometimes mean, for example, that at a political meeting, instead of asking how many of the oppressed group we have in the room and then saying that if we don't have enough we're not the real thing, we would be asking how many white middle-class men do we have in the room? Because those are the people that we need to be reaching.

When we talk about a politics of meaning we are saying that the deprivation of people's ethical and spiritual needs is as fundamental as the deprivation of economic and political rights.

Consequently, we say to religious people that instead of buying into what liberals have been telling religious people for a long time, "If you want to be part of a liberal alliance, leave your religious paraphernalia at the door and enter into a secular arena," we say that the progressive movement desperately needs the insights that come from the spiritual and religious traditions of the human race, that those insights are desperately needed in progressive politics. TW

Soft patriarchy or servanthood?

by Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen

In 1992, well before the Christian men's movement known as Promise Keepers became front-cover news for American journalists, Gloria Steinem — the founding editor of *Ms.* magazine — wrote: "Make no mistake about it: Women want a men's movement. We are literally dying for it. If you doubt that, just listen to women's desperate testimonies of hope that the men in our lives will become more nurturing towards children, more able to talk about emotions, less hooked on a spectrum of control that extends from not listening through to violence, and [that they will become] less repressive of their own human qualities that are called 'feminine.' ... Perhaps the psychic leap of 20 years ago [when feminists announced that] *women can do what men can do*, must now be followed by [the announcement that] *men can do what women can do*."

These days the North American men's movement has almost as many faces as are found within feminism, but sociologist David Blankenhorn, author of the 1995 best-seller, *Fatherless America*, has characterized Promise Keepers as "the largest and most important men's movement in the United States today." The most public and media-covered feature of Promise Keepers is its two-day sports stadium rallies held annually throughout the U.S. Beginning in 1991 with a single gathering of 4,200, the rallies expanded over five years to 13 weekends and over 700,000 attendees. In the same time period, the organization's paid staff more than doubled yearly to almost 300, its budget rose to $65 million and its branch offices expanded to include 28 states and provinces.

Promise Keepers in Pontiac, Mich. Donna Binder/Impact Visuals

McCartney and the seven promises

The original moving force behind Promise Keepers is Bill McCartney, a former Catholic who is now a member of the charismatic Protestant Vineyard Fellowship, and erstwhile head football coach at the University of Colorado. McCartney's own experience reflects many of the concerns expressed in the "seven promises" to which movement members commit themselves. For all its defects, organized sport is one of the few North American institutions which is fairly successfully integrated by race, and McCartney's track record in this regard is impressive: He was the only Division I-A head coach to have equal numbers of black and white coaches working for him, and on resigning his post in 1995, he publicly protested (with the help of Jesse Jackson) the fact that the long-time assistant coach in line for his position, a black man, was passed over for a less experienced white candidate.

Hence McCartney's concern for promise #6 ("reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity"). Moreover, 25 percent of the organization's paid staff are people of color; it draws about half its rally speakers from the ranks of minorities, and its leaders repeatedly press the mostly white rally attendees to reach out to minority men once they return home to form accountability groups (promise #2).

But the dark side of sport also took its toll on McCartney's pre-Promise Keepers life. His unmarried daughter gave birth to two children, each fathered by one of McCartney's varsity football players. In the process of producing a national championship college team he became, by his own admission, a workaholic absentee husband and father who expected his family's life to revolve around his professional priorities. Hence the concern for promise #3 ("practicing spiritual, moral, ethical and sexual purity") and promise #4 ("building strong marriages and families through love, protection and biblical values").

The remaining promises more specifically reflect the evangelical character of the organization — "honoring Jesus Christ through worship, prayer and obedience to God's word," "supporting the mission of the church" and being obedient to the

Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen teaches in the Department of Psychology and the Center for Christian Women in Leadership at Eastern College in St. Davids, Penn. A longer version of this article will appear in *The Journal of Men's Studies*, vol. 5 (1996-97) and can be obtained by writing the *JMS* at PO Box 32, Harriman, Tenn., 37748.

"Great Commission" (to evangelize and disciple all nations).

Statistics gathered by the National Center for Fathering based in Shawnee, Kans., showed (as of 1995) that while 88 percent of rally attendees were married, 21 percent had been divorced and close to 20 percent had parents who divorced. Attendees' median age was 38 and 84 percent were white. Over a quarter reported having become Christians after age 24 and a third attended Baptist or Southern Baptist churches. Half reported that their own fathers were largely absent while they were growing up.

The real test of Promise Keepers' success is not the drawing power of the stadium weekends, but the staying power of the local accountability groups which men are sent home to form. But these groups are too recent to have had any systematic evaluation research done on them to see, for example, if they really do foster cross-racial fellowship or if they strengthen local congregational life. What is not in question is that Promise Keepers has tapped into some strongly felt needs in a certain segment of North American men.

New Man

Despite the lack of systematic research showing how Promise Keepers is working at the level of local groups, one can sense how the organization hopes to influence its members during the off-rally season by looking at its official magazine, an eight-times-a-year glossy called *New Man*. Begun in 1994, by mid-1995 its publisher (Strang Communications) reported a paid circulation of 100,000. The magazine has a regular column exegeting and applying the Promise Keepers' promises and columns giving tips on such topics as leading a men's group, monitoring children's T.V. viewing, losing weight and fighting off incipient baldness. It features profiles of men who are Christian athletes, evangelists, missionaries and entrepreneurs; stories of individual conversion or struggles in sanctification; and advice on the cultivation of Christian virtues such as courage, honesty and perseverance.

Unlike fundamentalist and evangelical magazines of the pre- and post-World War Two periods, which were characterized by an aggressively masculine rhetoric that upheld the boundary between the domestic (female) and public (male) spheres, *New Man* seems enthusiastically to embrace the image of the "sensitive new age guy," albeit with a distinctly evangelical slant. Such a man is more than just a good provider: He is friend, counselor, servant and enabler to his family, colleagues and fellow Christians. He can, it seems, rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

Promise Keepers project an image of being "weekend weepers" not "weekend warriors." The group appropriates the feminist critique of stereotypical masculinity and reclothes it in a biblical theology of "true manhood."

Forces behind the movement

Why should such a movement have arisen at this particular time? First, men are pondering the meaning of masculinity in these new economic times. The economic upheavals of the late 20th century — a "peace dividend" that never materialized, the expansion of multinational corporations and the consequent flight of North American capital to cheaper labor markets, and technological shifts — have heightened the risk of unemployment for some and wage stagnation or decline for many others. While these changes have added to almost everyone's insecurity, their effects are compounded for men in a society which has traditionally identified masculinity with economic power, an idea tinged with memories of the era before the industrial revolution when 90 percent of free men in the U.S. owned their own shop or farm (today, less than 10 percent do) and worked in close daily contact with their families. Today the very identification of "breadwinning" with masculinity is under siege, as even middle-class, intact nuclear families often need two adults in the waged workforce to survive economically.

Second, there is the feminist factor. Almost nothing is said, either positive or negative, about feminists in Promise Keepers' assorted literature, and yet it is clear that feminism is in large part what these men are responding to. Like the mythopoetic wing of the secular men's movement, Promise Keepers appeals to the same historical and psychological analysis of troubled manhood, but rejects the mythopoetic movement's tendency to blame women for men's feelings of insecurity and disempowerment. Promise Keepers instead sends a strongly evangelical message of personal repentance and conversion — if divorce, sexual irresponsibility and father absence are running rampant in society, it is individual men who must confess complicity and ask family members for forgiveness. Far from blaming women for men's current role confusion, Promise Keepers board member Gary Oliver praises them for keeping important institutions functioning: "Let's face it: if it weren't for women, there would be no prayer in many churches, missionaries would not get ongoing support and there would be a lot fewer Bible studies. There has definitely been a vacuum of men doing what God has called them to do in the church."

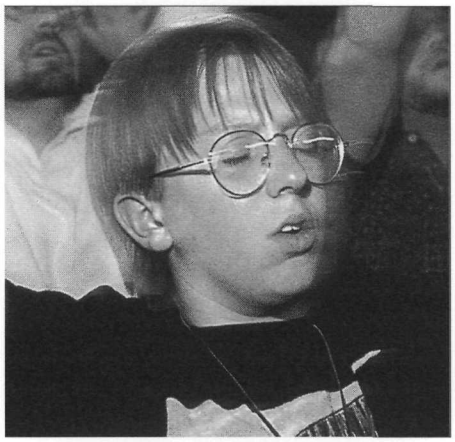
Promise Keepers thus project an im-

age of being "weekend weepers" not "weekend warriors." The group appropriates the feminist critique of stereotypical masculinity and reclothes it in a biblical theology of "true manhood." Thus Promise Keepers are enjoined to reject the profile of the "friendless American male" and instead to practice the biblical virtues of encouragement, forgiveness, mutual confession and mutual aid. Changed individuals, working together in a visionary parachurch organization, is seen as a vital component of social transformation.

Church-based criticism

Some of Promise Keepers' church-based criticism can be understood in terms of the historic tension in evangelical circles between revivalist and separatist impulses. Those of a revivalist bent — and Promise Keepers is nothing if not revivalist — are concerned mainly with preaching the Gospel to the unconverted and renewing commitment among the previously converted. Revivalism is highly experiential in tone, focussing on the need for a personal encounter with God. Eager to reach as many people as possible, revivalists tend to focus on the basics of the evangelical message (personal repentance, salvation by faith alone, self-discipline and service as a witness to God's transforming power), and to tolerate some ambiguity on other issues. "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty and in all things charity" might well be the motto of the revivalist, and this helps to explain Promise Keepers' ecumenical outreach.

However, the boundary between doctrinal essentials and non-essentials is a matter of debate in biblically focussed churches, and those of a separatist bent tend to have a much longer list of essential markers of a true church. This longer and more complex list (which includes matters of church order, family structure and interaction with society at large) inclines them towards fundamentalism — a kind of works righteousness of intellectual assent in which the capacity to state sound doctrine (based on literalist readings of the Bible) overshadows any religious experience as a source of authority. Separatist fundamentalists examine the Pauline epistles for minute rules of church order, then go on to create a hierarchy of



religious authority which almost always features male elders and pastors at the top.

Thus G.I. Williamson writes in the monthly magazine of the conservative Orthodox Presbyterian Church that Promise Keepers "usurps the prerogatives that our Lord has given only to his church" by encouraging mere laymen to help each other be accountable instead of appealing to their church elders, whom "God himself has provided ... to watch over the flock." He also criticizes the ecumenical character of the Promise Keepers' rallies, where evangelicals rub shoulders with Catholics and members of "apostate denominations."

More moderate evangelicals critique the group for different reasons. Writing in *Perspectives: A Journal of Reformed Thought*, Rebecca and Douglas Groothuis point out that there is nothing in Promise Keepers' seven promises that does not apply equally to all Christian believers. Thus, to the extent that the seven promises are held up as a description of godly masculinity, they imply that "there is something distinctively masculine about godliness. ... Defining masculinity as though it were the same thing as godliness can lead to a devaluation of femininity. If Christian men are like Christ not simply because they are Christians, but also because they are men, then men are simply more Christlike than women."

Ambiguous call for repentance

Even Promise Keepers' emphasis on men's personal repentance might be construed as a declaration of men's greater importance for the building of God's kingdom and a renewed society. If the problems of our time are due to men's neglect of God's calling, does this mean, the Groothuises ask, that "the moral and social order [is] falling apart for lack of the spiritual leadership that only men can adequately provide? Or are things degenerating simply because men have not been carrying their share of the load, having left family, church and social responsibilities entirely to women (many of whom have been wearing themselves out doing double duty)?"

The ambiguity of this call for repentance was also noted by *Ms.* magazine's avowedly secular reporter, Donna Minkowitz, who infiltrated a Promise Keepers' rally disguised as a teenaged boy. Having listened to Randy Phillips affirming God's concern for "the cries of our wives, the cries of our mothers, the cries of our daughters," Minkowitz writes that "if this sounds like a grandiose assessment of individual men's effect on everyone, it is. The Promise Keepers spend the bulk of their time telling men how to refrain from abusing because they think men ought to be good masters, not abusive ones. They don't doubt for a moment that the ultimate responsibility for the world — for men's and women's lives both — is men's. This fantasy of benevolent domination is at the core of

A cross-cultural comparison

Anthropologist Elizabeth Brusco has studied the explosive growth of evangelical and Pentecostal churches in Colombia and their effect on gender relations among converts. As a feminist trained in Marxist thought, she is conscious of the fact that religious ideology could be "a powerful tool of patriarchy ... reinforcing women's subordination and mystifying it." This possibility seemed all the more likely given the strict gendering of the public/private dichotomy in Latin American society, the high degree to which women identify with their roles as wives and mothers, and the strong cult of *machismo* which draws men into habitual public displays of aggression, drinking and womanizing.

At the same time, as an anthropologist Brusco was committed to hearing and respecting the accounts of her female informants regarding the place of Pentecostal evangelicalism in their lives. What she has found is that women are often the first to convert, and that as husbands and other male kin follow them into the evangelical movement, the material conditions of households improve markedly. The evangelical proscriptions on drinking, smoking, gambling and keeping mistresses leads to a redirection of the husband's resources and time back into the home.

Moreover, even though (or perhaps because) the evangelical and Pentecostal Churches are male-led, they provide male converts with an alternative to the dysfunctional aspects of *machismo* which is at once face-saving and woman-friendly. Because of the "house church" character of the movement (services usually being held in a front room of the pastor's residence) leadership is functionally — even if not formally — in the hands of a "pastoral couple," with strong women's group activities complementing both men's groups and gender-integrated worship. Brusco thus concludes that "in some ways, Colombian evangelicalism can be seen as a 'strategic' woman's movement, like Western feminism, because it serves to reform gender roles in a way that enhances female status. ... In reforming male values to be more consistent with female ones (i.e., oriented toward the family rather than toward individualistic consumption) the movement provides a 'strategic' challenge to the prevailing form of sexual subordination in Colombia."

Part of Brusco's point is that what counts as "feminist" depends greatly on the cultural context in which women are operating. Without oversimplifying parallels between the two societies, it might be said that many North American women also perceive a need to "reform male values to be more consistent with female ones," living as they do in the midst of high rates of divorce, the resulting feminization of poverty, and a heavily sexualized culture of consumption which draws male resources away from households towards everything from pornography to spectator sports and substance abuse. The Promise Keepers movement provides a supportive yet challenging environment in which — much as in a 12-Step program — men can turn over a new leaf as they respond to its calls for sexual purity, moderation and attentiveness toward wives and children. This may not be a liberal feminist's notion of gender utopia, but it cannot — at least not yet — be labelled anti-feminist. — *M.V.L.*

the Promise Keepers' vision."

Racism is evil, sexism doesn't exist

Other observers have noted that Promise Keepers' concern to understand the pain wrought by racism has no real parallel in an organizational concern about sexism. Rebecca and Douglas Groothuis conclude that for Promise Keepers racism is evil but sexism doesn't exist: "While even traditionalist women acknowledge the existence of an unbiblical and hurtful prejudice against women in many evangelical churches, awareness of this problem seems to be missing from the PK agenda." They praise Promise Keepers' attempts to educate white men to understand the pain felt by men of color due to racism, but add that it "is a shame that they are not also learning to hear, uncritically and nonjudgmentally, the pain that women of all races have experienced in a male-dominant church." And although *Ms.* magazine's Donna Minkowitz defends the personal-change focus of Promise Keepers, she agrees that it needs expansion to include a concern for institutional changes in gender relations. At this point in time, she notes, "for the Promise Keepers, the loving care of devoted husbands is the only thing required to improve women's lives."

Almost a century ago, xenophobic American white men were known to support women's suffrage in order to offset the votes of immigrants and people of color. Are we now witnessing a development of the reverse attitude among Promise Keepers — that is, a willingness to sacrifice female empowerment to the goal of cross-racial male solidarity?

A nonpolitical movement?

Promise Keepers leaders have repeatedly stated that their movement is nonpolitical. Minkowitz has quoted Promise Keepers' press secretary, Steve Chavis, as saying: "We are dedicated to uniting men. We are not prescribing what party this is done through, or what ballot measure."

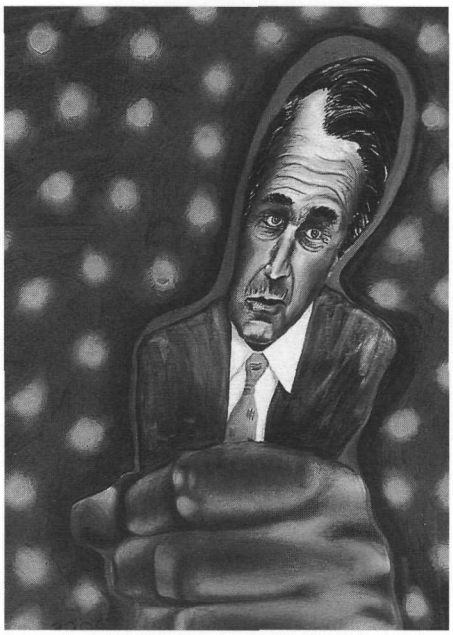
Although no statistics have been compiled on the group's political preferences, observers of the Christian Right such as Russell Bellant caution against the assumption that Promise Keepers are uniformly of a Right-wing bent, noting that "committed trade union supporters and social justice supporters" attend the stadium rallies.

Although founder Bill McCartney has avoided using the Promise Keepers' podium to promote a particular political agenda, as a coach he allowed his name to appear on the fund-raising letters of Colorado for Family Values, sponsor of the famous Amendment Two aimed at blocking civil rights guarantees for homosexuals. He has taken similarly public stands against abortion, although not as a Promise Keeper.

Promise Keepers have sponsored talks by Jerry Falwell, their leaders have been interviewed on Pat Robertson's *700 Club* and their books have been published by James Dobson's Focus on the Family. Minkowitz observes that, with resources such as mailing lists, phone banks and voter lists, "an evangelical men's movement with as many as a million members could be a fertile ground for Right-wing organizing." Equally troubling is the image of "men who, in their eagerness to reform, have declared a willingness to be commanded" — by God, by their movement leaders — even while taking loving command as servant-leaders in their own homes. "It is possible," she states, "that the depth of emotion and loyalty created in the Promise Keepers would be used to fuel a Right-wing movement."

Servanthood *and* soft patriarchy

At this point in its organizational development, Promise Keepers is nothing if not contradictory in the messages it sends forth about gender relations. In *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper,* an unwieldy volume featuring 18 contributors, men are urged in one chapter to "take back the reins of spiritually pure leadership God intended them to hold" and in another to recognize that "equality of leadership" between men and women is "the way God intended the church to operate ... male and female leaders sharing the burden for their families and their community." It is likely that Promise Keepers has grown so quickly that its leaders have spent little time thinking through the movement's basic stance on gender relations. "Much is assumed and very little is discussed or debated when it comes to such questions as the validity and meaning of the concept of masculinity, how (or even if) a godly man's behavior is distinguishable from a godly woman's behavior and how women fit into the 'masculine' Christianity being promoted by PK," point out Rebecca and Douglas Groothuis.



Marc Ross

Promise Keepers have sponsored talks by Jerry Falwell, their leaders have been interviewed on Pat Robertson's 700 Club *and their books published by James Dobson's Focus on the Family.*

Ambiguity also allows each listener to hear what he or she wants to hear in Promise Keepers' messages about male responsibility, which suits the aims of a revivalist organization to reach as many people as possible. In addition, as the Groothuises note, Promise Keepers is typical of mass evangelical movements in that its "overall tenor ... does not appear to be conducive to thoughtful reflection. Promise Keepers typically offers men answers, not questions; catchy slogans, not difficult alternatives to study and evaluate."

While it may be that Promise Keepers' deeper tendency is to become an organization which proclaims not only a gender essentialism along traditional, stereotyped lines but also a strong gender hierarchy in family, church and society, it is also possible, as *Ms.* magazine's Donna Minkowitz asserts, that Promise Keepers may be irreversibly shaped by the 30 years of second-wave feminism that preceded it.

"The group's ethic of mutual responsibility and mutual support is perpetually at odds with its conviction that domination is ordained by God," she writes. "It would be a mistake to conclude that PK's religious-right leaders are somehow immune to the progressive ideals that they themselves are promoting through this organization. In creating Promise Keepers, they may have themselves been caught in a quasi-feminist whirlwind."

As I leaf through future issues of *New Man*, I will be inclined to affirm Minkowitz' optimism if I see two yet-to-be-written articles by the magazine's male writers. The first would be titled something like, "What I Learned the Year I Stayed Home With My Kids." The second would be, "My Daughter the Seminarian." TW

Auschwitz did not end in Auschwitz

by Dorothee Sölle

More than 51 years ago, on Jan. 27, 1945, the camp of Auschwitz was liberated. This date has a subjective biographical meaning for me. Like a red thread, the event of the Shoah marks my attempt to reformulate the Christian faith.

In my well-thumbed diary of Anne Frank, one passage is underlined. On October 9, 1942, she wrote: "What a people, these Germans! And I am one of them. Now Hitler has declared us stateless. There is no greater enmity in the world than between these Germans and the Jews."

How often I wished that Hitler would have also made me "stateless"! That I would not have been one of them! Anne Frank made a distinction between "these" Germans and others. This attests to her ability to differentiate and express herself precisely. For me as a German, this is not so simple. Ultimately all who did not offer resistance were involved, bound in different forms of believing, following and profiting. Among these "accomplices" in the broad sense of the word were also those who practiced the arts of not seeing, not hearing and remaining silent.

I spent almost 10 years of my young adult existence with the question of my generation: How could that happen? What did my parents do against that? On what side were my teachers? Which traditions of my land had prepared "that"? Was Luther involved, Wagner, Nietzsche or Heidegger?

Dorothee Sölle is a German feminist theologian and socialist. This essay was translated by Marc Batko.

The worst answer to our many questions was the denial of reality. "We knew nothing about that. We had no contacts with the Jews. 'That' did not happen among us in the village. One heard terrible things about concentration camps but they were only for criminals, homosexuals and the Jews." This answer heard in a thousand places made shame even more unavoidable. Sometimes I responded helplessly: "Have you read Anne Frank's Diary?"

'The Nazis were not so bad.'

As a young teacher in the Adenauer era, I recognized immediately that in my school German history ended with 1914. Nothing was taught about German fascism. One day I used the example of the Nazis to explain something to my 14-year-old students. A week later, the children came into class and said to me: "My father says that the Nazis were not so bad. They built the autobahn/superhighway." Then I noticed that not only my class but the students of the whole school wanted to know nothing about the Nazi time. That was the reality of the 1950s.

My step to theology was joined politically and historically with a feeling not conscious to me at that time, that liberal Protestantism and the German culture of my parents' home where people read Goethe more than the Bible were helpless and could not avert 1933. They were naive when they thought in 1945 that we could begin again where we were before.

Where I need forgiveness is for catastrophic things which we as a society do to the poorest and to our mother, the earth.

At that time in these years of teaching, I learned to ask: Why did the German bourgeoisie capsize and betray its liberal thoughts and ideas? How could parents and teachers assume that the middle class which met its definitive end in Auschwitz could be saved through reconstruction, re-education and restoration of the old property relations? Were the Nazis only a nightmare for them from which one awoke? Not the consequence of this German history? How could they hope to be renewed without a radical incision?

Destructive apathy

I found their relation to Christianity too cool and irresolute. What I found attractive in Christianity was the high esteem for every individual life: You can gain or lose your life. When people want to remain in apathy, this pre-political consciousness of the three famous monkeys who did not want to hear, see or protest anything, that is a destruction of human dignity.

The development of Germany confirmed my mistrust.

At my first public appearance in 1965 I said, "After Auschwitz, I do not know how one should praise God who over all things so wondrously reigns." Two basic theological questions, the questions of sin and God's omnipotence, had changed for me. My book, *Political Theology: Conflict with Rudolf Bultmann*, was published in 1971. It arose from the experiences in our group of "Political Night Prayer" in Koln since 1968, from experiences in the light of the Vietnam war and the student move-

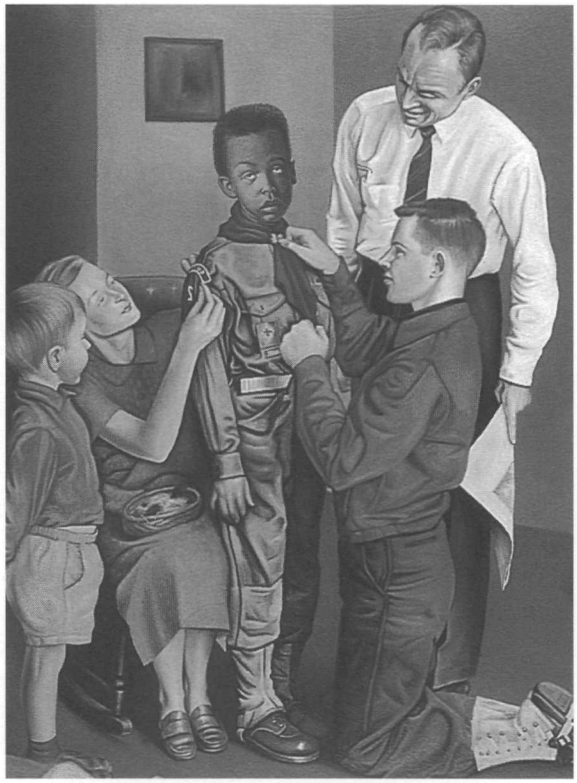
ment. It reflects the theoretical background of our praxis at the end of the 1960s. Bultmann wrote me a critical four-page letter about the book from which I would like to quote a passage: "I agree with you that the number of pressures which force us to sin today could be reduced through certain changes of social structures. But what is the meaning of sin? According to my 'individualistic' understanding, sin is not caused by the coercions of social structures. I understand sin as an offense of person to person, for example as a lie, breach of trust, seduction and the like, not as a collective crime against what is commanded. You are right in your intention. However I call guilt what you call sin. To exemplify this in your banana example, there is a distinction whether I rob and kill a banana grower or obtain bananas through the mediation of the United Fruit Company. If the banana grower is paid miserably by this company, he could take the course of law or strike."

I laughed but also had to cry about this. The greatness of liberal thinking is its hope, which is a fragment of the inheritance to which we must hold fast. This hope is absolutely naive and does not have the least access to reality because this banana grower, this *campesino,* this exploited slave can neither strike nor take the course of law.

A false division

The distinction between guilt and sin cannot be understood by defining guilt as collective and sin as only individual. I regard this as a very false division from my experience and reflection on the fate of our people, the German question and German existence after Auschwitz. I can identify what separates me from Bultmann in this one word: Auschwitz.

My pursuit of theology is marked by consciousness of living after Auschwitz. In contrast, Bultmann thinks in the spell of a middle class understanding of science as objectivized and suspended above time.



Color corrected Ron English

One of the consequences is that sin is involved and that we cannot dissociate from a personal sin considering the six million murdered Jews. My consciousness of sin rested on the collective things that happened in my land, my city and my group. The individual sins for which I reproach myself and which are naturally conspicuous in my life are far more trifling. Where I need forgiveness is for catastrophic things which we as a society do to the poorest and to our mother, the earth.

My parents made nothing as clear to me as the impossibility of imparting to my offspring what Auschwitz means for my generation. Naturally I attempt it and find it outrageous when people who can explain quantum theory do not know the words: selection, ramp and zyklon B. Again and again I have asked: How can I hand down the feelings of shame and disgrace so that they are not forgotten? How can a national identity arise which does not "elaborate" but represses this past?

I struggle against my own aging, that my experience becomes a throw-away experience and also against the plain denials of the feeling of collective shame.

Prayer contradicts death

Auschwitz did not end in Auschwitz. What can we do? The Jewish tradition teaches that we should pray and do what is just. No one should not know. This means not allowing everything but resisting, giving bread to the hungry instead of ever more sophisticated weapons. Praying means not despairing. It means concentrating, meditating, gaining clarity over the actual purposes and desires of our lives, remembering and therein becoming like God, having wishes for ourselves and our children, expressing these desires loudly and softly, together and alone and becoming more and more like the people we imagine.

That the picture of the heavenly sovereign, the omnipotent one enthroned in heaven who allowed events like the Shoah changed with these theological changes became increasingly clear to me. "Power in relation" is different from omnipotent power of domination dependent on no one.

God was very small 51 years ago. God's sun didn't shine; God's spirit had no home among us. God had few friends.

Perhaps only the mystical language which does not speak *about* God but *to* God is able to name this God who needs us. As Jacob Bohme said, God is "the nothingness who seeks to become everything." TW

Former treasurer Ellen Cooke begins prison sentence

Ellen Cooke, former treasurer of the Episcopal Church, began serving a five-year sentence for embezzlement at the Federal Prison Camp at Alderson, W.V., at about noon on August 26.

Cooke pleaded guilty to tax evasion and transporting stolen money across state lines January 24 in connection with the embezzlement over a five-year period of more than $2 million from the church. On July 10, U.S. District Court Judge MaryAnne Trump Barry departed from federal guidelines to impose a stiffer than normal sentence, referring to the "flagrant" abuse of trust the crime represented.

Plato Cacheris, Cooke's attorney, has filed an appeal of the sentence. His request that Cooke be allowed to delay her incarceration pending the appeal, however, was denied, his office reported, and Cooke presented herself to the camp on the date set by the court. The appeal process is expected to take between six and nine months.

Richard Russell, executive assistant at the Alderson camp, described the facility as a minimum security prison built in 1927 for female federal offenders. Cooke will eventually be assigned to a work or education program.

While parole is not offered under current federal sentencing guidelines, Cooke may reduce her sentence by accumulating "good time."

— Episcopal News Service

Absalom Jones Center

Stimulated by the 1992 bicentennial celebration of the African American presence within the Episcopal Church, efforts are underway to raise funds for the construction of an Absalom Jones Historical and Cultural Center on the campus of Philadelphia's St. Thomas Episcopal Church. St. Thomas, where Jones was the first rector, is the first of the Church's African American congregations. Born in slavery and self-educated, Jones was the first African American to be ordained an Episcopal priest. St. Thomas will be hosting a celebration of the 250th anniversary of Jones' birth November 9-10.

"The center will provide a facility for exhibitions, historical research, and the collection of writings and memorabilia that pertain to the church's African-American history," said Frances I. Clark, president of the Absalom Jones Center's board. "We hope to encourage dialogue on the church's history. We want to hold conferences, classes and seminars."

The Diocese of Pennsylvania will match funds raised for the project, Clark said. "This is our first public request for financial support," she added.

Checks in support of the center should be made payable to "AJHCC" and sent to Clark c/o A. E. Church of St. Thomas, 6361 Lancaster Ave., Philadelphia, PA, 19151.

— Julie A. Wortman

Role of church in community development to be examined at November conference

A participatory look at what's happening in the American economy called "The Growing Divide: Inequality and the Roots of Economic Insecurity" will kick off the organizational meeting of the Episcopal Network for Economic Justice (ENEJ) scheduled for Nov. 22-24, at Mercy Center, in Burlingame, Calif. Conference workshops will focus on the "how-to-do-its" of forming community development banks, credit unions, loan funds and micro-enterprise programs and funds.

The ENEJ will honor Gloria Brown during a Saturday luncheon. Brown served as staff to the Episcopal Church's Economic Justice Implementation Committee during the Committee's early history, in the first years following its creation by the 1988 General Convention. Formalization of the new network's structure and election of a steering committee will occur during a business meeting following the lunch.

For more information contact John Hooper, Economic Justice Commission, Diocese of Michigan, 4800 Woodward Ave., Detroit, MI 48201; 313-833-4413.

Consultation urges rite for same-sex couples

Some 50 lay and ordained Episcopalians from 25 dioceses and nine seminaries — all funding their own attendance — participated in a consultation on the development of a church rite of blessing that can be used for couples of the same gender held in Washington, D.C., last summer. Guest presenters included Andrew Sullivan, senior editor of *The New Republic* and author of *Virtually Normal*, a book about homosexuality, and Kevin Cathcart, executive director of Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund and co-counsel for the legal case challenging Hawaii's denial of marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples.

Consultation participants focused much attention on further development and revision of "An Illustration of a Rite for the Celebration of Commitment to a Life Together," the product of a similar consultation held three years ago. In addition to providing a sample rite, the document provides theological reflections on the need for such a rite as well as suggestions regarding education for those proposing to use it.

The consultation also developed a resolution for presentation to the 1997 General Convention asking the Standing Liturgical Commission to develop a rite for possible official use by the church.

— based on a press release distributed by the Second National Consultation for Episcopalians on the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions

Yet with a steady beat

by Paul M. Washington

Yet With a Steady Beat: The African American Struggle for Recognition in the Episcopal Church, by Harold Lewis, Trinity Press International, Valley Forge, Penn., 1996.

Harold Lewis has given readers valuable information about the history of the Episcopal Church that has been omitted from seminary courses and unavailable in religious bookstores.

He begins with a quote from Booker T. Washington: "If a black man is anything but a Baptist, someone has been tampering with his religion." But in his concluding chapter he writes: "If a black man is an Episcopalian, he has been tampering with the white man's religion."

Throughout this work, we are confronted with an anomaly, for after the emancipation, blacks, who had been baptized in the church of their largely Anglican masters, defected *en masse* to the Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal churches. The Board of Missions to the General Convention of 1877 reported that "while in 1860, South Carolina alone claimed more than 3,000 black souls, not even one half of that number of blacks could be found in *all* the dioceses of the church, north and south."

In his sermon at the 1894 centennial celebration of the founding of the first black Episcopal church, St. Thomas', Philadelphia, Bishop Henry Coleman Potter of New York said, "I do not think that it would have been very strange if the colored race, after it had been freed, should have refused to follow the white people's God. It shows a higher order of intelligence and an acute discernment in the African race, to have distinguished the good from the evil, in a religion that taught that all men were brothers and practiced the opposite."

In addition to the anomaly of "how possible is a black Episcopalian" is another anomaly — the white man's fear that enfranchisement of blacks would rob whites of what they perceived as "their inalienable right to exercise authority in all things spiritual and temporal." Colonel Miles, attorney general of South Carolina and one of the lay delegates to a specially convened congress of Southern church leaders held in 1883 at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tenn., reportedly "spoke against admitting colored ministers to the diocesan lists on the same basis as the white clergy, since it was possible, with the great majority of negroes in South Carolina, that they might come into the Church in such numbers as to be able to outvote the white clergy, and the Church would be practically in their hands." According to *The Churchman*, Mississippi's coadjutor, Bishop W.M. Green, added that "the Church had nothing to do with the question of social equality."

In addition to the anomaly of "how possible is a black Episcopalian" is another anomaly — the white man's fear that enfranchisement of blacks would rob whites of what they perceived as "their inalienable right to exercise authority in all things spiritual and temporal."

"Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod, felt in the days when hope unborn had died, *Yet with a steady beat*, have not our weary feet come to the place for which our fathers sighed."

In 1794, St. Thomas' African Episcopal Church of Philadelphia was founded, the first black Episcopal Church, and the first black church of any denomination. This was followed by the founding of St. Phillip's, New York, in 1818, St. James', Baltimore, in 1827 and St. Luke's, New Haven, in 1844. When Henry L. Phillips began his ministry in Philadelphia in 1875 there were only two "colored" congregations. When he retired as archdeacon in 1947, two months after his 100th birthday, there were 18 black churches.

Bishop John Burgess, who became the bishop of the largest American diocese, has observed that the vast majority of black Christians — whose forebears chose to leave the Episcopal Church and other white-dominated denominations — have tended "to ignore or minimize the accomplishments of those black Christians who have chosen to stay within the white church structures." This leads Lewis to comment:

"The fact that the first black Christians in America were Anglicans and that it was the Episcopal Church that established the first black school and trained the first black teacher, that Absalom Jones was the first black minister ordained in the United States in any major denomination, and that St. Thomas' Church, Philadelphia, was the first truly constituted black congregation are forgotten if they were ever known; and such ignorance makes it possible for observers to believe that a quest for an enhanced social status is the only factor responsible for attracting blacks to the Episcopal Church."

As Lewis hopes it will, *Yet With a Steady Beat* does much to correct such misunderstandings. "The theological and ideological position of black Episcopalians," Lewis rightly points out, "has always been that they are, by virtue of the Church's being a catholic institution, part and parcel of the membership of the Church, for whom no sort of special patronizing treatment is deemed necessary."

Paul Washington, a longtime champion of social justice for blacks and women in both church and society, is rector emeritus of The Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia, Penn.

Our readers tell us ...

Hiroshima condemned in 1945

by Leo Maley III

Many suggest that while we may *now* believe that the atomic bombing of Japan was wrong, it is a mistake to judge history by present standards.

But many leading theologians, ethicists and religious editors wasted no time in speaking out against the atomic destruction. In August 1945 *Christian Century*, the Protestant weekly, editorialized against "America's Atomic Atrocity," and *Commonweal*, the Catholic magazine, argued that American victory had been "defiled" by "American guilt and shame."

One of the most important early statements on the moral implications of atomic weapons was "Atomic Warfare and the Christian Faith," the March 1946 report by the Federal Council of Churches' Commission on the Relation of the Church to the War in the Light of the Christian Faith.

They called upon churches "to urge ... that all manufacture of atomic bombs be stopped, pending the development of effective international controls," and to urge that the U.S. government "affirm publicly, with suitable guaranties, that it will under no circumstances be the first to use atomic weapons in any possible future war."

The commission deplored the manner in which the bombs had been "loosed without specific warning, under conditions which virtually assured the deaths of 100,000 civilians." Even if the atomic bomb had shortened the war, by using it in a manner that resulted in the "indiscriminate slaughter of non-combatants," the U.S. had "sinned grievously against the laws of God and against the people of Japan."

"Whatever be one's judgement of the ethics of war in principle," the report continued, "the surprise bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are morally indefensible." The commission called upon American Christians to be "deeply penitent for the irresponsible use already made of the atomic bomb." "Plain justice" obligated Americans to make "specific amends for damage that has resulted from our wanton acts of destruction." They called upon churches to raise funds to rebuild Hiroshima and Nagasaki, "those two murdered cities."

It should be emphasized that these strong statements were made by

a commission of leading Protestant theologians and church leaders, including John Bennett, Angus Dun, Georgia Harkness, Reinhold Niebuhr and Henry P. Van Dusen. By one count only seven of the twenty-two commission members were pacifists. That some, like Niebuhr, were known for their ethical and political "realism" makes the report's strong condemnation of the bombings all the more striking.

Recovering the findings of "Atomic Warfare and the Christian Faith," as well as other early reflections on our use of the atomic bomb, should lay to rest the historically false claim that critics of the Hiroshima bombing are imposing 1990s morality on a 1945 decision. The bombings have always been criticized on moral grounds. For those who struggle to prevent the future use of nuclear weapons, how we remember Hiroshima matters. TW

Leo Maley III is currently engaged in a long-term study of the impact of Hiroshima and nuclear weapons on American culture.

Dancing and hammering for the children

Before dawn, four women poured their own blood, danced, sang and swung hammers on a torpedo test cylinder used in fast-attack nuclear submarines on July 27, 1996 during a "Weep for Children" plowshares action at the Naval Sub Base in Groton, Conn..

Base personnel stood nearby while an officer said over the loudspeaker, "They are Plowshares. They are nonviolent peace protesters."

Kathy Shields Boylan, of the Washington D.C. Catholic Worker and Sisters Liz Walters, Carol Gilbert and Ardeth Platte said they were encouraged that U.S. Naval officers have come to understand the intent and the spirit of these actions.

They were scheduled for a court appearance Sept. 30.

Four other plowshares activists received prison sentences from a federal judge in Norfolk, Va. on September 6. Amy Moose, Michele Naar-Obed, and Rick and Erin Sieber — who were arrested Aug. 7, 1995 at Newport News (Virginia) Shipbuilding — were given sentences ranging from eight to 18 months without parole, followed by three years of supervised probation.

The end of the age

by Bill Wylie-Kellermann

***The End of the Age,* by Pat Robertson (Word, 1995).**

Pat Robertson is no novelist. Nor could a stable of ghostwriters make him so. This book is testimony, at least in that regard.

Robertson has, however, understood the import of the popular in culture wars. And he has probably hungered after the market tapped in recent years by Frank Peretti, whose *This Present Darkness* has sold two million copies, becoming something of a handbook in the worst of the spiritual warfare movement. Where Peretti's scale is local (small college town possessed), Robertson has cast his narrative as global millennial apocalypse.

In *The End of the Age,* a meteor (which could have been shot down had not the president vetoed a certain nuclear missile appropriation) strikes the Pacific, washing California from the face of the earth. In the waves of chaos which ensue, a satanic conspiracy pulls off a U.S. coup, masterminded by one Tariq Haddad — the shadowy friend called upon by an overbearing, new age feminist first lady. In an ongoing narrative conceit, the Thornberrys, an amiable ad executive and his wife going through a timely conversion, are tutored in Bible study which provides a running blow by blow from Revelation of events taking place on CNN. By a series of providences they are led to Rev. Jack Edwards (yes, descendent of Jonathan) whose shrewd investments have graced him with a comfortable mountain hideaway, equipped with the latest in communications technology, from which he is able to coordinate the Christian resistance movement via satellite and worldwide web. In fact, generally, when these fundamentalist Christians circle the wagons for apocalypse, they pull up driving RVs and BMWs.

Robertson's audience is one which comes hungry for the material trappings of justification and success, in combination with a gamut of fears (for which that dark and formless meteor hovering somewhere in space is a suitable metaphor). Robertson, as on *The 700 Club*, deftly feeds both in his novel.

Robertson's audience is one which comes hungry for the material trappings of justification and success.

Certain fears are more than legitimate: like the centralized, cashless, electronic global economy against which he elsewhere rails (more or less accurate, in my view). But others are xenophobic innuendo, a kind of spiritual hit list more easily novelized than footnoted: like the new Satanic cabinet composed of a Harvard professor of Eastern religions, a Buddhist monk in saffron robes, a Lebanese Shiite Muslim who ran a filling station in Dearborn, Mich., a militant black feminist, and a host of Shiva worshipers. The *New York Times* reporter is a Marxist fan of Ché and Fidel. The new president himself is a 1960s radical, experienced in hallucinogens, who was first possessed achieving enlightenment at the feet of an Indian guru. And the center of the new world government will be housed in the extravagantly completed palace begun by Saddam Hussein in Babylon itself. This is paranoia beyond parody.

Certain racial and ethnic inclusions are interesting. Early on the Thornberrys hook up with Dave Busby, a Bible-believing African American (but wouldn't you know he's a power forward for the Lakers — and in a book whose names are fraught with allusion and double entendre, is it actually possible that his is contracted from "bus boy"?). Manuel Quintana (from "recruitment of soldiers by lot"?) and his family survive the blast and heat to join the enclave (but then he's a skilled communications technician, fitting in as the community's electronic handyman).

Another matter of interest in the narrative text: The Secretary of Defense is one person inside the government neither replaced nor seduced in the coup. The Pershing missiles which he is able to marshall on God's side, however, prove puny and superfluous alongside the destructive power of angel legions when they begin to kick butt.

The politics of demonization is one fundamental issue raised by this volume. We must confess that it is not a tactic limited to the Religious Right. William Stringfellow once described "cursing and conjuring" as itself a demonic tactic in a book put out by this same publisher 20 years ago. The "condemnation to death and damnation" is a method of dehumanization. Stringfellow saw in it a common tactic of the principalities and powers. Moreover, he recognized a basic idolatry (from which we all suffer more than we'd like to acknowledge) in presuming to know the judgment of God. TW

review

Bill Wylie-Kellermann is a Methodist pastor and author of *Seasons of Faith and Conscience* (Orbis, 1991).

Witnesses, the quick and the dead

Scripture cuts two ways

by Marianne Arbogast

Reta Finger is a pacifist and war-tax resister. For many years she edited *Daughters of Sarah*, a magazine which issued an early, steady challenge to sexism in the church. But these days, much of her resistance work takes place in a classroom, as a teacher of the New Testament.

"I feel that I've been called to be a student of the Bible, to responsibly understand it and teach it," Finger says.

At a time when biblical texts are being commandeered to support a Right-wing political agenda, it is no easy vocation.

Finger encountered controversy during her first term at Messiah College in Pennsylvania last fall, after members of a nearby evangelical church came upon an article she had written on feminist interpretation of the Bible. Missing the nuance that she was not necessarily endorsing the wide range of approaches she discussed, they fired off an anxious letter to the school's administration, expressing the fervent hope that they had not known what Finger was like when they hired her.

Finger soon discovered that simply highlighting the leadership or assertiveness of certain women in the Bible raised red flags with some of her students — particularly younger, male students from fundamentalist backgrounds.

"I run into problems with some of the conservative students who may not know what's in the Bible any more than students to the Left of them," Finger says. "They think they do, but with the sort of literalism with which they approach it, they do very little contextualizing. I've had to rethink how I introduce biblical interpretation. I can't hit them head-on with some of this stuff — they're not ready to hear it."

"I don't ever want to harden my position on the Left to the point where I cannot talk to people on the Right, especially youth."

Reta Finger

Keeping lines of communication open is a top priority for Finger.

"What I think we shouldn't do is polarize," she says. "I don't ever want to harden my position on the Left to the point where I cannot talk to people on the Right, especially youth. I want to listen to them, to try to understand where they're coming from, and to concede as much as I can."

What she always can concede is a deep reverence for Scripture.

"When I'm interacting with people on the Right, what I have behind me is the Bible," she says. "I know it as well or better than they do, and I respect it as highly without saying it's inerrant."

She believes that the Religious Right has taken root within the evangelical tradition, in part, because of the evangelical emphasis on biblical authority.

"There is certainly a connection between the Religious Right and a high view of scripture," she says. "They say, this is the word of God without any error — but then they also assume that the way they interpret it is without any error. This kind of view leads to the attitude that 'We're right, and if you don't think the way we think, you're wrong.' "

Finger laments the evident lack of biblical knowledge revealed by the results of a recent survey, published in *Christianity Today*, which reported a high correlation between religious faith and political conservatism.

"People said religion affected their

Marianne Arbogast is assistant editor of *The Witness*. *The Witness* wishes to celebrate the life of *Daughters of Sarah*, which Reta Finger edited for 15 years, in this final year of its publication.

views on homosexuality and abortion a lot more than it affected their views on the poor and the environment. That makes me see red! Teachings about the poor and use of wealth run throughout both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament."

A Mennonite, Finger comes out of a tradition that takes the Bible seriously, while maintaining a skeptical distance from state power. Far from advocating a forced imposition of biblical law, Mennonites — the horrors of religious persecution deep in their historical memory — renounce violence and cherish freedom from government interference.

"From the time of the Reformation, the whole anabaptist movement stood for the separation of church and state," Finger explains. "They refused to take up the sword. From the beginning, Mennonites have not gone along with any idea that the state is the new Israel, or that America is a Christian nation. We have assumed it *wasn't* a Christian nation."

Those who insist otherwise "don't know their history," she adds. "The founding fathers were anything but evangelical Christians. They were deists, and they wanted the separation of church and state."

Finger grew up in eastern Pennsylvania in a traditional Mennonite community, where women wore head coverings in church and rarely spoke during worship. It was not until the early 1970s that Finger, by then married and the mother of two sons, began to seriously question gender discrimination in the church.

When she moved to Chicago in 1976, she joined the small circle of mostly evangelical women who, after meeting for a year's study and reflection on women's issues, had begun to publish a newsletter called *Daughters of Sarah*.

"Up until that time, evangelicals had assumed that women should be silent in church and accept a much more restricted role," Finger says. *Daughters of Sarah* offered a forum for women to faithfully question those assumptions. In 1979, Finger became editor of the publication which would grow into a Christian feminist magazine reaching over 7,000 subscribers, until financial pressures and loss of staff forced it to shut down this year. Finger left the magazine in 1994 in order to teach and to continue her doctoral studies.

In her current setting, Finger often finds herself challenging Right-wing intolerance, but she stresses that "people on the Left can be just as narrow and unable to hear any position but their own."

It is common, she believes, for liberal Christians to underestimate the difficulty involved in changing one's mind on an issue like same-sex relationships.

"For me, it was probably the largest conversion I've had since I was a Christian," she says. "It took me awhile; it wasn't till I did a study from a biblical perspective, and met some gay and lesbian people who were not at all the way I'd imagined them, that I could accept the value of same-sex relationships. People need to recognize what an emotional and conceptual leap it is."

She also recalls a difficult editorial meeting at *Daughters of Sarah* following the 1993 Re-Imagining conference.

"Along with our support, I felt there were some challenges we should make to the theological content of the Re-Imagining conference, but others did not want to deal with that at all," she says. "It seemed to me that people on the Right could only see what was wrong, but people on the Left could not admit that anything that was said there could be questioned.

"I want to be free to challenge anyone's statements on either side, Right or Left, if what is said does not reflect the biblical or ethical values they claim for it or is illogical or inconsistent theology. I think that commitment helps me avoid knee-jerk reactions, so perhaps I can be a mediating influence." TW

Dorothee Sölle

The Witness *represents the voice of "the other America," different stories other than the official ones, burning questions and, best of all, a spark of hope and resistance.* The Witness *contradicts my lamentations and moves me into "taking my bed and moving on."*

— Dorothee Sölle
Hamburg, Germany